

Robert Tichborne

1610-1682



Robert Tichborne, eldest son of Robert Tichborne of the Skinners' Company, was born in London around 1610. His Grandfather was John Tichborne of Cowden, Kent, who was a direct descendant of Sir Roger de Tichborne, a Noble Knight who flourished in the Reign of King Henry II. Brought up to follow his father's business into the Skinners' Company, {who engaged in the trade of skins and furs,} from apprentice in 1631 to his freedom in 1637; young Tichborne ranked high among the City Merchants of London at the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1636 he joined the Honourable Artillery Company of London, and by 1642

served as a Captain in the Yellow Regiment of the London Trained Bands, which at that time were the City of London's Militia, composed of householders who fulfilled their constitutional obligation to maintain arms and serve in the defence of their City. On the outbreak of civil war he was quick to display a militant Parliamentarianism and in 1643 became Lieutenant-Colonel of a regiment of London Auxiliaries. In the spring of 1643 he joined other City militants on a London subcommittee established at Salters' Hall to raise a volunteer citizens' army. This brought him into close contact with other emerging leaders of political Independency in the City. After the passing of Cromwell's "Self-Denying Ordinance," in April of 1645, when the Parliamentary Army was remodelled, he obtained a Captain's commission in that Army. Tichborne was speedily promoted to the rank of a Colonel; and in 1647 was appointed Commander of the Tower of London by General Thomas Fairfax. Indeed he was considered as one of Cromwell's 'saints' and according to an official journal entry dated December 24, 1647, at a Council of War, "Cromwell, Ireton and Tichborne prayed, and from Scripture exhorted to Unity and Obedience to Commands." He appears to have been one of the greatest advocates for the destruction and execution of King Charles I, presenting a petition from the Council of London for his trial; and as a Commissioner of the High Court of Justice, gave judgment, and signed the fatal warrant for his execution on January 27th, 1649. It was also during that eventful year that both his religious works were printed. "A Cluster of Canaan's Grapes," dedicated to Lord Thomas Fairfax; and "The Rest of Faith;" which he dedicated to Oliver Cromwell. Notwithstanding the pressure of political involvement during this period, it would appear that he also still managed time to attend to his trade, and thereby largely increased his fortune. Civic honours were heaped upon him, and with the ensuing political transformation in London, Tichborne was elected Alderman for Farringdon in July 1649, and a London Sheriff and Master of the Skinners' Company in 1650. In 1653 Tichborne was elected as one of the members for London of that Parliament which gave Oliver Cromwell the Protectorship. The Lord Protector himself knighted him on December 15, 1655, and summoned him to his House of Lords in December of 1657. In the autumn of 1656 he was elected Lord Mayor of the City of London, and took his oath of Office at Westminster, on October 29, 1656. Of course, upon Cromwell's death, {on the 3rd of September in 1658,} Tichborne's political world began to crumble; and as early as April 1660, {after the failure of establishing Cromwell's son Richard as Ruler of England, and just prior to Charles II being proclaimed King again on May 14th;} Tichborne, along with John Ireton, who were both now considered highly dangerous from their firm adherence to Cromwell, were both arrested, charged with high treason, all their wealth confiscated and were sent to the Tower of London to await their trial.

Upon sentencing Tichborne humbly confessed to his activity in the execution of Charles Stuart; and among other things said, "My Lord, it was my unhappiness to be called to so sad a work, when I had so few years over my head; a person neither bred up in the laws, nor in Parliament, where laws are made. I can say with a clear conscience, I had no more enmity in my heart to his Majesty, than I had to my wife that lay in my bosom - had I known that then which I do now, {I do not mean, my Lord, my afflictions and sufferings; it is not my sufferings make me acknowledge,} I would have chosen a red hot oven to have gone into as soon as that meeting - the Great God before whom we all stand hath shown his tender mercy to persons upon repentance. Paul tells us, though a blasphemer and a persecutor of Christ, it being done ignorantly, upon repentance he found mercy. My Lord, mercy I have found, and I do not doubt mercy I shall find. My Lord, I came in upon proclamation; and now I am here, I have in truth, given your Lordship a clear and full account, whatever the Law shall pronounce, because I was ignorant. Yet, I hope, there will be room found for that mercy and grace that I think was intended by the proclamation, and, I hope, by the Parliament of England. I shall say no more; but in pleading of that, humbly beg that your Lordships will be instrumental to the King and Parliament on my behalf." This humble confession and the fact that he had previously saved some Royalists from death by execution, kept him from immediate execution, but he never regained his liberty. He spent

the rest of his days in prison, although his wife and children were permitted to live with him during his imprisonment in Dover Castle in 1664–74. He died in the Tower of London on 6 July 1682 and was buried with the utmost confidentiality in Mercers' Chapel. The irony of his imprisonment is that he became a prisoner in the very fortress of which he had once commanded.

According to Wilson {Dissenting Churches Vol. 1,} there is a report that Tichborne preached frequently in William Kiffin's Devonshire Square {Particular Baptist} Assembly during the reign of Oliver Cromwell; and another source informs us that Tichborne also had strong spiritual ties with George Cokayne {1619-1691,} an Independent Minister, whose London Congregation met at St Pancras, Soper Lane. This is the same Cokayne, who joined with Henry Pinnell in 1646, in writing a long recommendatory preface to the works of Tobias Crisp. {"Christ alone Exalted," Volume III, 1646} A close examination of Tichborne's "Cluster of Grapes" warrant the speculation that these were preached sermons that were {after their delivery} edited, and perhaps improved by the author; and if so; {and if Tichborne did frequently preach at Devonshire Square;} these discourses may indeed be the closest example of the type of preaching that characterized this formative Particular Baptist Assembly. Certainly, when one compares the contents of this work with the body of truth as set forth in the London Confession of 1646; the writings of Samuel Richardson, {another early Particular Baptist;} and the early sentiments of William Kiffin himself; one can see a beautiful Gospel Accord, as these messages flow simultaneously with the essence of Heavenly Truth contended for at this time; and more especially in their essential exaltation of Christ. {A note of interest obtained from the Cromwell family papers at the Cambridgeshire Record Office is the fact that Tichborne; who was Lord Major of London at the time; performed the marriage ceremony of William Kiffin's daughter Hannah, who in 1657 married Benjamin Hewling; a rich and eminent Turkey merchant, and citizen of London. The paper states that the marriage was witnessed by both William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys.}

Joseph Caryl {Nonconformist 1602-1673} in an attempt to promote the book said: "I have delightfully looked upon these Clusters of Canaan's Grapes, and have helped them to the Press, that they may be Wine for common drinking; I only mind the reader, that these Grapes yield the New Wine of the Gospel; let him take heed he puts it not into the Old Bottles of envy or of malice, of prejudice or of contempt; if he do, his Bottles will break; and though the wine, {because it is saving wine} cannot but be safe, yet himself will be a loser, yea, in danger to be lost; whereas, his profit and salvation are {I believe, on this side the glory of God} the highest end of the Author, is this publication, as they are of the licenser."

In conclusion let us examine a few of Tichborne's own motives for sending forth his book, as found in its Preface to the Readers:

I know that you will wonder why I mean to appear in print, especially in these times, when plain truths from the most of men, will find nothing else but plain scorn; most men have sight but on one side, and their stomachs so full of crudity's, that they cannot else but vomit up with scorn in the face of him that brings them, even saving truths; beside you will think I cannot be ignorant but to know, that my very name will prejudice these truths unto many that live by fancy more than faith; such as will cavil with all Truth that comes by hand they like not, and have little other grounds for the Truth they take up, but that it come by such hands that they at present fancy. I confess that I cannot make myself so ignorant as not to understand these things; nor is it my design by appearing in print to make myself public, for I expect by it to be the derision of most men; nor do I print because I think the press wants work, for I am thoroughly convinced that much evil hath overspread this Land by those many unsavoury pamphlets, and those rending, dividing principles which have this way been spread abroad, by which the members of Christ have been scandalized, rent and divided and have almost made themselves a prey to the wild boars, and the subtle foxes, which have no higher ends but to destroy the tender vines. The reasons why I choose to render myself to the world's scorn in this matter and manner are these: It is the

manifesting of his Free Grace that is my design in giving forth freely as I received; and I shall I trust with much more ease bear the reproaches of the world than I could a concealment of the love of God in Christ. - God hath moulded me into his will, and I do freely cast myself upon his love and power, to bear up my spirit to carry me through good and evil reports, and I hope shall ever esteem of this worlds scorn as not worthy of thoughts in that day when God shall manifest his will and work to me. A second reason why I thus appear, is that I might be a Christian servant to fellow saints. God is as free in giving as he is in saving, he gives what he pleaseth, how he pleaseth, when he pleaseth, and by whom he pleaseth; and this I have in some measure experienced of God, and I think it my duty to be a servant to God and to fellow saints, to bring unto them what I have received from him. When saints reveal their knowledge and experience of God, they do thereby confirm, strengthen and build up one another in their most holy faith; and I know of no higher work that saints on earth have than this, and were it more in practice, I do verily believe that the beauty of holiness and the power of godliness would be more transparent; but instead of serving one another this way in the Spirit of God, we are devouring and destroying one another by an evil spirit of lying and slandering, and needless jealousies one of another. This is either in the beginning or the end of most men's discourses, of their printings; and it hath been, where I am sure it ought not to be, in men's preachings. These tares which the evil man hath sown amongst the good seed have exceedingly scandalized the Gospel of Christ with the professors thereof; and if God delight in this generation, he will exceedingly humble us under this very thing. Instead of crucifying Christ in one another, saints should be servants to carry Christ to each other; I mean their light in Christ, and their experiences of the love, faithfulness and holiness of God. This would increase love to God and his people instead of devouring; beget embracings into the bosom and arms of love, and faithfulness; not to stab and scandalize, but to honour and vindicate every child of God. A third reason that moves me in this, to stir up those many thousands which this land affords that are abundantly more able to take up this necessary work. Truly it is sad to see how frothy and light things do take up the spirits of able and godly men, when is this only thing necessary is as it were quite forgotten, not only dead but buried out of sight. I do believe these last seven years have brought forth as little of this fruit, as any seven years before, in which men did complain that they dare not send truths abroad, lest in so doing they should be confined to prisons. Had the seven years liberty that the Press has had been improved in this, through the blessing of God, it might have left such monuments of God in the world as after ages might have blessed him for. I do believe Satan hath blinded much of this work from appearing by the scandal and reproach of the world which is usually cast upon it; truly I found it a very hard thing to get over, but when God gave me to understand, that the good and comfort of one soul was of greater weight than the reproach of all the world, I was immediately carried above that temptation, and I hear mention it to stir up others to the same work; for doubtless God hath many thousand poor saints in this Kingdom which will gladly gather up those pearls of Divine truths, which the swine of the world trample under their feet; and if but one soul bless God in truth for the revealing of these truths, though many thousands profane ones should come scorn me to my face, yet I shall not lose my end, nor repent of my reproaches, if God be honoured by them. My last reason is to give the world a true discovery of my spirit, and light in those things which I count weighty, and every Truth of them to be more concernment than a thousand worlds. I cannot tell the thoughts of men concerning myself, nor will presume to take the place of God to judge the thoughts of any; but this I can truly tell that in the following truths I have clearly opened my heart to the view of every reader, and have faithfully given to the world what light God hath given to me in those main truths and fundamentals of Salvation, in which my soul lives, and what I can cheerfully die in, the next moment. - I shall hold you no longer in the porch, but open every door of the house that you may both read and see the truths of God made known by his Spirit, to the weakest, and one as unworthy as any of his servants, Robert Tichborne.