

Suffolk Institute of Archæology and Natural History.

THE VENERABLE FRANCIS MASON.

(Vindex Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ).

RECTOR OF SUDBOURNE CUM ORFORD, SUFFOLK.

A TERCENTENARY MEMOIR.

The Church of England has never lacked faithful sons, ready to support her catholicity and constitutions by using to the best advantage such gifts of scholarship as they possessed with little or no expectation of reward. Many of them did receive the high esteem of their compeers, because the religious doctrines or practices they dealt with were taken seriously to heart. Thus, both the supporters and opponents of the Church knew well the men of mark on their respective sides. Such controversies were usually more or less transient. In each new generation some new point of attack was made and a fresh area was defended. And as the interest shifted, the leaders in strife that had passed away were either neglected or entirely forgotten. Such has been the fate of the temperate minded scholar, Francis Mason, who vindicated English Orders against the leading contemporary apologists of the Church of Rome, and gained in doing so the fine title of "Vindex Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ."

That careful biographer of Oxford's Alumni, Antony à Wood, knew that Francis Mason was a Durham man, but the exact place of his birth has only lately been discovered. It was not known to the author of the article in the Dictionary of National Biography. There is now no doubt that Francis was the son of Ambrose Mason, a well-to-do merchant dyer of Barnard Castle, and that he was born in that town in the year 1566. At that date the power of the Bishops had been but little weakened. The Bishop of Durham was not only a spiritual but a temporal Prince, with full Palatinate jurisdiction. Needless to say the influence of the Church was very strong among the good folk of "the Bishopric," who were properly proud of their peculiar position, and we can well believe this influence was felt and responded to by the future apologist in his early boyhood.

In fixing the place and date of Francis Mason's birth two recently discovered wills deserve careful consideration. The first,* that of the father, Ambrose Mason, was signed October the 3rd, 1592. In it the testator mentions his wife Cecilie, and his children, viz., Bartholomew, his son, and heir, Francis and Henry, both already provided for, and John, who had the previous year entered Merton College, Oxford, where his brother Francis was Fellow. There were also three sisters, two of whom are mentioned, viz., Allyson and Margaret, while Anne the third is a legatee in the second will, that of their brother Henry Mason of Barnard Castle, *P.C.C. 5 Weldon*. This latter will was made during a visit to Orford, in Suffolk, November 10th, 1616, evidently in anticipation of apprehended death, and proved January 24th following. Besides other provisions Henry leaves to his sister Anne his property in Barnard Castle. Francis

* Durham Registry.

Mason, at that time Rector of Sudbourne and Orford, and Elizabeth his wife, were witnesses.

It is on record that a school existed in later mediæval times at Barnard Castle. There is some doubt if it continued active through the Reformation, but, whether it was reborn or not after that event it certainly was flourishing in 1650. It is therefore possible that it never really ceased; and if so, Francis Mason received his early training in the town of his birth. The only other school available was that of the Cathedral town of Durham, which was some fourteen miles away from Barnard Castle. If Francis was sent to school there his master must have been either Christopher Green or Francis Kay. Wherever he was taught, a sound foundation was well and truly laid, so that upon it a worthy edifice was, in the competent judgment of his contemporaries; erected.

In the year 1578, on December the 8th, Mason's godfather and kinsman, John Glenton, made a will leaving to his godson a stole, and all the books which formed the library of his brother (Geoffrey Glenton, a priest) and by the same document he left to Ambrose Mason, the father of Francis, his "best cloithe gown, a grogrome jackett and a dagger." It is thus evident that the younger Mason's profession had already been chosen, although he was then but twelve years of age. Five years later, the 10th May, 1583, when seventeen he matriculated at Oriel College, Oxford. Wood comments: "making a hard shift to rub on, being the son of a poor plebian." How far the father assisted his son, there is now no means of discovering, but the description hardly seems applicable to one in the position of a dyer, who sent two sons to the University. It may safely be assumed that Mason had scant margin for extravagance.

He early made a mark in his University, taking his B.A. from Brasenose, 27th January, 1586-7. Brodrick (the Hon. George C.) says in *Memorials of Merton*, p. 62, "Antony Wood tells us that of all Savile's benefactions to Merton the greatest was the care he took in getting deserving persons chosen Fellows, and afterwards obtaining promotion for them. In his first election which consisted but of four, were Henry Cutt and Francis Mason." A little further in the same book, p. 70: "Wake . . . was less famous in the University than his brother-Fellow, Francis Mason, who obtained the highest reputation as a literary champion of the new Anglican Church."

Francis Mason was elected Probationary Fellow in 1586, and proceeded to his M.A. the 4th June, 1590. In the following year he was strong and influential enough to risk the displeasure of William James, Dean of Christchurch, at that time Vice-Chancellor. The story is thus told by Antony à Wood in his *History and Antiquities of the University*, ed. by Gutch, Vol. 2, pt. 1, 247.

"Thomas Aubrey being minded to take his degree of Bachelaur of Divinity made his supplication in (sic) order thereto by his dean or censor July 10 this year [1591] but his supplicate being no sooner uttered, Mr. Francis Mason of Merton College and Mr. John Vicars of Broadgates Hall vented unseemly words against him, and things, as it seemed to the Vice-Chancellor, that would prove scandalous to the University, whereupon by virtue of a statute then read by him the Vice-Chancellor, he pronounced them deprived of the Liberties of the University for an year's time without hope of restoration. But Mason, looking upon this as an unwarrantable precedent, put up his appeal to the Congregation for a redress, but Dr. Thomas Glasier, then Pro-

vice-chancellor, refused to take it at that time, yet the Pro-proctors' (Gerard Williamson and Maurice Merick) who then sate, did admit of his appeal, and so the matter for a while rested, but the event I know not."

Somewhere about this time, in Wood's words, "after he had proceeded in his faculty, he entered into the sacred function and when full standing, he was admitted to the reading of the sentences in 1597, about which time he was made rector of Orford." Thus far Wood. Mason received licence to preach 30 June, 1597, and a few days later, on 7 July, proceeded to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. His work at Oxford was, however, nearly over, since he was instituted Rector of Sudbourne with the chapel of Orford on 23 November, 1599, where he acted the part of a faithful parish priest and gathered the material for the great work which made him famous.

In the meanwhile the assailants of the Church of England grew bold and clamorous. Papists on one side and the virulent Brownists on the other; called out the persuasive eloquence of Mason's scholarship to pour oil on the troubled waters. Mason, who before this had been appointed a Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the King, preached two sermons in the "greenyard" in Norwich, in which he very skilfully defended the newly published Canons against the Brownist agitators. He prefaced his printed* version of the sermons with an address to his friend and supporter Richard Bancroft. Two short extracts will be sufficient to show the style of his oration and the nature of his arguments. It is hardly likely that even Mason could do much to persuade his opponents of their errors, plead as temperately as he might.

*Vide pp. 124, 5, 6. *Early Suffolk Tracts, Pamphlets and Printed Sheets: A Bibliography.* Published 1921 by Wallace Gandy, London.

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OF
THE CONSE-
CRATION OF THE

BISHOPS IN THE CHVRCH

OF ENGLAND:

*With their Succession, Jurisdiction, and other
things incident to their calling:*

AS ALSO

OF THE ORDINATION

of Priests and Deacons.

FIVE BOOKES:

Wherein they are cleared from the slanders and odious

*imputations of BELLARME, SANDERS, BRISTOW,
HARDING, ALLEN, STAPLETON, PARSONS,
KELLISON, EVDEMON, BECANVS,*

And other Romanists:

*And iustified to containe nothing contrary to the Scriptures,
Councels, Fathers, or approved examples of Primi-
tiue Antiquitie.*

By FRANCIS MASON, Batchelour of Diuinitie, and sometimes
Fellow of Merton Colledge in Oxford. *Archdeane of Northampton*

*parts of original
with alterations
perhaps last time
1621*

Hebr. 1. 4. No man taketh this honour vnto himselfe, but he that
is called of God as was Aaron.



G. Harvey

IMPRINTED AT LONDON

by ROBERT BARKER, Printer to the Kings

most Excellent Maiestie. Anno 1613.

*Title page of first edition, 1613, of Mason's famous book, kindly lent by
Mr. Wallace Gandy.*

(Section 8). "The ceremonies of the Church though they cannot alwaies be costly, yet they must alwaies be comely, againe, if all things bee decent, then religious solemnities must be performed with grauitie: Magnificent they may be and sumptuous, according to the circumstance of time, person, and place: but alwaies without vanitie, without luxurious pompe, or méretricious brauvery."

(Section 28). "As Jacob loued Joseph aboue the rest of his children . . . so God hath loued the Church of England aboue manie other Churches: he hath decked and adorned her with sundrie gifts and graces: so that she is like a king's daughter in a beautiful garment of changeable colours. . . . What a world are wee growne vnto, when thankes-giuing after childre-birth, kneeling at the Communion, reading the holy scripture and funerall sermons are made matters of reproach, yea, the whole Communion Booke. Some are said to call an Idoll, a Portius, a piece of swynes flesh yea, the Temples of God, they are said to become temples of Baal, Idoll synagogues, abominable sties. But I hope my brethren of the Ministrie, for whose loue I have undertaken this labour, are for the more part judicious and of milder temper."

The following thirteen years were spent by Mason in preparing his great defence of the English Ordinal, which saw the light in 1613 under the title "Of the Consecration of the Bishops in the Church of England with their Succession, Jurisdiction and other things incident to their calling, as also of the Ordination of Priests and Deacons. Five bookes, wherein they are cleared from the slanders and odious imputations of Bellarmine, Sanders, Bristow, Harding, Allen, Stapleton, Parsons, Kellison, Endemon, Becanus and other Romanists."

The famous volume was addressed to George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, and printed by the King's printer, Robert Barker, in 270 pages, small folio, a reproduction of the title page of which, by the kindness of Mr. Wallace Gandy, appears as an illustration to this paper.

Commenting on this work, Antony à Wood says : " from which book it appears that the author was a general-read-scholar thorough-pac'd in the councils, and all sorts of histories," and again he says : " The next year as a grateful son he sent a copy of it to be reposed in the Library of his tender parent Merton College, with this note of it, written with his own hand : ' Whereas Mr. Fitzherbert hath lately sent a book from Rome against the most Revd. Bishop of Ely, to which he hath annexed an appendix concerning the records and registers by me produced, desiring that some of their discreet Catholics might view and consider whether they be true or counterfeit. Know therefore, that upon the 12th of the present May An. 1614, his Grace of Canterbury sent for Mr. Colleton the Arch-priest, Leake a secular priest, as also one Jesuit called Laithwait, etc. [sic] and showed unto them the register and other records of his predecessor Math. Parker, which they perused over and over, and found that the said Parker was consecrated in Lambeth Chapel (and not at the Nag's Head in Cheapside) by certain Bishops that had been ejected in Qu. Mary's reign.' "

The discredited " Nag's Head Fable " alluded to above is thus summarised by Bishop Bramhall (Works, p. 436) : " Archbishop Parker and the rest of the Protestant Bishops in the beginning of Qu. Elizth's reign, or at least sundry of them, were consecrated at the Nag's Head in Cheapside, by Bishop Scory alone, or by him and Bishop Barlow, without sermon, sacrament or solemnity, but they know not what day,



TABLET TO THE VEN. FRANCIS MASON,
South Aisle, St. Bartholomew's Chapel, Orford.

nor before what public notaries, by a new fantastic form, and all this they accept, on the supposed voluntary report of Mr. Neale (a single malicious spy) spoken in private to his own party, long after the business pretended to be done. Archbishop Parker was consecrated alone at Lambeth, in the church, by four bishops, under commission of the great seal of England, with sermon, sacrament and due solemnity, on the 17th December, 1559, before four of the most eminent public notaries of England, one of whom was principal actuary at Cardinal Pole's consecration."

Mason's great task was not merely the confutation of an absurd slander. It was far nobler in design, and faithfully upheld the right of the English Church to carry on the line of Apostolical Succession of her bishops in her own manner, which he proved was no new-fangled device but soundly Catholic. He casts his argument in the form of a dialogue between Philodox and Orthodox, the former defining the Roman and the latter the Anglican claims. His efforts won high praise from the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England and called forth renewed efforts from the apologists of the old faith.

Long ere the great work saw the light, Mason had married the lady of his choice, Elizabeth, daughter of Nicolas Price, parson of Bisham, Co. Berks, which place was the chief seat of the Hoby family, one of whom, Sir Edward Hoby, was recipient of a venomous letter from the Jesuit John Lloyd, printed under the initials I.R. Elizabeth Price was baptized at Bisham 15 October, 1567, and was therefore but a year younger than her husband to whom she proved a most affectionate and dutiful wife and bore him three children.

The opponents who now appeared to attack Mason's book were in one respect better able to obtain a wider

audience : Fitz Herbert, Fitz Simon, Saerbosco, and the most learned of all, Antony Champney, Doctor of the Sorbonne. All published their replies in Latin, thus throwing the whole learned world open to their theses. Mason; nothing daunted, prepared to turn his own work into Latin, and at the same time, by additional arguments, to confute his new critics. He made such progress that in the preface to a sermon preached before the King in January, 1620, "Concerning David's adultery and his politick Practices" he is able to write as follows :—"Moreover, whereas thou gentle Reader has long expected my booke of the consecration of Bishops, which by command of authoritie was to be translated into Latin, I certifie that, I have already finished the translation, and by occasion of the opposition of my many antagonists, who have written against me, much enlarged the worke, and prepared it for the presse, under this title 'De Ministerio Anglicano.' But the childe being brought to the birth, as yet there wanteth strength to be delivered. Yet I hope, that our good God in his due time will give it a comfortable issue."

This sermon named above was preached after he had been instituted as Archdeacon of Norfolk, which dignity he was granted by mandate of George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury. The mandate is addressed to Samuel Harsnett, Bishop of Norwich, and bears date December 13, 1619. The new Archdeacon was installed four days later—December 17th—and instituted the previous day. He compounded for the payment of his first fruits May 3, 1620. Unfortunately, before he could receive any emolument from his office or pay the agreed sum, he developed a serious and painful malady. Worried about the fate of his book, "greviously visited wth sickness of stone, whereof being cutt hee lay three qrters of a yere in London in greate miserie and at extraordinary charges,"

he passed to his Maker December 21st, 1621. Eight days later his wife took out Letters of Administration in the Consistory Court of Norwich, and also forwarded a Petition to the King praying to be excused the payment of first fruits. This petition was supported by the Archbishop, who signed January 23rd, and by the Bishop of Lincoln. The prayer was granted and referred to the Lord Treasurer April 4th, 1622.

Mason's unissued work was then taken in hand by Dr. Nathaniel Brent, Warden of Merton, who, according to Wood "did review it . . . but at length printed the copy as he had found it under the author's hand" in the year 1625 under the title *Vindiciæ Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ; sive de legitimis eiusdem ministerio, Id est, de episcoporum successione, electione and confirmatione Item de Presbyterorum and diaconarum ordinatione, Libri V.*

The Archdeacon's widow erected to her husband's memory a tablet in the chancel of Orford Church (now upon the South Wall of the South Aisle) in which he is represented in his academical robes with scarf and ruff kneeling at a prayer desk beneath an entablature in the Corinthian style. The following inscription is cut thereon :

"HERE LYETH FRANCIS MASON BORNE IN YE BISHOPRICK OF DURESM, BROUGHT UP IN YE UNIVERSITIE OF OXFORD, BATCHELOUR OF DIVINITY, FELLOWE OF MERTON COLLEGE, THEREAFTER RECTOR OF ORFORDE IN SUFFOLKE, WHERE HE BUILT YE PARSONAGE HOUSE. CHAPLEYNE TO KING JAMES. YE BOOKES WHICH HE WRITT TESTIFIE HIS LEARNINGE. HE MARRIED ELIZABETH PRICE DAUGHTER OF NICHOLAS PRICE, VICAR OF BISSAIN IN OXFORDSHIRE BY WHOM HE HAD THRE CHILDREN. SHE ERECTED THIS MONUMENT FOR HIM. HE DIED IN DECEMBER 1621.

PRIMA DEO CUI CUIA FUIT SACRARE LABORES CUI
STUDIUM SACRIS INVIGLARE LIBRIS EXE SUB HOC
TANDEM REQUIEVIT MAR MORE MASO EXPECTENS
DOMINUM SPEQ FIDEQ SUUM."

To this has been added a triangular piece of white marble which in the following words perpetuate a not unusual but very unscholarly blunder :

"IN JUSTICE TO THE MEMORY OF SO GREAT A
MAN WHO WAS RECTOR HERE 80 YEARS AND ABOUT
110 YEARS OLD THIS MONUMENT WAS REMOVED FROM
YE RUINOUS CHANCEL AND REPAIRED AND SET UP
HERE AT YE CHARGE OF YE PRESENT. INCUMBENT.
JOSIAS ALSOP.
BD. ANNO 1720."

The amused reader may in charity forgive the 80 years and the 110 years of the inscription in recognition that Alsop cared for his predecessor's monument and brought it to a place of safety.

On this Tercentenary* (21st December) of the death of Francis Mason, we testify to a life and work which lighted a torch whereby all faithful Churchmen have truly walked for three centuries.

In these unsettled post-war days, when destructive tests are ruthlessly applied to all our institutions by critics of pronouncedly iconoclastic intent, few higher services can be offered to Church and State than those involved in preserving the inspiration of the memorials "of famous men, and of our fathers that begat us," and the place they filled in the up-building of the spiritual fabric of this our England.

H. W. B. W.

*At the request of the Francis Mason Memorial Association, and by permission of the Rev. Hugh A. Tudor, M.A., Rector of Orford, a special memorial for Mason was made at the Eucharist in Orford Church, on St. Thomas' Day.