

A FAMOUS LANCASHIRE PRESBYTERIAN - JOHN TILSLEY

Vicar of Deane 1643-1662

by

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If it was true in the 18th century, as Dr. Johnson says, that the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever saw was the high road that (led him to England, it was true also that over a century earlier the noblest prospect which many an English Churchman ever saw was the metaphorical high road that led him to Scotland. Particularly true, perhaps, if that English Churchman had been educated there.

Amongst such was John Tilsley (1614-1684): English vicar, Puritan, Presbyterian, and ejected sufferer of 1662—a rebel against the "establishment" in one era, an "establishment" figure in the next, and the bane of the "establishment" in another. "By following Oliver Key-wood rather than Calamy, who is incorrect", wrote John Eglington Bailey, in his privately-issued memoir of Tilsley (1885)¹ "Tilsley was born in 1614". The passage was written without irony, but there is some wisdom in not following Calamy too closely in looking again at the remarkable life of this very considerable Lancashire Presbyterian covering the period 1614 to 1684. Calamy refers to Tilsley's "stupendous qualifications for his ministerial work; he had prodigious Parts, a retentive Memory, which made whatsoever he read his own; a solid Judgement; a quick Invention, warm Affections, and a ready Utterance. He was," concludes Calamy, "strict in Life, and free and familiar in his Discourse."

John Tilsley qualified for Calamy's panegyric largely because of his being numbered amongst the Two Thousand who suffered ejection because of their principles on "Black Bartholomew" (24 August, 1662), but, owing perhaps to his "quick Invention", his "sufferings" were mild when compared with a great number of his ejected brethren. He shared that 1662 distinction with many, but he had been "ejected" also from the same living during the Commonwealth when Independency seemed in the ascendant, but that was not an ejection with which Calamy had much concern, and the impression has been given that his "ready Utterance" remained almost unimpaired for nearly two decades after "Black Bartholomew"—even in the parish church from which he had been ejected twice, for it was not until 1678—four years before his death—that he was ejected a third time and finally silenced. The Victoria County History of Lancashire says:

"Ejected from the vicarage in 1662, he was allowed to reside in the house, and with the goodwill of the new vicar and the tolerance of Bishop Wilkins afterwards preached in Deane church, as the 'lecturer', until Bishop Pearson silenced him in 1673. After this he retired to Manchester where he died in December, 1684".²

from which the conclusion could be drawn that Calamy's swans are sometimes geese. If they were, then John Tilsley was one.

He was born in 1614, the son of John Tildesley, a tanner in Westhoughton,³ then part of the extensive parish of Deane, in Lancashire, and although his father's spelling of the family name was the more familiar one, the son never apparently departed from the spelling he adopted as his own. Tilsley called his native county "my deare Mother and nurse". He lived and worked within its boundaries—in the parish of Deane and in Manchester—for practically the whole of his life. At the age of fourteen he lost his father, whose will (27

August, 1628), said: "my desire is that my eldest son shall be brought up at learning ". Puritan formative influences upon him were undoubtedly strong, for in Westhoughton chapelry in that part of the parish of Deane where he was reared, the minister, one John Ridgeley, a rabid Puritan, was alleged to have maintained, as early as 1624, that he would not allow a Book of Common Prayer to lie in the chapel.⁴ Young Tilsley was an apt pupil, for twenty-two years later he was able to boast that as a result of his and his Lancashire Presbyterian coadjutors' efforts " in no congregation in that whole county the Book of Common Prayers or Ceremonies are in use and exercise, nor have been of a long time past".

"To learning" young Tilsley's steps were turned—to the University of Edinburgh—then frequented by many youths whose parents were unwilling to make use of the English universities. "Joannes Tilsleyus" was laureated 22 July, 1637, and as Bailey says, "his Scottish education at the time when Laud was endeavouring to impose a Liturgy on the country, led him to favour the ecclesiastical polity of that country. He took the Covenant, became a Presbyterian, and soon after eulogised ' our dear brethren of Scotland ' for ' imbarqueing with us in the same Cause and War in the depth of winter when our Enemies were most proud". On leaving Edinburgh, Tilsley was episcopally ordained in England, and in 1641 was serving as a curate in his native parish of Deane. It was the time of the signing of the National Protestation "for the maintenance of the true Reformed Protestant religion, expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England, against all Popery and popish innovations within this realm contrary to the same doctrine ". That at this date the Royalist vicar of Deane and his Covenant-taking curate could agree in defence of the "doctrine of the Church of England " might be thought remarkable. It was soon to be plain whose interpretation of what was the doctrine of the Church of England was to find favour in places of authority. Nor did Royalist notions find much favour in and near the town of Bolton—the "Geneva of Lancashire ". The Royalist vicar of Deane's days were numbered.

Amongst the curates with Tilsley, serving one of the chapelries at Deane (not as vicar as some authorities allege) was Alexander Horrocks, whom the credulous Calamy likened as Paul to Timothy in his relationship with Tilsley—a son in the gospel. The likeness between these two was to be given another analogy—that of Jacob to Esau—a supplanter rather than a son, for when the vacancy in the vicarage (then a Crown living) was later to be filled by Parliament in 1643, the older and revered Horrocks was to be passed over for the young, vigorous, and partisan (especially in the Parliamentary cause) Tilsley. Alexander Horrocks, the old-style Puritan, was possibly not root-and-branch enough for the new masters.⁵ Bishop Bridgeman of Chester (whose Lancashire seat was scarce two miles from Deane church) had " tolerated " him in Laudian days, and there was a like-ableness about the character of Horrocks in the anecdote told of him in Axon's Life of John Angler. Horrocks was sick, and Mr. Angier came to visit him, just after Mr. Pike (of Rainford) had gone out from him. Mr. Horrocks said, "Mr. Angier, you must pray with me; but Mr. Pike hath kill'd me with a long prayer . . ." Alexander Horrocks served faithfully under Tilsley after he became vicar of Deane until Horrocks's death in 1650.

Not long after the coming of Tilsley to Deane as a curate, the hostilities of the Civil War began. If the Book of Common Prayer was anathema to this, up to then, unknown curate in an obscure Lancashire parish, there was, perhaps, a passage in the Liturgy which had a special significance: the "Church militant here in earth". It was to thrust Tilsley forward into

some fame or, alternatively, some notoriety. "There was," says Croston,⁶ "a good deal of the 'drum ecclesiastic' in Mr. Tilsley's character. When Sir John Seaton, with his newly-raised dragoons, augmented with well-trained men from Bolton and the villages near, went from Manchester to attack Preston, Tilsley was present at the capture of the town, and wrote a jubilant letter to an eminent divine in London, describing the affair, and relating with almost barbarous satisfaction⁷ the killing of several Papists, 'As if men must have been singled out for slaughter, we could scarce have picked out better' "; he refers to several "desperate Papists", and he especially rejoices in the capture of one of the name and family of Anderton, the then lay-impropriators of the tithes in the parish of Deane. Tilsley, whilst remarking on the skill of Sir John Seaton. complained that he had only one fault: "He was 'too harsh for our knotty-rigged dispositions." Sir John was not popular amongst his 'sojiurs' who at Manchester threatened to kill him because he would not give them the 'plundage'".⁸

Tilsley had, Calamy reminds us, "High, even Stupendous qualifications for his ministerial work ". Yet another of this young curate's alleged escapades in these years of strife concerns the capture of Wigan from the Royalists. Seacombe⁹ tells us that the Manchester Parliamentary troops " took and plundered to the very Utensils and Plate of the Communion table, which one of their Puritanical teachers, one Tildesley, hung round him as the spoils and plunder of a Popish idol". That Tilsley should, a short time afterwards, be appointed to a living which still prides itself on the possession of two beautiful pieces of Commonwealth Communion silver (given to Deane church in 1655 during Tilsley's vicariate and, which authorities on church silver maintain are quite rare) perhaps softens somewhat the harsh picture of his alleged exploits at Wigan.

Within months of the publication of his pamphlet, the House of Commons noticed that the tithes of Deane church, not to mention a large part of the land in three townships in Deane parish, were in the lay hands of one Christopher Anderton of Lostock, one of Tilsley's "desperate Papists". They also noticed the Rev. John Tilsley.¹⁰ On 29 June 1643, an order of Parliament stated that " the parish church and chapels within that parish having no means of maintaining ministers, and the people by the sad distractions of that county are much impoverished, having been much plundered so as not to be able to maintain ministers at their own charges ", and because of this the House ordered that out of the tithes belonging to Christopher Anderton payments of £20 per annum should go to the ministers. The House did more: on 9 October, 1643, a further order appeared sequestering the whole of the tithes arising in Deane parish to the use of Mr. John Tilsley, " a godly, learned and orthodox Divine, who is hereby appointed and required to be Vicar of the said parish, and to preach there every Lord's Day, and to take for the discharge of that place " further sums out of the proceeds of the sequestered tithes. The number of "godly, learned and orthodox Divines" in Lancashire, if one accepts solely the evidence of Parliament and later the Plundered Ministers' Committee, was never so high as at this time. The Rev. Richard Hardy, clerk, vicar of Deane, in spite of his signature on the National Protestation of 1641, was not one of them. He had been quietly removed. Nor does the Parliamentary document give any indication as to how four curates in addition to the vicar were maintained at Deane before this time before the alleged plundering occurred. The tithes of Deane had been "plundered" during the dispersal of the temporalities of the Abbey of Whalley, and the Andertons had purchased them at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Plunder had begat plunder.

From what evidence is available, Tilsley's appointment to Deane gave satisfaction to most of the parishioners, but in 1645 the Committee of Plundered Ministers in London resolved upon another sequestration from the Andertons of a house and land near to the church, which they described as " heretofore parcel of the glebe of the said church ", (the word " heretofore " was perhaps a little ambiguous: it meant before the Reformation) which was " to be settled upon Mr. Tilsley, vicar, for his habitation, the said Mr. Tilsley's means being very small".¹¹ Such a sequestration must have appeared to the parishioners but an impermanent arrangement, and within a short time they had contributed amongst themselves a sufficient sum to lease¹² and later to purchase the property and land, so as to make the transaction a permanent one. In doing so they arrogated to themselves a pretended right without precedence in the up-to-then jealously guarded Crown patronage of the living of Deane—that of electing and choosing their own minister. This act of independence (if not of Independency) on the part of the Deane parishioners was acquiesced in by the rigid Presbyterian Tilsley. Its ratification by the self-appointed trustees who conveyed the house and land, by "permitting Mr. Tilsley, the incumbent or vicar, to enjoy the premises if he continue there and remain orthodox, and after him such other sufficient minister as shall be elected and chosen by the contributing parishioners their heirs and assigns " etc., is explicit enough; but the date of the ratification—1649 —is even more explicit: the Crown, as Englishmen had known it, was no more. The spirit of the times had unfettered these freedom-loving Deane parishioners to make bold claims, and into this conveyance, of what was later to be described as the "vicarage house", they went even, further: "and if [they] . . by any pretence of law or authority ... be denied debarred letted or hindered in the Free choice and election of the Minister ... the said parishioners their heirs and assigns to employ the profits of the said premises to any other purposes by them to be limited ". They had written their own inscription, far away from the place where a similar inscription then graced the spot where King Charles's statue had stood in front of the Exchange in London: "*exit tyrannus ultimus, anno libertatis Angliæ restitæ primo, annnoque Domini 1648.*" In neither place was it to be abiding. There never was to be, of course, "after him [Mr. Tilsley] such other sufficient Minister "as the conveyance of the property quaintly put it, " as shall be elected and chosen by the contributing parishioners ". Nor had there been one before! even Tilsley's "election" had been a Parliamentary one. Accepting the conveyance as he did, Mr. Tilsley no doubt felt certain in his own mind of his ability to convince the not inconsiderable weight of local opinion amongst the trustees as to his orthodoxy, either then or later, so as to enable him to retain possession of the freehold which was being conveyed, whch in fact he did when his orthodoxy was being challenged by others. But the challenge this time was to be made by the also not inconsiderable weight of opinion in the Crown, the Church, and Parliament in 1662. This un-Presbyterian act of independence (or of Independency) on the part of parishioners of Deane in 1649, when " freedom " was at its height, was to have some influence on the life and times of the Rev. John Tilsley in the post-1662 era.

A recent writer¹³ has said: "The attempt to enforce a Presbyterian establishment in England failed. Only in Lancashire and London did the classes survive the end of the Commonwealth period ". That the Lancashire experiment succeeded to the extent to which it did was due in a large measure to the zeal of Tilsley, in pressurizing in the first instance the authorities in government, and afterwards by making himself one of the mainsprings in the organisation which was set up in Lancashire.

In 1645-46, Bailey tells us: "On the rise of the Independents and other sects, Tilsley's attitude towards them assumed so severe a form that, says Martindale, he and his friends were called ' Rigid Presbyterians '. Tilsley had in particular many controversies with the Independents, and when the first part of the war was over he interested himself in establishing Presbyterianism in the county. He asserted that through the non-settlement of church-government by Parliament. schisms, errors, heresy, profaneness, and blasphemy were woefully spread: 'separate' congregations were 'erected' and multiplied, and sectaries were growing insolent, confidently expecting a toleration." If the word "Parliament" is altered to read "Convocation", such an assertion could possibly have been made by Vicar Hardy of Deane a short time earlier. "About the end of June, 1646," goes on Bailey, " Tilsley and his friends, including Warden Heyrick and Richard Hollinworth, of Manchester, Edward Gee of Eccleston, Mr. Alt of Bury, and other ministers promoted a petition to Parliament, couched in the spirit of the National Covenant, for the speedily fixing of an Ecclesiastical discipline, according to the advice of the Assembly of Divines, to suppress the sectaries, and keep them out of all places of public trust; and to encourage ' the orthodox Presbyterian noblemen, gentlemen, ministers and others well-affected '. After great efforts the petition received 12,578 signatures, of which 6000 were from Salford Hundred, that part of the county, Tilsley tells us, which was ' confessedly most eminent for Religion, most effective for the service of Parliament; it alone, together with the assistance of Blackburn Hundred, having reduced the rest of the whole countie'. We are likewise told that it was all subscribed at Liverpool, called by Tilsley 'a garrison of good note and the prime haven in all that county'. On 25 August the petition was presented to the Lords. It was put to the question whether thanks should be given to the gentlemen that exhibited it, and being resolved in the affirmative, the Earl of Manchester and Lord Roberts were appointed to draw up the thanks. . . .

" Meanwhile an anonymous pamphlet in the Independent interest was published against the petition, called *A New Birth of the City Remonstrance* (about eight pages in length) the title being in allusion to a remonstrance of the pressing grievances of the people of London, presented to Parliament 26 May, 1646. The *New Birth* animadverted on the manner in which the signatures of the Lancashire petition had been obtained. Moreover, an ' anti-petition ' was spoken of. Adam Martindale, who was then at Gorton, enumerates ' three very worthy ministers of great abilities, piety, and interest', living within two-and-a-half miles of him, who were deeply engaged in promoting the Presbyterian scheme, viz.: Mr. Harrison of Ashton-under-Lyne, Mr. Hollinworth of Manchester, and ' Mr. Tilsley of Dean, but then living in Manchester, as his severe book in vindication of the petition, and promoters of it doth still make it appear'. Of this severe book," continues Bailey, "there is a copy in the Chetham Library . . ."

In view of John Tilsley's intimate connections with the Chetham Library, Manchester—he was, as will be seen responsible for the purchase of some of the earliest collections in that library—their copy of Tilsley's book did not come from him. but was accessioned much later. It possesses a title-page crowded with word—a very " marathon " of a title-page—transcribed as follows:

"A True Copie of the Petition of Twelve Thousand Five Hundred and upwards of the well-affected Gentlemen, Ministers, Freeholders, and others of the County Palatine of Lancaster to the Right honourable House of Peers And the honourable House of Commons Assembled in the High Court of Parliament.

Together with some True and materiall Observations concerning the said Petition avouched for the avouchers of the Petition rectifying the fals surreptitious Copy lately Printed under the name of 'A New Birth of the City Remonstrance', and invalidating the Animadversions of the nameless publisher thereof. As also a particular clear and satisfactory Answer to the said Animadversions, Showing the falshood and frivolousness thereof: Vindicating the Petition and the Petitioners from all the injurious charges, imputations, aspersions of the Animadvertor: Showing the harmony of apprehensions and desires betwixt the renowned City of London and the aforesaid County: and what repute the famous Remonstrance of that City is in, amongst the well-affected of that County, detecting the lawlesse, licentious, anti-parliamentary practise of this nameless Sectary, and pointing out thereby the Sectarian spirit. Together with a Parænetic to Lancashire.

By John Tilsley,

Minister of the Gospell at Dean-church in Lancashire, one of the Avouchers of the Petition.

Together with the Answer of the Right Honourable the House of Peers.

London: Printed by John Macock. for Luke Fawn, and are to be sold at his Shop at the sign of the Parot in Pauls Church-yard, 1646."

Bailey points out: "It contains the Petition itself (pp. 1-14); Certain Observations concerning the Petition (pp. 5-6) signed by Robert Ashton, John Tilsley, and William Booth, in which the writers claim that the petition was the true sense of the Parliamentary party in Lancashire. A Clear Answer to the 'Nameless Sectary' on the petition (pp. 7-19); the Parænetick dated 'from my lodging at the golden fleece in Tuttle-street. Westminster, 27 August, 1646' (pp. 19-21); and the Lord's Answer (pp. 22).

"Tilsley characterises the author of the *New Birth* as a 'hasty spirited Sectarian hot-spur', 'a whelp of the same litter with insolent John Lilburn'. He averred that no one advanced the petition in Manchester, but 'prudent, honest, sufficient men of good repute in that famous town' (p. 17). The tract is written with considerable spirit, and its language is racy. Two sayings are quoted—one about finding a knot in a bull-rush; the other, 'a great boast but little roast'. He alludes to the 'gallantry' of 'those northern spirits', his countrymen, and to the 'vast congregation of thousands of souls' at Manchester. He criticises a statement that Hollinworth had pressed his congregation to sign, telling them that none refused to sign it but malignants and Covenant-breakers.

"Presbyterianism in Lancashire was set up by ordinance of Parliament, 2 October, 1646, and 'Mr. John Tildesley' was named as a minister of the Bolton, or Second Classis of the County. Calamy is justified in stating that Tilsley was a principal member of this Second Classis. He was frequently Moderator, and attended its proceedings with great regularity. On 16 August, 1647, this Classis was considering the business of 'repaying some part of Mr. Hollinworth and Mr. Tilsley their disbursements about setting the Church government'. As became a Covenanter, Tilsley set his hand to the fierce *Harmonious Consent* of the Lancashire ministers in 1648; and he was no less ready to sign the strictures on the pamphlet called *The Agreement of the People*, 1648-49; his name, with that of his associates, being in both cases near the head of the signatories.

"These facts show Tilsley to have been of a bold and uncompromising spirit, and confirm what was said of him, that when he was satisfied as to the grounds of the matter, he pursued his aims to the end. 'When the assembly at Bolton', relates Calamy, 'had once suspended a prophane and dissolute Preacher at Ribchester' [Christopher Hindle?] 'few but

were fearful to go and preach at the Place and declare the Suspension: but Mr. Tilsley was free to it, and did it with great courage, and yet with a becoming Candour and Meekness '."

It would seem, therefore, that during the middle and late 1640s Tilsley had but little time for parochial work at Deane. In 1646 he was living at Manchester—twelve miles from his parish, and during his "lobbying " of Parliament he was writing from his "lodging in Westminster ". With the establishment of the Classis at Bolton came the organisation of the government of the Elders at Deane, and the names of those appointed—showing them to be the more substantial yeomen and lesser gentry of the parish—and their attendances at the Bolton Classis meetings, seem to add up to the fact that government by the Elders worked tolerably well.¹⁴ On moral issues, during the ten years of the Presbyterian establishment at Deane there were only two appeals against the judgement of the Elders to the local Classis. One (in 1647) when Tilsley appeared to be unable to induce his Elders to enforce discipline for " certain miscarriages ", and as a consequence appealed to the Classis. Tilsley was not the first, or the last, vicar of Deane to find independent thinking among his parishioners. No details are available to show how the incident terminated. A second case showed how intolerable the rule of parochial Eldership could be. A woman accused a parishioner of committing adultery with her, which charge the parish Elders found proved, suspended the accused from church membership, and forbade him access to the Lord's table. The accused appealed to the Bolton Classis on 14 November, 1653. Several meetings were spent in investigation, although they had no power to call witnesses, and at last, fourteen months later—on 29 January, 1655 —it was resolved that the evidence given to the Classis was not sufficient to prove the accused guilty, and ordered that " his suspension from y' Lord's Supper be taken off by y' Congregational Eldership at Deane ". But yet it was judged convenient that the accused, his wife, and his brother should appear before the Elders at Deane and satisfy them of his innocence; and it was further ordered that before his readmission to the Lord's table he should openly and solemnly before the congregation at Deane declare and profess his innocence! During the later stages of this wretched case the Rev. John Tilsley appeared to be seeking a new sphere of labour! At the Bolton Classis meeting on 10 December, 1655, a letter was presented from the Classis of New-castle-upon-Tyne desiring that Mr. Tilsley might come to be pastor of St. Nicholas's parish there. Mr. Tilsley applied to the Bolton Classis that he might obey the " call ". Bolton decided to appeal to the first Classis at Manchester. Manchester reported (13 December): "They do conceive it will be most for the Glory of God and good of the Church that Mr. Tilsley do remove to Newcastle ". Curiously enough, Bolton Classis—although they had asked for the advice—refused to be guided by it, and voted that Mr. Tilsley stay at Deane, on which Tilsley appealed to the Provincial Assembly but with what result is not recorded, although (on 20 March, 1656) there was an order of the Newcastle Common Council for Mr. Tilsley " of the Presbyterian Judgment " to preach at St. Nicholas's every Lord's Day, and once a month in the forenoon at the monthly Sacrament, with a salary of £150 per annum.¹⁵ Walker in his researches into the sufferings of the Church of England clergy before 1660 records one of Tilsley's contemporaries' rather peevish comment: " Mr. Tilsley did go to Newcastle; but finding not the place so beneficial as we expected, returned back; it being not, it seems, to the Glory of God for him to stay, when it was not to his own advantage. How this accords with the character which " . . . [Calamy] "gives of him, I leave anyone to judge ". That Tilsley's bitter denunciations of others should be paid back in a similar coin, and sometimes

with interest, ought not to have been (and probably was not) unexpected. On 27 March, 1656, Tilsley's stipend at Deane was increased by the Council of State.¹⁶

On 4 March, 1642-3 — before his appointment as vicar — Tilsley had married that lady whom he described twenty years later (although it was on her tombstone) as “loving, lovely, loved”. She was Margaret, the niece of Humphrey Chetham, the benefactor of Manchester, renowned for his gift of a school and a library. “The marriage”, relates Bailey, “took place at the Collegiate Church, Manchester, the bridegroom being called ‘preacher of the Word of God’. Although Tilsley was intimate with the benefactor, the family were not enamoured of the connection and his name was left out of the Turton pedigree of the family at Dugdale's Visitation of 1664.” But Humphrey Chetham was then dead. “By his will (16 December, 1651) Chetham made Tilsley one of the feoffees of his proposed hospital [or school] terming him John Tildesley of Rumworth, clerk”. Rumworth being the township in which Deane church was situated. “He also nominated him one of the persons to purchase godly English books ‘proper for the edification of the common people’ for church libraries at Manchester, Bolton, Turton, Walmsley, and Gorton, for which £200 was bequeathed; and he was also one of those named to form the library in the town of Manchester ‘for the use of Scholars and others well-affected’”. Chetham also left £200 to Tilsley's wife at his death in 1653. Tilsley's extremely narrow views are well illustrated in the way he went about purchasing books for the church libraries:

“... I have sent a catalogue inclosed of books enough for twice soe much moneys as is to be bestowed. Mr. Johnson [an episcopalian, and late fellow of the College at Manchester, and at that time preacher at the Temple] may take such as hee thinks meete: I have spoken with some chiefe of Bolton, who desire to have noe erroneous Authors Or that have any tincture thereof, though mixed wth never so much other good matter, for feare of infection : Particularly by all meanes they would Not have One Independent writer in all the number, by any meanes how excellent soever for feare of any there falling in love wth the way for the mans sake. This makes I have purposely omitted many excellent authors, e.g., Tho Goodwine, Mr. Burroughs, Greenhill, Caryl, Bridge . . . Shep-heard. As alsoe upon the other accompt Dr Jere. Taylor, Ham-mond, Chillingworth, Baxter . . .”

To that rather illuminating revelation of Tilsley's character, Bailey, in another place, adds a postscript gleaned from Henry Newcome's (the ejected Manchester minister) diary, written some weeks after Tilsley's death. On 29 January, 1685, he went over to Tilsley's daughter's, “and was there till six at night going over Mr. Tilsley's books. And I was fond of it (as I use to be of such little things before they come), and it was very just I should find very little in it when over; but well wearied I was. That was the most that I got for my fondness”, from which Bailey deducted that Tilsley's library had been formed on the principle that characterised the letter Tilsley wrote thirty years earlier.

“In 1659 Tilsley entered into the debates that were agitating Manchester in reference to an ‘accommodation’ of Congregationalists with Presbyterians, the project being approved by prominent members of each body. There was a meeting of the two parties at the College on 13 July, when some ‘heads’ of accommodation were agreed to. But with Roote on one side and Tilsley on the other”, adds Bailey, tartly, “there was little hope of any good result. Newcome records the gist of one of Tilsley's speeches: ‘I remember Mr. Tilsley said that the Episcopal principles he could rather accommodate with than theirs (i.e., Congregational), and with their persons and practices for life rather than the other. But this accommodation was set on foot by them; and what we now agreed upon was referred to a further

meeting'." There were no further meetings; the Cheshire Rising under Sir George Booth stopped all further negotiations.

"When Major Joseph Rigby, Clerk of the Peace of the County Palatine of Lancaster, wrote his ' Ingenious Poem called *The Drunkard's Prospective, or Burning Glass*, 8vo, 1656, Tilsley wrote him, his ' much honoured friend ' some complimentary verses, which thus warmly conclude :

————— The drunken sot
Must pledge himself in fire and brimstone hot.
It is most sad, and yet most true, they'll find
two hels: one here, another yet behind
May this thy Burning Glass the conscience scorch
Of Drunkards, while they are yet in the porch
Of hell; and so most happily suspend
Direful infernal! flames world without end."

So much Bailey quoted of Tilsley's efforts at versifying. There is perhaps a little more in Tilsley's lines than this. Major Joseph Rigby, although then " of Aspull " in the parish of Wigan, was one of the long line of almost hereditary Clerks of the Peace in Lancashire who resided at Peel Hall, Little Hulton, another of the townships in the parish of Deane; in the Civil War he had been a doughty supporter of the Parliamentary cause. The office of Clerk of the Peace was wrested from Major Rigby after the Restoration by his brother-in-law Roger Kenyon also of Peel Hall, and the persevering opponent of Tilsley after 1662.¹⁷ It was owing to Kenyon's untiring efforts to indict Tilsley that he was finally removed from Deane church in 1678. There are other lines amongst Tilsley's commendatory verses which are revealing as to his character, apart from their being a very early example of temperance propaganda usually associated with the nineteenth century. Contrary to his famous letter about the exclusion of " unorthodox " writers quoted above, they show an admiration for the lines of the high-Anglican George Herbert, a contempt for tobacco, a seeming affection for the office of the lay-preacher who can reach ears not reached by the minister, and perhaps a preference for the singing of Psalms. Tilsley's line run:

"Is't not most shameful Christians should strive,
Painim and Pagan Gods for to revive?
Bacchus an Idol old and exolete,
Is now become a Deity compleate.
See how he's worshipt, see how his throng train,
Each where do cry him up, their God amaine.
Taverns his Temples, daily multipli'd,
While great Jehovah's would be set aside.
Tables his altars, Indian his perfumes,
I meane Tobacco: While each one presumes,
God's sacred Incense to extinguish quite,
And make it yield to their Idolothyte.
And his Church-musick, filthy blattering songs,
Still canted out by the unhallowed tongues
Of drunken rimers; men profane forlorne.
God's sacred praise in Psalms must be foreborne.

His yellow tapers burn both night and day,
 God's must go out: And most men dare to say,
 They are but dead and uselesse stinking snuffe.
 Preachers I meane: is not here goodly stuffe?
 Flat Atheisme sure doth farre excel
 This Deity, calTd back from th' lowest hell.
 Well acted then friend the Lay-Preachers part,
 To lance this pest with lines so sharp and tart.
Her- (This versing may him catch that sermons flies.
bert (And turne delight into a sacrifice.
 And of all gifted brethren thou shall have
 By my consent, the Laurell to thy grave.
 Thus pithily God's cause to plead and cleare
 By exercise, out of the Preachers speare.

To which verses he added: "So singeth and prayeth Your respectful friend, John Tilsley, Pastor of Dean Ch. Lancashire."

With the Restoration in May, 1660, Parliament enacted that in all benefices where incumbents had been deprived since the rebellion began, they should be restored to their livings. Tilsley was safe, for Vicar Hardy was dead, and Tilsley put his name to the Address to the King from the Lancashire ministers. Events moved inexorably on towards Bartholomew Day 1662. In and around Deane the air was full of rumours. Informers told their lurid stories¹⁹: if the Presbyterian ministers were forced to conform they would resist; an "arising" was spoken of. There had been a meeting at Hindley chapel, and Tilsley, it was alleged, had been seen receiving letters from the hands of a conspirator—letters concerning an "arising". That Quakers and Presbyterians would join together against Parliament. In June, 1662, it was stated that the "arising" would be before Bolton Fair or within a month, and further that it was known that four preachers, including Mr. Tilsley, were to preach all of one day "next week" at Chowbent, and after would go to Scotland. The Justices of the Peace found the stories to be wild tales. The Act of Uniformity was passed and came into force on the 24 August, and Tilsley, along with the ministers at both of Dean parish's chapels-of-ease, Westhoughton and Horwich, refused to conform. They were ejected. On the 19 November the Rev. John Angier, formerly Presbyterian minister of Ringley chapel in the parish of Prestwich, and son of the more famous John Angier, eminent Nonconformist, was instituted as vicar of Deane. He had of course reconciled himself to the Church before the Act of Uniformity.

There has been some misapprehension as to Tilsley's position at Deane in the years following the Act of Uniformity, even in scholarly works of reference. The *Victoria County History of Lancashire* account, already quoted, may be reiterated:

"Ejected from the vicarage in 1662, he was allowed to reside in the house, and with the goodwill of the new vicar, and the tolerance of Bishop Wilkins afterwards preached in Deane church, as the 'lecturer', until Bishop Pearson silenced him in 1673, . ."

and quotes as its authority the evidence of Bailey. It is a misconception. Bailey says quite plainly: "Under Bishops Feme and Hall" [1662-1668] "he does not appear to have been allowed to exercise his vocation". The impression given by the V.C.H. is that of a recalcitrant Tilsley rendering ineffectual the stringent provisions of the Act of Uniformity "with the

goodwill of the new vicar and the tolerance of Bishop Wilkins afterwards ". A most recent authority²⁰ puts the situation in better perspective:

"John Tilsley, the prominent Presbyterian who fell foul of Cromwell and Cavalier alike, had been ejected, with his curates at Howich and Westhoughton, in 1662, but he retained the vicarage house and considerable authority among his parishioners, whilst under the gentle rule of Bishop John Wilkins 1666-1672, he was allowed to preach in his church again, as lecturer* (*In 1665 we find him . . . suspected of chafing against the intolerant measures of the Cavalier Parliament). His successor as vicar, John Angier' (1663-1672), who seems to have taken up an Anglican position although formerly Presbyterian minister of Ringley chapel, was unhappy as his colleague, but cut a pathetic and ineffective figure against Tilsley and the Dissenters on account of his insolvency ".

Even in this nearer to the truth account "the gentle rule of Bishop Wilkins " is shown as beginning in 1666, when in fact he was not consecrated bishop until November, 1668,²¹ and the licence given by him to Tilsley was not given until 1670. This account shows, however, that Tilsley did not have the "goodwill of the new vicar ". Croston²² says that Tilsley continued to reside at the vicarage by the "connivance" of the trustees. Not one of these descriptions: "retaining the vicarage house ", "continued to reside at the Vicarage by the connivance of the trustees", or "allowed to reside in the house" is an adequate description of Tilsley's position at the time of the ejection. Certainly he did "retain" the house—he "retained" it against all comers until 1678 or possibly until 1683, but it was on the strength of the conveyance made out to him in such emphatic terms in 1649. He held it in the face of the vicar, the trustees, and everybody else. It was argued against him that the house was sequestered by Parliamentary order; to which he replied that that order had been made redundant by the lease made personally to him. In fact he said he could " satisfy anyone that the house &c., was made perfectly to him and no one else had to do with it".²³

Parishioners and trustees after 1662 explained that:

" the intent of the contributors was chiefly to have it [the house] for the use of a minister there, but because that the presentation [to the living] passes the Broad Seal and heretofore ministers of mean parts and of unexemplary lives have been put upon them they account it prudential to make such reservation as aforesaid thereby to be more safe that in case of vacancy such ministers should not post to London to procure a presentation till he had encouragement and consent of the parishioners."

Which was their manner of explaining away the awkward claim of electing and choosing their own minister. The passage in the foregoing extract referring to "passes the Broad Seal" is a reminder that the right of patronage at Deane had, with the Restoration, reverted again to the Crown after the one instance of Parliamentary usurpation in the case of Tilsley's appointment. In later years it was sometimes in the gift of the Lord Chancellor, and the mention of the Broad Seal (a euphemism for the Lord Chancellor) is a reminder here that the holder of the office at that time was Sir Orlando Bridgeman, son of the former Bishop of Chester, who, it will be remembered, had " tolerated " the Puritan Horrocks in an earlier day at Deane. Like his father, Sir Orlando had a house (for he described himself in his will as " of Great Lever") which was within two miles of Deane church. He was particularly active in Church matters as an " appeaser " in these troubled times; Hutton²⁴ says: —

"In 1666 was passed the 'Five Mile Act' levelled directly against the dissenting ministers who had not subscribed the Act of Uniformity . . . The Lord Keeper [Sir Orlando] Bridgeman had an interview with [Richard] Baxter, probably by [King] Charles's orders, with a view to a scheme for comprehension for the Presbyterians . . . Baxter proposed that all who had been ordained by forms other than those of the Church should be admitted to be ministers by the following form: 'Take thou legal authority to preach the Word of God and administer the Holy Sacraments in any congregation in England where thou shall be lawfully appointed thereto . . .,' " Dr. Wilkins who represented a new body in the Church, which came to be called the ' Latitude Men ', agreed with these proposals; but again, the House of Commons would not hear of them . . . "

Tilsley was not "ordained by other forms"—he had been episcopally ordained in the Church of England—and would appear to be a perfectly proper instrument in Bishop Wilkins's eyes for restoration to parish work.

There appears therefore to be no evidence whatever to show that Tilsley engaged in any parochial activity in the six years between his ejection in 1662 and the consecration of Bishop Wilkins in November, 1668; or even before 1670.²⁵ Bailey's evidence says: "No longer now" (after 1662) "mixed up with public events, Tilsley's life is a mere record of his private concerns and his intercourse with friends "; and then, after referring to some incidents in 1666, Bailey goes on: " Tilsley's connections, as we have seen, were respectable; and his influence enabled him to retain some official position at Deane church . . . The Bishop of Chester at this time was not so severe against Nonconformists as his predecessors. He was John Wilkins, who succeeded to the see in November 1666 " {should be 1668} "He favoured Tilsley at Deane" allowing him " to preach in his church as lecturer, another being vicar who read the prayers . . . Oliver Heywood says that Tilsley had " done something to satisfy Bishop Wilkins, and kept his publick station at Dean-church ". Bailey goes on; "When Thoresby visited Manchester in 1684, he tells us how pleased he was with the agreeable conversation of Mr. Newcombe and Mr. Tilsley 'from whom I received several remarks concerning Bp. Wilkins and Lord Keeper Bridgeman, their temper and moderation, etc."

There would appear to be no doubt that Tilsley's advance into official favour again after 1668 was due to these two. It adds extra point to the rather plaintive letter addressed by John Angier, the suffering vicar of Deane, to his diocesan; written during the "appeasement " period of Bishop Wilkins and the Lord Keeper (in 1669) :²⁶

Vicar Angier reported thus; " There are eleven Hamblets in this parish, and for several years past in every hamblett there have been weekly two or three or more meetings to the number of 30 or 40, and many times double that number, and sometimes two or three Nonconformist Ministers at one of their meetings. The persons that usually so meet are Ministers and common people of all sorts and degrees, both men and women, and most in this parish are notorious nonconformists or favourers of them. Their hope of impunity (as is conceived) doe arise from the favour they expect from their Rulers, and their friends about the Court and the example of others in London.

"Their was a publique meeting (or Conventicle) att Horridge Chappell, for which the Ringleaders are prosecuted against. All the above ", ends the report significantly, " was presented by the vicar, but the churchwardens certified under their hands that they did not know of any conventicles."

As Mr. Higson says "Tilsley retained considerable authority amongst his parishioners." That he did so was inevitable; after twenty years amongst them, he had by the weight of his authority made the name of this hitherto obscure parish known far and wide. There were those, prominent in the parish (and not Dissenters) who appeared to feel, like the "Latitude Men", that the rigours of the repressive Acts passed by Parliament could be made to bear less heavily on men whose offence was the possession of an offended conscience. In 1665, Oliver Heywood (who was, incidentally, brother in-law to the new vicar of Deane, as well as a widely known Nonconformist in Lancashire and Yorkshire) wrote in his diary²⁷ the case of an instance in point:

"Mr. Bessick parson of Ratcliffe made bitter complaints against me to some justices that I came over into Bolton parish, and gathered great companys to preach and pray to them, which he called conventicles; but the justices put him off; he went on purpose another time to complain at a privy session, and Mr. Hulton of Park ,[a leading Deane parishioner], a justice, told him, he knew not what a conventicle means, that it he

informed against was none, he said he had heard that business discussed at the council table many times, and it was concluded negatively, and thus they gave him a rebuke for his information."

Not all prominent Deane parishioners were as tolerant as Mr. Hulton. There were those who believed that Tilsley's licence to preach not only in his former parish church but in churches throughout Lancashire, together with his solidly entrenched position in what was now becoming commonly called the " vicarage-house ", really was the exercise of *licence*. Bailey reminds us that "in August 1670, he was under the Five Mile Act indicted at the Assizes, but Newcome thought he might get off 'by his licence '. He says that that this Act was 'strangely revived' against Mr. Tilsley, and executed against Mr. Jollie ". There was some sagacity in Newcome's reaction to Tilsley's indictment; the penalties under the Act and a fine of £40 seemed to be his due, living not only within five miles of his former (before ejection) church, but within five hundred yards! His licence from his diocesan cancelled out the offence.

With the death of Bishop Wilkins, however, in 1672, the reaction was almost immediate. Evidence was gathered in Deane parish of the Tilsley misdemeanours, of his omissions under the various Acts of Parliament, and in that year he was again indicted under the Five Mile Act, when he promised conformity and procured a *nolli prosequi* (a petition from a plaintiff to " stay " a suit), but was then enjoined by the King's particular commands that he should in all points conform. Roger Kenyon, now well-established as Clerk of the Peace of the county was indefatigable in gathering evidence. There were many depositions from parishioners of Tilsley's misdemeanours during the time he enjoyed the Bishop's special privileges. He had, it was alleged, used it to levy a "rate" in the parish, threatening objectors with the Bishop's displeasure if they did not contribute. Even Sir Roger Bradshaw, M.P. for Wigan, was enlisted in the case against Tilsley.

Roger Kenyon as prosecutor, said another deponent, "hath offered to desist prosecution if he [Tilsley] would either accept the Vicaridge himself or putt it & take his young scholar with him and have it to the present Bishop of Chester to Recommend who hee thinks fitt for that place. But Mr, Tilsley will not." The reference to "his young scholar" (an added complication to the narrative) was to the Rev. Richard Hatton, then the acting vicar of Deane in the place of the removed John Angler. Sir Orlando Bridgeman, before he "went out" and gave up the "Broad Seal ", had been prevailed upon (by Tilsley presumably, or so Kenyon's plaint seems to suggest) to make the presentation and institute young Hatton to the living in 1672; he was inducted 1673.

" Kenyon's indictment was unequivocal:²⁸

"That in the unhappy times he was a preacher to the Army against the late King ... in those times came to be vicar of Dean . . . That in the year 1662 he was suspended from that place for his Nonconformity. That he hath not appeared since publicly conformed himself according to the Act of Uniformity, hath not in his church declared his assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles, nor renewed the Covenant nor sworn according to the Test in the Act made at Oxon 17 of this King before the Justices of the Peace . . . that he wears not the surplice, baptized not children, reads not the Common Prayer as the Canon and Law directs. But contrary to the law lives and weekly preaches at the place where he was suspended for his nonconformity. That in the year 1670 the then Bishop of the diocese certifying that before him he had declared and done what was required by the Act of Uniformity gave him a licence to preach during his pleasure in any parish in his diocese. That his conformity in no respect appears further than what is Implied by his Lordship. That the licence did long since determine by the death of that Diocesan. Mr. Tilsley before the Bishop that now is hath not in any respect manifested his conformity nor by him is licensed to preach."

One penal Act, the Test Act of 1673, Tilsley had conformed to. It was soon after his " young scholar's " induction as vicar of Deane, and as officiating minister—as the Sacramental Test certificate required —the Rev. Richard Hatton, vicar of Deane, issued such a certificate to " John Tilsley, clerk, one of the Governors of the Hospital at Manchester ". On the same day "John Tilsley, clerk, Minister of the Gospel at Dean" issued a similar certificate to the Rev. Richard Hatton.²⁹ It is not clear whether the minister who issued the certificate in the second place was the celebrant. Perhaps he was.

It has been said of the Oxford Oath (the Oxford, or Five Mile Act) 1665:³⁰

(by this Act) "Nonconformist ministers were not to reside in any corporate town, or in any parish wherein they had, before ejection. exercised their ministry, under penalty of £40. The ministers could escape the penalties and inconveniences of the Act by taking the Oxford Oath. Few of the Nonconformists could, for various reasons, take this Oath, even after Sir Orlando Bridgeman, the Lord Keeper had explained the ' endeavour' in the last paragraph to mean only ' unlawful endeavour '. The rest risked the penalties and suffered imprisonment and inconvenience until the Act fell into disuetude a few years later."

Tilsley, it will be recalled, had on being prosecuted a second time under the Five Mile Act, procured his respite; but it was only respite. Roger Kenyon's indictments still pursued him. On 20 July, 1676, John Tilsley, clerk, took the Oxford Oath:

"I, John Tilsley, do swear that it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take up Arms against the King; and that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking Arms by his Authority against his Person, or against those that are commissioned by him, in Pursuance of such Commissions, and that I will not at any time endeavour any alteration of Government either in Church or State."³¹

John Tilsley's wheel had come full circle. It is not believed that he was at this time a renegade, which seems to be implied in the comment given above, against the causes for which he had so stoutly fought during his life. Sir Orlando Bridgeman's comment (on what the oath could be taken to mean by conscientious Nonconformists) given when he was Lord Keeper did not, in Tilsley's case, apply. In any case, in 1676 Sir Orland Bridgeman was not then Lord Keeper. Tilsley perhaps knew another of the late Lord Keeper's observations: " If a case admitted of diverse doubts, which the lawyers call points, he would never give all on one side, but either party should have something to go away with."³² In giving his submission to the Five Mile Act and his subscription to the Test Act, John Tilsley was perhaps giving that " something to go away with" to the other side according to the precept of the Lord Keeper; excepting that it was Tilsley who, in this instance, was to " go away ".

On 14 March, 1683-4 the inhabitants of the parish of Deane made declaration " that they desire the parish house to be demised to their present vicar, Richard Hatton ". He had been "their present vicar "for ten years. It had, as a document, far more significance than, on the face of it, it appeared to have.

"Under date of Friday, 12 December, 1684, Newcome wrote: 'At night my dear friend, Rev. Mr. Tilsley, died. Went with him to his grave at Dean, December 16. I after (as he desired) preached to his children upon Hebrews xiii, 7, 8.' ... He was buried beneath the old yew tree in the church yard beside his wife; and the following inscription was placed on his gravestone:

Here . Lyeth . the . Body
of . John . Tilsley . Clark
Master . of . Arts . and
sometimes . Vicar . of
Dean . which . was

interred . the . 16th . day
of . December
1684

A new stone (re-lettered in exact facsimile some seventy-odd years ago) with the worn old stone intact underneath may still be seen in Deane churchyard. Deane parish is still proud of its native-born son and its vicar.

NOTES

- 1 Bailey, J. E., "Memoir of John Tilsey," appeared also in Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Notes, ed. Pink, Leigh, 1885, Nos. 90, 96, 102.
- 2 Victoria County Hist. Lancashire, V, p. 4.
- 3 Heaton Partington MSS (Deane Church), Chetham Library.
- 4 Victoria County Hist. Lanes., V, p. 25.
- 5 Heaton Partington MSS.
- 6 Baines's Hist. Lanes, (ed. Croston), III, 129.
- 7 An Exact Relation (of the taking of the town of Preston) by An Eye-Witness 1642-3 (quoted by Bailey).
- 8 Bailey.
- 9 Seacombe, Hist, of the House of Stanley (1767), p. 72.
- 10 Journal of the House of Commons. HI. p. 271.
- 11 Bailey.
- 12 DD/Hu/40/8, 10. Lanes. County Record Office.
- 13 Journal Presb. Hist. Soc. England, XIII, No. 4, p, 140.
- 14 Heaton Partington MSS.
- 15 Bolton Chronicle, 15 Dec., 1900 (quoting Brand's Hist. Newcastle-upon-Tyne).
- 16 Bailey.
- 17 Palatine Note Book. Vol. IV, pp. 143-47.
- 18 Original edition of work in Chetham library.
- 19 Hist. Soc. Lanes. & Chesh., 27 N.S., Vol. 63, p. 120.
- 20 Higson, "Promoters of Nonconformity," Lanes. & Chesh. Antiq. Soc., Vols. 75-76, p. 139.
- 21 Handbook of British Chronology (R. Hist. Soc.), 1939, p. 181.
- 22 Baines, Hist. Lanes., ed. Croston, III, 130.
- 23 DDx/Kenyon 1671, Lanes County Rec. Office.
- 24 (Hutton) English Church 1625-1714 ("Hist. Eng. Ch." series 1904), p. 204.
- 25 DD/Kenyon/30n.d. L.C.R.O.
- 26 Higson quoting Cheshire Sheaf, LVIII (1963), p. 24.
- 27 Diaries of Oliver Hey wood. Vol. I, 197.
- 28 DD/Ke/30 n.d. L.C.R.O.
- 29 Q83/8/1/90and Q/83/8/1/102 L.C.R.O.
- 30 Axon, Life of John Angler, Chet. Soc. N.S., 97, p. 92.
- 31 Original certificate in L.C.R.O.
- 32 Dict National Biography, Vol. II, 1227.
- 33 DD/Hu/40/20 L.C.R.O.