

Thomas Ken.

(Concluded from p. 864.)

KEN, in his humble and single-minded aims, refrained, though he was a man of learning and a wide reader, from writing any theological or controversial books, that might have made him conspicuous in the world of letters and that might have increased his fame in the future; but wrote, whenever he felt there was a need, whatever might minister to the souls of those over whom he had charge. The first instance of this is found in the *Winchester Manual*. This remarkable book he put forth anonymously in 1674¹, under the title of "A Manual of Devotions for the Scholars of Winchester." It is still in use among the candidates for Confirmation there, and was republished in our time by one like to Ken in primitive piety, Dr. Moberly. Here I may mention a fact, which may be known to few in the present day, that Edward Bickersteth, a leader among the Evangelicals of the last century, republished large portions of these devotions in his "Prayers for the Young." Careful directions as to prayers had formed a part of the constitution of the school as appointed by the founder. Ken's book was, of course, supplementary to these. The question has been suggested whether the devotions of the *Manual* are too highly pitched for schoolboys. Parts of them are indeed more suited to the boyhood of such persons as Dr. Liddon and Bishop Gore than to the average schoolboy. But the ordinary faults and temptations of schoolboys are not by any means ignored; the book is thoroughly practical, and where it rises to a more than usual height of devotion we may remember that a high ideal will always touch some young hearts, and kindle an answering response. Self-examination is carefully insisted on, and where difficulty is felt, resort is recommended to a spiritual guide. The well-known

¹ Plumptre says the first edition of the *Manual for Winchester Scholars* came out anonymously in 1674, and passed through five editions before it appeared with Ken's name in 1687. The chief of Ken's devotional works are:—(1) His "Manual of Prayers for Winchester Scholars," 1674;(2) "The Practice of Divine Love, an Exposition of the Church Catechism." 1685; (3) His "Prayers for all Persons who came to the Baths for Cure."

hymns for morning and evening were not added to the Manual till some years later. The schoolboy is addressed as one who wishes to serve God, for he is named Philotheus—that is, one who loves God—and directions are given him for the whole of his duties, and prayers for morning and evening, and devotions preparatory to the Eucharist. Questions for self-examination for times of quietude and short ejaculations for busy moments are supplied. A few specimens of Ken's mode of speech to boys shall here be given :

“ Philotheus, when you are ready, look on your soul as still undrest, till you have said your prayers.¹

“ If you are a commoner, you may say your prayers in your own chamber, but if you are a child or a chorister, then, to avoid the interruptions of the common chambers, go into the chapel, between first and second peal, in the morning to say your morning prayers, and to say your evening prayers when you go *circum*.”

By the words “ if you are a child ” is meant a boy on the foundation, a term of tenderness used in the statutes towards those whom Wykeham regarded as the special care of his educational Home. *Circum* refers to the procession round the cloisters at 5 p.m., when the whole society, Warden, fellows, masters, clerks and choristers went in procession round the cloisters, returning to a supper in the hall, followed by evensong in the chapel at 8 p.m.

Another passage from the Manual shall be quoted to show the religious influences brought to bear upon the boys by the system of the school :

“ O Philotheus, you cannot enough thank God for the order of the place you live in, where there is so much care taken to make you a good Christian, as well as a good scholar, where you go so frequently to prayers, every day in the Chapel and in the school; and sing hymns and psalms to God so frequently in your chamber and in the chapel and in the hall, so that you are in a manner brought up in a perpetuity of prayer.”

A bright view this, taken by Ken, of religious opportunities in a public school; there must have been a sad falling off later on, one would think, for what does Dr. Moberly, Headmaster of Winchester, say when writing to Stanley of Rugby? The letter is quoted by Stanley in his “ Life of Arnold.” Speaking of his experience in the early part of the last century, he remarks :

¹ So George Herbert, “ dress and undress thy soul.”

“The tone of young men at the University, whether they came from Winchester, Eton, Rugby, Harrow, or wherever else, was universally irreligious. A religious undergraduate was hardly to be found, except in cases where domestic training or good dispositions had prevailed over the school habits and tendencies.”

And then Dr. Moberly goes on to express thankfulness for the improvement that has set in.

But to go back to our Ken. One of his objects in the Manual is to impress upon boys the value of short inward words of prayer, such as are called, though mistakenly, ejaculations. The habit he knew to be very helpful towards forming a soul that lives in touch with the Will of God, and towards carrying out the precept of St. Paul when he says, “Pray without ceasing.” Among the short breathings of prayer which Ken suggests we find this somewhat longer one for midnight :

“O Lord, the holy angels are now before Thy throne in heaven; they never rest day or night from Thy praises, and with them do I now sing hallelujah, salvation, and honour, and glory and power be unto our God for ever and ever.

“Lord, I know that thou wilt one day call me to give an account of my stewardship, but when Thou wilt come I know not, whether at even, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning. O do Thou give me grace to watch and to pray always, that at Thy coming Thou mayest say to me, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of Thy Master.’ Amen, blessed Lord, Amen.”

The devotions preparatory to the Holy Communion are very helpful—for instance :

“Lord, I believe that the bread that we break, and the cup that we drink, are not bare signs only, but the real communication of Thy Body and Thy Blood, and pledges to assure me of it, and I verily believe that if with due preparation I come to the altar, as certainly as I receive the outward signs, so certainly shall I receive the thing signified, even Thy most blessed Body and Blood, to receive which inestimable blessings do Thou fit and prepare me.”

Before passing from these devotions it should be noticed that Ken shows a wise common sense in his directions for their use. He separates those intended for younger boys from those that he makes longer for older ones, and he encourages his readers to feel that they are not to make a burden of their prayers, but to use

them as circumstances render reasonable and as time and strength admit. So he closes with this advice :

“ Be not then afflicted, good Philotheus, if you cannot come up exactly to the rules here given you. Believe me, it was never imagined that you would. It was only hoped that you would endeavour it; and know that it is a great error of many devout souls to think all they do signifies nothing because they fall short of the rules laid down in their books of devotion; little considering that it is sincerity God requires of us, and not perfection, ‘ for if there be a willing mind in us, it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not; ’ so that your infirmities ought to humble, but not discourage you.”

Bishop Ken entertained a very high opinion of the Church Catechism, as a help to learning saving truth. He remarks :

“ It is a great error to think that the catechism was made for children only; for all Christians are equally concerned in those saving truths which are there taught: and the doctrine delivered in the Catechism is as proper for the study, and as necessary for the salvation of a great doctor, as of a weak Christian or a young child.”

He goes on to show that in his devotional work on the subject he has turned the Catechism into prayers, for the use of each Christian who studies it with a view to living it out; and he of course exhorts parents and masters to make sure that they teach it to children and servants, and instruct them also to turn their Catechism into prayers, as he says, “ after the manner which I shall show you.” He then gives daily prayers, for morning, evening, and noon, founded on the Catechism, expressing himself, as in the case of the Winchester scholars, very considerably as to their use, pointing out that these prayers for each day will not take up more than a quarter of an hour in all, and observing, “ Certainly *that* person has very little sense of his duty, very little concern for his immortal soul, very little honour for God, or value for heaven, who will not spend one quarter of an hour in the space of four and twenty hours in the service of God and the salvation of his own soul.” You will find, as Ken himself remarks, that in his Exposition of the Church Catechism he has turned it all into prayer and devotion: but there is one salient feature which deserves special notice. He has brought everywhere into prominence the great truth, that all God’s teaching and dealing with men is pervaded

by the great and wonderful motive of Love. He beautifully says: "God's law is the 'Rule of Love.'" And if any persons have ever thought that the Catechism is dull, they could never say so if they would study the pages in which Ken has *glorified* its questions and answers by throwing upon them the Light of the love of God to men.

By this, and some other publications, Ken endeavoured to influence for good the people of his diocese; but he did not think only of them, but also of the visitors who came to Bath for cure, being concerned, in a true Christian spirit, both for the welfare of their bodies and their souls. For them he wrote a short manual of prayer with suitable exhortations. He says:

"I could not satisfy myself in only praying for you, as I daily do, unless I did also send you these directions and prayers, which are few and short and familiar, to comply with the infirmity of your condition, and which I hope, by God's blessing, to be words spoken in season; nor can I doubt but that all of you who want such helps will seriously peruse them, and observe the advices of your spiritual physicians, as you are wont to do those of your corporal."

A little further on he quotes a passage in the Revelation, which runs:

"Fear God and give glory to Him, and worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea and the fountains of waters" (Rev. xiv. 7).

And adds,

"Look therefore on the bath as a very admirable and propitious work of Divine Providence, designed for the good of a great number of infirm persons, as well as for yourself. Praise and adore God, who has signally manifested His power and His mercy in creating so universal a good; worship God who made the fountain."

Closely connected with Ken's devotional works are his well-known hymns, for morning, evening, and midnight. They appear to have been written in the first instance for his own devotional use, for he said or sung them daily, and then added them to the devotions he prepared for the Winchester scholars. They do not appear, however, in the earlier additions of the Manual, and it is Dean Plumptre's conjecture that they were published in leaflets. The earliest edition which contains them is that of 1695. Similar

hymns had been published before Ken's time, but these of his evidently met a want that had not been adequately supplied. Robert Nelson, whose honoured name is known to most Church-people, himself a contemporary of Ken, embodied them in the book of prayers, which was entitled, "The Practice of True Devotion," and took especial delight in them. He entreated his readers to learn them by heart, and remarks, "The daily repeating of them will make you perfect in them, and the good fruit of them will abide with you all your days."

The edition published in 1712, a year after Ken's death, by his publisher Broome, contained many variations. It is reasonable to think that these were the final suggestions of Ken himself. This form of them has been the one usually accepted and handed down, though of course editors of hymn-books have mutilated them at pleasure ever since.

To Nelson's contemporary appreciation we may add that of Keble in our own day; and it is interesting to know that the poet of the "Christian Year" in his own last illness sent for Roundell Palmer's "Book of Praise," that he might recall the verses of Ken's evening hymn.

They have been household hymns in many and many of the homes of Churchpeople, from that day to this. Some may be able to recall how they heard them sung by their own bedsides in the nursery, by a holy mother who has now passed to the hymns of the eternal life. They have helped to mould the religion of thousands as they sang them in home and church. Keble's morning and evening hymns have of late somewhat driven them out, and his are more poetical, but for practical helpfulness Ken's are second to none. They have been translated into several heathen languages for missionary use.

It being of the utmost value for us to be careful about giving our first thoughts to God, both when we are waking, and while we are getting up and dressing, the morning hymn is helpful, especially in the following words:

"Lord, I my vows to Thee renew;
Disperse my sins as morning dew,
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with Thyself my spirit fill."

“ Direct, control, suggest this day,
 All I design, or do, or say,
 That all my powers with all their might
 In Thy sole glory may unite.”

Next to Sancroft, if not before, the Bishop who might certainly claim the first place, in his day, alike for his saintliness, his abilities and attainments, would be Thomas Ken.

There is no trait in his character more conspicuous than his moral courage; but at the same time it is clear that, as has been well said, “ Ken was just the reverse of some men who only seem to come to the front when a quarrel has arisen. Ken, on the contrary, was always in evidence when some plain, practical good was to be done; never, if he could avoid it, when disputes arose. Was there need of Christian intercession on behalf of sufferers cruelly treated, as in the case of those who were used so barbarously after the suppression of the Monmouth rebellion? There was Ken, ready to rush, as it were, into the lion’s mouth, and to intercede for them, not ineffectually, with their infuriated and powerful oppressors. Was there a careless, godless King to be admonished, in sickness or in health, living or dying, of his faults? There was Ken, ready to admonish him faithfully, without fear or favour. Was there an infatuated King, rushing to his own destruction? There was Ken, ready to stop him if possible, in his headlong course. . . . Was there a poor man condemned to death for actions of which Ken utterly disapproved? Still, there he was, to comfort him and pray with him in his dying hours. Was there urgent need of the aid of the charitable to stave off starvation from sufferers for conscience’s sake? There was Ken in the forefront of the effort, and ready to justify boldly the course which he had taken. The kind of work in which the broad principles of Christian faith and charity were at stake, he loved to take part in. No one better than he could play the part of a St. John the Baptist, and, after his example, constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth’s sake. But to contend about disputable points was not in accordance with his nature.”

S. HARVEY GEM.

