

A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED PASSAGE IN THE LIFE OF JOHN WARNER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER FROM A.D. 1637 TO 1666.¹

By the Rev. JAMES LEE WARNER, M.A.

THE time on which a man falls unavoidably stamps an impress on all his future history. Hence the "natale astrum" is pictured by the poet as the "naturæ deus humanæ," deciding the "albus an ater" of all that is to follow. And, without pressing the sentiment to its strict and legitimate conclusion in the case now before us—without seeking to justify the suicidal policy of Laud and his associates—I claim for a distinguished ancestor this merit at least, fidelity to the party with which he was linked by circumstances, through evil as through good report. Royalist as he was by conviction, he stands out a regular royalist according to the form and pressure of the seventeenth century.

In the course of a long life he experienced some strange vicissitudes. In honour, as a royal chaplain, he attended Charles to Edinburgh; in dishonour, as Bishop of Rochester, he obeyed a summons to Newport, as the unhappy monarch's adviser; and when that forlorn Conference was rudely interrupted, he witnessed the crowned head falling at Whitehall, and the divinity that hedges kings outraged and blasphemed. No wonder, then, that the scenes passing before him stirred the depths of his nature, and wrung from him strong expressions, which even the sanctity of his cathedral could not always restrain.

Few men's lives have ever been longer; few were ever more laborious. And yet history has taken small note of his labours. Fuller names him as the Prelate to whom the Bishops in Parliament confided the defence of their order, and designates him accordingly, as him in whom "dying Episcopacy gave its last groan in the House of Lords."

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His Treatise on the Sale of Church Lands, written at the royal mandate, exhibits his pen, like his voice, ready in the service of his brethren.² And his share in the most voluminous commentary, then extant, on the Holy Scriptures, called forth from the Editor of Poole's Synopsis a deserved acknowledgment. Uniform liberality marked his steps from the earliest. One of his first cures, the Parish of St. Dionis Backchurch, London, still retains a silver sacramental flagon—the Cathedral Church of Canterbury a costly font—as the Bishop's gift. His journey with the king to Scotland seems to have suggested the endowment of two scholarships for natives of that country at Baliol College, Oxford; and his connexion with Magdalene College is attested by its library, in which the donor's portrait thus records the gift:—

QVOT, WARNERE, TIBI SPECIOSA VOLVMINA ! QVANTUM
HÆC TIBI SPLENDOREM BIBLIOTHECA REFERT !

But chiefly in his own diocese his charities will be remembered—for the asylum for clergymen's widows connects his name with Bromley as its chief benefactor.

The passage in Warner's life, on which I would now dwell, is best prefaced by an extract from his earliest biographer, who tells us, that “in the second year of Charles' reign, the Parliament sitting, he preached a sermon at Whitehall, on Matt. xxi. 28, in which he urged the consequence of that Parliament's proceedings so far, as very highly provoked some members of both Houses; from the effects of whose resentment nothing but the dissolution of that Parliament could secure him.”³

I cannot confirm this anecdote by producing the discourse in question; but there seems little doubt that a bold and uncompromising style, especially in the pulpit, was the cause of Warner's promotion, A.D. 1637, to the See of Rochester. Here, we may be sure, he did not disappoint his patrons, as is testified by an anonymous writer in a libellous publication of the day, called the Scot Scout's Discovery. “All Lent long his majesty's chaplains, instead of fasting preached fighting, and instead of peace preached punishing of rebels; among whom wily Warner of Rochester, having got a

² Church Lands not to be Sold, was the title of this treatise, which was printed

in 1646, and a second edition in 1648.

³ Biogr. Britann., vol. vi. part ii. p. 4159.

bishopric for making one sermon, he gave the king another gratis, wherein he so railed at the rebels, that his patron hath promised him a better bishopric."

It is held, "the greater the truth the greater the libel." Whether it be so, or not, I am able in this instance to measure the extent of the libel by producing not only the discourse itself, but a correspondence arising from it. No sooner did it attract attention, than the Primate, Archbishop Laud, requested to have a copy of it.

The Bishop's answer to the request sounds strange to modern ears. Was it empty adulation? or was it an expression of homage to one whom the writer counted worthy of double honour? I am inclined to deem it the latter. At all events, it runs as follows:—⁴

"BROMLEIGH,
"March 8, 16²²½.

"My most honor'd and good Lord,

"In a dutiful obedience to your most gracious commands, I here humbly present to your merciful judgment the Eccho of those Voices which I fear, for their manifold imperfections, might better have been forgot. But I hold it neither discretion nor modesty in me to dispute, where your wisdom and love are pleased to lay on the charge. However, I hope your Grace will give me leave to crave your accustomed pardon, that I have sent this poor body so naked and rude. For your Grace's summons came to me so late last Friday night, that I had no more time than to awake it out of sleep, and to restore it to its former senses, without kembing or washing the very face. And dare your Grace believe me, I had enough to do to shift it out of a foul into a clean shirt, though this but made of rags. And Bromley is so far from being able to furnish it with a silken coat, which in respect of your entertainment it should have, that it will not so much as afford it a leathern doublet, or jerkin of vellum, as though all too good for this poor wretch. But your Grace hath a derivative power from God to draw good out of evil, which grace I here humbly implore. And then, tho' these voices shall purchase me some enemies, yet I shall not therewith be moved, especially since that my heart bears me

⁴ This remarkable letter of Bishop Warner's is preserved amongst family papers at Walsingham Abbey, Norfolk.

witness, that neither hath his sacred majesty, nor our holy mother, a subject or servant of my rank more ready to lay down his life for either, than is

“ Your Grace’s most humbly affectionate servant,
“ JOHN ROFF.”

The sermon thus distinguished by the approbation of the Primate would be deemed in these days a model of prolixity. It starts from the position that Psalm lxxiv. describes the desolation of the temple in the days of King Antiochus, proceeding to draw a parallel on the 24th verse: “ Forget not the voice of thine enemies ! ” The enemies are, of course, the Puritans : their voices, the string of objections which they urged against the Church of England—whether against priestly orders, vestments, idolatries, endowments, and the long catalogue of real or unreal abuses ! These voices, under eight heads, the preacher undertakes to demolish, and he does so in the main successfully.

Sometimes, by a quaint expression, he conveys a pithy meaning ; as where incentives to rebellion are called the “ gladius oris, which devours worse than os gladii,” or where they are likened to “ Shimei’s venomous breath, which was able to fill Sheba’s seditious trumpet.”

Sometimes the line of argument is worked out clearly and forcibly, as where the Puritan objection to the pulpits of the Establishment is thus stated and answered :—

“ But these great priests, they do not their duty ; they preach not. Resp. (1) Be preaching a part of the duty, yet not the whole : neither was the maintenance only for preaching. (2) But what is preaching ? Is it nothing but saying good words upon a text out of a pulpit ? Where then shall we prove that the Apostles preached ? (3) But may not the grave, wholesome instruction, exhortation of apostolical men—as weekly epistle—as word of mouth—whether publickly or privately, go for preaching, as in St. Paul’s epistles it may appear it did ? (4) Or do ye not hold that he doth the work of the carpenter, who directs and sets others to work, unless he himself be daily hewing of the logs ? Or unless the pilot row or work, but only steers and directs, is he not worth the title and pay of a pilot ? (5) Or, lastly, when, under God’s law, the Levite at 50 years of age was exempt from bodily service in the temple, yet shall the High

or Chief-Priest, neither at 50 nor 60, have any dispensation? 'Cast me not away in the time of age! forsake me not when my strength faileth me!' Ps. lxxi. 8."

Or, to give yet another illustration of Bishop Warner's style. By a dexterous repartee he sometimes overwhelms his opponent.

The Puritan has often urged the poverty of the Apostles as a precedent to be invariably followed. To this the Bishop answers; "If this be the voice, upon one condition, we may say, Amen. Be ye as the primitive Christians, who laid all at the Apostles' feet, and we are content to be as poor as the Apostles. Which if ye refuse, then I perceive your desire is to keep yourselves rich, and to make us poor; and thereby prove us Apostles, but yourselves no Christians. And I would hardly trust to be at his courteous finding, who would take from me that which is mine to the end he might maintain me."

In a memoir like the present, a complete abstract of a sermon would be considered out of place; but it is hoped that the foregoing extracts are not irrelevant to the objects of archæology, as recalling important arguments which were urged by the good Bishop in his cathedral church of Rochester 200 years ago, at a solemn crisis, and which otherwise would have been forgotten.

In this same discourse the writer has preserved an anecdote current in his time, to the effect that when Henry VIII. and Charles V. were riding through London (A.D. 1522), they were greeted with the popular voices;—"Vivat defensor uterque—Henricus fidei—Carolus Ecclesiæ!" "A happy presage this" (he adds), "sung in England 100 years ago, and many 100 years after may it continue—Carolus Ecclesiæ!" This was indeed the key-note of all our author's writings, and if the presage failed (as fail it did), it was not for want of a loyal subject, or a bold and able advocate.

The only printed discourse of this Bishop, which I have been able to discover, is among the collection of tracts presented by George III. to the British Museum. It was preached on Quinquagesima Sunday, almost on the morrow of the tragic 30th of January; and appeared soon after, (as well it might) anonymously; for had the authorship been avowed, assuredly another prelate would have fallen to the axe of the executioner. This extremity of trial was, how-

ever, graciously averted. We may, in the divine recompense for a given line of conduct, frequently trace an analogy—a repayment in kind (as it were) from the hand of retributive justice. And so it was here. Warner had been faithful to his principles, and his fidelity was fittingly rewarded. He lived to a great age; and after “the battle and the breeze” he came back to his old moorings, reposing on the still waters of his episcopal palace at Bromley. He is noted by history as an instance almost solitary of a bishop who exercised his functions before as well as after the Commonwealth; and in his eighty-first year his sermons give proof that “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” In that year (1662) he held a visitation, and issued articles of inquiry for the reformation of the ritual, and, preaching on the 11th of February before his assembled clergy, he thus alludes to the events of the preceding quarter of the century:—

“It is twenty-five yeeres since I visited in this place, and in twenty of these the Bishop’s power hath been utterly taken away, and in the two last yeeres much suspended; no mervail then that the Bishop hath work inough to set all in order that is left undone or done amiss; yea, or to tell you all in particular that is to be corrected, when, as to this, I have to my best understanding given you of my clergy, churchwardens, and sidemen, articles to be inquired into by you, and by you to be made knowen to us, that therby we may by the best of our ability study to set all in order in due time; for Christ when (Mar. xi. 11) he went into the temple to see the profanation therof, the text notes that he did not correct all the same day, but that he took another time to do it, and so much more must I.”

To the Bishop, thus engaged in the oversight of his diocese, the final summons came. And it found him, not only watching, as ready to give account, but it found him ready to confess that he was but an unprofitable servant. About this time he made his will, and wrote his own epitaph; in how opposite a spirit to that which fulsome adulation has since inscribed upon his monument, let his own words testify!

HIC IACET CADAVER JOHANNIS WARNER
TOTOS ANNOS XXIX.
EPISC : ROFFENS :