

## Voices from the Past : John Hackett.

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I HAVE a volume of seventeenth-century sermons of the Restoration period, which came into my possession nearly thirty years ago. I was in the habit of paying a visit from time to time to an "Old Curiosity Shop" in a provincial town. On one such occasion the proprietor produced a bulky volume with the remark that it was just the book for me: "There's black letter!" he exclaimed, as he opened the book and proudly pointed to the coarse, thick type so commonly used in those days. I did not correct him, and on turning over the pages agreed with him that it was "the book for me," and it became mine for the modest sum of five shillings. I do not suppose it would really have been worth that in the open market, but for the fact that in the middle of the volume, bound up with twenty sermons, is a clean and perfect copy of the first Report issued by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the sermons were by men of renown in their day, and some of the sermons themselves enjoyed a more than ephemeral reputation.

They represent, it need scarcely be said, a period when one of our "twenty minutes" performances would have been thought an insult to the intelligence of the ordinary worshipper, and anyone who sits down to read the volume now before me must make up his mind to face from twenty-five to forty pages of closely printed matter, in some cases running to thirteen or fourteen thousand words. Further, the unrelieved dulness of some of these productions makes the reading of them hard work; yet they are well worth reading for their solid reasoning and their unmistakable earnestness. The chief interest, however, of the sermons is to be found in the light that they throw on contemporary history, and the help they afford us in realizing

what was then being said and done in the religious world; and it may not be altogether waste of time to examine some of these twenty discourses, with the view of illustrating from them particular aspects of the condition of religious and ecclesiastical thought in our country at the time of their production.

Often have I wondered who it was that collected these sermons and had them bound in strong calf binding, which is good and sound to-day. I incline to the belief that the volume started on its career in the library of some parish priest of moderate, but decided, Church views, with a strongly anti-Roman bias, and with a devout longing, on the one hand, for the return of non-conformists to the bosom of the Church, and, on the other hand, for the spread of the Gospel beyond seas. Further, I find indications of a mind in sympathy with much that had come, and was coming, from the pen of Cambridge Platonists, a mind that would have felt at home with Bishop Jeremy Taylor and Archbishop Usher.

The subjects treated in the sermons are those of permanent import and undying interest. Here, for example, in this volume are sermons bearing upon the subject of conformity and reunion preached in 1661, 1664, 1668, 1683, and 1692, the last of these seeing the light three years after the triumph of Christian charity in the Toleration Act of 1689.<sup>1</sup> It was a time, as we well know, when non-conformity was fighting for its very existence, and it can be no anachronism for us at the present day to listen for a few moments to what some of the best-known Churchmen of the day were saying on the subject of union and reunion. Their utterances are characterized by such vigour and lucidity that, from whatever point of view they write, it affords me satisfaction to rescue some small fragments of their work from utter oblivion.

Here is a sermon preached by John Hacket, D.D., Chaplain-in-Ordinary to His Majesty, before the King's Majesty at

<sup>1</sup> This, of course, must be said with considerable reservation. The civil disabilities of Dissenters were not removed by the Act, whilst Romanists and Unitarians were expressly excluded from its operation.

Whitehall on Friday, March 22, 1661; published by His Majesty's appointment.

Few clergymen of the Restoration period were better known, none more respected, than John Hacket. Already a man full of years (he was born in 1592), he was soon to be full of honours. As far back as the later years of James I. he had exercised considerable influence in the ecclesiastical world. In 1623 he was elected Proctor in Convocation and made Chaplain to the King, with whom he was a great favourite. In 1624 he was presented to the important living of St. Andrew's, Holborn, and in the very same year to Cheam, in Surrey, "the one for wealth, the other for health." He preached to crowded congregations, and was an active parish priest. He used his influence in the cause of moderation when Laud was pursuing his policy of intolerance towards the puritanically inclined section of the clergy, and in the struggle which took place between Church and Parliament he took a discreet and dignified part. On the triumph of Parliament he was deprived of the well-endowed living of St. Andrew's, Holborn, but was permitted to retain the benefice of Cheam. There, not without personal risk, he continued his ministry throughout the period of the rebellion and Protectorate. On one occasion a Roundhead entered the Church and, presenting a pistol at the Rector, ordered him to stop. Hacket refused to discontinue the service, saying that he would do as befitted a divine, and that the other might do what became a soldier. It is recorded of him that he committed the Burial Service to memory in order that he might use it without giving offence to the Puritans.

On the return to England of Charles II. in 1660, Hacket forthwith took a prominent place in the Church, and was made Chaplain to the King.<sup>1</sup> He was at once offered the Bishopric of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. T. Plume, in his "Life of Bishop Hacket," records the fact that the Bishop had preached eighty times before the three Kings—James I., Charles I., and Charles II. "A Century of Sermons," by Bishop Hacket, edited by his biographer, T. Plume, was published in 1675. Samuel Taylor Coleridge read these sermons, and has left us his impressions of them in his "Remains," vol. iii., p. 175. They are, to his mind, "a conspicuous example

Gloucester, but declined it. In the following year, however, he accepted the See of Lichfield and Coventry. In spite of his sixty-nine years he displayed in his episcopal labours the activity and enthusiasm of youth. He found the cathedral in ruins. Giving lavishly of his own substance, he raised no less than £20,000 for its restoration, and had the satisfaction of seeing the work completed the year before his own death, which took place in 1670.

John Hacket was a man of strong character and undaunted resolution, as was shown in his dealings with Thomas Wood, his own Dean, and his successor in the see.<sup>1</sup> The Dean openly opposed the Bishop in his efforts to restore the ruined cathedral. The Bishop retaliated by publicly excommunicating the Dean. It was a bold step to take, but the good Bishop's reputation did not suffer by it; and as Thomas Wood, many years afterwards, was suspended from his episcopal office for simony, our sympathies may fairly go with the courageous Bishop, who excommunicated him in 1667. "Perhaps the secret of Hacket's wonderful energy to the very last may be found in his favourite motto: 'Serve God and be cheerful.'" <sup>2</sup>

When the Act of Uniformity came into force the Bishop used all his influence to persuade ministers threatened with ejection to conform. It may be that his sense of humour seconded his efforts in this direction. To one, Christopher Comyns, he remarked: "I hear you have often said that hell is paved with bishops' skulls; I desire you to tread lightly on mine when you come there!" <sup>3</sup>

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of weaving the most childish interpretations and fancies of the Fathers into his public utterances." He "could trick himself up in fantastic rags and lappets of Popish monkery; could skewer frippery patches, cribbed from the tiring room of Romish Parthenolatry on the sober gown and cassock of a Reformed and Scriptural Church." But Coleridge is conspicuously unfair in his criticism. A critic is self-condemned when he takes up a volume of seventeenth-century sermons and expects to find in it specimens of nineteenth-century preaching.

<sup>1</sup> For the scandal connected with the elevation of Dean Wood to the Episcopal Bench, and for the part that the infamous Lady Castlemaine, mistress to Charles II., played in this piece of preferment, see John Houghton's "Church of the Restoration," p. 500.

<sup>2</sup> Overton, "Life in the English Church 1660-1714," p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. T. Plume's "Life of Bishop Hacket."

The sermon from which I propose to give a few extracts was preached, as we learn from its close, in deference to the direction of the first Nicene Council that a Synod should be held in the season of Lent, with the aim of composing differences and preparing the Church for her Easter festival. In some of his first words the preacher shows how deeply he was impressed and affected by difficulties arising from disunion. "If," he says, "Babel itself could not be built up among a *discord of tongues*, how much more can Sion never be well built up with *discord of hearts*. If the nets be broken, the fishers of men may catch a draught, but they can keep nothing."

The sermon embodies a defence of episcopacy, but on the whole is a model of caution; nor would it have been easy, on the ground of this utterance, for either the stiff Anglican or the party of compromise to have brought any charge against the preacher. His text on the occasion was Acts xv. 39: "The contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from another." The first paragraph of the sermon is a key to the whole. "The contents of this chapter are famous for two things that had most contrary events. The one how a great variance was concluded with a happy concord; the other how a small variance did proceed to an unhappy discord." The great variance was that which arose between Paulinism and Judaism, which was settled by compromise; the small variance between Paul and Barnabas, small because "they fell not out for anything that touched the life of truth, or the honour of Christ," ended in separation—"they departed asunder one from another."

Let the Church take warning from the story of these two good men. "The walk of men is contention (1 Cor. iii. 3): the way of God is peace. We are sure He is in the still Voice; we are sure He is not in the whirlwinds of controversies and uproars." The preacher warns his hearers that "God will depart from that Church where the flames of notorious discords are broken out." From the general tenor of the sermon we may infer that Hacket, while not averse to concession on the part of the Church, was fully persuaded that submission was both the

wisdom and duty of the non-conformist ; and he must have had the non-conformist body chiefly in his mind when he wrote : " First bring a supple, a soft, a tractable mind that hath a good affection to agreement, and I will undertake to furnish you with rules enough that, if you differ in no greater things than Paul and Barnabas did (yea, what if they were greater ?), you may soon greet one another with the kiss of peace. But if we stand at this distance, ' I have pitched on my resolution, I must have my will, and will not yield an inch,' such an untractable obstinacy, can never profit by any exhortation. ' Only by pride cometh contention,' says Solomon." Unfortunately, the supple, soft, tractable mind that he postulates was not to be found on either side.

The law, he maintains, must take its course. " There is no exception to be made against the sentence of the law under which we live. It is an indifferent judge ordained to try our causes before we were born. It hath no passions, no kindred, no corruption to transport it." It must be confessed that the next few years, with their harsh and cruel policy towards non-conformity, were destined to give the best possible ground for challenging such a statement. " Why," continues the preacher, " should men take exception to the canons of the Church and the form of prayer provided by authority?" He points to the early Christians dragged to heathen rites and festivals—nay, to flat idolatry. " How glad would they have been to have nothing laid upon them but canons for ceremonies and forms of prayer. Now they are wanton. And, being no longer scared with the howling of the wolf, they are offended at the whistle of the shepherd." There is something, we must admit, irresistibly comic in the picture presented to us of uncompromising disciples of Archbishop Laud sitting on the Episcopal Bench and whistling back the sheep that had strayed from the Anglican fold into the wilderness of non-conformity. And when we call to mind the harsh and overbearing attitude of the Church at the Savoy Conference, which was to meet only three days after the preaching of this sermon, we are certainly reminded rather of the howling of the wolf than of the whistle of the shepherd. The King, who

would himself have welcomed a policy of toleration, and even of compromise, was helpless in the hands of a nation almost mad with the spirit of reaction; and though moderate men on both sides might still indulge the hope of reunion, it required no gift of prophecy to see that the Presbyterians, who had done so much to place the King upon his throne, would have to complain of cruel neglect and broken faith.

The Bishop, Hacket maintains, is the appointed arbiter. "What think you of arbitration? When many take the thing in hand, commonly, it is so long a-doing that it is never done. Make the appeal, then, to few. Nay, why not *to one Person*? I am so directed by the Apostle, 1 Cor. vi. 5: 'Is there not a wise man among you that shall be able to judge between his brethren?' . . . Unless you give some prerogation of power to *one Bishop in a diocese* to examine external order and maintain sound doctrine, you will have so many fashions as there are men, and so many Faiths as there are parishes."

Once more the preacher points to Paul and Barnabas. Theirs was a quarrel within the very bosom of the fold, and between leaders of Christ's Church. "This was a jar at home, amongst themselves; a civil war. I tremble to speak the word, though in a bare metaphor"—and we can almost see the deprecatory and effusively loyal glance that the preacher, as he spoke the words, threw at his royal hearer. "This is not an opposition between Ishmael and Isaac of two venters, but between Jacob and Esau in one womb—nay, between the pilot and the master in one ship. God help us if the right hand fight against the left, when both are made to defend the body! When the rams of the flock contend, the poor sheep that look on must stand amazed." Thus the future Bishop of Lichfield deploras the divisions and misunderstandings that prevailed within the Church itself; and we must remember that he was speaking before the passing of the Act of Uniformity, which, at whatever cost, did introduce some measure of external order and agreement within the Church.

Yet, after all, whatever the mistake, whether of Paul or

Barnabas, there was more of infirmity than sin in it, since they both believed that they were acting for the glory of God. "Cloth of the same making hath not always the same dye. Here's one wool and one cloth, but dipped in two colours"—but the thought is not followed up, as it might have been, in the cause of charity and comprehension.

The preacher's thoughts, however, are not confined to the problem of reunion in his own land. He widens his outlook and contemplates the Reformation movement as a whole. And in so doing he emphasizes two causes of contention between those who have abjured the dominion of Rome, which outweigh all others. "There two wounds deeper than others, which cannot be concealed, that stink and are corrupt through our foolishness." One of these wounds is "through the unrelenting ubiquitaries among the rigid Lutherans never ceasing to cry out, and yet never proving, that, with the substance of bread remaining, Christ's fleshly body is in the Sacrament of His Supper." The other wound is the fiercely debated question of the externals of worship. "These are the two quarrels at which the Papists clap their hands to see us brawl among ourselves." Then he turns upon the Papists. "Do they insult upon us for it? What, they? whose janglings are ten for one of ours, and twice ten times greater, as a millstone is bigger than a pebble!"<sup>1</sup>

What is most worthy of note in the foregoing observations is surely this—namely, that, in the judgment of a zealous episcopalian like Hacket, not the lack of episcopal government and orders, but the doctrine of consubstantiation, was the chief bone of contention between Anglican and Lutheran; and we may conclude from this pronouncement that John Hacket, had

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Plume, in his "Life of Bishop Hacket," tells us that the Bishop "was extremely afflicted for the horrible division of Christians through the jugglings of the Papacy." Further, "he believed that Papists ever bear bloody minds towards us, and want nothing but power and opportunity to make as many bonfires in England as they had done formerly." Five years before this sermon was preached before King Charles the massacre of Piedmontese Protestants took place; in 1685 the Edict of Nantes was revoked.



he retired to the Continent during the Great Rebellion, would have had no more compunction than Bishop Cosin in communicating with members of the Reformed Church in Germany, France, or Holland.

Once more, towards the end of his discourse, the preacher emphasizes the triviality of the cause that separated Paul and Barnabas, and it is implied, though not actually stated, that they might have found a way out of the *impasse* by mutual concession. "Sacrifice small, indifferent things to the fruition of peace. To hold fast our conclusions in *petty matters*, with all the strength of our will and wit, is not constancy, but a worse thing." Without venturing to judge between Paul and Barnabas, Hacket observes that the ancient Church acted in the spirit of Paul, "for if a clergyman shrunk in the wetting, as we say, either he was thrust down to a laical communion, or chastened with a penance of many years." In the Middle Ages and the latter times, he further remarks, the Church has followed in the steps of Barnabas, and acted with undue remissness.

"'They departed asunder one from another.' This is the last point and the saddest word of the text." And yet Satan defeated his own end when he stirred up this strife, for Paul and Barnabas went in different directions scattering the seed of the Kingdom.

The sermon closes with a further vindication of episcopacy as against congregationalism. Barnabas and Paul "performed what they intended, *to visit their brethren in every city where they had preached the word of God*. All governments, in all ages, have approved this to be the best way to conserve unity. Not that every city, much less every conventicle, should be entire within itself and acknowledge no authority over it. As if every parish should be like a several island divided from the continent. . . . It is impossible to avoid a multitude of corruptions in Faith, and not to contract a prodigious licentiousness in discipline, when the part, *against nature*, shall not depend on the whole. . . . Then the whole Church shall be nothing else but a great schism, and yet no man shall be convinced to be a

schismatic." As for Paul and Barnabas, "though they *were two* upon a small disgust, yet they remembered there was but *one Shepherd and one sheepfold*, whose peace they studied to preserve by their pastoral vigilancy." So here we have Dr. Hacket wielding the favourite weapon of Rome, substituting the false reading *ovile*, sheepfold, for *grex*, flock.<sup>1</sup> The lesson contained in the true reading of John x. 16 has not yet been fully learned by the Anglican Church. Had the genuine text come down untampered with from Apostolic times, and the true meaning of Christ's words been fully grasped, how much of the unhappy strife of the last 350 years might have been averted! Thus the sermon we have been examining closes with a false note, a note of intolerance and exclusion. In this the preacher only reproduced the knowledge and the spirit of his own day; and, taken as a whole, the sermon, considering the time at which it was preached, is a moderate expression of Anglican conviction, and as sensible, we may add, as it is moderate.

The discourse was "publish't by His Majesty's Appointment." Whether His Majesty listened attentively to every paragraph of this formidable production of eight-and-thirty pages is open to reasonable doubt; but John Hacket was already in the King's good graces, since he held the post of "Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty." The Chaplain was soon to be a Bishop, and we may be allowed to surmise that this very sermon may have proved a step to his promotion. Against that promotion nothing can be said, for he proved a most active and resourceful administrator of the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry.

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Westcott remarks: "The translation 'fold' for 'flock,' 'ovile' for 'grex,' has been most disastrous in idea and in influence" (*comment., in loc.*). Wycliffe, following the Vulgate, made "one fold" familiar in English, and the false reading remained uncorrected until the revision of 1881.

