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Thomas Ken.

1637–1710.

THE period in which Thomas Ken lived is one of the most troubled in English history, and even an elementary study of it familiarizes us with the sad careers of our rulers, with the overthrow and restoration of the monarchy, and then again with the second revolution, and the flight of our last Stuart King. But amid the troubles of the age there stood out, in happy contrast, a remarkable number of influential clergy, and of excellent laymen and laywomen, whose energies, intensified by the trials and afflictions of the Church, bore a noble witness to the power of religion and the claims of holy living.

Among these, none deserves our reverence more than Thomas Ken. He was born at Berkhampstead in 1637, and the year which brought this holy and peace-loving spirit into the world was marked by two occurrences that were ominous of evil to come. These were Laud's attempt to force a Liturgy upon the Scotch Presbyterians, and Charles I.'s unfortunate imposition of the tax of ship-money.

Ken's father was a London Attorney of Furnival's Inn, and is supposed to have been connected with the Kens of Kenn Court in Somersetshire. His mother was a daughter of a poet of the Elizabethan period, named Ion Chalkhill. She died when he was four years old, and at the age of fourteen he lost his father also. He was piously cared for by a half-sister many years older than himself, and some years after she married the devout and cultured Izaac Walton. It was to her influence, and to that of her husband, that young Ken owed the early training in piety from which he never afterwards fell away. Walton and his wife would wish to give the boy the best education of the day. In 1651, he had the advantage of becoming a scholar of the great foundation which more than two hundred years before had been established by William of Wykeham at Winchester. In its stately buildings and its complete collegiate arrangements it far outshone the boys' schools that had long been adjuncts to monasteries;

and, no less than in the monastic schools, the object of all the arrangements had been to cultivate piety first and learning afterwards. To a boy already devout, the *genius loci* must have been indeed congenial. We must, however, bear in mind that, Oliver Cromwell being in power, the school had been placed under the Puritan régime. Ken must have sorely missed the Church prayers in which he had been trained; and yet it must be admitted that Puritan divines, with all their defects, were in real earnest about religion, and that, with whatever change of outward form, the spirit of piety would still be cherished in the school. There is, indeed, reason to believe that a choral service of praise was maintained in the Chapel even by the Puritans. Doubtless the experiences of his boyhood were borne in mind when, many years afterwards, he wrote his helpful manual of prayer for the scholars of Winchester. But we cannot linger over the devout boyhood, which sowed the seeds of that subsequent fruit, and must pass from it with the assurance that among all the worthies of the great school of Wykeham, none deserve to be had in more reverence than Thomas Ken. His name, afterwards to be inscribed for ever in the annals of the Church of England, is to be found deeply cut, according to the fashion of schoolboys, on the south-east corner of the cloister of the school.

The thoughtful Wykeham had provided that when the children of his school grew towards manhood they should be saved from any rough transitions in their education, and so they passed on to the noble college of St. Mary Winton at Oxford, which, after the lapse of more than five hundred years, we still call New.[1] There, too, the heavy hand of Cromwell's visitors had been felt. The members of Wykeham's society in Oxford were all pledged by oath not to submit to any alien jurisdiction. To their honour be it said, fifty-four fellows and eight chaplains and almost every college servant resigned rather than be false to the protecting oath. New College became a prominent abode of Puritanism. But some relaxation of oppression appears to have prevailed in the University about the time when Ken entered it, in 1657. Under the Vice-Chancellorship of Owen, the Independent, who had been Cromwell's

[1] Date 1386.

chaplain and became Dean of Christ Church, it became permissible to hold Church of England services in a neighbouring house, and these were attended by about three hundred members of the University.

Cromwell died while Ken was completing his Oxford course, and soon afterwards the latter appears to have been ordained on his fellowship. In 1663 he was appointed Vicar of Little Easton, in Essex, where he became the spiritual guide of an excellent Churchwoman, Lady Maynard. This admirable woman was one of the ladies who, in the responsibilities of a high position, and amid the temptations of the dissolute Court of Charles II., maintained, by the grace of God, a devoted piety and a consistent Churchmanship. One of the most remarkable features of this evil time, when the reaction from an overstrict and sometimes hypocritical Puritanism had given the reign to indulgence, is to be found in the number of excellent women, of high intelligence and thoughtful Churchmanship, who shone like lights in the world. We find a most interesting notice of them in Overton's " Life in the English Church," an account which no student of the period should omit to read. Among these saintly women was Lady Maynard. While fulfilling all the duties of her station, she was the friend of the poor and needy, and for her own children her greatest desire was for their piety, rather than for their earthly distinction. She was very regular at the daily prayers and the frequent Communions, and while reverenced by all around her, she was ever humble and lowly in her estimate of herself. When she died at an early age, Ken, at the request of Lord Maynard, preached her funeral sermon, which still exists, and in one of his poems the ideal of what a woman should be in high station is doubtless drawn from his remembrance of her. These verses are quoted in the second volume of Dean Plumptre's " Ken," pp. 254–255.

" No vain expense she on herself bestowed;
A spirit frugal and yet generous showed.
Her usual dress was comely, never gay,
No new vain fashion could her judgment sway.
Early she rose; her dressing was in haste,
Would at her Toylet but few minutes waste.

" God was her constant Sovereign, dearest Care;
Her Closet fumed with Incense of her Prayer,
Three times a day she would for prayer retire,
Daily frequented twice the public choir.
Her Library was with her Bible filled
And with good books which Piety instilled.

" And (*or read* " She ") oft spent, piously, diverting hours,
As Jesus midst the Lillies, midst her flowers;
The fasts and feasts of Holy Church she kept,
And oft in secret for the Kingdom wept;
She each Lord's Day on the immortal Bread
With sacred hunger at the Altar fed;
She lived God's constant Lover, hating ill,
Conform both to His Image and His Will."

To return to Ken himself. We do not know why he retired from Little Easton, but it is evident that Winchester still exerted over him the spell which the associations of boyhood had laid on him. Whatever living he is promoted to, we constantly find him resigning, and returning to labour instead, without any pay, in a poor and neglected parish called St. John in the Soke at Winchester. Here he was chaplain to the earnest and distinguished Bishop Morley.

In 1666 he was made Fellow of Winchester, and held for a short time the Rectory of Brighstone in the Isle of Wight. In the garden of that parsonage a walk is shown where Ken carried on his pious meditations, and which was in consequence endeared to more recent occupants of the living, the brilliant Samuel Wilberforce and the saintly Heygate.

His life was one of the most rigorous temperance, and for him the Church's fast-days were very serious realities. He had trained himself, following the example of Bishop Morley, to take but one meal a day; and made it a rule to rise in the morning whenever he first awoke. It is said that he did not take any life vow against being married, but that every day he made a vow that he would not be married that day. It may be doubted whether this was necessary, for would any lady have married him at such short notice?

In 1675 Ken went abroad, and travelled for several years. At Rome, like many other Northern visitors, he was terribly shocked

at the venality and mammon-worship prevailing in the centre of Western Christendom, and spoke of these evils in severe terms. He came back more fully convinced than ever that the Church of England was right in being Protestant as regards Rome, and that she was a true branch of the Catholic Church, notwithstanding her opposition to the Papacy.

In 1679 Ken was offered the post of chaplain to the Princess Mary at The Hague. There he was first brought into contact with William of Orange, whose reign in England was so much to affect his future. I pass over his subsequent chaplaincy at Tangier, and hasten to the point when he was raised to the episcopate by Charles II.

With a boldness worthy of St. John the Baptist, Ken had rebuked the vices of Charles II., and the courtiers thought that his chances of promotion were irretrievably ruined. But Charles, though a bad man himself, had the merit of being able to respect a good man when he found one. Ken had, on the occasion of a royal visit, refused to lend his house to the King's mistress, Nell Gwyn, but Charles respected him all the more for this. He said, "Who shall have Bath and Wells but the little black fellow who would not give poor Nelly a lodging?" And he not only made a Bishop of Ken, but insisted that his appointment to the See of Bath and Wells should be his own distinct appointment, without any intervening influence. Ken was consecrated in Lambeth Chapel on the 25th of January, 1685, and peacefully entered on an episcopate which was afterwards to prove so stormy. Wells was an ideal home for such a man as Ken. To one so peaceful and heavenly-minded the beauty of its situation and its fresh streams, the images of the grace of God, would make a delightful appeal. The little city, nestling near beautiful hills, presents a perfect type of the cathedral precincts of the Middle Ages. The close is still shut in by its ancient gates; the Bishop's castle has still its moat and drawbridge; and the Deanery and all other usual surroundings of a centre of Church life gather round the expanse of green from which rise the stately towers of the Cathedral. What an image was there of the restful activity that holy work can bring to the soul! But all this was to be invaded by the storms of political change, and even the Cathedral itself was to be

desecrated by rebellion, and the rural scenes of the fair county of Somerset were to be tinged with the blood of the victims.

After a couple of dissolute Sunday evenings, which almost rivalled the orgies of Belshazzar, the handwriting on the wall, though unseen, went forth against Charles. On the 2nd of February the King was seized with fatal illness. Ken remained with him three nights and days, and Burnet, who was by no means favourable to Ken, tells us that he spoke "like one inspired." But Charles was, if anything, a Roman Catholic at heart, and so he was carried off at last by Huddleston the Jesuit. Was Charles really penitent? God only knows, and if he was, it mattered not whether he died Anglican or Roman.

James II. succeeded, and it soon became evident that he was going to force Romanism on the country. This afforded a pretext for Monmouth's rebellion, noticeable as regards Ken's diocese. Two circumstances connected with the defeat of Monmouth offer a singular contrast to each other. On the one hand, Peter, Bishop of Winchester, who had been a chaplain in the army of Charles I. and afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells, scented the battle from afar, and hastening to the scene of action, he undertook the direction of the artillery, and made excellent practice against the members of his former flock. Ken, on the other hand, when the rebels had fallen into the hands of the Government, did all he could to save them from the terrible severity with which they were treated. After in vain remonstrating, Ken gave himself up to ministering to the prisoners at Wells, Taunton, and Bridgwater, "relieving their bodily wants with food and clothing, and giving them, as far as opportunities allowed, such spiritual counsel and comfort as they would receive." For these good purposes he visited them day and night. It was not long after this practical acquaintance with some of the peasantry of his diocese, and his consequent perception of the need of teaching that existed, that he addressed to all classes of his people an exhortation as to Christian duty, in the shape of a manual of devotion on the Catechism. I quote a passage from the Introduction:

"To the inhabitants within the Diocese of Bath and Wells, Thomas, their unworthy Bishop, wisheth the Knowledge of the Love of God. Since the providence of God, Who is wont to glorify His strength in the weakness of the

instruments He uses, has caught me up from among the meanest herdmen into the pastoral throne, and has been pleased to commit you to my care; the love I ought to pay to the chief Shepherd obliges me to feed all His lambs, and His sheep, that belong to my flock; and according to my poor abilities to teach them the knowledge and the love of God, and how they may make them both their daily study and practice. One thing I most heartily beg of you all, that ye would help me to save your own souls . . . and as for you who have families, I beseech you to instil in to your children and servants their duty, both by your teaching and your example. In good earnest, it is less cruel and unnatural to deny them bread for their mortal bodies than saving knowledge for their immortal souls."

In the year 1685 an event occurred which had far-reaching consequences, felt even to this day. Louis XIV. perfidiously revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had given toleration to the Huguenots of France. Numbers of them came over to England and Ireland, and subscriptions were started for the refugees, who had sacrificed everything for conscience, and were very destitute. Ken had just received a fine on the renewal of a lease of £4,000, and though his see was a poor one, he gave up nearly the whole of this for the Protestant sufferers.

We must now hasten on to that event which proved to be the great central crisis in the life both of James II. and of Bishop Ken. We know that the King desired as far as he possibly could to bring back Roman Catholicism. He was therefore willing to extend a wide toleration to dissenters, so that under cover of that Romanists might be favoured. For this purpose he prepared a "Declaration of Indulgence." This was published in the *London Gazette*, and had he gone no further the Bishops of the Church of England would not have been involved. But shortly after he set forth a second declaration to the same effect, and by an Order in Council he called upon the Bishops to cause it to be read in the churches of their dioceses during the time of Divine Service. It was not illegal in itself that a royal declaration should be read in church; but the point to be noticed in this instance was not the declaration in itself, but what it contained. It was observed by the Bishops that the wording of this particular declaration infringed the rights and decisions of Parliament; it abolished restrictions which Parliament had made, and had a right to make, and abolished them by the sole authority of the King.

To consent to the clergy being obliged to read this in church would have been to sanction an illegal action. Archbishop Sancroft, though old and infirm, rose to the occasion, asserting that the "Declaration being founded on such a Dispensing power as may at pleasure set aside all laws Ecclesiastical and Civil, appeared to him illegal."

Conferences of some of the Bishops and clergy were now held, the result being the petition of the well-known seven Bishops to the King. Ken was one of these. They respectfully declared that they could not see their way to the publication of the declaration in the House of God, and in the time of Divine Service. The result is familiar to the readers of history: how the Bishops were eventually carried to the Tower amid the prayers and blessings of the people; how they were tried and acquitted, the shouts of joy resounding through and beyond London; how all classes of the nation hailed the seven Bishops as the deliverers of their country, and they became for a moment the idols of the populace. Not for the first time in English history the Church had saved the State.[1]

Both Archbishop Sancroft and Bishop Ken had felt that the coming of William was a necessity. James, to whom they owed allegiance, had proved himself to be an impossible ruler. What was to be done? Sancroft joined in an appeal to William; Ken saw that he was the only available deliverer. But they hoped he would be satisfied to be only Regent of the kingdom. William seemed to have no wish beyond being helpful, anxious only to be of use to England and the Protestant cause. But when once established in England, he sent to Holland for his wife, herself a daughter of James II., and soon found his opportunity of insisting on the royal dignity. It would, indeed, have been hardly possible to maintain his ground without doing so. Without the authority of kingship, how could he have curbed the political factions that raged around him, or have offered an effectual resistance to plots for bringing back James? To a practical statesman it would be obvious that this would be the only course. But, in consequence,

[1] The seven Bishops who came to the front against James II. (though others would have joined if they could have arrived in time) were Sancroft of Canterbury, Ken of Bath and Wells, Turner of Ely, Lloyd of St. Asaph, White of Peterborough, Lake of Chichester, and Trelawney of Bristol. Of these seven, Trelawney and Lloyd afterwards took the oath to William.

the Bishops and clergy were placed in a difficulty which would not have occurred had William been merely Regent. They had sworn allegiance to James, his heirs and successors, with the usual binding formula, "So help me God." Could they now transfer their allegiance to another King? This question was met with opposite answers. Some of the Bishops, and a large number of clergy, including some of the best men, were of opinion that they might. Had not James forfeited all claim to reigning by his misgovernment and tyranny? Had he not himself vacated the throne by flying from the country to France? He had gone, and had left the country without a Government. Could there, then, be any sin in accepting another King? So many of the clergy agreed to the demands of the revolution, and gave their allegiance to the new King and Queen. The oath was made as mild as possible. It did not even assert any right to the throne. It simply ran, "I, *A. B.*, do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to their Majesties King William and Queen Mary." Ken himself was prepared to pay obedience to a King *de facto*. He doubted for a long time whether he should take the oath to William or not. We learn from Anderdon that *the King desired to excuse the Bishops from the oath altogether*, and this would have solved the difficulty. It might safely have been done, for any man who was prepared to plot for the return of James would certainly not have been conscientious enough to be restrained by an oath. The oath was burdensome, not to the unscrupulous, but to men of the highest principles. William was sagacious enough to see this. But the factions in Parliament made it impossible for him to give effect to his wish. Ken took time to think the question over, and at one moment was very near taking the oath, and he never subsequently condemned those who had done so. But his tender conscientiousness led him at last to decide against it, afraid lest any personal interest should weigh with him. It was, spiritually, more right, he decided, to take the losing side, and so he gave James the benefit of the doubt and declined the oath to William.[1]

[1] The Nonjuring Bishops elected were six. There had been, however, nine Bishops who refused the oath, but three of these, Thomas of Worcester,

It was a great sacrifice to make. So unworldly a spirit as that of Ken would not regret the loss of the dignity or of the emoluments of a bishopric; but he had enjoyed a wide sphere of usefulness for the souls of others, and all this was to be given up. As a preacher at Court, whom people crowded to hear, he had been wont to speak home truths to great personages without fear or favour, and he had encouraged good men in high places by awakening a response in their hearts. From these influential duties he had turned to the humblest persons in his diocese, endeavouring to promote godly teaching and living among them; he had established elementary schools for the children of the poor; he had sent forth addresses to help all classes of his people on their heavenward way; and now he was to give all this up, and he, so capable of wide usefulness, was to retire into an obscure privacy, to minister only among a few personal friends.

Plenty of time was allowed to the deprived Bishops by the Government. When the limit of allowance fixed by the Act of Parliament came, Ken was suspended, but six months' grace was allowed him before his sentence passed into deprivation. Even after this six months' grace, Government waited a year before the see was given to a successor.

The See of Bath and Wells was offered to Beveridge, one of the most spiritual clergymen of the time. He had seen his way to taking the oath, but in other respects was in sympathy with Ken in all Church affairs. By the advice of Sancroft, Beveridge declined. The see was then offered to Kidder, Rector of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, an able man and a good preacher, and he took it, but afterwards regretted that he had accepted. It is not easy to judge of his merits or demerits, and we are not called upon to pronounce an opinion.[2] By his acceptance, Kidder had placed himself in

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Lake of Chichester, and Cartwright of Chester, died before the time of deprivation came. The six ejected were, Sancroft of Canterbury, Ken of Bath and Wells, Frampton of Gloucester, Turner of Ely, Lloyd of Norwich, White of Peterborough.

[2] It is to be remembered that he wrote a memoir of the Rev. Antony Horneck, one of the best clergy of the day, and at one time Rector of All Saints, Oxford.

an invidious position, and was likely to be found great fault with; but someone had to be Bishop, and we can scarcely blame him for taking a position which Ken declined to retain. Ken speaks of him as latitudinarian, and thought that he ordained dissenting ministers to the Church without adequate inquiry. Kidder's end was tragic, for, in the great storm of November 26, 1703, a stack of chimneys fell through the roof, and killed Kidder and his wife in the night. Of course there were many who looked upon this terrible occurrence as a judgment for taking Ken's see. It certainly appeared like it; but we must rather be guided by our Lord's words about the tower of Siloam, and remember that, " except we repent, we shall all likewise perish."

But to return to Ken. Macaulay, quoted by Plumptre, V., 2, p. 277, remarks as follows on Ken's retirement:

" Ken quietly retired from the venerable palace of Wells. He had done, he said, with strife, and should henceforth vent his feelings, not in disputes, but in hymns. His charities to the unhappy of all persuasions, especially the followers of Monmouth and the persecuted Huguenots, had been so large that his whole private fortune consisted of 700 pounds, and of a library which he could not persuade himself to sell. But Thomas Thynne, Viscount Weymouth, though not a Non-juror, did himself honour by offering to the most virtuous of the Non-jurors a tranquil and dignified retirement in the princely mansion of Longleat. There Ken passed a happy and honoured old age, during which he never regretted the sacrifice he had made to what he thought his duty, and yet constantly became more and more indulgent to those whose views of duty differed from his."

Ken, whose heart was wounded within him, could not refuse the solace of such a refuge. Lord Weymouth gave him £80 a year for his £700, and for twenty years he experienced his friend's untiring kindness. Of him Ken remarks:

" The good lord does really conduct his life by the divine maxims, recorded by St. Paul, and he is truly rich in good works, and indeed so are his near relatives."

Longleat House, says Anderdon, deserving rather the name of a palace, rises amid natural slopes and hills, crowned with woods; the ornamental gardens, enriched with plants brought from many climes, are arranged in antique fashion. Endless walks and rides are cut through the woods; they offer at each turn some bower

of solitude or some opening of the landscape. These "shades benign," as Ken calls them, might well give him rest; they abound in every requisite for the peaceful abode of a retired Christian. There, too, he might indulge his "great relish for Divine Poesy," and we know that he wrote there, as a relief to sorrow and illness, many poetical compositions, which were published after his death and dedicated to Lord Weymouth. Ken had not sold his books; and under every aspect of his fortunes they proved companionable friends. The room he used at Longleat is at the top of the house, remote from the noise and bustle of the hospitable hall, and is an apartment of ample dimensions, still occupied by many of his books. Others he left by his will to the library of the Abbey Church at Bath and to the Cathedral Library at Wells.

In his retirement at Longleat, Ken found much consolation in his books. May we not learn a lesson from him? A love of study, unhappily not hitherto common, seems to be in some degree extending. Among English people in general, the love of learning has not been so usual as it might be. We are not naturally an intellectual, or even a studious nation. But we are improving a little. If any of us, while still young, will take the trouble to cultivate a taste for study, they will find, in later life, a constantly increasing pleasure in devoting their leisure moments to reading. The fields of knowledge will open out more and more before them, as parts of an ever new world of wonder, a fairyland of new interest. Study may be irksome in youth; but when once the habit is established, it will prove an unfailing comfort amid the troubles of life, and a diversion amid more trying duties. And if enforced retirement occur, as it did to Ken, it will then become, next to religion, the unfailing resource of later years.

So we may imagine Ken in his retirement at Longleat, or visiting a few chosen friends elsewhere. He kept out of controversy, and joined in no plots for the restoration of King James. He was extremely anxious that the Nonjurors should avoid occasioning a permanent schism. But "he was wounded in the house of his friends," for many of the Nonjurors looked down on him, and wrongly thought him half-hearted. Some of them held that it

was sinful to hold any communion with those that had taken the oath to William, and regarded the whole Church of England as in schism, *except themselves*. Ken never joined in this narrowness; he was good friends with persons who had taken the oath to William, and among these were his entertainer, Lord Weymouth, and his lifelong friend Hooper, then Dean of Canterbury.

Better times were in store for Ken at the last. To him, as to many Christians in their old age, the promise was to be fulfilled that " at evening time it shall be light." On the accession of Queen Anne (date 1702), always a good Churchwoman, she was led to offer to Ken restoration to his see, on the occurrence of Kidder's tragical death. The old man's feelings must have been greatly soothed by the proposal, but he thought himself too infirm, and was much delighted when his lifelong friend Hooper was appointed in his stead. In *his* hands he knew that the spiritual welfare of his dear people would be safe. He could now " depart in peace " when God called, " for his eyes had seen His salvation."

His later years were beset with great bodily suffering; he took refuge, not in drugs, but in religious poetry. Four volumes of verse that he had gradually put together were brought out and published after his death.

A few days before he died he put on his shroud in preparation for his last hour. He passed away at Longleat on March 19, 1711. He was buried at Frome Selwood, the nearest parish in his diocese. In the days of his prosperity he had entertained twelve poor persons every Sunday at his table at Wells to dinner; now twelve poor men carried him to his grave. He was buried by his own desire at sunrise.

As to Ken's religious position, he says in his will:

" As for my religion, I die in the Holy Catholick and Apostolic Faith, professed by the whole Church, before the disunion of East and West; more particularly I die in the Communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from all Papall and Puritan Innovations, and as it adheres to the doctrines of the Cross."

S. HARVEY GEM.

(*To be concluded.*)