

CHRISTOPHER DODINGTON¹

A PATRON OF ST. SEPULCHRE'S CHURCH,
HOLBORN

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BOTH Newcourt² and Hennessy³ agree that before the patronage of this church was exercised by the President and Scholars of St. John's College, Oxford, in 1683, it was in the gift of Christopher Dodington.

As neither of these authorities affords any clue to Dodington's identity, it may be useful to say that he was the second son of John Dodington, Esquire, of Dodington in the County of Somerset, where the family had been settled for many centuries.

Dodington is a small parish about ten miles from Bridgwater, pleasantly situated under the northern ridge of the Quantocks, where Dovesborough Hill overlooks a large tract of land and the coast of Wales. The manor house is an ancient building near the church and bears on its front the date 1581. Both here and at the church the arms of the Dodingtons—sable, three hunting horns argent, stringed gules—may still be seen.

Christopher Dodington (b. about 1605) and his elder brother Francis (b. about 1604) were admitted to Wadham College, Oxford, in 1621. Their father had recently died, but their grandfather, George Dodington, survived till the year the boys went to college. When he made his Will in 1618 he appointed his two grandsons, Francis and Christopher, sons of his son John, late deceased, his sole executors. The boys were then about 14 and 13 years of age.

On 26th May, 1622, Francis, "son and heir of John Dodington, Esquire, deceased" was admitted as a

student at Lincoln's Inn, where, on 18th October of the following year, he was joined by his brother, Christopher.

But little is known of their life at the Inn. It is, indeed, recorded in the *Black Books*,⁴ under the date 1626, 22nd June, that "For the difficulty which the Masters of the Bench have found in the discovery of the first move and occasion of the affray made in this House between Mr. Arthur Pyne of the one part and Sir Francis Dodington and Mr. Harbottle Grimston on the other part, and to prevent greater mischief: It is ordered that all further proceedings therein shall cease."

This entry reveals the fact that the young law-student was already a knight, an honour conferred by King Charles I at Hinton, on 27th September, 1625.⁵ Not long after he seems to have left the Inn and devoted himself to the care of his estate and local business, for on 7th November, 1630, he was appointed Sheriff for the County of Somerset.

Meanwhile his brother Christopher devoted himself assiduously to the pursuit of the law and was called to the Bar (as the *Black Books* show)⁶ on 3rd February, 1631.

The next important event of his life was undoubtedly his marriage, the license⁷ for which as granted by the Bishop of London on 24th June, 1634, is worded as follows:—"Christopher Dodington, Esqre. of Lincoln's Inn, batchelor, 30, and Mary Gouge, 20, daughter of the Right worshipful William Gouge, D.D., of Blackfriar's, London, who alleges and consents—at St. Anne Blackfriars."

Although the bridegroom was some ten years the senior, the marriage seems to have been both happy and fruitful, for they had two sons and four daughters.

Little more is heard of Christopher or Sir Francis till the outbreak of the Civil War. The former, with lawyer-like prudence, did nothing intentional to bring him into conflict with the Parliamentary party, but the latter was an out-and-out supporter of the king, and although

he escaped with his life, his property was confiscated, and he was forced to lead an exiled life abroad until the Restoration. The State Papers for the period are full of references to his activities which would be tedious to recount. Briefly, he commanded a brigade in the royal army and suffered all the ups and downs of the campaigns—now winning, now losing—till the fighting was over and his name was inserted in the Bill for the sale of Delinquents' Estates, and he was sentenced to perpetual banishment and confiscation. It was alleged against him that "after the taking of Woodhouse in Somerset, he hanged the husband of Katherine, the widow of Hugh Miller, and her son after barbarously mangling them alive." If this may be believed, no wonder his name was anathema to the Roundheads, yet even then they showed some pity, for when in 1651, his wife, Alice, Lady Dodington (widow of Sir John Sydenham) petitioned the Government for the continuance of the allowance of one-fifth of her husband's sequestered estate on the plea that she "wanted bread," they granted her request.⁸

Collinson⁹ informs us that "Sir Francis upon the destruction of the royal party fled into France, and there maintained himself several years by selling English knives and buckles; till at last a French widow took compassion on him, and married him, and by her he had two sons both bred up in the French army. His first wife was Anne[*sic*] daughter and heir of Sir William Hoby, and relict of John Sydenham, Esquire, by whom he had John, his son and heir. . . . He could never be persuaded to ask anything of the Crown, having engaged himself (as he always declared) on a mere principle of conscience."

Attractive as Collinson's narrative may be, it is difficult to reconcile it with the facts. Alice, Lady Dodington's petition of 1651 has already been mentioned, and the State Papers assert that she died on 20th January, 1653. At the Restoration her husband promptly

addressed a petition to the Government stating that "for his fidelity to the King's service he was declared delinquent and his estates confiscated (for which he prays) that a proviso for his relief may be inserted in the Bill of Indemnity."

The story of Christopher Dodington's troubles has now to be told. It lasts over a period of eleven weary years—largely spent in confinement at Peterhouse—from 1643 to 1654, and occupies considerable space in the records of the Parliamentary Committees for the Advance of Money and Compounding.

Although, as has already been stated, he seems to have assumed a neutral attitude, it was only natural that, as the brother of so violent a partisan as Sir Francis, he should be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion. Whatever his motive, he seems to have thought it safer to leave the Metropolis for a while, and, in February 1643, he went from London to his mother's at Dodington, where, it must be admitted, he committed an act of indiscretion which led to most of his later misfortunes.

Meanwhile his case was being investigated by the Committee for the Advance of Money, and in the spring of 1644 he was brought up in custody to pay his assessment. His father-in-law, Dr. William Gouge, having helped him out with half the amount, the residue was respited till further order. In the autumn of 1645 he was ordered to pay £400 in full or be committed to Peterhouse. Apparently he could not raise the money, for in the following October it was ordered that he was to be brought up from Peterhouse before the Committee for Compounding, at the Goldsmiths' Hall. Here he said in his defence that "during the time he was staying with his mother at Dodington, his name was inserted in several Commissions issued either from the King or the Prince's Council, but he conformed not thereto"—that is to say, it was done without his knowledge or consent. On this the County Committee were asked to certify whether he had acted on the Commission of Oyez and

Terminer or was only a spectator. They seem to have been satisfied with his answer and gave a favourable report—leaving him alone for a while, but the Committee for the Advance of Money “seized, sequestered and inventoried the goods in his chamber in or near Whitehall.”

The game of battledore and shuttlecock between the various committees proceeded merrily for several years, each having its innings in turn, and to follow the score in every detail would obviously be waste of time.

In desperation, poor Christopher appealed to Parliament to commiserate his case. In July, 1653, he alleged that by an order of the County Committee of October, 1649, he was permitted quietly to enjoy his estate, and by the Act of Pardon ought to be free from sequestration, not being under sequestration on 1st December, 1651. He could get no relief though he had attended to his case for nearly seven years.

Again the committees, refreshed with this new stimulus, resumed their labours, and came to the conclusion at last that the petitioner should be discharged.

But after the elapse of a further three months and nothing done, Christopher made a final appeal to the Protector himself on 25th January, 1654. He declared that his case was before the Committee for sequestrations, who, in respect of the votes were equal, ordered it to be reported to both Houses: *the charge was only for sitting on the bench at the executing a Committee of Oyes and Terminer of the late King in February, 1644, he being neither a Commissioner nor acting as such.* The stay of his rents was ordered till the Parliament's pleasure was known, and now Parliament was dissolved! He therefore begs confirmation of the discharge recommended by the Committee of Petitions.

Cromwell's answer was characteristically short and speedy. On 23rd February, 1654, came the welcome Minute, “Sequestration discharged, there being no sufficient cause for it.”

What the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn had been doing all this time is set down in their *Black Books*.¹¹⁰ On 8th February, 1646, it is recorded that Christopher Dodington is one of divers gentlemen who have for these two years last past absented themselves from the Commons of the House and whose chambers shall be seized to the use of the House. In November following, his name again appears in a list of those who have discontinued from this House for four years and are considered to have adhered to the enemy against the Parliament. But the provison is added that "Inquiry must be made concerning Christopher Dodington and others whether they come or not within the order, and be permitted to come again into their chambers."

Two years later the record runs: "Whereas Christopher Dodington hath appealed to the Committee of the Lords and Commons for sequestrations against the sentence of a Committee in the Country, It is ordered that, if sentence shall pass for him upon his appeal, then he shall be called to the Bench, and his antiquity saved unto him." Then on 9th May, 1654, they inscribe the comfortable minute: "In regard to Christopher Dodington, Esquire, one of the Barristers of this Inn, who lay under a suspension *upon a pretence of delinquency*, is now cleared thereof by a Resolve and Order of the Committee at Haberdashers' Hall upon a reference to them by the Lord Protector, as by the copy of their Order, now read, appeareth, The suspension is therefore removed and he is called to the Bench with his antiquity."

So, his innocency triumphant, Christopher is not only made a Bencher of the Inn with his seniority preserved, but the further honour is bestowed of the keepership of the *Black Book* itself for the term of the ensuing year.

On 21st January, 1656-57, Dodington made his Will. He was only some 52 years of age, but anxiety and imprisonment had sapped his strength. He describes himself as "sick and weak in body," desires to be buried

privately at night, none present but his own family, provides for his "dear and loving wife," his boys and girls (all unmarried) and remembers others of the family. His Will was proved before the year was out.

It only remains to state what is known about his appointment of the Rev. Thomas Gouge, M.A., to be Vicar of St. Sepulchre's on 6th October, 1638. Being his brother-in-law, family interest may well have had weight in his selection, but it is not unlikely that religious preferences may also have been taken into consideration.

Newcourt¹¹ says that "James the First, in the 7th of his Reign granted the Rectory¹² and its appurtenances, and advowson of this Vicarage to Fran. Philips and others [*sic*]. After which the said Rectory and its appurtenances were purchased by the Parishioners, and held in Fee-farm of the Crown. And the Advowson of the Vicarage by the President and Fellows [*sic*] of St. John Baptist College, in Oxford, who continue Patrons thereof to this day."

The grant that Newcourt refers to may be found on the Patent Roll of 7 James I, part 9, under the date 18th May, 1609.¹³ It grants to Francis Phelips [*sic*] and Richard Moore of London, Gentlemen, their heirs and assigns for ever, all that the King's Rectory and church of Stokenham, Co. Devon [and other rectories and churches [named] in the counties of Cornwall, Lincoln, Somerset, Yorks, Bucks, Staffs, Salop, Warwick, Worcester and Leicester] and all that our Rectory and church of St. Sepulchre in the City of London . . ., and the Advowson, donation, free disposition and right of Patronage to the Parish church of St. Sepulchre afore-said, to the same Rectory of St. Sepulchre belonging or appertaining.

Nothing is known of the two gentlemen who thus acquired by a single *coup* the patronage of some of the finest churches in no less than a dozen counties, nor

whether financial profit or religious zeal had prompted their action. Secrecy was not inadvisable where such bargaining was concerned.

It is significant, however, that Dr. William Gouge,¹⁴ the father of Dodington's nominee to St. Sepulchre's, was, in 1626, one of twelve trustees to a scheme for buying up impropriations¹⁵ in order to foster a puritan ministry. The trustees spent between £5,000 and £6,000 and bought-in thirteen impropriations, when, at Laud's instance, the Court of Exchequer adjudged the Society an illicit corporation (13th February, 1633), but a threatened persecution in the Star Chamber was dropped.

It would certainly be interesting to know whether Messrs. Phelps and Moore were acting as agents for such an association, but the present author has discovered evidence that they found a private purchaser for a part of their venture.

In the Will of William Harrison, citizen and haberdasher of London, dated 4th March, 1619–20, this clause is written: "To Thomas Harrison, my son, all that the Advowson, donation, free disposition and right of patronage of the vicarage of St. Sepulchre's-without-Newgate, London, with the appurtenances, *which I late bought or purchased to me and my heirs*, to have and to hold the same unto the said Thomas Harrison my son and to his heirs and assigns for ever." The Will was proved the following month.

Whether the patronage came into the market again before its acquisition by Dodington is unknown, but until another purchaser comes to light it must be assumed that Dodington obtained it from Thomas Harrison for due consideration and for one turn, at some date between 1620 and 1638.

NOTES.

1. Dodington is spelled in various ways—often Doddington and sometimes Dorrington.
2. *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum*, Vol. I, p. 534. Newcourt says "Fellows" on p. 531 and "Scholars" on p. 534. The latter word is used by Hennessy.
3. *Novum Repertorium*, p. 383.
4. Vol. II, p. 263, ed. by W. P. Baildon.
5. Shaw's *Knights*, Vol. II, p. 189.
6. Vol. II, p. 299.
7. *Harl. Soc.*, Vol. XXVI, p. 218.
8. *Call of State Papers Domestic*, 1646-60.
9. *Hist. of Somerset*, Vol. III, p. 518.
10. Vol. II, pp. 368, 371, 403, 405.
11. *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum*, Vol. I, p. 530.
12. Spelman (1613) defines a Rectory as "a spiritual living composed of Land, Tithes and other oblations of the People."
13. P.R.O. Ref. C.66/1797.
14. D.N.B., Vol. VIII, p. 272.
15. Murray defines an Impropriation as "the annexation of a benefice or its revenues to a Corporation, Office or Individual, especially, in later use, to a lay corporation or a lay proprietor."
It is said that Alderman Henry Smith who died in 1627 left £10,000 "to buy impropriations for Godly preachers."