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ROGERS ON ISAIAH 5

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A STRANGE VINEYARD
IN PALESTINA:

IN AN EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH'S PARABOLICAL SONG
OF THE BELOVED DISCOVERED:

TO WHICH GOD'S VINEYARD IN THIS OUR LAND IS PARALLELED.

BY

NEHEMIAH ROGERS,

MASTER IN ARTS, AND PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATION AT MESSING IN ESSEX.

*'Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant
of a strange vine unto me?'—JER. II. 21.*

EDINBURGH: JAMES NICHOL.

LONDON: JAMES NISBET & CO. DUBLIN: G. HERBERT.

M.DCCC.LXVII.



Tentmaker Publications
121 Hartshill road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffs.
ST4 7LU

www.tentmaker.org.uk

ISBN: 1 901670 42 2

This edition originally published 1867
Reprinted 2007

NEHEMIAH ROGERS, B. D.

FOR almost all the knowledge that we possess of the history of NEHEMIAH ROGERS, we are indebted to the research of an American, Mr Joseph Lemuel Chester. This gentleman, believing himself to be a descendant of John Rogers, the noble proto-martyr of the English Reformation, came to England to trace the genealogical tree, and expended immense energy in investigating the family history of the martyr, both upwards and downwards. The results of his researches he has given to the world in an interesting volume,* in which, with singular ingenuousness, he confesses that the branch of the Rogerses from which he himself springs, is not that which bore the noble martyr. From this volume we shall take the liberty to quote at length the accounts which it contains of Nehemiah, and shall add to it a few notes of our own.

Rev. Nehemiah Rogers, B.D. 1594-1660.—He was the second son and third child of Rev. Vincent Rogers, of Stratford Bow, Middlesex, and supposed great-grandson of the martyr. He was baptized in that parish, October 20th, 1594. Very little has been preserved of his history, although he seems to have been, in his times, a man of considerable eminence. Of his earlier life, it is only known that he was for some time Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. His first preferment, of which there is any account, was to the vicarage of Messing, in Essex, May 13th, 1620; for some time previous to which he had been acting as curate or assistant of St Margaret's, Fish Street Hill, in London. On the 25th of May 1632, he was appointed to the sinecure rectory of Tay Magna, in Essex. Late in 1635, or early in 1636, he presented, as a free gift, to the president and Fellows of St John's College, Oxford, the perpetual advowson of the rectory of Gatton, in Surrey, which had previously lapsed to the Crown, and which he had evidently received from Charles I. The living was then worth more than £100 per annum; and a letter from Archbishop Laud is preserved, in which his liberality is recorded in the warmest terms. On the 1st of May 1636, he was presented by the king to a prebend in the cathedral church of Ely, and became possessor of the sixth stall. In the cathedral records he is styled S. T. B. On the 26th of March 1642, he resigned the rectorship of Tay Magna, and was collated to the rectory of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, in London, probably resigning also his vicarage of Messing shortly after, as his successor was appointed on the following 3d of May. These seem to be all the livings which he ever possessed,

* *John Rogers: the Compiler of the first Authorised English Bible, the Pioneer of the English Reformation, and its first Martyr.* Embracing a Genealogical Account of his Family, Biographical Sketches of some of his Principal Descendants, his own Writings, &c. &c. &c. By JOSEPH LEMUEL CHESTER. London: 1861.

although that of Finchley has been assigned to him, as it appears, erroneously. Soon afterwards, probably in 1643, being an uncompromising royalist, he was sequestered of both his rectory and his prebend, though he seems to have retained both nominally until his death, as his successor was not appointed in either case until after that event. As late as February 23d, 1653, the vestry of St Botolph's petitioned the Lord Protector that the inhabitants of that parish might have liberty to make choice of a minister, and he was the rector named whose place was to have been usurped by this election. No new rector was appointed, however, until August 10th, 1660—"per mort. Rogers," according to Newcourt. He appears to have continued to preach after his deprivation, at least during several years immediately preceding his death, and to have been still in connection with the Established Church; for, in the preface to one of his books, published in 1659, he refers to his ministry for three years at Little Braxsted, and his subsequent "nomination and free presentation," to the church at Doddinghurst, both in Essex. He died at the latter place early in May 1660. While passing through the churchyard, after Sunday morning service, without any previous warning or complaint, he fell suddenly to the ground, speechless and motionless, and was a corpse before the hour for afternoon service. He was buried at Doddinghurst, on the 9th of that month.

His published works are still extant, and comprise some eight or ten volumes. They are chiefly expositions of the most interesting parables, and the subjects are handled with much skill. The titles of some of them are as follows:—"The Wild Vine; or, An Exposition on Isaiah's Parabolical Song of the Beloved"—"The Indulgent Father" (the Prodigal Son)—"The Watchful Shepherd" (the Lost Sheep)—"The Good Housewife, with her Broom and Candle" (the Lost Groat)—"The Fast Friend; or, A Friend at Midnight"—and "The Figless Fig-tree." Besides these, several other works of a similar character are announced in the publishers' advertisements. He also published, in 1631-2, a sermon, preached at the second triennial visitation of the Bishop of London, held at Kelvedon in Essex, which evinces his scholarship and high intellectual abilities. It is probable that some of his works were translated abroad, or, at least, that his eminence as a scholar or a theologian were recognised on the Continent, as the writer has seen a single copy of a fine engraved portrait of him, by Bernigeroth of Leipsic, with a German inscription, and evidently from some German work which he has not yet been able to discover.

The name of his wife has not been preserved. A daughter, Mary, died in 1642. His eldest son, Nehemiah, was a civilian, and held a responsible post in the customs. He married Mary, daughter of Edmund Porter, D.D., and sister of Sir Charles Porter, Kt., Lord Chancellor of Ireland, and their son, Edmund, was living in London in 1701. His second son, and probably his only other child, was John, the immediate ancestor of the present Blachford family, and father of its first baronet, an account of whom will be found hereafter.*

Such is Mr Chester's account of our author; we now append to it a few notes.

1. There are two questions relating to Nehemiah's descent from John; whether he was descended from him at all; and if so, in what relation he stood to him. Now there is a family of baronets who are unquestionably descended from our Nehemiah,—the first baronet having been his grandson,—and they trace their pedigree to John, asserting that Vincent, the father of Nehemiah, was one of the sons of John. But then we have a list of the eleven children of John, of which we have no reason to doubt the accuracy, and the name of Vincent does not appear in it.

* 'Parish Register, Stratford Bow. Kennet's Register and Chronicle. Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy. Willis' Survey of Cathedrals. Bentham's History of Ely Cathedral. Malcolm's Londinium Redivivum. Newcourt's Repertorium. Laud's Words, Oxford, 1860, vol. vii. p. 242.

Yet we have good reason for believing that Nehemiah was descended from John ; for Nehemiah's son John, the father of the first baronet, in the preface to one of his books, speaks of the martyr as his 'predecessor.' Now he was not his predecessor in any office ; and therefore we suppose that he uses the word *predecessor* in the sense of *ancestor*, a sense which it bore commonly enough at the time. Mr Chester cuts the knot by supposing that Vincent was not a son, but a grandson of John, and consequently that Nehemiah was a great-grandson of the proto-martyr. This supposition, however, is not without difficulty. Vincent married in 1586, being the minister of Stratford Bow, Middlesex. Now it is not at all likely that he was under thirty years of age at the time of his marriage ; but suppose him to have been only twenty-five ; this would give 1561 as the year of his birth. Now Daniel, the eldest son of the martyr, who became one of the most noted diplomatists of his time, was born about 1538. In 1561 therefore he was only twenty-three years old, and in that very year he graduated at Oxford. He was certainly unmarried at that time, and indeed it is probable that he did not marry till long afterwards. It seems certain, therefore, that Vincent could not be his son. John, the martyr's second son, took his degree at Cambridge in 1562-3, and was soon after elected to a fellowship. He must therefore have been unmarried in 1561, and could not be Vincent's father. Suppose that the third child of the martyr was also a son, he could not have been born earlier than 1541, and in 1561 could not be above twenty years old ; it is therefore extremely improbable that either he, or any one of his younger brothers, was Vincent's father. In this very unsatisfactory state we must leave this interesting question.

2. In his notice of Timothy Rogers, the elder brother of Nehemiah, Mr Chester states that, 'in 1623, according to Morant, he became vicar of Great Tay in Essex, and appears to have continued such until 1650, in which year his successor is first named ;' while in the notice of Nehemiah, as quoted above, he states that 'on the 25th of May 1632 he was appointed to the sinecure Rectory of Tay Magna in Essex ;' and again that 'on the 26th of March 1642, he resigned the Rectorship of Tay Magna.' Now we do not suppose that there was both a vicarate of Great Tay, and a Rectory of Tay Magna ; and therefore we presume that Timothy, appointed in 1623, resigned in 1632 in favour of his brother, who held the living till 1642.

3. The account which Walker, in his *Sufferings of the Clergy*, gives of the livings from which Rogers was removed by sequestration, differs from that given by Mr Chester, inasmuch as the former represents him as having been deprived of the vicarate of Messing, while the latter represents him as having resigned it shortly after his removal to St Botolph's. Although Walker knew little of Rogers, yet it is probable that he took the account of his sequestration from Messing from an official record, and that it is correct. It may be as well to present Walker's account of him entire. 'Nehemiah Rogers, B.D., prebendary of the 6th stall in Ely, vicar of Messing in Essex. [I take it to be one and the same person who lost all these.] I find him in possession of this prebend in the year 1642, and presume he died before the Restoration ; because in 1660 Dr Laurence Womock, afterwards bishop of St David's, was possessed of it. Not knowing the precise time of Mr Rogers' death, the same *quære* must be made of him as of Mr Wigmore and Dr Hall before. As to the living of St Botolph, he was admitted to it March 26, 1642, and dispossessed of it about May 1643. Lloyd seems to make him sequestered also from the Rectory of Finchley in Middlesex ; but this is certainly a mistake ; for no such name occurs in Mr Newcourt's list of the rectors of that church. But I find by Mr Newcourt that he had some time the living of Tay Magna in Essex. Whether he suffered anything there, *quære*.'

4. The fact that Rogers, stanch royalist and episcopalian though he was, continued to officiate in

St Botolph's after his deprivation, and that in 1653 the Protector refused to the parishioners to supersede him by granting them liberty to choose a successor to him, ought to be noted as a proof of the moderation of Cromwell and his maligned 'expurgators.'

5. The works of Nehemiah Rogers are exceedingly scarce, and that which is now reprinted has been hitherto apparently the rarest of all, its name having been unknown to Watts and Darling. It will be noticed that Mr Chester gives it a different title from that by which it is here designated. This would seem to indicate that more editions of it than one had been published. This, however, we do not suppose to have been the case. The edition from which we reprint, published in 1623 was certainly the first, and we have no doubt that the present, issued after an interval of 244 years, is the second. To us it appears not doubtful that this small work will be regarded as an interesting specimen of the expositions of the 'doctrinal puritans.' Clear throughout and occasionally eloquent; at once evangelical and faithfully practical, it is worthy of attentive perusal, which the liveliness of the author's style will render a pleasant task.

T. S.

A STRANGE VINEYARD IN PALESTINA.

‘Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.’—ISA. v. 1.

IT was a practice usual* with the prophets in former times, after that they had prophesied to the people, to gather a compendious sum of what they had taught, and affix it to the gate of the temple, that the prophecy might be the better viewed and learned of all; † and after it had there remained for certain days, it was then taken down and put into the treasury of the temple, that the memory thereof might continue for ever. And thus, by God’s special providence, it came to pass, that if not all, yet most of the books of the prophets were gathered and preserved, and now, as rich treasures, are enjoyed by us; wherein we have the sermons of the holy prophets, not so largely penned as they were preached, but only such general heads collected as were by them delivered. ‡ Now, as before in the former chapters, so here in this, we have some such sermon notes, preached by an excellent and incomparable prophet, by name Isaiah, a man of noble birth, and of as noble a spirit. Trace him, and you shall still find him like his noble self, pithy, powerful, and, as St Paul witnesseth, Rom. x. 20, very bold in delivering of his message, fearing no cruelty nor danger, albeit for his boldness he lost his life, being by the commandment of Manasses sawn asunder with a wooden saw, if history speaks true. §

He was a courtier and a master of speech, being, saith one of the ancient, || the eloquentest prophet for Hebrew in the Old Testament, as St Paul was the elegantest apostle for Greek in the New; to whose elegancies the rollings of Demosthenes do no

more answer than that confused noise of waters doth to that sweet noise of harps spoken of in St John’s Revelation, chap. xiv. 2. In all his writings he rather seemeth to be an evangelist than a prophet, most lively describing and setting forth the nativity, preaching, persecution, apprehension, death, resurrection, ascension, yea, and latter coming to judgment of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; so that no evangelist seems to go beyond him. His auditory was Judah and Jerusalem, a stubborn and disobedient people, more brutish than the ox and ass, Isa. i. 18, whose sins were crimson, receiving a double dye, or admitting a twofold aggravation, one from God’s unutterable kindness unto them, in nourishing, bringing of them up, and choosing them for his; the other, from the quality and multitude of their transgressions against him, whose sins were for number many, for nature heavy.

To these is Isaiah, *God’s health*, sent, that he might heal their sickness. With these he deals, and first discovers their disease, and then labours for their recovery. He proves that they are ‘a sinful nation, a people full of iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, corrupt children, whose whole head was sick, and whole heart heavy; so that from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there was no soundness; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores,’ &c., Isa. i. 4–6. And that of ‘a faithful city it was now become a harlot, whose silver was become dross, and wine mixed with water,’ &c. For all which God’s anger was conceived against them; and yet withal he signifies his mercy, if it were received by them; using his best oratory in inviting those that did rebel, inciting those that did neglect, hastening those that did linger, and recalling those that did wander, to

* Calv. in præfat. ad hunc lib.

† Isa. viii. 1, 2, and xxx. 8; Hab. ii. 2.

‡ Muscul. in Isaiam.

§ Hieron., lib. xv. in Isaiam in fine.

|| Hieron., Epist. ad Paulinum.

sue out their pardons, and make peace with their maker. And thus he spends the four foregoing chapters. All which to have heard this orator himself press in his own words, and with his own affections, whose bowels would not have yearned and heart melted within their breasts? And yet, ah Lord! what hear I? Israel is not gathered, thy servant's report is not believed, Isa. liii. 1, even Isaiah himself labours in vain, and spends his strength for nought, chap. xlix. 4. No better fared it with him in his ministry, than it fareth with us, the ministers of thy gospel. Scarce a tenth is gathered. And yet we cannot wonder that it fareth so with us; for can we, who are but rude in speech, and of a slow tongue, hope for that which so rare a rhetorician found not? Little or no fruit could he see of all his travails; and yet he doth not faint, but, with an invincible constancy, goes on in performing his rhetorical function.

Oh, how sorts the humour of many with this his practice! Such is the impatience of our hearts, that except we see present reformation in those we have to deal withal, we are ready with Jeremiah to resolve to speak no more in the name of God, Jer. xx. 9. It is noted as his blemish, and the word of God gives him no rest until he had altered his resolution.

But what course wilt thou now take, O thou man of God, with this obdurate people? Their hearts are fully set in them to do evil; they will not obey; nay, which is worse, they will not hear thee. Would they listen to thy sermons, there were some hope they might be wrought upon; but, turning away the ear, what hope is left? Tell us then, O noble prophet, what wilt thou do? Let us be so bold with thee as to ask the question, and be so favourable as to acquaint us with thy purpose.

'Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard,' &c.—*q. d.*, I see indeed they lightly set by my ordinary sermons, and therefore I purpose to leave my accustomed manner of prophesying, and fall to singing, being unto them rather as a poet than as a prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 32, that so by their own delights they may be allured.

Thus God seeks to draw us to himself with those baits which are somewhat agreeable to our palate: he doth compose himself to our disposition; and even as face answereth face in a glass, so doth he apply himself to fit the humours of mortal men. Do the sages love stars and dreams? a bright shining star and a dream shall instruct them in the truth of God, and direct them unto Christ, Mat. ii. Doth St Peter love fishing? he shall be won by a great draught of fishes, Luke v. Doth Augustine love eloquence? Ambrose by his eloquence shall catch him at a sermon. What is it that can win us? Which way soever our desires stand, that is not sinful, God doth in his word allure

us; the best things in earth and heaven are made our bait. Let us yield ourselves therefore to be caught, for with these doth the Lord seek us, not for any need that he hath of us, but for our own salvation.

In which song we have a parable proposed of a fruitless vineyard, which, after great care and cost of the painful husbandman bestowed on it, is left desolate and forsaken for its barrenness.

The argument of it seemeth not to differ from that of the foregoing chapters, here being nothing said that for substance was not before taught; the difference that is, is only in circumstance, the style and method only being altered and changed.

The scope and drift of the prophet is first to get audience and attention; and therefore he chooseth to deliver his message in the sweetness of verse rather than in prose, that so the ear, having that which delighted it, might without tediousness listen to that which was taught, which, being listened unto, might the better and more kindly work upon them. And questionless by this course he got him hearers; for many would flock to hear him sing, who would not step over the threshold to hear him in his wonted vein.

Secondly, That they might the sooner learn and better retain what he did teach them; for verse, being composed of certain musical proportions, both in the number and measure of feet and syllables, are sooner and with greater delight learned; and once being learned, are longer retained. As by experience we find that our common people have many unwritten songs, which are older than their great-grandfather's father, those they learned being children, and never forgot again until their death. Yea, by this means the remembrance of some things have been kept from many ages past, which both history and tradition had else for ever left neglected and forgotten.

Thirdly, That he might bring them to a sight of their ingratitude, and draw from them an impartial sentence against themselves. For look, as it is with the eye, which both seeth and correcteth all other things save itself; so is it with the sinner, when his own case is proposed to him, not as his own, but in the person of another. He will soon see the fault, and pass a just sentence on it, but else it cannot be espied. Whilst wise Nathan, 2 Sam. xii., was querulously discoursing of the cruel rich man that had forcibly taken away the only lamb of his poor neighbour, how willingly doth David listen to the story, and how sharply, even above law, doth he censure the fact: ver. 5, 'As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.' See how severe justicers we can be to our very own crimes in others' persons. Had he known on whom the sentence would have light, it should not have been so