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Elizabeth's First Archbishop*

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THE pictures of Archbishop Parker show us a man of full and fleshy face, almost stolid in appearance, even tending to grimness. We might imagine from these pictures that here was a man out of keeping with his age, representing in the ecclesiastical realm a spirit very different from that which pervaded the nation in other spheres. This, however, is by no means the case. Queen Elizabeth's first Archbishop was capable of showing an independence of judgment and a strength of will which gave to the Church the lead which it needed in a fast-moving age. Of this we shall have ample evidence as we proceed.

I

We shall do well to begin by reminding ourselves of the main events of this life which spanned most of the first three quarters of the sixteenth century. Born in 1504, Parker was the son of a substantial business man, a calenderer (or glazer) of stuffs. His father having died when Matthew was only twelve, his mother married again and John Baker proved a worthy stepfather to the boy. The family life seems to have been a happy one. 1522 was a notable year, for it saw the beginning of Parker's long and intimate association with the University of Cambridge, of which he was to become a Bachelor of Arts in 1525, M.A. in 1528, B.D. in 1535, and D.D. in 1538. A Fellow of Corpus Christi College, he showed (as some of us would hold !) sound sense in refusing the invitation of Wolsey to cross over to Oxford and become a Fellow of what later was to be known as Christ Church. He was to give undivided loyalty and devotion to his alma mater—indeed, in 1544 he was elected Master of his College, King Henry VIII commending "his beloved Chaplain" to the Fellows of the College, "both for his approved learning, wisdom and honesty, as for his singular grace and industry, in bringing up youth in virtue and learning. And that he was so apt for the exercise of the said place that he thought hard to find his like in all respects".[1] Twice he held the office of Vice-Chancellor of the University and he proved himself, both in College and in University, a diligent and efficient ruler. It would seem clear that, in later life, when the cares of his high office, assumed so reluctantly under pressure from the Queen, weighed heavily upon him, he longed somewhat nostalgically for the peace of a scholar's life at Cambridge. There was much in that life which appealed to him, not least the contact with such a mind as that of Martin Bucer, whom Parker had installed as regius professor of divinity, and whose funeral sermon Parker preached in 1551. But such years, and the years he spent as Dean of the College of St. John the Baptist at Stoke-by-Clare in Suffolk, were beyond recall.

* A lecture delivered at St. Peter's, Vere Street, W.1, on May 21st, 1952.

[1] Strype, *Life of Parker*, vol. I, p. 26.

Parker was not without parochial experience. For a short while he was in charge of the parish of Ashdon (or Ashen) in Essex, and subsequently of Burlingham in Norfolk. In 1533 he had been licensed by Archbishop Cranmer to preach throughout the southern province. His tenure of the office of Chaplain to Anne Boleyn, which he assumed in 1535 and held at the same time as the Deanery of the College of St. John the Baptist at Stoke-by-Clare, brought him into touch with Anne's young daughter Elizabeth—a contact the lifelong consequences of which the young man can scarcely have dreamed of. He held the Deanery of Lincoln at the same time as he was Master of Corpus Christi College.

Mary's brief and troubled reign (1553-1558) saw the future Archbishop in seclusion, in his own country it is true, but forced to be in hiding. These were not wasted years, for, in a short autobiography appended to *The Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, he refers to the fact that " happy in my conscience . . . not dejected ", he was able to study, and found in that study more delight than he was able to do later when the duties of high office pressed upon him.[1] The accession of Elizabeth meant for Parker the end of his seclusion and, to a large extent, of his uninterrupted study. A double summons to the Court in 1559, the first time from the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicholas Bacon, and the second from Sir William Cecil, indicated that the Queen had it in mind to appoint him to high office. Neither his own desire to return to Cambridge and serve his University and College further, nor his plea of physical infirmity due to a fall during the reign of Mary when he was in flight from his pursuers, was sufficient to hold him back from the assumption of the duties of the Archbishopric. The Queen was insistent, and Parker could not be unmindful that she was the daughter of the Queen Anne whom he had earlier served as chaplain. " If he had not been bound so much to the mother, he would not so soon have granted to serve the daughter. . . ."[2] So his consecration took place on December 17th, 1559, in Lambeth Palace Chapel, and in February of the next year Parker took the oaths of homage and allegiance. Thus the work began which was to occupy him ceaselessly for the next sixteen years, until his death in 1575.

With the vexed question of Matthew Parker's consecration, we need not deal here, only pausing to refer to Canon F. J. Shirley's booklet *Elizabeth's First Archbishop* (S.P.C.K. 1948), written in reply to Mr. J. C. Whitebrook's *Consecration of the Most Reverend Matthew Parker* (Mowbray, 1945). This careful piece of historical research on the part of Dr. Shirley is generally regarded as an adequate reply to the objections raised by Mr. Whitebrook and others.

Such, then, in briefest outline were the main events in the life of Matthew Parker, a life made the happier by his marriage in 1547 to Margaret Harleston. There were four sons of the marriage and one daughter, but two of the sons died in infancy. Mrs. Parker proved herself an able sharer of her husband's fortunes, both in his high office and in the hard times of the Marian rigours. The famous remark of Queen Elizabeth to Mrs. Parker, on the Queen's taking leave of her

[1] *Correspondence*, p. 483.
[2] Strype, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 120, 121.

after being her guest at Lambeth, may be taken both as a reflection of the Queen's well known hatred of clerical marriage, and as a tribute to Mrs. Parker's gracious hospitality : " Madam I may not call you ; mistress I am ashamed to call you, so I know not what to call you ; but yet I thank you ".[1] What a picture the saying conjures up, set as it is against the background of such a letter as that which Sir William Cecil wrote in 1561 to the Archbishop : " Her Majesty continueth very evil affected to the state of matrimony in the clergy. And if I were not therein very stiff, Her Majesty would utterly and openly condemn and forbid it ". A. L. Rowse, commenting on the difficulty which thus faced a married Archbishop, writes : " The Archbishop was carpeted by the Queen, and was shocked by the Henrician language he heard : ' I was in a horror to hear such words to come from her mild nature and Christianly learned conscience, as she spake concerning God's holy ordinance and institution of matrimony. . . .' This storm blew over : the clergy kept their wives."[2]

II

We must now turn to the very considerable contribution which Matthew Parker made to the world of learning of his day. From the time when he went up to the University as an impressionable youth of eighteen, to the day of his death at the age of seventy-one, Cambridge was not long out of his thoughts. On taking his first degree in 1525, Parker " devoted himself for seven years to the study of the Fathers ". This period of study and this field of research meant that when, later in his life, he had to weigh the doctrines of Luther or of Calvin, " their conclusions were not authoritative for him. He rather, by an appeal to the Fathers, acted toward them as a judge : he might read their writings ; but it was in the spirit, not of a disciple, but of a critic ".[3] While the years of his Mastership of Corpus Christi College saw much improvement of finances, a revision of the statutes, and other material improvements due to his meticulous care, they were also marked by Parker's association with some of the best minds of the sixteenth century. To Cambridge many continental scholars made their way and it was Parker's delight to entertain them and talk with them. When he went to Lambeth (where, it may be noted, he lived in considerable state and entertained on a lavish scale), he found among his books a refuge from the storm. " There," writes A. L. Rowse, " fanatics ceased to rage, lunatic clergy to torment, the Queen to be unfair ".[4] He surrounded himself with students and antiquarians. John Joscelin in particular may be mentioned. He was his Latin secretary and one of the earliest of Anglo-Saxon scholars, and proved himself of great help to the Archbishop in the collecting and editing of manuscripts and in other similar work.

Some of the literary work which Parker either did himself or which he inspired (and financed) others to do was occasioned by the needs of the time. For example, the tractate *On the Lawfulness of Clerical*

[1] Sir John Harrington, *Nugae Antiquae*, ed. 1779, I, p. 4.
[2] *The England of Elizabeth*, p. 402.
[3] W. F. Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, IX, pp. 54, 55.
[4] Op. cit., p. 400.

Marriage (which Parker edited) appeared first in the reign of Mary and was reprinted, with the permission and at the expense of the Archbishop, in 1561—a moment in history when for reasons not entirely impersonal, Parker wished to influence Elizabeth's thinking![1] Others of his literary productions were the fruits of his own sheer love of learning. Such were the chronicles which he delighted to edit, for example, the *Flores Historiarum*, the *Historia Major* of Matthew Paris, the *Historia Anglicana* of Walsingham, the *Life of Alfred* by Asser, and so on. Mention must also be made of Parker's *De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae*, of which Hook says, " It seems, indeed, to be in advance of its age, and to be a very carefully written history ".[2] The Archbishop has an interesting and extremely humble letter about this book, when sending a copy to Lord Burghley.[3] He refused to allow its general publication during his lifetime : " To keep it by me I yet purpose, whiles I live to add and to amend as occasion shall serve me, or utterly to suppress it and to bren (burn) it ". We should also note the munificent benefaction of books and manuscripts which he made to the library of his own College at Cambridge.

Mention must also be made of what indeed was one of the great projects of Parker's life, the *Bishops' Bible*. To the production of this work, Parker gave immense care during the years 1563-1568. The idea of the work seems to have originated with Bishop Cox of Ely, but on Parker fell the load (willingly borne) of collecting materials, choosing competent scholars, and generally directing the execution of the task. There is an interesting letter of the Archbishop to Sir William Cecil[4] in which he outlines the distribution of the various Biblical books to different scholars and ecclesiastics. Judging by this letter at least, it would seem clear that the Archbishop himself did a substantial part of the work. (There is, however, some doubt as to the exact limits of the Archbishop's participation.) The work was unmarred by marginal notes such as had added fuel to the flames of controversy when Tyndale did his work. It was Parker's hope that Elizabeth would order this edition to be read in churches, and so uniformity would be promoted ; but such a royal order does not appear to have been given.

The prefaces to the Old and New Testaments, written by the Archbishop, are especially noteworthy. Referring to the Scriptures, he writes : " Occupy thyself therein in the whole journey of this thy worldly pilgrimage to understand thy way how to walk rightly before thy God all the days of thy life. . . . Only search with a humble spirit, ask in continual prayer, knock with perpetual perseverance, and cry to that good Spirit of Christ, the Comforter ". Parker defended the liberty of reading the Scriptures gained for all by the Reformation and witnessed to by the early and Saxon Church. " This Christian Catholic Church of England " will repose " in this authority " ; and while others claim some new-found authority " we will proceed in the Reformation begun, and doubt no more by the help of Christ His Grace

[1] Strype, op. cit., I, p. 66.

[2] Hook, op. cit., IV, p. 506.

[3] *Correspondence of Archbishop Parker*, pp. 424-6.

[4] *Correspondence*, pp. 334-7.

of the true unity of Christ's Catholic Church, and of the uprightness of our faith in this province". In the Canons of 1571, it is laid down that a copy of the Bishops' Bible shall lie in the hall or great chamber of the house of every archbishop and bishop, so that servants and strangers may be edified; churchwardens, too, are exhorted to see that a copy be found in every church. So is maintained the grand principle of an open Bible, in a language understanded of the people, unencumbered by note or comment.

We now begin to be in a position to estimate the kind of man with whose story we are dealing and who, in the University and in the affairs of the Church, exercised so great an authority. Parker stood for enlightenment. He who all his life was in close touch with the best minds, clerical and lay, in England and on the Continent, could scarce do otherwise. He welcomed the fresh winds which blew from the Reformation. He had seen enough of the Marian persecutions and himself had tasted enough of the bitterness of years spent in hiding, to be in no mood for a return to domination by Rome. Nor could he give uncritical assent to certain 'reformed' movements from the Continent. He had drunken too deeply at the well of the patristic writings not to insist that any new movement must be judged by the New Testament documents and tested by the practice of the early Church. He found himself constantly in trouble with the Puritan party. How often he longed to work quietly at the Bishops' Bible, only to be torn from this congenial task to deal with the noisy protestations of men shocked by the "Advertisements". These were a series of enactments drawn up by the Archbishop with the help of some others, "partly for due order in the public administration of common prayers and using the holy sacraments, and partly for the apparel of all persons ecclesiastical, by virtue of the Queen's letters commanding the same".

The use of the surplice in parish churches with a hood in the choir, and a cope for the three ministers at the Holy Communion in cathedrals, was not a startling innovation, but it was enough to rouse the ire of the puritan party. That ire fell on Parker almost alone, and when thirty-seven clergy refused to conform (a number which was to be considerably reduced during the three months given them for reconsideration), Parker felt the bitterness of disunion. To the genuine puritans, he showed real respect. Some of the more ignorant and noisy he was not sorry to see deprived of their work. But he resented the fact that Elizabeth withheld her open approval of the Advertisements, and that he, in his sixty-second year, was forced to handle the miserable situation largely unaided. "All other men must win honour and defence, and I only shame to be so vilely reported; and yet I am not weary to bear, to do service to God and to my prince, but an ox can draw no more than he can." "Mr. Secretary," he writes to Sir William Cecil, "can it be thought that I alone, having sun and moon against me, can compass the difficulty?" He is referring to the Queen's desire for uniformity.[1] But such things as surplice and square cap were obnoxious to those of the Genevan party, and the Archbishop, longing for unity on the one hand and moved by a desire to mitigate the

[1] *Correspondence*, p. 280.

sufferings of those worthy men who protested on the other, found himself in an extremely difficult position.

Papists on the one side and puritans on the other! Poor Parker! "There are two rocks," he wrote at the time of the Council of Trent, in which he took a critically theological interest, "there are two rocks between which godly men must with great diligence sail. For some by reason of lightness of mind without judgment and true faith embrace every manner of religion. But other some so stubbornly resist and will not once so much vouchsafe to know the doctrine set forth because their mind is bent unto an opinion which they defend for the truth, or being overcome with pleasures of this world they have no care of the truth nor the salvation of their souls". That is a vivid description of the Scylla of a lawless puritanism and the Charybdis of a conservatist papism, between which he had to steer his ship. And the waters were made the rougher by a lack of personal religion, a love of the "pleasures of this world" only too characteristic of the Elizabethan era. To preside, as Parker had to do in 1563, over Convocation was no easy matter, composed as that august body was of certain men who recognized the authority of the Church, and of others who chafed under the compromise which had been reached in regard to vestments and under the directions of the Prayer Book.

III

We live some four centuries after the first Primate of All England under Queen Elizabeth I. We meet in the early months of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. It would be unseemly and impertinent to compare the outlook and work of the occupants of the See of Canterbury in the reigns of the two Queens in two such different centuries. But as it is true of a nation that it gets the rulers that it deserves, so, in a measure, it is true of the Church. The kind of leadership which our Church of England will get in the coming years will depend, to a large measure, on the kind of thinking and acting and praying which her laity do now. We shall do well therefore to stand back and seek to draw up an estimate of the character of one of the greatest Primates of the Church, and see whether certain of his emphases may not be guides to our thinking and to the framing of our policy in years as exciting as his own, though darker far than those of the sixteenth century.

1. We note, first, his *insistence on the open Bible.* We have already alluded to this. The Bishops' Bible is uneven in the quality of its work. Perhaps its chief importance lies in the fact that the second edition (1572) was used as the official basis of the Authorised Version. It is of interest mainly because it pointed to the Archbishop's desire for *uniformity*; he disliked the existence, side by side, of the Coverdale, Matthew, Great and Genevan Bibles. He aimed at *order* in the biblical as in the ecclesiastical realm. But more than this. The Archbishop knew that a nation's greatness, as a Church's purity, depends on the extent to which the Bible is used and its principles obeyed. He believed in the power of the Word of God to do its own work. The agreement of the committee over which he presided "to make no bitter notes upon any text" was good precedent for the rule adopted many years later by the British and Foreign Bible Society,

" of which the sole object shall be to encourage the wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures, *without note or comment* ".

This insistence of the Archbishop on the open Bible has a word for us in an era when, in the homes of our own people, it is being displaced by the *Radio Times* and the comics ; in an era when illiteracy is being rapidly overcome, thanks to the work of Laubach and others like him, with the result that the door is open *either* for an unprecedented propagation of the Christian faith by means of the Bible *or* for the dissemination of Communist doctrine on a scale hitherto undreamed of. The enemy is at the gates. Our only weapon is the Word of God.

2. We note, secondly, Parker's emphasis on *sound learning and culture.* We have already noticed some of his scholarly enterprises. " There was," writes Rowse, " a whole succession of scholars in the house at this work "—editing MSS., etc.—" a number of them afterwards being preferred to bishoprics or deaneries. . . . The gentry of Kent and Sussex were glad to have their sons brought up in attendance on the Archbishop's household ; one sees the function it performed : like Cecil's household, it was a school of virtue ".[1]

This insistence on sound learning, on free enquiry, on good scholarship, has always been a mark of Anglicanism at its best. But would it not be true to say that this is sorely imperilled by present conditions ? There is always, within the realm of theological education, the danger which constantly rears its ugly head, of *examinations* taking the place of *education* (the two are very far from being synonymous) ; of the spirit of free enquiry being suppressed by a welter of dates, church councils and theories of Q, M, L, J, E, D, or P, or Gestalt Psychology ! There may lie the damnation of theological education. In the wider field of the ministry, much of the best thinking of the parish (or even cathedral) clergy may be drowned at the sink when it should be stimulated in the study. The bearing of the financial welfare of the clergy on the scholarship of the Church is closer than some of us realize. If, for any reason, the Church of England ceases to be characterized by a wide culture and a deep learning, then one of its chief sources of glory will have departed.

IV

3. The third emphasis made by Archbishop Parker to which I would draw attention is his *sense of continuity in the history of the Church.* In *The Genius of the Church of England* Canon Charles Smyth has a section of such importance that I venture to quote it here. " Anglicanism rests on the appeal to Scripture and to history : and Parker's distinctive legacy is the appeal to history and the material for that appeal. The manuscripts which he collected, worked upon, and bequeathed, with the most stringent provisions for their safe keeping, to his own College in the University of Cambridge . . . were designed to serve as the arsenal of ' this Christian Catholick Church of England ' in her controversial warfare, refuting the familiar accusation of the Romanists that Anglicanism was a new-fangled religion, retorting the charge of innovation upon the Middle Ages, and demonstrating ' how the religion presently taught and professed in the Church at thys

[1] Op. cit., pp. 404-5.

present, is no new reformation thinges lately begonne, which were not before, but rather a reduction of the Church to the Pristine state of olde conformitie, which once it had . . . : as it is manifest to be proved, not onely in thys cause of the vulgar translation of the Scriptures, but in other cases also of doctrine, as transubstantiation, of Priestes restraint from mariage, of receauing under one kinde, with many other pointes and articles moe of like qualitie, newly thrust in, and the olde abolished by the Clergie of Rome'. Parker's concern was primarily to vindicate Canterbury against Rome, as Hooker was to vindicate it against Geneva : and it was he who encouraged Bishop Jewel to write his *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* . . . with its confident appeal to the belief and practice of the first six centuries. But Parker, with a prescience rare in his generation, could perceive that the appeal to antiquity is compromised by the appeal to history, and he to some extent anticipated the conclusion of modern scholarship, that Church History is a stream of development, and that at no point is it possible to draw a line across it and to say that what comes before that line is pure, and what comes after it is corrupt. The weight of historic precedent is authoritative, but it is not conclusive : the final criterion is the Word of God" (pp. 31, 32).

That is well said, and leads me to add two points.

(i) Controversy with Rome, while being an uncongenial task to any man, cannot be avoided if the purity of the faith is to be maintained. It is all to the good that Professor Woodhouse has re-edited Professor Salmon's *The Infallibity of the Church*—a book never yet answered. There are those within our own Communion who seem to be far more keen on reunion with Rome than, say, with our Methodist brethren. Let them take down the relevant volumes of the Parker Society series and steep themselves in the writings of the Archbishop to whose memory that great series of volumes is a tribute, and they will find a healthy correction to such a tendency. The claims of Anglicanism to historic continuity are well founded and must not be treated flippantly.

(ii) We who are Evangelical Anglicans must be prepared to do some hard thinking about the relation of tradition to Scripture. We have noted the years that Parker spent in the study of the Fathers. We may ask ourselves whether Evangelicals have not tended to leave patristic study too much to scholars of a different tradition within Anglicanism. We may go further and ask ourselves whether we have not too easily and too lightly offset Scripture against tradition and failed to give due weight to the latter. We should do well to give heed to a passage which occurs in *The Fulness of Christ* (a report presented by a group of Evangelicals to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1950). I quote from pp. 62-3 :

"Tradition represents the Church's apprehension of the revelation attested authoritatively in the Bible ; an apprehension truly made possible by the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration, yet an apprehension which is incomplete and fallible because the Church's membership is not yet complete and because the Church is still made up of sinful and ignorant men. While, therefore, Christians can rightly use the historical approach, and enter into the meaning of the Bible

through the collective wisdom of the Church, they must also approach the Bible directly, and by it check the tradition. Error and incompleteness will remain an element in tradition until the Church is made perfect. God has always fresh light to break forth from His Holy Word; and even venerable and long standing tradition may turn out to be hoary error. *Consuetudo sine veritate vetustas erroris est.*

" Finally—a very important point—tradition must be taken in its full sense. It is the Church's collective understanding of the gospel. It is, therefore, not to be confined to the tradition of any one age or any one area of the Church. The Holy Spirit did not cease to operate in the Church after Nicaea, or after Chalcedon, or after 1054, or after the sixteenth century. Nor did he absent himself from the East or from the West, from the Lutheran, from the Calvinist, or the Anglican parts of the Church. Tradition includes, therefore, the tradition of the churches of the Reformation; and their contributions, as well as those of the early and medieval periods of the post-Reformation era, must be given the full weight which is their due."

4. I conclude with a fourth characteristic of Archbishop Parker. I refer to his *strength of character.* We have seen this in his controversy with the Queen on the question of the marriage of the clergy. Nor was he afraid to protest to her against the erection of images in churches,[1] and against the crucifix and lighted tapers which were retained in the royal chapel though abolished by law from the churches.[2] We may see his strength of character also in his determination to take a line of his own, even when that course of action was a *via media* which brought him applause from neither wing, leaving him to fight a somewhat lone battle with papists to right of him and puritans to left (if I have my directions correct !). Parker, wrote Bishop Boyd Carpenter, " had a wide mind; he realized that little things were but little things, but he realized also that order was indispensable in every society ".[3] Parker wrote to the Lord Treasurer: " Does your Lordship think that I care for cap, tippet, surplice or wafer bread, or any such? But for the laws as established I esteem them ".[4] That, again, is well said. The ability to " discern the things that differ " is a gift much to be sought after and prayed for, and one which we do well to covet.

[1] Strype, op. cit., I, p. 191 ff.
[2] *Correspondence*, p. 97.
[3] *A Popular History of the Church of England*, p. 227.
[4] *Correspondence*, p. 478.