

THE BERKELEYS OF CANTERBURY

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY STUDY

By DOROTHY GARDINER, F.S.A.

I RECENTLY became possessed (from a second-hand bookseller's catalogue) of a copy of the will of Mrs. Eliza Berkeley, the wife of George Berkeley, Canon of Canterbury in the sixth Prebend, 1768-95. The will is contained in a small neatly bound volume, clearly written and carefully indexed. Mrs. Berkeley speaks of having a fair copy made of certain "scralled sheets" on which she had written, and subsequently altered and interlined, her last will and testament. Mine would seem to be the copy in question, for there are pencilled notes by Mrs. Berkeley in the margins. She died in 1800, and had left the Precincts, Canterbury, five years earlier, on her husband, the Canon's, death. She had also left Canterbury and was living at Chertsey, and, when the end came, at Cheltenham. But her memory of the Precincts and her Kentish entourage was very vivid, and with her help and the contemporary biographies of some of her friends, together with the Minutes of the Dean and Chapter in her husband's time, one may create a picture of Canterbury life during the latter half of the eighteenth century and bring to view certain very interesting people.

II

The Precincts seems not to have been at this time a very quiet place. Soldiers had been in the habit of parading and exercising there, causing so much inconvenience that, at Midsummer, 1780, the Dean and Chapter forbade the practice, though a few months later they so far relented as to allow parade "for the purpose and during the time of roll-call only"—at the discretion of the Dean or Vice-Dean. At St. Catherine's Chapter, 1784, came an order to discontinue "admitting the rabble during the Fair or other holy day times, to see Bell Harry etcetera;" and to make up to the official in charge his loss of "perquisites accruing on such occasions"—his tips in fact—he was allowed three guineas a year, "so long as his behaviour was unexceptionable." Further directions were given to the porters at the two entrance gates to keep out disorderly persons from the Precincts on Sunday evenings, especially during the winter half-year from Michaelmas to Lady Day. Four assistants were appointed to "our Constable" to patrol the

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Precincts during the winter season, on Sundays from 5 to 10 o'clock (when the gates were to be shut), to prevent disorder. These assistants were paid 1s. a night and provided with lanthorns and candles. The cloister door leading to the Archbishop's palace had also to be shut up because of damage done by persons passing through.

III

Canon Berkeley's term of office—his first residence was in the fourth quarter of 1768—covered those of several Deans. He came in during the reign of Dean John Potter (1766-70). John Moore succeeded Brownlow North, who had become Bishop of Lichfield in 1771 after one year in the Deanery. James Cornwallis followed in 1775; George Horne in 1781, till in 1790 he became Bishop of Norwich; William Butler in 1790, till his appointment three years later to the Bishopric of Exeter; Folliott Cornwall was in office when Berkeley died—that is to say in the course of 27 years he worked with seven different Deans. These rapid successions must have thrown a good deal of responsibility on the Chapter, and perhaps account for Berkeley's preference for holding the office of Vice-Dean; very often out of his course, in substitution for another prebendary; though he also served in his turn as Treasurer and Receiver. It may be of interest to relate some few activities of the Chapter during those twenty-seven years, before passing on to the more personal aspect of Berkeley's career. From the Eleemosynary Fund which they administered they subscribed (in 1771) twenty guineas to the repair of Cogan's Hospital, occupied by six clergy widows. Another fund was devoted to the repair of roads—"Reparationes Viarum"—and from this source the Mayor and Commonalty of the City received £40 for widening King's Bridge; £10 for repairing the street-pavement from the Red Pump to the Butter Market; another £10 "towards turning the road to the Old Castle, Wincheap."

Berkeley seems to have possessed a sense of humour. Criticism had been made (about 1788) of the high cost of the dinners when the Dean and Chapter dined together at St. Catherine's Audit. So when Canon Berkeley, as Vice-Dean, arranged the celebration, to the surprise of his colleagues, Mrs. Berkeley, instead of a many-course meal, provided a sirloin of roast beef, and a round of boiled beef with potatoes and cabbages; the conversation turned no more on extravagance.

Earlier (in 1762) Archbishop Secker had proposed that "the money hitherto allotted to the Entertainment of His Grace and his Attendants at his visitation of the Church should be devoted to some more useful purpose, to be approved by His Grace."

Accordingly the Chapter assessed the cost of their wonted hospitality at £40; to which the Archbishop added another £40, on learning it

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was proposed to allot the windfall towards new paving the body of the church, from the West Door to the steps to the Choir. "The Lay Clerks, Choristers, Vesturers, and such other Inferior Servants who used to be entertained at the Third Table" were allowed 2s. 6d. apiece as compensation for the loss of their feast.

In 1792 stained glass from the Choir was arranged in the "Great South Window," and a present of £10 rewarded the official (Mr. Simmons) who had performed the work so efficiently. Much attention was paid to the Library, and to the acquisition of new books to keep it up to date. "We agree to purchase," the Minutes record, "Gibbons's History of the Roman Empire, and Boys's History of Sandwich, large paper," and so forth. Gostling, a Minor Canon, had died in 1777 and the Chapter completed and published his *Walk round Canterbury*. They agreed to employ "an Able Artist to engrave a drawing of the Screen in our Church for Mr. Gostling's book, at an expense not exceeding 20 guineas." The drawing was ultimately made by a Mr. Raymond, for a fee of, not twenty, but one guinea.

IV

We have glanced through the Chapter's activities for the years 1768-95, during which George Berkeley was of their number. It is time to turn to the more intimate record of his family life. He was the son of a distinguished father, the "learned and ingenious" George Berkeley (1685-1752), Bishop of Cloyne; Berkeley, the philosopher, a link between Locke and Hume, who "aimed at discrediting materialism;" the philanthropist who interrupted his own career in the Church to further the foundation, in Bermuda, of a missionary college of St. Paul, "for converting the savage Americans to Christianity, at a cost of £10 each per annum"—Berkeley owed his promotion to the remote bishopric of Cloyne to his patroness and admirer, Queen Caroline, after she had failed to secure for him the rich deanery of Dover. The discovery of his later years was the celebrated remedy about which he wrote a treatise called *Siris, a Chain of Philosophical Reflections and Enquiries concerning the virtues of Tar-water*. This remedy not only benefited his own failing health but sick folk in the little poverty-stricken town of Cloyne. The Bishop even chose to wear "ill clothes and worse wigs rather than suffer the poor of the town to remain unemployed." Any article of clothing they could possibly make he would have from no other place. Bishop Berkeley married in 1728 Anne, elder daughter of John Forster, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons—their family consisted of three sons and a daughter—our Canon Berkeley was the second son. One gets a glimpse of his early education which suggests that the Bishop expected his children to be no less strenuous than he was himself. "At Cloyne he constantly rose

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between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning and summoned his family to a lesson on the base viol, from an Italian master he kept in the house for the instruction of his children."

V

In July, 1752, Bishop Berkeley—despite the tar-water, hypochondriacal and a sufferer from nervous cholic, the penalty of a sedentary life for one of his vigorous constitution—removed to Oxford to superintend the education of his son George, a student at Christchurch. It was evidently during his brief stay in Oxford, for he died in January, 1753, that Bishop Berkeley became acquainted with Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Secker, at this time Bishop of Oxford, residing at Cuddesdon. Here we come in touch with another and a fascinating character of the period, Catherine Talbot, Secker's adopted daughter and the close friend and constant correspondent of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter of Deal, the translator of Epictetus. To Mrs. Carter Miss Talbot wrote on January 29th, 1753, a fortnight after Bishop Berkeley's death; "This last year has been a very afflicting one to us, and even the new year is tinged with melancholy, from the loss of the good Bishop of Cloyne, and the distress of his amiable family, whom we have just known enough to sympathize in their affliction." Six months later, the Bishop's widow came to pay a visit at Cuddesdon. "Next week," again writes Miss Talbot, "Mrs. Berkeley and her Julia, a girl that you would love dearly if you knew her, are to stay with us." George Berkeley, the future Canon, came over from Oxford to see his mother during her prolonged stay of at least a month at Cuddesdon, and was present at readings of Mrs. Rowe's poems and the Rambler.

These references to the widowed Mrs. Anne Berkeley are pleasant enough, but the picture drawn of her, some forty years later, in Eliza Berkeley's will, suggests a very different personality. "The late naturally amiable lovely Dr. Berkeley" she writes, "on his first proposing to me (about 1760) gave his Honour that his violent and spirited fretful mother, Mrs. Anne Berkeley, should *not* live with me; but alas! for him, dear Man, he could not keep that promise, she having repeatedly told me before his face, I will live with you in spite of your Teeth." It was rumoured that Mrs. Anne "beat the maids." Her daughter-in-law saw her beat her husband, the Canon, when his son was old enough to rejoice "that any Body dared beat his Papa."

VI

George Berkeley took his degree and was ordained early in 1759, and was then presented to the Vicarage of Bray in Berkshire.

Intimate friends believed that he was deeply in love with Catherine Talbot and wished to marry her, though some twelve years younger

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than she was. Any offer he may have made her she certainly declined; but friendship and esteem remained to the last and she often writes of his devoted attention to his parishioners, "attending them in damp cottages" which led to his dangerous illness, and of his charm as a friend, "always welcome, always useful." Eliza Berkeley evidently shared her husband's admiration for Catherine. Her will speaks of "the very fine Holy Family by Dominichino left to me by my dear Miss Talbot"; of a portrait of "The Queen's Mother in Crayons done by Miss Talbot"; "of a black and gold Shagren 'Etwée,' late dear Mrs. Catherine Talbot's containing gold scissors etc."; and most valued of all "a ring of sweet Miss Talbot's and my dear Son's Hair, set with Fine Brilliants. The Motto, Prepare to follow, Cath^{ne} Talbot—" The Berkeleys were constantly with their friend in her last sad illness.

VII

George Berkeley evidently met his future wife after he became Vicar of Bray, for she was a Berkshire girl, Eliza Frinsham, daughter of the Rector of White Waltham, Berks, and grand-daughter of Francis Cherry of Shottesbrook. Through her mother she was descended from the Finch family of Fiennes Court; "in John Finch's clothes King Charles II escaped with Jane Lane"—Eliza was a considerable heiress, both of landed estates, including Vines Hill at Henley-on-Thames in Berkshire, and of five shares, worth a hundred pounds apiece, in the Oxford Canal.

She and George Berkeley married in 1760 and started life in the Vicarage of Bray. Two sons were born to them. The elder died in 1776; the second, George Monck Berkeley, survived till 1793. He was a minor poet and author of a volume of literary relics containing many of Bishop Berkeley's letters. After his death his mother published his poems, with a "vivacious" preface, which, according to Prebendary George Gilbert's reminiscences (published by Canon Shirley in 1938) should be read by all interested in the scandal of Canterbury, 1780-90.

Canon Gilbert (though we must remember he was speaking only from hearsay, for he held office 1864-73) describes Eliza Berkeley as "a vain conceited woman, plain and high-shouldered." "One day, speaking of her dear self, she said she was so handsome in her youth that she was quite annoyed by the importunities of her numerous suitors. So she took the door-key of her father's house and put it into her small mouth to stretch and render herself plain." "And you did it effectively," observed one of her hearers.

VIII

But whatever her foibles and vanities her devotion to her husband and above all to her son is abundantly clear. The son, George Monck,

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was educated at Eton, though, presumably after his parents moved to the Precincts, he migrated to the King's School. That is not mentioned in Mrs. Berkeley's Will, but she left "to his beloved Eton boarding Dame, Mrs. Tyrrell, two prints, and a Miniature Water-coloured Picture of my dear Son by Groombridge, a very bad likeness of him; it hangs up over my Dressing Room Chimney in blue Drapery." She made the Eton Dame a further bequest, with philanthropic intent. "I likewise request her acceptance to hang up in her Eating Room the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, written by the Famous Jew (Ignatius Dumay) who was thirty years ago at Oxford and is mentioned by William Jones in his horridly stupid ungrateful *Life of sweet Bishop Horne of Norwich*, hoping that it may induce some of the Young Gentlemen to learn the Language of Heaven—vide Acts of the Apostles." In the preface to her son's poems she mentions, as a proof of his great physical strength "that he drew the sword of Edward the Black Prince from its scabbard, and that the vesturer's wife declared that she witnessed the deed and had never seen the sword drawn before." The sword, upon the Prince's tomb in the Trinity Chapel is however, only a representation of a sheathed sword and could not be drawn, Canon Gilbert suggests that it then lay loose beside the effigy and Monk Berkeley may have drawn it between the bars of the grill surrounding the tomb and held it up. When questioned, the vesturer's wife said she had no recollection of the incident and "it was one of Madam Berkeley's fibs," probably not the only legend attached to poor George Monk's story.

The lady's dislike of William Jones's *Life of Bishop Horne* is not easy to understand; it relates Bishop Atterbury's definition of Bishop Berkeley's character:

"So much understanding, so much innocence, and such humility I did not think had been the portion of any but angels till I saw this gentleman"; and a footnote to the passage describes Canon Berkeley as "the excellent son of an excellent father."

George Horne, it may be recalled, was one of the seven Deans under whom Canon Berkeley worked—but they had become friends in their Oxford days and spent much time in each other's company. When Horne was advanced from Canterbury to the See of Norwich "Dr. Berkeley preached his consecration sermon at Lambeth; an act of respect for which he had reserved himself, having been under a persuasion for some years before that he should see his admired friend, Mr. Horne, become a bishop." Canon Berkeley exchanged his living of Bray for that of Cookhām; in 1775 the Dean and Chapter presented him to East Peckham; in 1784 to the Vicarage of Ixning; in 1789, when Dr. Beauvoir died, to that of Milton; in 1792 to Ticehurst. He probably owed his Canonry to the patronage and friendship of Arch-

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bishop Secker, as also the Chancellorship of the Collegiate Church of Brecknock.

IX

THE BERKELEYS' HOME IN THE PRECINCTS

Canon Berkeley, as we know, occupied the sixth prebendal stall, to which was attached a house standing east of the Infirmary chapel.

Mrs. Berkeley describes the view looking on to the Oaks from the "eating-room," the dining room as we should say. There George Monck Berkeley hung up "Twelve Caesars in Enamel," which he had purchased, with many other treasures, from the collection of Colonel Nairne of St. Andrew's—"the late unfortunate honourable Colonel Nairne" as Mrs. Berkeley calls him; "Son of the attained Lord Nairne [in the 1745], a great Antiquarian and Collector." George inherited his taste for antiques and objets d'art from his grandfather, Bishop Berkeley, and of this the house in the Precincts gave ample proof. There were pictures reminiscent of the Bishop's four years' sojourn in Italy, as tutor to the son of an Irish Bishop, when he travelled over Apulia, Calabria and the whole of Sicily. From the Nairne Collection had come "a Miniature Picture of the Admirable Crichton," and two ivory medallions of Henry V and the Duke of Bedford. There was a fine picture of Mary, Queen of Scots, and one of Charles I, on copper, by Cowper, the miniature painter; this Horace Walpole had given to young George. Canon Berkeley had purchased a painting on vellum by Janson of Canterbury Cathedral "before the Altar Monument was removed." Mrs. Berkeley also describes "a fine small picture of Hugo Grotius, in the clumsily carved black frame, which cost sixteen pounds at Lord Coote's sale." This she ordered her Executor to keep, lest it should come into the possession of Grotius's "ungracious Descendant, Grotte of Badgemore House, son of old Grotte, the Dutch Banker." She adds an N.B.; "If Grotte and his conceited Sisters had visited me here, I being well acquainted with their Mother, I meant to have left it to him." There were other historic mementoes; James II's Ebony Cabinet; a bell which had belonged to the last Pictish King; this was bequeathed to the Antiquarian Society at Edinburgh, as a memento of Mrs. Berkeley's son, "that dear young man who they honoured by electing him a member—rather before he was nineteen years old." Portraits and miniatures of the Berkeley family and their collaterals of course abounded, often the work of well-known artists. "I give my Picture, done in the year 1790, to Henry Grimston (her Executor); it was done for a Ring to his dear Friend, my lovely Son, who rejected it, not thinking it handsome enough for his old Mother." One treasure cannot be overlooked—a large silver salver which had belonged to Dean Swift's "Vanessa," Esther Vanhomrigh. In London in 1713

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Swift had introduced her to George, afterwards Bishop, Berkeley, who often dined at her house. When she removed, in later years, nearer Dublin and discovered Swift's attachment to Stella, her Will, reconsidered, left her whole fortune, about £8,000, between her two executors, of whom Berkeley was one. No doubt the silver salver was part of her legacy.

One might say much more of the wealth of treasure in that vanished house in the Precincts, not forgetting the jewels and linen of Mrs. Berkeley's gorgeous wardrobe, and the editions, elegantly bound, of the *Spectator*, *Guardian* and *Tatler*, her husband's gift, and of Ballard's *Lives of Famous Women*. An inheritance from the Cherry family was Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, "bound in Crimson Velvet, embroidered in Gold and Pearls, the Prince of Wales's Crest in Pearls; it was the Property of the excellent lovely Prince Henry, Son of King James the First, and presented by him to a relative of my Grandfather . . . it has some of the Prince's Handwriting in it." What, one cannot but ask, became of all this wealth of historic interest?

X

After Monck Berkeley's death at Dover, nursed by his aunt, Eliza's only sister, because the Canon was ill too, in Canterbury—after her husband's death in 1795—Eliza became a sad and lonely creature. She grew more than ever "touchy" and difficult. Her great ally in the Precincts, up to the day of her departure, had been Mrs. Susanna Duncombe, the widow of a Six Preacher, formerly Vicar of St. Andrew's and St. Mary Bredman, churches in the city, and Rector of Herne. Susanna was a daughter of Joseph Highmore, the painter, Kneller's pupil, and, like Catherine Talbot, she was a friend and correspondent of Richardson. She lived in a house in the passage up the steps leading to the North door of the Cathedral, "a curious erection of three stories to its back and two to its front sides, entered from the Cloisters," pulled down some century and a half ago. She was "eccentric, and walked round and round the Cloisters, reading novels and the light publications of the day." To her and her daughter, Mrs. Berkeley, in the early stages of her Will, which covers in all about five years, left many attractive remembrances; but just before the end she revoked them all, because Mrs. Duncombe had become intimate with a titled lady she particularly disliked.

Poor Mrs. Berkeley!

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