

## The Bookshelf by the Fire.

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### III.

#### The Ferrars of Little Gidding.

THERE are three men—it has already been pointed out—born in the same year, whose lives breathe charity and peace among the warring passions of seventeenth-century strife: George Herbert, Izaak Walton, and Nicholas Ferrar. Of these three much the least known is the last; to most, indeed, he is hardly even a name. We meet him first in association with his friend Herbert. The two men were at Cambridge together, and though both then and afterwards their actual intercourse seems to have been of the slightest, their souls were knit as the soul of one man. Theirs was that rare kind of friendship which grows strong without need of external aid. When Herbert lay upon his deathbed it was to the hands of Ferrar that he committed the manuscripts of his poems, bidding him print or burn as he judged best. In like manner, six months before, Ferrar had sent to Herbert for examination and censure his translation of the *Divine Considerations* of Valdeso, the Spanish mystic. And now to-day, in Ferrar's preface to the poems, and in Herbert's letter and notes on the translation, all the world may see in what high and constant regard these two good men held each other. It was natural therefore that Izaak Walton, writing of Herbert, should have something to say about Herbert's friends, the Ferrars of Little Gidding. This account in due course fell into the hands of John Wesley, while still a young man, and deeply moved him. "I long to see such another family," he wrote, "in any part of the three kingdoms."<sup>1</sup> A century later Carlyle's all-devouring eyes, peering eagerly into all the dark corners of Cromwell's century, turned more than once towards the inmates of Little Gidding, so that Nicholas Ferrar and his household still live for the modern reader in the *Letters and Speeches*, and in the posthumous—though really earlier—*Historical Sketches*.<sup>2</sup> But probably most of those who have any clear

mental image of the Little Gidding establishment owe it to *John Inglesant*. Whatever we may think of Mr. Shorthouse's famous romance, whether our sympathies lie with the eminent literary critic—Andrew Lang was it?—who congratulated himself that he had escaped reading it, or with those who count it among the classics of English fiction, we shall all agree that it contains no sweeter, pleasanter pages than those which tell how Nicholas Ferrar and his household lived together in the practice of good works and the worship of God.<sup>3</sup>

#### I.

Nicholas Ferrar was born in 1593, and was entered as a student at Cambridge while still only twelve years of age. Admiring biographers have much to tell us of the unfailing vivacity and love of study that marked his childhood. But some of their readers will think that young Ferrar never was a child, but only a solemn little prig, and that some of the hours given to the Psalms and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* had been better spent in the nursery or the playground. With all the 'sick hurry' of our modern life, which we so often deplore, we manage things better to-day. From his twentieth to his twenty-fifth year, Ferrar travelled on the Continent, indulging to the top of his bent alike his intellectual and his religious inquisitiveness. He felt strongly the attraction of the Roman Catholic Church, but remained throughout firmly loyal to the Church of England. After his return he devoted himself during the next few years (1618-1624) to the affairs of the Virginia Company, with the business of which his family was closely connected. And now, had he willed it, a career in the State would have readily opened before him. For a short time

<sup>1</sup> Other books dealing with the subject are *Two Lives of Ferrar*, edited by J. E. B. Mayor; *Nicholas Ferrar, his Household and his Friends*, edited by T. T. Carter; and *The Life and Times of Nicholas Ferrar*, by H. P. K. Skipton. There is also a useful summary in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, by Bishop Creighton.

<sup>1</sup> Wesley's *Works*, vol. xi. p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> A volume by no means as well known as it deserves to be.

he sat in the House of Commons as Member of Parliament for Lymington. With his great natural gifts, his education, his wide experience of men and affairs, his influence at Court, he might easily have climbed high. But his mind was set on other things. The world and all that it could offer was for him, in George Herbert's phrase, but 'a nothing between two dishes.' The idea of celibacy, which he seems to have cherished during his travels on the Continent, returned in the strength of a fixed resolve. Finally he determined to spend the rest of his life in mortifications and devotion, in charity and in constant preparation for death.

Happily for himself, Ferrar found nothing but sympathy and support from among the members of his own household. His father was dead, but his mother entered eagerly into her son's projects. The family affairs in London were quickly wound up; some solitary lands at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire, including an old and deserted manor-house and a tiny church then used as a barn, were purchased,<sup>1</sup> and there in the first year of the reign of Charles I., amid the quiet woods and meadows, Nicholas Ferrar, his mother, a married brother and sister with their families, 'waving the world and its traffic a long adieu,' gave themselves wholly to the search after God and the life in Him. The following year Ferrar was ordained deacon, in order that with due ecclesiastical authority he might minister to his small household; but to all suggestions of further preferment he turned a deaf ear. Throughout the rest of his brief life—he died in 1637—no rival interest divided his allegiance. The daily routine of prayer, meditation, and good works went on without a break. Once, in 1633, there was a momentary ripple on the quiet waters, when Charles I. visited the manor-house. He came again on the eve of the Civil War in 1641, and again in 1646, but then a lonely and hunted fugitive. By this time Ferrar was dead and his household fallen on evil times. In 1641—the wonder is that in those fiercely Puritan days the attack was so long delayed—a hostile pamphlet called the attention of Parliament to 'the late erected Monasticall Place called the Arminian Nunnery at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire.'<sup>2</sup> From that day,

though it lingered on for a few years more, the fate of the little community was sealed. The blow fell soon after the last visit of the king; Puritan zealots sacked both the house and the church; Ferrar's experiment in Protestant monasticism was at an end.

## II.

The manner of life in the Little Gidding household is best described in George Herbert's fragrant page: 'This family, which I have said to be in number about thirty, were a part of them his kindred, and the rest chosen to be of a temper fit to be moulded into a devout life; and all of them were for their dispositions serviceable, and quiet and humble, and free from scandal. Having thus fitted himself for his family, he did, about the year 1630, betake himself to a constant and methodical service of God; and it was in this manner: He, being accompanied with most of his family, did himself use to read the common prayers—for he was a Deacon—every day, at the appointed hours of ten and four, in the Parish Church, which was very near his house, and which he had both repaired and adorned; for it was fallen into a great ruin, by reason of a depopulation of the village before Mr. Ferrar bought the manor. And he did also constantly read the Matins every morning at the hour of six, either in the Church, or in an Oratory, which was within his own house. And many of the family did there continue with him after the prayers were ended, and there they spent some hours in singing Hymns, or Anthems, sometimes in the Church, and often to an organ in the Oratory. And there they sometimes betook themselves to meditate, or to pray privately, or to read a part of the New Testament to themselves, or to continue their praying or reading the Psalms; and in case the Psalms were not always read in the day, then Mr. Ferrar and others of the congregation did at night, at the ringing of the watchbell, repair to the Church or Oratory, and there betake themselves to prayers and lauding God, and reading the Psalms that had not been read in the day; and when these or any part of the congregation grew weary or faint, the watchbell was rung, sometimes before, and sometimes after midnight; and then another part of the family rose, and maintained the watch sometimes by praying, or singing lauds to God, or reading the Psalms, and when, after some hours, they also grew weary or faint, then they rung the watchbell

<sup>1</sup> The manor-house has long since disappeared, but the tiny church with the graves of the Ferrars may still be seen.

<sup>2</sup> The title-page of the pamphlet is reproduced in Skipton's volume referred to above.

and were also relieved by some of the former, or by the new part of a society, which continued their devotions—as hath been mentioned—until morning. And it is to be noted, that in this continued serving of God, the Psalter of the whole Book of Psalms, was in every four-and-twenty hours sung or read over, from the first to the last verse : and this was done as constantly as the sun runs his circle every day about the world, and then begins again the same instant that it ended. Thus did Mr. Ferrar and his happy family serve God day and night ; thus did they always behave themselves as in his presence.'

Thus far, it may be thought, there is little to distinguish the life at Little Gidding from the daily devotional round of a medieval monastery. And when we remember that it was only a century before that Englishmen in just anger had torn down the rookeries of corruption and uncleanness with which monasticism had filled their land, it is not perhaps to be wondered that Puritan reformers in their constant dread of a Romish reaction should turn wrathful eyes and hands against any who seemed to be bringing back the accursed thing into their midst. On the other hand, whatever there may have been in the ways of the Ferrar household calculated to awaken Puritan suspicion, it is only fair to remember that Ferrar himself always disavowed, and with something like vehemence, any sympathy with Rome. In the spirit of one who had been nourished on Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, he declared that 'he did as verily believe the Pope to be Anti-Christ as any article of his faith.' When he was asked what he would do if by any chance the Mass was celebrated in his house, he replied that he would pull that room down and rebuild it. Moreover, though he encouraged two of his nieces to remain unmarried, he suffered them to take no vows ; others of them married, and left Little Gidding for homes of their own. Except on special occasions Holy Communion was only administered monthly, and the Communion Table in the church was placed not altarwise, but, after the Puritan manner, with the two ends pointing east and west. When the bishop of the diocese—Bishop Williams, a man of moderate views, and often in opposition to Laud—visited the place, he found nothing of which he could not heartily approve.

Nor must it be supposed that religious exercises like those described by Izaak Walton, claimed the

whole time of the inmates. The girls, as they grew up, were required to take the housekeeping in turn for a month at a time, and their accounts were regularly kept and audited. One room was converted into a schoolhouse, 'which being larger than was wanted for the young people of the family, permission was given to as many of the neighbouring towns as desired it, to send their children thither, where they were instructed without expense, in reading, writing, arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian religion.' There was an infirmary for sick members of the household, and a kind of out-patients' room where surgical and other help was given to such of their neighbours as required it ; so that, as Bishop Creighton says, Little Gidding became the school, the dispensary, and the infirmary of the district round about. But the chief industry of the little community was the making and binding of books—Scriptural Harmonies or 'Concordances,' as they were always called. On these were lavished the utmost skill, and the most loving care, as some of the originals presented to Charles, and still preserved in the British Museum, abundantly demonstrate. And the whole of the work, be it remembered—the transcribing, arranging, illustrating, binding, gilding, lettering—we owe to the busy brains and deft fingers of the members of Ferrar's household.<sup>1</sup>

A few lines may be added concerning one bit of work for which Ferrar himself alone was responsible—his translation of Valdeso's *Divine Considerations*, to which reference has already been made. Valdeso—or to give him his true name, Juan de Valdes, of which Valdeso is the Italianized form—was a Spanish mystic of the first half of the sixteenth century. Though always a member of the Roman Catholic Church, he had somehow become suspect, and all the original copies of his work were suppressed by the Spanish Inquisition. Ferrar fell in with an Italian version of it during his travels on the Continent, and, it is evident, was greatly impressed by it. In 1632 he sent the manuscript of his translation of this version to George Herbert for his judgment—Herbert, who was then nearing the end of his brief pilgrimage, returned it with a few critical notes and a letter strongly urging his friend to publish. For some years the counsel was unheeded, but in 1638—the year after Ferrar's own

<sup>1</sup> A 'Descriptive Catalogue of the Concordances made at Gidding'—sixteen in number—will be found in chap. viii. of the volume edited by T. T. Carter.

death, the translation appeared together with Herbert's letter and notes. Of this edition Mr. John Lane has recently issued a very handy and beautiful reprint.<sup>1</sup> I have no space in which to deal further with the book, but the reader may be interested in its title-page: 'The Hundred and Ten Considerations of Signior John Valdesso: treating of those things which are most profitable, most necessary, and most perfect in our Christian profession. Written in Spanish, brought out of Italy by Vergerius, and first set forth in Italian at Basil by Cœlius Secundus Curio, anno 1550. Afterwards translated into French, and printed at Lions, 1563, and again at Paris, 1565. And now translated out of the Italian copy into English with notes.'

### III.

And now, what is to be said of all this? What judgment shall we pass on the ideal which Ferrar and his friends sought to embody in their lives?

Something has already been said—common fairness demanded that it should be said—in defence of the Ferrars against the ignorance and malice of some of their assailants. To call the establishment at Little Gidding 'an Arminian Nunnery' was only to employ a common device of the unscrupulous who think to injure an opponent by giving him an ugly name, which they hope will stick. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in the rule of life which Ferrar obeyed and imposed, there was in many ways a harking back to the monastic ideals with which, only a century before, English Christianity had deliberately broken. In the matter of marriage, though, as we have seen, he laid no restraint upon others, he chose for himself the path of the celibate, fully assured that for those who could tread it, it was the higher way. His austerities grew so strict as the days went by that even his most admiring biographers admit that he shortened his life by their severity. Still more significant is the story of his committing to the flames on the spot which he had chosen for his grave three large hampers full of 'comedies, tragedies, love hymns, heroical poems, novels, and the like.' The healthier and nobler ideas which had been set free by the Renaissance, and which, as Dr. Dale says, found both sanction and home in Protestantism, left Ferrar untouched. He called himself a Protestant, yet he believed as firmly as any Catholic, ancient or modern, that it

<sup>1</sup> In the 'Sacred Treasury' series, 2s. 6d.

is in solitude and retirement rather than in 'dusty lane and wrangling mart' that man can best live the life that is most pleasing to God. Was he right?

'I respect all earnest souls,' writes Carlyle, with Nicholas Ferrar in his mind; and to so much catholicity of sympathy, it may be hoped, we have all by this time attained. It was the privilege of the writer a short time ago to visit, on the same day, the noble ruins of Furness Abbey and Swarthmore Hall, the Mecca of the followers of George Fox. A sharper contrast within the sphere of religion than that which was thus suggested, it would be difficult to imagine. Yet one whose own spiritual life could find adequate expression neither in monasticism nor in Quakerism may cheerfully allow that each in its own time, and in its own way, has served the kingdom of God. It is easy for us, with the records of the past before us, to wax eloquent over the false ideals and shameless corruptions of monasticism; yet there must have been something besides evil in a system that for a thousand years was able to attract to itself so many of the best men and women in Europe. In matters of this kind the centuries cannot judge one another. To-day, if a man is in earnest about his religion, he can find a hundred outlets for his zeal; in the tenth century, as Dean Church says, he had little choice but to be a monk.<sup>2</sup> And even yet monasticism though dead still speaks, to remind us that what in its mistaken way it sought to secure, man still needs and must somehow gain if he is not to lose his soul. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee*—it is a word we all must hear if we would live.

Nevertheless, the modern world can never go back to the way of the monk. For a thousand years monasticism had its chance, and we know what came of it; history's stern verdict is not to be reversed. Even if there had been no civil war, Ferrar's mild experiment was foredoomed to failure; not along that road did England's salvation lie. We know now that we cannot overcome the world by flight; we must face it and fight. Humility and severity to the body have indeed, as Paul says, *a show of wisdom*, but the simple, damning fact which in the end monastic history burnt into men's minds for ever is this: *They are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh*. Moreover, we have

<sup>2</sup> See the opening pages of Church's *Anselm*.

gained to-day a new ideal of saintliness. Every one knows the traditional saint of the Middle Ages—'the thin pale face, the eyes red with tears or weary with watching, the transparent hands, the wasted form.' This is not our ideal; in our protest

against it we may even miss the truth that it was vainly seeking to express; but it is something more than Pharisaic self-complacency which thanks God that He has laid upon us to-day a higher and a nobler law of Christian service.

## Ordination.

BY THE REV. R. M. WOOLLEY, B.D., EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

OUR Lord committed the founding of His Church to the twelve apostles whom He had chosen and selected for this purpose out of the number of His disciples. To the apostles He gave power and authority to govern, to teach, and to direct that Church over which He had placed them. With the beginning of their preaching and the accession of numbers to the Faith, the need arose of ministering to the souls gathered in, and a development of the ministry became a necessity.

In Ac 6<sup>ff.</sup> we are told of the establishment of an order of deacons whose function was not only to minister in the temporal matters of the Church, but also to assist in the general work of the ministry. Thus we read of a deacon Philip doing great missionary work in Samaria, and baptizing his converts. The account of the institution of this order is the only direct account of the circumstances of ordination. We read that the deacons were elected by the people and presented to the apostles, who ordained them to the diaconate with prayer and the laying on of hands (*καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας*).

The mission of St. Paul and St. Barnabas from Antioch was preceded by a solemn laying on of hands (Ac 13<sup>2f.</sup>). Some have seen in this an ordination. The laying on of hands was, however, always used in the act of benediction, and it is a benediction rather than an ordination which is implied by this passage, for St. Paul expressly denies that he had received his apostleship from human sources, claiming that he had been called to the office by revelation, and moreover implying that the alternative to this call by revelation was the receiving his apostolic commission from the hands of the apostles (see Gal 1<sup>12</sup> 2).

In Ac 14<sup>23</sup> we are told of a further step in the organization of the ministry. St. Paul and St.

Barnabas ordain *πρεσβύτεροι* to minister to the small Christian congregations that they had established in the cities of Asia Minor (*χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς κατ' ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν παρέθεντο αὐτοὺς τῷ Κυρίῳ, κ.τ.λ.*). The ordination is preceded by a fast, and it is performed with prayer and probably the laying on of hands. The word *χειροτονεῖν*, which probably implies the laying on of hands, is from this time forward a technical word. In one other case we are given incidental information as to ordination. This is in the case of Timothy. Timothy was ordained by St. Paul to a position of authority in the Church, and tradition makes him first Bishop of Ephesus. St. Paul twice refers to his ordination. In 1 Ti 4<sup>14</sup> he speaks of the spiritual gift, the *χάρισμα*, which was bestowed upon him by the laying on of hands of the presbyterate, or perhaps, rather, 'for the presbyterate' (*μὴ ἀμελεῖ τοῦ ἐν σοὶ χαρίσματος ὃ ἐδόθη σοὶ διὰ προφητείας μετὰ ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν*). And again in 2 Ti 1<sup>6</sup> he speaks of Timothy's ordination by himself (*ἀναμμνήσκω σε ἀναζωπυρεῖν τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν σοὶ διὰ τῆς θέσεως τῶν χειρῶν μου*). Here again we have the laying on of hands with a form of words. 'Prophecy' here is more or less equivalent to 'prayer.' The actual order to which Timothy belonged is a matter of controversy. However, this much is evident, that he was ordained to a position of authority, and that he had the power himself to ordain others (1<sup>5, 22</sup>), and tradition calls him bishop. It must be remembered that these allusions to orders and ordination are but incidental and that from them no general conclusion can be safely drawn.

The rationale of orders is clearly shown in the New Testament. St. John tells us (20<sup>22</sup>) of the solemn act by which our Lord delivered to the apostles their apostolic commission. 'He breathed