

Court, when I saw a stage-play instead of a sermon on the Lord's days in the afternoon, and saw what course was there in fashion." Baxter would have made a poor courtier, even had no scruples of conscience troubled him. But this short experience determined him fully as to his career. He turned his whole soul toward the Christian ministry. The pages of his autobiography reveal a steady growth of this great purpose. His preparation for the ministry was already in progress by his studies in scholastic theology. One great English treatise, more than all others, moulded the future Baxter. He mastered the *Ecclesiastical Polity* of Hooker. He might have had a worse training for his work as preacher and theologian than the study of this noble specimen of theological learning and reasoning, in its stately English style. In 1638 he sought ordination at the hands of the Bishop of Worcester, was by him ordained and after brief ministries at Dudley and Bridgworth entered, in 1640, on that ministry at Kidderminster which was to be so remarkable a chapter in his life. For two years he labored among the people, finding the moral and spiritual condition at the lowest ebb. His fidelity and boldness stirred up the enmity of the "baser sort." He was repeatedly mobbed. Meantime the Civil War was on foot. The country was divided. Kidderminster was Loyalist. Baxter never trusted Charles I., and he was thought by his townsmen to sympathize with the decree of Parliament removing all images and crucifixes from the churches. The mob was enraged—his life was threatened, and he was compelled to flee. Thus after two years the work at Kidderminster was suspended, to be resumed in after times. We find him next holding a *quasi*-chaplaincy at Coventry where "he lived in the governor's house, followed his studies as quietly as in a time of peace for about a year, preaching once a week to the soldiers, and once on the Lord's Day to the people, taking nothing from either but my diet."

When "Cromwell lay at Cambridge with that famous troop with which he began his army," the officers proposed to "make their troop a gathered church," and invited Baxter to become its pastor. Baxter disapproved the step and declined the call. Subsequently, however, though leaving his "studies, and friends and quietness of Coventry" with great reluctance, he became the chaplain to Col. Whalley's regiment. Baxter's account of his military chaplaincy in the autobiography is full of lively detail. "I set myself from day to day to find out the corruptions of the soldiers and *dispute them out of their mistakes*,* both religious and political. My life among them was a daily contending against seducers, and gently arguing with the more respectable." We suspect that the chaplaincy was strongly colored by Baxter's love of polemical debate, too much so for its highest success. It is not to his chaplaincy that we should turn for his best record. It is easy to picture Baxter among Cromwell's soldiers by some camp-fire

* The italics are ours.