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0521548195 - From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History, 1660-1768 - Norman Sykes

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THE FORD LECTURES
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FROM SHELDON TO SECKER

ASPECTS OF ENGLISH CHURCH HISTORY
1660—1768

BY

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PREFACE

To the electors to Ford's Lectureship I owe the privilege and opportunity of giving the lectures of which this volume is an expanded version, and I desire to express to them my gratitude and appreciation of the honour done me by their invitation. To an Oxford historian the Ford Lectures are the blue riband of his profession, and the pleasure of an exile in the prospect of a series of visits to his home is tempered with apprehension lest he should fall sadly below the high standard of the foundation. When the invitation reached me in March 1957 the responsibility of writing six lectures for delivery in Hilary Term 1958 seemed to carry more of *onus* than *honor*. For, coming on the eve of the publication of what I had believed to be my *magnum ac ultimum opus*, a biography of Archbishop Wake, it found the cupboard indeed completely bare, with my note-books empty of facts and my head of ideas. In the short time available I therefore resolved to try and clear up some problems of English church history during the half-century following the Restoration of 1660, which had puzzled me often, and to ascertain, if possible, how far the faults and shortcomings of the Hanoverian church were due to the failure in 1660 and 1688 to effect the necessary reforms in the ecclesiastical constitution. The ensuing chapters represent my suggested answers.

An initial survey of the character of the Restoration Church Settlement indicated its essentially conservative nature, and emphasised the gravity of the problems with which the episcopate had to grapple along traditional lines and without the necessary revision of the Canons of 1603 and those of 1640, or without the reform of ecclesiastical administration and judicial procedure. This failure was particularly underlined by the eclipse of Convocation, thanks to the surrender of its right of taxation and its consequent decline, followed by the disputes during the reign of Anne and its suspension in 1717. The ill-effects of this suppression became clearer as my investigation proceeded. Closely associated with the conservative nature of the church settlements at the Restoration and Revolution were the fluctuating fortunes of Comprehension and Toleration, in which respect I have tried to discover the reasons for the failure to comprehend Presbyterian and Episcopalian within the re-established

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national church and the consequent, unexpected, triumph of Toleration and its vicissitudes between 1689 and 1719. Contemporaneously with these domestic issues, ecclesiastical union was a prominent feature of the *Zeitgeist*, and to this tendency the Caroline divines of the Church of England made a noteworthy contribution by their learned patristic studies and appeal to the primitive church, which not only earned the proud compliment *clerus Anglicanus stupor mundi*, but also led to eirenic discussion with Gallican churchmen and with foreign Protestants. Simultaneously, however the theological climate was undergoing a marked revolution as the defences of patristic orthodoxy by Bull gave place to the age of reason and the triumph of the Latitudinarians, which swept away traditional standards of belief and doctrine. Finally, a last attempt was made to effect the necessary reforms by Gibson, whose scheme of ecclesiastical reconstruction, if successful, would have remedied the omissions of 1660 and 1688 and would have equipped the *Ecclesia Anglicana* to meet the challenge of the age of reform which succeeded the Hanoverian *quieta non movenda*. With the failure of Gibson's thorough-going project, Secker strove to maintain the position of the established church by diligence and devotion to episcopal duties along conventional lines, accepting the suspension of Convocation and the impossibility of carrying through a programme of change. Surveyed as a whole, the pregnant century from Sheldon to Secker may be seen as the most influential epoch of English church history between the Reformation and the Victorian age.

I should like to express my especial thanks to His Grace The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Geoffrey Fisher, for his ready and generous authorisation to quote from the valuable collection of manuscripts of Archbishop Secker, preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth Palace. Embracing copies in Secker's hand from various papers of Gibson hitherto unknown to me and also an Autobiography of Secker himself, this collection has furnished the greater part of what is new in these lectures; and I am most grateful to Dr C. R. Dodwell, the Lambeth Librarian, for having opened for my inspection these items, to which access had hitherto not been allowed. To many other friends and colleagues who have helped me in various ways I can offer only a general expression of thanks. To the Secretary of the University Press and his staff and to several members of the Printer's staff I am indebted for their patience and

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perseverance in grappling with the manuscript of a most trying and troublesome author and Syndic. To my wife I owe more than words can tell for ungrudging help in the thankless tasks of proof-reading and indexing.

A few days before the delivery of the last lecture I received the invitation to become Dean of Winchester, and it was therefore with very mixed feelings that I realised that these lectures would be my swan-song as an academic teacher. To the University of Oxford and to The Queen's College on the one hand and to the University of Cambridge and to Emmanuel College on the other hand, I owe more than I can express for the privilege of membership of their respective Societies, in which may true religion and sound learning ever flourish in accordance with their Founders' intentions.

N. S.

THE DEANERY, WINCHESTER

Michaelmas 1958