

**THE CLASSIC PREACHERS OF THE
ENGLISH CHURCH, LECTURES
DELIVERED AT ST. JAMES'S
CHURCH IN 1878, SECOND SERIES**

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The Classic Preachers of the English Church, Lectures Delivered at St. James's Church in 1878,
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SECOND SERIES.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
BULL (THE PRIMITIVE PREACHER)	1
W. P. WARBURTON, M.A., H.M. Inspector of Schools.	
HORSLEY (THE SCHOLARLY PREACHER)	35
LORD BISHOP OF ELY.	
JEREMY TAYLOR (THE ENGLISH CHRYSOSTOM)	55
ALFRED BARRY, D.D., D.C.L., Principal of King's College, London, Canon of Worcester, and Honorary Chaplain to the Queen.	
SANDERSON (THE JUDICIOUS PREACHER)	93
LORD BISHOP OF DERRY AND RAPRON.	
TILLOTSON (THE PRACTICAL PREACHER)	133
W. G. HUMPHRY, B.D., Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Rector of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London.	
ANDREWES (THE CATHOLIC PREACHER)	167
J. H. NORTH, M.A., Rector of White Roding, Essex.	

BISHOP BULL,

THE PRIMITIVE PREACHER.

"It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."—

Jude 3.

Introduction and apology—Bull's early life and training—Ordination—Parish work—Home life—Personal habits and characteristics—Love of study—Abstention from public affairs—Chief Latin treatises—'Harmonia Apostolica'—'Defensio Fidei Nicænae'—'Judicium Ecclesiæ Catholicæ'—Public approval of Bossuet and the French clergy—'Corruptions of the Church of Rome'—Bull made Bishop of St. David's—His appearance in the House of Lords—Last illness and death.

His churchmanship—Estimate of him as a theologian and parish priest—His Sermons—Analysis of that "Concerning the danger and difficulty of the priestly office"—Choice of subjects for sermons—Love of the marvellous—His method of composition—Characteristics of his preaching; defects; merits—Comparison with teaching of the present day—Bull's position in theological history.

[The passages included in brackets were not delivered from want of time.]

THE above fragment of a verse seems to contain an epitome of the objects aimed at and the work accomplished by Bishop Bull, about whom I am to speak to you this afternoon. It brings before us the watchful shepherd of souls—the eager and

earnest preacher—the keen controversialist—the unhesitating and uncompromising champion of primitive orthodoxy.

Bishop Bull was all this, but he was something more. He was a noble type of a strong and wise and tender-hearted Christian man,—whose example was more eloquent than his sermons, whose faith had a deeper and more vital root than that of ecclesiastical tradition, and whose charity was wider and more comprehensive than he would perhaps have been willing, himself, to admit.

I believe that, following the precedent of those who delivered the last series of lectures from this pulpit, I should abstain from the attempt to give an account of Bishop Bull's life and character as a whole, and confine my endeavours to the task of setting before you a just estimate and appreciation of his rank as an English classic, and more particularly as an English preacher. But, seeing that a comparatively uneventful career and a historical prominence inferior to that of most of his great contemporary preachers seem to make it improbable that Bishop Bull will have a second lecture devoted to him, I venture to claim the liberty of prefacing my remarks with such a brief outline of his life as may conduce to a better understanding of his position as a religious teacher and divine.

George Bull was born about the middle of the reign of King Charles I., of a good old Somerset-

shire family of middle rank,—and devoted by his father at the baptismal font to the ministry of the Church. He got his early schooling, like some other famous men, at Peter Blundell's free school at Tiverton, and went up to Exeter College in Oxford at the age of 14. This was in the year of "the Martyrdom," as he would doubtless himself have called it, for he had imbibed from a most loyal father a strong belief in the doctrines of divine right and non-resistance. And indeed he was early called upon to suffer for conscience' sake, for in the second year of his residence, refusing to take the oath of fealty to the Commonwealth tendered to all members of the University, he was compelled to retire from Oxford, and without a degree, a fact which no doubt injuriously affected his advancement in his profession. The forcible dissolution of his connection with the University proved, however, in Bull's case, what Gibbon tries to make out that it was to himself, a substantial moral gain.* He had been a wild and idle boy at college, and soon acquired the character of a clever and disputatious, but not very satisfactory undergraduate. His retirement to a country village [with his Oxford tutor, who, though a red-hot Cavalier and bigoted ecclesiastic, was a man of worth and learning,—removed him from dangerous associations, and rescued him,

* Miscellaneous Works, vol. i. p. 108.