

Baptists in East Kent.

(Continued from page 92.)

At Hythe and Saltwood, Richard Hatton was teaching; at Folkestone [] Arthur,* with John Cheesman and Thomas Tunbridge. At Dover Richard Hobbs preached in a room at the south end of Samuel Taverner's house; also [] Milford* taught at Lawrence Knott's. Hobbs taught also at Guston and Lower Deal, where Joan Colemar offered her house; while Edmund Prescott used the houses of Thomas Partridge and Richard Barrow at Guston. Sandwich had a conventicle largely attended, and Minster a small one. Away to the west, George Howson's house at Herne was a centre, and to the south James Henry of Preston by Wingham had many adherents; perhaps he was the teacher at John Russell's house in Chislett. The Canterbury reports are mis-copied; it is certain that the meeting-place was on St. Mary, Northgate, and that Alexander Tritton taught there in 1669, Matthew Saunders in his own house in 1672, though this was then entered as "Norgame"; it is also certain that widow Sanders opened her house at Boughton Monchelsea over the hill; it is probable that the John Knott reported at the city in 1669 was a Baptist. At Chilham, George Nash was teacher. Wye had 50 or 60 meeting regularly in 1669, and they were in three groups by 1672, Thomas Glover, Norton Munden and John Jarman being teachers, at the houses of John Searles, George Hadlow and Michael Hadlow. They also had two houses at Ashford, belonging to George Hadlow and Agnes Young, where Benjamin Bowyer and [] Smallwood had been teaching in 1669.

We have equally detailed information about those on the Chatham road, on the Maidstone road, and round Cranbrook; but these formed other groups not closely connected with those of East Kent. As far as we can tell, nearly all the people and causes named above were General Baptists; the only doubtful case is the Canterbury group and Northgate, where we know the Particular Baptists met in 1715.

*From Baptist sources the name is spelt Auther. A late respected Messenger of Assembly had as his second Christian name Aurthur. This might be cleared up by inspection of parish registers.

† Probably another misreading; Fulford.

Sheldon was so dissatisfied with the actual administration of the new Conventicle act, that he instituted fresh enquiries in 1676, asking this time how many adult dissenters there were in each parish. The larger returns showed 25 at Hythe, 40 at Folkestone, 101 and 200 at Dover, 10 at Deal, 121 and 147 at Sandwich, 12 at Eythorn, 800 at Northgate in Canterbury, and 324 in Westgate. These of course were not all Baptists.

Persecution was renewed, and fresh leaders appear. George Hammon, who had worked further west, is now heard of from Canterbury, as holding meetings in the woods and making fun or making converts of the informers.*

In a second lull, Taverner carried out an organization into better-defined groups.† On the coast he arranged three churches: the group round Hythe and Folkestone looked to [] Auther and one of the Hadlows: he himself Richard Cannon and Thomas Partridge saw to Dover: those near Deal and Sandwich chose Henry Brown and Richard Slaughter [of Northbourne]‡ as Elders. The whole community agreed on an annual May meeting, which lasted till 1732.

The example was speedily followed by those a little further inland, and they grouped as Stelling, Eythorn, Wingham, Isle of Thanet. And at Canterbury Daniel Saffery and Thomas Beacham were ordained Elders, with Vincent Marsh, William Huggett and John Knott as Deacons.

Thus before 1681 closed, there were eight churches of the same faith, organized on the same lines that were now standard with General Baptists. All officers were unpaid, and there was a preference for two joint-Elders to watch over each church.

II. CONTACT WITH DENOMINATIONAL LIFE.

The General Baptists had elaborated a system whereby churches grouped in order to maintain evangelists, who were called, from 2 Corinthians viii. 23, "Messengers" of the churches. All the groups met annually, if possible, to consult their plans for the next year, and to deal with any matters which had arisen of general interest. At the end of Queen Anne's reign, a man of Kent named James Richardson had the happy idea of gathering up scattered records of such meetings, both for his own county and for the kingdom. The books he compiled were then handed over to the relevant bodies, and were continued as current minute-books in each case. They give us inner information for the next period.

* Ivimey; II., 221.

† Taylor; I., 278.

‡ Cong. Hist. Soc. *Trans.*, V. 127.

In 1691 Canterbury was strong enough to spare one of her members, Nathanael Foxwell, to help the aged Grantham at Norwich: Francis Eastwicke of Hythe was at the meeting that arranged this. He was accompanied next year by Taverner, who registered the south end of his dwelling-house for the worship of his congregation.*

But in a year or two grave trouble arose owing to the views held by Matthew Caffin of Horsham as to the Trinity, and the peculiar person of Christ. Joseph Wright of Maidstone opposed him, and the atmosphere became so heated that most of the Kentish churches preferred to abstain from the meetings. There was a disruption in 1696, and Ashford was the only local church which took sides. To those who were clear as to the Deity of Christ, it sent its two elders, George Ellis and Henry Longley, with John Searles. And finding that one of its own members, Norton Jarman, held anti-Trinitarian views, it disowned him. Canterbury held aloof, but to its Elder, Daniel Saffery, it added as officers Samuel Ongley and Searles Jarman; the last-named evidently had something of Norton Jarman's views.

It will be observed that in these circles, a Christian name was often taken from another family. It is worth noticing that Sampson Pearce was another member at Ashford, and tracing the filiation of his name. Another Sampson Pearce was at Dover a century later, and Priscilla Peirce later still immortalized her name and her church and her denomination by her bequests for charity. Meanwhile Sampsons had been all over the district.

In 1704 peace was made between the rival conventions in London. The terms were signed by Joseph Green and William Spilstead for Hythe, Christopher Fulford for Deal, William* Knott and John Bush for Eythorn, Samuel Ongley for Canterbury; Parsons and Bush were also present from Faversham, with another Fulford and Daniel Hammon from Canterbury. But within five years there was a second disruption, when again the Kentish churches were divided. Most, however, adopted the laxer view, and after Eythorn, Canterbury, Dover, Boughton, and Hythe had once more sent to London, they ceased to attend at all, but found what they needed by organizing on 16 May, 1717, an Association for East Kent.

Meantime enquiries had been made by a Presbyterian minister in London as to the political strength of dissent, with

* Taylor; I. 350.

* *William*; probably the son of Henry and Elizabeth, christened 20 October, 1642. There is no sign of any John Knott at this time. These names are on a broadside discovered by the Rev. A. S. Langley, F.R.Hist.S.

a view to the repeal of the penal laws. The information that filtered through from East Kent in 1715 showed as to the Baptists:—[William] Kennett of Folkestone, John and David Simpson of Dover, [] Fulford and [Stephen] Lacy of Deal, [James] Knott of Sandwich, Richard Godfrey of Thanet, Samuel Ongley, and Searles Jarman of Canterbury, [George] Ellis and Henry Longley of Ashford. There were also Samuel Newman and [] Linacre at North Gate, Canterbury, who represent the Particular Baptists, and therefore raise the question whether the North Gate group of 1669 and 1672 were of that type.

As church books become available now for both Eythorn and Thanet, we can trace separately the various streams into which the whole was parting.

III. THE CANTERBURY CHURCH.

In 1711 William Browning emerges as a representative of this church at a London assembly. His family was long identified with this cause, and from it eventually sprang the poet, Robert Browning. John Hobbs was another man of mark. Searles Jarman in 1721 was ordained Messenger, to superintend the work in Kent generally; but already the instinct to evangelize was dying fast, and Messengers were prone to continue in residence at one place, to compose difficulties in existing churches, to preside at meetings, to ordain Elders. Especially at Canterbury was it easy for the example of an Archbishop to infect the Messengers, and a protest rather later on that very line did not check the tendency.

Samuel Ongley bequeathed £300 to buy premises for a meeting-house, and another gift of £100 facilitated the scheme. Hitherto the church had evidently met in the private houses of its members. Now in 1236 the Dominicans had built a Friary, whose refectory bordered on the Stour. The buildings had been converted to other uses under Henry VIII, and in 1658 this block was acquired by one of the large Huguenot colony, Peter de la Pierre, a doctor. The Baptists purchased the premises, including a little garth, in 1732, and converted them into a meeting-house and burial-ground.

Then there came an important gathering in 1734 when Richard Drinkwater came from Chichester and Robert Mercer from Warbleton to preside as Messengers over a general re-organization. William Browning and Stephen Philpot were the local representatives, there being no Elder of Canterbury at the time. Hythe and Folkestone apparently did not send; we are aware of serious trouble there, disruption on doctrinal

grounds, and the rise of a Particular Baptist church. Dover sent its Elder, Robert Pyall, with John Prescott and John Sanders. Deal sent Stephen Lacy with Stephen Broadley. Thanet sent John Bush and Richard Chilton. Distant Tong sent John Pantry. Wingham sent Elder John Kingsford and John Ladd. Stelling sent Elder George Ash and William Mackney. Eythorn sent James Knott, restored as a member, but not Elder, for the meeting arranged that Eythorn should be supplied by John Kingsford and John Sanders.

After this display of energy, Canterbury seems to have fallen asleep. Except for two isolated mentions at Associations, it withdrew within itself. Richard Huggate went to Assembly in 1754, where Stephen Philpot joined him four years later. And the Philpot family proved to have plenty of vitality; Stephen himself took charge successively of Stelling, Dover, and Saffron Walden for more than fifty years; others ministered to various places in East Kent.

A turning point came in 1770, when once again a clear evangelical note was sounded, and all who believed in the gospel and in a vigorous preaching of the gospel, drew off from the old Assembly. Among them were James Fenn of Deal and Elder John Knott of Eythorn, the latter being one of a deputation to take formal leave. Canterbury however held by the organization, which declined to budge from the principle of General Redemption coupled with the Six Principles of Hebrews vi. Next year a young man of twenty-one was sent for the first time, Sampson Kingsford of Sturry. His family had been prominent at Wingham for a generation; and was destined to uphold the churches with money, men, and advice.

(To be continued.)

Eythorne: the Story of a Village Baptist Church, by Pastor A. C. Miller, 80 pages, 2s., Kingsgate Press.

This little work tells the story of a sturdy church which has been true to the gospel for 270 years, but has been in a variety of ecclesiastical relations. The writing of her history has prompted the article on the neighbouring churches in East Kent, elsewhere in our pages; for Eythorne is the mother or the grandmother of every live church around, while she is still vigorous and alive to changing needs.

On page 56 the last sentence about Charles W. Skemp should read:—He did excellent work in Iowa for 46 years, dying at Vinton in 1912.