Theobalds and Colonel Packer.

A REPORT reached the Government on 8 January, 1666, that "the head of the serpent" was at Edmonton, Ware, Epping, and Enfield, and that a crew of rebels dwelt at Theobalds. Such a compliment from such a quarter invites inquiry for good Baptists in the district, and it is amply rewarded by search in the State Papers.

Theobalds is an estate in the Lea Valley, just south of Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire, adjoining Enfield in Middlesex, and eight miles from Hatfield. Paul Hentzner, travelling in 1598, gave the following account of it, as reproduced in the Annual Register for 1758: "Theobalds belongs to Lord Burleigh the treasurer. In the gallery was painted the genealogy of the Kings of England; from this place one goes into the garden, encompassed with water, large enough for one to have the pleasure of going in a boat, and rowing between the shrubs; here are a great variety of trees and plants, labyrinths made with a great deal of labour, a " fountain " with its basin of white marble, and columns and pyramids of wood, and other materials, up and down the garden. After seeing these, we were led by the gardener into the summerhouse, in the lower part of which, built semi-circularly, are the twelve Roman Emperors in white marble, and a table of truck-stone; the upper part of it is set round with cisterns of lead, into which the water is conveyed through pipes, so that fish may be kept in them, and, in summer-time, they are very convenient for bathing: in another room, for entertainment, very near this, and joined to it by a little bridge, was a noble table of red marble." This paradise was acquired by James I. from the Cecils in exchange for his Hatfield and Enfield palaces, and was further improved by bringing the New River through its grounds. The highway to it from Westminster is yet marked by Kingsgate and Theobalds Road in Holborn.

After the execution of Charles the First, the future of the royal estates was considered, and by August, 1649, it was agreed that fifty elms should be cut for the navy, and all the rest of Theobalds should be sold. It proved, however, that the Earl of Salisbury had certain interests in Theobalds, Cheshunt,

and Enfield, and these were not satisfied for six years, when he was paid out with £5,360 18s. 4d. Long before that, however, a group of military Baptists had obtained a foot-hold.

Captain Packer comes to light on 4 June, 1650, when a report from him, Richard Merest [Merriman?] and Gledman reached the Council that they had arrested some ministers at Manchester for seditious preaching. The approval of the Council must have been a shock to Hollingworth and the Presbyterians generally. In March, 1651, he was voted £50 to buy a horse, and next month was sent to Scotland in charge of a hundred recruits for the General's own regiment of horse; on this journey he was accompanied by another good Baptist, Captain Edmund Chillenden.

John Spencer was known earlier. In 1639 he founded one of the first Separatist churches, to which Paul Hobson subsequently belonged; he was a pioneer of lay-preaching, and was fiercely attacked as a wavering minded fellow, a stable unstable companion in all his ways, having been a serving-man, a porter, a groom to a stable, a chandler, a weaver, yea, more, of as many trades almost as religions. He was not slow to publish a claim that every man was to exercise his gift as God should call him. Soon he heard and obeyed the call to enlist, and his record for a few years was in army reports rather than scurrilous pamphlets. On 10 April, 1650, he was made by Harrison, lieutenant-colonel of militia in Yorkshire, in case the Scotch chose to invade by the East Coast route. On 10 August, 1651, he was ordered by the Council to enlist people near Theobalds, and in this he was aided by Captain Kiffin.

On 5 April, 1652, a petition was considered by the Council, from Major Packer and the other proprietors of Theobalds, as the interests of the Earl and of the Navy commissioners were not yet satisfied. Here we find a syndicate which had risked its money in buying an estate with a most precarious title; as it would be ruined by the accession of Charles II., every member was likely to fight to the last: we shall soon see that most were Republican and Baptist.

In 1653 Harrison and this party persuaded the Council to try a Nominated Parliament, composed of people suggested by the Baptist and Congregational churches. It is natural that Packer was put on committee after committee, and we find him associated with other Baptist officers, Major Wigan, Colonel Zanchy, and others, whose careers are well deserving of study. On 7 July Spencer had a fine triumph, for an order passed that Major Packer, Captains Joseph Strange, John Spencer, Thomas Impson, Quartermaster Foxley, and William Kiffin, should be free to preach in any pulpit in the land.

Even when the Nominated Parliament dissolved, Packer and his friends were not thrown at once into opposition. During 1654 he and Gladman were referees on a petition, he was sent to superintend the execution of an order as to tobacco-planting in Gloucestershire, and he figures as a J.P. for Herts. And, from being only an authorized preacher, he was promoted to test all candidates for preaching. It is often overlooked that the Tryers, whose certificate was needed before any minister could be inducted, included nine laymen; Packer was the only Baptist, and apparently the only officer in the army on the board. Here he met Daniel Dike, minister of Hadham, thirteen miles up the rivers Lea and Ash, and a friendship sprang up between them; it would be interesting to know whether he was the means of winning Dike over to the Baptists.

During 1655 he was often employed in paying off troopers, and at least once he was capitalist enough to advance £200 for the purpose. During this year the second Protectorate Parliament had to be dissolved, and its acts were not confirmed; as the new constitution seemed to work so badly, Packer, Spencer, Empson, and others drafted a new one, and submitted it to Cromwell on 5 December. Though it was not adopted, the Theobalds syndicate waxed in influence. Packer and Dike were placed on the committee for the sufferers in Piedmont, and on 6 February, 1656, Packer was made deputy Major-General for Herts., Oxon., and Bucks., with almost unlimited powers. This system, however, was abrogated in November, when a new Parliament met. Meantime, he had all kinds of miscellaneous work in reducing the army and enforcing the certificates of the Tryers.

Early in 1657 the proposal was made to elect Cromwell as king. This was resisted by a large party in the army, and though Cromwell yielded, relations were henceforth strained. Matters came to a climax on 12 February, 1658, when Cromwell cashiered Packer, and five captains of his own regiment, including Anthony Spinage, John Gladman, Malyn, Barrington, and Hunter. The fall, however, was broken by settling Spencer in March as preacher at Theobalds with a salary of £50.

With the death of Cromwell, Chillenden and Spencer came out again, opposing the accession of Richard, and when he had dissolved his only Parliament, Packer and Gladman were commissioned again on 29 April, 1659. The Rump re-assembled in May, and all parties prepared for civil war. Packer was sent to keep Gloucestershire quiet, and then was promoted to be Colonel. On 16 June the names of his officers were carefully considered; high testimony was given to Spencer for his conduct

[in 1648?], when, at Hamilton's invasion, he had done excellent service with eighty troopers. Merriman was appointed major, but misgivings were felt as to Ramball, late captain in the guards, a violent persecutor of all good people, and discontented at the late change. Packer was sent to Dunkirk, to hold this recent conquest against the Spanish, while Spencer was sent to the great fortress of Ayr, commanded by Colonel Roger Sawrey.

By October the tide was turning. Parliament cashiered Packer, with others, whereupon it was again expelled by the army grandees. But Monk, being appointed Commander-in-Chief by the new Committee of Safety, intrigued at Ayr and put the Republican officers to flight, disbanding Spencer's company, which was found to be chiefly Baptist. The Rump met again, and renewed its orders to Packer in January, 1660, to quit town under pain of arrest. When Monk, on 21 February, restored the full Long Parliament, all hope of Packer's regaining influence was at an end, and the only questions for him and his friends were their property and lives.

By the end of May, 1660, Charles was in London, and inquiries were being made as to the recent leaders of the army, and as to the Royal estates. Theobalds was reported on 29 June as in the hands of Spencer, and the guess was made that it was worth £10,000. A new law provided that all such estates were to revert, but that purchasers might draw the rents up to June 24. The Baptist Syndicate would therefore have been ruined, but for a strange transaction. Monk had to be rewarded, and he was promised Royal estates to the value of £7,000 a year. As part of his reward, he chose Theobalds, which was valued, on 12 August, at £1,749 10s. The manor itself thus became legally his, and whether he leased it as a whole to the syndicate, or whether they retired to smaller houses on the estate, it is certain that the district remained their stronghold. Their lives were assured by the Act of Oblivion and Indemnity, the only Baptists who suffered for their proceedings before 1660 being two of the king's judges, Harrison, who was executed, and Hutchinson, who was imprisoned.

In January, 1661, the insurrection of Venner gave reason for forbidding all meetings of Fifth Monarchy men; but the proclamation went further, and forbade Baptists and Quakers to meet. This called forth, on 15 February, a petition from divers persons, commonly called Anabaptists, and others commonly meeting to worship of God at Theobalds. They disclaimed sympathy with Venner, declared their acceptance of Charles's rule—though they were loath to call themselves "subjects," and at first only styled

themselves "servants"—and asked leave to meet for worship. The petition, to be seen at Worcester College, Oxford, MS. 33, folio 64, is signed by thirty men, among whom figure Dike, Spencer, Rumbald, Empson, Spinage, Packer, Disbrowe. It availed little, for in October Packer was jailed at the Gatehouse, and was further involved in several lawsuits. As some Baptists were certainly thinking of appealing to arms, it is not strange that such a prominent man was carefully watched; his wife, however, petitioned that he had done nothing since the Act of Grace. This was not credited, for on 2 September, 1662, he and Gladman were sent from the King's Bench prison to the war-ship Colchester, apparently to be transported to the West Indies, and thus his English career ended.

This simply showed the others that they had better fight at once, and by April, 1663, Spencer was planning a wide-spread plot for a general rising, if the informer, Atkinson, is to be trusted. From Theobalds reports came twice a year that there were Nonconformist meetings, with no one hindering—a fact to be set to the credit of Monk. In October Paul Hobson turned informer, and more and more light came to the Government. Henry Lawrence, late President of the Council, was holding great meetings at Cheshunt; Gladman (who lived at Finsbury) and Spencer were leagued with three ministers, Masters, Cressett, and Wollaston, in having a great meeting at Theobalds. So in August, 1665, Spencer and John Rede of Porton were arrested, the latter admitting on 1 September, that he was in touch with Spinage. Nothing, however, could be proved till 10 June, 1667, when news came that a Southwark brewer had been sending a cart to Theobalds ten or twelve times, with kegs supposed to contain powder, with a blunderbuss, and drums. No action seems to have been taken on this; even a secretary of state might credit that a brewer's kegs contained beer.

As the Conventicle Act expired in 1668, Spencer opened three buildings at Hertford, and conducted worship regularly, much to the indignation of the local clergy, reporting in 1669. When Charles licensed such worship in 1672, Spinage protected his house at Cheshunt, while Spencer and Joseph Masters registered as preachers.

At this point detailed information in the State Papers ceases. It may be added that, in 1680, the colony of Cheshunt was reinforced by Richard Cromwell, though he may have worshipped with the staid Presbyterians under Wadsworth, or the Congregationalists under Tutty, Towler, and Yates. By 1683 Richard Rumbold was at the Rye House, where Keeling, a Baptist,

accused him of plotting against Charles, for which he was executed, though he denied it.

Theobalds has ceased to be a Baptist centre; the manor is now in the hands of a brewer, who has erected Temple Bar as an entrance to his private drive. As that was often adorned with the heads of traitors, there is some fitness in its new position, though it is to be regretted that Baptists hardly flourish at Edmonton, Ware, Epping, and Enfield as they did in 1666.

Notes.

Professor Ward as a Baptist.

The church connection of Dr. Ward is hard to trace. The funeral sermon of his mother was preached on the 7th April 1697 by Walter Cross, M.A., the Independent Minister of Ropemakers' Alley, in Devonshire Square. The records of the church owning those premises do not seem to contain her name; but the building was hired out to other congregations, and Wilson asserts that it was being used in 1688 by the Seventh-Day Baptist Church, founded by Bampfield and revived by Edward Stennett. The minutes of that church show that Joseph Stennett was pastor from 1690, and that the other Calvinistic Seventh-day Church used the same premises, which, curiously are not named. Joseph Piggott, a school-master, often preached for that church in 1692, though a member of the Wapping First-day Church; but next year he became pastor of a new church meeting at the Two Golden Balls in Bow Street, which soon removed to St. John's Court, Hart Street. In 1699 Piggott withdrew and hired a chapel in Little Wild Street, some staying on at Hart Street, and others going to join Joseph Stennett. Now Ward was a close friend of Stennett, and drew up the elaborate inscription for his grave when he died in 1713; it may be conjectured that his earliest Baptist associations were with the Seventh-day Baptists. This is borne out by the following extract from the Historical Papers, page 143:—"John Ward was an officer in the English revolution of the Seventeenth Century under Oliver Cromwell. His son, Thomas Ward, came to the