The Rood of Grace

Colin Flight

The abbey of Boxley was founded in the 1140s and survived until the 1530s (Fowler 1926, pp. 153–5). It was the first – it remained the only – Cistercian house in Kent. For the rest, it was a monastery like many others, not very large or very small, not very rich or very poor. The monks were not saints; they were not egregious sinners.

If Boxley was famous for anything, it was famous for a carved wooden image of Christ on the cross, the Rood of Grace, as it was called (Brownbill 1883, Bridgett 1888, 1890, Cave-Browne 1892).[1] The only account we get of the history of the Rood is the one given by Lambard (1576), who took it, he says, from an advertising pamphlet printed for the monks of Boxley – 'as the same was sometime by them selues published in printe'. No copy of this pamphlet survives; but I think we can be sure that it did exist, and that Lambard had seen a copy of it,[2] because the story he tells (even after he has distorted and exaggerated it) runs counter to his purpose. His description of the Rood itself cannot possibly have come from the pamphlet; that aside, I am satisfied that his account is what he says it is – a sarcastic version of the story authorized by the monks.

> It chaunced (as the tale is) that vpon a time, a cunning Carpenter of our countrey, was taken prysoner in the warres betweene vs and Fraunce, who (wanting otherwise [i.e. lacking other means] to satisfie for his raunsome, and hauing good leysure to deuise for his deliuerance) thought it best to attempt some curious enterprise, within the compasse of his owne Art and skill, to make him selfe some money withall: And therefore, getting together fit matter for his purpose, ...[3]
>
> This done, he made shifte for his libertie, came ouer into the Realme, of purpose to vtter his Merchandize, and layde the Image vpon the backe of a Iade, that he draue before him. Nowe when he was come so farre as to Rochester on his waye, he waxed drye by reason of trauaile, and called

[1] In any church, the most conspicuous image was a crucifixion scene carried on a beam or loft; in a monastic church that image was set on top of the screen at the entrance to the choir. The Rood of Grace was not that rood: it was a smaller, more approachable image.

[2] Lambard's account of the early career of the 'Holy Maid of Kent' is similarly said to be based on a pamphlet published at the time – 'a litle Pamphlet, conteining foure and twentie leaues, ... printed by Robert Redman, Intituled: A marueilous woorke of late done at Court of Streete in Kent' (Lambard 1576, p. 149, 1596, p. 188). Though again no copy survives, again I see no reason for not taking Lambard at his word.

[3] The passage omitted here will be quoted later (p. 10).

at an alehouse for drinke to refreshe him, suffering his horse neuerthelesse to goe forwarde alone thorowe the Citie.

This Iade was no sooner out of sight, but he missed the streight westerne way that his Maister intended to haue gone, and turning Southe, made a great pace towarde Boxley, and being driuen (as it were) by some diuine furie, neuer ceassed til he came at the Abbay church doore, where he so beate and bounced with his heeles, that diuers of the Monkes hearde the noyse, came to the place to know the cause, and (marueiling at the strangenesse of the thing) called the Abbat and his Couent to beholde it.

These good men seeing the horse so earnest, and discerning what he had on his backe, for doubt of deadly impietie opened the doore, whiche they had no sooner done, but the horse rushed in, and ranne (in great haste) to a piller (which was the verie place where this Image was afterwarde aduaunced) and there stopped him self, and stoode still. Nowe while the Monkes were busie to take off the loade, in commeth the Carpenter (that by great inquisition had followed) and he chalengeth his owne: The Monkes, lothe to loose so beneficiall a stray, at the first make some denyal, but afterwarde, being assured by all signes that he was the very Proprietarie, they graunt him to take it with him. The carpenter then taketh the horse by the heade, and first assayeth to leade him out of the Churche, but he woulde not stirre for him: Then beateth he and striketh him, but the Iade was so restie and fast nayled, that he would not once remoue his foote from the piller: At the laste he taketh off the Image, thinking to haue carried it out by it self, and then to haue led the horse after, but that also cleaued so fast to the place, that notwithstanding all that euer he and the Monkes also, (which at the length were contented for pities sake to helpe him) coulde doe, it woulde not be moued one inche from it, So that in the ende, partely of wearinesse in wrestling with it, and partely by persuasion of the Monkes, which were in loue with the Picture, and made him beleeue, that it was by God him selfe destinate to their house, the Carpenter was contented for a peece of money, to go his way and leaue the Roode behinde him. (Lambard 1576, pp. 182–5)

In short, there was nothing miraculous about the Rood itself, only about the manner of its arrival in Boxley. Some supernatural power had guided the horse to the abbey, then to the church door, and at last to one particular pillar inside the church. When the image was unloaded from the horse, the same power prevented it from being moved away. Left with no other choice, the carpenter sold the image to the monks, and the monks set it up on the pillar which seemed to have been thus designated for it.

It would be pointless to ask whether the story is true. We are free to believe it or not; we are not expected to question it – to inquire, for example, why the carpenter had to bring the image back to England, rather than selling it to a church in France. This is a miracle story. Of course it is not true in any narrow sense of the word.

Prospective pilgrims, wondering whether it was worth their while to make a visit to Boxley, would not care much about the origin of the im-

age, nor about the quality of the workmanship. For them the question was simply: Does it work? Did one's prayers have a better than average chance of being answered if they were said in front of this image? As people judged of these things at the time, the evidence seemed to favour an affirmative answer.

That was not the view of dimwits and peasants alone. In 1524, when the abbot of Boxley was unable to raise the money to pay his share of a subsidy granted by the clergy to the king, he wrote an apologetic letter to archbishop Warham, who (together with the bishop of London) was responsible for chasing up defaulters; and the archbishop then wrote to cardinal Wolsey, saying that he was inclined to allow the abbot more time, if the cardinal agreed. This is Warham's letter,[4] as it was summarized by Brewer (1875, p. 127):

> Has received letters from the abbot of Boxley, offering the security of his house for the payment of money due to the King. Would not have interfered, as the place is exempt, had he not been forced by the act of convocation authorizing him and the bp. of London to proceed against such as pay not their collect. As the place is much sought from all parts of the realm visiting the Rode of Grace, would be sorry to put it under an interdict. Wishes his opinion about the matter. The Abbot is inclined to live precisely, and bring the place out of debt, 'or else it were pity that he should live much longer to the hurt of so holy a place where so many miracles be showed.'

Such was Boxley's reputation in the 1520s. The abbey was a holy place, 'much sought from all parts of the realm' by pilgrims who wanted to see the Rood of Grace, 'a place where many miracles be showed.' As Bridgett (1890, p. 205) remarked, archbishop Warham's opinion has to count for something.[5]

The miracles, of course, were not free. It went without saying that one's prayers would not be heard unless one proved one's sincerity by making whatever donation one could afford. What income the monks of Boxley derived from the Rood of Grace is impossible to say. Those pilgrims who came from a distance were probably saving most of their money until they got to Canterbury. The only known facts are a few entries in the petty-cash books of royal personages, who, without actually visiting the abbey themselves, might sometimes send someone to make a donation on their behalf. King Henry VIII is recorded to have made an offering of six shillings and eight pence on 29 July 1510 (Ellis 1846, p. 168); and in that

[4] Warham to Wolsey, Otford 3 May 1524 (below, p. 11).

[5] But Bridgett was wrong to suggest that Boxley would have been included in a 'personal visitation of all the monasteries' in the diocese of Canterbury made by archbishop Warham in 1511. As a Cistercian house, Boxley was exempt from the archbishop's ordinary jurisdiction. When Warham 'interfered' in 1524, he was acting, not as diocesan, but as one of the enforcers appointed by convocation. This is all stated plainly enough in his letter to Wolsey.

he was following the example of his mother, who had made an offering of twenty pence in 1502 (Nicolas 1830, p. 3, cited by Bridgett 1890, p. 180), and of his father, who had made an offering of four shillings in 1492 (Bentley 1833, p. 91, cited by Bridgett 1890, p. 165). As donations went, these were on the modest side.

The abbey of Boxley was surrendered – entirely of the monks' own free will, as the monks were required to say – on Tuesday 29 January 1538 (Gairdner 1892, p. 56). The site and buildings of the monastery itself together with all of its possessions passed into the hands of the king. An agent of Cromwell's, Walter Hendley, arrived to make a survey of those possessions (Gairdner 1892, p. 67) – the lands which had formerly belonged to the monks but now belonged to the king, the rents which had formerly been paid to the monks but were now to be paid to the king. On Hendley's departure one of his assistants, Geoffrey Chamber, was left in charge of the next operation, the 'defacing' of the church (which meant stripping it bare and selling whatever could be sold) and the 'plucking down' of its images – sacred a week ago, monuments of superstition and idolatry now. The monks had been promised that they would be awarded pensions, but nobody knew quite what they were supposed to do next. Until instructions arrived from London, they had to remain on the premises, watching their world distintegrate around them.

From Maidstone on Thursday 7 February, Chamber wrote to Cromwell with news of a strange discovery. This is the whole letter, as it was printed by Ellis (1846, pp. 136–7).[6]

> My singler goode Lorde, my dutye remembrede unto your Lordeshipe this shalbe to aduertise the same that upon the defacyng of the late Monasterye of Boxley, and pluckyng down of the Images of the same, I founde in the Image of the Roode callede the Roode of Grace, the whiche heretofore hath beene hadd in greate veneracion of people, certen ingynes and olde wyer, wyth olde roton stykkes in the backe of the same, that dyd cause the eyes of the same to move and stere in the hede thereof lyke unto a lyvelye thyng; and also the nether lippe in lyke wise to move as thoughe itt shulde speke; whiche, so famed [found?], was not a little straunge to me and other that was present at the pluckyng down of the same, whereupon the Abbott heryng this brut dyd thether resorte, whome to my litle witt and conyng, with other of the olde Monkes, I dyd examyn of their knowleg of the premisses; who doo declare themselff to be ignorante of that same. So remyttyng the further [examining?] of the premisses unto your goode Lordshype whan they shalle repayer unto London. Neverthelesse, the sayd Abbott is sore seke, that as yett he is nott able to come. Further, when I hadde seene this straunge sight,

[6]It was printed again by Bridgett (1888, pp. 9–10, 1890, pp. 171–2) – who at first did not realize that it had been published before – from a transcript supplied to him by Gasquet. In detail there are numerous discrepancies, and I do not know which edition is the more accurate. The letter is summarized by Gairdner (1892, p. 79).

> and consideryng that th'inhabitaunce of the Cuntre [Cuntie?] of Kent hadde in tyme past a greate devocion to the same, and to use contynuall pilgramag thither, by th'advise of other that wer her with me, dyd convey the sayd Imag unto Maydeston this present Thursday, then beyng the markett day, and in the cheff of the markett tyme dyd shew itt openly unto all the people ther beyng present, to see the false, crafty, and sottell handelyng therof, to the dishonor of God, and illusion of the sayd people, whoo, I dare say thatt if in case the sayd late Monasterye were to be defaced agayne (the Kyng's Grace not offended) they wold aither plucke itt down to the grounde, or ells burne itt, ffor they have the sayd matter in wonderous detestacion and hatred, as att my repayer unto your good Lordeshipe, and bryngyng the same Image with me: wherupon I doo somewhatt tarrye, and for the further defacyng of the sayd late Monasterye, I shall declare unto youe. And thus almyghty Jesu preserve youe to hys plesure, with good liff and long. Att Maydeston the vijth day of Februarye.
>
> Yours most bounden,
>
> Jeffray Chamber.
>
> To the right honorable and hys singler goode Lord, Lorde of the Preuy Seale, be thes delyuered.

One could hardly ask for better evidence than this – a first-hand account of the discovery, written within a few days of the event.

As I read it, the story goes like this. When the Rood of Grace was prised away from the masonry to which it was fixed and lowered to the floor (evidently lowered, not just allowed to fall), there were found to be some bits of machinery projecting from the back of it. This caused some excitement among the bystanders who had come to watch ('other that were present').[7] Hearing the noise, the abbot appeared on the scene, and Chamber demanded an explanation. The abbot denied any knowledge of the machinery; so did some of the other monks, when Chamber questioned them. To all appearances, the discovery would have come as a surprise to the Boxley monks, just as much as to everyone else. Until the image was detached and brought down to ground-level, the machinery was neither visible nor accessible. Besides, it is rather to be gathered from Chamber's words – 'old wire, old rotten sticks' – that the controls, such as they were, were not in working order.

Within a few days, once the necessary repairs had been made, once someone had learnt how to operate the controls, it was decided to exhibit the image to the populace at Maidstone on the next market-day (which was Thursday). The decision was Chamber's; but evidently the idea had been suggested to him by some of the same local people who had witnessed the discovery. (He acted, he says, 'by the advice of other that were here with me'. It is clear, by the way, that he had not referred the

[7] It appears that one of these people (if there were indeed more than one) was a protestant from Lenham named Partridge (below, p. 15).

matter to Cromwell: Chamber is assuming that Cromwell will not have heard anything about these proceedings until he gets this letter.) Accordingly, on Thursday 7 February, the image was made to perform its tricks in public.

From Chamber's description, and from other early accounts to be mentioned shortly, it turns out that the tricks of which the Rood was capable were few and unspectacular. That is hardly a surprise. The human figure was supposed to be nailed to a cross: it could not be expected to move its arms or legs. In fact, the only working parts were in the face: the eyes could move, and so could the lower lip.[8] What was meant by saying that the eyes could move, I do not exactly understand. Perhaps it just means that the eyelids could open and close.[9] But perhaps the eyes themselves could move, perhaps even the eyebrows as well. Certainly the lower lip could flap up and down, 'as though [the image] should speak'. But that was the limit of its repertoire.

Whether everyone who saw the performance regarded the Rood with 'detestation and hatred', I think we are permitted to doubt, despite what Chamber says. That this was the politically correct reaction, that some people did react in precisely that way, I am willing enough to believe. But most of the audience (if they could get close enough to see what was happening) would, I suspect, have been more amused than annoyed. *They* had not been made fools of. The monks of Boxley had not tried to hoodwink *them* (and would not have succeeded if they had). With its eyes blinking and its lip twitching, the figure was being made to look ridiculous. Why should they not laugh?

Within another few days, the abbot and his monks had travelled up to London to negotiate their pensions. The man they had to deal with was Sir Richard Rich, chancellor of the Court of Augmentations. Nine monks had their pensions assigned to them on 10 February, four pounds a year for some, four marks a year for the others (Gairdner 1892, p. 583).[10] It took a little longer for the abbot's business to be settled, perhaps because Rich could not authorize a pension as large as this one – fifty pounds a year – without a chit from Cromwell.[11] That pension was assigned on 12 February (Gairdner 1892, p. 583). Chamber had suggested that the abbot

[8] It seems that the head of the image bore some resemblance to that of a ventriloquist's dummy – or one of the puppets from 'Thunderbirds'. How big do we think the rood was?

[9] A contemporary writer speaks of 'diuers Images that had inginnes to make their eies open and shut, and other limis to stirre' (Grafton 1542, p. 489). He is talking about the images which were brought up to London in the summer and autumn of 1538; but I think he may be ascribing to them the tricks of the Rood of Grace.

[10] Of these nine, five were still in receipt of their pensions in 1553 (Willis 1719, pp. 96–7).

[11] Like the one for the abbot of Kenilworth: Cromwell to Rich, 5 May 1538 (Merriman 1902, vol. 2, p. 139).

ought to be interrogated further on the subject of the Rood of Grace, but I doubt whether Cromwell saw any point in that. He had no interest in finding out the truth, only in making the most of the Rood's propaganda value. What the abbot ('late abbot') might have to say was no longer of any concern.

At around the same time, the Rood travelled up to London. Once Chamber had finished defacing the abbey, he returned to headquarters, bringing the image with him. News of its arrival got about. A citizen of London, Charles Wriothesley by name, who, by way of a hobby, kept a chronicle of current events, thought the news worth reporting, in these words:

> This yeare, allso in Februarie, there was an image of the Crucifixe of Christe, which had bene used of longe continuance for a great pylgremage at the Abbey of Boxley, by Maydestone in Kent, called the Roode of Grace, taken from thence and brought to the Kinge at Westminstre, for certeyne idolatrie and crafte that had bene perceaved in the sayde roode, for it was made to move the eyes and lipps by stringes of haire, when they would shewe a miracle, and never perceyved till now. The Archbishop of Canterburie had searched the sayde image in his visitation, and so, at the Kinges commaundement, was taken thence, that the people might leave their idolatrie that had bene there used. Allso the sayde roode was sett in the markett place first at Maydstone, and there shewed openlye to the people the craft of movinge the eyes and lipps, that all the people there might see the illusion that had bene used in the sayde image by the monckes of the saide place of manye yeares tyme out of mynde, whereby they had gotten great riches in deceavinge the people thinckinge that the sayde image had so moved by the power of God, which now playnlye appeared to the contrarye. (Hamilton 1875, p. 74)

This report of Wriothesley's is inaccurate in one respect. Archbishop Cranmer had nothing to do with the affair – neither with the surrender of Boxley abbey nor with the exposure of the Rood of Grace.[12] For the rest, what we get from Wriothesley is the approved version of the story.

While it was in Cromwell's custody, the Rood was apparently kept at St James's – one of the king's spare palaces, lent to Cromwell for the time being.[13] It is possible that some private viewings may have been arranged; but the only person who is known for certain to have seen the image, after its arrival in London, before its destruction, is another agent of Cromwell's, Robert Southwell, who mentions the fact parenthetically

[12] From mid January till mid March 1538, Cranmer was staying at Forde (between Canterbury and Reculver). His letters to Cromwell make no mention of Boxley or the Rood of Grace (Jenkyns 1833, nos. 204–11). As far as this evidence goes, he was not consulted; he was not even informed.

[13] Cromwell moved into St James's no later than 15 February and remained there for more than three months (Merriman 1902, vol. 2, p. 281). By the beginning of June he had moved to Chelsea. In July, when other images were brought up to London, they were delivered to him there, and burnt (Hamilton 1875, p. 83).

in a letter written on 3 March.[14] The monks of Boxley, it seemed to him, had been let off too lightly.

The performance given by the Rood of Grace in Maidstone was now to be repeated in London. To make sure that the audience knew what reaction was expected from them (this time there was to be no laughter), the show was to start with a sermon; and the venue chosen for it was Paul's Cross, the open space alongside the cathedral, in the middle of the city. The man who delivered the sermon was Dr John Hilsey, a turncoat Dominican friar, rewarded for his subservience by being made bishop of Rochester (a post which had fallen vacant in 1534 when bishop Fisher was deprived). Again we have Charles Wriothesley to thank for a report of the proceedings:

> This yeare, the 24th daie of Februarie, beinge the Soundaie of Sexagesima and Sainct Mathias daie, the image of the roode that was at the Abbey of Bexley, in Kent, called the Roode of Grace, was brought to Poules Crosse, and their, at the sermon made by the Bishopp of Rochester, the abuses of the graces[15] and engines, used in old tyme in the said image, was declared, which image was made of paper and cloutes from the legges upward; ech legges and armes were of timber; and so the people had bene eluded and caused to doe great adolatrie by the said image, of long contynuance, to the derogation of Godes honor and great blasphamie of the name of God, as he substancially declared in his said sermon by scripture, and also how other images in the Church, used for great pilgrimages, hath caused great idolatrie to be used in this realme, and shewed how he thincketh that the idolatrie will neaver be left till the said images be taken awaie; and that the boxes that they have to gather the devotions of the people were taken awaye first, so that they should have nothing used to putt the charitie of the people in; but if their were any persons that would offree to such images, that the said offring might be geaven incontynent to poore people, and that the people should be shewed howe they should offree no more to the said images, he doubted not butt then in short tyme they would grant that the said images might be taken awaie; .....[16] also, after the sermon was done, the bishopp tooke the said image of the roode into the pulpitt and brooke the vice of the same, and after gave it to the people againe, and then the rude people and boyes brake the said image in peeces, so that they left not one peece whole. (Hamilton 1875, pp. 75–6)

There were, no doubt, some ruffians planted in the crowd, with hammers and chisels up their sleeves, ready to attack the idol when the moment

[14] Southwell to Cromwell, Northampton 3 March 1538 (Wright 1843, pp. 171–3). (This letter has sometimes been taken to mean that Southwell was involved in the surrender of Boxley abbey; it neither says that nor implies it. Cave-Browne (1892, pp. 61–2) gets things very thoroughly wrong.)

[15] 'Probably a clerical error for vices'. Wriothesley's chronicle does not survive in the original, only as a copy made in the early seventeenth century. So there are some defects in the text, such as this, or 'Bexley' for 'Boxley'.

[16] The passage omitted here will be quoted later (p. 19).

came. But this, after all, was London; there were plenty of people around who would enjoy smashing things, with or without encouragement.

Some months later, another account of the Rood of Grace occurs in a wretched piece of doggerel composed by one of the hacks in Cromwell's employment – one of those 'sundry and dyuerse freshe and quicke wyttes', as John Fox preferred to put it, 'by whose industrie and ingenious labours, diuerse excellent both ballades and bookes were contriued and set abroade, concernyng the suppression of the Pope and all Popyshe idolatrie' (Fox 1563, p. 598b).[17] As a sample of their work, he quoted one ballad at full length, a 'litle treatise made & compyled by Gray' (p. 600c).[18] It is entitled 'The fantasies of idolatrie', and includes these two stanzas (p. 599c) about the image from Boxley:

> For the rode of grace
> Hath lost his place,
> And is rubbed on the gall
> For false deuotion
> Hath lost his promotion,
> And is broken in peces small.
>
> He was made to Iogle
> His eyes would gogle
> He wold bend his browes & frowne,
> With his head he would nod
> Lyke a proper yong God
> His chaftes[19] would go vp & downe.

There is more – but does anyone have the stomach for it?[20]

Once the original had been destroyed, there was no constraint on the number of tricks which might be imputed to it. It is likely enough that Gray had seen the image; he could perhaps have given an accurate account of it, if he had been asked for one. But here he was not expected to tell the truth. Though I am not unwilling to believe that the eyebrows

[17] It is questionable, perhaps, whether the inclusion of this ballad was Fox's idea. I say this because the introductory paragraph uses the first person plural: 'we might', 'we thought'. That sounds to me more like the printer speaking than the author. The whole block of text was dropped from the second edition (1570) – the first, I would think, for which Fox is fully accountable.

[18] The author is assumed to be the William Gray who has some other publications to his credit (if that is the word for it). In Fox's book the pages containing this ballad are misnumbered; I cite the numbers as they ought to be, 599 and 600, not as they are, 590 and 589.

[19] 'Chafts' are 'jaws'. The word has sometimes been misquoted as 'shafts' and wrongly supposed to mean 'legs'.

[20] If anyone does and cannot get hold of Fox's book, a fairly accurate transcription is to be found in Cattley's edition (1838, pp. 404–9).

could change expression, I doubt whether Gray had any reason for saying that the head could move except that he wanted 'nod' to rhyme with 'god'.

Within a few weeks or months, some accounts of the Rood of Grace had got into circulation which were even more wildly exaggerated than Gray's;[21] but they did not find their way into print till more than thirty years later.

After 1570, anyone who thought that there might be some description of the Rood in Fox's *Acts and Monuments* would, if they had looked hard enough, have found a few lines on the subject. (Finding anything in a book this big is difficult. An entry in the index, 'Idols destroyed', is the only help that this hypothetical reader would get.) In Fox's account of the life and deeds of Thomas Cromwell, there is a rapturous passage in which he recalls 'what crafty iugglyngs, what Idolatrous deceptions, and superstitious illusions he detected and abolished out of the Churche'. The first example which he mentions (the only example of which he says more than a few words) is the crucifix from Boxley:

> What posteritie will euer thinke the Churche of the Pope pretendyng such Religion, to haue bene so wicked, so long to abuse the peoples eyes, with an old rooten[22] stocke (called the roode of grace) wherin a man should stand inclosed with an hundreth wyers within the roode, to make the Image goggle with the eyes, to nodde with his head, to hang the lyppe, to moue and shake his iawes, accordyng as the value was of the gift whiche was offered? If it were a small peece of siluer, he would hang a frownyng lyppe: if it were a peece of gold, then should his iawes go merely.[23] Thus miserably was the people of Christ abused, their soules seduced, their senses begyled, and their purses spoyled, till this Idolatrous forgery at last, by Cromwels meanes was disclosed, and the Image, with all his ingines shewed openly at Paules Crosse, and there torne in peeces by the people. (Fox 1570, p. 1359b)

What came to be regarded as the standard description of the Rood and its tricks is the one supplied by Lambard (1576). By splicing it into his account of the history of the Rood (above, p. 1), he gives the impression that he is quoting the monks' own description of the image; but he is certainly not doing that. He is responsible for it, not the monks.

The carpenter, Lambard says, to raise the money for his ransom, decided to make a piece of sculpture that he could sell. So, after 'getting together fit matter for his purpose',

> he compacted of wood wyer, paste, and paper, a Roode of suche exquisite arte, and workmanship, that it not onely matched in comelynesse,

[21] Such as the version heard in Frankfurt by Nicolas Partridge (below, p. 13).

[22] i.e. rotten.

[23] i.e. merrily.

> and due proportion of the partes, the beste of the common sorte: but in straunge motion, varietie of gesture, and nimblenesse of ioyntes, passed all other that before had beene seene: the same being able to bowe downe, and lift vp it selfe, to shake and stirre the handes and feete, to nod the heade, to rolle the eyes, to wagge the chappes, to bende the browes, and finally, to represent to the eye, bothe the proper motion of eche member of the bodye, and also a liuely, expresse, and significant shewe of a well contented, or displeased mynde, byting the lippe, and gathering a frowning, frowarde, and disdainefull face, when it woulde pretende offence: and shewing most mylde, amyable, and smyling cheare and countenaunce, when it woulde seeme to be well pleased. So that now it needed not Prometheus fire, to make it a liuely man, but onely the helpe of the couetous Priestes of Bell, or the ayde of some craftie College of Monkes, to deifie and make it passe for a very God. (Lambard 1576, p. 183)

Whether Lambard honestly thought that this was an accurate description, whether he genuinely believed that the image was capable of this whole gamut of lifelike movements, I find it hard to decide. Of course he had no personal knowledge of the facts. He was less than two years old when the Rood of Grace was destroyed, less than four when the last English monks were evicted from their homes.

Archbishop Warham's letter

This is the full text of archbishop Warham's letter to cardinal Wolsey, on the subject of the abbot of Boxley's financial difficulties (above, p. 3), as it was printed by Larking (1859, pp. 150–1).

> Pleace it your grace to understand that now lately I receyved letters from thAbbat and Convent of Boxley, in whiche they offerred to bynd thaire house by thaire writings obligatorie, to be sealed with thaire convent seale, for the payment of all suche sommes of money as thAbbat oweth the Kinges highnes, bireason of his collect. Wherein, he and his said convent desireth respite, and favor, touching dayes of payment to bee graunted, for a tyme in that behalf.
>
> In whiche matier, seing the said Abbey is an exempte place of your graces jurisdiction, I wold bee very lothe to medle, unles I were in maner forced thereto, by thact of convocation, auctorising me, and my lord of London, to make processe against suche collectors as pay not thair collect, accordingly as it is specified in the xviith and the xxith chapiter of the said convocation. And forasmuche as the said place is power, and much seking is thither to the rode of grace, from all partes of this realme, I wold be lothe, if I myght chose, to interdicte the place, or, to put the fruictes of the same, under sequestration, tyll the kinges highnes bee payed for diverse causes, whiche I doubt not, but your grace wol son coniect.
>
> Whereupon, considering that it is an exempt place of your graces ju-

risdiction, whiche I wold bee lothe to interdict, or sequester the fruictes thereof, and considering this matier concerneth paymentes to be made to the kinges grace, wherein, I am not mynded to gyve dayes, without your graces pleasure knowen in that behalf. I entierly beseche your grace to advertise me by your moost honorable letters, what is your graces mynde and pleasure best to bee doon in this caas, outher to interdict the said monastery, and sequester the fruictes; orels graunt thaim som respite and dayes of payment, upon thair writinge obligatory under thair convent seale. Thabbat, as far as I can perceyve and lerne, is utterly disposed to lyve hardly and precisely, to bryng the place out of debt, and affore hand after this greate warnyng, and if I thought he wold not, I wold in no caas wrote or speke any letter or word in his favor. Diverse men bifore this, have fallen sore, whiche have arrisen and recovered; and have doon as well and better, than they whiche never fell, and so I trust this Abbat woll, orels it were piety that he shuld lyve muche longer to the hurt of so holy a place, where so many miracles be shewed. At my manor of Otford, the third day of May.

At your graces commandement,

WILL'M CANTAR.

To the moost Reverend Father in God, and my very singular good lord, my Lord Cardinall of York and legate de latere good grace.

John Hooker's letter

The strictly contemporary accounts of the discovery and destruction of the Rood of Grace – the letter from Chamber to Cromwell, the entries in Wriothesley's private chronicle – were not known, or at least were not easily available, until they were put into print, by Ellis (1846) and Hamilton (1875) respectively. Before that, the source on which historians chiefly relied – if they looked beyond Fox and Lambard – was a letter written by a man named John Hooker ('Hocherus' in Latin, 'Hoker' or 'Hooker' in English). Largely on the strength of this letter, Hooker has been thought to deserve a short entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; but there is not much to say about him, because not much is known. He was born or brought up in Maidstone. At the time when he wrote this letter, he was a fellow of Magdalen College in Oxford, with a reputation for being 'uncommonly well read in Greek and Latin' (Bale 1559, p. 712, Wood 1691, p. 53, Bloxam 1873, pp. 52–3, Macray 1897, p. 71, Emden 1974, pp. 292–3). He became rector of Storrington in Sussex (dioc. Chichester) in July 1544 and died a few months later.[24]

To understand Hooker's letter, one needs to know something of the circumstances in which it came to be written.[25] A friend of Hooker's,

[24] His successor was appointed in December that same year (http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp).

[25] In writing the paragraphs which follow, I have profited greatly from the advice of Dr Reinhard Bodenmann (Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte, Universität

Nicolas Partridge – also a fellow of Magdalen, also originally from Kent (Macray 1897, pp. 67–8, Emden 1974, pp. 434–5) – was one of the first Englishmen to make contact with the Swiss reformers. In August 1536, with two companions and a letter of recommendation from Martin Bucer of Strasbourg,[26] he arrived in Zürich, introduced himself to Heinrich Bullinger, and was taken into his house. He spent the next five months there. In January 1537 he set out on a visit to England, accompanied this time by a 17-year-old student of Bullinger's, Rudolph Gwalther, who kept a diary of their journey (Boesch 1947). Crossing from Calais to Dover on 2 March, they headed first for Faversham; and then they made a detour towards the south, so that Partridge could visit his relatives – his stepfather in Rodmersham, his family home in Lenham, his sister in Maidstone. (Riding from Maidstone to Rochester on 5 March, they passed close to the abbey of Boxley but did not stop to visit it.) On 11 March they reached Oxford, where Gwalther was introduced to many of Partridge's friends. They remained there till 28 March. After that they spent some weeks in Kent and in London; and then they started their journey back to Zürich, taking ship at Gravesend on 3 May, landing at Nieuwpoort on 6 May, and reaching their destination on 8 June.

By November 1537 Partridge had left Zürich for Bern (with three other English students).[27] In the spring of 1538, he was on his way back to England (alone), timing his journey so as to arrive in Frankfurt at the time of the half-yearly book fair.[28] He wrote to Bullinger from Frankfurt on 12 April 1538, passing on the English news which had reached him there (Robinson 1847, p. 608).[29] By July he was back in Oxford,[30] though only

Zürich). My thanks to him for his help.

[26]Bucer to Bullinger, Strasbourg 8 Aug. 1536 (Bächtold and Henrich 1995, p. 386). To judge from a letter written fifteen years later – Oglethorpe to Bullinger, Oxford 30 Oct. 1551 (Robinson 1846, p. 124, the date determined by Boesch 1947, p. 465) – the president of Magdalen College was under the impression that Partridge had been travelling to Italy, and had only stopped in Zürich because he happened to fall ill. But Partridge's intention is plain enough: he wanted to study with Bullinger.

[27]They wrote a joint letter to Bullinger, thanking him for his kindness: Butler, Partridge, Eliot and Traheron to Bullinger, [Bern, Nov. 1537] (Robinson 1847, p. 623).

[28]Correspondence between Switzerland and England took its rhythm from the Frankfurt fair. Letters and parcels from Switzerland would be carried to Frankfurt by Christoph Froschauer, a famous Zürich printer; letters and parcels from England would be carried to Frankfurt by Reiner Wolfe, a (not yet famous) London bookseller; and there they would be exchanged. On this occasion Wolfe did not appear (because his wife had just died, so Partridge was told); but Froschauer arrived with a batch of presentation copies of Bullinger's new book for Partridge to take to England. (There were copies for the king, Thomas Cromwell, archbishop Cranmer and others.)

[29]From a German merchant, a partner in one of the companies trading in London, he had heard an account, much improved in the telling, of the sermon delivered at Paul's Cross some weeks before. (It was unjust of Bridgett (1890, p. 190) to cast aspersions on 'Mr Partridge's veracity'. Partridge was passing on the story as it had been told to him.)

[30]As is proved by a (previously unpublished) letter from Michael Drome to Bullinger,

for a short visit. (Apparently he had ceased to be a fellow of Magdalen the year before.) Soon after that,[31] he returned to the continent, but went no further than Frankfurt. From there he wrote to Bullinger on 17 September 1538, forwarding other letters and parcels from England (Robinson 1847, p. 610). He is next heard of in London in March 1539,[32] then in Dover in February 1540;[33] apparently he died not long after that, but I do not know exactly when or where. Four lines of Latin verse, composed by one of his friends as an epitaph for him, were published many years later (Parkhurst 1573, p. 93). By then, I suppose, few people would have remembered who he was.

In September 1538, Rudolph Gwalther was studying in Basel. Towards the end of that month,[34] he received a batch of letters from people he had met in England the previous year. Probably all of these letters had been written in July–August 1538, so that they could be carried as far as Frankfurt by Nicolas Partridge.[35] (At the time, everything seemed to be going the reformers' way, and the writers of these letters were in an exultant mood.) None of the originals survive. What does survive is a letter from Gwalther to Bullinger, dated Basel 3 October 1538, in which he quotes passages from three letters, as well as referring briefly to several others.

The first letter quoted by Gwalther is the letter from John Hooker, whom he had met in Oxford in May 1537. (In his diary, where English names are, as one might expect, rather strangely spelt, Hooker is 'Mr Hugger'.) Probably this letter of Hooker's was written in reply to one from Gwalther, delivered to him by Partridge in July 1538. In the excerpt which is all that survives, he regales Gwalther with the story of the Rood of Grace, from the moment when it was plucked down till the moment when it was smashed to pieces at Paul's Cross. Though it may well be that Hooker had friends or relatives still living in Maidstone, it seems

dated Magdalen College 31 July 1538 (Bächtold and Henrich 2000, p. 181). Drome also wrote to Gwalther, who mentions this letter in his own letter to Bullinger (see below).

[31] Probably in London, he picked up a letter from Nicolas Eliot, another ex-student of Bullinger's: Eliot to Bullinger, [London?] 21 Aug. 1538 (Robinson 1847, p. 617). Eliot thought that Partridge was on his way to Zürich; perhaps that was Partridge's intention at the time.

[32] Butler, Eliot, Partridge and Traheron to Conrad Pellican and others, London 8 March 1539 (Robinson 1847, p. 624). Rumours of war had caused Partridge to drop the idea of attending the Frankfurt fair.

[33] Partridge to Bullinger, Dover 26 Feb 1540 (Robinson 1847, p. 614). He was tutoring the sons of Anthony Aucher, who was paymaster of the king's works at Dover (Gairdner and Brodie 1896, p. 189). At around the same time he wrote (in English) to an English friend in Basel, and that friend reported the gist of his letter to Bullinger: Butler to Bullinger, Basel 4 Apr. 1540 (Robinson 1847, p. 629).

[34] After writing to Bullinger on 23 Sep. 1538 (Bächtold and Henrich 2000, p. 230).

[35] And onwards from there by Froschauer. That was how Drome's and Eliot's letters (see above) made their way to Zürich.

clear that he had got his information about events in Kent from Partridge, who would presumably have visited Lenham along the way, in May or June 1538, as he had done, with Gwalther, the year before. As Hooker heard the story, Partridge's brother had been present when the Rood was plucked down; in this version, in fact, the plucking down was Partridge's brother's idea.[36]

Gwalther's letter, with these three quotations embedded in it, had never been printed until it was included in the new edition of Bullinger's correspondence (Bächtold and Henrich 2000, pp. 233–7, from Zürich, Staatsarchiv E II 359, fo. 2760r). But the quoted passages got into circulation by themselves. At some later date (in or after the 1550s, I think), Bullinger decided to put together an album of letters from England. For that purpose, he made his own copy of the excerpts quoted by Gwalther, introducing many small changes in the wording as he did so (Zürich, Staatsarchiv E II 369, fo. 57v). Eventually, by unknown means,[37] a copy of that – i.e. a copy of Bullinger's edited version of this portion of Gwalther's letter – came into the hands of the Huguenot scholar Paul Colomiès (who was living in England at the time); and he included it in a collection of miscellaneous letters, *Clarorum virorum epistolae singulares*, appended to his edition of the Epistles of St Clement (Colomiès 1687).[38] That is how Hooker's letter first found its way into print. It was printed again (but much less accurately) by Gilbert Burnet, who had seen the album of letters when he passed through Zürich in August 1685 (Burnet 1686, pp. 50–3), and who afterwards arranged for transcripts to be made and sent to him.[39] He published some of them, including this excerpt from Hooker's letter, in the collection of documents appended to the third volume of his *History of the reformation of the church of England* (Burnet 1715, part 2,

[36] I take this to mean that he had shouted out, 'Pluck the idol down!' or some other encouraging remark to that effect. He was not in charge: the workmen were following Chamber's orders, not his. Possibly this brother is the Thomas Partryche of Lenham whose will was proved in 1540 (https://wills.canterbury-cathedral.org); but that is just a shot in the dark.

[37] It is chronologically possible (though only just) that Gilbert Burnet might have transcribed some excerpts in August 1685 (see below) and sent copies to Colomiès. But I doubt whether this is the answer.

[38] Altogether four items from Zürich are printed here (Colomiès 1687, pp. 313–18). The first is an excerpt from Partridge's letter to Bullinger, Frankfurt 17 Sep. 1538; the others are the excerpts quoted in Gwalther's letter, as they were recopied by Bullinger. They appear again in the second edition of this book (Colomiès 1694, pp. 300–5) and in a collection of Colomiès's works reprinted at Hamburg in 1709 (Colomiès 1709, pp. 544–6).

[39] 'And by the Interposition of my learned, judicious, and pious Friend Mr. Turretin of Geneva, Mr. Otto, a worthy Professor there [in Zürich], has taken such Care, that Copies of them [the letters in Bullinger's album] are procured for me' (Burnet 1714, p. 50, 1715, p. xvi). It is not said when this happened. Burnet's friend in Geneva was François Turretin (1623–1687); the Zürich professor ('Ott', not 'Otto') was Johann Rudolf Ott (1642–1716). (My thanks to Dr Bodenmann for the latter identification.)

pp. 131–2). The heading he gives to this item, 'A Letter to Bullinger from one of Maidstone', is wrong on both counts:[40] it ought to be 'A letter to Rudolph Gwalther from one of Magdalen College, Oxford'.

Now that we know when and where this letter was written and who it was written to, its evidential value is much diminished. Hooker was not writing to an equal: he was writing to a much younger man, of the same sort of age as the students he had to teach. That is why he exerts himself to show off his command of Latin.[41] In order to write a letter, he needed a theme; the theme he chose, perhaps at Partridge's suggestion, was the five-month-old story of the Rood of Grace. But the style matters more than the substance. This is not so much a letter – more a lesson in the art of letter-writing.

Text

This is the text of Hooker's letter, as it was quoted by Gwalther. Apart from replacing tailed 'e' with 'ae' and making a few changes in the punctation, I print it exactly as it was printed by Bächtold and Henrich (2000).

> Nova vero, quae ex Anglia percepi, haec sunt. Ioannes Hokerus Meidstanensis (quae urbs est Cantiae), et pietate et eruditione insignis vir, sic scribit: "Ruit hic passim Azoticus Dagon, Babyloniorum confractus iamdudum Bel est. Repertus est nuper Cantianorum deus, ligneus divus, pensilis Christus, qui cum quovis Promethei figmento concertare posset; nam et capite nutare, minari oculis, barbam concutere, incurvare corpus, adeuntium aversari et audire preces scitissime noverat. Hic, cum picales monachi sua causa caderent, repertus est in eorum templo plurimo cinctus anathemate, lintheis, cereis, agricis, urbicis, exterisque ditatus muneribus. Subodoratus est fucum cordatus vir, Partrigii nostri frater: affixum parieti e vestigio solvit, apparent artes, apparent imposturae, mirus ac polypeus praestigiator. Erant foraminoso corpori occultatae passim fistulae, in quibus ductile per pinnulas ferrum a mystagogo trahebatur, laminis meatus artifitiose caelantibus. Hinc factum est, ut populum Cantianum, imo et Angliam totam, iam saeculis aliquot magno cum quaestu dementarit. Patefactus, Meidstonensibus meis (gaudeo patriae) spectaculum primitus dedit, ex summo se culmine confertissimo ostentans populo, aliis ex animo, aliis Aiacem risu simulantibus. Delatus hinc circulator Londinum est. Invisit aulam; regem ipsum novus hospes novo salutat more. Conglomerant apum ritu aulici; barones, duces, marchiones, comites adsunt et e longinquo ad hoc spectaculi. Circumstant, circumspectant, intuentur, vident. Agit ille, minatur oculis, aversatur ore, distorquet nares, mittit deorsum caput, incurvat deorsum corpus, annuit, renuit. Vident, rident, mirantur, strepit vocibus theatrum,

[40] Worse, he refers to it elsewhere as 'a Letter written by the Minister of Maidstone to Bullinger' (Burnet 1715, part 1, p. 132). Hooker was never that.

[41] 'Ambitious Erasmian Latin', as Bridgett (1890, p. 186) describes it. Gwalther's Latin, at the time when he visited Oxford, was not perfectly correct (Boesch 1947, p. 436).

volitat super aethera clamor. Rex ipse incertum gavisusne magis sit ob patefactam imposturam, an ex animo doluerit magis tot saeculis deludi miserum vulgus. Res ad consiliarios delata est. Habita est post aliquot dies Londini contio; praedicat e suggestu Roffensis episcopus, stat ex advorsum Danieli Bel Cantianorum summo erectus pulpito, ita ut videri ab omnibus commode posset. Hic denuo sese aperit, hic denuo comoedus fabulam scite agit. Mirantur, indignantur, stupent, pudet tam turpiter fuisse ab idolo delusos. Cum iam incalesceret concionator ac dei verbum occulte in cordibus eorum operaretur, praecipitio demolitus est ligneum truncum in confertissimos auditores. Hic varius auditur diversorum clamor. Rapitur, laceratur, frustillatim conscinditur, in mille confractus partes tandem in ignem mittitur, et hic tulit exitus illum." Hactenus ille.

Translation

This is the English translation made by Gorham (1857, pp. 17–19). It was based on the Latin text as printed by Colomiès (1709) and Burnet (1816), both of whom were using copies of Bullinger's version.[42] A few adjustments would be needed to bring the translation into line with Gwalther's text. The meaning, however, would not be much affected, and I reproduce the translation exactly as it was printed.

The Azotic Dagon falls down everywhere in this country. That Babylonian Bel has already been broken to pieces. There was lately discovered a wooden God of the Kentish folk, a hanging Christ who might have vied with Proteus himself. For he was able, most cunningly, to nod with his head, to scowl with his eyes, to wag his beard, to curve his body, to reject and to receive the prayers of pilgrims. This [puppet], when the pied Monks lost their craft, was found in their Church, begirded with many an offering; enriched with gifts, linen, waxen, rural, oppidan, and foreign. That energetic man, the brother of our Nicholas Partridge, got scent of the cheat. He loosened him, fixed as he had been to the wall, from his pedestal. The artifices are disclosed; the impostures are disclosed; the wonderful and Polypëan juggler is caught. Throughout his channelled body were hidden pipes, in which the master-of-the-mysteries had introduced through little apertures a ductile wire; the passages being, nevertheless, artfully concealed by thin plates. By such contrivances, he had demented the people of Kent, – aye the whole of England, – for several ages, with much gain. Being laid open, he afforded a sportive sight, first of all, to my Maidstonians, exhibiting himself from a lofty platform to a crowded throng, some laughing heartily, some almost as madly as Ajax. The stroller was taken hence to London. He paid a visit to the Royal Court. This new guest salutes the King himself after a novel fashion. Courtiers, Barons, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, swarm round him like bees; they come from a distance, stand around,

[42] Another translation can be found in Gairdner (1908, pp. 124–6); but that was based only on Burnet's text (ed. Pocock 1865), which in places is seriously flawed.

> stare, and look him through and through. He acts – scowls with his eyes – turns his face away – distorts his nostrils – casts down his head – sets up a hump-back – assents – and dissents! They stare, they deride, they wonder, the theatre rings with their voices, the shout flies into the sky. It is difficult to say whether the King was more pleased on account of the detection of the imposture, or more grieved at heart that the miserable people had been imposed on for so many ages. What need is there of so many words. The matter was referred to the Council. After a few days, a Sermon was preached in London, at the Metropolitan Cathedral, by the Bishop of Rochester [Dr. John Hilsey]. The Kentish Bel stands opposite to Daniel, erected on the upper part of the pulpit, so that he may be conveniently seen by all. Here, again, he opens himself; here, again, the Player acts his part skilfully. They wonder, they are indignant, they stare with bewilderment, they are ashamed to find they have been so deluded by a puppet. Then, when the Preacher began to wax warm, and the Word of God to work secretly in the hearts of his hearers, the wooden trunk was hurled neck-over-heels among the most crowded of the audience. And now was heard a tremendous clamour of all sorts of people; – he is snatched, torn, broken in pieces bit by bit, split up into a thousand fragments, and at last thrown into the fire; and there was an end of him!
>
> JOHN HOKER.

The holy blood of Hailes

When John Hilsey gave his sermon at Paul's Cross on 24 February 1538, he could descant at length on the evils of idolatry and superstition, but he did not have any facts to report about the Rood of Grace beyond what was obvious to everyone – that the image had some movable parts. On another subject, however, he had some private knowledge which he thought it was right to make public on this occasion; and in this accidental way the story of the Rood of Grace became linked with the story of the Holy Blood of Hailes – a glass phial containing (it was said) a small quantity of Christ's blood, a prized possession of the monks of Hailes, a Cistercian abbey in Gloucestershire.[43] For twenty years, Hilsey (so he says) had known that this relic was a hoax. The liquid inside the phial was actually the blood of a duck. The abbot of Hailes had blurted out the secret to his lady friend, and she had revealed it to her confessor, Hilsey himself. He had already shared the information with higher authority; now he shared it with his audience.

This is what Hilsey had to say, as it was recorded by Wriothesley:

[43] Writing in 1533, the reformist rector of West Kington in Wiltshire spoke disapprovingly of the 'flocks' of pilgrims from the west country whom he saw travelling along the Fosse Way, most of them heading for Hailes, some of them seemingly under the impression that a sight of the Holy Blood was all that it would take for their backlog of sins to be instantly forgiven (Corrie 1845, p. 364, a letter first printed by Fox 1563, pp. 1314–17).

> … also, he said, how he confessed a woman twentie yeares agoe in Oxford, which woman was the miller's wief, by the Abbey of Hailes, and how she shewed him how the abbott of the same place had given her manye jewells that had bene offred ther at the holie bloode, and how he would have geaven her one jewell which she knewe verie well hanged about the said holie bloode, and said to the said abbott that she would not have that,[44] because she was afraid because it hanged by the holie bloud, and the abbott said tush! thou art a foole, it is but a duckes bloode; and this the said bishopp shewed that it was true, as he besought God he might be damned if it were not so as he said; and also how he had shewed the King and the Counsell of the same, and that it should be knowen more openlie afterward … (Hamilton 1875, pp. 75–6)

For several months the King and Council did not respond to Hilsey's accusation. During this period of uncertainty, the abbot of Hailes, 'wonderously perplexed', travelled up to London in the hope of obtaining an interview with Cromwell; he was told to state his business in writing.[45] He would have been comforted to know (but no doubt he was prevented from knowing) that the king himself was very reluctant to stop believing in the Holy Blood. The bishop of Worcester, Hugh Latimer,[46] was keen to take action against this blot on his diocese; the king refused permission. It took much effort, it took a long time, before the king could be persuaded to give way. 'What a do was it to brynge thys out of the kynges heade, thys greate abhominacion of the bloud of hales could not be taken a great whyle out of his mynde.' Ten years later, the ex-bishop rather smugly recalled this small triumph as proof that even an obstinate king can be made to see reason, if his advisers know how to go about it. Delicate, persistent pressure will do the trick. *Gutta cavat lapidem, non vi sed saepe cadendo*, 'The droppe of raine maketh a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by ofte fallynge.'[47] He seems to forget that within a year the king would take revenge on these tiresome advisers.

In October, finally, four commissioners were sent to Hailes with orders to examine the supposed relic and interrogate the monks. The result was anticlimactic: they arrived at no very definite conclusion.[48] The phial of

[44] After 'that' the manuscript repeats the word 'bloude' (Hamilton 1875, p. 76, note b).

[45] The abbot's bill (not dated) is summarized by Gairdner (1892, p. 119); the interesting part (after the abbot stops grovelling and comes to the point) was printed in full by Gasquet (1899, pp. 536–7).

[46] The same man who, six years before, had been shocked by the sight of crowds of pilgrims on their way to Hailes.

[47] Latimer 1549, sig. 2D3r–v; ed. Corrie 1844, pp. 231–2. (The Latin sentence is a hexameter, the first three words borrowed from Ovid.)

[48] The report submitted by the commissioners – the bishop of Worcester, the prior of Worcester, the abbot of Hailes, and Robert Tracy esquire – says that their commission was dated 4 October 1538; the report itself is dated 28 October. It was printed by Coningesby (1735, pp. 751–4), from the original, which was in his possession at the time. There also exists a letter to Cromwell from Latimer (Corrie 1845, pp. 406–8, Ellis 1846, pp. 249–

liquid was subsequently taken up to London,[49] where it was subjected to some further analysis. Predictably, Cromwell's experts were less diffident than the commissioners. They decided that the 'blood' was not blood: it was honey tinted red with saffron. How they proved this we are not told – but the proof was good enough for Cromwell. Bishop Hilsey was informed that he would have to deliver another sermon, contradicting what he had previously sworn to be the truth. Once again we have Charles Wriothesley to thank for the only authentic report of what Hilsey said:

> Also the 24th day of November, beinge Sonday, the Bishop of Rochester preached at Paules Crosse, and there shewed the bloude of Hales, and recanted certeine wordes that he had spoken of the sayd bloude that it was a dukes bloude, and nowe shewed playnely that yt was noe bloude, but hony clarified and coloured with saffron, and lyinge lyke a goume, as it evydently had bene proved and tasted afore the Kinge and his counsayll, and did let every man behould yt there at Paules Crosse, and all the way as he went to dinner to the mayres, to loke on yt, so that every person might well perceive the abuse of the sayd thinge. (Hamilton 1875, p. 90)

That, one might think, would be the end of the matter. The duck's-blood theory had been officially discredited; the honey theory had been officially approved. But no official attempt was made to put these facts on record. (There is no suggestion that either of Hilsey's sermons was ever printed.) If a private individual had not made these entries in his personal chronicle, none of this would be known.

After Wriothesley's death in 1559, his books and papers were dispersed. Twenty years later, John Stow got to see the manuscript of Wriothesley's chronicle (or a copy of it) and incorporated numerous extracts from it into his own book, *The chronicles of England*, published in 1580. Among these extracts is a shortened version (Stow 1580, p. 1014) of the passage quoted above;[50] and the identical paragraph turns up again seven years later, among the additions made by Stow for the new edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* (Holinshed 1587, p. 946a).[51]

It is an odd fact that John Stow, after having ushered this paragraph into print, suppressed it from the next edition of his book (Stow 1592, p. 973).

51) which says more or less the same as the report. Both documents are summarized by Gairdner (1893, pp. 272–3).

[49] Writing on 28 October, Latimer was not sure whether Cromwell wanted the relic sent to him; evidently Cromwell decided that he did.

[50] The sentence which follows, about four Dutch Anabaptists, is also taken from Wriothesley.

[51] From Holinshed's *Chronicles* the same paragraph was eventually transplanted into Sir Richard Baker's *Chronicle of the kings of England* (Baker 1643, part 3, p. 48), a book which was popular enough to be brought up to date and reprinted several times. The ninth edition appeared in 1696. (Another edition was brought out in 1730, but the horse was dead by then.)

Wriothesley

Also the 24th day of November, beinge Sonday, the Bishop of Rochester preached at Paules Crosse, and there shewed the bloude of Hales, and recanted certeine wordes that he had spoken of the sayd bloude that it was a dukes bloude, and nowe shewed playnely that yt was noe bloude, but hony clarified and coloured with saffron, and lyinge lyke a goume, as it evydently had bene proved and tasted afore the Kinge and his counsayll, and did let every man behould yt there at Paules Crosse, and all the way as he went to dinner to the mayres, to loke on yt, so that every person might well perceive the abuse of the sayd thinge. Allso foure persons of the Anabaptistes ...

Stow 1580

The xxiiij. of Nouember, the Bishop of Rochester preached at Pawles Crosse, and there shewed the bloude of Hales, and affirmed the same to be no bloud, but Honey clarified, and coloured with Saffrone, as it had bin euidently proued before the King and his Counsell. Also, foure Anabaptists, ...

Holinshed 1587

The foure and twentith of Nouember, the bishop of Rochester preached at Paules crosse, & there shewed the bloud of Hales, and affirmed the same to be no bloud, but honie clarified, and coloured with saffron, as it had beene euidentlie prooued before the king and his councell. Also foure anabaptists, ...

Stow 1592

The 24. of Nouember, fower anabaptists, ...

But the explanation is not too hard to find. He had realized, I suppose, that this was not the story which his readers would want to hear. In spite of bishop Hilsey's volte-face, it was the duck's-blood theory which people preferred to believe. John Bale set the pattern. Ranting and raving from exile, he deplored the fact that only two idols had ever been publicly denounced at Paul's Cross, 'the gapynge rode of Boxlaye and the duckes blood of Hayles' (Bale 1543, fo. 94r). John Fox took the same line. After speaking of the exposure of the Rood of Grace (above, p. 10), he goes on to say that 'the lyke was done with the bloud of Hales, whiche in lyke maner by Cromwell was brought to Paules Crosse and there proued to bee the bloud of a Ducke' (Fox 1570, p. 1359b). Whether 'proved' is the right word, I leave it to the reader to decide.[52] In the longer run, it was only the most scrupulous of historians who felt constrained to hint that there might be some shadow of a doubt as to whether this story was true.

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[52] I also leave it to the reader to explore the part played by William Thomas (d. 1555) in elaborating and propagating the story.

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