

ART. XIV.—*Kendal (Unitarian) Chapel and its Registers.*  
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*Read at Carlisle, September 8th, 1904.*

THE registers of Kendal Chapel are probably the oldest non-parochial registers in Westmorland. The baptisms begin in 1702, but there are a number of earlier entries, which, though they date from 1687, were evidently not copied into the present book until 1709. There are a few gaps, but the record is fairly consecutive to 1839. The earliest burial is recorded in 1722 in the register of baptisms. In the succeeding thirty-four years there were certainly some burials in the chapel ground, but the register of burials does not begin until 1756. It continues until 1834, and there is also one burial for 1855. Besides the Kendal Chapel register, there is a register of births of children of members of the congregation of Unitarian Baptists, Kendal, from 1801 to 1816, with some later births registered in the same form from 1818 to 1839. The original registers are at Somerset House, and a transcript belongs to the chapel trustees.\*

The baptisms include some people of note, amongst whom may be mentioned the Rev. Joseph Bourn of Hindley (1712), the Rev. Samuel Bourn of Norwich (1713-4), John Rotheram, M.D., of Hexham (1719-20), the Rev. Caleb Rotheram of Kendal (1732), Ecroyde Claxton, surgeon (1769), Edward Holme, M.D., F.L.S., of Manchester (1770), and many local worthies.

The burials give the ages at death in most cases—facts which many contemporary parish registers ignore—and

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\* I have, with the kind permission of the trustees, made a copy of the registers, which I hope shortly to print in full.

in a number of cases the minister has given a reference to the date when the same person was baptised. Interesting entries are those of the young Scot who died on his way home to Wigtown (1778); Thomas Gibson, who added to the endowments of the chapel and the Bluecoat Hospital (1781); James Patrick, linen draper, said to be the prototype of the wanderer in Wordsworth's "Excursion"; John Claxton, surgeon, the ancestor of a well-known Liverpool family (1812); and James Busher, 83, who "was killed by falling down Scout's Scar" (1830).

The early history of Nonconformity in Kendal is somewhat obscure. Dissent did not there originate with an ejected vicar, for William Brownsword, vicar of Kendal in 1662, was a Conformist. A previous vicar was ejected in 1662, but it was from a living in the south of England. In this obscurity Kendal is not alone, for Nonconformists suffered many disabilities in the years following the passing of the Act of Uniformity, and a sect harried by magistrates and conducting its worship in private, if at all, cannot be expected to have left many traces of its existence. Strict laws were enforced against the holding of conventicles, and the Oxford Act (1665) prevented ministers coming within five miles of any city or corporation or of any place where they had been ministers. The strictness of the administration of the laws varied from time to time and in different places, but it was generally sufficiently strict to prevent Dissenters meeting for public worship. Dissenting history of the period must be sought in the records of Quarter Sessions.

After ten years of persecution and suppression the King issued his famous Declaration of Indulgence, an indulgence which would have pleased the Dissenters better if it had been issued with the consent of Parliament, and if it had entirely excluded the Catholics from its benefits. The Declaration was dated 15th March, 1671-2, and by it Nonconformists were allowed to hold meetings for public worship. Licences were to be taken out both for the

"teacher" and the Meeting-house, and though some of the Dissenters had conscientious objections to the Declaration, there was a very general demand for licences. It is in connection with the Declaration of Indulgence that we get the first definite date for Kendal Nonconformity, and the number of licences taken out shows that Nonconformity was at that time in a vigorous condition in the parish. On 13th May, 1672, a licence was granted to Thomas Whitehead for the house of John Garnett, Kendal; on 16th July, George Benson had a licence for his own house in Kendal; on 22nd July, the house of William Syll, Kendal; on 5th September, the house of John Gernet, Kendal; and on 9th December, the houses of James Cork (Cock?) and James Atkinson, Kendal, were licensed.\*

All these were stated to be Presbyterian excepting the two last, and it is probable that they also were Presbyterian. Mr. Cock of Kendal, probably identical with James Cork, was a subscriber to one of the works of Oliver Heywood, who may be looked upon as the leader of the Presbyterian party in the north of England. Of those who took out licences in Kendal, Whitehead and Benson appear to have been ministers; and, if so, may be regarded as the first Dissenting ministers in Kendal. Whitehead was probably identical with Thomas Whitehead, sometime rector of Halton, near Lancaster, but ejected in 1662 from the living of Dalton-in-Furness, "a pious, painful and faithful Minister, who study'd to do good in his Place, and preach'd as often as he could to his people, after his being ejected."† He died in 1679, and was succeeded in his congregation by Mr. Benson, who had been ejected from Bridekirk in Cumberland, and afterwards lived at Kellett near Lancaster. He died in 1691.‡ Apparently Benson was

\* *Calendar of Domestic State Papers*, 1671-2, p. 503, 550; 1672, p. 352, 379, 579; 1672-3, p. 260.

† Calamy's *Account* (1713), ii., 413.

‡ Calamy (1713), ii., 155, 413.

living in Kendal in 1672, but Whitehead could have been only an occasional visitor. Whether they had different congregations in Kendal does not appear, but it is probable that the licences taken out for Kendal included those for the congregations at Crook and Natland.

Kendal, Crook, and Natland are so close together that it is probable that they at times were in the care of one minister. That the Natland congregation existed at an early date is shown by the fact that Richard Frankland in 1674 "remov'd to Natland near Kendal in Westmorland upon a call from a Christian Society there." \* Frankland preached "frequently in his own House, at Kendal, and in several other neighbouring places. From thence, by reason of the Five Mile Act he remov'd to Dawsonfold, about 5 miles from Kendal." † Kendal Nonconformity did not, as Mr. Nightingale ‡ supposes, originate with Frankland, and it is by no means certain that he ever had ministerial charge of the congregation which afterwards built Kendal Chapel; but he doubtless had great influence in keeping Nonconformity alive in Kendal. His greatest service to Nonconformity was rendered in his capacity as tutor of one of those academies by which a learned ministry was made possible to the Dissenters, at a time when the English universities were closed to them. Frankland trained some 300 young men for the Nonconformist ministry. His academy was at Natland from 1674 to 1684, and it is probable that he, his assistants, and his pupils supplied the ministerial wants of all the small congregations in the neighbourhood, with the occasional assistance of men like Oliver Heywood, who seems to have preached whenever he visited his sons, who were studying at Natland.

Soon after Frankland we find the name of James Hulme, who was minister in Kendal at the date of his

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\* Calamy, ii., 287.

† Calamy, ii., 287.

‡ Nightingale's *Lancashire Nonconformity*, i., 278.

death in February, 1688. In 1702 William Pendlebury of Kendal was ordained, and as ordination, involving power to administer sacraments, was necessarily preceded by licence, giving authority to preach, Pendlebury may have been at Kendal for some time. In 1705, however, he was a minister in Leeds. Apparently it was Pendlebury who began in 1702 the register of baptisms at Kendal Chapel. A gap of two years, 1707 and 1708, in the registers suggests that Kendal had then no settled minister.

Samuel Audland,\* the next minister, was educated at Manchester, entering under John Chorlton on March 16th, 1699. He had no bursary from the Presbyterian fund, and therefore was probably an Independent. His first settlement was at Penruddock, where he succeeded Anthony Sleight, M.A., an Independent minister, who died June 13th, 1702. He was still at Penruddock on March 14th, 1708, when he preached the funeral sermon for John Noble. Audland appears to have removed to Kendal in 1709. He made an effort to record the births or baptisms of the children of his congregation, and, as the result, the register contains the births and baptisms of the children of six families. The earliest of these births was in 1687, but the record is obviously not a contemporary one. Audland died October 24th, 1714, and was buried at the parish church.

It is probable that Samuel Bourn, minister of Crook, officiated in the interval between the death of Audland and the appointment of his successor. At any rate, he is mentioned in the register as baptising two children in 1716, and Bourn's own children were baptised at Kendal. At Crook part of the congregation strongly disapproved of infant baptism, and it is just possible that those who wished such baptism for their children could not get it at their own chapel, and had to go elsewhere for it. So the

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\* The details of Audland have kindly been supplied by my friend the Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A.

fact that Bourn baptised children at Kendal might either mean that he was acting as minister there, or that the aforesaid element in the Crook congregation was too strong to allow infant baptisms to take place in the Crook meeting.

In 1716 the greatest of the Kendal ministers was appointed. This was Caleb Rotheram, D.D., and he held the office until his death in 1752. In his time the chapel was built, the date of its erection being 1720, the cost being defrayed by subscription and the sale of pews. The first burial in the chapel ground was in 1722 when Hannah, Dr. Rotheram's infant daughter, was buried. Dr. Rotheram, like Richard Frankland, conducted an academy at Kendal, which served the purpose of a university for Nonconformists. He trained very many young men for the ministry, and probably his pupils were mostly theological students. But young men intended for trade and medicine also spent a year or two under his care. It happens that several members of my family were pupils of Dr. Rotheram at Kendal, as their maternal grandfather, the Rev. Samuel Yates, M.A., of Warrington, had been of Richard Frankland at Natland; and I may perhaps be allowed to draw on my family papers for a few items which, though not directly bearing on the history of Kendal Chapel, have an interest as concerning its most eminent minister, Dr. Rotheram.

In 1735 Samuel Nicholson, afterwards an M.D., wished to study for the ministry under Dr. Rotheram. His father, Matthew Nicholson of Liverpool, wrote to a cousin, Edward Blackstock of Kendal, whose tombstone still stands in the chapel yard, to enquire Dr. Rotheram's terms. The doctor's reply was:—"You may please to acquaint Mr. Nicholson that I have good convenience for lodging his Son in my House, That the Terms on which I take young men are eight guineas a year for lodging & boarding, & four guineas a year for Learning, they find their own Fire & Candle in their Rooms, and wash their

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own wearing Linnen, That if they go through a whole course of Mathematicks, as that obliges me to a particular attendance when their other Lectures are over, I have a distinct Consideration for that Branch of Instruction." Modest as these terms were, they were not unduly increased by "extras," as Dr. Rotheram's subsequent accounts show. In one of Samuel Nicholson's letters we get a glimpse of student life at Kendal academy:—"I shall then acquaint you," he says, "with the happiness I enjoyed yesterday in the Company of the most Ingenious men in Westmoreland, I mean Mr. Rotheram & one Justice Shepard the most accomplished Gentleman, Lawyer & Scholar in these Parts. We were shooting all day for Woodcocks & dined with the Justice & were handsomly entertain'd, & had the conversation that was to be expected from Men of Parts, Learning & Knowledge of the World."

Dr. Nicholson's youngest brother, Robert Nicholson of Liverpool, my great grandfather, was also a pupil of Dr. Rotheram's. He became a merchant, and according to the family tradition, sacrificed his interest in a lucrative business rather than continue to trade in slaves after he had realised the wickedness of the business. As Robert Nicholson died in 1779, he must have been one of the first of Liverpool merchants to withdraw from the slave trade from conscientious motives, for it was not until 1787 or 1788 that Wilberforce and Clarkson began their great work which culminated in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.

After Dr. Rotheram's death in 1752, there appears to have been an interval of a few years during which there was no settled minister. The baptismal register shows that between 1752 and 1756 Mr. Daye of Lancaster, Mr. Dickinson of Penruddock, Mr. Ritchie of Great Salkeld, Mr. Andrews, and Mr. Simpson baptised children, and presumably also conducted services. Evidently the congregation was waiting for Dr. Rotheram's son to be old

enough. Born in 1732,\* Caleb Rotheram the younger was only twenty at his father's death. When he was twenty-four, he succeeded his father as minister of Kendal Chapel, being the "unanimous choice" of the congregation. He was ordained August 26th, 1756, at Kendal, and a full account of the ceremony, copied from the "Record of Transactions on the Provincial Meeting of the Ministers of the Protestant Dissenting Congregations in Cumberland," is in the possession of the chapel trustees. It would be interesting to know what has become of the original "Record," a document which would be of the utmost importance to the student of the history of Dissent in Cumberland and Westmorland.

When Kendal Chapel was built, it was held by the trustees on an open trust—that is, there was no doctrinal test exacted from either minister, trustees, or congregation. The effect of the trust being open was that the ministers and congregation could advance with the movement of theological thought. Not being tied down by a creed, and having the utmost freedom in expressing their views, the Kendal ministers and congregation gradually passed from Trinitarianism to Unitarianism. According to a manuscript history of the chapel, prepared by the Rev. E. Hawkes, "the sentiments of Dr. Rotheram were certainly not orthodox, although not avowedly Unitarian. His views on the Trinity seem to have been far removed from those of the Church of England, and were probably the most moderate form of Sabellianism. The sentiments of Mr. Rotheram were Arian, and those of his successor, Mr. Harrison, decidedly Unitarian." Mr. Rotheram's Arianism was always very moderate; and, latterly, he nearly coincided in his views with those of his friend, Dr. Priestley.

It was probably the growing tendency of minister and congregation towards Unitarianism which caused, in the

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\* Several accounts of Mr. Rotheram state that he was born in 1736. The register of baptisms shows that 1732 is the correct date.



time of Mr. Rotheram, a secession of the more orthodox Presbyterians, who obtained in 1763 a minister from Scotland. This secession eventually developed on Congregational lines, and is regarded as the origin of Congregationalism in Kendal.

Mr. Rotheram was selected by Dr. Priestley to perform the first Unitarian baptisms in Scotland. The baptisms are recorded in the Kendal Chapel register, but took place at Montrose on August 16th, 1781. William Christie, the father of the children, was the first avowed Unitarian in Scotland. As no neighbouring minister would baptise the heretic's children, he asked Dr. Priestley to send him a minister. Mr. Rotheram was the minister selected, and thus it happens that the first Unitarian baptisms in Scotland are recorded in the Kendal register.

Mr. Rotheram died in 1796, and was succeeded by the Rev. John Harrison. Wordsworth was an occasional worshipper at Kendal Chapel during the ministry of Mr. Harrison.\* In Harrison's time, apparently about 1816, the Market Place congregation had an interesting addition to its numbers. The Rev. James Kay, who had been pastor of the Congregational Church in Kendal, seceded, and in 1809 established a church of Unitarian Baptists. Mr. Kay left Kendal for America, and in 1816 or thereabouts his congregation united with the older body of Unitarians. Their register of births, not baptisms, thus came into the possession of the Kendal Chapel trustees.

Mr. Harrison died in 1833. His successor, the Rev. Edward Hawkes, had, like many contemporary Unitarian ministers, trouble with the Scotch Presbyterians. In 1823 a society of Scotch seceders [United Presbyterians] was established in Kendal, and by 1838 was turning longing eyes on the Presbyterian Chapel and its endowments, and was threatening legal proceedings to recover chapel and endowments for orthodoxy. The congregation

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\* *Papers of William Pearson*, 1863, p. 13.

in the Market Place appealed for help to their fellow Unitarians all over the country, and the appeal was responded to, for it was recognised that if Kendal Chapel could not be retained by the Unitarians, no chapel could be. Nothing seems to have come of the United Presbyterian threat, and the legal ownership of Kendal Chapel and of many others was finally settled by the Dissenters' Chapels Bill of 1844.

It is not necessary to say anything of the subsequent history of the chapel.

In this sketch I have not endeavoured to write a history of the older Dissent in Kendal, but merely to correct and supplement previous accounts. I have to express my indebtedness to Mr. R. W. Thompson and the other trustees of the chapel for their courtesy in placing their documents at my disposal, and to Mr. Ernest Axon for assistance in the preparation of this paper.

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