

THOMAS BECON, CANON OF CANTERBURY

By H. B. THOMAS, O.B.E.

THE GENTLEMEN OF KENT

IT will not easily be beleued, after that the Kynges graces letters were deliuered now of late¹ to certayne Gentil men in this Country of Kent for the preparacion of certayne men apte for the warres, how expeditly hys graces pleasure was accomplished in euery condicion. The Gentil men (al other businesses laied aside) immediatly provided their tofore appoynted number of men, arraying them with decent martiall armoures so that nothyng wanted, but all thynge set at such a stay that they receiuing premonicion of uery litle tyme, were ready at all houres to bring forth their men apte and ready for the warres

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Agayne the men, which wer prest to go unto the warres, it is almost incredible to see and perceauē what alacryte & quickenes of spirite was in them. They semed to be so desirous to defende theyr countrey, that they in a maner neglected their domestical trauayles, their priuate businesses, not much esteemed their dere wiues and swete chyldre, no nor yet their own liues, so that they might in any point do good to the publique weale of Englande. Whan I saw thys valeaunt Courage in them, and perceyued their unfayned affection and loue towarde their countrey, Lord God, with how great admiracion and stupore was I affected and stryken. My joy was surely greater than I can here expresse, to see thys faythfull obedience in them towarde the Kynges graces majestie, thys feruent loue towarde their countrey, thys hartly affecte towarde the common weale of England

T. Becon. *The Polecy of warre*—The Preface (1542)

This stirring tribute—penned not in 1940 but when King Henry VIII's narrow realm was set about with enemies—coupled with the fact that the writer had many associations with, and spent his last years in, Kent, should be warrant for his inclusion in the roll of Kent

¹ In 1542 Henry VIII was planning war against Scotland. It was necessary at the same time to secure his rear in Kent from attack across the Channel, where a threatening situation was developing. Musters were made all over England during the autumn months. The Scottish campaign ended with the rout at Solway Moss (November 25th, 1542).

worthies. His children also were connected almost exclusively with Kent. Yet it is remarkable that none of their names is to be found in the indexes to *Archæologia Cantiana*.

Thomas Becon (1512-67), if one of the less prominent, was certainly among the most erudite and industrious artificers of the Protestant Reformation in England. In his day he was a considerable figure, in high repute pre-eminently as a propagandist and preacher, as is recognized by the generous length at which the *Dictionary of National Biography* sets out nearly all that has hitherto been known of his career.

Nevertheless he has long been undeservedly neglected. Quite recently an admirable study by Dr. D. S. Bailey¹ brings together much new material which calls for a re-writing of the *D.N.B.* account. In the present note I refrain for the most part from drawing attention to the differences between the *D.N.B.* and Dr. Bailey: for the latter sets out *les épreuves* with scholarly precision, and for the student comparison will be a simple matter, and will at the same time reveal my debt to this source. Dr. Bailey does not follow up Becon's family in Kent and here it is possible to supplement his account.

Becon was "of Norfolk" perhaps of small farmer stock; but of his antecedents nothing is known. There is no record of his birth which may, however, be placed in 1512. He went up to Cambridge—a poor scholar—perhaps to St. John's College. Religious reform was in the air, and he came under the influence of Hugh Latimer, to whom Becon continued to give unwavering reverence and affection. They had much in common, for both had their roots in the homely environment of the English countryside. Becon graduated B.A. in 1530-31, but does not seem to have proceeded further. Later portraits show him as "Sacrosanctæ Theologiae Professor," but Venn (*Alumni Cantabrigienses*) does not record his receiving this degree at Cambridge.

In 1532 he was ordained as exorcist and acolyte in the Norwich diocese. Thereupon he joined the College of St. John the Evangelist at Rushworth—now Rushford—near Thetford, where as *praeceptor puerorum* his work was the instruction of scholars on Lady Anne Wingfield's foundation. Perhaps as a local lad he had himself been one of "Dame Anny's children". He was "priested" in the following year but seems soon to have left the community. For some years he was probably engaged as a tutor in the family of one or other of the gentry of East Anglia, among whom he doubtless became known as an advocate of reform and a supporter of King Henry's rejection of the Papal Supremacy.

¹ *Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church in England*. By Derrick Sherwin Bailey, Ph.D. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952. xv+165 pp., 15s.

These were times of ferment and perplexity. Henry might disown the Pope's authority, but the Statute of Six Articles in 1539 indicated that he had no fancy for reformed doctrine. The attention of the authorities fell upon Becon. Towards the end of 1540-41 he was "presented" in London for heretical preaching. He duly submitted, but deemed it well to retire, before June, 1541, to seclusion in Kent, perhaps at the instance of his patrons in Norfolk and Suffolk, who were able to commend him to gentry in Kent with like sympathies towards the new thought, and with some of whom they were connected.

One account after another of Becon's life repeats the claim that Becon having been ordained in 1538 was preferred to the living of Brenzett, Kent. The evidence for this statement, almost certainly incorrect, cannot be traced. The succession of vicars of Brenzett is on record and leaves no place for him. He held no parish living in Kent until the days of Queen Elizabeth.

Becon's earliest works date from this period. To divert attention he adopted the pseudonym of Theodore Basille, and under this name began to pour out material for the press. The prefaces of a number of his earlier works are addressed to Kent notables. Such are Sir Thomas Nevill (c. 1480-1542), of the Bergavenny family who entertained him at Mereworth; George Whetenhall of East Peckham; Richard Scott of Scott's Hall; Thomas Royden of Fortune; and (later) Paul Johnson of Fordwich. It can be demonstrated that all these were inter-related. Other dedications of Kentish interest were to the courtier-poet Sir Thomas Wyatt of Allington (1503-42); Sir George Broke, Lord Cobham (c. 1497-1558); Lady Anne Grey, perhaps the widow of Sir Richard Clement of Ightham; and William Gybbes of Elmstone. These names indicate the extent and political complexion of the circle in which Becon moved in Kent; while the wording of his prefaces bears witness to the remarkable phenomenon that despite Henry VIII's dubious conduct in not a few matters, opinion in England continued to give him a loyalty and support which Queen Mary later failed to evoke. In Becon's view God's word was "that swerde of the spirite" which inspired the hearty affection of English men towards their king and country. In later years he addressed *The Booke of Matrimony* (c. 1560) to Thomas Wotton of Boughton Malherbe (1521-87), who had been imprisoned in Marian times; and *The Demandes of holy Scripture* (1563) to the Mayor (Sir Matthew Mennes) and his Brethren of Sandwich, with the hope that it will "help forward some point of godly doctrine to be taught in your new-erected school"—to wit, the Sir Roger Manwood Grammar School at Sandwich.

Not less than eight of Becon's works were published during these years 1541 to 1543 and Theodore Basille became markedly popular as a writer. There came a stiffening of Henry's anti-protestant policy.

The agents of Gardiner and Bonner had little difficulty in detecting the source of this stream of perverting literature. Becon was arraigned and by a timely abjuration at Paul's Cross on July 8th, 1543, probably saved himself from the fate of the three victims who were burned in front of Windsor Castle three weeks later.

Once more he sought safety in the provinces. After visiting his family in Norfolk, he moved on to Derbyshire and passed the rest of Henry's reign among friends in the Midlands. He was poor, and supported himself by teaching, while continuing to write voluminously. Meanwhile the authorities had not forgotten him. In the proclamation against books of July 8th, 1546, thirteen named publications of Theodore Basille alias Thomas Becon were ordered to be burnt.

The death of Henry VIII in January, 1546/7, completely changed Becon's prospects. He was appointed to a chaplaincy in Protector Somerset's household; and Archbishop Cranmer made him a Six Preacher at Canterbury and one of his Chaplains. On March 24th, 1547/8, he was presented by the Grocers' Company to the living of St. Stephen Walbrook. He doubtless entered into the controversies which were agitating ecclesiastical circles in England at this time—on such matters as clerical marriage, sitting or kneeling at Holy Communion; and he continued to write with enthusiasm upon the achievements of the Reformation.

On July 6th, 1553, Edward VI died, and another sudden change befell. Within a few weeks Becon was committed to the Tower of London. At Canterbury he was declared contumacious and deprived of his preachingship, and as a married priest he was in due course ejected from his London living. In March, 1553/4, in circumstances which are obscure, he escaped from confinement, and, making his way to the Continent, reached Strasbourg; and here and at Frankfurt and Marburg he spent the years of Queen Mary's reign. Groups of exiles gathered together. Among them was fierce doctrinal contention. Episcopacy or Calvinism were debated; Becon seems to have been a supporter of the middle-of-the-way party with some leanings to puritanism. He was still active with his pen, comforting the victims of Marian persecution and attacking their persecutors. In his absence, by the proclamation of June 13th, 1555, his works were again proscribed.

The accession of Elizabeth in November, 1558, led to yet another reversal of his circumstances. He was soon back in England, and in 1559 was appointed a canon of Canterbury, where he followed the ardent Marian, Nicholas Harpsfield, in the Fourth Prebend. For a short time in 1560 he held the Rectory of Buckland, Herts. In March, 1560/1, he became Vicar of Christ Church, Newgate. For a few months in 1563 he reoccupied St. Stephen Walbrook, until in August, 1563, he was instituted as Rector of St. Dionis Backchurch, which

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living together with that of Christ Church, Newgate, he held until his death. His incumbency of Sturry, Kent, from 1562 to 1564 has often been overlooked. On his record of service to the reformed religion Becon was marked out for advancement in the Church.¹ But perhaps infirmity, surely induced by overwork—his health was never robust—stood in the way. Perhaps doubts as to his orthodoxy militated against him. In his attacks on Queen Mary he had by implication enrolled her in John Knox's monstrous regiment of women, a circumstance which may have been regarded as compromising when the young Elizabeth came to the throne.

He continued to write and was particularly engaged on the revision and republication of his collected works; and he was an acceptable popular preacher. His latter years were spent at his prebendal house at Canterbury, and here he died on June 30th, 1567. His motto *Vive memor lethi* reflects the dangerous times through which he had lived. But he was not primarily a man of action. His chief contribution to the Reformation was made with his pen, and that not as a theologian but as a writer of what are, in essence, tracts. He had the very modern technique of proceeding not so much by reasoned argument as by repeated assertion, which he supported by an astonishing wealth of quotations from the Bible and patristic literature. And herein perhaps lies the later neglect of his writings, for in the main they served the needs of his generation.

Thomas Becon's literary output was prodigious. He is credited with over sixty works some no longer extant, or known only by single copies. The bibliography of his works (as an appendix to Dr. Bailey's work demonstrates) is extremely complex and offers an intriguing study. His earlier works in particular, having been twice proscribed,

¹ Mr. W. G. Urry has kindly extracted from the Chapter Archives: *Canterbury Letters*, No. 36, the following, which indicates that Becon, who is referred to as vice-dean, was held in some esteem among his fellows. Dean Wotton and two others of the Chapter were evidently in London at the time.

"After hartly recommendacions. Wheras Sr John Armeerar (sc. at one time rector of Ivychurch), late parson of Saynt Denis of Barcke-church yn London is departed to godde: and therby the presentacion of that benefice now vacant aperteynith vnto vs: we thynke it shall be very well bestowede vpon Mr Becon our vicedeane. And therefore yf yow agree to the same, we ar contentid he be presentid vnto it, and that the presentacion be made and sealid accordinglye. And thus we wishe yow hartely well to fare from London the sixth of Marche 1562.
Your lovers and freendes

N. Wotton
Hugo Turnbull
Alexander Nowell

(Addressed:)

To our lovinge freendes the senyor prebendary and other the Chapitre of Christes Church yn Cantourbury.

are extremely rare and are to-day collectors' pieces. Excluding reprints he must have penned little short of two million words.

His collected works in three volumes, prepared under his own supervision, were issued in 1560-64 by the well-known printer, John Day. The Parker Society¹ printed most of Becon's works in three volumes (1843-44). These are admirably edited by the Rev. John Ayre, whose biographical notice of Becon is the foundation of the *D.N.B.* account. Both these are now superseded by Dr. Bailey's study.

Although popular selections from Becon's works were included in publishers' lists into the nineteenth century, most of his writings to-day give an impression of intolerable prolixity. They fall generally into three groups. In those written during the reign of Henry VIII (the earliest recorded is *Newes out of Heaven* in 1541), Becon shows himself a sincere but restrained advocate of reform of faith and manners. Such are *A Christmas Bankette*, *A pleasaunte newe Nosegaye*, *David's harpeful of armonie*, *The Governace of vertue*, and *An invectyve agenst swearing*. Edward VI's reign permitted Becon to write openly in a manner which was perhaps most in tune with his temperament—devotional manuals, homely and hard-hitting, addressed to common folk "persuading to virtue and dissuading from vice" often illustrated by contemporary catch-phrases and proverbs² such are *The Jewel of Joy*, *The Castell of Comforte*, *The Pomaunder of Prayer*, and *The Sick Man's Salve*. This last was for many years a "best seller" and gained a mention in Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman*. He contributed *An homily against whoredom* to the First Book of Homilies of 1547: and he tried his hand at the englishing of psalms. None of these forms a part of the "Old Version" metrical psalter of Sternhold and Hopkins as first brought together in *The Whole Booke* of 1562. But, in succeeding editions (1564, 1565 (4to), 1565 (8vo)), versions of the 117th and 134th psalms follow the 150th psalm under the title of "an exhortation unto the prayse of God to be song before Mornyng Prayer" and ". . . before Evening Prayer" and are attributed to "T. Becon" or "T. Be" by name.

¹ Founded in 1840 "for the Publication of the Works of the Fathers and Early Writers of the Reformed English Church." There is an interesting reference to the origins of the Parker Society in Queen Victoria's letters. On February 2nd, 1841, Lord Melbourne suggested to the Queen that he should tell the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Howley) that the absence of his name from the list of subscribers to the Society might give rise to comment, for "it is to some extent a party measure levelled against these new Oxford doctrines."

² As an example of his style: in *The Displayeng of the Popishe Masse*, Becon, commenting on "why the priest at mass turneth his back to the people," exclaims "Look up, knock your breast, behold the apple-maker of Kent, and mark well him that killed thy father." Ayre, in editing Becon's works, is unable to offer any explanation of this allusion which is probably derived from some popular Kentish folk-story.

But having experienced the Marian persecutions, Becon admits to have "more sharpened my pen against antichrist and his Babyonical brood." From his exile he exhorted his harassed brethren with *A Comfortable Epistle*; and later, he launched out with full-blooded invective in such works as *The Displayeng of the popishe Masse* and *The Monstruous Marchandise of the Romish Bishops*, in which in the robust spirit of the times, he borders on the scurrilous.

In their final shape *The Booke of Matrimony* and *The Catechism* appear in the Collected Works (1560-64). The latter is in the form of a dialogue between a father (Becon himself) and a son aged about six (presumably his eldest surviving son Theodore). It comprises many hundreds of pages of abstruse dialectics. From the modern reader heartfelt sympathy would go out to any child who was indeed subjected to catechizing on this scale. From *The Catechism* comes such immortality as derives from inclusion in *The Oxford Book of Quotations* (1941) "For when the wine is in, the wit is out."

The Monstruous Marchandise, which is not reprinted by Ayre, is notable for including an itemized list of relics existing at Christ Church, Canterbury, in 1315 in the time of Prior Henry of Eastry. This Becon copied from "an old written book," *Memorale Multorum Henrici Prioris*, then in the Cathedral Library. Some time in the early seventeenth century, this found its way into the Cotton collection, and is now in the British Museum (BM. MS. Cotton Galba E IV). The Latin text was printed, in mutilated form, in Dart's *The History of . . . Canterbury* (1726), but is now authoritatively transcribed in Wickham Legg and St. John Hope's *Inventories of Christ Church, Canterbury* (1902). Becon's free translation seems, however, to be the only English version in print.

In *The Reliques of Rome*, Becon quotes at length from a treatise, apparently of the fourteenth century, of the Articles of the General Greater Curse, found "among other old bokes at Canterbury in the parish church of S. Paule in the year 1562." Mr. W. G. Urry, the Cathedral archivist, informs me that some years ago he ransacked the parish chest in the hope of finding this but without avail; and Becon's translation may thus be the only record of it now extant.

The reader looking for some light relief may also regret that Ayre does not reprint *An Inveective against Whoredome*. This consists of some three hundred four-line verses, some of which merit preservation as witness to the matter and manner of Becon's exhortations.

Downe with the court of dame Venus
 And hyr pastimes voluptouse
 Downe with hyr trayne so mischeususe
 Let them al go downe a downe a

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Downe with cupide that wanton chylde
Which of long time hath us begilde
Downe with all them that are so wild
Let them al go downe a downe a

Later stanzas decry "all this beastly kyssing," "Vayn halsing and cullyng," "bawdy ballets," and "the whoryth rollinge of eyes."

Thomas Becon is thought to have married shortly after the legalization of clerical marriage in 1549. Of his wife, who survived him, nothing has come to light, not even her name. Five children, two of whom had died, are known to have been born before 1560; and since Becon was in exile from 1553 to the end of 1558 it may be assumed that his wife accompanied him and that some of his children were born on the Continent.

His nuncupative will, dated June 29th, 1567 (Cant. Consist. 30/495) made when he was "sicke of body" (he died next day) leaves all his property to his wife subject to earlier reservations to his surviving children who were a daughter Rachel and sons Theodore and Basil.

Rachel married as his first wife William Beswicke of Spelmonden, who became Sheriff of Kent in 1616. She had died and he married again before Cooke's heraldic visitation of Kent in 1592. They had four daughters all of whom married and a son William who died *s.p.*. Thus Arthur the heir of the Beswicks, who married a Washington of Maidstone, was a son of William's second wife and was not of Becon blood (Philipott, *Visitation*, 1619: Berry, *Kent Genealogies*; Hasted, "Horsmonden").

Venn (*op. cit.*) records details of the academic achievements of Theodore and Basil: and Cowper, *Monumental Inscriptions of Canterbury Cathedral*, gives an account—somewhat misleading—of the former.

Theodore was born, probably at Marburg, in 1555. At Cambridge he graduated in both arts and medicine, and became a fellow of his father's old college, St. John's. He was also incorporated M.A. and M.D. at Oxford. He married on October 31st, 1587, at St. Michael's, Cornhill, to Dorcas Smythe: and perhaps then began to practise medicine in Canterbury. In a city subsidy roll, 4 Jan. 44 Eliz. (1601/2), is an assessment of Theodore Becon, doctor in physicke . . . goodes vj li. xvi s. At some time he seems to have taken orders since, for a few months from March 24th, 1603/4 (his successor was appointed from October 14th, 1604), he was Rector of Toppesfield, Essex; but he did not continue in the church and for the rest of his life he was a "phisitian" in Canterbury. His wife Dorcas was buried at St. Peter's,

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Canterbury, June 7th, 1615. On July 2nd, 1619, a licence was granted for his second marriage at St. Mary Magdalene, Canterbury, to Clemencia Stroughill,¹ but it seems clear that this did not take place; for on March 18th, 1619/20 he died, aged 65, and on February 13th, 1622, Clemence Stroughle was married to Thomas Everard at St. George's, Canterbury. He was buried in Canterbury Cathedral, where he and his elder daughter Elizabeth are commemorated by an inscription (printed by Cowper). On this he is described as "Doctor of Phisick": Elizabeth "his virgin daughter" died January 31st, 1629/30, aged 30.

Theodore's will, proved April 1st, 1620 (Cant. Archd. 60/133), mentions his only son Anthony who died *s.p.* before the daughter Elizabeth made her will (Cant. Consist. 49/187). Another daughter Sybilla married John Bigge of Maidstone at Otham on September 17th, 1634. This male line thus became extinct.

Theodore bequeathed to St. John's College, Cambridge, a "colledge pot" of 16 ounces of silver engraved with his arms and the words *Theodorus Beaconus in medicinis doctor quondam socius hujus collegii dedit quod debet quod potuit non quod voluit*. The senior Bursar of St. John's College has recently been good enough to note that "the piece of plate duly came to the College, but is no longer in its possession. On August 8th, 1642, the Master and Seniors agreed to send a total of 2065½ ounces 'Grocer's weight' of College Plate to King Charles I. There is a record in summary form of the Plate sent, and the list includes the following—'Pots with two ears, *Clippesley, Crew, Theodore Beacon, John Lucat* (?), *Thomas Wentworth*, etc. Number 22, weight 559¾ unc.' So far as I can trace, no further description of the pot, or of the inscription or arms upon it, survives." The facts and relevant documents are printed in *History of the College of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge*, by Thomas Baker, edited by John E. B. Mayor, Cambridge University Press, 1869.

He also left to his brother Basil 20 shillings "to make him a ring with our arms ingraven upon it." What were these family arms? Although the College of Arms has no record of arms being granted or allowed to the family of Becon or Beacon, the answer is perhaps furnished by Harris, *History of Kent*, 1719, where the arms of Beacon of Canterbury are given as, *Argent two pales sable on each two palmer's staves or*. No more appropriate charge could have been assumed by their father, the hard-bitten Reformer, who could indeed claim to have

¹ In the Canterbury Marriage Licences as printed by Cowper, he is described as Mus.Doc. This fact leads Cowper (*Monumental Inscriptions*) to suggest that there may have been a son also of the name of Theodore. Mr. Urry has been good enough to inspect the original register of licences and is satisfied that the entry, in which there is a blot or scratch, in fact reads Med.Doc. Theodore had but one son, Anthony, who was the sole executor of his will.

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made, in spirit, the pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre.¹ The seal still attached to Theodore's will in the Kent Record Office, though very indistinct, shows a shield which is seemingly parted palewise.

"Bassell Becon son of Thomas Becon which was parson of St. Stephens" was baptized at St. Stephen Walbrook on January 14th, 1558/9. His parents must have hastened back from exile on the accession of Queen Elizabeth. Venn (op. cit.), however, records that Basil Beacon, a King's Scholar (1574) from Eton was admitted scholar at King's College, Cambridge, on August 27th, 1579, aged 17, which would advance his birth to 1562. It may be that the first "Bassell" died, and that a later child, whose baptism has not been traced, was so named; early matriculation registers are not, however, infallible.

He graduated and was a fellow of his college from 1582 to 1587, when he left Cambridge to be instituted to the rectory of Warehorne on February 21st, 1587-8. His marriage to Anne Coale at St. Michael's, Cornhill, followed on October 2nd, 1588. Thereafter his life was that of a country parson, bringing up a large family and becoming a land-owner in a modest way. He held four other Kent livings, but the tale of his incumbencies is confused.

Venn gives the impression that he vacated Warehorne for Snave in 1597: but all the evidence points to his having held Warehorne without interruption until 1626 (when Henry Curtise was instituted), his other cures being held in plurality. There is no record of an institution to Warehorne between these dates: children of Basil were baptized at Warehorne in 1589, 1592/3, 1596, 1600, 1604/5, 1610.² The Warehorne transcripts for 1600 to 1604, 1606, and 1608, now at Canterbury (the registers are missing), are signed by him: and in a Court Book at Lambeth Palace he signs in 1610 as Rector of Warehorne and Vicar of Waltham.

Basil can have held Snave for but a short time. This he exchanged for the vicarage of Hawkinge (inducted January 28th, 1596/7), which he resigned, his successor being collated on June 23rd, 1599. In 1605 he became Vicar of Hernhill and, having effected another exchange, was collated to Waltham May 11th, 1610. There is evidence that even then

¹ A remarkable confirmation that these are indeed the family arms borne by other Becons hailing as did Thomas from Norfolk is contained in a note by Miss Margaret Toynbee, "The Becon Arms," in *Notes and Queries*, N.S., Vol. 2, No. 9, September, 1955, p. 381.

John Becon (d. 1587) was chancellor of Norwich, of about the same generation as Theodore though no relationship is known. His daughter, Elizabeth, was the mother of Sir Robert Stone (c. 1605-c. 68). An extant portrait of Sir Robert dated 1637 shows his arms, of which the third quarter would be those of his mother. These are now identified as "Argent two pales sable each charged with three palmer's staves or palewise."

² Baptisms of other children are on record at Hawkinge (1598), Hernhill (1606) and Waltham (1613).

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he was not permanently resident at Waltham: for on July 14th, 1623, a Canterbury licence was granted to James Harris of Waltham, yeoman and Joan White of the same parish to marry "at Petham, because Mr. Beacon, who is minister of the parish of Waltham is not at home, neither hath he left any minister to marry them there." From 1626 he doubtless lived at Waltham where "Mr Bassil Beacon" was buried, November 6th, 1638.

With this record of continuous service in Kentish livings it is difficult to reconcile a footnote by Hasted when listing Vicars of Hernhill, that Basil Beacon "resigned for the vicarage of Silkeston in co. Ebor," a statement which is repeated by Venn. Enquiry has yielded no trace of his presence in Yorkshire, nor was the vicarage of Silkstone vacant at the relevant period.¹ It is unlikely that the source of Hasted's information can now be identified, but it seems wise to reject it as erroneous.

In his will made September 10th, 1638 (Cant. Archd. 70/431), Basil remembered the poor of his five Kent parishes. He seems to have been the father of eleven children, but only two of six sons survived him. To the younger of these, another Basil, he left his house and grounds at "Mersham apud Southstoure." Robert of Mersham, husbandman, licenced to marry at St. Margaret's, Canterbury, May 9th, 1665, was his son, but this line seems soon to have failed.

The elder surviving son, Thomas Beacon the elder, gentleman of Waltham (1596-1659) succeeded to the remaining lands at Mersham: but he had probably been provided for in his father's lifetime. For he was assessed for subsidy at Waltham in 1628, probably in respect of the small manor of Whetacre (known in Hasted's time as Walnut Tree Farm), which was still in Beacon hands in 1659 (Philipott's *Villare* and Hasted). This Thomas married three times and had fourteen children: and from this stock came a number of Beacon families scattered in East Kent during the next 150 years, some of which can still be identified. William Beacon (1665-1720), jurat and four times Mayor of Tenterden (1703, -08, -15, -16), was a great-grandson of the Rev. Basil. He had a large family, his eldest son being William Beacon of Charing, surgeon, baptized at Ivychurch, August 27th, 1692, who was buried at Charing, November 30th, 1721, *s.p.* The eighteenth century yeomen family of Beken of Biddenden is placed in descent from the youngest son of Thomas the elder by his third wife and relict, Ann.

The names of Theodore and Basil continue to recur. Mr. Theodore Beacon, yeoman, was buried at Boughton Malherbe, April 24th, 1702. There was a large family at Lenham where Basil Beacon or Beakon, cordwainer, was buried, July 25th, 1739. His son, Bassell, was bap-

¹ See *The History and Topography of the Parish of Silkestone*, by Rev. J. F. Paine. Penistone. 1922.

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tized, December 13th, 1702, and, as Bozwell Beacon, was buried there, January 12th, 1789, aged 86.

In 1863 the Beacon Charity for the poor of Lenham was established by the grant to trustees of property at Egerton by George Beacon, gentleman, of Gravesend. It seems safe to assume that he was descended from the Lenham branch of a family for which can thus be claimed over 300 years of continuous connection with Kent.