

Transactions

of the

Baptist Historical Society.



James Toppe and the Tiverton Anabaptists.

TIVERTON is a parish of very large extent. The town and mother church are well situated at the centre, but in the outlying districts of the parish there were hamlets of some importance, the religious needs of which were met by subordinate chapels. We shall have something to say of the remote chapelry of Cove in the course of this article. The ecclesiastical arrangements of the town were peculiar. The rectory was not a solidarity but was divided into four "portions," Pitt, Clare, Tidcombe, and Priors, covering the whole parish and supporting different clergy in the mother church. Thus there were four rectors and there was opportunity for differences of theological accent to be concurrently represented in the official clergy of the parish. The town rose into prominence as a convenient mart for the woollen and cloth trade of the West of England. Like other industrial towns in England it entered whole-heartedly into the movement for the reformation of religion and in the days of Elizabeth became strongly Protestant, at the same time retaining a keen

sense of the importance of religious worship and instruction.

There were some of the inhabitants of Tiverton who concluded from their study of the New Testament that the Anglican Church was not sufficiently reformed and that a simpler form of Church government was explicitly set out in the Scriptures. It was from this group that the founders of the Tiverton Baptist Church appear to have emerged. The Rev. H. B. Case, in his history of this church, looks to foreign Anabaptists as its originators. In my opinion it was a thoroughly native movement. The names of its early adherents are those of families long known in the district. There was intercourse, it is true, with kindred believers in Holland, but the Tiverton Anabaptists displayed independence of judgment and a remarkable power of resistance to leading ideas of the Dutch Mennonites with whom they corresponded. The town was prosperous, and the noble bequests of Peter Blundell (1520-1601) and Robert Chilcot (died 1609) for education point to the intellectual activity of the inhabitants. Some other bequests may be noted. In 1619 Elizabeth Berry, widow, left a charity for ten weavers of Tiverton. John Berry, "clothier" (that is, a manufacturer of cloth), left money in 1623 to support "a lecture in divinity" if it could be established. In the same year another John Berry, of Kentisbeare, gave to Tiverton a tenement, the profits to go to "four poor men whereof two to be husbandmen, one a fuller, and the other a weaver." In 1628, Richard Capron, clothier, left John Foxe's "Acts and Monuments" to remain in St. Peter's Church. Hence the entry in the Warden's Accounts:

"1628 Paid Mr John Cogan for a chayne to tye the Booke of Martyrs which Richard Capern gave to remayne in the Church of Tiverton, S[outh] aisle."

It is from the Warden's Accounts that we get a valuable sidelight upon the religious history of Tiverton and definite mention of the Anabaptists. As early as 1617 we have this entry:

“Rec^d of certen psons for their absence from church of Sabaoth dayes as by a particuler accompte thereto appeareth. 6s.”

This probably refers to those who absented themselves on account of conscientious conviction. By the year 1626 we know that a church of Anabaptists was in being at Tiverton,¹ in fellowship with kindred churches at London, Lincoln, Sarum, and Coventry. These churches sprang from the movement initiated by John Smith and subsequently led by Thomas Helwys and John Murton. In all likelihood those who were absenting themselves from the parish church in 1617 were the nucleus of the Anabaptist church which comes into view in 1626. Two years later the Tiverton churchwardens give us the names of eight members of this church and refer to two unnamed wives of members, all of whom were fined for absence from the parish church service. The wardens were also busied in 1628 in securing and serving a process for “Mr Webber of Cove to appear before the bishop.”² It occurred to me that if these Tiverton Anabaptists were sufficiently well off to be fined it was likely that their estates would be large enough to leave by will, and that some information might be gleaned as to their condition from that quarter. The wardens had to “present” the names of those absenting themselves from Church at the Bishop's Visitation. Here is a typical entry:—

“laid out at Collompton at the Bishopp's visitacon

1 Evans, *Early English Baptists*, ii. 26.

2 Abraham Boobier was paid 3/- for serving this process. *Warden's Accounts*.

for receiving of our pſentmt 4^s 4^d and for our
dinner and horſe meate 17^s 2^d

all is xxi.^s vi.^d”

They mention “charges at three ſeverall tymes about
or Anabaptiſts” as though this group was well known
in Tiverton. The liſt as given by Rev. Edwin S.
Chalk, in his hiſtory of St. Peter’s, Tiverton, 1905,
is as follows:

“An accompte of moneys levied on the Anabaptiſts for their abſence
from Church in the year 1628.

Imprimis at Eaſter Sessions the 26th of April. Charity Berry 4/-.

Of Iſrael Cockram 4/-, of John Tucker the ſame tyme 4/-, of John Tucker,
the 8th of June, 4/-.

Of Iſrael Cockram and Charity Berry the xxxth of September, 8/-.

Of Richard Berry, the xx^{ist} of January, for himſelf and his wife, 8/-.

Of John Tucker the ſame daye for himſelf and his wife, 8/-.

Of John Gibbons, the ixth day of February, 4/-.

Of Iſrael Tappe, for huſbande, the ſame day, 4/-.

—Of James Tappe, the xivth of March, for himſelf and his wife, 8/-.

Of Richard Berry, the ſame time, for himſelf and his wife, 8/-.

Of John Skibbon, the ſame tyme, 2/-.

The ſum total of the Anabaptiſts is £3 10s. 0d.”

The reſults of my reſearch ſerve to clear up one or
two obſcure points and bring to light a few freſh
details.

Fiſt let us look at the caſe of Mr. Webber, of
Cove. I take him to be Thomas Webber, clerk in
holy orders, curate of the chapel of St. John the
Baptiſt at Cove. This chapelry is in the northern part
of Tiverton pariſh, on the borders of Bampton, ſome
four and a half miles away from the mother-church.
The ſtipend was ſmall. If the curate carried the
attenders at his chapel along with him in his opinions
he could take a fairly independent line without much
interference. But Thomas Webber ſeems to have
gone too far. Being a cleric, he was not proceeded
againſt at the “Sessions” like the lay Anabaptiſts,
but the ſtrong arm of the Biſhop of Exeter, Joſeph

Hall,³ was invoked to bring him to order. It seems as though Webber gave way. He appended his name as a witness to the entry of the Induction of James Hartnoll to "Pitt Portion" of Tiverton Rectory, January 18, 1630-31, in this form: Thos. Webber, "curate of Cove." He evidently retained his curacy. If he went his own way with his farming and preaching at Cove he was maintaining something of the old independent spirit of the chapelry. An Elizabethan document bears the note that "by reason of many lewd marriages the chapel at Cove is called a lawless church."⁴ I found the will of Thomas Webber in the Registry of the Archdeaconry Court of Exeter. It is mainly in his own handwriting, and dated May 1, 1647. He does not give any description of himself, but filed with the will is an inventory giving particulars and describing him as "clarke, late of the pish of Tyverton deceased." His wearing apparel is appraised at £3, his books at 6s. 8d., "corne in the ground" at £4, "three swine hoggs £2." He mentions his wife, son, married daughter, and little grandson, to whom he left "one redd heifer." The declaratory statement at the opening of his will is brief and simple for that period:

"I doe give & bequeath my Soule into the hands of Almighty God my Maker, Saviour and Redeemer and my body to the earth."

A generation later the Baptists were strong in the northern parts of Tiverton parish and over the border in Bampton. Under the Indulgence of 1672 the following application reached the office on 25 May:

3 Hall had been offered the post of headmaster of Blundell's School at Tiverton on its opening. No bishop understood the position of the Brownists and Anabaptists better than he. His first controversial work was directed against John Smith and John Robinson. He was consecrated to the see of Exeter 23 Dec., 1627.

4 *Chronicles of Twyford*, 1892, p. 132, by F. J. Snell.

Licence is prayed for Richard Hooper to preach to a Congregation of people beinge of the Baptist Judgmt in his owne howse in Bampton in Devon The like for W^m Facey to preach in Martin Dunsfords howse in Tiverton in Devon being of the same Judgem^t as above

Facey and Dunsford got their licences the same day, Hooper on June 10. On November 18 a group of Baptist licences was granted in Somerset and Devon, including the houses of John Ball and Tho: Bryant, of Bampton.

Away on the north-east border of Tiverton parish is a farm marked on a map of 1844 as "*Baptist Frost*."⁵ Did its name originate from the Baptists of this early period?

Turning to the laity who were fined in 1628, we have a group of "Berrys"—Charity Berry, fined twice, with Richard Berry and his wife, also fined twice each. I have not identified Charity Berry. The Berry family was largely represented in the Tiverton district. The will of one Richard Berry, of Tiverton, was proved December 13, 1628,⁶ but this could hardly have been our man. I think the Anabaptist was Richard Berry, of Tiverton, "weaver," who made his will on September 24, 1633, which was proved on the following December 6. The inventory of his goods describes him as "yeoman." We may note the following bequests:

"I doe give unto my eldest sonne John Berry on[e] Bible"

"I doe give unto John Berry the younger on[e]

⁵ *History of Tiverton*, by Lt.-Col. Harding, part 2, p. 16. Mr. Arthur Fisher, coroner for Tiverton, writes 25 April, 1913: "The farm you mention I know as '*Baptist Frost*,' but I have no knowledge of the origin of the name."

⁶ "Recd. for Richard Berry's buryall v.s." *Tiverton Warden's Accounts*, 1628.

paire of loomes warpinge bars, quill tornes and all other furniture thereunto belonging”

“I doe give unto sixe poore men of the Easter[n] Almes hows⁷ vj^d a pece”

The residue he leaves to “Debora my nowe wiffe.” We may ask whether he was not previously married to Charity Berry.

Tuckers also abounded in Tiverton, but I think we must identify the John Tucker who so stoutly refused to attend the Anglican services, with the John Tucker who came into possession of his little patrimony in the spring of 1628. His father, Richard Tucker, alias Glover, left a fair amount of household effects, betokening a comfortable middle-class family. John Tucker himself appears to have died in 1634. A certain Thomas Tucker, who died in 1648, was in business at Tiverton as an apothecary.⁸

We turn now to Israel Cockram, one of the first to be fined. The unusual Christian name enables us to identify her with certainty. I found the will of “William Cockeram of Tyverton in the County of Devon, Pewtrer,” in the registry at Exeter. It is a nuncupative will, dated April 3, 1623, and proved on May 6, 1623. The following clause describes the family:

“He gave & bequeathed all his worldly goods unto Israell Cockeram his wife, unto Abigaile Cockeram his daughter, unto Caleb Cockeram

7 The Almshouses in Gold Street were generally called the Eastern Almshouses, to distinguish them from those in the western part of the town.

8 The question of the lawfulness of bearing arms was discussed by Toppe in his letter to Holland. The matter had a practical bearing in English life. Regular musters were held and yeomen were responsible for providing certain arms. I find the following entry in the *Tiverton Warden's Accounts* under date 1628: “paid John Rowe for keeping of the pishe armour this yeare, vii.s. vi.d.” The State Papers disclose the fact that Richard Tucker, of Tiverton, was a defaulter at the musters, but Henry Ayshford, the deputy lieutenant of the county, was able to report on Feb. 20, 1638/9, that Tucker had then come into line. Was Richard Tucker's default due to religious scruples?

his sonne and unto an Infant then in the wombe (but since borne and named Benonie) to be equally divided betwixte them”

If Israel married again she was to give security to the overseers of the will for the payment of the portions of the children when they came of age. One of the said overseers was “Richard Berry of Tiverton.” The inventory discloses a well-stocked home, with “Wares in the Shoppe” to the value of £44 12s. 2d. Israel signed the Administration Bond thus: “Isra^ell Cockram,” putting in the “e” as an afterthought. Did Israel marry again? I think she did, and I think she married James Toppe as her second husband. She was fined 4s. on Sep^r 30, 1628, as “Israel Cockram” and on “the ix day of February” in the following year Israel Tappe was fined 4s. for her “husbande.” I conjecture that between those two dates she had married. I am confirmed in this conjecture because the will of James Toppe, which we shall consider later, makes his daughter “Abigaile” sole executrix and, as we have seen, Israel Cockeram had a daughter of that name. The conjunction of these unusual Christian names points to the marriage of James Toppe with Israel, the widow of William Cockeram. There is one more entry in the Tiverton warden’s accounts of a fine levied on this pair, and in this case James Toppe is first mentioned by name.

“Of James Tappe the xiv of March [1629] for himself and wife 8s.”

Toppe’s uncompromising hostility to the Anglican Church is shown in his letter to the English and Dutch Mennonite Church at Amsterdam, written about the year 1631. The fines to which he and his wife had been subjected had not convinced them of the lawfulness of listening to those whom they thought of as “false prophets.” But the English Anabaptists at Amster-

dam, influenced by the last teachings of their beloved leader, John Smith,⁹ had taken up a more tolerant position on this matter; they were not prepared to withdraw from a brother or "deliver him to Satan" merely because he heard with edification the preaching of some of the Anglican clergy, even though he had been advised not to listen to them. The Tiverton Anabaptists were face to face with a pressing and practical difficulty on this point. Toppe had written to his English fellow-believers in Holland on the matter about the beginning of 1630, and had received a reply dated September 13, 1630, with a letter touching on the same question, from the Dutch section of the Amsterdam Mennonite Church. The arguments of the refugees in Holland left Toppe unconvinced. He held to the absolute position laid down by Thomas Helwys that those who went "to hear a false prophet," or endeavoured by compromise or flight "to avoid persecution," and were unrepentant of these acts ought to be excommunicated. The whole of the letter in reply to the brethren in Holland is worth careful study. It was "written from Tiverton," and signed by "James Toppe and Israel his wife," addressed to Hans de Ries, the Mennonite elder, and on arrival was translated from the English tongue June 5, 1631, by Swithune Gryndall. At the time it was penned Toppe declares they were "suffering persecution," and this continued to be the lot of the English Anabaptists for some years.

Toppe was a schoolmaster, and his opinions did not escape the eagle eye of Laud, who was as keen on securing uniformity of belief amongst those of the teaching profession as among the clergy. James Toppe was dragged up before the Court of High Commission for Ecclesiastical Causes, and imprisoned

⁹ See "John Smith the Se-baptist, &c.," p. 259 *et seq.*

in Newgate. Laud could not break his spirit. He suffered a "long and tedious imprisonment." His frequent petitions for release were disregarded. At length, on August 7, 1639, he offered bail, and seems to have been set at liberty, for on the following January 30 the Court made an order for his attachment, unless he appeared by the last day of term.¹⁰ His case probably ended with the abolition of the Court of High Commission a few months later.

We have an interval here in Toppe's life which needs further research to fill up. There is, however, an important manuscript¹¹ from his hand in the British Museum Library, containing a reply to a work of "Mr. Mark Leonard Busher," who controverted the millenarian opinions which Toppe had by this time adopted. Toppe's manuscript was evidently designed for the press, but does not appear to have been printed. We gather from it that Toppe, at the instance of a friend, wrote down his opinion about Christ's monarchical and personal reign on earth. The subject was much to the front in those days. Those who took the New Testament in a severely literal sense had ample warrant for their belief that Christ would return to reign in person on earth. The opinions of Toppe came to the hands of Busher, as also did a work by John Archer on "The Personal Reign of Christ upon earth."¹² The views expressed by these two writers were not at all to Busher's mind. He thought that Christ was King over His Church, which was His heavenly kingdom, and did not think He would reign in person over the kingdoms of the world. Accordingly Busher issued a little book refuting the

10 State Papers Domestic, Charles I., Vol. 427, No. 29, and Vol. 434, fol. 69b.

11 Sloane MSS. No. 63, ff. 36-57. This is probably the MS. referred to by Mr. Champlin Burrage in his "Early English Dissenters," I, p. 279. The Calendar of Sloane MSS. was printed in 1904.

12 London, 1642. A sixth edition appeared in 1661. A copy of the first edition is in the Vestry Library of Tiverton Parish Church. It may be the very copy used by Toppe.

opinions of Toppe and Archer. At the foot of the title page he put:

“Printed with priviledge of the heavenly King
Christ Jesus the Messiah and onely son of the
most high God.

Matt. 28 19. Gen. 14. 18, 20.

Anno Domini

Syons style 1663, Romes Style 1647”¹³

It was this publication which stirred up Toppe to reply, and we have his answer in the manuscript now under notice. He heads it:

“CHRISTS MONARCHI-
call and personall Reigne uppon Earth over all
the Kingdoms of this world Rev 11. 15. 17. Dan.
7. 14 27”

He subsequently inserted a sub-title as follows:

“Or an Epistell to his loving frind Mr. Busher.
In w^{ch} is / also shewed the tyme when this king-
dom shall begin and where it shalbe.”

and still later he spatchcocked “Mark Leonard” between the “Mr” and the surname of his opponent. Several pertinent texts were also written out in full to stand on the title-page. “The Epistle to the Reader” describes the origin and scope of the work, and may be transcribed:

“Friendly Reader

I did heretofore uppo[n] the desire of a frind
write some fewe lynes to proue Christs Monarchi-
call reigne over all the Kingdomes of this world,
And the same comeing into the hands of one Mr.
Busher dwellinge then in Delph in Holland, he

¹³ Sloane MS. 63, fol. 56b.

took uppō him to answer & to refute (as he saith) that judgment and caused my writing to be printed wth his ans[wer] to it. As also to a pte of Mr. Archers Book formerly written concerning the same subiect calling that judgment a Jewish opinion As if therefore not becominge Christians to hold or belieue & onely because it is a Tenant of y^e Jewes

To wch his ans: I nowe make this replie prouinge therein the trueth of that opinion (viz. that Christe shall reigne over all y^e kingedoms of this world vnder the whole heauens duringe the tyme of 1,000 yeares & more, to beginne after his second and nexte coming []) confuteinge all his obiections to y^e contrary. Committinge the same vnto thie vnp[ar]tiall consideracon and remayne Thyne allwayes in y^e Lord.

Ja: Toppe."

It is evident that the recovery of a copy of Busher's book would also give us Toppe's first "fewe lynes" on the subject. Toppe's reply to Busher shows that the latter held the ancient Anabaptist opinion that Jesus was subordinate to the Most High God, was endowed with a celestial body, and consequently took no flesh of the Virgin Mary. Toppe is quite as much concerned to set Busher right on this point as to convince him of the coming millennial reign of Christ on earth. He devotes many pages of this manuscript to the matter, and stoutly maintained the Athanasian doctrine. He cannot help returning to the subject in the closing paragraphs of his epistle, so important did it seem to him to be. The following extract will serve to show his attitude with regard to Busher's opinions on this point:

"But it appeareth that you hold that Jesus Christe is not true god nor true man, butt

that he is onely a meere creature a nothing as will followe from yo^r distinction of him, in y^t you say that he has & allwayes have had a heavenly humane body even from eternity, w^{ch} if it were true it will followe that there is a heavenly-earthly god & god muste be earthly allso as well as heavenly w^{ch} is most contradictorie even as a man should say a livinge-dead man neither was there ever any such a manhood created and therefore it must followe that he is nothings, for he is neither god nor mā nor any thinge else."¹⁴

From his study of the books of Daniel and Revelation Toppe came to the conclusion that the Jews would shortly return to Judæa and build the Temple anew, and again be driven out, and the Temple again ruined. Then, after the Jews had once more returned to their land, the Turk would come upon them so furiously that "they shall see noe way of escapinge his hands," at this juncture, declared Toppe,¹⁵ "Christe shall descend from heauen uppō the Mount of Olives . . . & rescue them," and so the thousand years of Christ's reign would be ushered in.

Date of the document.

It is difficult to determine the date of this manuscript. In one place it refers to Busher's calculations in these terms:

"And further you say that y^e 1000 yeares w^{ch} John speaks of, reu. 20, are nowe allreadie allmoste expired and that they beganne in y^e yeare 666 and shall end 1666 w^{ch} will be about 6 yeares hence accordinge to the true style as you say."¹⁶

¹⁴ MS. Sloane 63, fol. 38b.

¹⁵ Toppe, MS. Sloane 63, fo. 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 46b.

The natural inference would be that 1660 was the date of writing, but we have to note that Busher had constructed a chronology of his own, which he no doubt regarded as the "true style"—"Syon's style." Moreover in a letter of 1642 he had described himself as "an old weak man far into 71 years."¹⁷ So that 1660 is too late. In another place Busher declared his belief that "Christ shall reigne, butt not psonally aboute 337 yeares . . . and that his reigninge shalbegin about 16 yeares hence."¹⁸ There seems to be some confusion in his statement. It is difficult to run a double chronology. We may adopt Toppe's comment: "here I thinke there will be some contradiction but I leaue it."¹⁹ There is one other indication of date, and that is a reference to the death of the Rev. John Archer.

"Thus I haue answered yo^r booke soe much of it as doth concerne myself leaueing the reste because it is the iudgm^t of another man; and seeinge allsoe he is deade (as I haue heard) I will not meddle to answer any thinge in his behalfe but lett it likewise reste as he is at reste."²⁰

When did Archer die? Benjamin Brook says probably soon after 1640,²¹ but he was busy publishing sermons in 1645. Perhaps the year 1648 will be about right for the date of this manuscript.

We can fix the date of the death of James Toppe exactly, so far as the year goes, from his will, which was proved in the archdeaconry court of Exeter, July 3, 1661. The document is broken away at the top right-hand corner. I fill in the missing parts by conjecture.

17 Baptist Historical Society. Paper by Dr. Whitley, Vol. 1, p. 107.

18 MS., fol. 50b.

19 Toppe MS., fol. 51.

20 Ibid., fol. 56b.

21 Brooks' *Puritans*, II., 455, art. on Henry [should be John] Archer.

“ In the name of God Amen. The third day of [June] one thousand sixe hundred sixtie & one [I James Toppe of Tiverton] in the County of Devon being s[ick in body but of] a sound mynde & pfect memory praise [the Lord]. And callinge to mynde the certainty of dea[th and the nearness] thereof doe therefore make and ordaine th[is my last will and] Testament in manner & forme followinge renouneing & makinge voyde all other & former wills by me made. ffirst I give & bequeath my soule to Almighty God my maker hoping & steadfastly beleavinge that in & through the meritts death & passion of his deare & only sonne Jesus Christe my savior to be made ptaker of his heavenly kingdome. And as for my body I comitt it unto the earth from where it was taken to be buried in a comelie & devout manner as it shall seeme fitt to my Executrix hereafter named.

Itm. I give unto my daughter Mary Hawkey the sume of five poundes of lawfull mony of England to be paid unto her wthin one moneth next after my decease.

Itm, all the rest & residue of my Goods & Chattells, creditts debts, household stuffe & ymplements of householde & all other my substance whatsoever (my debts & legacye being paid & funerall expenses discharged) I give & bequeath unto my daughter Abigaile Saunders whome I make & ordaine to be whole & sole executrix of this my laste will & Testament. In witnes whereof I have hereunto sett my hand & seale the day & yere first above written

JAMES TOPPE ”

The signature is in a very shaky hand, as though the writer were extremely weak. The attestation gives the spelling “Tapp.”

“Sealed signed & declared to be the last will & Testam^t of the said James Tapp in the psence of
Jo: Edge
John Hill”

The will is endorsed “James Tappe nuper Tiverton,” and is calendared under that name, but the Inventory filed with the will gives the correct form “Toppe” & the profession of the testator which is lost in the will itself.

“An Inventory of the Goods of James Toppe late of Tyverton in the County of Devon Schoolemaster—deceased taken & prized the second day of July Anno dni 1661 by Henry Battyn & Robert Sharpe as followith—

	li	s	d
In primis his wearing Apparrell	2	10	0
Item money by him & in his purse	15	00	00
Item his bedding	02	05	00
Item his Linnen	01	03	10
Item one old Trunck & a deske	00	05	00
Item his Bookes	02	00	00
Item small things as drincking cups &c.	00	01	00
	<hr/>		
Sume	23	04	10”

It would be of interest to know what school Toppe had charge of. Did he hold an usher's post in the famous Blundell School during the Commonwealth time? Or was he master of Chilcot's “English school?” Chilcot's will, executed in 1609, laid it down that “no married man . . . shall at any time be schoolmaster in the saide schoole,” but this clause is known to have often been disregarded. Another provision was that the master was to be appointed “with the allowance of the Bishoppe of the Diocesse

for the time being." This clause would cause no difficulty when there were no bishops. Chilcot's school escaped the fires of 1612 and 1731, which swept away a great part of old Tiverton, and the building still stands. The master had £20 a year and a house. Some local historian by further research may be able to determine whether James Toppe held office in one or other of these schools or carried on a private school of his own. The latter is more likely in my opinion.

The epistle of Toppe to Busher is carefully written in a small, neat hand. It discloses an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures and an independence of the authorised version in some of its renderings. Though strongly opposed to what appeared to him to be the "false doctrine" of Mark Leonard Busher, he conducted the controversy with a kindly tone, ending his letter in these terms: "And thus I cease further to write at present remaying yo^r Lovinge frind Ja: Toppe."

There remain two other names in the list of Tiverton Anabaptists:—John Gibbons and John Skibbon. Of these two there is little to be said. There was a Robert Gibbins²², of Tiverton, who died in 1629, probably of the same family. With regard to the name Skibbon, I think it must be a misreading or an erroneous entry for Skibbowe. I cannot trace any family named Skibbon in Tiverton, but there was a family of Skibbow or Skibbowe well represented in the town. In the Archdeaconry Court at Exeter are the wills of:

John Skibbowe	1621
Robert Skibbowe	1630
Lewis Skibbowe	1647
Anne Skibbowe	1648
John Skibbowe	1665

²² "Recd. of Robert Gibbens, for the widowe Burrowes seate, iii.s. x.d." *Tiverton Warden's Accounts*, 1627.

The will of the last named is dated November 28, 1665. He describes himself as a "fullere," mentions his wife Elizabeth, his brother Lewes, to whom he left his "Tanie Sute"; his cousin John Stone, who was to have his "boots and spures," and his son Francis, then under age. It is possible this is the man fined for Anabaptism in 1628. He signs his will John Skibbow; it was proved January 8, 1665-6, and the value of the estate was sworn at £31 10s. 10d.

The Tiverton Warden's accounts show a revenue each year from the sale of seats in the Parish Church. In 1619-20 "Richard Skybbowes" seat was sold for £1 15s. 6d., and "Phillip Tockers" for £1 10s. 6d. This is worth noting, though it may mean no more than a change on the death or removal of the previous holder. In 1630 there is the entry:

"Rec^d of Lewes Skibbowe for the widowe Styles seate for his daughter Elizabeth Skibbowe ij^{li} xiii^s.vj.^d"

which shows that some of the family adhered to the Church of England.

These details about this little company of early Anabaptists of Devon may seem to be trivial and unimportant to many minds, but they enable us to picture these earnest men and women of the past more vividly than was possible before. We see them busy with their farming, their trading, their teaching, their weaving and fulling of cloth, their preaching, their Bible reading, their eager pursuit of religious controversy, perhaps their protest against the obligation to furnish arms and attend musters. We realise afresh their fidelity to conviction and their firmness even under fines and imprisonment. They were true to the light as they saw it.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since this article was written I have consulted a copy of the scarce tract "The Leaper censed" (sic) printed in 1657, "being a narrative of Richard Bellamie of Tiverton his falling off to Anabaptism and of his returning to the Truth" in the hope that it would make some mention of Toppe. It gives abundant references to "William Facy their present Pastor" but is silent as to Toppe. Bellamy joined the Tiverton Baptist Society and was a member for two years but becoming satisfied about "Infant baptism," he says "I went to hear the publick Ministry, but this coming to the ears of the Anabaptists, there came three of their Society the next day to me to have an account concerning this thing; I told them if they please[d] to come at a time appointed I would give them the reasons of my withdrawing from them and accordingly they came, the preachers & the principallest among them, where I gave them an account of my withdrawing from them" (p. 11, The Leper Cleansed). Toppe may have been one of their preachers.

This tract throws a flood of light upon the practice and principles of the Tiverton Baptist Church. It reveals the fact that its members objected to the magistrates' interference with the Quakers. It only runs to thirty-one pages and might very well be reprinted by the Baptist Historical Society, together with the pertinent parts of the reply to it, published by Cheare of Plymouth and Steed of Dartmouth.

WALTER H. BURGESS.

Plymouth, June 23, 1913.