



BAPTIST CHURCH, HEREFORD STREET, 1871.

PILGRIMS

A Sketch of the History of Oxford Terrace Baptist Church, Christchurch, New Zealand.

By E. J. D. HERCUS, M.A.

THE existence of Canterbury as a settlement dates from the closing days of the first half of the nineteenth century, when the "first four ships" furled their sails and cast anchor in Lyttelton harbour. The project of the founders had been to convey to these plains a body of men and women who should be representative of all classes and levels of English society—a cross-section of the stratified life of the Motherland. On the ecclesiastical side the comprehensiveness of their scheme was seriously impaired through its ignoring the existence of Christian faith and organisation outside the Church of England. "We intend," said the first document published by the Canterbury Association, "to form a settlement to be composed entirely of members of our own Church." The support accorded to their proposals came in the main only from the Tractarian party within their Church. To the Evangelicals New Zealand was still a mission-field: they shared with the Methodists the glory of having planted the Gospel among the cannibal warriors of the North Island, and experience there had taught them to regard

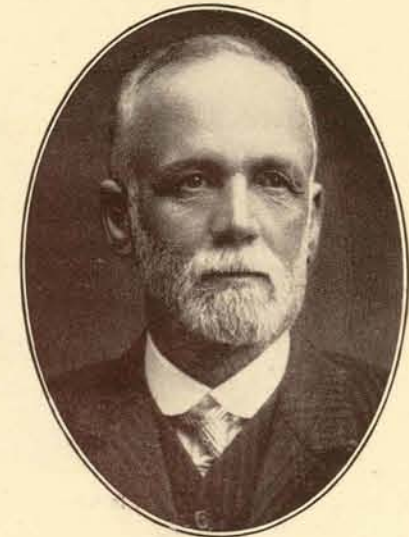
with anxiety the intrusion of their fellow-whites.

At first sight there would seem to be little prospect of successfully building up a Baptist Church and congregation in a community so selected and controlled. But in actual practice, "the Association scheme allowed for emigrants and land purchasers of all denominations, the only condition being the willingness to pay £1 an acre to the ecclesiastical and educational endowment fund. The Magna Carta myth is no greater than the myth which declares that Canterbury was exclusively a Church of England settlement." These words (from a recent able article by the Rev. Gordon M. McKenzie, B.A., in the "Press" of October 10th) recall the prospectus of Artemus Ward's show: no one could go in without paying, but all were free to pay without going in! For confirmation of Mr. McKenzie's conclusion we have but to cite the instance of the senior life-deacon still happily spared to the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church: slightly more than eighty years ago Mr. J. A. Pannett arrived in Canterbury with his Baptist father, only nine months after the first Pilgrims to Canterbury.

While the first four ships were still on their way out, the "Castle Eden" and "Isabella Hercus" set forth with further batches of colonists. "In nine months from the beginning of the emigration of the settlers 16 ships were dispatched by the Canterbury Association, carrying in round numbers 2,500 people. In September, 1851, the "Lyttelton Times" estimated the population at about 3,000." That month saw again in New Zealand waters the ship "Lady Nugent," on which John Richard Godley had arrived eighteen months previously to prepare the way for the settlement. Among her passengers was Mr. T. A. Pannett, a member of the Baptist Church at Lewes, with his infant son. The first winter had been a testing time for the immigrants: the 4lb. loaf cost 1s. 8d., and flour was £40 a ton wholesale. Mr. Pannett passed over the Port Hills to the plains, covered with flax and tutu and raupo (there were then twenty houses in Christchurch) and settled on the Newbigger farm in the earlier founded district of Riccarton.

In Christchurch, as in early Christian Rome, the first Baptist Church was the "church in the house." As a boy of nine or ten, Mr. J. A. Pannett would walk with his father four or four and a half miles to attend service in the house of Mr. Allchin, a building of either sods or cob, which stood near what is now Fitzgerald Avenue: here there gathered Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lewis, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Hebden, the two brothers Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Tunmer. The last-named lived at the corner of Manchester Street and Bealey Avenue, and worship was conducted for a time alternately in their house and Mr. Allchin's. An Oddfellows' Hall in Lichfield Street was resorted to later, also a building—possibly erected by those interested themselves—in St. Asaph Street (October, 1867).

The same year (1851) which witnessed the arrival of Mr. Pannett had already seen the first Baptist minister established in New Zealand. Nelson (like Auckland and Wellington) dates its history from 1840, and Baptist lay-preachers held services in the district as early as 1842. On May 3rd, 1851, thirteen people gathered in Nelson to consider the erection of a church: a ship appeared in the offing, and the meeting was adjourned; when the little flock met again that evening a



MR. J. A. PANNETT.

pastor stood in their midst—the Rev. Decimus Dolamore. Eleven years later Mr. Dolamore was invited to Christchurch, and services were begun in the Town Hall. Until then neither Canterbury nor Otago contained a Baptist church building: now Rangiora erected one, and the Lichfield Street building speedily followed. It stood in the middle of a "paddock," somewhere about the present site of Messrs. Ross & Glending's warehouse: the Square ("Ridley" Square,—matched with those of Cranmer and Latimer) was itself a paddock in those days, affording pasture to idle bullock-teams. Unfortunately Mr. Dolamore found the Christchurch Baptists all too like the early Corinthian believers: differences of religious views prevented cordial co-operation, and a case of immorality on which the church declined to take action led to his resignation. Another man became pastor, headed a division in the membership, and withdrew to build a church in Hereford Street, on ground now occupied by the Y.M.C.A. On his eventual dismissal from the pastorate the sundered fractions agreed to reunite, sold to the fire-brigade (for £50 cash over mortgage!) the Lichfield Street meeting-house, and worshipped together in the more commodious Hereford Street building. That union of "Strict and Particular" with "General" Baptists (how many could to-day distinguish the terms?) took place at the