

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

If he does this in all its breadth and fullness, he will find that questions such as those about J and E and D and P in the Pentateuch, about pre-exilic and post-exilic Psalms, about one Isaiah or thirty Isaiahs, about the date of the Book of Daniel, will then take a far less prominent position than they do now. He will trouble himself less about them ; they will be seen in their due proportion. The main backbone of his teaching and preaching will be that it was God the Holy Ghost who spoke by the prophets, though the individual character of the writer is still to be seen in his writings, and that "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for instruction which is in righteousness : that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. iii. 16).



Parish Life in Medieval England.

By G. G. COULTON, M.A.

ABBOT GASQUET'S recent book on this subject is assured of a wide circulation by the general excellence of the series in which it appears, the author's own reputation as an apologist of the Middle Ages, and the indiscriminate praise lavished on it, even by such journals as the *Guardian* and the *Athenæum*. The *Church Times* alone, as far as I know, has seen through its weakness, even on points of mere antiquarian detail ; but nobody as yet has taken the course—always far the most instructive in Abbot Gasquet's case—of verifying his references. Critics might, indeed, plead the difficulty of the task, since there is only one unhappy footnote in all the 273 8vo. pages, while chapter and verse references are frequently denied, even where the reader needs them most and they would have given no extra trouble to the printer ; indeed, I have counted fifteen cases in which the Abbot withholds the very title of the book from which he is professedly quoting ! The

list of misstatements and misquotations on vital points which I am here about to give is therefore necessarily incomplete: it represents only the main cases in which my previous knowledge of the documents has enabled me to run him to earth without too great waste of time. Space forbids my referring to many others less important; and even these I am obliged to treat as briefly as possible, though I hope to add fuller quotations in reprinting this article, with two others on Medieval Parish Life, in about six months' time.¹

One of the chief sources of Church revenue before the Reformation was the Church Ale—a convivial meal held either in the church-house or in the sacred building itself, and therefore obnoxious to the Reformers. Abbot Gasquet, of course, sets himself to whitewash this institution. He quotes all that is pleasant and picturesque from Peacock's paper in vol. xl. of the *Archæological Journal*, which he further cites as his authority for the statement that "the drink itself was apparently a sweet beverage made with hops or bitter herbs. It was not the same as the more modern beer, but *was less heavy, and hardly an intoxicant.*" It will surprise only those who have not been in the habit of verifying the author's references to learn that the crucial statement which I have here italicized is not only not to be found in Peacock, but is definitely and repeatedly contradicted by him. Church Ales (says Peacock) were "the direct descendants of those drinking-bouts of our unchristened Saxon and Scandinavian ancestors," who loved "something strong, heady, and heart-inspiring" at their feasts (p. 3). "They were originally solemn rites in honour of the gods or of dead ancestors; and so, when these feastings became Christianized, the objects of Christian worship—the Holy Trinity and the saints—were in like manner pledged" (p. 5). "We must not be too severe on our forefathers because they enjoyed coarse revelry and what we might perhaps think low society" (p. 10). Quoting the Puritan Stubbes's description of the participants in these Church Ales as "swillying and gullying, night and daie,

¹ "Medieval Studies," No. 8. Simpkin Marshall and Co. 1s.

till they be as dronke as rattes and as blockish as beastes," he adds: "There is no reason for regarding it as very much overdrawn" (pp. 11, 12). Lastly, he thinks he may safely identify a certain fragment of stained glass and a certain piece of sculpture as representations of Church Ales, because the figures therein are "in various stages of intoxication," and "hopelessly drunk" (pp. 14, 15). Moreover, Peacock remarks: "What will seem to not a few of us one of the most strange things connected with these festivals is the fact that, evil as their influence must have been, they seem to have drawn forth hardly any remonstrance until the rise of Puritanism." Of all this, which forms the very pith and essence of Peacock's article, nobody would conceive the least suspicion from Abbot Gasquet's professed summary of it. Out of the strong, under his deft touch, comes forth sweetness; and this reckless misuse of authorities runs through his whole book from beginning to end. There are, perhaps, no contrasts quite so startling as this just quoted—indeed, there scarcely could be. But of all his historically important statements—of all that profess to describe the real inner life of the parishioners, and not merely the outward pomp and bumbledom of the parish—there is scarcely one which is not contradicted by irreproachable medieval authorities, and frequently by the very documents which he parades in favour of his assertions, however loosely he may omit to lay them upon the table before our eyes.

He deals, for instance, with the custom of the Boy Bishop just as he deals with the Church Ales. An institution which, however it might be tolerated here and there even by great Churchmen, scandalized a man so little scandalizable as the good friar Salimbene, and was actually suppressed for its indecorum by the Council of Bâle, wears an actual halo of sanctity in these pages (p. 165 *et seq.*). The Sarum statutes are cited, but their complaint of the " manifold disorders " and the " grievous damage to the Church " is suppressed; nor is there a word of the close connection with that Feast of Fools which Grosseteste and Gerson branded as " blasphemous " and " devilish," or with those wild dances and

profane songs in sacred places which good prelates strove so vainly to suppress, especially in nuns' convents.

Again, in his attempt to minimize the irreverent treatment of medieval churchyards, Abbot Gasquet speaks of the customs as only "growing" in the latter part of the fourteenth century, and as first mentioned in a Constitution of 1367 (p. 159). This statement would, of course, fit in admirably with his contention that all went pretty well in the Roman communion until the great pestilence of 1349, which for a while disorganized society altogether; and that the Church is therefore rather to be pitied than blamed for the undeniable abuses of the later Middle Ages. But, unfortunately, the alleged fact is in direct contradiction with the documents on which it professes to be based—the Constitutions of different Bishops from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Archbishop Thoresby's Constitution of 1367 against holding markets on Sundays in churchyards *or in churches* (the italics mark another of his suppressions), is, in fact, not the first (as the Abbot asserts), but nearly the last of its kind. Between 1229 and 1367 there are eleven such episcopal injunctions recorded; while from that date to 1539—*i.e.*, to the Reformation—there seems to be only one. Bishop after Bishop thundered in vain against those who "turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves"; and if such anathemas grow rarer in the century before the Reformation, it is probably only because a large number of prelates were then non-resident, and the bonds of discipline were notoriously relaxed.

Let me trace yet a third of Abbot Gasquet's most important contentions through the justificatory documents which he himself offers. "It is very generally stated," he writes (p. 15), "that [the impropriation of parochial tithes to monasteries, etc.] was one of the great abuses of the medieval Church redressed at the Reformation"; and he proceeds to combat this idea. Such impropriations were never made, he says, but "upon condition that the vicar should receive amply sufficient for his support and for the purpose of his parochial work." This statement, I may remark in passing, is flatly contradicted

by a former argument of his own, at a time when the exigencies of his thesis required that he should exaggerate rather than minimize the poverty of the medieval clergy;¹ but I am rather concerned here to point out how little it accords with the evidence of a more trustworthy witness. The Oxford Chancellor, Gascoigne, writing in 1450, finds no words too strong to condemn what he calls the "robbery" of parish endowments by the monks under this title of impropriations. "The cure of souls," he says, "is ruined in England nowadays by the appropriation of churches"; and again, "The appropriation of parish revenues brings about the eternal damnation of many and even countless souls" (pp. 3, 106; *cf.* 195, and *passim*). Moreover, the whole University of Oxford had already made an equally strong complaint in their prayer for reform addressed to Henry V. in 1414. Cathedrals and monasteries (the University asserted) swallowed up many parishes, "whence arises grievous desolation of the parishioners, the hospitable entertainment of the poor is withdrawn, and (what is worse still), the cure of souls is neglected" (Wilkins, iii. 363). It is strange to pass on from these words to Abbot Gasquet's bland assurance: "The grievance of which so much has been made is an academic rather than a real one, and one of modern invention rather than one existing in the Middle Ages" (p. 17).

Again, he makes an equally false use of the evidence as to the hospitality exercised by incumbents. To begin with, he offers practically no evidence beyond the mere *theory* of Canon Law, which is just as legitimate as it would be to quote the rubrics of the Prayer-Book in proof that all Anglican clergymen read the service publicly twice a day, and adhere to a fairly uniform and moderate ceremonial in church. Secondly, he cannot even thus make out his case without thrice misquoting the great Canonist Lyndwood almost as grossly as he misquotes Peacock (pp. 8, 84, 85; Lyndwood, ed. Oxon, pp. 132-134). Moreover, even if Lyndwood's theory were in fact what the Abbot states it to be, yet we have the most definite evidence

¹ "Great Pestilence," p. 206, note.

that it was constantly neglected in practice. For if Abbot Gasquet had been incautious enough to quote the *ipsissima verba* of the Constitutions on which Lyndwood comments, he would at once have cut the ground from under his own feet. After all the emphasis with which Archbishop Stephen Langton had decreed in 1222, and Archbishop Peckham in 1279, that the poor parishioners should not be defrauded of their share of the tithes, it was still necessary for Archbishop Stratford to repeat their decrees even more emphatically in 1342. In spite (he complains) of theories to the contrary, "yet monks and nuns of our province, procuring appropriations of churches, strive so greedily to apply to their own uses the fruits, revenues, and profits of the same, that . . . they neglect to exercise any works of charity whatsoever among the parishioners. Wherefore, by this their exceeding avarice, they not only provoke to indevotion those (parishioners) who owe them tithes and ecclesiastical dues, but also teach them sometimes to become perverse trespassers on, and consumers of, the said tithes, and abominable disturbers of the peace, to the grievous peril of both monks' and parishioners' souls, and to the scandal of very many" (Wilkins, ii. 697). Moreover, the Abbot writes equally patent falsehoods about the cheerfulness with which tithes were generally paid, and the popularity of the parish clergy—falsehoods which can be exposed from the very synodical decrees which he is constantly citing in his own favour! (pp. 14, 20). We have it on the authority not only of the Bull *Clericis Laicos*, which Abbot Gasquet must surely have read, but also of many Church synods, that the laity were constantly at feud with the clergy. Again, probably the most frequent complaint of all, in Church councils and synods, is that of trespasses committed by the laity on Church privileges or incomes. Next to that, as I reckon roughly, come complaints of tithe quarrels: there are thirty-seven of these latter in the councils quoted by Wilkins between 1195 and 1540.

I can only deal in the most summary fashion with two other cases out of many in which the Abbot's contentions would be

wrecked by the production in full of his own chosen authorities. His tenth chapter ("The Parish Pulpit") is in the main a *réchauffé* of Abbot Gasquet's own "Catholic Truth Society" pamphlet, and is written exactly on the lines thus indicated. While expressly recognizing the extreme controversial importance of the subject, he again deals with it mainly on the absurd assumption that medieval theories were always realized in fact, and studiously ignores the contrary assertions even of such well-known writers as Chancellor Gascoigne and Dean Colet.¹ Moreover, even his own evidence is shamelessly garbled before he produces it to the public. He himself, in another place, where the exigencies of his thesis required the argument, pleads that the practical futility of any particular legislation is always sufficiently proved by the two facts of (*a*) its frequent re-enactment, and (*b*) complaints of non-compliance.² Now, this double damnatory evidence is exactly supplied, in the case of medieval religious education, by Abbot Gasquet's own chosen witnesses, the Church synods! He therefore (1) disguises the fact of their frequent re-enactment (except once on p. 215, in a sentence so misleading as exactly to reverse the significance of the fact), and (2) altogether suppresses from his quotations and allusions the fact that the eighteen re-enactments during the period he chooses were accompanied in *eleven* cases with complaints of non-compliance!³ Convocation declared in 1413, for instance, that England was like a blighted tree for lack of the sap of wholesome doctrine; and the protest of the University of Oxford in 1414 complains of clerical unworthiness and incapacity with an emphasis which Wycliffe himself scarcely surpassed.

If, in this generation of easy publicity, such manipulation of evidence seems scarcely possible on the part of any man with

¹ I have already exposed this part of his argument in my "Medieval Studies," No. 7. Simpkin Marshall. 6d.

² "Great Pestilence," p. 197.

³ The synods to which these refer may be found in Wilkins, ii. 52, 54, 143, 176, 300, 416; iii. 10, 59, 314, 315, 352, 361, 599, 620, 662, 712, 718, 829, 843, 844.

a reputation to lose, let doubting students read carefully through the whole of Bishop Quivil's Constitutions (the historical value of which the Abbot expressly acknowledges, and from which he quotes fifteen times in his own favour), and then compare them with the extracts given in this book. I can here only briefly summarize the passages which, if he had honestly acknowledged them, would have destroyed his painfully woven apologetic cobwebs. In one of his direct quotations he omits, without the least warning sign, a complaint of the "grave scandal in the churches and frequent hindrances to Divine service" generated by the scrambling of parishioners for seats during Mass. Three of his other citations, without equally dishonest omissions from the text, blink no less awkward facts in their immediate context—viz., (1) the "unhonest games . . . stage plays and buffooneries [in churchyards], whereby the honour of the churches is defiled"; (2) the practice of paying private fines out of Church moneys; and (3) the gross superstitions which, in Exeter as in other dioceses, caused ignorant parishioners to "abhor" the Sacrament of extreme unction (pp. 66, 197, 201). On p. 207 he mistranslates the Constitution about marriage to an extent which not only shows startling ignorance of a very elementary principle of medieval Canon Law, but also obliterates the fact that no medieval Englishman—indeed, no English boy or girl—needed to drive to Gretna Green, since they might at any time, and in any place, bind themselves by a clandestine but perfectly valid marriage without help of priest or Church. Beyond these grave misrepresentations, where the very facts lay under his eyes, he omits all mention of the following other matters dealt with by the Constitutions: (1) The desecration of churches by farmers who, indignant at the manner in which the clergy tried to enforce the tithes of milk, would come and pour it out on the floor before the altar "as an insult to God and to His Church"; (2) the evidences of clerical ignorance and incapacity; (3) the increase of crime; (4) the clergy who frustrated the archidiaconal visitations by carrying furniture furtively from church to church; (5) the quarrels

between clergy and people about the offerings; (6) the prevalence of clerical concubinage and consequent embezzlement of Church property; (7) the clergy who haunted nuns' convents "without honest and legitimate cause"; (8) the cleric who, wishing to shirk daily service, suborns his clerk to deceive the parishioners with a lying, "You're come too late to-day; the parson has just gone away"; (9) the layfolk who brought their dogs into church, or "made a tumult" during service; (10) the "damnable presumption" of the sompnours; (11) the confusions introduced into the Mass by the monks' habits of supplying appropriated churches with incorrect or worn-out books, in which the parson cannot find his place, and "the laity, at the sight of his ignorance, however innocent, begin to mock at him as a fool"; (12) the growing unpopularity of the parish clergy; (13) the difficulty of controlling pardoners with their fictitious indulgences and immoral lives; (14) the danger of venerating false relics; (15) the law that (in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred) the layman must make his will by word of mouth to a clergyman on his death-bed; and (16) the death-dues which the Church claimed out of his estate.

The foregoing heavy list is, as I have said above, far from specifying all the points on which he leaves his readers under very mistaken ideas of the actual evidence. I may add, in conclusion, that even on the purely antiquarian side the book is very far from accurate. A poem is attributed to the author of "Piers Plowman" which all students of English literature for the last fifty years have known to be spurious; and, indeed, this quotation with its context is one of the passages (pp. 73, 76) which the writer has conveyed without acknowledgment from Cutts, whose book—though decidedly superior on the whole to that under review—is not even mentioned in the long list of authorities. Another quotation from "Piers Plowman" is so inaccurate as to make nonsense (p. 184). There is a bad blunder in the quotation from "Sir Gawayne" (p. 146), and even the Latin is far from blameless. But these are small matters in comparison with the systematic misstatements by

which he attempts to belittle our own "sordid age" (as he has called it) in comparison with the Middle Ages. This book will be read by hundreds of Church-folk who are laudably anxious to know something of our own past, but who would have no chance of checking the author's statements, even if he himself had supplied proper references. It is therefore important to enter a prompt *caveat* against his implications on all points of conflict between medieval and modern ideals.



Notes on Hebrew Religion.—II.

By HAROLD M. WIENER, M.A., LL.B.

A LARGE portion of Mr. Addis's book really depends on the views he holds on "shrines." It happens, however, that he has stated these more clearly in a recent article than in his "Hebrew Religion," and it is therefore advisable to refute much of what he has written in a discussion of a passage of that article. It will be necessary to consider once more some of the matters treated in an article on the "Jewish Attitude towards the Higher Criticism" that appeared in the *CHURCHMAN* for December, 1905. No answer has been put forward to that article, in spite of the clear challenge it contained. On the other hand, further reflection has enabled me to strengthen some of my positions very materially, and to go some way further towards reconstructing the historical background of the laws.

The Book of the Covenant sanctions altars at various places: "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto Me . . . in every place where I record My name I will come unto thee and bless thee." Deuteronomy admits that there has been inevitable, and therefore excusable laxity in the past; but when once the LORD has chosen a place from all the tribes (*i.e.*, Solomon's Temple), sacrifice is to be offered there and only there. The Priestly Code assumes that sacrifices can be offered only at the central shrine, but supposes that this rule prevailed from the beginning. The patriarchs had offered no sacrifice—nor could they, since as yet the Tabernacle with its altar was not