

Baptists in East Kent.

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In 1773 careful enquiry was made by Josiah Thompson, a Baptist minister of London, as to the state of the Dissenting Interest. His results, to be seen at Dr. Williams' Library, show that thirty out of forty-six dissenting churches in Kent were Baptist, thirty-nine out of fifty-five ministers. In this district Jonathan Clark and James Hosmer at Hythe, William Ashdowne at Dover, James Fenn of Deal, Stephen Gowland of Sandwich, Sampson Kingsford of Canterbury, Stephen Philpot of Stelling, and Thomas Gillibrand of Ashford signed a petition to parliament for the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts. There were also Baptist ministers at Folkestone, Ramsgate, Margate, Wingham, besides Knott of Eythorn, who did not sign.

Although Sampson Kingsford was thus practically the chief man at Canterbury, yet technically he was only a "minister," and ten years elapsed before he was ordained Elder. But the denomination saw his energy, and almost at once chose him as Messenger, perhaps with the hope that at the age of thirty-five he would have many years in which to travel and extend the work. They saw the problem, Was a Messenger with district duties also to hold office as a local Elder; and they asked whether the Canterbury church would agree. No objection was raised, though we may think it would have been wiser to release him. With two others he was ordained at Canterbury at the end of July. His influence steadily extended through the whole denomination till his death in 1821, when a fine altar-tomb was placed in the little graveyard.

This wider ministry brought about a revival of the old plan of joint-Elders. John Farrin was associated before 1798, and continued till his death in 1838, before which time John Marten and T. B. Barton had been successive colleagues. The full list of Elders is known, and it includes Thomas Cromwell, Ph.D., F.S.A., in 1864, Cyril Abdy Greene, D.C.L., in 1883, Joseph Remington Wilson, M.A., in 1891. These and the others are better known in Unitarian than in Baptist circles.

There appears nothing to record as to any doings of the

church. Early this century the building stood disused, and it was ultimately sold by leave of the Charity Commissioners, the proceeds being applied, like much other property in the district, to support the church at Adrian Street, Dover. Any Old Mortality who cleans the tombstones at Canterbury, may discern a memorial to Priscilla Kingsford, second daughter of Sampson, who passed away in 1839 at the age of 51. He may then remember that from the family of Sampson Pearce in Dover there sprang another Priscilla, whose liberality prolongs the last remnant of this ancient denomination in East Kent.

IV. THE THANET DISTRICT.

In 1715 Richard Godfrey was reported to London as a Baptist in this island. It is possible that he was a General Baptist, but that surname is otherwise unknown in the denomination. It is equally possible to associate him with the Baptist meeting known at St. Peter's in 1710. But it is more likely that he and it were Particular.

We are on sure ground when we take the minute-book of the Thanet church which opens in 1725. This speaks of property at Alkham and Poulton held for the poor, the former worth 9/- a year, also of meeting-houses at Deal and Sandwich. The leaders were John Bush, who lived at Monkton, a house in the island where meetings were held, and Richard Chilton who began his public work in 1727. Two years later a meeting of ministers was held at Ramsgate to arrange for supply of the churches. When re-organization took place in 1732, the Thanet members numbered 32; they chose Bush and Chilton as Elders, with three deacons. It is evident that though Sandwich and Deal were stations, Ramsgate was the centre of gravity; in 1738 a meeting-house in Farley Place was put in trust.

More than that, when Eythorn had a hard time owing to the remarkable views of David Rutter, which disturbed the church for six years, Bush and Chilton rendered steady aid, sending John Sanders, junior. Work was opened also at Birchington, where in 1740 Nathanael Matthews was called to the ministry. Yet with all this enterprise there was a remarkable conservatism, and when Elder Chilton married out of fellowship, great trouble ensued, so that five arbitrators were called in to deal with the case in 1751; their verdict was that he had erred, but not beyond forgiveness. This principle had been laid down early, and was upheld though challenged again and again; it led to very close bonds, but also to a dying out, or exclusions: this case is the latest that seems to have been

formally raised. Chilton bore no malice, and left a legacy to the church.

In 1758 the church was in need of a minister, and the need was only met by Thomas Piety of Hythe being appointed. He was well-to-do, and so could probably drive over; but the arrangement was not likely to promote the church life. However, he revived united action, took John Griggs and William Foord to an Association meeting at Canterbury, and represented that only one deacon was left, aged and six miles away, so that one or two more officers and ministers were needed. The Association, however, threw the onus back on the church, but next year John Knott of Barfrestone, Elder of Eythorn, announced that he and his assistants would supply Thanet once a month, John Kingsford [of Wingham?] once a month.

Meantime Piety and his wife Ann settled £300 to support a minister at Ramsgate, and tried to strengthen their own town of Hythe by importing a Baptist schoolmaster. And in that same year, 1768, a meeting-house at Birchington was put in trust. The difficulty evidently was to find men, not money; and the church declined to take the bold step of Eythorn, abandon old-world custom and Unitarian doctrine, and throw in its lot with the New Connexion.

On the contrary, when four London churches of the Old Connexion united to build a meeting-house in Worship Street for their alternate use, but could not unitedly find the money, Thomas Piety lent them £300 on mortgage; this was apparently a new investment of his former endowment. The Thanet church was about as strong, financially and spiritually, and numerically, as the London churches, for in 1782 it had just eight members, and both meeting-houses were rented out to other bodies.

A revival took place, with George Kingsford of Stelling coming as a "minister." New trustees were appointed for Ramsgate, and conversions began again. Until now, baptisms had been either in the sea at Sandwich or in the Particular Baptist meeting-house at Shallows, but on 23 April, 1786, the first was held at Ramsgate. It is carefully minuted that candidates were asked whether they agreed to the Six Principles, and that after they were baptized, hands were laid on them.

On 6 July, Messenger Sampson Kingsford was asked to come and ordain George as Elder, which was duly done on 21 April, 1787. At this ceremony, Ashdowne of Dover, Fenn of Deal, Philpot of Canterbury, and W. Kingsford of Wing-

ham signed the minutes along with the Messenger: it is also noted that Rainger of Eythorn, Purchis of Margate, and Atwood of Folkestone were present; they were Particular Baptists.

The same year new trustees were appointed for Birchington, where a gallery and a baptistery were put in.

W. Kingsford of Barton Mill built a meeting at Broadstairs, which was opened on 20 June, 1790, by Dan Taylor, who was now back in the Assembly, having indeed been in the chair a month earlier. He was working with Fenn of Deal and with Sampson Kingsford, having joined with him in writing the Circular Letter. George Kingsford presided at the Lord's Supper on 12 September, but seems to have died within eighteen months. Fenn also went to America, and Thanet chose Thomas Christophers senior as its Elder on 2 June, 1793.

The next fifty years show steady decline. The meeting-house at Sandwich was closed, and when re-opened for a few weeks in 1803 it was damaged by "evil-disposed persons," and the church simply complained to the Association, but did nothing, and abandoned the premises. Apparently Eythorn did step in, but Thanet was too languid to do anything. We only have glimpses of Thomas Chapman in 1806, of Fenn back at Deal, then of supplies there in 1833.

The fact is that other causes had grown up in the neighbourhood, fostered by people with clear evangelical convictions, willing to make sacrifices for them. The Independents had founded Zion at Ramsgate in 1816, Ebenezer at Birchington in 1819, and a place at Wingham in 1817, while a Union chapel arose in Herne Bay in 1822. What the Particular Baptists were doing will be shown presently. There was no longer any scope for a church that had no vision beyond the Six Principles, and relied on the spare time of a tradesman to whom they paid nothing, but who was allowed to take the balance of endowments after all expenses were defrayed.

The New Connexion came to the rescue after the death of Christophers on 31 March, 1842. John Stevenson of Borough Road in London presided at a special meeting in 1844. It proved that counting one member at Canterbury and one at Sandwich, there were thirteen on the roll. Under the guidance of the New Connexion, Joseph Packer, the assistant-minister was chosen pastor, the building at Birchington was let to the Primitive Methodists, with the right reserved to preach there occasionally, all the trust deeds and property were overhauled. There was money enough to lend Sevenoaks £250, but Sevenoaks paid no interest, Worship Street followed the

example, and the New Connexion declined to act as collector. As for spiritual work, it proved that when in 1855 two daughters of the pastor were baptized, and they counted two members at Worcester, two at Margate, one at St. Peter's, one at Deal, one at Sandwich, there were still thirteen all told. Three years later, when a Particular Baptist chapel was built at Birchington, the old General Baptist building was sold, and the proceeds were spent on repairing the Ramsgate premises.

The New Connexion felt unable to cope with this remarkable situation, but they showed to the trustees of the General Baptist Fund that the "pastor" was a well-to-do business man, so that grants from this source ceased. When the Worship Street building was acquired by the Metropolitan Board of Works for improving the street, the mortgage of 1780 was paid off, and the proceeds were invested in government stock. New trusts were prepared under the guidance of the New Connexion, the "pastor" was induced to resign, and the church of eight members disbanded on 20 June, 1884.

V. THE CHURCH AT DOVER.

The Dover church had a meeting-house by 1655, with John Finis and Richard Hobbs prominent; Luke Howard, however, joined the Quakers that year. All the leading men were imprisoned in 1661, and many details of persecution are available. In 1681 Samuel Taverner and Richard Cannon were ordained joint Elders. After the Revolution, Taverner registered part of his dwelling for worship, and gave part of his garden for burials. His tomb of 1696 may still be seen there, though the ground is merged with the public burial-yard between Prince's Street and Market Square.

The cause was next upheld by the Simpson, Finis and Prescott families, till with 1728 Robert Pyall came to the front; in 1745 a new meeting-house was built near Market Lane. After twelve years with no apparent leader, William Ashdowne and Stephen Philpot were ordained Elders in 1771, then Sampson Pearce emerged in 1783. James Peirce married Priscilla, a descendant of Taverner, and in 1803 she started the first Sunday school in the town. Benjamin Marten was Elder 1800-1823, and saw a new chapel on Adrian Street opened in 1820. Here George Culmer Pound flourished, preaching to congregations of four hundred in afternoon and evening; but at this time a local historian wrote, "of late years most of the members appear to have embraced Unitarian doctrine." The tendency would be the more pronounced after 1821, when

Particular Baptists began to organize in Dover, and afford an evangelical centre.

Priscilla Peirce, however, left an endowment for Adrian Street. In 1870 this church was second in the Assembly only to Trowbridge, for it had forty-five members. To-day it is the second oldest in the Assembly, yielding only to Deptford, one of whose constituents dates from 1626; and it is the only church of this type surviving in Kent.

VI. THE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS.

All the Baptists mentioned hitherto had laid firm hold on the truth that Jesus Christ had died for all, so that redemption was available to men in *general*. But Calvin had so emphasized the choice by God of *particular* people as the objects of His grace, that in the early seventeenth century the great mass of religious Englishmen believed these particular people alone were saved, and even that they alone could possibly be redeemed. Men of this creed who were won to Baptist principles retained their limited view in this respect, and were known as Calvinistic or Particular Baptists. Among them William Kiffin was prominent, and we know that about 1650 he did evangelize in Kent, though we are not sure he reached these parts.

Except for Daniel Coxe of Canterbury, the first Particular Baptist known to be in this district was Colonel Hutchinson, who was confined at Sandown blockhouse in 1664, while his wife lodged a mile south, in Deal. But there is no likelihood he was in a position to win any converts.

It is possible that the group of Baptists reported at Canterbury in 1669 as worshipping on Northgate under Alexander Tritton were of this type. It is certain that when a congress was called in London for 1689 of all churches which agreed with a Baptist revision of the Westminster Confession, a church at Sandwich responded, and sent its pastor, Thomas Feckenham, with Edward Taylor. This illustrates the mobility of evangelists, for Feckenham had worked for a score of years in Worcestershire and the midlands. Of his work in Kent we know little, except that he had a public debate with an Independent minister at Ramsgate.

Meanwhile a Particular Baptist church arose at Canterbury on Northgate, under Samuel Newman and [] Linacre, who were reported in 1715 to Dr. Evans in London. And since the G.B. church at Hythe and Folkestone had come into contact with the teachings of Matthew Caffin, one element in it was not satisfied to be quiet; the Green family had been prominent, but were increasingly disturbed. Now in Folkestone there were Particular Baptists, of whom John Stace was chief;

they both held local meetings, as early as 1720, and also went to Canterbury to meet their brethren in the city.

When in 1728 the two Assemblies of General Baptists began negotiating for reunion, and the pronouncements on the Trinity seemed likely to be vague, several of the people with George Green broke away from the General church, which they esteemed heterodox. They joined forces with Stace, who in 1729 put up a meeting-house in Folkestone at Mill Bay, and looked out for a leader. John Howe, a Londoner, had visited Portsmouth in 1727, the first pastor of the P.B. church there; they asked him to come to Kent.* He settled in Folkestone, whence till his death in 1750 he shepherded the Particular Baptists there, and in Canterbury and in Thanet. Each group deserves attention.

Of Canterbury we know nothing more. When Ryland in the Midlands was making enquiry about 1750, he had no information at all from Kent. When Thompson enquired in 1773 he heard that the cause had decayed eighteen years earlier. That is to say, soon after Howe's death the church died out. Perhaps the records of the Independent church might give an allusion or two.

A second P.B. church was established in Canterbury, in Burgate Lane, taking the name Zoar. It existed by 1790, had Parnells as its pastor in 1794, and in 1798 Samuel Rowles from Chard came, staying four years. Its subsequent history has not been explored, to show why Eythorn formed the third successive P.B. church there in 1823.

Folkestone church had some trouble with the G.B. church in 1733 over the will of Jarvis. On the other hand Green widened out his energies to Ashford in 1741, and the people there prospered so well that in 1748 they started a building fund, for which they got the approval of the London Board. A dozen years later they stood upon their own feet again, and started a prosperous career under Samuel Brooks from Northampton, College Lane. The Folkestone church at the death of Howe organized separately, undoing the ties with other towns, so that 1750 has been regarded as the year of origin. At first Thomas Wantnall was minister, then John Davies of Waltham in 1759, and four years later Thomas Whitehead came from Northampton, which under Ryland was sending out ministers to many churches.

But if the General Baptist churches were often liable to heresy, the Particular Baptist were liable to immorality, and again and again ministers gave scandal. Nothing but active

* Ridoutt, *Early Baptist History of Portsmouth*; page 34.

evangelism could protect from these dangers or from decay. In 1773 Whitehead had to be dismissed, and three years elapsed before a successor was found, in Daniel Gillard. He obtained help from London to rebuild, but in 1783 he quitted, and soon established a new cause on Fenchurch Street, which he named Zion. The Mill Bay church promptly turned to a family which had long been Baptist, and chose William Atwood as pastor; and then joined the Kent and Sussex Association, founded in 1779. Gillard went to Hammersmith and began a new church there, which had to dissolve owing to his conduct, so that he went into business as a druggist, and Hammersmith organized afresh. But strange to say, Atwood resigned Mill Bay in 1816, and went to Zion. This building was now at the disposal of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. There were further complications as it was mortgaged to the Clarks, and the title-deeds were not forthcoming; D. Clark became minister at the Baptist church. It is not to be wondered at that the Association did not understand, or if it understood, that it preferred to say nothing. Francis Read of Canterbury also flits across the scenes without contributing anything useful. It was 1824 before Joseph Belcher was settled at Folkestone, and that the Mill Bay church resumed connection with its sisters.

Three years later the Association published figures for nearly every church. We find with some surprise that Eythorn was far the largest in the two counties, even Chatham being a poor third. In East Kent the proportions were:—Eythorn, 214, Folkestone, 84, Ashford, 70, Dover, 54, Canterbury, 52, Deal, 46, Margate, 39; St. Peter's had almost as many.

Turn to Thanet in its early days. After the death of Feckenham, we have only scattered allusions. We may probably think that the work at St. Peter's in 1710 was a continuation, and that Richard Godfrey in 1715 was shepherding the Particulars, for Howe of Folkestone did not initiate work in the isle so much as foster what was existing. By 1748 the cause was centred at Shallows, and was prospering so well that a G.B. member of the Ramsgate church resident at Margate asked whether it would be allowable for her to attend here.

The letter agreeing to Folkestone being separate was signed for Thanet and Canterbury in 1750 by John Illden, John Laming, Daniel and Thomas Smith, and Valentine Austen.*

In 1762 Shallows organized separately, and the energies

* *Baptist Magazine*; 1820.

of Jonathan Purchis catered for the residents and visitors in Margate, which in 1777 came suddenly to the front as a port, a market and a bathing-place. In 1787 a lad of seventeen, Thomas Cramp, was baptized, and he at once began preaching in his village of St. Peter's, where in ten years he bought a chapel from the Wesleyans. When Purchis died in 1800, the church divided, Margate and St. Peter's being the two centres, while the old building at Shallows was used by them jointly. George Atkinson was pastor at Margate, Ebenezer, till his death in 1825; then David Denham took the church into the Kent and Sussex Association, which we are thus assured was hyper-Calvinistic. At St. Peter's Thomas Cramp not only worked his farm, but was unpaid pastor till his death in 1851. His church joined the Kent and Sussex Association in 1801. But in 1835 the East Kent churches formed a separate Association, and as Denham had left in 1834, the Margate church joined next year. This ushered in a new period in Baptist life for East Kent, whither within a generation a stream of influence from Spurgeon began to tell, and change the whole position and influence.

A Rare Letter to the Western Association.

THE Editor has asked me to give a short account of a rare letter which the American Baptist Historical Society has recently secured from the Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont, and which I have been able to identify through his assistance. It seems clearly to be the "printed letter" referred to in No. 32-789 on page 20 of volume 2 of the *Baptist Bibliography*, though Dr. Whitley writes me that he has not been able to place a copy.

I think it may be of use in the pages of the *Baptist Quarterly*, and of assistance to those concerned with rare British Baptist historical documents if I reproduce the title page entire and in its printed form, which is as follows: A / LETTER / addressed to the / MINISTERS OF THE ORTHODOX, / or, / CALVINISTIC BAPTISTS; / particularly those of the / WESTERN ASSOCIATION. / shewing the / INCONSISTENCY OF THEIR CONDUCT / AND