

Slapton G. B. Church.

A SUBSTANTIAL little volume, six inches by nearly four, bound in parchment, has been entrusted to the care of the Society. To-day the church whose early days it recounts, is known as Weston by Weedon. But this volume is headed, "The booke beeloning to the Church of god meeting in And about Slapton 1681."

The entries are made in very irregular order. At one end of the book are notes of Meetings, mostly dated, but with one of 1748 interpolated before 1716, and with two important sets of rules showing no date at all. There is a long silence between 1719 and 1744; and entries cease with 1758.

At the other end are accounts which are more continuous, and even straggle on till 1767, when the book was disused, though there were several pages yet blank. From the two sets of entries the main lines can be discerned, with an occasional amusing episode.

The church was General Baptist, but never sent any representatives to the Assembly. It joined in Association with Horley, Weston and Stony Stratford at some date not mentioned, which may be near 1716. The opportunity was taken to augment the fundamental rules of the church; they present no feature of special interest, except that Laying on of hands was to be optional. This will explain the aloofness from the Assembly, and the lack of response to the

invitation sent out thence to Northamptonshire in 1691. It is unfortunate that the records are lost of the Assembly which met at Stony Stratford till 1731, or more light might be shed on the dark period here.

The senior member was Mary Marriott, who supplied bread and wine at a cost of about 2s. a communion. John and Robert Joanes hired a horse about a shilling a month; whence we may infer that the preacher came from a little distance. The church book was only paid for in June 1690, so that the entries of earlier date must have been copied and are not original. Other payments show that Joseph Goodman certified his house for worship, that John Stanley took the oaths as a preacher. The total expenses of the church from October 1689 till the first audit in July 1691 were £3 6s. 11*d*.; and there was a balance of 13/9: the income had been contributed on twelve occasions. Stanley being now Elder, he was given £1 next year, while Mary Marriott supplied much bread and cheese for a shilling each time. But the lump sum to the Elder was not approved, and each time he needed a horse to come from Northampton, it was hired for eightpence or a shilling or eighteenpence. Other entries are of charitable contributions asked for by a Brief, or to pay a surgeon at Banbury for a poor member, the huge amount of 11/6. More curious is that 1/6 was given to Mr. Stanley for something to drink after his preaching.

This honorary pastor ended his work in 1708, and John Brittain took charge; his modest expenses of two shillings or half a crown figure once a quarter. Soon Nathaniel Kinch appeared as a helper, but neither was chosen pastor. When the rebellion of 1715 had failed, and dissenters felt more secure, one of their own number was chosen pastor, Thomas Lovell junior, whose father was still joint-deacon. He was ordained 17 November 1716, at a cost of 1/8 for

bread and cheese. Within a year new deacons appeared, Samuel Carpender and Job Goodman.

With 1721 the record becomes obscure, and it is from Towcester we learn that the centre of gravity shifted there, a house being fitted up and conveyed to John Brittain.

Accounts of 1730 imply that Lovell was dead. Half-crowns were paid constantly to Brittain, Claridge, Gibbs, Ashby, Stanger, Blundell. When this state of affairs became evidently bad, Samuel Gibbs, elder of a neighbouring church, persuaded them to reorganize. In 1744 they fixed headquarters at Weston; and soon John Goode, the Messenger from Lincolnshire, came to help them set their house in order. William Stanger was ordained Elder in 1748, and after serious consideration it was agreed in 1753 to sing hymns and psalms.

In the numerous cases of discipline there are two which are slightly exceptional. One brother "acknowledged his fault of marrying a sober woman not of the community to the church's satisfaction." But other entries show that if he had married a drunken woman of the community, it would not have been satisfactory. On the same day the church took into consideration the great mortality amongst the horned cattle in many places, and agreed to keep a day of fasting.

The church ceased to keep even accounts in 1767, and it would appear that like many of the Midland General Baptist churches it verged on extinction. Some were revived by the Barton-Melbourn preachers. But Weston found helpers in the strong trio of Fuller, Ryland, Sutcliff. These were the driving force of the new Northamptonshire Association, and just as they revived Moulton, whence Carey soon came, so they came to the rescue here, saw a new meeting-house erected, and a new preacher installed, whose theology probably differed by a shade from his predecessors'.