

## A MEDIAEVAL BISHOP AND HIS LONDON ADVENTURES

*Bishop Reginald Pecock, A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought*, by V. H. H. Green, M.A., formerly Scholar of Trinity Hall, and Lightfoot Scholar of the University of Cambridge. Fellow of St. Augustine's College, Canterbury. Assistant Master at Sherborne School. Thirlwall Prize, 1941. Published 1945. Cambridge University Press.

ANY light that can be shed on mediæval London is welcome. We have far too little knowledge of the background of its civic history and of the habits and customs of its citizens, as contrasted with the doings of the Kings and Nobles who lived in or near its borders. But it is quite clear that the close of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century was a period of great importance in London and the country generally; when it looked as though there might be a genuine Renaissance in Life and Letters, a Reformation in Church manners, discipline and even in doctrine, and social changes of an epoch-making character. The Black Death and the Peasant Revolt, the writings of Chaucer, the teachings of Wycliffe and of John Ball, the outlook of *Piers Plowman*—all seemed to point to far-reaching change and reform. But the deposition of Richard II, the usurpation of the Lancastrians, the French Wars and the consequent unrest leading up to the thirty years of civil strife effectively stopped what might have been a great period of prosperity and progress. In this era, so full of promise and disappointment, a very interesting product of the times was Reginald Pecock, whose outlook has been so differently interpreted by those who have written about him. A very complete analysis of his life and activities, his works and opinions, his triumphs and his disasters, has recently been written by V. H. H. Green. It has a particular interest for Londoners, as a considerable part of Bishop Pecock's life was spent in London; and some of the most dramatic incidents of his career were enacted there. Some of those who earlier discussed Pecock have regarded him as a precursor of the Reformation; some as a defender of the *Via Media* between Rome and Wycliffe; some as a bulwark of Protestantism against aggressive Catholicism; some as an ultra-papist; some as an enlightened advocate

of toleration in times peculiarly intolerant; a Renaissance man in a land still content with its ancient ways and thoughts; essentially the Aristotelian, scholastic type of mind, a thorough-going rationalist. The author of this latest Life finds the mere spectacle of a mediæval bishop on trial a thing of outstanding interest; he feels that Reginald Pecock "fits into the vast dramatic background of fifteenth-century history, and in so doing helps us to understand that fascinating but difficult age," and that there are two aspects which demand consideration, "the Pecock who lived, wrote and thought from c. 1390 to c. 1460-1; and, on the wider canvas, the Pecock who reflects the feelings, moods and aspirations of the time in which he was living, who points the way to the age that had passed and to the age that was yet to come."

Pecock, after early training at Oxford, where he became a Doctor of Divinity, and Fellow of Oriel College (like Newman four centuries later) and came into contact with Lollard opinions and views, obtained the patronage of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Humphrey was a great hunter-down of heretics, and a generous patron of Pecock's University. As he was *amator virtutis et reipublicae sed praecipue clericorum promotor singularius*, it seems that to him was due Pecock's promotion to be Rector of St. Michael Royal and Master of Whittington College, London, in 1431. Pecock had been ordained the year before by Bishop Fleming of Lincoln, the founder in 1427 of Lincoln College at Oxford, intended as a counterblast to the Lollards. St. Michael Paternoster Royal derives its double name from two adjacent Lanes; Royal being a corruption of "La Rirole," a lane inhabited by wine-merchants from a town of that name near Bordeaux. The church is in Vintry Ward, and was rebuilt by Richard Whittington, Mayor of London, in 1396, 1397, 1406 and 1419. He founded a college of St. Mary and the Holy Ghost, which was not completed at the time of his death in 1423; but he had arranged that the Rector of the Church was to be Master of the College, and he left enough money with his executors to complete and endow the college, which has given its name to College Hill. It was to consist of the Master, four fellows, all clerks who had obtained their M.A., two other clerks, the parish clerk, four choristers and an Alms-house for 13 poor folk, to be called God's House Hospital. The college, over which Reginald Pecock presided for thirteen years, was dissolved by Henry VIII, but the Almshouses

remained in College Hill till 1808, when the Mercers' Company moved them to Highgate Hill. Various rules for the charity were made either by Whittington himself, or by his executors, John Coventry, Jenkin Carpenter and Will Grove. The election of Master was to be made by the four fellows, and reported to the wardens of the Mercers' Company, and by them to the Prior and Chapter of Christ Church, Canterbury, patrons of the living. The stipend of the Master was ten marks a year, not very adequate, and the executors granted a further £53 a year until the complete endowment of the College in February, 1424. *Richard Puringland seems to have been the first master* from November, 1424, when Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, granted a licence for the erection of the College and Hospital. The master was bound by the statutes to pray for Richard Whittington and his wife Anne, her father and mother, King Richard II, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, King Edward III, Walter de Waldeliof and Jean his wife, Philip Taylour and Sabina his wife, King Henry VI and Archbishop Chichele. This is a curious mixture, and it would be interesting to discover why Henry IV and V were omitted.

Jenkin Carpenter, who figures among Whittington's executors, is our old friend John Carpenter, Town Clerk of London from 1417 to 1438. Carpenter was the founder of the City School, which remained almost in abeyance for 400 years, and the author of the *Liber Albus*, that mine of London mediæval lore. In his will, dated 8th March, 1441, he leaves Pecock twenty shillings, and asks him with William Lichfield to see that Carpenter's "good or rare books" should be put into the Guildhall Library for the "profit of students there and those discoursing to the common people."

Pecock held strong views on the question of endowments, and wrote with some vigour on the subject in general, and possibly of his emoluments as Rector and Master in particular. In his book *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun* he says that all parish churches should be properly endowed, and complains that it would seem that the rule of the King's law of England is more reasonable and more pure and more avoiding the said inconveniences and mischiefs than is the spiritual law of the Church—God set here help and amendment soon. And in *The Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy* he returns to the charge. His remarks, in modern spelling, are as follows: "And peradventure this cause moved devout temporal lords

in the old days for to so richly endow bishops and other states of the church; and therefore no man may argue and prove that, as by strength of her rich endowing, that the states of the church ought or should be laid into worse plight than they should be, if they were poorer endowed; or if they were not endowed with immovable goods at all. Would God the bishop writer of this book had so sure knowing of his salvation as he hath experience upon the truth of this now of him affirmed sentence."

It was a very great change from the comparative quiet of Oxford to the busy commercial environment of London. In July, 1431, the month in which Pecock succeeded Puringland, the church was formally recognised by the Pope as a collegiate church, "with honours, privileges and insignia after the manner of other collegiate churches, and grants indult for the said master, chaplains, clerks and choristers to use and enjoy the like habits, honours and pre-eminence as other persons of such college churches."

Some evidence as to the insanitary customs of the time from which the terrifying experiences of the Black Death had not yet released the Londoners is given in a letter written in July, 1431. It gives orders that in future burials are to take place on the north side of the church and no longer in the first cemetery near the Rectory, because "on account of the smells and infections of the dead buried there, the said master could not at certain times live at the said church."

For thirteen years Pecock remained at St. Michael Paternoster Royal, with its double duties, and he evidently came into frequent touch with business men in the City. It was a very thrilling time in which to live in London with the streets fast becoming the battlefields of rival factions. The young King Henry was only ten when Pecock became Rector, and had been crowned just two years before. When there was trouble between the English in France and the Duke of Burgundy, the citizens of London murdered a number of Flemings in the city as a method of revenge on the Duke. In January, 1437, the body of Katherine, widow of Henry V, rested at St. Pauls on its way from Bermondsey Abbey to Westminster Abbey for burial there. Her second husband, Owen Tudor, was not able to attend his wife's funeral as he was imprisoned in Newgate, from whence he escaped in the following year. In the same year which saw the death of Henry V's widow there also died in London Joan of Navarre, widow of Henry IV. The Duchess of

Gloucester, the good Duke Humphrey's wife, was convicted of necromancy and plotting against the King's life, and had to perform three days of elaborate penance through the streets of London. Her husband was the head of the war party in the country in opposition to Cardinal Beaufort, who saw the futility of further waste of money in useless campaigns.

From 1435 to 1442 Gloucester, who had been Pecock's patron, was prominent in the struggle for supremacy, but in the latter year Henry VI came of age, and Gloucester's prestige, already lowered by his wife's disgrace, almost completely vanished. It is rather remarkable that no reference to any of these striking events occurs in any of Pecock's numerous extant writings. Perhaps there may have been some in those books which have disappeared. Here are a few items of London interest which the author of Pecock's *Life* has collected. He uses London Bridge to point a metaphor, and refers to people going on pilgrimage to the college of Saint Katherine beside London on the vigil of the saint. There are dealings with prominent Mercers, the company responsible for Whittington's College, over which Pecock presided, and other well-known business men. "John Wockynge, citizen and vintner to Master Reynold Pecoke, Clerk, Andrew Michell and Robert Fytlynge, citizens of London, gift of all his goods, chattels and debts moveable and immovable, quick and dead." Here is another deed of 26th March, 1443, which is of considerable interest in its relation to Middlesex. "John Forde of Yver Co. Buckingham to Master John Somerseth Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reynold Pecoke, William Lichfelde, Sir Edward Wyche, Richard Hakedy, Thomas Bourgoyne, Gentilman, William Sommann, their heirs and assigns quit claims of all lands rents reversions and services called Osterley and all lands etc. in the parishes of North Wode, Istelworth, Braynforde, Heston and Hese Co. Middlesex belonging to Thomas Osterley."

In *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun* Pecock speaks of "harder and darker evidences in pleas of land, in pleas of debt and of trespass, in reckonings to be made of receivers and rent gatherers in the account of an audit, in bargains making of great merchandises and in reckonings made thereupon, as a man shall soon learn if he take 'homlynes' (intimacy) with mercers of London." In his *Folewer to the Donet*, a kind of grammar which Pecock wrote, a son speaking to his father says "I know well, father, that now late in London a book of your

writing which the cunningest and wisest clerks in 'Ynglond' make full much of and prize it much, and in which they find no evil, was scorned and reproved of mercers servants, when the book came into their hands and was of them read."

One of the big problems of the Middle Ages arose from the accepted views of the period on the subject of Usury. In an age when the virtue of poverty was still highly valued most religious folk condemned usury and undue riches. Wycliffe, in his writings on the 7 *Deadly Sins*, condemns in the strongest terms the man who must be wicked, or he would not and could not have been poor yesterday and rich today. Pecock is quoted as condemning usury with great vigour—"in usury the lender, by menacing that he will not else lend driveth and compelleth the borrower to assent for to pay a sum of his own goods besides the sum borrowed, and that for the borrowing or the lending, which is not reasoneth cause to so compel, for it is against law of nature of reason and of charity." But R. H. Tawney, in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, takes a different view of Pecock, whom he styles as a rationalist. Pecock seems to take a fairly modern view of riches, when he says that Christ taught us that it is possible for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, "that is to say, with grace which God proffereth and giveth . . . though he abide still rich, and though without such grace it is over hard to him being rich to enter. Wherefor, followeth hereof openly, that it is not forbidden of God any man to be rich." But he then goes on to moderate his views so much that R. H. Tawney says "The embarrassing qualification at the end—which suggests the question, who then dare be rich?—is the more striking because of the common-sense rationalism of the rest of the passage."

The teaching of the early 15th century church on the subject seems clear—"Merchants who organize a ring, or money-lenders who grind the poor, it regards not as business strategists, but as *nefandae belluae*—monsters of iniquity . . . when the price of bread rises . . . strong in the approval of all good Christians, they stand the miller in the pillory . . . and the parish priest delivers a sermon on the sixth commandment, choosing as his text the words of the Book of Proverbs, 'Give me neither riches nor poverty, but enough for my sustinance'."

Church Councils of the 13th century forbade clergy or laity to take usury, and laid down rules for punishing offenders. Clergy who lent money to persons in need, took their property

in pawn or accepted any profits beyond the sum loaned were to be deprived of any office they held. Usurers were not to be given communion or Christian burial, they were not to have houses let to them, and any magistrates who assisted such folk were themselves to be excommunicated. Any one who tolerated usury was to be condemned as a heretic, and usury was to be interpreted in a very wide sense. But it was not easy to detect usury or to find means of dealing with it. There was no doubt about the need for punishment but it was not always possible to decide who should punish the usurer. The City of London made byelaws against "unlawful chevisance" and the House of Commons asked that the Lombard brokers should be banished. R. H. Tawney makes an interesting comment when he reminds us that "the Church was an immense vested interest, implicated to the hilt in the economic fabric, especially on the side of agriculture and land tenure. . . . The persecution of the spiritual Franciscans, who dared, in defiance of the bull of John XXII, to maintain St. Francis' rule as to evangelical poverty, suggests that doctrine impugning the sanctity of wealth resembled too closely the teaching of Christ to be acceptable to the princes of the Christian Church." He goes on to say that "the basis of the whole mediæval economic system . . . had been serfdom or villeinage . . . the very essence of feudal property was exploitation in its most naked and shameless form. . . . The Peasants' Revolt in England, the *Jacquerie* in France, and the repeated risings of the German peasantry reveal a state of social exasperation which has been surpassed in bitterness by few subsequent movements."

These are some of the problems which faced the folk of Pecoek's day, and we have not as much knowledge of his outlook as we should like to have. We do not know how he spent those thirteen years, but the large number of books that he wrote suggests that a good many were written before he exchanged his London rectory for his Bishop's palaces at St. Asaph and Chichester. Of all his two dozen books, only five survive and three of them are incomplete. V. H. H. Green sees good ground for thinking that *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun* and *The Donet* were completed before 1444, and that "his ideas had been systematized during his tenure of the mastership of Whittington College." He also collected while in London material for "an all-inclusive survey of the Christian religion written in particular relation to the needs of the century in which he was living . . .

a mode of informing his hearers of the orthodox faith which he was vindicating, and of refuting and converting heretics."

While Pecock was in London, the last five years of his stay there were very much influenced by the fact that his friend, Vincent Clement, was Rector of the nearby church of St. Martin Vintry, which stood at the corner of Royal or Queen Street and of Upper Thames Street. Clement, "*venerabilis et egregius vir*," was orator to the good Duke Humphrey, and he spent a great deal of his time passing to and fro between England and Rome and acting as ambassador and collector of Papal dues. It was largely through his influence that Thomas Bekington became Bishop of Bath and Wells, and was able to prove a second benefactor to Lincoln College at Oxford. Clement himself was a very serious pluralist and held more than a dozen benefices, more than half of them at the same time, though they were as widely separated as England, France and Spain. He was a man of wide influence, friend of King and Pope, and he may well have helped Pecock to his first bishopric, that of St. Asaph. After Pecock had been a bishop for three years he added to the irritation which his theological views were producing by a sermon which he preached at St. Paul's Cross in 1447. It was an apology for the non-preaching, non-resident bishop. He emphasised the notion that there were more important duties for a bishop to perform and was so pleased with his sermon that he circulated it among his friends. Thomas Gasgoigne and one or two Cambridge dons attacked Pecock for what they called his heretical opinions, and Millington, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, warned followers of Pecock when he too preached at St. Paul's Cross. Pecock was also attacked by Thomas Eborall, his successor at Whittington College, by Gilbert Worthington, rector of St. Andrew's Holborn, and by William Lichfield, rector of All Hallows the Great and St. Mary Magdalen, Old Fish Street, all prominent in the London life of the day.

In March, 1450, Pecock was advanced to the see of Chichester, to take the place of Adam de Moleyns who had been murdered at Portsmouth by a mob of angry sailors "for abridging of their wages." It was a time of great strain and stress for all, with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, the rebellion of Jack Cade, and the first battle in the devastating Wars of the Roses. The struggle between York and Lancaster was beginning, and Pecock had chosen the wrong side. There were riots organised

in London by the Mercers Company against foreigners graphically described in the Paston Letters. Pecock was becoming more and more unpopular, and he complains very bitterly that his adversaries, behind his back and with great rudeness, attack him because he does not always agree with the teaching of the Fathers of the Church. He had important work to do on the Privy Council, and his association with the Lancastrians aroused considerable resentment against him. While still at St. Asaph he is mentioned in a document closely connected with the county of Middlesex. It is dated 12th October, 1446, and runs as follows: "Whereas the King's servant, Master John Somerseth, Chancellor of the Exchequer, built of late a chapel on a piece of ground containing 20 feet in length and 40 feet in breadth, lying at the west end of the bridge of New Braynford, Co. Middlesex . . . the foundation stone of which chapel the King laid with his own hands . . . the said John intending to found on his piece of ground, held of the King, contiguous to the said chapel, a hospital for nine poor men and a gild in honour of the nine orders of the holy angels; the King has granted in frank almain to Reynold, bishop of St. Asaph, Nicholas, bishop of Llandaff, Master John Somerseth, Master Peter Hyrford, Master William Lychfield . . . etc., the said piece of ground on the late ancient highway, with the water of Braynt and the soil thereof pertaining to the ancient wooden bridge . . . and licence for them to found a gild." A letter which Reginald Pecock wrote in 1455 to Sir Thomas Canning, Mayor of London, was so *valde suspiciose perturbacionis fidei et insurreccionis in regno Angliae*, that it was forwarded to the King; and it is evident that Pecock's political and theological views were bringing him into serious disrepute. John, Viscount Beaumont, complained to the King of the presumption of "this pecok this Bisschop of Chichester," and intimates that he had also written to the Archbishop, Chancellor, other prelates and members of both Universities.

Pecock had been in London a good deal during these years, helping in the consecration of two bishops, and acting as proctor at a convocation in London for the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The blow which led to his downfall actually occurred when, at a council of lords spiritual and temporal, 22nd October, 1457, the latter refused to continue if Pecock was allowed to be present. Archbishop Bouchier instructed him to appear before him at Lambeth on 11th November, bringing

his books with him. His nine books, some of which he had corrected and amended, were handed to twenty-four doctors for their report. Lowe, Bishop of Rochester, who had been prior of a London house of Augustinians during part of Pecock's stay in London, was one of his assessors, and he was a convinced Yorkist, one of the delegation sent by the Londoners to offer the crown to the Duke of York. Another was Bishop Waynflete, who had been an assessor when Pecock's sermon at St. Paul's Cross was challenged. When the assessors presented their report, it formed the basis of a semi-official condemnation which Archbishop Bourchier instructed Dr. Pinchbeck, rector of St. Mary Abchurch, to read at St. Paul's Cross on a Sunday in November.

It is not clear whether the trial of Pecock on 28th November, 1457, took place at Westminster before the King in Council or before the Archbishop at Lambeth. Three Bishops took part in the discovery of his heretical views, his many errors, and especially the fact that he had "vehemently and shamefully censured and denied the true and holy words of the blessed Jerome, Saint Augustine, of that holy Doctor Gregory, and other saints." In either case Bourchier addressed Pecock, condemned him for denying certain clauses in the creed, especially about the descent into Hell, explaining why they were left out of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, ordered him to make a public abjuration, and threatened him, if he is obstinate, by saying that he will become "fuel of the fire as well as the food of the burning." Bourchier reminded Pecock of Augustine's comment that without the authority of the Catholic Church he would not believe the Gospel; and of Gregory's statement that the Four Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon were as much honoured as the four Gospels. Bourchier continued "It behoves us to cut you off as rotten flesh, to drive you from the flock as a scabbed sheep." Pecock realised the grimness of his situation, a choice between burning as a heretic ("I must be burned to death") and becoming a byword through his recantation. He chose the latter alternative and was ordered to read his retraction at St. Paul's Cross on 4th December, 1457. Bishop Brunton, of Rochester (1373-89) emphasises the importance of this centre of church life in England. "In that place there is a greater devotion and a more intelligent people, and therefore it is to be presumed greater fruit. Moreover, because each bishop of

England has subjects as parishioners in London, therefore when he gives instruction there it is as though he were preaching to his own people and the other churches in England in addition." According to Gasgoigne, Pecock's most deadly foe, there were 20,000 spectators of the Bishop's humiliation, but this may be an exaggeration.

Pecock, arrayed in his bishop's robes, followed the Archbishop, Lowe Bishop of Rochester, a former London priest, Kempe Bishop of London and many others, and he knelt before the Archbishop and read his recantation: when this was done he handed three folios and eleven quarto versions of his writings to the executioner, who threw them into a specially prepared fire. We are told that "the London crowd, possibly spurred on by the drama of the moment, pressed forward, and would, had they been able, have forced the bishop to follow his literary compositions into the flames." Here is a very interesting and early example of the truculence of a London mob. Pecock, watching his lifework being burned, exclaimed "My pride and presumption have brought these troubles and reproaches upon me."

His subsequent doings have no connection with London but they may be briefly summarised. He was sent to Canterbury and thence to Maidstone; and then thinking better of what he had done he appealed to Pope Callixtus III, who ordered the Archbishop to reinstate him in his bishopric. But all the force in Church and State combined against Pecock; Callixtus died, and Pecock was imprisoned for the remaining years of his life at Thorney in "a secret close chamber (having a chimney) and convenience within the Abbey, where he may have sight to some altar to hear Mass and that he pass not the said chamber. To have but one person that is sad and well-disposed to make his bed, and to make his fire as he shall need. That he have no books to look on, but only a breviary, a mass book, a psalter, a legend, and a Bible. That he have nothing to write with; no stuff to write upon. That he have competent fuel according to his age, and as his necessity should require. That he be served daily of meat and drink as a brother of the abbey is served when he is excused from the freytour and somewhat better after (the first quarter) as his disposition and reasonable appetite shall desire, conveniently after the good discretion of the said Abbot." Forty pounds a year was allotted for his upkeep.

Reginald Pecock died at Thorney Abbey in Cambridgeshire about 1460-1, just as the Yorkists were supplanting the Lancastrians on the throne. It was suggested by Ball and Foxe, who both regarded him as an early Protestant, that he was "privily made away," and there is a chronicle which says:

His bookes brent at Paule's Cross  
 He in Newgate kept  
 All hys liffe after, for the heresys  
 He had kept.

But it seems more probable that he died at Thorney. All copies that could be found of his books were burned, and twenty years after his death King Edward IV wrote to the Universities coupling together Wycliffe and Pecock as equally dangerous and venomous and members of the same sect. The King also wrote to Pope Sixtus IV asking for his aid in putting down the heresy. Both Universities seem to have been tainted with "Pecockism" which was regarded as a danger both to Church and State.

The early Statutes of both King's and Queens' Colleges at Cambridge included a clause ordering every member of the College at the end of his three probationary years to take an oath against the damnable errors of Wycliffe and Pecock. It is distinctly ironical that Pecock, who devoted so much of his writing to reasoning against the Lollards, should have been classed with the very folk he was trying to convert. His famous *Repressor* was at once an attack on Lollardy and a defence of just those tenets of the Catholic Church which Wycliffe so vehemently attacked.

He is a most interesting historical figure, and this latest study of his life and thoughts brings out his character and his tragic downfall with exemplary clarity. Reginald Pecock is a London figure of real interest and importance in one of the most critical periods of English history.

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