

Distressed Sion Relieved, 1689.

BENJAMIN Keach had published a score of works by 1689, and was destined to publish quite thirty-four more; some of them ran to twenty editions, notably his *Primer for Children*, for which he had been pilloried, and his *War with the Devil*, an allegory six years earlier than *Pilgrim's Progress*. A copy of the political poem named in the title has just been acquired for our Society's Library from the Rev. E. A. Payne of Bugbrooke; six other copies are known. It is a pocket octavo of 154 pages, with two plates, and a six-page publisher's list of 1692. The work is dedicated to William and Mary. It is a sequel to *Sion in Distress*, as to which a bibliographical note is due.

In Sixty-Six a year of expectation
Came no relief, but still fresh Lamentation; . . .
In prospect of what I saw coming on
Poor Sion, e're her miseries would be gone,
And therefore did before that year run out,
Foretel some things time since hath brought about. . . .
But all my hopes being frustrate, I again
In the year Eighty pour'd out Tears amain,
For at that time came forth a new Addition
To Sions groans and sorrowful condition.

The address To the Reader also speaks clearly of the first impression in 1666, and of the new edition in 1680 with enlargements. Neither edition was ever advertised; and indeed in 1666 Keach was a poor unknown man, in prison. In 1683, however, an advertisement of *The Travels of True Godliness* styles him the Author of *Sion in Distress*. No copy of 1666 is known. The 1680 enlarged version was published in 1681, and six copies are known; the edition in 1691 is called the second, of 1692 the third.

This little volume of 1689 makes extensive quotations from the earlier, to show how his hopes had been fulfilled. It also quotes a poem by Stephen Colledge, executed for treason 31 August, 1681; one couplet deserves note:—

But Walls and Bars cannot a Prison make,
The Free-born Soul enjoys its Liberty.

Colledge, therefore, was no narrow-minded Puritan, but was familiar with Richard Lovelace's lines to Althea:—

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.

The poem reviews the story of suffering since the reaction after the Popish Plot.

But to return; nothing for many years
Is seen but Persecution, Blood and Tears, . . .
Did a Dissenter Law or Justice crave?
He's branded for a Rascal, Rebel, Slave.

A dozen lines are given to Titus Oates being whipped, with great eulogy; he had not yet deceived Baptists and been excommunicated by them. Abraham Holmes, who had moved in the army from Cambridge to Leith, Exeter, Burntisland, had been in the Army Council, had been involved in the Rye House plot, had been captured after Sedgemoor, called forth this apostrophe:—

Brave Colonel Holmes, Wise, Valiant and Sincere,
Who didst to Sion true affection bear,
Thy worthy name shall not forgotten be,
But shall recorded be in History
To after Ages; nor can thy Arrears
Be duly paid without a Flood of tears.
Great Soul! thy Life thou seemedst to despise,
Rather than ask it of thine Enemies. . . .
How didst thou grieve and publicly bewail
Thy undertaking should so strangely fail?
And yet Prophetically didst Divine,
It would revive again in little time, . . .
And now the sad Spectators wondring saw,
The Horses long refuse the Sledge to draw;
The poor dumb Beasts by Heavens Instinct are
Made sharp Reprovers, whilst the Lash they bear;
Yet all these warnings from the Foe are hid,
For dye they must, and dye they also did;
Although on foot to slaughter they must drudge,
To gratify a most Tyrannical Judge.

Then comes a long section on the pastor of the Baptist church at Lyme Regis; has the church there erected a tablet to him with any couplet?

The next Great Worthy 'mongst the vanquisht Host,
Which in that hour of darkness I have lost,
A Preacher was, indu'd with Holy Art,
Who did dissolve the Stone in many a Heart, . . .

Must *Sampson* fall by the Philistines hand
 Who from their bondage strove to save the Land? . . .
 Have you not seen an early rising *Lark*
 Mounting aloft, making the Sun her mark?
 Lo, here's a *Lark* that soar'd up higher, higher,
 Till he had flung himself into Heav'ns Quire.

Macaulay apparently drew on this poem, which has a section on the Hewlings, grandsons of Kiffin. Some attention is due to one vindication:—

Undaunted *Rumbold* is the next that I
 Register in my mournful Elegy,
 He both Couragious and Religious was,
 Whose Zeal for Countreys Freedom did surpass
 Most others; and although he then did lye
 Under the scandal and the infamy
 Of secretly conspiring how to slay
 His Sovereign Lord in a vile treacherous way,
 Which he deny'd, and did abominate, . . .

But Keach does not explain exactly, who, at the Rye House, did intend to assassinate Charles, though he shows how he drew the line between private murder and open rebellion. There is another long passage that seems to show how Thomas Hicks, Baptist champion against the Quakers, ended his life:—

Dear *Hicks*, shall slanderous mouths seek to defame,
 And so calumniate so sweet a name? . . .
 A worthy Preacher, who could not comply
 With what his Conscience could not justify. . . .
But he's a Rebel; Ay! that, that's the cry;
 Now as to that, let's weigh impartially
 His dying words, now printed, which relate
 He did believe Monmouth legitimate.

Keach, as a Londoner, was much excited by the death of Alderman Cornish, and only spatchcocks in to a long passage about him, a few lines as to Elizabeth Gaunt:—

Few of thy Sex ever excelled thee
 In Zeal, in Knowledge, or in Charity,
 Who wast condemn'd a cruel death to die,
 'Cause thou relievedst men in misery. . . .
 Who by a Jury at Hicks-Hall was freed,
 Yet at th' Old Bailey 'gainst her they proceed;
 A London Jury took her Life away,
 Which they may answer for another day.

When he wrote, William and Mary reigned in England, but he was concerned about the state of things in Ireland, fearing that the massacres of 1641 would be repeated:—

Is't fit such bloody Butchers should bear sway,
Whose Hearts were never changed to this day.
Here's not a Constable, ev'n so mean a place,
But what is of the Irish Popish Race.

There are always people who lament the degeneracy of their times, and the declension of Christians. Pages are filled with faithful exposure and warning. Then comes a prolonged attack on the Romanisers, who are depicted as planning to divide Protestant opinion with the 1687 Declaration of Indulgence:—

Some other of thy Children we will please,
By giving of their Consciences some ease;
We'll give them Conventicle Room that they
May let us steal the Englishman away.

We cannot wonder at the strong language used in 1689; there was a good deal in 1918. It is more pleasant to cull a few verses from the hymns, which Keach had long been training his people to appreciate and use. One sums up like a good Calvinist:—

Let all men know; The Power Divine
Is absolute, and that alone,
None ever 'gainst him did combine,
But they were surely overthrown.
'Tis He pulls down, and sets up too,
And who dares say, *What dost thou do?*

An address to the discontented subject was not intended for congregational song, but ends on a fine note:—

Can none be Loyal to the King,
But only those that roar and sing,
And drink his health each day?
Come don't mistake, for certainly
He shows the greatest Loyalty
Who for him most doth Pray.

Ireland was much on men's minds then, and Keach has one long Hymn of Praise which includes a prayer for her conversion. An even longer "Sighs for Ireland" quickens his imagination and shows how he could follow up a train of thought, and even in that day rise to the great Missionary theme of Baptists—in tropic lands at least:—

Let not thy Glorious Sun appear
To lighten only these dark Parts;
But let the Nations, far and near,
Thy Gospel-Light have in their hearts:
From Ireland, Lord, all Clouds expel,
Oh, pity there thy Israel. . . .

Let thy blest Gospel grow and work
Victoriously in every place;
Let Tartars, and the ignorant Turk
Enlightened be with Heavenly Grace:
Poor Ireland, Lord, relieve with speed,
For whom our Hearts do almost bleed.

Send forth thy Light ev'n like the Morn,
That it o're all the Earth may fly
From Cancer unto Capricorn;
That all Lands, which in darkness lye,
May see how they have gone astray,
And be reduc'd to the Right way.