

## John Tombes as a Correspondent.

**J**OHN TOMBES (1603-1676) is known to fame primarily as the Baptist protagonist in the disputations that characterised his age. His oral debates were numerous, but his pen appears to have been even more active than his tongue. Most of his books, and they numbered 28, were controversial. As a correspondent little is known of him. Now, however, we have two letters which he sent to Sir Robert Harley in 1642, just on the eve of the Civil War. From them we learn of his sympathy and also his desire to keep his friend well informed as to the course of events locally.

Sir Robert Harley (1579-1656) was an M.P. and Master of the Mint. His home was at Brampton Bryan Castle, in Herefordshire. He was made a Knight of the Bath by James I. at his coronation. Sir Robert served on many important committees of the House of Commons during the Long Parliament, and on December 15th, 1643, he succeeded Pym as a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. In 1643 his castle was besieged by the Royalists for six weeks; he was in London at the time, but his wife, Lady Brilliani Harley, ably defended it until the siege was raised. The next year it fell to the Royalists. In 1646 Harley's losses during the civil war were estimated at £12,550. "Earnest for Presbytery," a man of pure life, devoted to religious observance, he loved to befriend the Puritans and Dissenters. His correspondence in course of time passed to his grandson, Robert Harley, the first Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, the founder of the Harleian Collection of books and MSS. in the British Museum. These letters of Tombes went along with other MSS to Welbeck Abbey in 1741 on the death of Edward, the second Earl of Oxford, for his MSS., etc., were inherited by his only daughter and heiress, Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, who in 1734 had married William Bentinck, second Duke of Portland. Most of the Harleian MSS. were transferred to the British Museum, but many historical papers and letters remain at Welbeck Abbey. The treasures of the library are only partially known to readers of the Reports of the Historical MSS. Commission.

Through the kindness of His Grace, the Duke of Portland, K.G., and the courtesy of his Librarian, Mr. R. W. Goulding, we are able to

reprint the Tombes letters, along with an enclosure which is an account of a disturbance in Leominster Church on the 31st July, 1642, when Matthew Clarke refused to read the King's answer to the Parliament. Clarke was a minister at Ludlow, eleven miles away; his son, of the same name, M.A. of Trinity College, Cambridge, was ejected from Narborough, in Leicestershire, in 1662.

ARTHUR S. LANGLEY.

"To the noble & right worthy Sr Robert Harley, Knight of the Bath, these present."

Sir,

At the instance of this bearer Mr Miles Hill mercer not longe since Bayliffe of this Borough of Lemster, brought into debt by losses in trading, yet conscionable to satisfy creditors, for w<sup>h</sup> ende he now repaires to London, intending to make ouer some estate of Landes to them for a time, but in the meane time wanting imployment for his maintenance, desires to be employed in some place fitt for him, I humbly request you that if there be any way wherein you may helpe him, you would vouchsafe your favour & assistance to him. God hath vouchsafed to call him home to himselfe so farre as my selfe and others, as Mr Flackett of Bucknill, Mr Becke of Sapy, can iudge, and we doubt not but he will proue faithfull, & vsefull, & therefore conceive our selues bounde to tender his case as the case of a Christian brother, w<sup>ch</sup> I embolden my selfe to Comend to your pious thoughtes, & your selfe & greate affaires to the Almightyes tuition, resting

Your worship's in most humble observance,

JOHN TOMBES.

Lemster. June 20, 1642.

The relation of Mr Matthew Clerke of the disturbance at Lemster in the County of Heref. in time of Divine service July 31, 1642, at the time when

the Assizes for the County of Heref: was kept at Hereford, & the Bayliffe (being Shieriff also of the County) and the Justice of the towne were absent at Hereford.

As service was towards an end Mr Wallop Brabazon a Justice of peace for the County & one of ye chiefe in the Comission of Array a parishioner of Lemster having bene at the Assizes the day before came into the Church the day aboue named, & sate himselfe downe behind the minister Mr Clerke (in the absence of the vicar) in the reading pew. Edmund Steade Churchwarden & John Scarlett & William Caswall the younger accompanying of him. The psalme growing towards an end I rose vp to goe to the pulpit. Mr Brabazon stayed me & reaching forth a booke vnto me siade Sr The King requires you to reade this. I not knowing who he was craued his name, who told me his name was Brabazon. Mr Brabazon (said I) I conceive The King doeth not require me to reade it here. Yes that he doeth saide hee, & wth that shewes mee the kinges order for the reading of it in the frontispice of the booke. On wch casting my eye, Sr (said I) it is to be reade in euery church by the parson vicar or curate of the same. And I am neither parson vicar nor curate of this place. Yes said he you are curate for the time being. No (said I) I am a stranger here intreated to preach, & no curate here. You shall reade it (said he) But I will not (said I) You asked my name (said he) tell me what is yours. Clarke (said I) Of what place (said he) Of Bitterly answered one that was by. Churchwarde (said he) take notice of his name. He refuseth to obey the Kings order. The Kings order (said I) bindes not me to reade it in this place. Ile make you reade it (said he) Neuer here whilst you liue (said I). And so I brake from him to goe to

the pulpitt. Stay him cryed he to the rude people that were in the way, let him not goe vp into the pulpit to preach. I care not (said I) a rush whether I preach or no. You shall heare of this (said he) & you shall heare of this (said I) Remember (said he) he threatens me. Remember (said I) he interrupts me in time of Diuine seruice. Stay him cryed he againe Downe w<sup>th</sup> the roundheade cryed they that had planted themselues in the way to the pulpit hauing staues & some swordes being some of the voluntiers (as was reported to me) that were to goe to Yorke w<sup>th</sup> horse. And vpon that they came all about me, & encompassed me about. Vpon that M<sup>r</sup> Brabazon came out vnto me in the Ile where they were about me. I offered you the booke to reade (said he) & you threatned me. You threatned me first (said I) saying I should heare of it. And then I told you [you] should heare of it. What shall I heare (said he) That I haue giuen you a good & a lawfull answer w<sup>ch</sup> might satisfy any reasonable gentleman. Oh (said he) a good & a lawfull answer. Yes (said I) & herevpon he began to be somewhat pacified towards me. But the rude people who flocked about me some w<sup>th</sup> swordes by their sides their hand on them others w<sup>th</sup> staues in their hand cryed againe Downe w<sup>th</sup> the round head, Downe w<sup>th</sup> the round head. Vpon w<sup>ch</sup> cry the women in the church (fearing they had knocked me downe) gaue a greate shreeke. Vpon that M<sup>r</sup> Brabazon endeauouring to keepe them off from me swore saying What are ye all mad, they still pressing toward me & crying downe w<sup>th</sup> the roundhead. Edmund Steuens said to M<sup>r</sup> Brabazon S<sup>r</sup> you are a Justice of peace I hope you will not see a gentleman to be murdered among vs. No said he I desire him to preach & I'll bring him to the pulpit. Then one Thomas Williams & Captaine Stepkin said to Steuens (as he told me)

what a prating do you keepe, meddle w<sup>th</sup> that you haue to doe w<sup>th</sup>all. All that I desire is said he that the gentleman may not be wronged. About this time one of them stepping out w<sup>th</sup> his cudgell ouer my heade said, shall I downe w<sup>th</sup> him. Mr Brabazon cryed what are you mad. And thus for some while some of them were for their knocking of me downe others of them were for the keeping of them off from me & the getting me into the pulpit to preach vnto [them] w<sup>ch</sup> I was very vnwilling considering the tumult. But as soone as I was quietly in the pulpit it was noted that most of those that came w<sup>th</sup> swordes & staues went out of the church & returned as sermon was done. Coming downe from the pulpit & calling for my hatt I said Mr Edward Dalley This Eckley (being an exco<sup>m</sup>unicate person) stood against the reading pewdore in the afternoone to keepe me from coming forth to preach so as the churchwarden was faine to remoue him. This tumult put women into such frights that they Continued long after distemperd.

[Then comes a list of names of those who cried roundhead.]

Sr

I haue sent vnto you this relation copied out of one written by Mr Clarke that whereas I doubt not but you haue heard a report of this disturbance you may haue true intelligencé thereof. Thereby you may perceiue in what estate we are in Herefordshire. Vnless some speedy course be taken to reduce thinges to a better way in that County I looke for no other then ouerawing by force, & for my selfe death & expulsion; on [blank] (as I am told) the forenamed Stepkin & Henry Toldervey strucke vp a drume for footmen to goe to Yorke or for such a [blank] as the malignant party intends. Here in Worcester they intend to putt the Comission of Array in execution

again & haue appointed this day seuennight to that end. Our helpe is in the name of the Lord who hath made heaven & earth. The Almighty be w<sup>th</sup> you.

Your worships in all humble obseruance

JOHN TOMBES.

Frō Worcester, August 5, 1642.

I am told that Mr Brabazon & Mr Conongsby were together late on Saturday night precedent to this disturbance. And that on the Lordes day in the afternoone a papist going through Ludlow reported there that the preacher at Lemster was carried away to the Assizes for not reading the Kings answer to the Parliament. By w<sup>ch</sup> may be gathered how thinges are plotted.

[Addressed]

To the right worshipfull & worthy Sr Robert Harley knight of the Bath at his lodging in Channel Rowe in Westminster these present.

[Matthew Clarke was only at the beginning of his troubles. He was driven from his living at Ludlow, and therefore the Lords and Commons stationed him, on 17 March, 1642/3, at St. Leonard's, Shoreditch, whence they sequestered John Squire. On 15 March, 1644/5 the Lords ordered him to Westwinch restory, in Norfolk, and here he was among congenial neighbours. When, therefore, peace was restored, the country was mapped out for presbyteries, and the details for Salop were published on 29 April, 1647, and Ludlow was chosen as the centre for the fifth classis, it is significant and exceptional that there was no minister there: Clarke had not chosen to return to his own living. This is the more to his credit as the stipend was presently augmented by £30 a year. The vacancy was filled by a returned emigrant, Richard Sadler; he, however, found the feeling of the country against him, and was summarily ejected in 1660. Tombes was quite right in seeing the probability of his own expulsion. Calamy indeed blunders in date, saying that he was driven out in 1641, which is clearly disproved by these two letters. But in the latter half of 1642 he did find his position untenable, and on 4 January, 1642/3 the Commons appointed him Lecturer at All Saints, Bristol. Only in 1653 did he resume residence at Leominster.—Editor.]