

BEDFORDSHIRE had a single church, at Sundon, five miles north of Luton. There were plenty of other churches in the county, but all Calvinist, and though some would fraternize with Calvinistic pedobaptists, they would not with Arminian Baptists. Sundon is heard of at intervals till 1759. Samuel Tide may be connected with the Tidds of Dunstable. Thomas Partridge was prominent at Dover in 1660 and 1669, while Samuel Partridge was at Aylesbury soon after.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE had the church at Fenstanton. Edmund Male figures constantly in its records. The Cock family was in many General Baptist churches, such as Amersham, Berkhamstead, Ford, Chalford St. Giles, Great Missenden, Brentford, in one direction, Westby and Boston in the opposite.

From the Fenstanton records, fully published in 1854, we learn that there was an Association meeting held at Stamford on 2 and 3 July, 1656, when two men were told off as Messengers for work in the west. The churches then mentioned were Leicester, Earl Shilton, Mount Sorrell, Nottingham, Winsford, Rempstone, Peterborough, Wisbech, Fenstanton, Ravensthorpe, Newton, Whitwicke, Markfield, Twyford, Langtoft, Thurlby, Bytham, Uppingham. Other churches in the district with which Fenstanton corresponded were Bourn, Haddenham (Cambs.), Spalding, besides a large group in Cambridge, who held a meeting in that town on 28 September, 1655.

Hamlets in Surrey and Sussex.

THE road from London to Brighton, between the North Downs and St. Leonard's Forest, passes near the villages of Hookwood, Horley, Charlwood, Crawley; on the alternative route to the east, the motorist runs through Horley Row, Copthorne, Worth, and Balcomb. In a tangle of lanes further east lie Inholme in Harold'sley, Shepherd's farm, the Outwood, Cogman's farm, Horne, Smallfield, Bysshe court, Burstowe, Turner Hill, West Hoathley, with East Grinstead as an outlier on the road to Lewes and Hastings. On the main road from Reigate to Sevenoaks will be found Nutfield, Bletchingley, Godstone, Oxted, and Limpsfield. In these obscure hamlets, all within seven miles of Horne, Baptists kept open house for one another to worship in, perhaps as early as 1650, certainly as late as 1823. To-day, over the whole area, Baptists have only modern

churches at Godstone, Horley, Outwood, Crawley, and Balcomb; their customs, origin, and theology are independent of the ancient group. The story of these bye-gone villagers is worth recalling, for their heroism, their friendliness, their conservatism. They themselves did not think the story worth recording till 1727, when perhaps they were prompted by the organization taking place in London, whither they were then sending representatives to the General Baptist Assembly; but an old member wrote down the traditions of the fathers into the new book, which is now to be consulted at Dr. Williams' Library; a study of it appears in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* for May, 1918. From it, and public sources, we can, however, realize something of the church life.

Of Baptist groups around, a brief word will suffice. With those at Croydon there are only late traces of intercourse. A good road linked with those at Bessels Green in Kent, and it is conceivable that the first impulse came hence, by Edward Delamaine, of St. Mary Cray, who was certainly preaching at Horley in 1668.

Westward were two Baptist centres. In Horsham a church had been gathered yet earlier, and it had passed under the influence of a farmer who had had some training at Oxford. We have definite information from the incumbent of Horne in 1669, that in his parish a farmer named John Reynolds entertained a monthly meeting of Baptists, whose "chief seducer was one Caffin of Horsham in Sussex." We may reasonably think that Caffin was influential at the other hamlets between Horne and Horsham. At Dorking about fifty people met habitually about 1669 in the house of John Barnard; and in May 1672 licences were issued for John Bernard to be a minister of a congregation of Baptists meeting at the house of Richard Humphrey, of Gadbrook, in the parish of Betchworth, two miles south-east of Dorking. From our company these people fall out, if they ever had any intercourse.

In the earliest stage remembered, there were two churches, the one in Surrey, the other in Sussex. The Elder of the former was Edmond Blundell, of Outwood. To him, tribute was paid in 1669 by the vicar of Bletchingley, who reported that no conventicle had been held in his parish since Blundell left. But the vicar was premature in his jubilation, for in the South Park Joseph Peters was keeping open house in 1678, where worship was regularly conducted by Thomas Budgen, Joseph Brown, and John Nicholas. The Surrey church called itself "Outwood and South Park people." After Blundell left, its leader was Thomas Budgen, who lived at Outwood in the parish of Horne. He was gratefully remembered by an old member as preaching

from 1678 till 1710 at eleven places. His circuit included Bletchingley, Nutfield, Horley, Smallfield, with Copthorn, Crawley, Balcomb, and Turner's Hill.

The Sussex church called itself "Turner's Hill and Hoathly people." Its leader was John Nicholas, who lived at Turner's Hill in the parish of Worth. As early as 1668 he had been preaching at Horley, in the tanyard, which remained for more than a century as a regular centre. When Blundell left, persecution was so savage that the two churches united, and Nicholas was ordained Elder of the whole group. Naturally, therefore, he preached at all the places mentioned. Only in 1716 is there a hint that his travelling days were done, and that his own house became a centre instead of the homes of Thomas Terry and Walter Arnold.

Other "ministers"—not Elders, but preachers—of these early days were Nicholas Arnold, apparently of Turner's Hill; Joseph Brown, who may be the Elder of Sevenoaks from 1692 to 1716; Ralph Bull, whose last appearance was at the London Assembly of 1712; David Chapman, of a family known at Cranbrook and Tunbridge Wells; Solomon Cooper whose family ranged from Turner's Hill to Ashford; Edward Delamaine, of St. Mary Cray; an Emery, of whom we would gladly know more; George Upton, who transferred his energies in 1672 to Chichester; and White, perhaps of the Sevenoaks family which in 1714 provided a missionary to Virginia.

Two new ministers appear about 1709, Robert Sanders and Griffell English, of Turner's Hill. In 1728 both were ordained Elders, apparently by Messenger James Richardson of Southwark. Sanders died in 1748, next year a meeting held in William Lury's house was replaced by one in Edward Stanley's house in Charlwood, and in 1753 William Bourne was ordained in the house of David Dodd, Hollyland, Horley, by Messengers Matthias Copper of Tunbridge Wells and Thomas Harrison of Bessels Green.

The church was very fraternal, and sent representatives frequently to Association and Assembly meetings. It was, however, doubtful whether the orthodox declarations made by the united Assemblies in 1733 and 1735 were in reality adhered to, what authority was claimed by the Assembly and the Messengers, whether there were not innovations of sentiments and practices. After discussion and division for three years, this church sent a letter of inquiry to the Assembly in 1756. The reply was a clever evasion, referring to the declarations of 1733 and 1735 without endorsing them or disentangling the various points as to singing, creeds, Christology; but it did say that the Assembly had often mediated happily in cases of difference, and that churches which

asked assistance were expected to recognize the authority of the Messengers. This proved satisfactory enough for regular attendance to be resumed.

Not till 1760 did the church take any advantage of the Toleration Act, and protect its places of meeting and its members by certifying the houses where they met—not necessarily buildings of their own, used chiefly for worship. But in this year they did register a place at Horley, and another at Charlwood, with perhaps two others. It may be remembered that because of Methodist propaganda, there was at this time a recrudescence of persecution, especially of mob violence, and that Baptists in other parts of the country claimed protection in this way.

The venerable Griffell English died in 1761, and four years elapsed before two more Elders were associated with Brown. Nathanael Palmer and Thomas Turll were ordained in the house of the latter by Messengers Samuel Fry of Horsley Down and William Evershed of Horsham.

In 1771 the church reaped some benefit from its fraternal relations. The Ashdownes belonged to Tunbridge Wells, and William had become Elder of Dover. He presented a library of books, which by his desire were kept by John Ellis and John Botley, in the meeting-house at Horley. Twenty years later the books were transferred to Shepherd's Farm, near Outwood; and in 1851 they were handed over to the General Assembly: apparently they have been dispersed since.

The benefaction prompted another. Robert Sale, of Limpsfield, near Oxted, charged his land at Outwood, in the occupation of John Budgen, with a rent charge of £5 yearly, payable quarterly, to such ministers as the people might choose. After the death of the last minister, the money accumulated, and by direction of the Charity Commissioners in 1878 the benefit was transferred to the kindred church at Billingshurst.

Bourne died in 1774, Palmer in 1790. Two years later Palmer's son was chosen joint Elder with Turll, and was ordained on 9 July, 1792, by the same Messenger, William Evershed, who had ordained his father. Turll died in 1803, Palmer not much later, and the church soon had no officers at all, nor any meeting-house, for about 1791 the Horley premises had been converted into a house and shop. Since 1920 they form a private house. Now the church at Ditchling was well off, with an Elder, a Deacon, two assistant ministers, and sixty-eight members. Yet about sixteen years elapsed before that church spared William Beal, who was ordained Elder in 1820 by Messenger Sampson Kingsford, of Canterbury. He was not so attached to old sentiments, and presumably styled himself Pastor. Whether on old lines or on new, the cause died down, and in 1851 Beal

acknowledged it dead by handing over the church book to the Assembly.

The church was fairly liberal, though its budget was by no means like our modern budgets. To-day, if a church sends seventeen per cent. of its total contributions to "outside objects," such as a mere B.M.S., or Union funds, it probably thinks it has done generously. But the local expenses of a church which did not pay its ministers, and met in private houses for most of its time, were negligible. The members spent their money on their own poor, on the Messengers' Fund, to defray the incidentals of the travelling evangelists, on the building funds of churches as far off as Hillsley, Castle Hedingham, Great Yarmouth, and Birchcliffe.

Like all other seventeenth-century churches, they were indefatigable in the care they exercised over one another. If members drank to excess, ran into debt, quarrelled habitually, or were slack in attending worship, and did not amend on private exhortation, then the church took formal notice, and sought to reclaim them; if it failed, it excluded them. There were two rather technical offences that troubled the church: one was attending at Presbyterian or Church of England worship; the other was marrying outside the denomination: again and again the rule was reiterated, but as in most of the General Baptist churches, the discipline weakened. A man would be excluded, but on profession of sorrow, he was soon re-admitted. The church flinched from Jane Taylor's definition: Repentance is to leave the sins we loved before, and show that we in earnest grieve, by doing so no more: not one case is recorded where husband was required to leave his wife.

The church was conservative in other matters, and its maintenance of old customs was peculiarly noticeable in its worship. Singing was not encouraged by the Tudors and Stuarts in the Established Church, except by professional choirs, though the people did insist on singing psalms. Some Puritans, however, objected to invite a miscellaneous crowd to sing sentiments they were not likely to share. Baptists were the first to invent hymns for general use, and they obviated this difficulty by making the hymns doctrinal rather than experimental. But though Benjamin Keach, a General Baptist, was the pioneer, yet the General Baptists hesitated, and in 1689 the Assembly pronounced against congregational song. The church at Turner's Hill never wavered in this, and at least once rebuked the Assembly when there was a sign of dallying with temptation. Again, there was great hesitation as to the public reading of the Bible, and while some were inclined to compromise and permit it by an ordinary member before the minister began, yet Turner's Hill was rather stiff

against even this concession. We may safely assume that there was prayer, and perhaps that several members would pray. We know that there was preaching, and that some ministers were rebuked for writing their sermons and then reading them. About once a quarter there was breaking of bread. But the most curious act was the quarterly washing of feet, following the precedent of our Lord before He broke the bread. When we add the occasional baptisms, at the tan-yard or the mill-pond or the riverside, we exhaust the usual acts of worship. And evidently by 1800 such a conservative church had no appeal to the young.

Within another half century the "pastor" ended a useless struggle, and the church had disappeared except from the books of an equally conservative denomination. Does its decay and death offer any suggestions?

Want of adaptability lies on the surface: a church which doggedly adheres to the customs of a century might as well die when the century does. How about doctrine? The church was little troubled here, and only once did it put its foot down, and say that any minister might preach his own views, but must not insist on thrusting them on the church as essential. How about meeting-houses? It tried both plans, private houses and a special building; and neither kept it alive. Is it because it never extended to a town? Reigate was within reach, and members lived there; yet we do not trace that a meeting was ever started in the town; and East Grinstead was occupied only intermittently. Now often, when we compare with a similar group in other parts of the country, we note that their salvation was opening out in a town, which gradually became the mainstay of the group; and Methodist experience rarely if ever shows a circuit of villages pure and simple. A contributory cause may have been the neglect to train new ministers; there is an amusing entry that liberty should be given to every Christian minister that is a brother, that he may be admitted to preach without examination with or without notes or writing. But probably the main reason was that the church had lost all purpose and all energy. There is no hint of any Sunday school, of any foreign mission to the heathen. Worse than that, in a church which was so terribly conservative, it failed to conserve the essential customs of its founders. They had evangelized through the villages, but it was left to the Methodists to revive that practice. They had sent messengers overseas to their kindred in Virginia and Carolina, but the later church grew so shortsighted it could barely see a mile beyond its members' homes. One thing stands to its credit in the last days: it did not pretend to be alive for the sake of drawing an endowment.