

# St. Mary's, Norwich.

## I.

ANTECEDENTS : THE CHURCH IN EXILE, 1611 to 1642.

**T**HE Baptist Denomination is a child of the Reformation. We can trace a succession of ideas from pre-Reformation bodies such as the Waldenses, but our direct ancestry is in that great movement. It is difficult to trace the emergence of our earliest Baptist churches from the elements that gave them birth, but in some cases this is possible. One such case is St. Mary's, Norwich, the ancestry of which can be traced to the English Church at Rotterdam through the Congregational Churches at Great Yarmouth and Norwich.

The Reformation of the Church in England had been a political move under Henry VIII. and a religious movement in the reign of Edward VI. Mary had failed to restore the Roman obedience and Elizabeth had imposed a settlement intended to be a compromise between Rome and Geneva. Neither the High Church party, who wished to retain much of medieval ceremony and teaching, nor the Puritans, who wished to complete the reformation of the Church on Genevan lines, were content. Each side desired to force its own faith upon the other. With the rise to power of the High Church party under the Stuarts the position of the Puritans became increasingly difficult. Revolutionary spirits began to separate from the established Church, but few had yet conceived the idea of a Church free from State control and patronage. When High Church domination made the position of the Puritan Clergy difficult, their inclination was to seek some office which they could fill without violence to their consciences or conflict with their superiors. One haven of refuge for them was the chaplaincy of English congregations in the Low Countries. A man who held such a position was not under the eye of a bishop. He owed an undefined allegiance to the States General, whose establishment was Presbyterian, and it was in his own power to interpret the degree of his allegiance as between the English and Dutch authorities in so far as it affected his ecclesiastical practice.

Such a chaplaincy existed at Rotterdam, where the magistrates had in 1611 given permission to the British residents to have a minister to preach in English. In 1619 this congregation

sought special privileges and secured their minister an annuity of 150 florins from the city for his house rent and an exemption from payment of duties on wine and beer and from municipal taxes.

The British congregations in Holland desired to organise on Presbyterian lines, and sought authority so to do. They had the help of the Rev. John Forbes, M.A., minister to the Merchant Adventurers at Delft, an able and influential negotiator. Forbes had successfully negotiated with King James for the Aberdeen Synod, but had subsequently been banished for defying the authority of the Privy Council. In 1616 he had secured from the king a promise that his banishment should be annulled, but this had not been effected. In 1621 Forbes obtained from King James a commission for an assembly of British ministers "as is used in the Walloon Churches." This body came to be known as the "Synod of the English and Scottish Clergy in the Netherlands."

In 1622 Rev. Thomas Barkeley was minister at Rotterdam. We read of him assisting at Utrecht in the recognition of the Rev. Thomas Scot, who was inducted by Forbes in the presence of the magistrates and of officers of the English garrison.

The "Orders" of the Church at Rotterdam at this date give some idea of its organisation. They lay down that nothing is to be established contrary to the orders of the Synod of Dort—the Synod which the Dutch Government had summoned in 1618, consisting of delegates from the Dutch, Walloon, English, Scottish, Swiss and German Churches, which had decided in favour of the Calvinist system as against the Arminian. The Church is to be governed by a Consistory of Deacons and Elders, with the Pastor as president. Rules of debate in the Consistory are laid down. Everyone is to speak seriously, touching matters propounded, as briefly as may be and in his turn. The president is to have a casting vote. Proceedings are to be kept secret. Prospective members must offer themselves for examination, bringing two sufficient witnesses of their good conversation or an attestation from another place where they have been members. All who are admitted shall promise to submit to the orders and discipline of the Church. Any complaint against a member must be attested by two witnesses, and no one shall be suspended from the sacrament unless he has failed to reform after two admonitions. Absence of members of the Consistory from regular meetings is punished by a fine of six stivers, unless they are sick or out of town. Anyone coming late pays two stivers. These mulcts are used for the poor.

In worship the church used a service book which had been printed at Middleburg towards the end of the sixteenth century.

After the accession of Charles I. the English authorities began to take notice of the Churches in Holland. Laud could not countenance any Church outside the bounds of episcopal order. As his influence grew, the laws against nonconformity were rigidly applied at home, and, so far as the influence of the Crown could affect it, abroad also. In 1628 the King wrote to the Synod of the English and Scottish Clergy in the Netherlands on the following matters :—

- (1) That they should not make or publish any new liturgy.
- (2) That they should not exercise the power of ordination, their ministers receiving orders from the churches of England and Scotland.
- (3) That they should introduce no novel rites or ceremonies.
- (4) That they should not meddle with points of doctrine outside those recognised by the English and German Churches.
- (5) That they prevent the assumption of the pastoral office by any not legally clothed with that sacred character; that they suppress immorality; and that they try to prevent any who write books or pamphlets derogatory to the Church or State of England.

To this the Synod replied defending their position. They profess their loyalty to Charles, but remind him that they are also amenable to the States General. To the individual articles they reply :—

- (1) That their liturgy has been in use since the reign of Elizabeth and has the approbation of the States.
- (2) They cannot conscientiously resign the right of ordination without being guilty of neglect of the office Christ has given them. A Synod without this power is not to be met with in any Reformed Church. Are the Churches of England and Scotland to take upon themselves the sole privilege of ordaining ministers for congregations in other countries where they have no authority and where the churches are not dependent on them, being under another and a foreign State?
- (3) Nothing has been done by them but what is laudable and decent agreeably to customs of the Reformed Churches.
- (4) None of them is polluted with Popery, Arminianism or any doctrinal error.
- (5) They never understood that His Majesty's father contemplated giving them less power than was imparted to the French Churches in those provinces. They would do their utmost to acquit themselves to the satisfaction of the States, of all the Churches and of His Majesty. They beseech

him to retain them in his royal favour and protection and to harbour no suspicions against them.

The King now forbade further assemblies. Once more Forbes' skill and influence were brought to bear, and a year later the King wrote that if, seeing their error, they were more moderate, their meetings might be allowed once a year, an account being sent to the ambassador.

Meanwhile, Charles' agents had the Churches under observation. An anonymous report dated 1630 mentions twenty places where Churches are allowed to His Majesty's subjects.

"In their publique worship of God, administration of His blessed Sacraments and performance of other holy rites (they) neither conform to the Liturgie of the Church of England, nor to that of the Netherlands nor to any other Churches in the world, most of them serving God in their publique assemblies without any set form of prayer at all, some of them administering the blessed sacraments in conceived forms of their own, and some mingling their owne private conceptions with such portions of the Liturgie of the Church of England as themselves please to make use of."

The report suggests that if these churches could be brought under discipline, many of His Majesty's subjects who suffer "the burden of great and heavy excises and taxation," would return to England and many unconformable divines would conform when they saw there was no way of subsisting abroad.

The Church at Rotterdam was advancing towards the Congregational position, and by 1628 had adopted this Covenant :

"We whose names are hereunder written, having a long time found by sad experience how uncomfortable it is to walk in a disordered and unsettled condition, do renew our Covenant in Baptism and avouch God to be our God.

"We resolve to cleave to the true and pure worship of God, opposing to our power all false ways :

"We will not allow ourselves in any known sin, but will renounce it so soon as it is manifested from God's word to be so, the Lord lending us power :

"We resolve to carry ourselves in our several places of Government and obedience with all good conscience, knowing we must give an account to God :

"We will labour to further growth by grace in hearing, reading, prayer, meditation and all other ways we can :

"We mean not to overburden our hearts with earthly cares, which are the bane of all holy duties, the breach of the Sabbath and other Commandments :

"We will willingly and meekly submit to Christian Discipline, without murmuring and shall labour so to continue and will endeavour to be more fervent, zealous, faithful, loving and wise in admonishing others :

"We will labour by all our abilities for the furtherance of the Gospel as occasion shall be offered us :

"We promise to have our children, servants and all in our charge taught the ways of God :

"We will strive to give no offence to our brethren by censuring them rashly, by suspicions, evil speakings or any other way :

"Lastly we do protest not only against open and scandalous sins, as drunkenness, swearing, &c., but also against evil company and all appearance of evil, to the utmost of our power."

In 1628 the Church called to its pastorate the Rev. Hugh Peters, M.A. He had been a popular preacher in London, but had been imprisoned for offering a prayer for the Queen (who was a Romanist) that as she came into the Goshen of safety, so the light of Goshen might shine into her soul and she might not perish in the day of Christ. After his release he fled to Holland.

A letter of Stephen Goffe, a royalist chaplain, describes Peters' ordination, but as this was written several years later on information drawn from a hostile source, too much reliance must not be placed upon it. He says that Peters would not be called by the vulgar English, but only by the Godly and good, who had subscribed to a Covenant he had framed. Mr. Forbes, who officiated as President of the Classis, said that there were two things to be observed, election by the people, and laying-on of hands by the presbytery. The people, including the women, expressed their election by holding up their hands. The ministers present then laid their hands on his head and

"there lay their hands half an hour all which time Forbes, did pour upon him the burthen of his ministry. We of England have reason to be greatly displeas'd inasmuch as Peters was ordain'd before."

For a time the Church shared St. Sebastian's Chapel with the French congregation, but in 1632 they obtained the use of a wooden building in the Glasshavn, formerly used for theatricals. It is said that they found there properties of the theatre which they broke and burned. They used this building till 1651, when the City authorities erected them a new meeting house.

In 1633 Peters seems to have revised the Covenant which

was thereafter rigidly enforced. His Articles, preserved among the English State Papers, bear the indorsement :—

“The 15 Articles or Covenant of Mr. Hu. Peter, Minister of the English Congregation in Rotterdam proposed to them before their admission to the Com'u'on 1633.”

In the main they follow the original Covenant, but there are additions, among them :—

“To be contented with meet tryall for our fitness to be members.

“To take nearly to heart our Bretheren's condicon and to conforme ourselves to these troublesome times in our dyett and apparell that they be without excess in necessitie.”

Another Article is redrafted :—

“To meditat the furthering of the Gospell at home and abroad as well in our persons as with our purses.”

Following this “reformation” it appears that only covenanted members were admitted to the Communion of the Lord's Supper, a change which caused dissatisfaction among gentlemen of the English Army stationed nearby who had been wont to come to Rotterdam to receive the sacrament. Goffe's description of Peters' ordination quoted above appears to confuse the two events of the “reformation” of 1633 and the ordination, which must surely have taken place at the beginning of his ministry.

For a few months Peters enjoyed the co-operation of a learned colleague, Dr. William Ames. Ames was a veteran Non-conformist and had already lived more than twenty years in Holland. He had attended the Synod of Dort and in 1622 had been appointed Professor of Divinity at the University of Franeker, of which he later became Rector. His reputation as a theologian and a teacher attracted students from Hungary, Poland and Russia as well as England and the Netherlands. In 1632 the Rotterdam Magistracy gave its approval to the Church calling Ames as second minister. The States of Holland agreed to pay 300 florins per annum towards his stipend, and the city was also to contribute. Ames proposed to set up a school of Logic and Ethics, and declared his intention of bringing with him twenty or more English Students. The city agreed to pay him 500 florins per annum for this service.

In coming to Rotterdam, Ames was moved partly by reasons of health. Peters alleged another reason, stating that Ames “left his professorship in Frizeland to live with me because of my Church's independency at Rotterdam.” This statement is interesting in view of the ecclesiastical position

Ames had taken up. Although he was a non-conformist refugee from the ire of the bishops, he long hoped to see the English Establishment reformed from within, and had always opposed separation. Experience had now led him to the Independent position, and he was joining a Church which, though it had grown into a new form, had never explicitly separated from the Church of England.

Ames' stay at Rotterdam was short. He died in November, 1633. A sudden inundation one night flooded his house in the Nieuwehaven. Ignorant of what had happened, he got out of bed and put his feet into the cold water. This brought on a fever which caused his death. Peters conducted his funeral and—says Stephen Goffe—

“To make himself inheritor of his spirit they say he preached in Dr. Ames' cloak.”

With the advancement of Laud to the See of Canterbury in 1633, renewed efforts were made to bring the Churches in Holland under discipline. The King wrote to The Company of Merchant Adventurers not to entertain any minister who had left England on account of Non-conformity. Later an order in Council was issued that they should not receive any minister to their Churches without His Majesty's approbation of the person, and that the Liturgy and Discipline of the Church of England was to be received under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. An attempt was made to appoint chaplains of the Laudian school to the congregations in Holland. One Gilbert Sladen was appointed to replace Forbes as chaplain to the Merchant Adventurers of Delft.

The Merchants were only a part of Forbes' congregation, and his Church continued in Delft while they in 1635 removed their headquarters to Rotterdam, taking their new chaplain with them. The city provided them with a place of worship, but the older English Church remained the more important body. Edward Misselden, a leading merchant and zealous Laudian, wrote in June, 1635 :

“When the Prince of Orange went into the field and all the Churches were sent unto by the States to pray for success, Mr. Peters' and Dampont's English Church in Rotterdam was sent to as the English Church and the Company's church was neglected, as if theirs were the only church allowed by authority and ours an obscure or schismatic.”

“Mr. Dampont” was the Rev. John Davenport, B.D., Vicar of St. Stephen, Coleman Street, London, who came to Holland in 1633 in response to an invitation from the British Church at

Amsterdam. Their pastor, John Paget, successfully opposed Davenport's appointment as co-pastor owing to his views on the subject of Baptism—Davenport being unwilling to baptise an infant unless at least one parent were in Church Membership. Davenport consequently removed to Rotterdam.

In the autumn of 1635 Peters left Holland for Massachusetts. He succeeded Roger Williams as pastor of the Church at Salem and later returned to England to become famous as one of Cromwell's chaplains.

The English community at Rotterdam which had obtained permission to hold religious services in 1611 had consisted of persons settled there for purposes of trade. As the religious struggle developed in England, Holland began to be attractive for the religious freedom to be enjoyed there. About 1635 the Rotterdam Church was strengthened by the influx of religious refugees from Norwich and Great Yarmouth. Dr. Matthew Wren, Bishop of Norwich, was an ardent Laudian. Many clergy opposed him and were deprived of their positions. Two such, the Rev. William Bridge, M.A., Rector of St. Peter's, Hungate, Norwich, and the Rev. John Ward, B.A., who had held the Rectory of St. Michael at Plea, Norwich, for twenty years, were ejected and fled to Holland. Laud reported to King Charles:—

“One Mr. Bridge, rather than he would conform, hath left his lectures and two cures and is gone into Holland.”

The King wrote in the margin:—

“Let him go, we are well be-rid of him.”

These two settled at Rotterdam, where they were joined by numerous lay people—we have records of more than forty—desirous of enjoying freedom of religion. One of the refugees later wrote of this exodus in the Great Yarmouth Church Book:

“The urging of Popish Ceremonies and divers innovated injuntions in ye worship and service of God by Bpp. Wren and his Instruments, ye suspending and silencing of divers godly ministers, and ye persecuting of godly men and women, caused divers of ye godly in Norwich and Yarmouth and other places to remove and to passe over into Holland, to enjoy ye liberty of their conscience in God's worship, and to free themselves from human Inventions. After they came into Holland divers joined themselves to ye church in Rotterdam and abode members of yt church five or six years.”

In 1637 Davenport left for America, where he became a leader of Newhaven Colony. Bridge and Ward were then appointed to the offices of Pastor and Teacher in the Church.



About this time the Rotterdam Magistrates sanctioned a third English Church which was gathered under the Rev. Sydrach Simpson. A disagreement arose in the original English Church, the cause of which seems to have been in the policy to be adopted towards Simpson's Church. In consequence, Ward was deposed from office, which led to the interposition of a sister church.

The Church at Arnheim (of which Nye and Goodwin were ministers) declared their offence at Ward's deposition and called upon the Rotterdam Church to submit to a public hearing. They agreed, and the Arnheim ministers, with two of their members, came to hear the case.

"After there had been for many days as judicious and full a charge, Tryall and deposition of witnesses, openly before all comers as can be expected in any court where authority enjoins it, that Church which had offended did as publicly acknowledge their sinful aberration in it, restored their minister to his place, and ordered a solemn day of fasting to humble themselves afore God and men for their sinfull carriage in it; and the party also which had been deposed did acknowledge to that church where-in he had likewise sinned."

Ward, however, left Rotterdam in January, 1639, and his place was filled by the Rev. Jeremiah Burroughs, M.A., who had been deprived of his Rectory at Tivetshall, Norfolk, by Bishop Wren.

Of Bridge, Burroughs and their associates, Heylin in his life of Laud says:—

"These men effecting neither the severe discipline of Presbytery, nor the licentiousness incident to Brownism embraced Robinson's model of church government in their congregations, consisting of a co-ordination of several churches for their mutual comfort, not a subordination of one to another in the way of direction or command."

In the "Apologetical Narration," Bridge and his friends define their position in regard to the English establishment:—

"For our own Congregations (we mean of England in which through the grace of Christ we were converted and exercised our Ministries long, to the conversion of many others) we have this sincere profession to make before God and all the world, that all that conscience of the defilements we conceived to cling to the true worship of God in them, or of the unwarranted power of Church Governors exercised therein, did never work in any of us any other thought,

much less opinion but that multitudes of the assemblies and parochial congregations thereof were the true Churches and Body of Christ, and the Ministry thereof a true Ministry; much less did it ever enter our heads to judge them anti-Christian. . . . Yea we always have professed (and that in these times when the churches of England were the most either actually overspread with defilements, or in the greatest danger thereof, and when ourselves had least, yea no hopes of ever so much as visiting our own land again in peace and safety to our persons) that we both did and would hold a communion with them as the Churches of Christ."

In 1641, Bridge came to England. He preached at Westminster before sundry of the Honourable House of Commons a sermon in which he says:—

"I am now returning to that Church and people of God which Jesus Christ hath committed to me and others. And if in this voyage the Lord shall put the winds and seas in commission for my death, my desire is that God would forgive our adversaries, if it be His will, that have put us in these extremities."

He did not long remain in Holland, but later in the year accepted an invitation to become Town Preacher at Yarmouth. Burroughs returned to England soon after. The Rev. Robert Parke, formerly Vicar of Bolton, was now called to the Rotterdam Pastorate. It fell to his lot to sign the dismissions of those members of the church who in 1642 returned to their homes in Norwich and Great Yarmouth with the intention of setting up a church on the model they had learned.

The excursion of the Rotterdam Church towards Congregationalism ended in 1651, when the Rev. Thomas Cawton, who had fled from England owing to complicity in a plot to restore Charles II., accepted the pastorate and "brought off" the Church to the Presbyterian position. The Church continued in this form, though the ministers were drawn from Independent seminaries in England, until 1876, when the remaining members amalgamated with the Scottish Church, which had been founded in 1642 and continues to this day. Thus the Rotterdam fellowship continues in that city as well as in those churches of Norfolk, Congregational and Baptist, which, as we shall see, owe their origin to it.

CHARLES B. JEWSON.