

## ANOTHER LAUDERDALE LETTER.

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IN the BULLETIN for July, 1922,<sup>1</sup> eleven letters of John, Second Earl of Lauderdale to Richard Baxter were published and no other was known to me. They were all written from Windsor Castle—the place of his detention since April, 1656—and the last, or what I took to be the last, was dated 17 March, 1658. But it was not the last. The last was written a year later—this time from London on March 20th, and signed simply ‘Yo<sup>rs</sup>.’ In consequence of its anonymity Mr. Black (who compiled a list of the Baxter MSS.) did not class it under his name, and apparently did not note the identity of its writing with that of the letters with his name attached. Hence it happened that I, too, missed it until I came upon it one day as a result of going carefully through the whole contents of the particular volume where it slumbers. The very first sentence shows that the correspondence had gone on—however intermittently—during the year: for this is in response to a letter of Baxter’s dated the 7th which the Earl found, greatly to his relief, “at Tom Underhill’s<sup>2</sup> shop yesterday.” The year had brought tremendous agitations to both of them—most of all, probably, to Baxter, who hoped for an era of peaceful settlement on the quiet succession of Richard to his masterful father. A Solomon after a David was his expectation. Instead of which the fountains of the great deep were broken up; and he himself almost engulfed. On April 25, 1659, just as he finished what was to be the last section of his mature pronouncement on the political situation—‘the Holy Commonwealth’—came the news of Richard’s dissolution of Parliament under pressure from Fleetwood and the great officers of the Army. The very thing he most dreaded—military rule—had come to pass. On May 7 the Long Parliament

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vii. pp. 73-105.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Underhill was Baxter’s publisher.

'or rather the fag end,' was restored—a somewhat reassuring fact. But on the 25th Richard formally abdicated and vanished into private life. The soldiers were uppermost, though Parliament claimed, and might seem to have, its way. "The members returned to their seats without a doubt that they possessed an indefeasible right to rule a people, some fraction of which had once elected them to represent it. They were the Bourbons of republicanism." Sir Henry Vane was the ruling, or driving, spirit of the republic which they tried to set up; and Baxter was made to feel his anger. In one of the suppressed passages of his autobiography he tells how Vane 'grievously threatened' him 'for shifting the guilt of the King's death from the Presbyterians to the military fanatics, Anabaptists and Vanists;' how he 'complained of him by name in the Parliament;' and how he 'sought, by messengers, to affright' him, and make him recant. Nothing came of this nor of the suspicions which were directed towards him in connection with the abortive rising of Sir George Booth in September.<sup>1</sup> He knew of the rising from Sir Ralph Clare of Kidderminster, and undoubtedly wished it well; but thought its defeat, and the defeat of any similar attempt, must be certain in the absence of any cordial and general understanding between the Presbyterians and 'Episcopal men.' Consequently, all he did was limited to private efforts—by means of Sir Ralph Clare and Dr. Hammond, for example—to make sure of some (Ecclesiastical) agreement with the Episcopal men. Then they, and his party, could work for the King unitedly. Meanwhile, however, events rushed forward. On October 13 a military clique broke up the Parliament. On November 24 the deposed Council of State, whose place had been taken by a 'Committee of Safety,' sent General Monck a commission to command all the forces in England and Scotland; and Monck was soon on the march into England. On December 26 the Rump was restored. On February 21 the members secluded since December, 1648, were readmitted. On March 15 the House dissolved itself and fixed the meeting of a Free Parliament for April 25. On that date the new Parliament assembled; and six days later voted the King's return. It was in the interval between the dissolution of the old and election

<sup>1</sup> "They laid wait upon the Road for my Letters" and sent one of them up to Sir Henry Vane to London, R. B. ii. 207.

of the new House—when the commotion of all parties was at its height, and the issue still undecided, that Lauderdale wrote to Baxter this last letter. The issue hung upon the attitude of the Presbyterians—already a name for the great middle party between the so-called fanatics and the Cavaliers ; and their attitude hung very much upon what they could be made to think about the King. Was he a good Protestant ? was he resolved to effect a fair settlement of the Church ? was he worthy of trust ? To convince them of all this became Lauderdale's absorbing business ; and, above all, to convince Baxter. This was why, even before his release on March 8, he offered, in a letter now lost, to visit Baxter at Kidderminster incognito, as soon as he was out of prison ; and why he was so concerned at not hearing from Baxter ; and why, in the present letter, he repeated his promise to come, as soon as he had the means to pay for his fare ; and why Baxter suddenly resolved to anticipate the Earl by hurrying up to London ; and why Lauderdale waited upon him at once. The cryptic language of the letter—near the end—suggests quite clearly the burning question. Charles, of course, is the 'gentleman' to whom the writer wishes very well ; but against whom he hears Baxter has declared himself. On other points in the controversy—King *versus* Protector or Republic—they are agreed. They are at one about the doctrine and its application ; in plain words, about kingship and Charles's kingly rights. His fitness to be king, or his utter unfitness, is what troubles Baxter ; and troubles many others, he thinks—the secluded members, for instance, those loyal friends of Parliamentary government who have lately regained their seats, and with whom Baxter's sympathy had always been strong. As to these, says the Earl, a word in your ear. They 'are not all of a mind. Some may be changed since you saw them. This I can assure you ;' while, as to yourself, wait till you see me ; and 'I am confident you will trust me in matters of fact and hear my reasons.' You are too strong for me in other controversies, but not in this. Baxter may have hurried up partly out of regard for the Earl's empty purse ; or partly to escape a too compromising visit from one who, in a small and inquisitive community, could not well be hid ; but his strongest motive seems clear. He was eager to get at the facts about Charles which Lauderdale professed to know. And Lauderdale talked him over ; nor is this surprising, if we remember that he had never seen the Earl

but knew him only through his letters ; that these had conveyed the impression of a kind and humble and genuinely pious man ; that Baxter, therefore, was disposed to credit what Lauderdale told him, from his own former experience, and from the recent testimony of others, in the King's favour ; and that the Earl had a very plausible tongue.

But, after all, he would not have prevailed had the course of events been otherwise. Those events spoke with a voice far more powerful than Lauderdale's eloquence. He took it to be the voice of God. So, whatever Charles might be, it was God's will to call him back and accept the consequences. "I was myself so much affected with the strange Providences of God that I procured the Ministers to agree upon a Publick Thanksgiving to God. And I think all the Victories which that Army obtained were not more wonderful than their Fall was, when Pride and Errour had prepared them for it. It seemed wonderful to me that an Army that had got so many great and marvellous Victories and thought themselves unconquerable, and talkt of nothing but Dominion at home, and marching up to the Walls of *Rome*, should all be broken and brought into Subjection, and finally Disbanded, without one blow stricken, or one drop of Blood shed ! And that by so small a power as *Monk's* Army in the beginning was : So eminent was the Hand of God in all this Change !"<sup>1</sup>

But there was one factor in the situation of which he made no account, and that was himself. Suppose he had read the signs differently ; and had got the ministers to see with him ; and had used his incomparable influence in the London pulpits to persuade the people ; and had 'procured' the ministers to do likewise, would there have been a restoration, or, at least, an immediate and bloodless one ? Would the members of the new Parliament, many of whom were certainly of doubtful mind, have carried a vote to invite the King ? Nay, would the crafty Monck, who to the end held the scales so delicately, have dipped them finally for the King's return, if Baxter and his friends had stood out against it ? It was the 'Presbyterians,' headed by Baxter, who, at the critical moment, had the casting vote. And Lauderdale was acutely and nervously aware of this. He felt it a necessity to win Baxter, because to win him was to win the

<sup>1</sup> R. B., ii., 214.

game ; nor can he ever have been more relieved and delighted than when Baxter “procured the Ministers to agree upon a Publick thanksgiving” for the object he had at heart.

The interpretation of Providence is apt to be a perilous thing. One may so easily find what one wants to see. Baxter wanted to see the hand of God descend in ruinous strokes on the Fanatics and Sectaries—people who, on their part, had once seen the hand of God uplifted for them in miraculous victories ; and now bewailed His withdrawal from them on account of their sins, but without any loss of faith in their cause as the cause of God. They thought that Baxter and his party, from hatred of them, had joined themselves to the dark powers of evil and would live to rue it. Baxter did live to rue it. In one of those self-confessions which, for their brave and humble sincerity, so endear him to his reader, he says—after mentioning seven other occasions for repentance—“And I do more repent of this cause of all, viz., *that I appointed God a time*, and limited his Providence.” The context shows that he was referring to the King’s Restoration—twenty-two years before. Bitter experience had taught him that the time of it was not God’s time, though it had seemed to be marked out by God’s wonderful workings. It was not God’s time, but really the time seized upon by man’s impetuous passions. These were the powers—the dark powers—which brought back the King, and God suffered them to have their way. It was, however, not *his* way. They did but hinder the better way which his ‘omnipotency’ held in reserve, and would surely have revealed, despite the human weakness of it, in his own time. Thus did Baxter revise his attitude of 1660, as he looked back sadly and regretfully in 1682.<sup>1</sup> His own insight had failed ; and Lauderdale’s counsel had led him wrong.

B. MSS. (Letters) V. f 211<sup>ab</sup>—anonymous but certainly the Earl of Lauderdale’s last letter to Baxter, dated 20 March (1660), London, endorsed For the Reverend—my much Honored friend—Mr. Richard Baxter, Minister of the Gospel—at Kidderminster.

SIR,

I hope I need not tell you how welcome yo<sup>r</sup> Letters are ever to me, but never was any of them so welcome as this last of the

<sup>1</sup> The True History of Councils . . . pp. 204-5.

7<sup>th</sup>), w<sup>ch</sup> I found at Tom Underhill's shop yesterday. For on Thursday was sennet that member of the Councell (by whom you was pleas'd to send me a kinde message) gave me a grievous alarm by the first news of y<sup>r</sup> dangerous sicknes. But blessed be the Lord I see better hopes in this—that our God will yet preserve you till you become a more usefull instrument in setling peace in the Churches of Great Brittain. Yo<sup>r</sup> charity in considering my concerns gives me the confidence to acquaint you with them. Upon the restoring the secluded members they were pleased the very first day to demand ane account to be given of the causes of our restraint. In obedience to w<sup>ch</sup> order the warrants for our comitment were sent. I did desire the Governor (in jest) to certifie that my crime was *Original Sin*, for I told him seriously nothing can be charged against me but that I was born in Scotland and obeyed the Laws and Supreame authority where I onely owed my alledgance. The busines was delayed ten or twelve dayes. At last ane order was sent for our enlargement upon Security to the Councell. On the 8<sup>th</sup>) of this month we appeared before them and had our liberty on honest terms without any restraint, except not to goe to Scotland without Leave. Thus it hath pleased the Lord to restore me to Liberty after 8 yeares and just 6 months imprisonment.

My next endeavor was to have been restored to the poore remnant of my Estate, and I found many friends and great professions of the justice of my demand. The Councell ordered it to be reported as their opinion That the Hous wold authorise them to restore me if they saw cause. But either the shortnes of the time or some unknown reason made the order insignificant. Sure I am it was not reported. So that I lye in the same condition as to my Estate. But my desire is to reeste all my concerns on him who rules heaven and earth. By his gracious providence things are brought to a more hopefull condition as to publick liberty. Many yokes of illegall oppressions are broken. By the same providence and without my demanding it I have gott my Liberty. Why, then, should I repine, thogh the Lord thinks it not fitt to trust me at once with Liberty and outward accommodations? I will, in his strenth, labour to waite patiently (having done duety in demanding my owne). Let the Lord doe with me what he pleases and when he pleases. This condition makes it not possible for me at this time to satisfy myself in performing my promise, but, esooner as I am enabled I shall come incognito to Kederminster. I long (more than

you can) to speake w<sup>th</sup> you even about that controversie w<sup>ch</sup> you hint at. It is a vanity for me to pretend that I can satisfy you in any point of controversie ; yet in *this* I am confident I can. We are agreed as to the doctrine, and in the application I can say so much ; and I am so confident you will trust me in matter of fact and heare my reasons that I shall beseech you not to engage against the generall received opinion till I can have the happiness to see you. This I say because it is reported in towne That you have declared against a Gentleman to whom I wish very well. I doe not beleeeve it ; yet friendship compells me to give you this hint. One hint more, let me give you. All seclused members are not of a minde. Some may be changed since you saw them. This I can assure you. I am unchangeably

Yours.

20 March, London.

One of the slanders diligently fostered, if not first set going, by the unscrupulous scribler, Roger L'Estrange—a slander which did much to intensify and prolong the sufferings of Baxter's friends, as well as to justify their persecution in the eye of public opinion—was this, that the Presbyterians were rebels all along ; were partly guilty of the late royal Martyr's blood ; and had done all they could to keep his son from the throne. This letter of Lauderdale's alone is enough to disprove such a story, but I will quote Baxter's summary disproof of it—and merely remark that he had to repeat the disproof, in some form or other, to the end of his life ; and that there are still intelligent, but prejudiced, people who think the story true.

“What the Presbyterians<sup>1</sup> did to preserve and restore the King, is a thing that we need not go to any Corners or Cabinets to prove ! The Votes for Agreement upon the King's concessions in the *Isle of Wight* prove it ; the Ejection and Imprisonment of most of the House of Commons and all the House of Lords prove it ; the Calamitous overthrow of two Scottish Armies prove it. The Death of Mr. *Love*, with the Imprisonment and Flight of other *London* ministers prove it ; the Wars in Scotland, and their Conquest by *Cromwell* prove it ; the Rising of Sir *George Booth* and his Army's

<sup>1</sup> See *supra* for the right sense of this name.

overthrow prove it ; the Surprize of *Dublin Castle* from the Anabaptists by Colonel *John Bridges* and others in *Ireland*, and the Gratulations of General *Monk* in *England*, the Concurrence of the *Londoners*, and the Ministers there, the Actual Preparations of the Restored Members of the Long Parliament, and the Consent of the Council of State left by them, and the Calling in of the King hereupon by the next Parliament, without one contradicting Voice, and finally the Lords and Gentlemen of the King's old Party in all Countreys' (counties) addressing themselves to the Parliamentarians, and the King's grateful Acknowledgments in his Letters, and his Speeches in Parliament, do all put this Matter out of question."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R.B., ii., 215.