

The English Career of John Clarke, Rhode Island.

THE question has arisen, what was this Baptist champion doing between 1652 and 1663. It is well known that he emigrated from Suffolk in 1637, was dissatisfied with the state of affairs at Boston, and led a new colony to the island of Aquidneck, which they bought and named Rhode Island. Here he conducted worship, and after the arrival of Mark Lucar from London, a Baptist church was organised at Newport about 1644. He won converts at Seekonk in the Old Colony, who were prosecuted, and therefore came to strengthen the island church. In July 1651 he went to visit a man at Lynn, in Massachusetts, a member of his church, and this led to a prosecution, when fines were paid for him and another visitor, the third being whipped. He was sent to England to defend the colony against the ill-will of its neighbours, and sailed in November. Next May the Baptist publisher, Henry Hills, issued his *Ill News from New-England; or, A Narrative of New-England's Persecution*. The Massachusetts people were very alive to their danger, and Cobbet, the minister of Lynn replied in February 1653. But this elicited no response from Clarke, and scarcely anything has been known about him for the next ten years.

The attempt is made here to fill the gap; but there is danger of confusion with other men of the same name. One John Clark was prominent in Connecticut, which was generally in opposition to Rhode Island, so that it is not hard to identify him. Another was excessively prominent in the army, and his papers are now a mine of wealth as to the inner history of that famous body. In the calendars of State papers, there is some reason to think that each of these has been confused with our man.

There are on the other hand fragments of information about a John Clarke in touch with the Fifth Monarchists, which have not hitherto been associated with the Rhode Islander, but which may relate to him. It has not always been remembered that the expectation of Christ appearing to

inaugurate the Fifth Monarchy was very vivid in New England: John Eliot preached on it, Thomas Venner was so attracted by it that he returned to England to facilitate actively. In the earlier half of 1653 Cromwell himself was thinking on these lines, and his speech in July to the Nominated Parliament is full of Fifth-Monarchy ideas. During the next six months he became convinced that the whole idea was irreconcilable with the actual situation, and when in December the Parliament dissolved itself, and asked him to provide for government, he acquiesced. Thenceforward he and the Fifth Monarchists were in deadly opposition.

Now for those months our Clarke was busy in England on the colony's business, and in the Colonial State Papers his movements can be traced, till in the spring of 1654 the Protector and Council decided to incorporate the colony, and to send letters that the colony should proclaim the Protector. In September letters of thanks were sent by the assembly of freemen for Clarke's services, which were continued at least till next spring, as a letter of 29 March by Cromwell evinces. Then there is a gap.

In August 1654 a Fifth Monarchy manifesto was issued, announcing that regular meetings would be held to discuss the topic. Signatures of 150 men were appended, and the list is well worth studying from many standpoints; the whole pamphlet was reprinted in our *Transactions*, III., 129-153. For our present purpose we note 14 members of Knollys' church, 9 of Simpson's, including Peter Kidd, 12 of Jessey's, including George Barret and John Clarke. The question is whether this man is the Rhode-Islander. He must have been allied with some London church during his long residence in England, and as he was well educated, Jessey's would be decidedly attractive to him.

Next year Henry Hills was licensed to print a concordance drawn up by John Clarke, physician, of Rhode Island. No copy is known, or it would have been interesting to search for any sign of interest in the Fifth Monarchy.

The description as "physician" raises the question whether he had obtained any medical degree, when, and where. It is only too usual to ante-date a man's degree, so that a man honoured with a doctorate at the age of sixty will be mentioned in after times as "Doctor" when the events thirty years earlier are being described. It is quite possible that Clarke graduated at Cambridge on his visit of 1652, and had not obtained his degree when he emigrated at the age of 29. The university records deserve to be explored for this purpose.

Next came up a family affair in 1656. His wife Elizabeth

was entitled to a legacy from her father, John Hayes, of Wrestlingworth; and he acted in the matter. There is no doubt as to the identity in this case.

Early in 1657 there was a move to change the title of Cromwell's office, and call him king. This would have two obvious advantages; his powers would then be well-known, so that arbitrary action could be resisted constitutionally; and any one serving a "king" *de facto* was protected against any charge of treason. But there were many who wished to keep kingship abolished, and opposition was quickly manifested, of many kinds.

On 3 April an address was presented to Cromwell, signed chiefly by Baptists, begging him to refuse, consistently with his former views. A few of the signatures run:—H. Jessey, John Clarke, Hanserd Knollys, Henry Jackson, Wm. Warren, John Spilsbery. We know that Clarke of Rhode Island was a friend of Jessey, Knollys, and Spilsbery; so it seems reasonable to take this as an indication of the Rhode Islander's political position. The document was reprinted in the Hanserd Knollys Society's *Confessions of Faith*, pages 335-338.

Within six days the violent upholders of the Fifth Monarchy were arrested in Shoreditch, a few hours before they intended a rising: their leader was Thomas Venner. Within a fortnight all danger of an armed insurrection seemed over. In this movement it does not appear that Clarke was concerned, or at least he was not recognized.

It was evident that Cromwell was ruling, whether under the title king or under the title Protector; and to his methods of rule there was opposition from many quarters. Constant manifestoes appeared, and meetings were frequently held. In April 1658 several people were arrested at Coleman Street meeting, including John Canne, Cornet Wentworth Day, John Clarke, John Belcher, Peter Kidd. Clarke and Day were tried at the Old Bailey for sedition, when Jessey and Barrett appeared to countenance them. Clarke defended himself with spirit, charged the judges with treason, and produced acts of Parliament to prove his case, to their great confusion. The jury acquitted him on most counts, and justified his action on the rest. Nevertheless the judges sentenced him next day. The others were brought up that day and were countenanced by Richard Goodroom, another Baptist.

The question again arises whether this able man is the Rhode Islander.

After the death of Cromwell, there was no one strong enough to govern. The leaders of the army quarrelled,

Parliament after Parliament sat and was re-modelled, and within eighteen months people were ready to acquiesce in any government that would maintain order. A Fifth Monarchy petition was presented in September 1659, and while it was signed by Jessey, Goodgroom, Day, no John Clarke appears in the list. This suggests that the man of 1654 and 1658 had now abandoned the cause.

Clarendon tells in his *History* that several Baptists in 1659 made overtures to Charles; he mentions scarcely any names, and no thorough search has been made in scattered papers to unearth them. There is some probability that our John Clarke at least sympathized with their attitude.

Charles II. was recalled in 1660, and the last serious attempt of the Fifth Monarchy was made when Venner rose in rebellion early in January 1661. Three days after his defeat there appeared a pamphlet of eight pages:—*The plotters unmasked, murderers no saints, or, a word in season to all those that were concerned in the late rebellion against the peace of their king and country, on the sixth of January last at night, and the ninth of January. By a friend of righteousness, and a lover of all men's souls, knowing that one is of more worth than ten thousand worlds, John Clarke.* There can be little doubt that this was the man who had been attracted by the movement, but had never associated himself with the extremists. He took this opportunity of emphatically disowning the rebels.

On 29 January, John Clarke of Rhode Island put in a petition for a royal charter to the colony, and he followed it up on 5 February. On 28 March he gave thanks for the measure of success attained, saying that he was about to sail. This was quick work, and we can see that if he was the pamphleteer, such loyal support would tell to the advantage of his colonial agency.

He possibly went to Rhode Island to explain the situation and obtain renewed powers. These were conferred on 27 August by an assembly, and in April 1662 he was stimulated by a gift of land in Providence. He reappears in England on 7 April, 1663, with an agreement as to the boundary with Connecticut satisfactory to Winthrop. On 8 July he received the long-desired charter, and sent it out via Boston. He himself was out in July 1664, and in September he was sent to the Commissioners for New England; next February he approved of the king's policy in sending rich coats to the Indian sachems, a policy doubted by some. In 1666 and 1667 he sent news to London about hostile fleets and their movements. In the latter year he was discussing boundaries with

the adjoining colonies; and the activities of his life till 1672 are well known.

It is more to our present purpose to note that John Belcher, arrested in 1658 as a Fifth Monarchist, evolved into a Seventh-day Baptist. In 1668 he joined in a letter from the church in Bell Lane, London, to the Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island, which led in 1671 to the formation of a separate Seventh-day church. But this John Belcher was associated in 1658 with the John Clarke who made such a spirited defence.

Thus the probability seems high that it is one and the same man.

THE BAPTIST CHURCHES OF ACCRINGTON AND DISTRICT: their formation and gradual development, with numerous character sketches of Baptist Worthies. Compiled by Robert J. V. Wylie, 467 pages, 103 illustrations. 10/6 net. Wellington Press, Accrington.

Seldom have we seen a local history so full, so accurate, so interesting. Those who remember that William Howie Wylie was biographer of Carlyle, besides being a skilled journalist, will rejoice that the family ability has been turned to such a theme. Accrington under Charles Williams, George Macalpine, and James Moffat Logan won a national reputation; but few knew that Cannon Street was but the centre of a cluster of churches rendering fine service in north-east Lancashire. There is a wealth of story in these pages, which are mercifully free from theological discussion and absurd legends of antiquity. While they will be conned with delight on many a Pennine hill, or in the dales, they are full of anecdotes which illustrate conditions rapidly passing away. Baptist interest in schooling was strongly evinced here, and the story may set us pondering why we have closed nearly all our denominational elementary schools. There are glimpses at August pilgrimages to disused sites; constant allusions to the love of music, both vocal and orchestral; mention of revivals. It is amazing what this district has done for the denomination; who knows that Joseph Angus was prepared for the ministry under Joseph Harbottle? Perhaps few areas can show such a record; but every one intending to chronicle the story of his own church should get this and see how to do it.