

The Rev. Colonel Paul Hobson,

Fellow of Eton.

PAUL HOBSON came to the surface for a score of years, then vanished in the odour of unsanctity. He began as a citizen of London, barber-chirurgeon. When Laud's power was waning, he was associated with Green and Spencer in a Separatist Church at Crutched Friars. In 1643, Parliament wished to have a League with the Scots, who insisted on a Covenant as well. Hobson did not take this, but a few months later he and Thomas Gower signed the first London Baptist Confession, as representing one of seven churches; and they signed a revision in 1646.

He had already taken arms, and in May, 1644, sat on a court-martial at Farnham, as Major. As his regiment moved, he preached; at London, Yarmouth, Bristol, Newport Pagnell. The Presbyterian governor at this last place, satirised in *Hudibras*, arrested him for lay-preaching. It proved a test case, and though no record survives of the issue, henceforth there was no general or effective opposition to laymen preaching, even in vacant parish pulpits.

With the second Civil War, he was sent to Exeter, and no outbreak took place. His military value was evidently considerable, and when, at the end of 1648, the English army decided to prosecute King Charles for breaking his Coronation Oath, while the Scotch army shrank from drastic measures, Hobson was promoted lieutenant-colonel, and placed in garrison at Newcastle. This opened an important chapter of his life; for his military career closed in May, 1650, with the execution of Montrose at Edinburgh before the new King, "a man brought into the Kirk and therefore of necessity to God," could spare his life.

Next year peace reigned. A strange person was appointed by the Mercers' Company as Lecturer at Hexham. This Thomas Tillam was of Jewish extraction, but was a member of the London church of Hansard Knollys. He built up a Baptist church at Hexham, but developed remarkable peculiarities, so that Hobson, who had built up a Baptist church at Newcastle, had to oppose him. The correspondence was published in 1854 by the Hansard Knollys Society, appended to the Fenstanton Records. Tillam had to disappear from the district at the end of 1653.

A commission was appointed to propagate the gospel in the four northern counties, in February 1652/3; Hobson was placed on this. Henceforth he lost touch with Baptists in the south;

Henry Hagger, of Stafford, disowned him soon. When Cromwell summoned the Nominated Parliament of 1653, he joined with people of Durham in congratulating him; when Cromwell accepted the resignation of that Parliament, Hobson urged that church-members who approved such action should be excommunicated, and he opposed petitions in the Army to make him Protector. Thus Hobson gained a strong hold in the affections of republicans in the north.

A third chapter opened with his appointment as Fellow of Eton in 1654. The duties of the Fellows are not onerous, and records are not published how they acquit themselves; probably he did as well as any other. This peaceful interlude ended with the restoration of the old order, when Hobson automatically lost his fellowship.

Hobson's career in Durham did not seem promising, though he had acquired property at Sacriston, close to Chester-le-Street. He therefore returned to London, and joined Kiffin's church. Here, however, he found an atmosphere of suspicion, so left for Holland. Every man of foresight could recognise that dangerous times lay ahead; one solution was to emigrate, another was to resume fighting. He did not clearly decide against the latter, but he did join hands with his old antagonist, Tillam. This man, of continental origin, had obtained from the Markgraf of Brandenburg an old monastery in the Palatinate, on the Rhine. He proposed a great emigration from the Durham district; by degrees one or two hundred families became interested, and Hobson was apparently the agent at Rotterdam.

Finding, however, that he was dogged by criticism, he returned, and found that he was not welcome with any Baptist church. He joined N.S. (Colonel Nathaniel Strange?), but presently found that his people had seceded from others in an unscriptural way, so that he began to question the customs, and presently the very ordinances.

He therefore went north to his home in Durham, where probably lived his wife Hester, with their children, Paul, Lydia, Sara, Reubenah; the daughter Hester had married Henry Woolfe. There was, however, little peace for the ex-governor, and the Bishop of Durham, who himself had Palatine rights, arrested him after the insurrection of Venner in London. When that scare died down, Hobson was released on bail in August, 1661. This time he did think more seriously of taking up arms again, and he found others, like John Joplin, the ex-jailer at Durham, who were of like mind. More steam was generated by the wholesale eviction of clergy in August, 1662; and as the safety-valve of emigration was screwed down, there was danger of an explosion.

He came to London in November, and being found with his old friend, Thomas Gower, at Lothbury, was arrested by the Marshall-general. He gave a bond of £1,000 to be of good behaviour, and to appear when called upon; describing himself as of Bishopsgate, a doctor of medicine. Herein he was fortunate, for eighteen other Baptists were lodged in the Tower, suspected of a plot. By March the government believed that the Baptist church of Muggleswick—the former Hexham church—was the centre of the conspiracy: the Durham militia was called out, and many arrests were made.

Hobson was re-arrested, and committed to the Tower, on August 20th, 1663. He whiled away some time by writing a hymn of twenty-one verses, which he sang to the great annoyance of his neighbours and his own great relief; one verse may illustrate—

Now I true Liberty doe know,
 To Christ I'le praises sing,
 For He thro' Death will bring me home
 No more to sigh and sin;
 I wish this news abroad may spread,
 That all my foes may see,
 And Saints with understanding read
 And know my Liberty.

At first he wrote to John Joplin, and to John Atkinson "the Stockinger," suspected of being leaders in the plot. After seven weeks he was examined by the Council, then privately by the King. Charles took a precisely similar course afterwards with Colonel Blood, thereby much puzzling many onlookers. In this case the news spread rapidly, and was interpreted as that Hobson had turned King's Evidence. His friends feared the worst; only E.D. wrote on March 10th, 1663/4, asking for an explanation, while all the rest ceased visiting or corresponding. Some said he was being paid large sums, others that he was in prison to protect him from their vengeance.

Things seemed very dark, so on March 12th he made his will, recommending his wife Hester "to goe and live with my said Children in the Bishopricke of Durham keeping possession for me and my children." To his family also he wrote a farewell letter.

When, however, the trial of the northern plotters took place, he was not produced to give evidence: and indeed, they seem to have been acquitted, though Surtees obscures the issue.

Hobson had offered to go abroad. But he was transferred to Chepstow castle, to be tried for treason. Constant delays took place: he offered to go to Jamaica, and was at length released on condition he went to Carolina.

In prison he had written a small book, which he published with his initials only. A copy of this, *Innocency, though under a cloud, cleared*, was discovered early in 1936 at Dr. Williams's Library, by its librarian, Mr. Stephen Jones. Its story dovetails with that published by Mr. Matthews in his recent *Calamy Revised*, and with the references in the State Papers, long ago extracted by the present writer.

Hobson prefaced the book with effusions by R.E., H.F., R.J., to show that he still had staunch friends. Yet if these were Captain Robert Everard, who became Romanist next year, Henry Forty, and Richard Ireland, their testimonials are of no special weight. And in no case can they outweigh the fact that in 1665 two women at Devonshire Square—Kiffin's Church, which he had joined—were disciplined for wanton conduct with him and a man named Malborne.

He was released on April 28th of that year. Carolina had already some Baptist settlers, including the widow of Colonel Axtell, one of the King's judges. But he did not live long to carve out a new career, or leave any mark on the colony. His will was proved on June 13th, 1666. It is not recorded that Eton went into mourning.

W. T. WHITLEY.

Stewards of the Mysteries of God, by P. Franklin Chambers (Kingsgate Press, 1s.).

This study in Spiritual Catholicity consists of a reprint (very slightly altered) of the author's article on Friedrich von Hügel and William Medley which appeared in our columns (IV., 337). It is useful to have it in this convenient form.

The Reformation (Independent Press, Ltd., 6d.).

Two outstanding addresses were delivered to the Assembly of the Congregational Union at Bradford in October last by Dr. C. J. Cadoux on "The Spiritual Principles of the Reformation," and by Mr. Bernard L. Manning on "The Reformation and the Free Churches." They were challenging utterances, and this booklet has been issued in response to requests for their publication.