



ARCHAEOLOGIA AELIANA.

I.—THE CORRESPONDENCE OF GEORGE DAVENPORT, SOMETIME RECTOR OF HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING.

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I must take you back first of all to the middle of the seventeenth century. The period was a bitter time for this part of the country. When the Scots came into England in 1640 they held the bishopric of Durham to ransom, and ate up the district in their whole year's occupation of it. That was the first trouble. Many of the more important clergy fled south, leaving their goods to be seized by the invaders. If the storm passed by for the present it was only to fall again with a second Scottish invasion after the battle of Marston Moor in 1644. The grip of the Scots was not relaxed until 1647, and misery reigned more or less supreme. Parliament took the church into its own hands and presently sold all the lands of dean and chapter, and of bishop of Durham. The band of high church clergy so sedulously planted at Durham was dispersed. In most parishes the use of the Church of England was suspended, though in other ways some kind of church order was maintained. When the Protectorate in 1653 took the place of the Parliamentary Republic, there was apparently no improvement for church people, despite Cromwell's professed toleration. Church lands and property generally were administered by trustees. The most deplorable feature in it all was the treatment of the old tenants of the bishopric lands by the new owners or lessees of those lands. These new men mightily oppressed the tenants and sometimes turned them out and brought beggary upon them.

I do not delay over those days. It is a picture whose unhappy details it would not be very hard to fill out with considerable amplification. My present point is that the dark times were a terrible reality in these parts, bringing much trouble not only upon the clergy themselves but also upon the people of Durham in particular, and to some extent of Northumberland. I direct your attention to the churchmen who were in hiding until this tyranny should be overpast. Among them was a group whose names were destined to be conspicuous in the history of the Church in general and of Durham in particular. There was Cosin, Prebendary of Durham since 1624, a man who had held high preferment in the North. He made his way to France and ultimately settled in Paris, where he collected books, many of which are now in his library at Durham, and can, Dr. Fowler thinks, be recognised by their binding. He had been a man of wide fame during the Church controversies of the reign of King Charles, and had attracted to him at Cambridge and elsewhere not a few of the more ardent young churchmen of the period. Among these was William Sancroft, a native of Fressingfield, in Suffolk, where he had a patrimony of substantial worth. Sancroft was a prominent Fellow of Emmanuel College, whilst Cosin was Master of Peterhouse about the years 1635-40. A life-long friendship sprang up between the two men, the older and the younger. Still younger was George Davenport, who belonged to Great Wigston, in Leicestershire. I have some evidence to prove that he was a member of Sancroft's college, and very probably a pupil. Others say that he was an Oxford man, though the assertion may be due to some confusion between two George Davenports. At all events Davenport was known to Sancroft at least as early as 1654, when his age was twenty-three, for a familiar letter of that date is extant in which the young man pours into the sympathetic ear of his friend the story of his bereavement by the death of his father. These three men

are just specimens of the many friendships that subsisted in those stern days of trial. Cosin had little or no private means besides his preferment of which he was now stripped. Sancroft was able to live at home, and Davenport was fortunate enough to be introduced by Sancroft to a family called Gayer, where he made himself useful, possibly as tutor and certainly as a friend of much worth. The Gayers were wealthy and generous. Gifts not a few were sent by the Gayers through Sancroft to Cosin, and these were supplemented by Sancroft from his own store. Thus Cosin, writing from Paris in 1659, acknowledges with gratitude the gift of one hundred and nineteen crowns from Sancroft, and adds: 'It may well be that in this particular I am likewise beholden to Mr. Gayer, of whose generous freedom and bounty I have had divers testimonies heretofore.' It was a cheering gift, for Cosin at the moment was blinded by cataract, and was awaiting with some apprehension the operation which a French oculist was about to undertake, nor did he know the extent of his calamity.

But the darkness drew away next year, not only from Cosin's eyes, but from England generally. The Restoration, in May, 1660, found Sancroft in Italy, where he had been touring with Mr. Gayer, and within a brief time Cosin, Sancroft and Davenport were all in England once more. It is to the excellent habit formed by Sancroft of preserving his friends' letters that we owe most of the facts which I have told you about the trio, and also the further facts which are the main subject of my paper. Sancroft's correspondence, which he put together in the later and still sadder days of his retirement, is probably the most voluminous collection of letters extant that belongs to the seventeenth century. Most of it is in the Tanner MSS. at the Bodleian Library. Many scattered letters have found their way into the Harleian Library now in the British Museum. I have had the Oxford letters noted down for some time, but I

was not aware until lately of the valuable addenda in London. I have now gone over all the Sancroft correspondence that has to do with Durham, at all events, and it is upon these contemporary letters that I chiefly rely in what I am putting before you. Mr. Ornsby, in the Cosin Correspondence, printed a very few letters to Sancroft but omitted others. The D.N.B. has consulted a very few of those that I have chiefly in mind to-day, and, so far as I know, their local allusions have passed almost, if not quite, unnoticed. Eighty letters from George Davenport have been preserved, and a large number from Dean Sudbury of Durham, Prebendaries Wrench, Basire, Brevint and others; and also from Miles Stapylton, Cosin's man of affairs. Independently of these letters, of course, we know that Cosin became bishop of Durham, Sancroft prebendary of Durham and at first rector of Houghton, and George Davenport rector of Houghton. Sancroft and Davenport alike were appointed chaplains to Cosin, but in the absence of Sancroft at Cambridge and at York, and then at St. Paul's, most of the work fell upon Davenport, who was one of the most indefatigably busy people in the whole diocese. His letters from Durham, Auckland, and Houghton to Sancroft range from 1662 to 1675, with some gaps in certain years for which I can not account.

Let us now proceed, with the light that these letters give, to see what George Davenport's correspondence supplies in the way of information about his work and surroundings. He arrived at Auckland at some date in 1662, and was well pleased with the neighbourhood: 'I like this country well. . . I am like to do well here if I may guess at my health by a good stomach, and most profound sleep. I never waked in the night since I saw London.' When winter came on and the weather turned cold, he describes how 'here is a certain sort of fuel much like to our Cambridge coal which when it burns they call ingle, and it warms us well.' Meanwhile Sancroft had been

collated to the rectory of Houghton, but had not seen it. Davenport rode over from Auckland to make a survey and to report. An invaluable curate called Cook and a factotum named Philpott were in possession. Davenport's impression of what was soon to be his own benefice was most favourable: 'Your living I like wondrous well. The Church stands in the midst and the extremities are about 3 miles distant every way. The chancel is in good repair but wants beautifying. The out-houses, as barns, stables, cowhouses, kiln, granaries, dovehouses, etc., I like wondrous well, being of stone and well slated, and a strong wall about the house, but the house I like not and assure myself you will not. It shows very well at two miles distance, but very ill it is contrived. All the stairs are of stone and winding, the windows small, the walls of it thick, and the doors low, and the floors from room to room not even but by steps. The hall, I believe, may be repaired for 100*l*. and the house for as much, but not floored even—I mean particular rooms which formerly were covered with rushes, which you will not like. The people, they tell me, are excellent good as to conformity: about 3 keep on their hats at church, but one of the best men never comes thither. In fine, change not for a bishopric worse than Sarum.' After his perambulation, Davenport went to the village inn and had supper before returning to Auckland: 'We supped very well for 2*s*. 6*d*. I mean the curate and I, and the Clerk, and Schoolmaster. John Philpott would have had you to pay for all, but I would not and was very glad it was so, when I saw the shoulder of mutton, and pie and such like reckoned, I thought, for nothing, for we drank 3 pints of claret besides ale. By this you may guess it a plentiful country.' This visit was paid in June and Sancroft was to come north in September. His prebendal house no longer exists in Durham, but lay then between Canon Body's house and Mr. Simey's. The building had gone to rack and ruin during the troubles. Davenport surveyed it and whilst staying at the

castle in July inspected it carefully: 'Since I came hither I have liked your prebend's house better, and find that a great part of the ruins adjoining that I was told before belonged to the next house is yours, so that the charge will increase.' It will probably cost 200*l.* before it is furnished. 'I wish you a large dividend to enable you to build.' From this point for the next four years the prebendal house was a subject of constant reference in the correspondence. Building was going on everywhere in the neighbourhood. 'My lord is hugely busy in building both here [at Auckland] and at Durham,' says Davenport during the course of this same summer, and it is no wonder that Davenport caught the perilous infection and became a builder. His friends' houses and his own were his absorbing interest for years to come, keeping him in constant activity, in constant anxiety, and in constant straitness of means.

Sancroft arrived in Durham in September, was instituted and inducted, and was entertained by the gracious old dean Sudbury. His visits to Durham, however, were rare, for he was soon made master of Emmanuel, and then dean of York, and rather later on dean of St. Paul's. He obtained a dispensation from his residence at Durham in order to give himself up to his work in London. In this action he anticipated Secker, another rector of Houghton and prebendary of Durham, who retained his prebend with various southern preferments. To this continuous absence from Durham we owe a large number of Davenport's letters which otherwise would never have been written. Davenport spent Christmas at Auckland with the bishop, watching the progress of the chapel and entertaining neighbours to the number of two hundred. The extent of Cosin's building operation provoked some criticism and certainly impoverished the bishop, who found it hard to get the finances of the see into any good order. 'Stone and lead,' said Davenport, 'will be easily kept in repair, and the bishop does not build his houses as other men do.'

A gap of two years follows the spring of 1663, during which, it is probable, Davenport was with Sancroft either in the north or the south. Sancroft became dean of St. Paul's in 1665, and the letters at once recommence. This preferment caused the resignation of Houghton and the acceptance of the benefice by Davenport. It was a memorable year, alike for the Dutch war and the great plague. Locally it was memorable for the completion of the first stage of Cosin's great works in Auckland and at Durham. Auckland chapel was consecrated with great pomp on St. Peter's day. 'The Dean and Prebendaries and many clergymen but abundance of gentlemen and gentlewomen, were present and had a great feast made to them.' Davenport preached. 'In the end of the sermon,' he says, 'I moved all the clergy and laity to be persuaded by the sight of the beauty of the Chapel to repair and beautify their own churches and chancels, and pressed it so fair on them that at length I onerated the bishop's conscience and his chancellors and archdeacons with care of seeing it done.' In August all men's minds were in anxiety at the spread of the plague. It was already at South Shields. Two houses were suspected in Gateshead. Sunderland had two fatal cases. Instant measures were taken to prevent any spread of infection, and with some success, for as late as December no infection had reached the city of Durham.

Davenport was busily engaged. It is not clear whether Barwick or Sancroft, his immediate predecessors at Houghton had seriously taken in hand the rectory which Davenport had described three years before as unsatisfactory. The new rector gave ample time and money to its reconstruction. He had made considerable progress by the winter, getting up the outside walls. 'I'll build leasurably in the spring,' he says, 'and finish the inside of what I have done as I see occasion.' Sancroft's prebendal house was making fair progress, and his faithful friend, reporting assiduously on it, was dividing his interest between the operations at Durham and those at Hough-

ton rectory. Davenport made request to Sancroft for some of the Durham materials, which were carted across to Houghton. But there was some disappointment before the rectory was completed: 'I began to pull down the end of the parlour southward,' he says, 'and the wall adjoining eastward. When I had laid the top a little open I found the chimney of the parlour and the room next the dining-room in wretched state, and took them down. This made a way under the roof that covers the last named room (the stoned hall between the parlours) and there I found the slates hung upon rotten laths without pins, insomuch that I took all that down from the dining-room eastward.' This demolition ended by leaving nothing of the old house but the chapel and parlour adjoining, with the rooms over it and the old larder east of the kitchen. Further details follow which I need not now give. It must be enough to say that the work was pushed on, and by the summer of 1666 Davenport had carried over to Houghton what he calls the rigging tree which he had taken from Sancroft's demolished house. He hoped to cover the building with lead by Michaelmas. The building of the rectory depended upon his own tithes and the punctuality of his tenants at Cocken and elsewhere, which gave much ground for anxiety. As if he had not enough on his mind, however, he had already embarked upon a plan of refounding Houghton hospital, for which he sought the goodwill and help of the Gayers and Sancroft and others. Eventually Mr. Lilburn, of Sunderland, came forward and helped him with a considerable portion of the funds required, and the work was eventually completed in 1668.

The summer of 1666 witnessed the execution of the work on the chancel at Houghton which the rector had warned his predecessor four years earlier would require to be done. But all these operations had been expensive, and at Michaelmas Davenport was 400*l.* in debt and wished to borrow until the rents came in at Martinmas: 'For borrow of some one I must,

or else my house must stand, which I would by no means, though I was sure never to live in it. It will be the greatest work I shall do whilst I live, and is like to jostle out some lesser pious works designed by me. My Lord is out of all patience when they talk of my building (for he saith none but fools build without money, and I now begin to be of his mind), and Sir Nicholas Colé, to mend the matters, tells him oft for building he is outgone by none but his own chaplain. I have told many that are now building in this country that they must meet me at the eating of a goose when all is done.'

Davenport was unmarried, and Durham people wanted to know what all his building meant. 'Almost every week,' he says, 'I am likened, as they call it here, to one body or other, widows old and young, maidens rich and poor, fair and foul.' All this nonsense is described to Sancroft. 'At least,' says the rector, 'I must have wedding gifts then,' and suggests 'presents of napery for smocks and gorgets' to furnish his wife. But whilst all this building and banter were going on in the north, a terrible calamity befell Sancroft when the great fire of London destroyed his cathedral and his deanery at St. Paul's and sent him forth to live where he could. Durham folk were sympathetic. The dean offered some of the dispossessed minor canons a home at Durham. Davenport was solicitous for his friend, and in one letter tells him that a new deanery will cost Sancroft at least £1,500, and that his own buildings in Houghton have cost him that amount, despite the cheapness of materials. Meanwhile Davenport was putting further touches to his Houghton work, adding a bowling-green by filling up a pond and so ministering to the enjoyment of his neighbours, who had suggested this means of amusement. Apparently the house had been more or less habitable since September, 1667, when a letter from Sancroft reached him telling of the conclusion of peace with the Dutch. 'I received yours in the midst of my workmen, harvest men, joiners, smiths, masons, setters-

up and pullers down.' When they heard of peace they rushed off to the church and would have rung for joy had not the churchwarden luckily borrowed one of the bell-ropes for a cart-rope. The chapel, however, was not taken in hand until 1671. The foundations were laid in the summer of 1671, but the building was not completed for five years after that, as we shall see. We have no reference to the house-warming when the rectory was finished, and the inference is that Sancroft was himself present and had no need of a description of the proceedings.

The hospital had been opened in 1669 and its inmates duly installed. After this the building of Bow church at Durham was a concern to Davenport. He set to work to raise funds for this object. 'We are about to build Bow church by the cathedral, the expense whereof will amount to about 400*l*. I am chief beggar, and I think I shall get the money.'

Into the details of this new scheme we must not now enter. One of the prebendaries had said of him, 'besides his own church and house, other churches and hospitals have him for their advocate or beggar, and a bad beggar he is, and is daily emboldened by good success.' His letters tail off from this point and leave a large gap between 1672 and 1675. We have therefore no details from him of Cosin's death nor of the accession of Crewe. One more letter of 1675 survives, which fitly gives a parting glimpse of his work at Houghton so far as building went: 'My chapel is now fully finished and a good organ erected in it, and reasonably well furnished with altar cloths and cushions. And I have before Michaelmas to finish all the outwalls of the house, which I have or shall make all new, and then I trust I shall give over all building whatsoever, unless I build a tenant's house upon Howden Hill. And it is time, for I have been a builder full ten years, and am almost glutted, yea and almost burst too.'