

**LETTERS OF HUMPHREY  
PRIDEAUX SOMETIME DEAN OF  
NORWICH TO JOHN ELLIS  
SOMETIME UNDER-SECRETARY  
OF STATE 1674-1722**

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Letters of Humphrey Prideaux sometime dean of Norwich to John Ellis sometime Under-Secretary of State 1674-1722 by Edward Maunde Thompson

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**EDWARD MAUNDE THOMPSON**

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LETTERS

OF

HUMPHREY PRIDEAUX

SOMETIME DEAN OF NORWICH

TO

JOHN ELLIS

SOMETIME UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

1674-1722.

EDITED BY

EDWARD MAUNDE THOMPSON

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## P R E F A C E.

HUMPHREY PRIDEAUX was born at Padstow on the 3rd of May, 1648. He came of an ancient Cornish family, being the third son of Edmund Prideaux of Padstow, a gentleman of good position and of influence in the county.

After some schooling at Liskeard and Bodmin, Humphrey was sent to Westminster in 1665, and remained there for three years as King's scholar under Dr. Busby. From thence he went up to Oxford, obtaining a studentship at Christ Church in December 1668; and took his B.A. degree in 1672.

At this time Dr. John Fell, Dean of Christ Church and soon afterwards Bishop of Oxford, was diligently urging on the work of the University press. He forthwith engaged Prideaux to assist in an edition of Lucius Florus, and, when that book was finished, set him to make notes for the work which afterwards appeared as the "Marmora Oxoniensia," and at the same time placed in his hands the History of Joannes Malala to edit. Prideaux was "groaning under the oppression of these two heavy burdens" in 1674, but soon threw off the second one, "a horrid, musty, foolish book," "stuffed with foolish and incredible lies," and devoted himself to the "Marmora," which was published in 1676.\*

\* John Evelyn has the following entry in his Diary, under date of 28th April, 1676: "The University of Oxford presented me with the 'Marmora Oxoniensia Arundeliana;' the Bishop of Oxford writing to desire that I would introduce Mr.

To this work Prideaux owed his introduction to his patron the Lord Chancellor Finch, who appointed him his chaplain, placed one of his sons with him as a pupil, gave him a sinecure in Wales, and in 1679 presented him to the rectory of St. Clement's, Oxford.

Meanwhile, he had taken his M.A. degree in 1675,<sup>a</sup> and became tutor and Hebrew lecturer in his college, in which last capacity he published two tracts of Maimonides with a Latin translation in 1679. That he was a disciplinarian may be easily imagined after reading his letters; and loss of popularity—the lot of most reformers—naturally attended his efforts in correcting abuses.

In 1681 Prideaux became Prebendary of Norwich, a preferment which he again owed to the Lord Chancellor, now Earl of Nottingham, and early in 1683 he was presented to the rectory of Bladen-cum-Woodstock by Lord Keeper North. His appointment to Norwich, where, with his usual activity, he at once began to busy himself in the affairs of the cathedral, weakened his connexion with Oxford. He was tired of college life, his generation had passed away, and his chance of succeeding to the Hebrew professorship and a canonry at Christ Church seemed but a poor one; so he took a decisive step: "yielding to the circumstances of his present condition" he married a wife, though "he little thought he should ever come to this," and, exchanging his living of Bladen and his sinecure for the rectory of Saham-Tony in Norfolk, he bade farewell to Oxford in 1686, and settled down to the duties of his cathedral and parish. As if to sever the last tie that bound him to the University, the death of his old friend, Bishop Fell, took place just at this time.

Prideaux, the editor (a young man most learned in antiquities), to the Duke of Norfolk, to present another dedicated to his Grace, which I did, and we dined with the Duke at Arundel House, and supped at the Bishop of Rochester's, with Isaac Vossius.\*

\* He became B.D. in 1682, and D.D. in 1686.

From this period the letters become less regular and fewer in number. Oxford gossip gives place to county politics, and criticism is transferred from heads of colleges to the Bishop and the Dean of Norwich, not always to the advantage of the latter.

Prideaux became Archdeacon of Suffolk at the close of 1688; but resigned his living of Saham in 1694, and retired to Norwich. In 1696, however, he took the small vicarage of Trowse near that city, and continued to hold it until 1710. During this quiet period of his life he had spare time to devote to literature, and produced, in 1697, his "Life of Mahomet," which was well received. And now the time was come when he was to receive his last promotion. In 1702 Dean Fairfax passed away after a reign of thirteen years, too long if the character which Prideaux has drawn of him with no sparing hand be a true one. Prideaux was installed Dean of Norwich on the 8th of June in the same year, having been recommended for the place by Daniel Earl of Nottingham, Secretary of State, the son of his old patron. He was now fifty-four years of age, his constitution was unusually good, and he had every prospect of a long and useful term of years before him. But seven years after he was overtaken by the "calamitous distemper" of the stone, which soon reached a critical stage. "My case grows worse and worse" he writes, "and there is noe remedy for me but by cutting; and, on full advice had upon my case, I am told I cannot bear that operation, but that in all likelyhood I must dy under it. If soe, to put my selfe upon it is nothing lesse than selfe murder, and for that I cannot answer to God who gave me my life, and therefore I must be content to bear my burden as it is, and it is heavy enough." However he did undergo the operation, and not only survived it but would in all probability have thoroughly recovered, had he not been carelessly treated afterwards. Yet, in spite of the doctors, he rallied, and was soon at work again. During his confinement he composed the book by which he is best remembered, "The Old and New Testaments connected," and published the first part in