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V. H. H. Green

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF PECOCK

ALTHOUGH REGINALD PECOCK'S importance in fifteenth-century history is undoubted, too little has so far been written about him to enable his real significance to be assessed. The attention which historians of the present century have paid to him is both slight and misleading. In 1932 a writer could still assert that only one, instead of, as in fact, five, out of the bishop's works had been published.¹ The political historians of the period, apart from the ordinary text-book writer, concentrate their attention on the trial, and on the trial alone.² This trial scene figures in nearly every history of fifteenth-century England, but it is mentioned as a sudden deviation from the main theme, a rock standing in the middle of the road. It has so far seemed impossible, even in the masterly introduction which Churchill Babington wrote for the 'Rolls' edition of Pecock's *Repressor*, to absorb Pecock into the main stream of fifteenth-century history. Besides the lack of material there is also a diversity of interpretation which inspires yet another writer to give what he, probably foolishly, regards as an integrated study of this learned and rather tragic bishop in relation to his works and to the age in which he was living.

The various attempts to interpret Pecock in themselves provide a valuable essay in historiography, for the oblivion which seemed to cover the bishop like a cloud almost as soon as, if not before, his own age was ended, prevailed with two or three notable exceptions until our own times. Thus the *Bibliographica Britannica* of 1766, which claims to relate something about the 'lives of the most

¹ H. P. Palmer, *The Bad Abbot of Evesham and other Medieval Studies* (Oxford, 1932), 119.

² E.g. Sir J. H. Ramsay in his *Lancaster and York* (II, 202 ff.), and Sir C. Oman in his *History of England, 1377-1485* (*Political History of England*, ed. W. Hunt and R. L. Poole, IV, 377). Yet both these attempts, gallant as they are, do not really tackle the question of Pecock's real significance.

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eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland from the earliest times down to the present day', makes no mention of him.¹ This ignorance was partly due to the misleading estimate of the martyrologist, John Foxe, who, following Bale,² classed Pecock with the Protestant martyrs who had suffered for their faith.³ It is ironical that Pecock should have been treated as a precursor of the Reformation and even more ironical that both Father Parsons,⁴ the industrious Jesuit, and the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum et Expurgandorum* of Madrid dated 1667, among others, should have condemned him as a Lutheran professor.

Indeed, the study of Pecock was in reality wholly subordinate to the theological viewpoint of his interpreters, and is in consequence really more revealing of the authors than of their subject. Thus that zealous scholar, Henry Wharton,⁵ interested, as befitted Archbishop Sancroft's chaplain, in defending the *Ecclesia Anglicana* against the Romanists and the Dissenters, welcomed the opportunity of editing Pecock's *Book of Faith*, so that it might prove that

¹ It should be noted that in the article on 'Henry Wharton', the latter's edition of the *Book of Faith* is mentioned in a footnote.

² *Index Britanniae Scriptorum* (ed. R. L. Poole and M. Bateson (Oxford, 1902), 337 ff.). Bale in his turn was mainly dependent on Gascoigne (*Loci e Libro Veritatum*, ed. J. Thorold Rogers (1881), *passim*).

³ *Acts and Monuments* (ed. 1684), I, 805. Edward Hall was even wider off the mark, for he thought that Pecock was condemned for lecturing against papal annates and Peter's pence (*Chronicle* (1809), 237).

⁴ The copy used was an Italian translation, *Esame del Calendario Protestante detto Foxiano, cioè Volpiano*, 'vedendo lo stesso paragonato col Calendario Cattolico Romano è coi Santi ivi contenuti'. Trans. F. G. Morelli (ed. 1753), II, 255-7.

⁵ Wharton, who was one of the greatest scholars of his day, never studied for less than 12 hours a day when in residence at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He assisted both William Cave and Archbishop Tenison in their controversial work, besides producing a great deal of valuable material himself. Bishop Stubbs sums up his scholarship: 'this wonderful man died in 1695 at the age of thirty, having done for the elucidation of English Church History (itself but one of the branches of study in which he was the most eminent scholar of his time) more than anyone before or since' (*Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum* (ed. 1897), iv). *Vide* 'Autobiography' in G. D'Oyly's *Life of William Sancroft* (London, 1821), II, 103 ff.; D. C. Douglas, *English Scholars* (1939), 175-97.

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‘scripture to be the rule of faith’¹ was an axiom of pre-Reformation Anglican theology. Similarly, Dr Daniel Waterland, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, a learned and perspicacious divine, who was as averse to Latitudinarian ideas as he was suspicious of any emphasis on the sentimental or mystical strands in Christianity, stands full square the eighteenth-century churchman when he treats of Pecock in his correspondence with the latter’s future biographer, John Lewis. His criticisms and his advice are precise, pithy and valuable, even for the modern scholar, but it is his admiration of Pecock’s common-sense rationalism which stands out in this correspondence. He submits very humbly that Mr Wharton makes Pecock more of a Protestant than he really was, and his attitude is best summed up in a letter that he wrote to his friend, John Loveday:

He was a very honest man, and one of the ablest divines of that age. His misfortune was that he undertook to defend a very corrupt Church against the Wiclevites, upon a scriptural and rational foot. It was impossible for him to do it, but by softening and disguising several principles and practices then prevailing. His design was very like to what the Bishop of Meaux [*i.e.* Bossuet] attempted in the last century; but Pecock was not altogether so artful, nor so well-guarded. He made some concessions which were very just, but which so corrupt a state of the Church would not bear. His enemies (some through envy, some through superstitious zeal) took the advantage and aggravated everything to the utmost. And thus a good and great man fell a sacrifice.²

This just and favourable estimate, which possesses far greater historical validity than Dean Hook’s trenchant judgement of a

¹ Preface to the *Book of Faith* (1688), ix: ‘it was the commonly received opinion of the Church that scripture is the rule of faith’, an opinion not reversed by the ‘sentence [*i.e.* against Pecock] of two or three partial bishops’ (*id.* xiii).

² Waterland, *Works*, ed. Van Mildert (Oxford, 1823), x, 428. Bishop Van Mildert’s life of Waterland should also be consulted with a view to a full understanding of Waterland’s position in eighteenth-century church history. His chief writings were directed against Arianisers like Daniel Whitby and Samuel Clarke.

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century later,¹ did not soften Lewis's Protestant bias. Lewis, who was the rector of a country parish in Kent,² was an earnest, somewhat laborious writer with a faculty for research but unfortunately lacking both Waterland's more balanced scholarship and his serene English prose style. His life of Pecock, which was a sequel to his study of John Wyclif, remains the sole full-length biography of the worthy bishop yet published and is therefore invaluable, but it was written with a view to justifying the 'great and invaluable blessing of the Reformation' and to disproving the 'antiquity of Rome's hold on England'.³ Lewis believed that both Wyclif and Pecock were bulwarks of 'Protestantism' against the aggressive poison of Rome. His portrait of Pecock is therefore inevitably unbalanced and his book as a whole suffers from his desire to denounce image-worship,⁴ 'that absurd and nonsensical doctrine of transubstantiation'⁵ and other irrelevancies.⁶ After care has been taken, however, to guard against this bias, Lewis's book remains the standard authority on Pecock.

One stage in the interpretation of Pecock has been concluded with Lewis and the information so gathered points to two important facts. In the first place, the writers who have been dealing with Pecock have approached him from a purely propagandist though not necessarily unhistorical angle, with the intention of supporting some factor in their own philosophy of life. Therefore

¹ W. F. Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury* (London, 1867), vol. v. It might be added that Waterland's judgement was more balanced than that of the non-juror, Jeremy Collier (*Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Barham, 1840), III, 390 ff.). His treatment of Pecock is misleading, especially in relation to episcopacy and its effects in England.

² 1675-1747, vicar of Minster from 1708 and master of Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury, from 1717. Henry Wharton had been vicar of Minster in 1688.

³ *Life of Reynold Pecock* (Oxford, ed. 1820-), vii.

⁴ *Id.* 54-60.

⁵ *Id.* 163.

⁶ E.g. 'one would have thought that so violent a shock, added to the general opposition [in relation to Anselm] which this doctrine of papal supremacy met from all the Western princes, had been enough to shame so groundless and impious an imposture out of the world. But ambition knows no bounds, especially when backed by interest, and flushed and encouraged by the superstitious madness of the people' (*id.* 92).

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it is not so much Pecock who passes through yellow manuscript and leather-bound volume as Master John Foxe, Henry Wharton, Archdeacon Waterland and the learned 'minister of Margate'. In the second place, Pecock has been viewed throughout, although with varying emphasis, as a precursor of the Protestant Reformation, a Lutheran before Luther, an eighteenth-century rationalist standing amidst fifteenth-century darkness, a living apologia of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*.¹

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Pecock was no longer regarded, with one or two exceptions, as a piece of scaffolding for the redundant arguments of erudite but controversial churchmen. There was, nevertheless, still little unanimity as to his real significance. Dean Hook, for instance, in his *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, reacts to Pecock very differently from Lewis and Wharton. Pecock appears in the noble dean's work as an 'asserter of Ultramontane principles and an upholder of the extreme pretensions of the Bishop of Rome',² 'an ultra-papist' who even 'if he had escaped persecution in his own age, would not have escaped it entirely in our own'.³ Churchill Babington, one of the most versatile scholars of the last century,⁴ took a very much more balanced view in the introduction to his edition of Pecock's *Repressor*, for he characterises Pecock there as 'the enlightened advocate of toleration in times peculiarly intolerant; he was the acute propounder of a rational piety against unreasoning and most unreasonable opponents'.⁵ This viewpoint is reflected and extended in Professor J. L. Morison's later estimate of

¹ Even later, Dr Thomas Short regarded Pecock as a 'promotor of the Reformation... though not a martyr, was a confessor in its cause' (*A Sketch of the History of the Church of England to 1688* (London, 1840), 70).

² *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury* (London, 1867), v, 178.

³ *Id.* v, 293-4.

⁴ Babington (1821-89) was an extremely competent natural historian and expert classic who was appointed to the Disney Professorial Chair of Archaeology at Cambridge in 1865. He also edited vols. 1-2 of Higden's *Polychronicon* (*D.N.B.* (Suppl. 1909), xxxii, 92-3).

⁵ Introduction to *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (Rolls, 1860), lix. In another place Dr Babington commented that his type of mind was 'Anglican rather than Roman' (*id.* xxvi).

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Pecock as a 'Renaissance man in a land still content with its ancient ways and thoughts'.¹ A writer a few years later hit on the happier formula 'a product of his own day and a child of a later generation'.² With a more intensive study of the method of the bishop's thought there has been an inclination to leave the 'Renaissance' and to return to the 'medieval' man. Both Dr E. Hitchcock and Dr Greet, who have together been responsible for the excellent editions of Pecock's work for the Early English Text Society, find that he can no longer be regarded as the sponsor of nineteenth-century liberalism born before his time but rather as a man with 'essentially the Aristotelian, scholastic type of mind'.³ Dr Greet, indeed, goes so far as to say that 'it was his habit in argument to take extreme positions, but always with recognition of their hypothetical character',⁴ thus suggesting, unjustifiably, that Pecock never sincerely held the opinions he circulated but merely relished them as an exercise in logic. Another recent writer, Canon Maynard Smith, calls Pecock a 'thorough-going rationalist'.⁵ Such, then, have been the opinions which different students of Pecock have held, and it needs little power of observation to detect the extreme diversity of views which characterises both earlier and more modern writers. Thus even though it has been possible for recent scholars to reach a more truly historical and critical view of Pecock's significance in the fifteenth century, there is not as yet any final opinion on the matter nor has an integrated study of Pecock appeared.

There is yet another reason why an essay on Pecock might be written. His own career and works are fascinating in themselves, for the spectacle of a bishop on trial may still interest the twentieth century, whilst his books, once the initial effort has been made,

¹ Introduction to the *Book of Faith* (Glasgow, 1909), 23.

² Bishop (then the Rev.) E. M. Blackie in *E.H.R.* (July 1911), 448. Cf. Ten Brink in his *History of English Literature* (trans. W. Clarke Robinson (New York, 1893), II, 335). He calls Pecock the 'enfant terrible of orthodoxy'.

³ Introduction to the *Donet* (E.E.T.S. 1921), xxi.

⁴ Introduction to *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun* (E.E.T.S.), xvi.

⁵ *Pre-Reformation England* (London, 1938), 283.

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are far less exhausting than Dr Greet would have us believe.¹ But it is doubtful whether any man is worthy of historical study for himself alone. Pecock *qua* Pecock is of only minor importance and interest, but Pecock *qua* fifteenth-century history takes on an altogether different appearance. No longer an isolated phenomenon, he fits into the vast, dramatic background of fifteenth-century history, and in so doing helps us to understand that fascinating but difficult age. There are then two aspects of Pecock to be considered in this study, the Pecock who lived, wrote and thought from *c.* 1390 to *c.* 1460–1, and on the wider canvas the Pecock who reflects the feelings, moods and aspirations of the time in which he was living, who points the way to the age that has passed and to the age that was yet to come.

Finally, it must be admitted that this study, in so far as it is concerned with original research, is a re-examination and integration of evidence rather than a fount of new, undiscovered material. The reasons for this are twofold. In the first place, it has not been possible to discover any really new material nor to have found any of Pecock's long-lost treatises, diligently as it had been hoped that this would have been the case. In the second place, the writer believes in all modesty that the re-examination and the integration of research partially completed, together with the interpretation to which that research must give rise, are frequently as valuable as the opening up of some newly discovered treasure trove. There is perhaps an unfortunate tendency in our own days to exalt new treasure trove rather more than its importance would justify. It is hoped, then, that the short estimate of the diversity of views which have been put forward about Pecock in past years together with the lack of 'any integrated study' of the bishop will amply justify this brief essay on a comparatively little charted sea of fifteenth-century history.

¹ Introduction to the *Renle*, xviii.

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CHAPTER II

PECOCK'S EARLY YEARS

REGINALD PECOCK was born in Wales somewhere between 1390 and 1395,¹ although both the exact date and place are unknown. All the evidence agrees on his Welsh parentage: he was, Gascoigne tells us, 'Wallicus origine',² whilst the bull of provision issued by Pope Eugenius IV at the time of his elevation to the see of St Asaph speaks of him as 'presbyter diocesis Menevensis'. One tradition asserts that he was born at Laugharne in Carmarthenshire, but there is no evidence to suggest whether this was so or not.³ Nor do we know anything about his parentage despite Lewis's hazard that he was probably of 'an honest family, though it was not much known or celebrated'.⁴ The name 'Pecok' or 'Pacok' does not give any clue to his surroundings nor to the identity of his-family.⁵ Indeed, any attempt to visualise his early years is not only by its very nature hypothetical but also comparatively unprofitable. The Wales in which he was brought up

¹ Babington says *c.* 1395 (Introduction, x) and Lewis *c.* 1390. The probable date lies somewhere between the two.

² *Loci e Libro Veritatum*, 26, 99, etc. Cf. *A Brief Latin Chronicle*, ed. J. Gairdner (Camden Soc.), 167: 'nacione Wallicus'; Incert. Chron. in Leland's *Collectanea* (ed. 1715, II, 409). Babington notes that Bale calls him 'Anglus' in the 1548 edition of the *De Brit. Script.* but follows Leland in his later edition.

³ Browne Willis asserts this in his *Survey of St Asaph* (ed. E. Edwards, London, 1801, 80), but I cannot find the reference in my copy of Fuller's *Worthies of Wales* (ed. P. Austin Nuttall, 1840, III, 492), apparently Willis's source of information.

⁴ The fact of his fellowship establishes that his family would not have been a very rich one. One of his friends, Lyhart (Fellow of Exeter, later Provost of Oriel and Bishop of Norwich), was a miller's son from Lanteglos in Cornwall.

⁵ The name Pecock is not infrequent in medieval literature, e.g. Thomas P. of Coggeshall (*Cal. Fine Rolls*, xviii, 126), Robert P. (grocer of London) (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, Henry VI, vi, 316). Cf. *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, Henry VI, v, 370; Edward IV, III, 490; Edward III, xvi, 365 (John P., parson of Alderton in Northampton); *Cal. Close Rolls*, Henry VI, III, 98, 112, 462; *Thorne's Chronicle of St Augustine's, Canterbury*, ed. A. H. Davis, 412; *Reg. Bekynton*, I, 134.

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was a wild and war-scarred country, yet again to suffer from the rebellion of Glyndwr which took place during Pecock's early childhood. St David's Cathedral, supposing St David's to have been the diocese of his birth, only just escaped the dire fate which overtook the churches of Bangor and St Asaph, for Glyndwr penetrated as far as south Pembrokeshire in 1401. In short, says Adam of Usk, *velut alter Assur, furoris Dei virga, inauditam tyrannidem ferro et flamma miserime vibravit*.¹

Pecock's early education, which probably took place at some school attached to his local church, can have been very little different from that of his contemporaries, nor can his time at Oxford, whither he went in the first decade of the fifteenth century, have been very notable from the educational point of view. It is difficult to find any originality in his contemporary professors, and, in any case, as yet no one has been found to whom any of Pecock's original ideas can be specifically traced. He would have read such works as Ralph Strode's *Logica* and the well-thumbed Biblical commentaries before attaining to his degree. He incepted under a Cistercian monk, probably during the last year of his residence in Oxford, for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. For this he would have pursued the normal scholastic task.² Later he proceeded to the Doctorate of Divinity but, adds

¹ *Chronicon Adae de Usk*, ed. Sir E. M. Thompson (London, 1904), 78.

² Dr Hastings Rashdall details the course and gives other information relative to studies at Oxford in vol. III of his *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (ed. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, Oxford, 1936), 158–60:

'THEOLOGY—For B.D. (*Admissio ad lecturam libri Sententiarum*):

For M.A. candidates two years more, i.e. seven years in all.

For others, two years more, i.e. eight years in all.

Certain opponencies, number not specified. (N.B. probably one—*Reg. Annalium Coll. Merton*, ed. H. E. Salter, O.H.S., xxvi–xxvii.)

For Licence (i.e. for the Doctorate):

Two years' further study.

To have lectured on one book of the Bible and on the Sentences.

An examinatory sermon at St Mary's.

Eight responsions to non-graduate opponents.

To dispute (as opponent) with every regent D.D.

Vespers.

In the fifteenth century an additional sermon was added by statute.³

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Gascoigne, 'fuit doctor in Oxonia per gratiam absurdam'. He continues:

Nunquam enim respondit alicui doctori pro forma sua, ut esset doctor, nec aliquem actum in scholis fecit in Oxonia, postquam incepit in theologia. . . . Per omnes annos a die incepionis suae in Oxonia usque ad diem praesentis scripturae nullum actum fecit scholasticum, nec legendo, nec praedicando, nec disputando, nec determinando.¹

Even so the interest of Pecock's early years centres on Oxford, for it was to be of a paramount, perhaps even the predominant influence in his life and work. He attended the university at a critical time, since events there and especially in his own college of Oriel must have had a pronounced influence on the future development of his thought and must to a certain extent explain his later antipathy to Lollardy. In November, 1407, Archbishop Arundel had summoned a meeting of the Southern Convocation at Oxford to try to prevent the continued reading and propagation of Wyclif's views and of his writings.² As a result of this, a commission consisting of members of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the heads of the 'Colleges, Halls and Entries' was appointed to make a monthly inquisition, the object of which was to find out whether the constitutions so passed were observed in the societies under their governance. In addition to this, lecturers were forbidden to make any book which had been written in Wyclif's time the subject of their classes unless it had been licensed by the university or its delegates and by the archbishop. The university not only disliked this unwelcome exercise of primatial power but it regarded the archbishop's interference as illegal and discourteous.³ Further, the primate's determination

¹ *Loci e Libro Veritatum*, 26.

² Wilkins, *Concilia*, III, 314-19; H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif*, II, 417-19 (Appendix v); Rashdall, *Universities in the Middle Ages* (ed. Powicke and Emden), III, 130 n.

³ On Oriel College, *vide* D. W. Rannie, *History of Oriel College* (London, 1900); G. C. Richards and C. L. Shadwell, *The Provosts and Fellows of Oriel College* (Oxford, 1922).