

# Evangelical Advance in the 18th and 19th Centuries

John and Angela Magee

## Persecution and Prosperity

**T**HROUGHOUT history, it is observable that periods of intense religious persecution increase the desire for both liberty of conscience and religious freedom. The non-Conformist Puritans of 17th century England endured extreme hardships under the Stuart monarchy, especially at the time of the Great Ejection of 1662. However, in the providence of God, the Stuart dynasty was brought to an abrupt end, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century the monarchy was dramatically changed.

This change came about when James II produced a male Roman Catholic heir to the throne by his second wife. Overtures were made to William of Orange to intervene to depose the King and secure a future Protestant line. James put up little resistance. He initially went to Salisbury to gather his soldiers around him, but it was there that four of his leading officers deserted to William, leaving him in a very vulnerable position. James realised that his prospects of retaining the crown were extinguished and he shortly fled to France.

William landed at Torbay, Devonshire, on November 5th, 1688. He speedily rallied support and boldly advanced to Exeter. He received a rapturous welcome in the city and a stirring sermon was preached by his chaplain, Gilbert Burnet (later appointed bishop of Salisbury). After Exeter, William entered Salisbury, and, as in Exeter, received the support of the city:

‘It is said to have been one of the most remarkable sights ever witnessed in Salisbury - more remarkable than at Exeter - and it was one which we may be sure

the people did not soon forget. The prince slept one night at the Bishop’s Palace, and then took the road Oxford way, in pursuit of James’ troops.’

William was crowned King of England and his wife, Mary, the Queen on February 13th, 1689. That same year an Act was passed which ‘gave religious toleration to all Protestants on easy terms; and the throne became and remained Protestant.’ The Act of Settlement of 1701 further secured the spiritual freedom of Protestants.

In the light of these events it must be asked, did this longed-for and newly acquired religious liberty help to further the spiritual prosperity of the land? The Puritans had bequeathed an extraordinary spiritual inheritance to this and subsequent generations. Who was there now to further their cause and to build upon the doctrinal and practical truths so dearly proclaimed by these godly men? J.C. Ryle, in his book *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*, observes, ‘The Church of England existed in those days, with her admirable articles, her time-honoured liturgy, her parochial system, her Sunday services, and her ten thousand clergy. The non-Conformist body existed with its hardly won liberty and its free pulpit. But one account unhappily may be given of both parties. They existed, but they could hardly be said to have lived. They did nothing; they were sound asleep. The curse of the Uniformity Act seemed to rest on the Church of England. The blight of ease and freedom from persecution seemed to rest upon the Dissenters.’ The Puritan cause was forgotten; England was preoccupied with

her pleasures and the favour of God had departed from the land.

### **Latitudinarianism**

Furthermore, although William was a professed Protestant and espoused Dutch Calvinism, his practices often fell short of his doctrinal creed. He sought to accommodate the moderate non-Conformists in the Church of England by having the Book of Common Prayer rewritten. This proposal was flatly rejected. Even with the 1689 Act of Toleration, disunity was to remain a part of English Protestantism. Not only was the Church of England in a spiritual state of discord, but it had, by the eighteenth century espoused divided political alliances. Many of the High Churchmen supported the Tory party, which was not agreeable to the King. To counteract this he appointed Whig and Latitudinarian bishops.

Latitudinarianism was the product of two tendencies. A century of religious strife and religious confusion had produced in many men a sense of sheer weariness; they were willing to drop the shibboleths of contending factions and ground themselves on what they considered to be 'fundamental Christianity'. This sense of weariness was reinforced by the appeal to reason; strife about 'non-fundamental' matters was not only wearisome, but also seemed to many men irrational. The appeal to reason and the advocacy of toleration for Protestant Dissenters were the chief features of Latitudinarianism.

### **Gilbert Burnet**

William made Gilbert Burnet (his royal chaplain) bishop of Salisbury. Burnet was a Latitudinarian. He was born in Edinburgh, on September 18th, 1643. His father was an Episcopalian lawyer and his mother was from a Covenanting family. Burnet was an outstanding academic, with degrees in philosophy and theology, and a proficiency in Dutch, French, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He became bishop of Edinburgh in 1665. He later moved to London and

became politically sympathetic to the Whig party. Burnet lost favour with James II because of his overt anti-Catholic writings. He sought refuge in The Hague where he ingratiated himself into the patronage of William of Orange and was appointed his chaplain.

Burnet took an active part in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, and following the coronation of William and Mary was advanced to Bishop of Salisbury. He occupied this office until his death in 1715.

Burnet is best remembered for his historical writings: *History of My Own Times* and *History of the Reformation in England*. His best-known theological work is *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*. This work was written during his time in Salisbury and was dedicated to King William. He exhorts the King to give the necessary example to his subjects which would induce them to seek after 'a suitable reformation of our lives and manners'. His breadth of knowledge in Reformation doctrines was not uniform, and this becomes evident as he systematically treats each Article. His strength lay in the fact that he was strongly Protestant and robustly anti-Catholic. His dealing with Roman Catholic teaching in his exposition of Article XIX (Of the Church), Article XX (Of the Authority of the Church), Article XXI (Of the Authority of General Councils), Article XXII (Of Purgatory), Article XXV (Of the Sacraments), Article XXVIII (Of the Lord's Supper), Article XXX (Of Both Kinds), Article XXXI (Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross), Article XXXII (Of the Marriage of Priests), and Article XXXVII (Of Civil Magistrates) is both scholarly and clear. For example, on Article XXVII, regarding the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation, Burnet says, 'This we think is gross idolatry'. However, there is vagueness to be found in his dealings with the doctrines of Predestination, Election, and Justification. For example, Burnet's exposition of Article XVII, 'Of

Predestination and Election’, is vague to the point of causing confusion. The plain sense of the relevant article is Calvinistic, yet Burnet gives thirty-three pages of arguments both for and against this Calvinistic understanding concluding that, ‘I ... have not on this occasion declared my own opinion.’

This ‘moderate view’ of predestination and election was not the only change which affected the Church of England in the eighteenth century. Churchmen generally were less able to defend Biblical teaching and left themselves open and defenceless when innovations in public worship began to be noised among some. The exclusive use of psalms came under assault by Isaac Watts as he subtly persuaded many that the worship of the New Testament Church was deficient and needed the addition of hymns to supply this lack. Watts himself was not slow to make provision for this purported need and before long his arguments for hymnody prevailed, leaving the use of exclusive psalmody to only a few, principally Scottish, churches.

The use of hymns in public worship was further advanced by the Methodist Movement with Charles Wesley making the biggest contribution to this innovative cause.

### **John Wesley**

John Wesley and George Whitfield are singled out as the founders of the Methodist Movement. It is John Wesley who is of interest to us on this occasion as he had significant dealings with Salisbury.

John Wesley was born in 1703 to devout parents. His father was Samuel Wesley and his mother was Susanna Annesley. John was educated at home by his mother (as were his ten siblings) and he attributes to his mother many of the strengths of character that he became renowned for during his itinerant ministry.

Wesley went to Oxford University in 1720. He was prompted to start a society there to counter-balance the prevailing dissipation of the day. ‘More and more

it became the purpose of the club to realize the ideal of a consecrated Christian life.’ Here, Wesley was ordained a deacon and three years later a minister of the Church of England, but he was, as yet, a stranger to grace and the converting work of the Holy Spirit.

It was through his attendance at a Moravian meeting in London, in 1738, that John Wesley was converted. He recounts God’s dealing with his soul:

‘I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death; and I then testified openly to all there what I now felt in my heart.’

Most of the clergy of the Church of England were rigorously opposed to Wesley, and barred him from their pulpits. Thus began his itinerant, open-air preaching. It was not long before he realised that this was an effective way to reach multitudes of unconverted people. Wesley’s preaching received a warm welcome. Its emphasis upon a heart religion rather than a cold formalism exposed the needs of many of his hearers, and a growing number of people were drawn to his preaching. The first Methodist Society was formed in London in 1739 at a place known as The Foundry. The nation was on the threshold of revival as the preparatory work of the Spirit was stirring hearts to call upon the name of the Lord. However, Wesley had espoused the Arminian view of free will; falsely assuring his hearers of man’s independent ability to accept God’s Gospel overtures of salvation. (It was on their disagreement of this doctrine that Whitefield and Wesley could no longer work together in preaching the Gospel, as Whitefield had declared himself a Calvinist.)

### **Methodism in Salisbury**

During his extensive open-air ministry, John Wesley records in his journals that he visited Salisbury over forty times. His initial visits to Salisbury were to

visit his mother. Now a widow, she had moved to Salisbury to live with her daughter Martha, who was married to Westley Hall. Hall had sought to establish a Methodist work in Salisbury, but he was not a reputable character, and after his demise Wesley made several visits to assist this fledging group to persevere despite their discouragements. Eventually the work in Salisbury prospered, and by 1759 the first Methodist Church was built in St. Edmund Street. Wesley's involvement in this programme was significant. The deeds of the building contain his signature. In one of his journal he records, 'I rode to Salisbury, and advised our brethren concerning the preaching-house which they are about to build.' By September of the same year (1759) he said, having preached in the new building, 'I think, [it is] the most complete in England. It strikes everyone of any taste that sees it: not with any single part, but an expressible something of the whole.'

Further accounts in his journals detail his impressions of the congregation then established in Salisbury.

In October 1769, after preaching there, he records, 'Here I was as in a new world (compared with Wincanton). The congregation was alive, and much more the society. How pleasing would it be, to be always with such! But this is not our calling.'

His last preaching engagement in Salisbury was in September 1790.

'I do not know that ever I saw the house so crowded before, with high and low, rich and poor; so that I hope we shall again see fruit here also.'

No further mention is made of Wesley visiting Salisbury.

Regarding other Methodists, it is interesting to note that Wesley had Francis Asbury (1745-1816) sent by the Salisbury congregation to establish the Methodist cause in America. He is considered by

many to be the pioneer of Methodism in the United States. To this day many come to visit the Methodist Church in St. Edmund Street to see the place of origin of their first Methodist preacher.

As numbers were added to the Methodist work in Salisbury, other meeting places were built. The present-day Emmanuel Church building, on the Wilton Road, was built in 1860 as a Wesleyan chapel.

Present-day Methodism in Salisbury lacks much resemblance to the work begun in the 1750s by John Wesley. It has merged with the professing Christian churches of the city that hold liberal views and fraternise with Rome, losing many of the distinctive features of Methodism so dear to its founder.

### **Augustus Toplady**

Augustus Toplady was born in November 1740. His father died of yellow fever just months before his birth while serving as a major in the British army at the siege of Cartagena, South America. Toplady's widowed mother was a Godly lady and she devoted herself to his up-bringing and education. She owned an estate in Wexford, Ireland, and moved there with her son for a time. Toplady continued his education at Trinity College, Dublin, where he was noted to be a serious and diligent student.

During a visit to his mother in Wexford, he attended a revivalist meeting, and was brought to saving faith through the instrumentality of the preacher, James Morris, 'a man of great natural abilities, but of little education.' Toplady often referred to him as 'that dear messenger' or 'that man of God'.

As a young Christian, Toplady was violently opposed to Calvinism. He contemplated leaving the Church of England because of the clear Calvinistic teaching of the Thirty-Nine Articles. However, at the age of eighteen he read Manton's Discourses on the Seventeenth of John, 'which straightway caused him to range himself with the Calvinists, and freed

him effectively from what he ever regarded as a dangerous delusion.’

Toplady’s best known ministry was at Orange Street, near Leicester Square, London. The building was owned by the French Calvinist Reformed Church, and they granted permission for Toplady to preach there on Sabbath and Wednesday evenings. His ministry there was considered powerful and effective, and was blessed by God.

His writings were extensive and well circulated. He became editor of the Gospel Magazine in 1775, and contributed greatly to its articles.

Toplady developed lasting friendships with many of the leading preachers of the day. He had one particular friendship of many years in Salisbury with Dr Baker, whom he esteemed highly in the Lord. Toplady last visited him in 1778, the year of his own death, as he broke his journey en route to Broad Hembury in Devon. Toplady’s thoughts were then much taken up with the uncertainty of his life, and he felt his departure from this world was imminent. His time in Salisbury seems to have been one of spiritual refreshing, and his affections were increasingly set upon the things that are above. To a friend he wrote:

‘God’s good providence brought me thither yesterday, early in the afternoon, quite unfatigued by my journey, and rejoicing in spirit before Him.... My mind is quite at rest. All my affairs respecting both this world and a better are completely settled.’

He entered into his Master’s rest on August 11th, 1778.

### **Salisbury Baptists**

By the eighteenth century the Baptist cause was firmly established in the land. Although it had been tried by many years of persecution, by God’s grace it had stood firm and not compromised with the National Church, although labelled by it as Dissenting. However, it must be said that the

Baptist interest in England fell into decline after the Glorious Revolution. Liberty did not bring life. The sunshine had for a time a withering effect. After the lapse of more than sixty years after the close of the persecution the denomination was found to have decreased. ‘There is no reason to doubt,’ says Ivimey, ‘that our churches were far more prosperous at the Revolution in 1688, than at this period [1753], sixty years afterward; so that prosperity had indeed slain more than the sword.’ Despite the spiritual slumber of the land, the Lord was still pleased to raise up Godly men such as John Gill, Benjamin Keach, Andrew Gifford, William Carey, and others, who were valiant both for the Truth and for Baptist doctrine.

Little is known of the life of the small Baptist work in Salisbury (which had been started in 1655) during the first half of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the prevailing ungodliness of the day had infiltrated the church and rendered her testimony insignificant among an unbelieving people. But, by the latter half of the century the Lord was pleased to bless the diligent labours of Henry Philips who pastored the Baptist work at Brown Street for twenty three years.

### **Henry Philips**

Henry Philips was born in Carmarthenshire, Wales, and was born again by the Spirit of God at the age of eighteen. He does not appear to have had a dramatic conversion experience, but was redeemed by Grace through the instrumentality of Howell Harris. As Philips studied the Scriptures he cultivated a Berean spirit, and, ‘reading the New Testament, and particularly the second chapter of Acts, he became acquainted with the true nature of a “gospel church”’. He was baptised as a believer and became a member of the Baptist Church in Pen-y-Garn in March 1750. He received some theological instruction from Mr Miles Norris before moving on to Bristol for further training.

Philips supplied vacant pulpits for a time before departing to Co. Waterford, Ireland. Here he was

later ordained as a minister of the Gospel. He spent a brief period preaching in Dublin to a small gathering of believers. On his return from Ireland he kept up a warm correspondence with many of the brethren there who had grown to love him.

In 1766, Philips settled in Salisbury. 'His settlement with this people was one of the happiest events of his life; and in this connection he demonstrated, that "the liberal heart deviseth liberal things."'

When he first arrived the congregation was made up of about thirty people. As the Lord blessed his ministry, the numbers in attendance began to increase, and by 1775 there was said to have been between two and three hundred coming to hear him at the evening service. He attributed this to the work of God.

On beginning his ministry he endeavoured to keep a record of activities at the church. This record was not kept for long but it lends us insight into his view of the doctrinal stand of the church when he described it as 'the Baptist Congregation of the Calvinistic persuasion who keep the first day of the week for their xtian [sic] Sabbath'.

Philips was well acquainted with the good old evangelical authors - they were his delight and from his very entrance on the work of the ministry he gloried in the doctrine of free and distinguishing grace. It appeared to those who knew him best, that no one acknowledged more heartily than he, that what he was as a Christian and as a minister, he was by the grace of God.

Philips had a burden for the ignorant and unlearned children of the city, and opened a free school, which on occasion exceeded 150 students. These children were equipped with the essential skills of reading and writing, but most importantly their teaching was grounded upon Christian truths. They were especially catechised from the Baptist Catechism, and instructed from particular portions of Baptist Assembly papers. These children received

a sound Christian education and were used to bring the Scriptures into their homes, as Philips often distributed New Testaments and Bibles as awards for his students.

He began to distribute Christian books and tracts in the city, and was known also to send quantities of Bibles to his beloved home country, Wales. In effect, a home mission work was begun by Philips, which was to greatly characterise future Gospel works. The fruit of these labours often remained concealed, but one account is given of the blessings received in Rippon's account of the life of Philips:

At one time he gave Bibles to a regiment that was going abroad. Some years after, a soldier of that regiment, marching through Sarum, while they halted just to take refreshment, asked a person of the town, who stood near him, whether Mr Philips was alive, and if he knew him? Being answered in the affirmative, he said, 'I beg you to give my love to him, and tell him I thank him for a Bible he gave me five years ago; and blessed be God! I now understand it.'

Philips continued his labours in the Lord with unalloyed zeal, and though considered by some as a 'plain preacher', the grace of God working through him gave glory to the excellency of the Word and not of the man.

'He was often afflicted with the excruciating pain of the stone and gravel, and for the two last years of his life thought every fresh fit the messenger of death.'

In 1789, the last year of his life, he stopped preaching just three months before his death due to a marked decrease in his well-being. It is thought that during these last three months he had a stroke resulting in the loss of power of his left arm. He was eventually confined to bed. As the church gathered to pray for him, he in turn was much taken up in prayer for them. Asked near the end how it was with him he replied, 'I am made up of sin and holiness: in myself black with sin, but in Jesus all fair - no spot

in that robe, which, blessed be God! covers me all over.'

Philips passed into the presence of his Lord on August 20th, 1789. 'He retained his senses to the last; and in the night, being frequently requested to move his hand if he was happy, he as frequently moved it.'

His funeral sermon was preached by Mr Horsey of Portsea, Hampshire, and Mr Adams, the Independent minister at Salisbury, spoke at the graveside.

### **John Saffery**

The Baptist Church at Brown Street had a brief period of vacancy after the death of Henry Philips in 1789, before John Saffery succeeded him as pastor.

Little is known of John Saffery's family connection and youth other than that he did not have the advantages of a good education or of social connections in his birth town of Hythe, in Hampshire. However, in the benign providence of God, he was compelled to move to Portsea for work and was directed by the Spirit of God to attend upon the ministry of Joseph Horsey. Under the quickening ministry of this man, Saffery's gift as a preacher was recognised and nurtured. Here he experienced necessary practical training for the ministry.

The bond of union between the young preacher and his pastor was strengthened when he married the pastor's daughter, Elizabeth Horsey, though this happy marriage was cut short by Elizabeth's early death on May 30th, 1798.

Rippon records her death in his Baptist Annual Register: '... the pastor, the church, dear relatives, a large connection, sustained no common loss, in the death of Mrs Elizabeth, wife of the Rev. Mr Saffery, and daughter of Rev. Mr Horsey, of Portsea, only 35 years of age. A voice was heard, by the side of her

grave, which published to her affectionate husband, a sermon in a sentence, -

'She is perfect, and You are training.'

Saffery was twenty-seven years old when he began his pastorate in Salisbury. His call from the congregation to be their pastor was unanimous. The letter issued to Mr. Saffery expressed their unity thus:

'The Lord in His allusive [elusive] providence having removed our late worthy Pastor Mr Henry Philips from us by death, it behoveth us as members of Christ's militant church to seek another to go in and out before us in his stead; and as well as we are satisfied with the report of your moral character, with your abilities as a preacher; and being well persuaded of your steady attachment to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and having we trust sought in a conscious manner the Divine direction of the Great Head of the church, we do by this our church letter invite you to come and settle among us, to preach the Gospel unto us and as soon as convenient to accept of the pastoral care of our church by Ordination - praying for a blessing upon your labours in the Lord's vineyard.'

Not only did the brethren desire a man who evidenced a hearty 'attachment to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel', but this ministerial call demonstrated a harmonious unity among the congregation in its desire to promote the truths upon which the church had been founded. At his ordination on April 13th, 1791 the text preached upon was 'my kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). The charge given to Saffery was from 2 Corinthians 5: 1-2 and the exhortation to the congregation was taken from 1 Thessalonians 4:1. Happily, Saffery's doctrinal views accorded with those of the church, and as he became established as the pastor of this Baptist congregation, these tenets of the faith were expressed in a document he produced for the trustees. The church believed in: Three equal

persons in the Godhead, Eternal and Personal Election. Original Sin, Particular Redemption, Free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, Regeneration, Conversion and Sanctification by the Spirit and the Grace of God, the Moral Law a rule for the conduct of all believers, the final perseverance of the saints, the resurrection of the body to Eternal Life, the future Judgement, the Eternal Happiness of the righteous and everlasting misery of such as die impenitent - and practicing Baptism by Immersion to such only as are of years of understanding upon their own personal confession of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus began a happy relationship between pastor and congregation that flourished as both grew in the knowledge of grace and in service to their Master.

Dr Steadman, then minister of the neighbouring Broughton Baptist Church, wrote in his diary in 1796, 'Salisbury thrives much ... within the space of time that I have been here [i.e. five years] they have had nearly fifty added to them, most of whom have been converted under the ministry there.' Despite the difficulties that were hindering the advance of the Gospel in Dr Steadman's congregation, he exercised a godly influence upon Saffery, especially in the area of evangelism.

The church to which Saffery came would find in its new minister continuity with his predecessor in both doctrinal views and evangelistic zeal. John Saffery was also equally committed to the education of the young with the provision of schooling for the poor. With this end in view Saffery rented other premises that could be used during the week. In 1792 he established a Sabbath school work which had a sound Biblical basis. Through the subscription of some of the church members Bibles, New Testaments, tracts, and catechism books were provided for these children.

### **The Baptist Missionary Society**

John Saffery's vision for the advance of the

Gospel was not peculiar to himself or to his own congregation in Salisbury. The more the Gospel was proclaimed the greater became the zeal of many men to take seriously the Great Commission.

'Salisbury by the late 1790's had a growing number of Evangelical Christians committed to itinerant preaching and village evangelism. It was reported that by 1798 as many as fifty to sixty preachers of different denominations were going out to the villages each Sunday.' Among these men were John Saffery and one of his members, Thomas Westfield. Two villages, Shrewton and Rockborne, are particularly associated with the outreach work of Saffery and Westfield. The success of these outreaches was contingent upon the work of the Holy Spirit and God in his sovereignty was pleased to bless the labours of these evangelically-minded men. Mr. Saffery took on the greater part of the preaching at Shrewton and Rockborne and was on occasion relieved by some of his own church members.

The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) was founded in Kettering, Northamptonshire, in October 1792 with the intent of bringing the Gospel to those countries which still remained alienated from the knowledge of the true and living God. It was not long before the Salisbury Baptist minister began to take an active role in supporting this new missionary endeavour. Under his influence an auxiliary group was set up in Romsey, Hampshire, and Saffery and Steadman took leading parts in the organisation of its business. His unrelenting desire for Gospel prosperity constrained him to seek necessary financial support from local congregations. He freely distributed copies of Carey's and Brainerd's writings to further advance this cause. 'The extraordinary growth in contributions from this part of England can largely be attributed to the astonishing zeal of the Salisbury minister travelling around the churches soliciting funds, in particular in Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire.' So well-known



was his involvement in the BMS that in June 1814 ‘he had the honour of giving a public lecture on behalf of this society in the Jews’ Chapel, London’.

National itinerant missionary work became a prominent part of the Society’s vision. A period of itinerant preaching was proposed for Cornwall, which was to be undertaken by two Baptist ministers. Saffrey and Steadman were approached to undertake this call and both agreed unreservedly. They left Salisbury for Cornwall on June 27th, 1796. This was a period of remarkable preaching throughout the county and was accompanied by Divine favour and blessing. Steadman submitted a report to John Rippon for publication in *The Baptist Annual Register*. Extracts from this report give us encouraging insights into the enthusiasm of these men for this work and the underlying confidence they had in a Sovereign God:

‘We preached in all the towns, except one towards the northeast, (and that was omitted through brother Saffery’s illness), and in most of the villages of any considerable size. Each of us preached three times on Lord’s days, except in two instances, and on one brother Saffery preached four times; and were not above seven or eight week-evenings in the whole eight weeks without preaching. We found the inhabitants in general civil, friendly, intelligent, and much inclined to hear the word. ... But whether in meeting-houses, or in town-halls, in private houses, or in the open air, we were, as far as we know, entirely free from any designed interruption worth mentioning. In several of the towns, and in some places amongst the tin mines, we had from 500 to 1000 hearers. The obligations of real Christians to labour to the utmost, to bring others acquainted with the gospel, appear to me so numerous, so powerful, and so obvious, I feel surprised that the godly among the Baptists, and other denominations, have made so few efforts to accomplish it.’

### **Irish Baptists Assisted**

It was not long after his return from Cornwall that

‘the Salisbury minister was convinced that a fresh enthusiasm for Evangelism was required in Baptist ranks’. He addressed his concerns to his colleagues of the Western Baptist Association. (This association eventually sub-divided and Salisbury became a part of the Southern Association). Saffery was a regular preacher at these meetings. He was asked on two occasions to produce a circular letter for the Western Association. His first circular, produced in 1805, was entitled *The Importance of Strenuous Exertions in the Cause of Christ*. He earnestly endeavoured to demonstrate how suitable Calvinistic doctrine was to Biblical evangelism, and reminded these men of the Baptist Association how incumbent this work should be upon their ministry.

Saffrey also visited the Irish Baptists on behalf of the BMS. The Irish Baptists were in a spiritually impoverished state and were glad to receive counsel from Saffery and his companion George Barclay. His report was published in the October 1813 issue of the *Baptist Magazine*:

‘The Baptist Churches are few and small. They are in danger of Arminianism on the one hand and Sandemanianism on the other; so that there is much to deplore; yet there are those in their communion who are desiring and praying for better days.’

Saffery felt the great need of the situation and was compelled to plead among his own brethren on behalf of the Irish Baptists. Joseph Ivimey (who was baptised by Saffery in 1790) responded by forming a new society in London, *The Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland*. Once this work was established, Saffery was able to leave it to others and he was freed to continue his ministry in Salisbury.

In 1799 Saffery re-married. He and Maria Grace Andrews were blessed with a happy family life. Maria had moved from Newbury, Berkshire, to Salisbury, and had begun to attend the Baptist church where Mr. Saffery was pastor. They had a

family of six children. Maria proved a suitable and constant help to her husband, making provision for his needs and giving support to all of his labours. She out-lived her husband by thirty-three years, and is best remembered for the girls' school she started in Salisbury. She was considered by some to be a gifted writer and many of her poems were put in print.

Although John Saffery was blessed with a sturdy constitution he was not exempt from the accidents of life that men in general are subject to. He suffered a severe fall from a gig when he was travelling in Dorset to raise missionary funds. His recovery was slow and was eventually arrested by complications associated with liver disease. He continued as a faithful servant of God to the end of his life and received his crown of glory when he entered into his Master's presence on March 9th, 1825.

God was pleased to use John Saffery to strengthen and advance the Gospel in Salisbury, and to engage others in missionary endeavours consistent with Biblical evangelism. He was a man taken from an

obscure background who, through the converting grace of God, directed many to seek and to find the Saviour he commended. He is remembered as one of the most prominent English Baptists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

While the eighteenth century in England lacked the doctrinal precision of the previous century and deadness abounded in the earlier years, particular blessings were experienced before this century ended. We see a reflection of these blessings in Salisbury at this time with the remarkable number of evangelical churches in the city and its villages, the determined effort to engage in evangelistic endeavour both at home and abroad and the resurgence of definite Calvinism. That these things are still found in Salisbury in the twenty-first century is a cause for hope and an occasion to beseech God that he will revive his cause throughout both this city and the whole country, as he did in the eighteenth century.