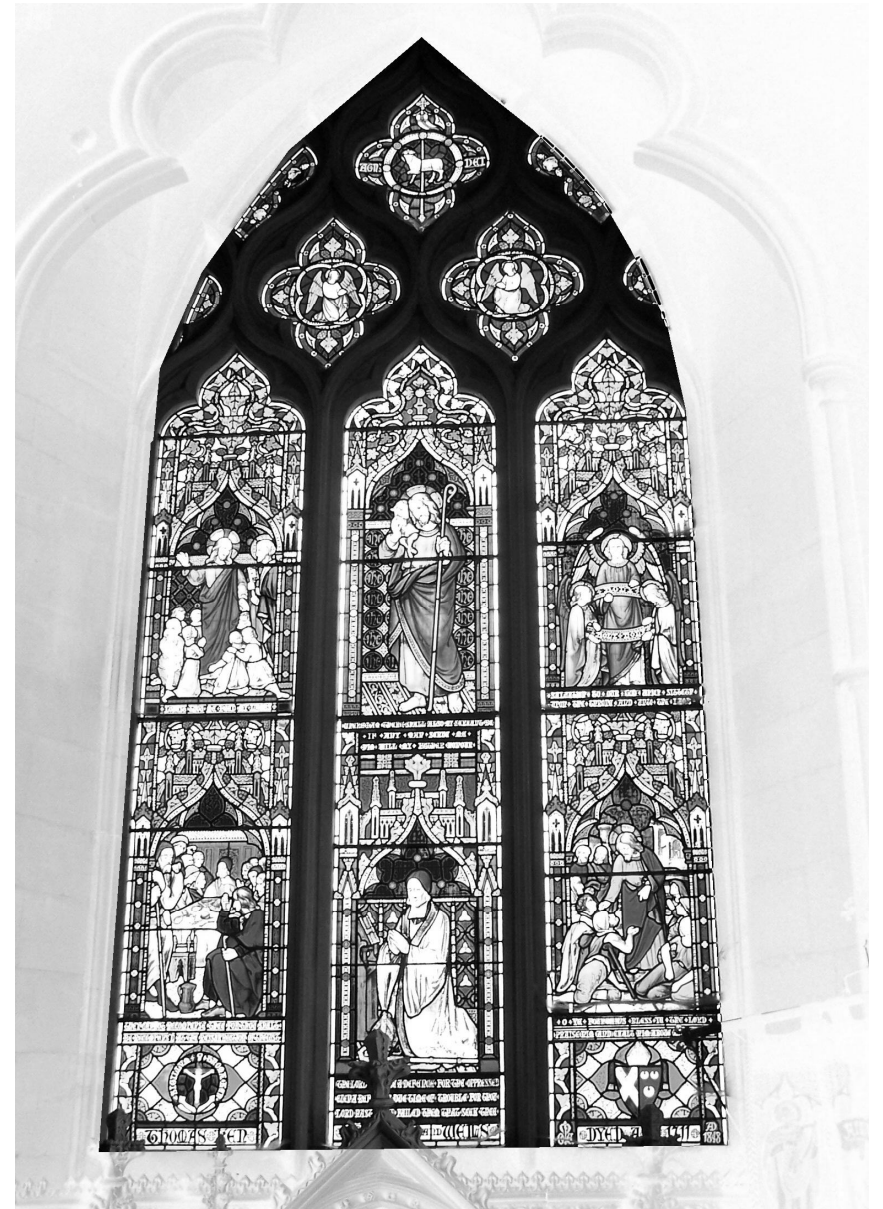


BISHOP THOMAS KEN



Early life and Education

Thomas Ken was born at Berkhamstead in July 1637. He was only four years old when his mother, who was his father's second wife, died and he was brought up by his step-sister, Anne. In 1646 she married Izaak Walton, famous as angler and writer, and Thomas was greatly influenced by his brother-in-law, who became his guardian when Thomas' father died in 1651.

Izaak Walton was closely associated with important figures in ecclesiastical and literary circles and this fact had significant consequences for young Thomas. Izaak was an intimate friend of John Donne, poet and divine, and he also knew well George Herbert, Rector of Bemerton, the writer of "The Country Parson" and of several well-known hymns. Another good friend was Nicholas Ferrar, the founder of the Little Gidding Community. Herbert and Ferrar were followers of the High Church tradition associated with William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 until his execution in 1645, and it is surely more than a coincidence that Thomas Ken in due course also adopted that tradition. We can see in Ken's pastoral work, both as parish priest and as Bishop, the influence of Herbert's insistence that a priest should invite the poorer members of his flock to dine with him on Sundays — which is exactly what Ken did at Wells; and in his strictly self-disciplined, ascetic way of life he was following the example of Nicholas Ferrar.

From John Donne, indirectly through Izaak Walton, Thomas Ken inherited a possession with which we at St. John's have a direct link. In his will, Donne bequeathed to Izaak Walton a signet ring which had on it the figure of Christ on an anchor, the symbol of Christian hope, and in due course Walton passed this on to Thomas, who wore and used it for the rest of his life, sealing his will with it. He also adopted the symbol for his gold crucifix — which now adorns our High Altar Cross.

In 1651 Thomas was admitted to Winchester College as a scholar and the school, the Cathedral and the city of Winchester held a special place in his affections for the rest of his life. In 1656 he was elected to New College Oxford, though he could not actually take up his place there until the following year and in the meantime he studied at Hart Hall (now Hertford College). At Oxford, if not earlier, he experienced the full consequences of the Puritan revolution and the

Cover illustrations:

Front - East window of Ken Chapel at Frome St John the Baptist

Back - Ken's Cross in the form of an anchor

Text substantially as edited and prepared by Peter Belham:

Reprinted: 2006 (with new cover); 2014

© The Vicar, Churchwardens & Parochial Church Council of the Parish of Frome St John the Baptist

rule of Cromwell; and this, together probably with his reaction to the beheading of Charles I in 1649, surely explains at least in part his firm belief in the need for loyalty to one's king, a belief which was to have such a profound influence on his career.

At Oxford he made a number of friendships which were to be life-long (he was in all things a very loyal person), including Hooper, who was eventually to become his successor-but-one as Bishop of Bath and Wells, and Thomas Thynne. This latter Thomas was the eldest son of a family which was well-known for its devotion to the Royalist cause in the political turmoil of the Seventeenth Century. His father had been punished for this by a heavy fine during the Cromwellian period. The fine, it is interesting to note, included a £20 per annum charge "for the benefit of St. John's Church at Frome".

Parish Priest and Prebendary

During Ken's time at Oxford, if not before, he became convinced that he had a vocation to enter the Church. He took his B.A. degree in 1662 and, probably in the following year (though no positive record exists) he was ordained deacon. In 1663 he became Rector of Little Easton, near Dunmow, but two years later George Morley, Bishop of Winchester, invited him to become his chaplain. So he resigned from Little Easton and returned to Winchester. In 1667 he became Rector of Brightstone in the Isle of Wight but was called back to Winchester again in 1669 to become a Prebendary of the Cathedral there and also Rector of East Woodhay, near Newbury. Three years later he resigned this living and returned to the Cathedral. This marked the end of his official career as a parish priest, though while serving as a Prebendary of the Cathedral he also undertook, without payment, the care of St. John in the Soke, a poor parish in the city.

In 1674 Ken wrote for the benefit of the boys of Winchester College a Manual of Prayers, which shows again and again in its ideas and spirit that he was steeped in Catholic doctrine. Though often accused of Roman Catholic sympathies, he was in fact a true Anglican and his stance was always that the Church of England is the branch in this country of the Catholic Church. In addition to the Manual, it is virtually certain that he also wrote for the boys of the College his Morning and Evening Hymns, although these were not actually included in the Manual until its 1695 edition.

Royal Chaplain

In 1679, for the first but certainly not for the last time. Ken found himself being called upon to play a part on the national stage. King Charles II appointed him as Chaplain to his niece Mary, who had married William, Prince of Orange. This royal connection became so important in his later life that it is necessary to explain the background to it now.

Charles I had three children. The eldest, who became Charles II, had no legitimate heir. The second child was James, Duke of York, who eventually succeeded his brother. James' first wife was Anne Hyde, daughter of the Earl of Clarendon, who was Lord Chancellor and chief advisor to Charles II. James had seduced Anne — as a young man, he was as profligate as his brother — and he was forced to marry her. By her he had two daughters, both of whom were destined to reign as Queen. The elder, Mary, married her cousin William. He was the son of William II of Orange (Holland) and of Mary, who was the youngest child of Charles I. James' second daughter was Anne. Anne Hyde died in 1672 and in the following year James married a Catholic, Mary of Modena. By her he had a son — James, who became known as the "Old Pretender" and was the father of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the "Young Pretender".

Both Charles II and his brother James had Roman Catholic leanings. James increasingly showed this tendency in public, but Charles attempted to conceal it and, realising that his nieces were likely to succeed him eventually, insisted that they should be brought up as Protestants. Morley, the Bishop of Winchester, became closely involved with the girls' education and upbringing and it was through this connection that his friend and chaplain, Thomas Ken, also became caught up in royal circles.

In 1677 Charles II arranged for Mary to be married to Prince William of Orange and Ken's Oxford friend Hooper went with her to Holland as her chaplain. Two years later, Ken succeeded him.

William appears to have been a somewhat unattractive character. Though renowned in Protestant circles for his courageous stand against Louis XIV of France (it was the need for assistance against Catholic France which was the reason why William welcomed

the marriage alliance with England), he was a cold calculating boor and an unfaithful husband and Mary was never happy.

Although apparently occupying a somewhat lowly position as chaplain. Ken was both a conscientious friend and protector of Mary and also boldly outspoken in his relations with William. He reprimanded him for his treatment of his wife and further annoyed William by insisting, in William's absence, that a friend of his, Count Zulestein, who had seduced Jane Wroth, a Maid of Honour to Mary, should marry her. This state of relations between William and Ken no doubt played some part in later transactions between them, when William was King of England.

In 1680 Ken returned to England and was appointed by Charles II to be one of his chaplains. Though cynical and a libertine, Charles was a good judge of character, a wise statesman for the most part and a man who did not let personal relations interfere with what he regarded as a right courses of action. He respected Ken for his straightforwardness and courage, even after Ken had refused to give his mistress Nell Gwyn lodgings in his house at Winchester.

Between 1678 and 1680 there took place in England the notorious "Popish Plot", in which the chief character was Titus Oates, a wholly wicked man. In order to gain fame and status, and with the aid of a hysterical mob whipped up by fear of the restoration of the Roman Catholic Church in England, he accused wholly innocent people, priests and prominent laymen, of complicity in a plot to murder Charles II and replace him with James, who would, it was alleged, overthrow Protestantism. Many people were tried, falsely found guilty and executed, on the perjured "evidence" of Oates and other informers. This was a completely disgraceful episode in English history. Its relevance to the story of Bishop Ken lies in the suspicion that he had "Romish leanings", an idea which appeared to be supported in 1688/89 when he remained loyal to James.

In 1683 in his capacity as a royal chaplain. Ken accompanied an expedition to Tangier. This was a British possession, which had come to us as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles II. Tangier, a haunt of pirates and smugglers, had proved to be more trouble than it was worth and the Government had decided to destroy the harbour installations and give up the place. The naval expedition carried out its task and brought back to England the

Governor of Tangier, Kirke. He was an appalling character, shortly to become notorious for his treatment of prisoners during and after the Monmouth Rebellion, and both at that time and also during the voyage home from Tangier, Ken was outspoken in his condemnation of him.

Bishop

While Ken was away in Tangier, Izaak Walton died (his wife Anne had died in 1662) and less than twelve months later, Thomas lost another old friend through the death of Bishop Morley of Winchester. He was succeeded by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Peter Mews, which meant that there was now a vacancy at Wells. Various suggestions were made to the King as to who should be appointed, but Charles interrupted them by saying "Odd's fish! Who shall have Bath and Wells but the little black fellow who would not give poor Nellie a lodging?".

On 16th December 1684 the Dean and Chapter at Wells formally elected Ken as Bishop. On 25th January 1685 he was consecrated at Lambeth Palace by Archbishop Sancroft and took the oath of allegiance to Charles II and his lawful successors, an oath which was to be of great significance in the future. It was typical of him that he did not conform to the practice usually expected from a newly-appointed bishop, of providing a banquet for local notables, but instead used the money (his own) in giving donations for the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral (destroyed in the fire of London in 1666) and for Winchester College.

Death of Charles II and Accession of James II.

Ken's enthronement at Wells was fixed for February 6th 1685, but in fact it had to take place by proxy, for on that very day Charles II died and Ken had been summoned to London a week earlier, when the King had been taken ill. His death bed was marked by unfortunately farcical scenes. Ken appears to have been called upon to play a leading part in urging repentance and giving comfort to the King, but at the last moment Charles' mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth, succeeded in spiriting a Roman Catholic priest into the bedchamber while the Anglicans were absent and he received the King into the Roman Catholic Church just before he died. This, however, was not generally known at the time.

During the lifetime of Charles, various influential people in Parliament had attempted to secure the passing of an act which would exclude James from the throne because of his Roman Catholic sympathies, but they had failed. Even so, there was general relief when at his accession James II said to the Privy Council that "he would always take care to defend and support the Church of England".

Thomas Ken was now at last free to go to his diocese and take up residence in the Palace. Certainly his presence there was urgently needed. There is plenty of evidence to suggest problems in the diocese — slackness (non-residential incumbents, ignorance and indiscipline) and the growth of non-conformity. One of his first acts was to get the Chapter to send an Address to James II, reminding him of his promise to uphold the Established Church and saying that "we securely rely on the sacredness of your Royal Word". The Address also described James as the Rightful Successor of Charles and the Bishop and Clergy of the diocese committed themselves "with all solemnity... to teach and inculcate Allegiance... to all your Subjects under our care".

Unfortunately, James soon showed by his actions that his promise to uphold the Protestant religion and the Church of England did not mean much. At his coronation (to which Ken had been summoned from his diocese) on 23rd April 1685, he refused to allow the service to be within the framework of the Eucharist. The Roman liturgy was soon openly practised in the chapel of the Palace of Whitehall, Jesuit priests were seen about the Court and Roman Catholics were appointed to high offices of State. James was more honest about his faith than Charles had been, but less tactful. He seems to have been totally unaware of the distrust which his actions generated towards him; and he continued on his foolish way.

Soon after entering upon his episcopate, Thomas Ken wrote an "Exposition of the Church Catechism", a work of deep spirituality and a defence of the Anglican Church and its principles. For this and other reasons, his influence was growing in the nation and this is shown by the fact that he was called upon to preach a Lenten sermon before the Court at Whitehall. In his sermon, he used allegory to remonstrate with the King (who was not present) for the difference between his professions and his practice in religious affairs.

When King James opened his first Parliament, he again promised to support and defend the Church of England; and Parliament showed itself to be still willing to accept his pledges by voting him all the revenues which they had granted his brother. This seems to show that in spite of James' attitude, the principle of legitimacy was still strongly held. James might not be popular, but he was the lawful monarch.

The Monmouth Rebellion

Belief in this principle, however, was immediately challenged by the Monmouth Rebellion, and once again Bishop Ken found himself caught up in events which, though they affected his diocese directly, also involved him in national affairs.

The Duke of Monmouth, illegitimate son of Charles II, was encouraged by some who opposed James to believe that the country would rise to his support and accept him as king. He landed in Lyme Bay from Holland on 11th June 1685 and marched towards Taunton, receiving a good deal of support from the ordinary people of Dorset and Somerset. On 17th June, an Act of Attainder was passed on Monmouth, convicting him of treason and putting a reward of £5,000 on his head, dead or alive.

Ken was present in the House of Lords when this was enacted and in his absence from the diocese, Wells was taken by the rebels.

After voting the King £400,000 to provide forces to suppress the rebellion, the Commons dispersed to their constituencies and Ken returned to Wells. The rebel forces, badly led and badly equipped, were defeated at the Battle of Sedgemoor on 6th July and James used Kirke (whom Ken had met on the return journey from Tangier) to round up the rebels, which he did with great brutality. Judge Jeffreys was given the task of presiding over the trials which condemned many to death and others to transportation.

It was a very sad time for Ken and his diocese. He did what he could to bring comfort and help to the prisoners, visiting them in the churches of Wells where many were imprisoned awaiting trial, and visiting the jails of Taunton and Bridgwater. He also wrote to the King protesting at their treatment, successfully pleading that martial law should be lifted; and he remonstrated with Jeffreys for his cruelty.

James, who had considerable respect for Ken despite their differences, sent for him to be with Monmouth, who was imprisoned in the Tower under sentence of execution. Ken and other bishops were with him in his last hours and eventually persuaded him to confess his sins and express contrition for the suffering he had caused. Ken was on the scaffold with him on the following day, 16th July, when he was executed, and he then returned to his diocese.

Many years later, in 1696, Ken appeared before the Privy Council and referred then to what he had done during the Monmouth Rebellion:—

"My Lords, in King James' time there were about a thousand or more imprisoned in my diocese who were engaged in the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, and many of them were such which I had reason to believe to be ill men and void of all religion; and yet, for all that, I thought it my duty to relieve them. It is well known in the diocese that I visited them day and night, and I thank God I supported them with necessaries myself as far as I could, and encouraged others to do the same".

Work in the diocese

The Monmouth Rebellion over, apart from the stark evidence throughout the county of the harsh treatment of the misguided people who had taken part, Ken was at last apparently free to concentrate on his pastoral work in the diocese. Certainly it was badly needed. His Articles of Visitation and Enquiry, addressed to the incumbents, churchwardens and sidesmen of every parish, showed the state of the churches. In some there were no proper altars in the chancels, no surplice, no Prayer Book, no Authorised Version of the Bible, even no chalice and paten. It seems that St. John's was rather better provided for; at all events, an Inventory of 23rd September 1690 showed that we possessed various kinds of plate and in addition, a Book of Martyrs and a Book of Homilies. Returns to the Articles also showed that the buildings themselves were often neglected and there were many examples of absentee incumbents. There was much ignorance of the Christian faith amongst ordinary people. In his "Directions for Prayer in the Diocese of Bath and Wells" (1685), Ken wrote "Some never pray at all, pretending that they were never taught, or that their memories are bad, or that they are not book-learned, or that they want the money to buy a book, and by this means they live and die rather like beasts than men".

Faced with this situation, Thomas Ken busied himself with the task of educating both priests and laymen. In August 1685 he wrote "The Practice of Divine Love", an exposition of the Church Catechism, which was a highly devotional book, full of reminders that he belonged firmly to the Catholic wing of the Church of England. "Glory be to thee, O Lord my God, who hast made me a member of the particular Church of England, whose faith and government and worship are holy and Catholic and Apostolic, and free from extremes of irreverence and superstition. . . ."

His first biographer, his great-nephew William Hawkins, tells us of how he set up Charity Schools with the encouragement of his friend Lord Weymouth, "in all the great towns of his diocese for poor children to be taught to read and say their Catechism ... and the ministers of the parishes were by him furnished with a stock of necessary books for the use of the children".

It is a well-established tradition that Bishop Ken set up schools for the poor in the diocese and it is therefore all the more strange that neither in Frome nor in any other of the "great towns" have I been able to find any references to them, or records of them. There were certainly some Charity Schools in existence in Somerset before Ken's time, and very many more after his time, but none seems to have been associated definitely with Ken, so one can only assume that his particular schools did not long outlast him.

Hawkins also refers to Bishop Ken's charity towards the poor of Wells, which is illustrated for us by the East Window of the Ken Chapel. "When he was at home on Sundays, he would have twelve poor men or women to dine with him in his hall and when they had dined, the remainder was divided up for them to take home to their families." [see front cover illustration]

Unfortunately, Ken was not to be left in peace to continue with his work in the diocese. Once more, affairs of state caught up with him and a series of events brought about a major change in the life of the nation and also in his own life.

Ken and James II

Ever since the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 — which brought with it the restoration of the Church of England — there had been an Opposition to the King's party in Parliament and in the country, as well

as continuing Dissent against the Established Church and a bitter enmity towards Roman Catholicism, both within and outside the Church. The Restoration Parliament had passed a series of acts imposing various penalties on both Roman Catholics and Dissenters and this had inflamed both political and religious antagonism towards the Establishment. Charles II, who was a wise statesman although his moral conduct could not be condoned, managed to hold the Opposition at bay, but when James II became king and did not bother to conceal his Roman Catholic tendencies, the situation became steadily worse.

James undertook a series of measures which made him widely unpopular, culminating in the Declaration of Indulgence of 1687. Under this, Roman Catholics and Dissenters were freed from the restrictions which had been placed upon them after 1660. This should perhaps have made him popular in some quarters, but the Declaration was widely regarded as an undercover way of strengthening the Roman Catholic Church; and it was in any case a statement of the Divine Right of Kings, because James was in fact setting aside Acts of Parliament. This was unconstitutional and was a revival of a principle which was thought to have been buried for good by the Civil War. So there was much distrust of the King and anxiety about the future, especially since his second wife, Mary of Modena, was not past child-bearing age and there was the continuing spectre of the possibility of the birth of an heir to the throne who would be brought up as a Roman Catholic.

Events now moved swiftly and Thomas Ken, much against his will, became caught up in the controversy. Relations between him and James had been reasonably good. James recognised Ken's goodness (he had listened to his pleas on behalf of the Monmouth prisoners and had chosen him to attend Monmouth's execution) and Ken regarded the King, as he regarded everyone, as a child of God and worthy of love. He also respected him because, unlike Charles II, he made no secret of his Roman Catholic faith. Above all, Ken was deeply influenced by the fact that he had sworn allegiance to James as the legitimate monarch and so far as Ken was concerned, an oath was an oath made before God and was binding.

Ken could not however remain unaware of increasing disunity and unhappiness in the nation and he was of course disturbed by the way in which the king was ignoring his promise to defend and support

the Established Church. On Passion Sunday, 1st April 1688, he was called upon to preach at Whitehall and he gave what we would call a "coded message". His text was Micah, Chapter 7, verses 8 and 9 and he spoke of how Micah, unlike Amos, preached before a king who listened to him (James was absent). His listeners could see many parallels between the state of England and that of Israel and Judah — dissension within and threats from without (Babylon being equated with the Roman Catholic Church). James' spies were present and they reported their own version of the sermon to the king. He sent for Ken and upbraided him, but Ken replied in his usual straightforward manner that if the King had been present, he would have been able to judge for himself whether the sermon had been disloyal. Ken then returned to his diocese.

The Seven Bishops

On 25th April 1688 James issued his Second Declaration of Indulgence, repeating the first one and saying that it represented his belief in religious toleration, but many people found it impossible to square this with his actions. He compounded his folly by ordering that the Declaration must be read in all churches and chapels.

Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, now summoned a meeting of bishops to decide on their reaction to this Order and at a second meeting attended by Ken and the bishops of London, Peterborough, Ely, St. Asaph, Bristol and Chichester as well as the Archbishop, it was agreed to present a Petition to the king asking him not to insist on the reading of the Declaration. Ken and six other bishops (the Archbishop had been excluded from the Court) appeared before James and asked him to grant them that same liberty of conscience which he was apparently willing to grant to the rest of his subjects. Ken also said "We have two duties to perform — our duty to God and our duty to your Majesty. We honour you, but we fear God". James dismissed them from his presence.

Within hours, copies of the Petition were circulating in London. Someone who had been present at the first or the second meeting of the bishops or at their meeting with the King had broken confidence. The theory is that it was Compton, Bishop of London, who was already engaged in secret negotiations with William of Orange about his possible intervention, but there is no proof. Also being circulated was a

letter to every parish priest in the country urging them not to read the Declaration in their churches; and in the event, hardly anyone did.

James was furious and the Lord Chancellor (the infamous Judge Jeffreys) advised the King to arrest the Seven Bishops on a charge of publishing a seditious libel. James ordered them to appear before him in Council on the 8th June and when they refused to withdraw the Petition, Jeffreys committed them to the Tower. They were taken immediately by river to the Traitors Gate, but in spite of the secrecy of the proceedings, word had got out and a large crowd had assembled at the Tower to encourage the Seven and ask for their blessing.

It seems almost as though Thomas Ken had a premonition of the crisis which was now rapidly developing, because in his Pastoral Letter of February 17th 1688 he wrote "I thought it most agreeable to that character which, unworthy as I am, I sustain to call you and all my brothers of the clergy to mourning, to mourning for your own sin, and to mourning for the sins of the nation. I exhort you to endeavour all you can to reconcile differences ... (and) to pray that we may know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, lest they be hid from our eyes".

Although in strict fact the Seven Bishops had not been committed to the Tower because they had refused to read the Declaration of Indulgence but because, as peers, they had refused to enter into recognizances to appear before the Court when summoned, believing that their word of honour should be sufficient, the general public believed that the former was the cause and they were therefore regarded as heroes.

Two days after the Bishops were imprisoned, on 10th June, the Queen had a son and he was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church. So the King's enemies renewed their contacts with William of Orange.

On 29th June Ken and the other six appeared before the Court of King's Bench to answer the charges made against them — and on the following day, they were acquitted, it being impossible to prove either that they had published a seditious libel or that the words concerned amounted to a libel. The jury's verdict led to great rejoicing throughout the country; and a group of prominent politicians and

soldiers invited William to come over and help in the struggle against "royal autocracy and the Romanist religion".

The Revolution of 1688

Events now moved swiftly. Archbishop Sancroft, aided by Ken, sent Instructions to all clergy, stressing that they owed "loyalty and obedience to the King in all things lawful, but loyalty and obedience first and foremost to the claims of God and to the faith of the English Church".

On 3rd October Sancroft, Ken and other bishops again met James and endeavoured to persuade him to adopt policies which might have saved the situation, but the King hesitated fatally. Thomas Ken returned to his diocese, William's fleet landed at Torbay on the 5th November and James, deserted by former supporters when they saw how William was welcomed, took ship from Rochester on Christmas Day and fled the country.

There now followed protracted negotiations with William as to the precise position he would hold, but he refused to accept any but that of King and on February 13th 1689 William and Mary formally received the offer of the throne, to reign jointly, though their powers were somewhat restricted by the passing of a Bill of Rights.

The ringers at St. John's were paid 5 shillings for ringing the bells to celebrate the coronation of William and Mary, but this is the only reference to be found in the churchwardens' accounts books to any of the stirring events which have been described.

As a member of the House of Lords and as a leading national figure. Ken had been involved in all the transactions between William and Parliament and he had voted consistently against the offer of the throne to William, though he was prepared to accept the idea of a Regency on behalf of the infant son of James II. He had sworn an oath of allegiance to James; and James was still alive and therefore was the only legitimate monarch.

Ken and the Oath of Allegiance

On 23rd February 1689 Parliament passed an act commanding all holders of civil or ecclesiastical office to swear an oath of allegiance to the new king; and the crisis of conscience which Ken had foreseen and dreaded was now upon him. He agonised for a while over the decision he must take, fearing that if some bishops took the oath and others did not there would be a schism in the Church, but eventually he decided that he could not obey this command. He regarded his oath of allegiance to James as a personal promise to that king which he could not in honour break and in any case, it was an oath before God. Also, he could not admit that Parliament had a dispensing power (that is, the power to set aside previous constitutional acts) any more than the King had. Laws were made by the King in Parliament, a joint action. Finally, he could not bear to be thought of as one who had acted against his conscience in order to keep his high office.

Parliament had fixed August 1689 as the time limit by which those who refused to take the oath would be suspended from office, but there was a further period of six months before they would be deprived. Ken held to his decision, in spite of pressure from his friends and in spite of the fact that most of his former colleagues on the Bench of Bishops took the Oath; and on February 18th 1690 he forfeited his see. He actually remained at Wells until his successor was appointed and it was on April 16th 1691 that he finally left the diocese, amidst general sorrowing.

Death and burial

He accepted the offer of his friend Lord Weymouth to take up his abode at Longleat and this remained his base for the rest of his life. He died on March 19th 1711 and two days later he was buried here at St. John's Frome.

This was in accordance with the provisions of his will, in which he expressed the wish that he should be buried "in the Churchyard of the nearest parish within my Diocese, under the east window of the Chancel, just at sun-rising, without any pomp or ceremony, besides that of the Order for Burial, in the Liturgy of the Church of England".

His coffin was borne by twelve poor men, in relays of six, from Longleat and he was buried a little after 5 a.m. The Parish Register of

Burials has the simple statement "21 (March) 1711 Thomas, late Ld Bishop of Bath and Wells. Deprived". It was signed by John Jenkins, the Vicar, who was also a witness to Thomas Ken's will. In this, he stated that he left £5 to the poor of the parish; and "I bequeath my little Patin and Chalice guilt, to the Parish, where I am buried, for the use of sick persons who desire the Holy Sacrament".

Thomas Ken had asked for a plain stone slab to be placed over the grave but, according at least to one of his biographers, E. H. Plumptre, a Dean of Wells in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, his friend Lord Weymouth was responsible for the erection of what was described by a later biographer, Hugh Rice, as "a curious iron grill-like monument, in the shape of a coffin and surmounted by an iron mitre and crozier" on top of the stone slab.

At some time in his life. Ken composed the following inscription which he wished to have put on his tomb:—

"May the here interred Thomas, late Bishop of Bath and Wells, and uncanonically Deprived for not transferring his Allegiance, have a perfect consummation of Blisse, both in body and Soul, at the Great Day, of which Good keep me allwaies mindful".

The phrase "uncanonically Deprived" is a somewhat sharp one for a man of Ken's gentle character and it was probably written by him when the memory of his treatment was still very sore with him. It was surely before Bishop Hooper, who was a life-long friend, became Bishop of Bath and Wells as successor-but-one to him. At any rate, the inscription was not in fact put on the tomb at the time of his burial but at some later date, because it is certainly there now. Perhaps it was done in 1844, when the grave was enclosed by a stone canopy.

Thomas Ken was only Bishop of Bath and Wells for a little over five years, hardly time enough, one would have thought, to have made much of an impression on the diocese, let alone on the nation — yet three hundred years later his memory is still revered, not just in this parish which has the honour of being associated with him in a particular way, not just in his diocese, but throughout the Church of England.

I suppose that part of the reason is that we can easily identify with the idea of suffering for conscience' sake, because we have seen

during our lifetime so many examples of this in various parts of the world. But there is surely more to it than this. Ken offers us an example of a truly saintly man, deeply versed in his faith, humble, full of love for God and his fellow men and above all, obedient to the will of God. He believed that his vocation was to be a faithful Shepherd of his flock, but no more than that. Yet again and again, it turned out that God had other plans for him and he was destined to play a key role in the difficult affairs of Church and State which marked the second half of the Seventeenth Century.

It would have been easier for him to ignore the promptings of his own conscience and the signs of God's will for him, but obedience to God and his conscience had to come first, whatever the consequences for him in his personal life.

All these qualities of Thomas Ken set an example which is as badly needed now as it was in his own lifetime; and we give thanks to God for him in the words of praise which he himself composed:—

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise him ye creatures here below,

Praise him above, angelic host,

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost

