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**Archbishop Sheldon and the Dioceses of Gloucester and
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ARCHBISHOP SHELDON AND THE DIOCESES OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL¹

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(revised by Roland Austin)

THE letter-book of Gilbert Sheldon between 13 October 1664 and 14 June 1669, now calendared ms. Add. c. 308 in the Bodleian Library, contains drafts of letters with corrections in the hand of Miles Smyth, the archbishop's secretary, addressed to dignitaries of church and state. Taken as a whole the letters are suggestive of an erudite ecclesiastic, energetic and efficient in the discharge of duty, and a vigilant overseer of the Province of Canterbury. In fact as the letters show, no one, whatever his rank might be, enjoyed immunity from rebuke whenever, after investigation, the archbishop had sound reason for remonstrance or censure. Like most men somewhat complex in his nature, a Puritan in his antagonism to evil, a statesman who could exhibit, as occasion might require, both pugnacity and persuasiveness—an excellent combination of qualities.

So much then by way of introduction to a series of letters, which as far as the west-midland bishoprics are concerned, begins in 1666. While wishful to put but little mortar between the bricks, a paragraph from the introduction to the *Calendar of Treasury Books* (II, p. x) may here be inserted to describe the political and financial conditions immediately antecedent to the letters. It runs,—‘The first supply which Parliament voted for the

¹ Both Sheldon and his secretary had a previous affinity with the county: the archbishop by installation 26 Feb. 1632–3 to a prebend in the Cathedral, and retained until his consecration to the bishopric of London in 1660. Smyth was a son of a one time vicar of King's Stanley.

war² (with the Dutch) was a royal Aid of £2,477,500. Of that Aid no money, not a single penny, came into the Exchequer before April 7th, 1665, and until the middle of July money dribbled in comparatively slowly. This meant that during all the months prior to the declaration of war, when hostilities were seen to be pending, Charles was obliged to equip himself for the war without parliamentary Aid; that for nearly two months after war was declared he derived not assistance of a penny from parliamentary grant'. In order therefore to relieve his urgent need, the King was amoved (doubtless on ministerial advice) to invoke the good offices of the Lord-Lieutenants of counties and the Archbishops in their several spheres to obtain advances of money by way of loan, on the security of the Aid.

To meet the royal request, Sheldon therefore directed to every suffragan in the Province an encyclical letter, dated 30 March 1666, which reads (Folio 57B) :—

My Lord,

I send unto your Lordship here inclosed a Copy of His Maties Lettrs directed unto me the Tenor and Effect whereof according to my duty I recommend unto yr Lorp that you will effectually undertake to promote and encourage ye Clergy of yr Diocese (especially those whom you know to be most able) readily and cheerefully to comply wth his Maties desires in a matter so much conducing to His Maties Service satisfaction and ye good of ye whole Kingdome; What soever shall be advanced by these Loans will be repayd wth full Interest and not be taken but upon those terms; for wch ye Act of Parlamt wch I desire you to peruse that you may the better satisfy those you speak wth is looked upon as the best Security in England.

Yr Lorp is further desir'd speedily to signify what you in yr owne particular will subscribe and with all possible

² The war with Holland was declared 22 Feb. 1664-5.

expedition to give ye like about ye Clergie and from yr Clergie I dowbt not yr readinesse on yr owne part and utmost diligence and endeavour wth your Clergy.

My Ld, Yr Ld very loving friend and Brother
Gilbert Cant.

As to the results in general of the appeal the letter-book is not informative, though on the other hand in particular instances it does disclose disappointment at what the archbishop considered an inadequate response.

F. 62

Abp. Gilbert Sheldon to Dr Nicholson, bishop of Gloucester
Apr. 14, 1666.

My Ld

I could easily conclude wth yr Lp that 100^l were enough for ye poore Bprick of Gloucr to subscribe for yr Loane to his Ma'ty, But ye Summe is too little for an Example to yr Clergy ; You must needs therefore double it, which I hope will be well accepted by the King, as I am confident it will be very safe for you, There being upon the security no Hazard at all either of Principall or Interest. I doubt not yr Endeavors wth your clergy, only I would give you this advise To receive no subscriptions under 20^l ; where any of yr Clergy are willing to advance but want ability, lett 2 or more of them joyne to make up that sum at lest and they may easily between themselves ascertain and secure their several proportions. By this time I presume you may have heard that ye next session of Parliamt is prorogued till ye 18th of September, so that there is nothing more to be sayd to that part of your lettr.

Nor shall I need to adde anything else but my good wishes and prayer for you, and that from

My Ld

Yr Lps very affectionate friend and Brother.

F. 65B

The same to Dr Ironside, Bishop of Bristol.

Lambeth House

My Lord,

June 18th, 1666

I have received yor Lorps Letter with ye Account of the Subscriptions of yr Clergie towards ye Loane upon the Act for his Ma'ties service. I doe not wonder to see the Subscriptions soe pittifully meane, seeing the Clergie had not the Encouragemt of your Lorps example to lead them on, The like whereof I am confident will not be found anywhere in England. The sumes in themselves are soe inconsiderable and low in the particulars, that I believe they will not be admitted into the receipt of the Exchequer singly as they are, and when the officers, that yor Lorp and your Clergie shall imploy about it shall speake with Sr George Downing he will tell them as much. For the other way that you have found out to salve the distrust your clergie have of one another and hide the shame of your subscriptions, by paying the money into the handes of your Country Receivers that will be soe farre from being Looked upon as an advantage to the King's businesse That it will be taken for a Disservice. I am sorry your Lordship and your Clergie were not better informed and soe ill advised. But I shall be no farther concerned in it having in this letter given your Lorps my opinion of it. And soe I Rest

My Lord, Yr Lorps very Lo : Friend and Brother

G.C.

In the following year we find the Primate advising his suffragan of Gloucester of the repute of a clerk preferred to the valuable rectory of Bourton on the Water.

F. 87B

April 1st 1667

My Ld,

The prsent occasion of this Lettr is to recommend to

yr Lorp an honest man & of good parts, Mr Vernon³ a Member of All Souls who hath obtayned a Presentation from Mr Cocks⁴ to ye parsonage of Burton upon ye Water. I would not have you looke upon him through his Patron ; but measure him by his owne deserts. If there prove any rubbe in his businesse when it comes before yr Lp. I desire you will afford him all ye favour his case is capable of and agreeable with justice. More then that shall never be asked of you for any person by

My Ld, Yr Lps very loving friend and Brother

G.C.

In justice, however, to the two prelates, and more or less acknowledged in the Primate's letters, evidence of the scanty revenues from endowment of the bishoprics about this time, is forthcoming from the report thereon made by the parliamentary Surveyors in 1646.

Rawlinson MSS. B. 240.

GLOUCESTER

Temporalities	Present rent and Profits per annum		
	£	s.	d.
Bishop's Howse and Vineyard	145	3	4
Wood Barton barne and Portham meade	8	12	4
Longford	28	19	3
Preston	21	7	3
Brookthorpe and Harscombe	29	10	0
Droyscourt	8	2	10

³ Adm. Brazenose Coll. : Oxford, 9 March 1653-4, aged 16 ; matr. serv. 17 March 1653-4 ; subst. for Nowell Sch. 25 Nov. 1654 ; B.A. 15 Oct. 1657 ; M.A. 5 July 1660, Chaplain of All Souls. Wrote *A letter concerning some of Dr Owen's principles and practices*, 1670 ; *Ataxiae Obstaculum*, 1677 ; *Life of the learned Dr Peter Heylin*, 1681. Preferences : rectories of Bourton on the Water and SS. John and Michael, Gloucester.

⁴ Richard Cocks of Dumbleton, Glouc. Vide G.E.C. *Complete Baronetage*, III, 242.

						£	s.	d.
Lassington	..	..	..	..	..	4	6	8
Rudge and Farley	..	..	..	..	..	13	5	0
Manchels Hope	..	..	..	..	..	10	15	9
Maysemore	..	..	..	..	..	70	10	7
Dewchurch	..	..	..	..	..	2	1	0

BRISTOL

Ashelworth	..	..	..	..	..	49	16	11
Bishop's Howse	..	..	..	..	..	20	10	0
Cromehall	..	..	..	..	..	17	9	9
Fiffheade	..	..	..	..	..	40	5	0
Rowborough	..	..	..	..	..			(blank)
Horfield and Hinton	..	..	..	..	..	50	19	1

In Bacon's *Liber Regis*, the bishopric of Gloucester was valued for first-fruits at £315 7s 1d; Bristol at £294 11s 0 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.

'Fiat justitia, ruat coelum' expresses the purport of the letter next in order.

F. 100

To ye Bp of Bristol

Lambeth House

Aug. 14 1667

My Lord,

I have lately recd a Petition from Mr Stephens ye late Schoolmaster of Worcester, wherein he complaynd of some hard measure he suffers under yr Lorps Inhibition: But untill I receive some dirt. from yr Lp. of the matter I have not nor shall doe anything in it. The man, by what he acknowledged to me I perceive hath been guilty of some indiscretion. But he says he believes yr Lorp hath taken a prejudice agt him from a Lettr of a Minister in Buckinghamshire, wch hath very highly but unjustly aspersed him, agt whom he sayes he would for his owne vindication, have brought his Action of Diffamation, but that he could never gett the lettr into his hands, upon wch

his ground worke must be layd. This Lettr he tells me he beleives to be in yr Lorsps hands, and if it be so, I thinke it but just yr Lorps should suffer him to have ye use of it, that he may vindicate his Reputation (if falsely accused) without wch the man must be for ever ruined, not only at Worcester but be rendered incapable of receiving any place of charge or trust anywhere else : And on the other side if he clear not himselfe, then he justly falls under yr Lorps censure as to that Schoole wch requires a man of good fame, and so if he be undone as to all places else it is his owne fault. I thought good to give yr Lorp my opinion in this point that yr Lp may not be sayd to stand in the way of this mans proving his innocence and purging his reputation, wch ought to be done to every man. And to my Ld

I bid yr Lp heartily farewell and am

My Ld

Your Lps very Loving Freind and Brother

G.C.

Passing to the last group of letters we meet Sheldon in a far different mood. No pleader for justice on behalf of another is he now, but the stern admonisher of a highly placed official charged with grave derelictions in the discharge of his responsibilities. Henry Jones, the dignitary under reproof, Chancellor of the diocese of Bristol; admitted at the age of 17, a Demy of Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1640; B.A. 21 November 1644; Fellow 1645-8; M.A. 7 July 1648. Expelled by the Parliamentary Visitors 7 July 1648, to whom he had replied, 17 May, ' I cannot submit with a safe conscience to this Visitation ' (Foster, *Alumni Oxon.*) From another source we learn that after reinstatement in 1660 ' he applied himself wholly to the study and practice of Civil Law. He supplicated for B. and D.C.L. in 1672, being then Chancellor of the diocese of Bristol, the

degrees being granted on account of his loyalty'. (*University reg. of Convocation*, T. VI, p. 13, quoted by J. R. Bloxam in *Magdalen College registers*). The date, however, assigned for conferment of these degrees is inconsistent with the form habitually used in the archiepiscopal letters. Reaching the end of his pilgrimage in 1695, Dr Jones was buried at Chastleton in Oxfordshire.

The final letter shows the Chancellor reinstated in the good opinion of the Primate.

F. 64

Lambeth House, May 11, 1666

For Dr Jones, Chanc : of Bristoll

Sr,

I have Received from a good hand the inclosed Complaynts against a Minister in your Diocesse, the matters whereof, if proved as is alleaged, are so scandalous that I cannot but wonder there should be noe effectuall proceeding against him to take off so greate a scandall from ye Church. I desire therefore that you will take the businesse into your particulr Consideracon and examination if you find the thing so, as is complained of, you will suffer no delay nor protraction of Justice against him ; And of what hath beene done, or you shall doe for the punishing of his offences and the Vindicating the Church, you will give an Account to

Sr yor very Loving Freind

G.C.

F. 102B

Mr Chancellor

I cannot but be very sorry for ye reports I heare of you, not only of yr remisseness in yr Duty of yr Place, but wch is worse that you doe and suffer things to be done in yr office wch are greatly to the dishonor of ye Church and ye ecclesiastical jurisdiction and much to ye scandall of all good men. You live in a place where many things

are dayly acted contrary to ye rule and order of ye Church by all sorts of people both Lay and Clergy, and yet you take no notice of them, and when complaynts are brought to you agt them, you use as little care to correct and amend them by such power as ye Law gives you. But beyond this by yr carelesse granting of Licences for ye greedinesse of present gayne, you make and permit yr office to be the shop of dispensations for disorder and crimes and particularly an open mart for incestuous marriages, in wch poynt you have lately beene too guilty if I be not much misinformed. I shall expect to heare from you what you have to say for yr vindication agst these complts. And wthall take this for a monition for the future lest you hear more seriously from me.

And so I rest Sr Yr very loving freind

G.C.

For my very loving freind Dr Jones, Chancellor of
Bristoll.

Lambeth House, 16 Oct. 1667

F. 105

Mr Chancellor,

I am sorry that by my last lettr I gave you soe much occasion of trouble, But having such complaynts brought unto me I could doe noe lesse then to take notice of them to you.

I am well satisfied in yr answer for as the Complaints are generall, soe I hope and beleive till there shall be more particular evidence, that yr generall justification of yrselfe is good and very allowable; And assure yr selfe, what ever designes may be upon or against you, I shall not condemne w'thout very just and apparent prooffe. Doe but you doe the duty of your place, as you ought and doe professe and you shall ever find me to be wth all kindnesse.

Sr

Yr truly loving & old Freind

G.C.

For my very loving friend Dr Jones, Chancellor of Bristoll,
at Bristoll. Lambeth House, Nov. 7, 1667

So much then for the excerpts relevant to Gloucestershire taken from the letter-book of a man to whose munificence the University of Oxford owes the Sheldonian Theatre.

In closing, one more item relative to his connexion with the diocese may be quoted, *viz.* a statement of income derived in 1638 from the prebendal stall he held in the Cathedral Church of Gloucester.

Tanner MS. 147, f. 162

Compotus Gilb. Sheldon pro preb. Glouc. 1638 :					
pro stipend : tot : an.	..	..	xxli		
pro pede comput	..	..	vli	xs	
pro reparat	..	..	..	xxs	
pro labore	..	..	..	xlijs	
pro sumpt Audient	..	..	..	xxxvs	xd
pro eleemos	..	..	..	xiijs	iiij
pro eleemos	..	..	..	xxs	
		sum tot :	xxxij	ij	ij
In fines and seales	..	..	xxxix	xvj	viiij
		sum tot :	lxxjli	xviiij	x
Lent the last yeare	xxli				
paid for the church	xxvijs				
		sum own :	xxxxiiijli	vs	xd
G. Sh.					
more due for Adeane's lease and seal	Lvjjs	viiiijd			
soe in all due to me	96	2	6		
Allowing Mr Robinson	1	18	8		
soe remaineth due	94	3	10		
Recd Nov. 27, 1638					