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Sermon Notes and Queens' College, Cambridge, MS 90

Queens' College, Cambridge, MS 90 is a paper book bound in plain, limp vellum covers: a type of manuscript similar to many others in the *Scriptorium* collection (e.g. St John's College, Cambridge, MSS S.23, S.31, S.32 and S.34), which, like Queens' MS 90, were acquired by university students in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and used to enter academic notes, verses, and various other kinds of personal and miscellaneous information. Hundreds of these paper books have survived to this day, and one can assume that they were an extremely common property in the early modern universities of Oxford and Cambridge.¹ Note-taking certainly formed an important part of university life, and many tutors, such as Richard Holdsworth, fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge in the 1630s, instructed their students to keep them: Holdsworth recommended that his students take notes as they read, partly as an *aide memoire* (students, as he writes, 'shall remember very little in a whole book, unless they have memorial notes to run over now and then'), partly because, in his words, note-taking brings a 'fuller, & clearer understanding of what you read', and also because it kept a student 'from growing dull & listless in y^r studies, as one often shall that only reads'.² This particular paper book may once have belonged to the Laurence Breton whose name appears many times, perhaps as a pen trial, on fol. 1r: a student of this name matriculated at Queens' College, Cambridge, in 1601. But it is also possible, perhaps even likely, that the book had subsequent owners and users.

Queens' MS 90 falls into two broad halves, both of them containing information of a type extremely common in paper books of this kind. The first section (fols 1-77) contains notes in Latin, recording speeches and exchanges given at academic exercises: the *declamations* (see the heading 'Declamationes', fol. 2r, and *passim*) and *disputations* at which early modern students were expected to display their proficiency in rhetoric and debate.³ These notes provide us with evidence of the routines and occasions of early modern academic life, as well as the extent to which the reading and study of classical literature and history influenced the humanist timetable: as one can see, for instance, in the references to Livy (fol. 2r) and Ovid (fol. 9v) in the titles of this particular student's declamations.

¹ Noteworthy studies of these paper books include Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Hugh Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain 1500-1700* (London, Faber and Faber, 1970). Both Todd and Kearney provide useful bibliographical appendices listing student notebooks and related material.

² 'Holdsworth's *Directions for a Student in the Universitie*', in Harris Francis Fletcher, *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*, 2 vols (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

³ On these exercises, see Costello, *Scholastic Curriculum*, pp.31-34, and also J. M. Fletcher, 'The Faculty of Arts', in T.H. Aston, ed. *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 3, *The Collegiate University* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp.157-99.

The second part of this notebook (fols 78-157), though, contains a new set of notes, largely in English, made upon sermons: the notes provide the texts for a succession of sermons, along with the names of the preachers who gave them, such as Rauens, Holborough or Brunning, each at the head of a page or so of abbreviated notes. Only one date appears within this section of notes: 'on Trinity Sunday Iune – 4: 1637' (fol. 132v), suggesting, if this book did indeed belong at some point to Breton (see above), that these notes were made either very much later in his life than the exercises recorded in the first section, or (much more plausibly, perhaps) by another scribe, to whom the book has passed, perhaps after Breton's death.

These notes, like the academic exercises that they follow here, are a common type of information in early modern notebooks; they are some of the most difficult pages to read in the entire *Scriptorium* collection (partly because of the spidery hand in which they are written, and partly because of their often abbreviated quality), but Figure 1 (see below) provides an example of the kind of information that they contain. The title of this section, 'Psal: 2, 12: Kiss the son, least he be angry, & so ye perish in the way: Mr Holborough:', provides the biblical text of one particular sermon and the name of the preacher who gave it, and the notes that follow, beginning with 'howsoever this Psalme be a consolation of Dauid against his enemies; yet is it applicable to christ', are a summary of what was spoken at the sermon. Taken together, these sermon notes, and others like them, provide a source of information about the daily religious life of the early seventeenth century.

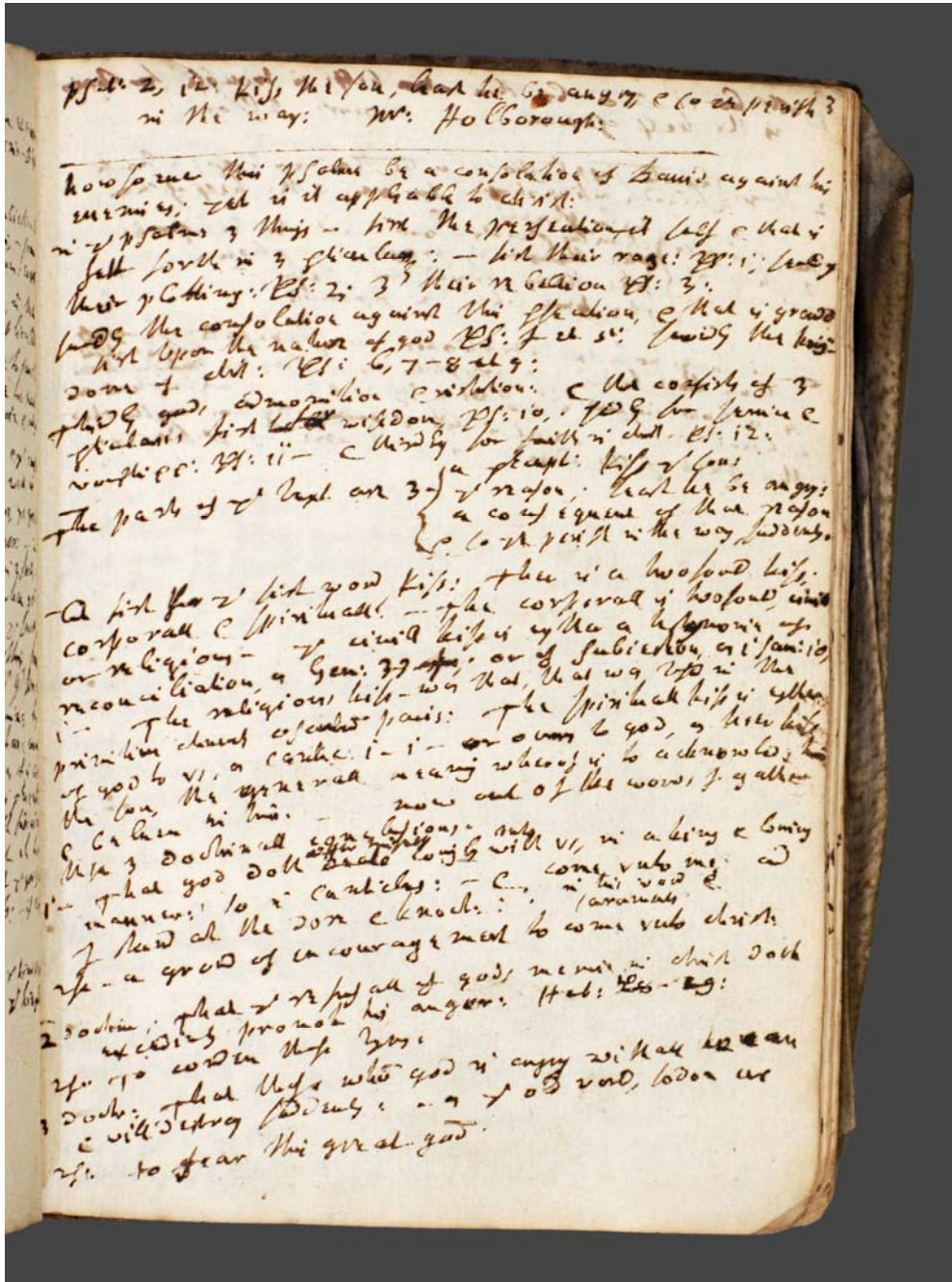
It seems that in the early seventeenth century, this kind of note-taking in sermons was widespread. In the autobiographical notes made by Sir Simonds D'Ewes, for instance, we can read that on Sunday 5 March, 1618, being 'at this time convinced of the holiness of God's Day', he went to three sermons: 'Every sermon was orthodox and useful', he writes; 'and therefore after supper I busied myself in enlarging and correcting such notes as I had taken in the afternoon session'.⁴ In other words, it was D'Ewes's habit to take rough notes in sermons, and then later to correct, emend, and expand them, perhaps into another paper book (this, presumably, is what he means by *enlarging*): we will say something more of this below.

And indeed, as Ceri Sullivan has discussed in a recent article, the early decades of the seventeenth century saw the publication of a number of books teaching schoolchildren and scholars how to listen attentively and effectively to sermons, advice which frequently included guidance on how best to take notes in church, as well as how such notes should be written up afterwards.⁵ John Brinsley's *Ludus Literarius* (1612) and *Consolation for our Grammar Schooles* (1622), for instance, contained guidance on the effective use of the memory and good habits of note-taking, the latter book promising to train young scholars to 'take all the substance of the Sermons, if they be plainly and orderly delivered:

⁴ *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart., During the Reigns of James I and Charles I*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1845), vol. 1, pp.137-38. See also Costello, *Scholastic Curriculum*, pp.111-12 and *passim*.

⁵ Ceri Sullivan, 'The Art of Listening in the Seventeenth Century', *Modern Philology*, 104 (2006), 34-71.

and to set them downe afterwards in a good Latin style, or to reade them extempore into Latin out of the English'.



(Figure 1: Queens' College Cambridge, MS 90, f. 80r (p. 3))

These contemporary descriptions of note-taking in sermons raise an important question about early modern writing practices in general, but also a specific question about Queens' MS 90. Were these notes, and others like them, actually

taken in church, while the sermon was going on, or were they the product of subsequent memorial recall, and perhaps the enlargement that Simonds D'Ewes speaks about? We cannot be absolutely certain how or when the notes in this particular manuscript were taken, though their apparently rough quality might lead us to suspect that they were made in a rush, either during the sermons that they remark upon or immediately after them, while their memory was still fresh. But this question points up several issues that touch upon the technology and materials of note-taking, questions of perhaps more general interest. If teachers and pedagogues expected their students to take notes in church, such note-takers must have had either inkwells to hand or portable inkhorns of their own, or they might have gone into church with a set of writing tables of the kind recently described by Peter Stallybrass, Henry Woudhuysen and others – waxed tablets or books containing waxed pages, which could be written on with pencils or special styluses and then erased.⁶ And in light of what D'Ewes says about his acts of enlargement (above), we can imagine that notes like those that appear in Queens' MS 90 might have represented one stage in a process of expansion and collation, involving not just one book, but several – further testimony of the importance of paper books in the academic and devotional life of the early seventeenth century.

But one further material aspect of this book might help us to provide a more detailed account of the way that it was used at this (and perhaps a later) point in its life, as well as shedding light on the way in which sermon notes were taken and used in the early seventeenth century. The section containing sermon notes has been paginated in an early hand, and an index at the back of the notebook (fols 159v-162v) corresponds to this paginated section, but not to the academic exercises in the first section of the book. That the index is written in the same ink throughout, and that its neat presentation suggests one stint of writing rather than cumulative composition, suggests that it can have been made only *after* the notes on the sermons were completed, not as part of an ongoing method of note-entry. That is, it is only after the owner of Queens' MS 90 had finished using it for sermon-notes that he (or yet another subsequent owner) came to sort its material for re-consultation. This may suggest in turn that this particular note-taker did not own a second, neat copy-book for his notes, or that the subsequent owner of the manuscript thought that they would want to read the notes again and again. Whoever paginated this section, though, and compiled the index, thought that the information contained in the sermon notes was worth ordering, worth looking through again, and worth arranging for subsequent re-use. That was not the case for the information contained in the first section, which is neither paginated nor indexed: it seems that the book's owner did not expect to go back and re-use this information again, at least not in the same way.

⁶ Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, John Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe (2004) 'Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55, 379-419. See also Henry Woudhuysen, 'Writing Tables and Table Books', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2004), <URL: <http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2004articles/article3.html>>.

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