

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

George Bull, D. D

by J. B. T. Homfray
1973, Vol. 92, 121-138

© The Society and the Author(s)

George Bull, D.D., 1634-1710

By J. B. T. HOMFRAY

‘I SHOULD wish their morals to be particularly attended to,’ said Mr Snawley.

‘I am glad of that, Sir,’ replied the schoolmaster, drawing himself up. ‘They have come to the right shop for morals, Sir.’

‘You are a moral man yourself,’ said Snawley.

‘I rather believe I am, Sir,’ replied Squeers.

Whether or not one agrees with Mr Snawley on the great value of morals for English children, “Moralism” was a disaster for English theology, according to a modern American professor,¹ and the trouble began in the seventeenth century with Jeremy Taylor and divines of the “Holy Living” school. Among them was George Bull, a key figure in the Restoration reaction against Puritanism, who held three livings in and around Gloucestershire before becoming bishop of St David’s in old age. He was an interesting character both from the standpoint of local history and also of the history of Christian theology.

His biographer was Robert Nelson (1656-1715), himself a Gloucestershire man, tutored by Bull and living at Driffield for part of his life with his mother. Nelson is best remembered as the non-juring author of the *Companion to the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*, but his life of bishop Bull, published in 1713, was itself a classic ecclesiastical biography, concise and easy to read. Its full title was *The Life of Dr George Bull Lord Bishop of St David’s, with the History of those Controversies in which he was Engaged, and an Abstract of those Fundamental Doctrines which he Maintained and Defended in the Latin tongue*. Nelson himself is commemorated in a window of Driffield Church and in a short life by W. H. Teale in *Lives of English Laymen* (1842).

By chance or Providence Nelson’s wholly admiring biography was balanced by another biography written some years later about

¹ C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism* (1966). Dr Allison, an associate professor of Ecclesiastical History at the School of Theology of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, devotes a chapter of his book to the theology of Bull, with further assessments of his contribution to theology in the last chapter. There are also many references to two Bishops of Gloucester, William Nicholson and Edward Fowler, who feature in Bull’s life and controversies of the time.



one of his parishioners at Siddington near Cirencester. The *Memoirs of the Life of John Roberts*, written in 1725 but not published until 1746—in an abridged edition—by his son Daniel Roberts, was one of the raciest and most popular of Quaker documents, and passed through many editions in this country and America.² The anti-hero of this document was none other than priest Bull.

Burton's edition of Bull's works (1827) includes a pedigree of the family of Bull traced back to Richard Bull of Vencourt, Dorset, whose eldest son John was chaplain to Henry VIII and Edward VI. Edmund Lawrence, in *Quaker of Olden Time*, mentions that 'the Bulls were an old Somerset family of good estate settled at Shapwicke'. George's grandfather was 'William Bull of Wells, Mercer', and his father, also George, was one of eighteen children, put to trade at Wells and eventually becoming mayor. George Bull III was born on 25 March 1634, the feast of the Annunciation, which conjunction 'fell out by the disposition of Providence, as Bull was later to vindicate the two chief subjects of this festival, the miracle of the Incarnation, and the great honour due to the Blessed Virgin'. This was in reference to his defence of the Nicene creed, and his famous sermon on the Virgin Mary. His mother died soon after childbirth; at his baptism his father dedicated him to holy orders; and at the age of four, his father dying, he was left to the care of guardians with a 'sufficient estate for a liberal education'. He went to Wells Grammar School and the Free School at Tiverton (Blundell's), where he showed promise in classics under Dr Samuel Butler. He was then entered at Exeter College as a commoner in 1648 aged about 14—'Thus transplanted from the strict discipline of a school to the enjoyment of manly liberty' writes Nelson, 'he was overpowered by love of pleasure and diversions . . . chiefly childish follies prosecuted with great earnestness'. One would like to know more about this period of youthful "Antinomianism" in the life of one of its foremost adversaries, but it came to an end at the age of twenty when he was 'influenced to great seriousness by his religious sister'. Already one suspects an inner personality conflict between the natural extrovert, vigorous, combative and determined to get on in the world and enjoy life, and the serious-minded introvert, searching for God and holiness of life, burdened with the sense of his own unworthiness. The conflict was never fully resolved.

His days at Oxford were curtailed, for on the advice of his tutor

² The latest edition of the *Memoirs* was *A Quaker of the Olden Time, being a Memoir of John Roberts by his son, Daniel Roberts, with particulars of the Roberts family collected from documents and other sources*, edited by Edmund T. Lawrence, with a prefatory letter by O. Wendell Holmes. 1898.

Mr Ackland he refused the engagement 'to be true and faithful to the Commonwealth of England as it is now established, without a King and a House of Lords', and retired with Ackland to join a small colony of students established at North Cadbury in Somersetshire. His year at Oxford had brought him to the notice of the rector of his college, Dr Conant, and John Prideaux, bishop of Worcester, for his gifts of 'sound debate and logic'; and also the useful acquaintance of his contemporary, Clifford, the "C" of Charles II's Cabal. From the age of nineteen to twenty-one (1655) he was placed under the direction of the rector of Ubley, Mr William Thomas, at the foot of the Mendips.³ Thomas was a Puritan who had acted as assistant to Cromwell's commissioners for ejecting scandalous ministers; Bull's sojourn under him was formative, but frustrating—'the advantage of living in a very regular family', but 'no real improvement or assistance in the study of Divinity, and he would often lament his great misfortune in that choice'. His theological reading had to be done by stealth—the works of Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Grotius, Episcopius—in company with the rector's son Samuel.

At 21 Bull began to seek for 'an unexceptionable hand that his mission might be valid', and was ordained deacon and priest in one day by the only bishop functioning during the "Usurpation", Dr Robert Skinner, the deprived bishop of Oxford. Afterwards he was presented to the small living of St George's, Easton-in-Gordano, then a port near Bristol, and 'small enough to be passed over by the men of those times'. Perhaps family connections with Wells helped, as St George's was a prebend of Wells cathedral and the vicarage a peculiar exempt from diocesan control.⁴ On the face of it St George's must have been a difficult parish for a young man of 21; full of 'Quakers and other wild sectaries', and Antinomianism reaching its zenith in reaction against the rigours of Puritanism. However people tend to weary of all forms of extravagance, and Bull was thus provided with a platform for winning souls back to the Church by sound doctrine, charity and the example of his life. Nelson gives us two stories of his first incumbency—once, when he was preaching, his notes, written on small pieces of paper, flew out of his bible. Half the congregation, rough sea-farers, burst out laughing, imagining that the young preacher would be at a loss to continue. The better-disposed picked up the notes and handed them back up to the pulpit. Bull shut the notes

³ Wood, *Athen. Ox.*, iv., 490 states that on leaving his university Bull first sojourned in the house of Mr Henry James, of Chedzoy, in Somersetshire, where he did, under him, improve his knowledge much in academic learning.

⁴ Lawrence states that St George's was worth only £30 per annum, but that this was no matter to Bull at that time being a bachelor of private means.

in his bible, and finished his sermon without another glance at them; 'which he performed so very much to their satisfaction that they who at first were most inclined to laugh at him, began to grow serious'. The other occasion was when a Quaker sprang up and cried out in the sermon, 'George, come down: thou art a false prophet and an hireling'. The parishioners to a man fell on the Quaker and belaboured him. Bull rushed down into the mêlée, calling on them to desist and warding off their blows. 'Let me, good neighbours, a little argue coolly the matter with him.' He then lectured the Quaker on prophets true and false: the parishioners again attacked the Quaker with such violence that had he not 'bustled very much among them' the Quaker would have been lynched. Finally he returned to the pulpit and finished his sermon. Rough stuff, but typical of the period; similar incidents would be recounted until the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689. The memory of them was preserved for the most part by the Quakers in their meetings for sufferings, and the clergy seldom come out well in the telling. Later, when Bull was at Siddington, there were incidents which showed him in a much less favourable light, when it was the Quakers, not the clergyman, who were fighting for what they believed to be their rights, against tithe payment and the operation of the Clarendon Code.

Besides Quakers there were other sectaries 'which the people there and in the adjacents parts were very ready to run into'. Nelson tells us how Bull dealt with them, in 'conferences' with opponents who usually underestimated his youthful powers of debate. On one occasion he won over a dissenter when he came to have his child baptised by taking the whole service without a book; the dissenter was so much impressed by Bull's 'dependence on the Spirit of God' that he returned to the Church there and then—in spite of the superstitious use of the sign of the cross in baptism!

His second living, to which he was presented in 1658, was Siddington St Mary. Lawrence, in *Quaker of Olden Time*, states that 'about the same year, by the good offices of Lady Pool and some rather smart practice on the part of a clever friend of Bull's, the Rectory of Siddington St Mary was secured to him'. What the smart practice was he does not say, but his presentation is recorded in the following form—'1658 August 4th. Certificate of Commissioners for the approbation of public preacher. George Bull Clerk was admitted to the Rectory of Siddington upon a presentation exhibited the 2nd August 1658 from his Highness the Lord Protector. Certificate from Alexander Gregory of Cyrencester. Ben. Wynnington of Bibury, and Carless of Barnesley. The said George Bull was admitted the

4th day of August 1658 to the Rectory of Over Siddington aforesaid upon his presentation exhibited the same day from Edmund Fettiplace Esquire and Dame Anne Poole the Patron'. The Pooles were Royalists, and suffering thereby. Colonel Fettiplace on the other hand had commanded the Parliamentary garrison during the siege of Cirencester and his son Giles became the leading Quaker of the neighbourhood.

His preferment was doubtless expedited by a romance. Every year he spent two months at Oxford because of the dearth of books at Bristol, and on the way would stay at Cirencester with the Master family. There he met and married Bridget, daughter of Alexander Gregory mentioned in the certificate, who was minister of Cirencester at the time, and one of the more distinguished Puritan clergy.⁵ Bridget is described as 'a fit consort for a clergyman, as being in her own nature sufficiently provident and yet well disposed to all manner of good works, out of a true principle of love to God and goodness. Her attire was very plain and grave: her chief diversion was the care of her family, and her main ambition to please her husband, to whom she was always a complying and obedient wife'.

On her wedding ring was the prayer *Bene parère, parère, parare det mihi Deus* (Fruitful, obedient, and provident God grant me to be). The first petition was fully granted, with five sons and seven daughters, all born at Siddington. But most of them died in infancy or youth, and only three had issue—Anne, who married Joseph Stephens, later archdeacon of Brecon; Richard, from whom were descended the Bulls of Durfield; and Robert, who became rector of Tortworth and published some of his father's writings.⁶

Towards the end of the Protectorate associations were formed among the country gentry to expedite the return of Charles II, and in 1659 Bull was admitted into the association: the rectory was used as a rendezvous. In 1662, perhaps as a consequence of this, he was presented to the neighbouring vicarage of Siddington St Peter through the influence of bishop Nicholson and Clarendon, and he worked the

⁵ For Gregory, see C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution*, 434. Also Baddeley, *History of Cirencester*, 249 (inaccurate) and Beecham, *History of Cirencester*, 41. The Bull family pedigree is given in Arthur J. Jervers, *Wells Cathedral: its Monumental inscriptions and Heraldry*, (1892). Most of the descendants are through Anne and her husband Joseph Stephens.

⁶ In the register kept at Siddington St Peter, there are two entries:
1676 Dorothea Bull, the daughter of George Bull, Rector of this parish and Bridgett his wife was buried December the 26.
1677 Sarah Bull, the Daughter of George Bull and Bridgett his wife was buried the 12 of April. Both infants.

two parishes as one.⁷ Before the Restoration he was using the full church liturgy, and publicly married a couple on Sunday morning before the congregation, following the prayer book service, in defiance of what was still the law. We are told that he took very great care in conducting the services gravely, seriously, distinctly and with natural authority. His sermons were likewise very conscientiously prepared in full and then preached from a few notes: they still make good reading for their originality and scholarship.^{7a} Bull would carefully catechise all the children of his parish, and on one occasion he presented no fewer than fifty persons for confirmation out of sixty families.

His incumbency of twenty-seven years at Siddington was notable on two accounts; the writings by which he attained international fame, and the quarrel by which he obtained local notoriety. Of his writings, Macaulay in his *History of England* said, 'meanwhile almost the only important theological works which came forth from a rural parsonage were those of George Bull, and Bull never should have produced these works, had he not inherited an estate by the sale of which he was enabled to collect a library, such as probably no other clergyman in England possessed'.

His first book was completed in 1668, the *Harmonia Apostolica*, a Latin treatise, as were all his theological works with the exception of the *Corruptions of the Church of Rome*, intended for a wider public and so written in English. The *Harmonia* was published in 1670 and dedicated to his ordinary, William Nicholson. According to Professor Allison, Bull owed much to Nicholson's encouragement, although his 'patronage of Bull is surprising because he espoused very different theological positions'. In his dedication he writes, 'All who know me must be aware of the favour you have shown me. Through your aid especially my lot has fallen on this diocese, with sufficient provision: to you I am indebted for the leisure I have for these studies.' Its genesis was a few notes on St Paul and St James which he had drawn up some years earlier as 'a brief employment of an hour',

⁷ The vicarage house was a 'poor little cottage' according to Lawrence, used to accommodate part of his large family. It was shown on the 1778 Inclosure map but no longer exists. In Bigland it is stated that Siddington St Mary's church was pulled down under this Inclosure Act, and the two Siddingtons united: 'But the monuments that were in that church were removed to Siddington St Peter's'. Details of three family memorials are given, but in 1871 they had 'long since disappeared'. St Mary's Rectory was rebuilt about 1840, some of the 17th century structure perhaps being incorporated. A copy of the Inclosure Act is in the Bingham Library, Cirencester.

^{7a} His sermons were the subject of a lecture 'Bishop Bull, The Primitive Preacher', in W. H. Warburton *Classic Preachers of the English Church* (1878), in which, besides comments on his preaching, the author has interesting notes on his personal life, and his 'highly strung, affectionate nature'. Lawrence is a bit sarcastic about Bull's family life, but W. H. Teale, *Lives of English Divines*, 187-248 (1876) gives a kinder picture.

very probably with a view to combating Solifideism and Antinomianism in his first parish. His purpose was to assist theological students in their study of St Paul and the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and the sub-title further explains the content: *Two dissertations: in the Former of which the Doctrine of St James on Justification by Works is Explained and Defended: in the Latter the Agreement of St Paul and St James is clearly shown.*

In this first work of Bull, one is impressed by his thorough knowledge of the Church Fathers and other writings relevant to his theme. He quotes from Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Berhard, Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Fulgentius, Irenaeus, Jerome, Justin Martyr, Lactantius, Origen, Tertullian and Theophylact among the Fathers: there are also references to Essene writings, Epicurus, Ludovic Crucius, John of Salisbury, Plutarch, Pythagoras, the Platonists, David Kinchi, Maimonides: and among the Reformation and post-Reformation writers Cassander, Bucer, Melancton, Luther, the Confessions of Augsburg and Ratisbon, Grotius and Davenant. He quotes Latin, Greek and Hebrew extracts, but *pace* Nelson his knowledge of Hebrew was probably slight. Allison pointed out that Bull was not always accurate in his quotations and sometimes, as in the case of Davenant, seems to have misrepresented his sources.

Inevitably the book reflected the anxieties of its period. As Dr Allison writes: 'It is quite likely that the Reverend George Bull, writing in the turbulent Restoration period, conceived the Epistle of St James as a basis for countering the immorality of the times, and as a corrective to certain weaknesses in the Church with respect to justification. His concern about the behaviour of the common people is evident when, for example, he writes that ' . . . whosoever of the common people shall receive this doctrine undisguisedly delivered, namely, that faith is the only instrument of justification and that good works have no weight, are of no importance . . . you will never persuade him to perform any good works' (*Harmonia Apostolica*, 34)⁸. According to Dr Allison, again, Bull's work contributed significantly to the phenomenon of "spiritual entropy"—the dissipation or running-down of spiritual energy—characteristic of the post-Reformation period both in England and on the Continent,

⁸ Allison has an interesting note about one who anticipated his view of the "run-down" of English Theology deriving from the "Holy Living" school. "The Reverend James Garbett in his Bampton Lectures of 1842, argued that the Decline of Anglican Theology could be dated from the publication of Bull's *Harmonia*, but almost everyone else since the 17th century has been astonishingly uncritical of Bull's theology."

and the transition from the strong soteriology of Classical Anglicanism defended by Hooker, Andrews and Donne, to the "Moralism" of their successors of the "Holy Living" school. According to his thesis, this transition in the mid-seventeenth century led to the Deism of the eighteenth century and ultimately to the secularism of our own age.

Bull ended his *Harmonia* with the statement that the concurrence of grace and freewill was a mystery, not to be explained but believed: 'therefore by the authority and great wisdom of our excellent King (Charles II) it was ordered, that none of our divines in their sermons should attempt to explain this inscrutable mystery. But although we be ignorant of the manner, the thing itself must be firmly believed'. His book however did not silence controversy, but rather the reverse, and brought the country parson into the public eye.

An ejected minister, Charles Gataker, sent to bishop Nicholson a copy of the *Harmonia* heavily scored with his strictures, the chief charge being that of "Innovation". Nicholson handed these strictures on to Bull, without pressing him for a reply. Papers were prepared for an answer, but after a time Bull let the matter slip, the bishop dying in 1672. Another Non-Conformist, Truman, wrote a more moderate criticism in his "Endeavour to Rectify Some Prevailing Opinions" published in 1671, and in 1676 John Tombes, a virulent Anti-Paedobaptist, published "Animadversions upon a Book of George Bull's which he hath entitled the Apostolical Harmony".

From within his own Church the reaction was more significant, and Nelson says that 'great means were being used to hinder his preferment by some very eminent men'. He mentions three divines who singled him out for attack. One was Dr George Morley, at that time bishop of Worcester and later of Winchester, one of the most influential of the Restoration bishops, 'supposed to be a great Calvinist', who in a pastoral letter warned his younger clergy against the *Harmonia*. The second was Dr Thomas Barlow, Lady Margaret professor at Oxford and later bishop of Lincoln, 'a prodigy of learning and notable benefactor', who attacked Bull in some theological lectures. Samuel Thomas, Bull's erstwhile friend at Ubley and now chaplain of Christ Church, sent word to Bull about these lectures and together they waited on Dr Barlow to ask him to vindicate his attack; which however he was unwilling to do. The third critic was Dr Thomas Tully, a friend of Barlow and principal of St Edmund's Hall, besides being chaplain-in-ordinary to Charles II. A more resolute and pugnacious controversialist than the other two—he figures in controversy with Richard Baxter who once published "An answer to

Dr Tullies Angry Letter”!—he took up the cudgels when other divines were too sluggish or prudent to defend reformed doctrine; but in spite of his zeal it took five years for him to produce his *Justificatio Paulina* in 1674, to which Bull replied two years later in his *Apologia pro Harmonia*.

An underlying fear of Bull’s critics was that by apparently undermining justification by faith alone he was opening the way to Socinianism, and it was this insinuation which moved him to prepare a massive defence of the Church’s teaching on the Trinity, the *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*, published in 1685, five years after its completion. It was this work which, according to the Cambridge *History of Literature*, established him as ‘the one Caroline divine who achieved European reputation’.

The background of the *Defensio* was the spread of the Socinianism of which Bull had been accused, and which was an ever-present menace during Restoration times to the established order.⁹ The Socinian challenge was first taken up before the Restoration by John Owen, dean of Christ Church, and by Bull’s friend John Prideaux. At the same time there was a revival of Patristic studies, in which Dr Fell, to whom Bull dedicated his *Defensio*, was a leading light. Many new editions of the Fathers were published in England, and there was a parallel revival of Patristics on the Continent led by Melchior Cano, Denys Petau (Petavius), Huet, Henri Valois and Casaubon, a friend of Prideaux.

Bull’s *Defensio* was part and parcel of the orthodox counter-attack.¹⁰ He set out to write a book which would not only vindicate his own orthodoxy but would clearly set out the errors of Socinians and Arians on the territory which they had begun to claim as their own—the opinions and beliefs of the Church Fathers before the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. In his preface, Bull mentions that at the time of his *Apologia* (1676), he had ‘drawn out certain historic-ecclesiastical propositions concerning the divinity of the Son, in which, as I trusted, I had clearly shown the agreement of the ancient doctors, who preceded the Nicene Council, with the Nicene Fathers, as well concerning the consubstantiality of the Son of God as His co-eternity, the tradition having been derived from the very time of the Apostles: but that, owing to ill health, and other cares and business of sundry kinds, it had not yet been in my power to

⁹ Practically the first open convert to Socinianism was John Bidle, Master of the Crypt School, Gloucester, at the time of the Civil War. For Socinianism, see H. S. McLachlan *Socinianism in 17th century England*, Oxford, 1951.

¹⁰ There is a tremendous background to this work, which is well summarized in two chapters of Norman Sykes’ *From Sheldon to Secker*, pp. 165 onwards.

put together my scattered sheets, and bring to a completion my imperfect work'. He then described how he had been assailed on all sides with entreaties from learned friends, 'that I would apply both mind and hand, to finish, as speedily as possible, a work which was absolutely needed. For they gave me to understand that the writings of Christopher Sandius were every where in the hands of our students of theology and others, a writer who openly and unblushingly maintains the blasphemy of Arius as the truly catholic doctrine. . . .' This was in 1676. 'Overcome at last by their reiterated requests, (although I had not even then sufficient leisure, nor was my health strong enough for so arduous task) I again read over the works of the primitive fathers: the testimonies out of them bearing on my subject, which I had collected into my note-books, I again submitted one by one to a fresh and most searching examination . . . and lastly, I put in order the whole of this, as it were, rude and confused mass of my observations, disposing and arranging them in the easiest and clearest method that I could; and it is now more than five years since I finished the work, in the state in which it now comes out.' He tells us of his difficulty in getting a publisher—'the author was little known, and the subject difficult . . . nor was I myself—a person of narrow income and with a large family—able to bear the expense of the press'. It lay on the shelves of his bookcase until at the suggestion of a friend, he submitted it to Dr Jane, the 'very worthy Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford'. Dr Jane eventually published the book at the Sheldonian Theatre, where he had fitted up a press at his own expense.

The *Defensio* is divided into four books:

(i) On the Pre-existence of the Son, (ii) On the Consubstantiality of the Son, (iii) On the Co-eternity of the Son, and (iv) On the Subordination of the Son to the Father. Lawyer-like and with powerful persistent logic he sets out to prove that each of these propositions were held and taught by the catholic Fathers before Nicaea; but in spite of its very great learning, his forensic defence of the Anti-Nicenes would not commend itself today, where our understanding of early Christian doctrine is set in a much deeper historical perspective, and theologians, however orthodox, are much more willing to argue critically and to draw on the concept of development. To our minds, he was over-anxious to prove his case, and as he admits himself in *A Letter to the Countess of Newburgh*—Lady Poole's daughter—he sometimes used a "sharpness of style" for which afterwards he felt constrained to apologise, due to his 'zeal for the honour of God and of His holy truth'. On the other hand, in the circumstances

of the time; it was an extremely competent piece of work, in fact unique: and for it he received recognition when Oxford Convocation conferred on him an honorary D.D.—without payment of the customary fees.

To give an idea of its "rating", one may quote Newman, writing in 1838 in his *Essay upon the Seven Epistles of St Ignatius*: 'To read a particular Father to advantage, we must divest ourselves of modern ideas and prejudices, and study theology. The works of Bull, for instance, or the Fifth Book of the Ecclesiastical Polity, or Laud on Tradition, will give quite a new character to our studies.' Or again, in 1690, when England and the Church of England were far more isolated from Europe than they are today, his work was appreciated and used by one of the greatest preachers and bishops of the French Church, Jacques Benigne Bossuet, in his controversy with the Calvinist Jurieu, when he 'sent the latter to the learned Protestant Bull'. Bossuet cited the *Defensio* in his *Histoire des Variations*, and some years later, when Bull had published his *Judicium Ecclesiae Catholicae* in 1694, his book was carefully read by Bossuet, and circulated amongst the most learned of his fellow-bishops. He later 'received the unfeigned congratulations of the whole clergy of France, assembled there at S. Germaine, for the great service he had done to the Catholic Church, in so well defending her determination of the necessity of believing the Divinity of the Son of God'. This was in 1700, on the eve of war between Louis XIV and William III. It is also of interest that Mabillon included Bull's works in his list of books suitable for monastic libraries in France.

In the village of Siddington there is an old Cotswold stone house standing on the corner near the village shop, which perpetuates the name of a former occupant, John Roberts, Quaker. It is the name of Roberts, not Bull, which is remembered in Siddington today.¹¹ The source for Roberts' life is the memoirs written by his son. 'Thus considering,' he tells the reader, 'that it would be a great pity these singular providences of the Almighty should not be recorded for the benefit of posterity, I was willing, for my own perusal, and that of my family, and some few particular friends, to commit them to writing. In the doing of which, respecting the several conferences my father had with the bishop, and others before-mentioned, I have been careful to pen them down in the same words they were then expressed in, as near as I could recollect, or at least to retain the

¹¹ John Roberts was the son of a farmer who occupied a small estate of his own at Siddington. His mother was sister to Andrew Solliss, a magistrate, of the same neighbourhood.

genuine sense and purpose of them. Which reader, if they tend to thy confirmation and encouragement in a course of true Christian piety, I have my end: who am

Thy Sincere friend,

Daniel Roberts, Chesham, 4mo, 1725.'

This was modestly and honestly spoken, but in reading Roberts's story one cannot place uncritical reliance upon the account he gives of the dispute between Bull and his father, bearing in mind that the memoirs were written forty-two years after his father's death in 1683, concerning events which had taken place before and around 1670. This is especially true as regards portrayal of characters, where one's bias can most readily betray one's judgment. On the other hand, the author himself had had personal experience of persecution and no doubt his memory was sharpened thereby, for when his father was dying in 1683 he was serving a two-year term of imprisonment in Gloucester gaol for refusing the oath of allegiance. The *Memoirs* give us a picture of Bull as remembered by a family of Quakers, but there is no means of checking the accuracy of the portrait apart from its general consistency.

As the *Memoirs*, with their account of the three "conferences" between Roberts and bishop Nicholson over his refusal to pay tithe to Bull, are readily available, there is no need to reproduce its contents here. The conferences, especially, make interesting and entertaining reading, and the surly confrontation between Bull and Roberts at his house, when Bull refuses to drink Roberts's beer—"it is full of hops and heresy"! What is very curious is that Nelson, while he refers to Quakers in the parish, makes no reference to this quarrel about tithe, although he must have known about it, as he was tutored by Bull about this time. He says 'the only Dissenters he had in this parish were Quakers who resisted all the endeavours he made to bring them into the Church, for they were as obstinate as they were ignorant, who by their impertinent and extravagant manners caused him no small uneasiness. And of this number was one who was a preacher among them, who would frequently accost Mr Bull'. One must conclude either that Nelson decided to keep silence on an affair so derogatory to his hero's image, or that Daniel's story contains much exaggeration. To bishop Nicholson, Bull was a sound, able and orthodox clergyman, one of the best in his diocese, even if his theological outlook was rather different to his own: but to Roberts his parishioner there was another side—"proud, ambitious, and ungodly". Nelson the apologist is at pains to show that he was the precise opposite, very godly and in spite of great abilities completely

lacking in personal ambition. Perhaps the truth was that at one point of his career his sense of frustration and exasperation with a leading parishioner, who refused tithe and kept interrupting the services, brought out the bully in him. Even the best and most conscientious clergy were guilty of harsh measures towards the Quakers, and it was natural that they should fear them, for a general withholding of tithe would have taken their livelihood away. It is only in retrospect that one can appreciate that the Quakers were helping to forge the principle of religious freedom, and not simply causing civil disorder.¹²

Bull was installed prebendary of the sixth stall in Gloucester cathedral in 1678, and this was his sole preferment until he was given the rectory of Avening in 1685, in succession to Robert Frampton.¹³ The change to Avening was welcome, for the value of the living was double that of Siddington—£200 per annum. Nelson tells us that having been compelled to sell his patrimonial estate he was in a bad way financially, with his family to support and the price of books he needed for his scholarship. While at Avening he rebuilt the parsonage house 'necessary for the convenience of his family and the benefit of his successors'—in 1683 the house was so ruinous that Frampton exchanged it for Standish, leaving behind what he had received there for its rebuilding. Bull found the people very loose and dissolute, and disaffected towards the Church of England, for the position of the clergy was less assured during the critical years of James II's reign and the first years of his successors, and Bull had to overcome a good deal of suspicion and "original aversion" before winning his parishioners' confidence or even getting them to have their children baptised. He gave a sermon every Thursday afternoon to instruct the people, awarding five shillings to each poor person to encourage attendance. The same afternoon his assistant curate instructed the children. Eventually their attitude 'changed into love and kindness', and there were general regrets when he and his family left: 'I am creditably informed that to this day they never name him without expressions of gratitude and respect', says Nelson; 'The above panegyric is in strange contrast to the account of Dr Bull given by John Roberts' comments the local historian of Avening, A. T. Playne.

His efforts at moral reform at Avening are of interest. He

¹² For other accounts of Quaker persecution in Gloucestershire, see Besse, *Sufferings of the Quakers*.

¹³ In *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries* there is an account of how Bull came to be offered the living by its patron, Mr Sheppard, when he was at Astrope-Wells, drinking the waters for his health.

suppressed the wake which was held annually on Holy Cross day. It had become an occasion for lawlessness: first he attacked it from the pulpit, and then procured an order of Quarter Sessions to suppress it, believing as he did that it aggravated the dissolute instincts of the people. At some time during this period he was a magistrate, either in 1689 as Nelson states, or later between 1698 and 1701; his name appears in the records for Quarter Sessions for 4 April 1701. It would be of interest to know which, for John Sharp refers to his being turned out of the commission of the peace by some party men in Gloucestershire, 'for no other reason that I could hear of, but his zeal in prosecuting immoral men according to the Statutes'. Perhaps we may connect this with the activities of the Societies for Reforming Manners, which were being promoted largely through lay and non-conformist initiative, and in which the bishop of Gloucester of the time, Edward Fowler, wished the clergy to take greater interest. Much of the trouble may have been caused by soldiers coming home from the European war: the clergy were encouraged to form a moral police force, passing information against common-swearers, drunkards and profaners of the Lord's Day.¹⁴

The year after his move to Avening, he was given the archdeaconry of Llandaff, in June 1686; according to Teale 'bestowed upon him by Archbishop Sancroft, whose option it was, and principally in consideration of the great and eminent services he has done to the Church of God by his learned and judicious works'. In accordance with the common practice of the time, made necessary by the poverty of the Welsh Church, he continued to hold Avening *in commendam* for another 18 years, and one wonders how he divided his time between the two. If he followed the example of some of the Welsh bishops, it is unlikely that he gave much time to his archdeaconry. At Avening he continued his learned activities with two other major works. The *Judicium Ecclesiae Catholicae*, published in 1694 at Oxford, was an important work directed against M. Simon Episcopus, the friend and successor of Arminius at the divinity chair of Leyden, who, though personally orthodox, 'railed against the fourth century creeds as precipitately framed from excitement, if not fury, and of a maddened and unblessed party spirit'. The *Judicium* set out to prove that the divinity of our Lord in its absolute sense was always crucial to the Faith, rather than a matter on which Christians held differing views before the Ecumenical Councils.

¹⁴ *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*, II, 4-5, has an interesting extract from the *Life of Ken*, 732, which describes a passing visit Ken paid Bull at Avening, and the slightly touchy feelings which existed between the Nonjurors and the High-Church Jurors at that time.

Again, a very thorough piece of scholarship, with its study of the creeds and Rule of Faith as well as the teachings of the Fathers, it was carefully read by Bossuet, who sent his congratulations. But he added in his letter a challenge: 'Give me leave to acquaint you, there is one thing I wonder at, which is that so great a man, who speaks so advantageously of the Church, of salvation, which is obtained only in unity with her, and of the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit in the Council of Nice, which infers the same assistance for all others assembled in the same Church, can continue a moment without acknowledging her. What is it he means by the term "Catholic Church"?"

Bull's answer was given in his best-selling *Corruptions of the Church of Rome* in 1700, in which he not only claimed that the Church of England was the 'best and purest Church at this day in the Christian world', but attacked the Roman Church for 'erecting an ecclesiastical monarchy', for adding new articles of faith at the Council of Trent, for corrupting the primitive liturgy, for fostering the cult of the blessed Virgin Mary, and—his final fling—for inculcating the superstitious worship of the sacrament, 'at the elevation of the Host, to be adored by the people, as very Christ Himself under the appearance of bread, whole Christ, Theanthropos, while they neglect the old sursum corda, the lifting up of their hearts to heaven, where whole Christ indeed is.' Here indeed the Protestant Bull speaks out, for although a High Churchman, he was totally out of sympathy with Roman Catholicism, and his mistrust would have been in no way lessened by the follies of James II. The *Corruptions* contains some glorious pieces of polemic against Monsieur de Meaux and the Church of Rome. So it is not surprising that Bull became quite popular with the subjects of King William when he wrote in this vein; nor that 'since the *Corruptions* was written in English, it failed to vindicate his position in the eyes of Frenchmen'.

When Bull became bishop of St David's in 1705, he was seventy-one. He owed his promotion to archbishop Sharp, who had been chaplain to the earl of Nottingham, and although a moderate himself, and bound by many ties of friendship to the Low Church school of bishops which predominated in William's time, became more and more associated with Tories and high-fliers in the new reign. He used his influence with the queen over the appointments to bishoprics and other high offices accordingly, and when, in the autumn of 1701, a new bishop of Bangor was required, Sharp proposed Dr Bull, who was turned down on grounds of age and nationality. 'If Dr Bull had been a Welshman,' Archbishop Tenison wrote to Sharp,

'I would have been for him, tho' indeed he seemed to me last session exhausted and broken.' (Incidentally, he seems to have suffered from ill-health during much of his life.) The rest of the story has been told by Dr Tindall Hart in his *Life and times of John Sharp*. 'In 1704 and 1705 the high-churchmen William Beveridge and George Bull were nominated respectively to the sees of St Asaph and St David's. Both were Sharp's personal choices, and were certainly very learned and deserving candidates for episcopal honours; although it might have been argued that their great age would prevent them from ever becoming very active bishops. But the archbishop was determined on their enthronement. He long strove unsuccessfully to secure Bull a bishopric; but, as he informed Bishop Lloyd, he had so sung his praises to Queen Anne in March 1703/4 that she could not decently pass him over any more'.¹⁵ He was consecrated in Lambeth Chapel on 29 April 1705.

The diocese of St David's comprised a vast area from St David's Head to the borders of Shropshire and Herefordshire, and until 1852 reached into Monmouthshire. The Welsh Church suffered from a state of chronic disorder and disorganisation, exacerbated by the Great Rebellion. At most times there was a complete lack of effective supervision and the only bishop to identify himself thoroughly with his diocese at St David's seems to have been the Welshman, William Thomas (1678-82). The Church was impoverished, and besides the practice of holding English livings *in commendam*, many livings were held in plurality within the diocese. "A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry", and when Bull arrived the truth of the dictum was everywhere apparent, with much dilapidation of buildings, insufficiency and inefficiency of clergy, and widespread lay-impropriation of tithe.

Bevan¹⁶ writes of Bull that when he succeeded he was 'in such a failing state of health as to incapacitate him for the efficient discharge of his duties'. He took up his abode at Brecon, the palace at Abergwili being then much out of repair: but he occasionally went for change of air to Abermarlais. His biographer, Robert Nelson, records the profuse charity of the bishop at Brecon. 'As he was unable to get about his large diocese, even for visitations, he appointed commissioners, of whom his son-in-law, archdeacon Stephens, was

¹⁵ The letter written by Sharp to Lloyd is in the Lloyd-Baker muniments at Hardwicke Court, and sheds an interesting light on how episcopal appointments were made in the reign of Anne.

¹⁶ Apart from W. L. Bevan *Diocesan Histories: St David's* (1888) materials are meagre for this period. There is an unpublished thesis by J. V. Davies "The diocese of St David's during the first half of the 18th century" at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

one, to deliver his charge at various centres.¹⁷ He encouraged the Welsh language, requesting the clergy to promote the sale of Welsh prayer books among their parishioners, and recommending them to read occasionally for their own edification a chapter of the Welsh version of the *Whole Duty of Man*. The language issue was indeed a complex one, as the upper classes preferred English, and even the lower classes used a language intermixed with English words and phrases. Teale refers to Bull's efforts to restore tithes which had been alienated by lay impropiators. 'He considered with Sir Henry Spelman and other great names, that the alienation of tithes was the scandal of the Reformation and he often related instances of God's vengeance upon some families of his acquaintance who had received them.' When he moved to Brecon, he repaired the College chapel (founded by Henry VIII) and afforded the means for restoring the daily service, at which he was always present. Teale also says that he accomplished some good work at Carmarthen, where he afterwards resided. His household was strict: for example, he only allowed constant communicants in his service, and no absenteeism was permitted. Of his charity, every Sunday he gave a dinner to 60 poor persons and a shilling to twelve old people each week, following Jerome's dictum that 'it is the bishop's glory to provide for the wants of the poor'. Characteristically, his charity was linked with the provision that the recipients 'would submit to learn the principles of the Christian religion, and be ready and willing to give an account of them'. Apart from his diocesan activities, Warburton mentions the speech he made in the House of Lords during the debate on the Act of Union on behalf of the Church of England—his first and last, after the previous speaker had over-commended the Presbyterian model: it made a great impression, not least because it was spoken "off the cuff".

On the whole, there is not much that one can say about this last phase of his life, overshadowed as it was by old age, partial blindness and severe rheumatics, and one wonders how much satisfaction he got from this belated recognition of his abilities. There may be truth in what Nelson says, that in the first instance he had declined the appointment, feeling the objection of his age, and only yielded to the importunity of friends in accepting it.

His last illness was brought on by a cold and coughing fit, with violent haemorrhage. 'The evening before he departed,' wrote Nelson,

¹⁷ Bull's Visitation sermon, Charge to his Diocese, and Circular letter to the clergy were incorporated with a Pastoral letter by Fenelon in *The Clergyman's Instructor*, which went through several reprintings and became a standard work of Pastoralia for the clergy.

'his son-in-law, Mr Archdeacon Stephens, arrived from a great journey, upon the news he received of his dangerous illness. The Bishop embraced him with great satisfaction, when he raised himself upon his bed to give him his blessing.' He told him 'he had endured a great deal, that he did not think he had so much strength of nature, but that now it was near being spent, and that in God's good time he would be delivered'. In his dying hours he kept close to his Master, 'his eyes and hands frequently lifted up towards heaven, and sometimes tears and smiles succeeding each other on his countenance'. About 9 o'clock in the morning of 17 February his spirits began to sink, and his speech faltered: and a few minutes after, without any visible pain, he resigned his soul to God. The last word he spoke was Amen, to the commendatory prayer. He was credited with the desire to be buried at Llandoverly by the side of Rhys Prichard, the author of "Carwyll y Cymry", to demonstrate his love of the Welsh people, but in the event he was buried at Brecon at his request that 'where the tree falleth, there let it lie', and there is a memorial to him in the cathedral.