

The Autobiography of the Rev. Elias Rebotier,  
Rector of Axbridge, Somerset.

---

BY MR. E. A. FRY.

---

THE original book, of which the following is a copy, is not now to be found. In the year 1846, it was stated to be in the possession of the Rev. Thomas Fry (no connection, however, of mine), then of Westgate Street, Bath, and formerly rector of Emberton, Oxfordshire, son of Peter Fry, of Compton Bishop and Axbridge, together with a History of Wells Cathedral, also by Rev. E. Rebotier. Enquiry among the friends and relatives of the Rev. Thomas Fry have not been successful in tracing it.

I have traced the pedigree of the Rebotier family for several generations, both previous to Elias and also down to the present day.

In Axbridge Church, on the left-hand side of the west window, there is still a tablet to his memory, of which the following is a copy :—

NEAR THIS PLACE  
IN HOPES OF A BLESSED RESURRECTION  
LIE THE REMAINS OF THE LATE REV. ELIAS REBOTIER  
WHO WAS RECTOR OF THIS PARISH FORTY-FIVE YEARS  
DYING THE 19TH OF DECEMBER, 1765  
AGED 88\* YEARS.

\* This should be 86 years.

HE WAS BORN AT ST. JOHN DE GARDONNENQUE  
IN THE CEVENNES IN THE PROVINCE OF LANGUDOC AND AT  
THE GREAT PERSECUTION OF PROTESTANTS IN FRANCE  
FLED FROM THAT PLACE AND LEFT HIS FAMILY, FORTUNE  
AND FRIENDS TO SEEK THE MOST PURE REFORMED  
RELIGION OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

HE FOLLOWED  
HIS STUDIES FOR SOME TIME IN GENEVA, HOLLAND AND GERMANY  
AND AFTER ENDURING MANY HARDSHIPS AND  
VICISSITUDES OF FORTUNE HE CAME TO ENGLAND  
WHERE HE WAS BY THAT GREAT AND GOOD PRELATE  
GEORGE HOOPER, LORD BISHOP OF BATH  
AND WELLS TAKEN INTO HIS PALACE AS CHAPLAIN AND  
PROMOTED TO MANY FAVORS IN THE CHURCH BY HIS  
LORDSHIP.

HERE ALSO LYETH THE REMAINS  
OF ELIZABETH THE WIFE OF THE SAID ELIAS REBOTEIR  
WHO DYED THE 20TH FEBRUARY, 1766.  
AGED 74 YEARS.

*True copy of a small book wrote by the  
Rev. Elias Rebotier, dec.*

Elias Rebotier was born in France, the 3rd day of August, 1678 (but 1679 according to his baptismal certificate), in a place called St. John de Gardonnenque in the Cevennes. Charles Rebotier, his father, had a numerous family who lived to be settled in the world by suitable marriages. Elias, the fourth son, was from his infancy designed for the service of the Church, though the persecutions were then very grievous in those parts. The Cevennes were always famous for zealous Protestants; Calvin had so well fixed his doctrine in that mountainous country that the Roman Catholics had scarcely any place of worship, a closet in the priest's house was his Church and his clerk his congregation. The family of the Rebotier's in particular was so zealously affected to the Reformation, that one of them was always promoted to the dignity of the sacred priesthood. The lot fell upon me in these trouble-

some times, and I was accordingly educated in the schools with a promise to be sent to Geneva to complete my studies, but the execution of this pious design became almost impracticable, through the severity of the edicts issued out about this time against those who should go out of the kingdom without proper passes. The penalties were nothing less than death, the galleys, or perpetual imprisonment, according to the circumstances of the offenders.

About this time, by a special order from Court, several young gentlemen and gentlewomen were confined in religious houses to be trained up in the Roman Catholic religion. This alarmed all the Cevennes : my father in particular, fearing lest I should fall into severer hands, was persuaded by his friends to send me to a College of Jesuits at Nismes, in Languedoc, where, I must confess, I met with far better treatment than I had reason to expect from persons so entirely devoted to the Court of Rome.

My tutor, whose name was Father Tupisier, was a man of excellent temper and morals. I had not been acquainted with him long before I became his favourite. He maintained with great moderation the principles of Popery, and heard with patience the objections made against it, returning such answers as were most likely to prevail upon a young man of eighteen years of age. But all his endeavours proved ineffectual : the longer I continued among the Jesuits the stronger was my aversion for a religion which I was satisfied in my own mind was not in conformity with the Holy Scriptures. Some things I did not dislike, though contrary to the doctrine I had once received. The observation of Lent and other fast days, confirmation, kneeling at the Holy Communion, and a suitable decency in the worship of God and administration of the sacrament, was very agreeable to my sentiments ; but the invocation of saints, the worship of images, and the adoration of the Eucharist, were doctrines I could never be reconciled to, however they might be disguised.

By the overpowering influence of God's grace my mind was so well grounded on principles of the Reformation, that neither the means used nor the civility received during the space of three years in the company of the Jesuits, who have been so remarkable for making proselytes, could make any change in my opinions. I was, I confess, obliged to comply with the external modes of their worship, for fear of some greater restraint, but this was always done with great reluctance and grief; of this my tutor himself was very sensible, but he used the same dissimulation towards me as I did towards him, till I could find a convenient opportunity to escape out of the kingdom, whatever hazards I might run in the execution of such an enterprise.

With this view, being heartily weary of a religion so contrary to my inclinations, I obtained leave to go home and spend some time with my friends, being fully determined never to return again, if by any means I could avoid it. I was not disappointed of my hopes, as my father who was as uneasy as myself under our unhappy circumstances, never attempted to send me to a place where my religion and his were in so much danger; but when I pressed him by myself and all my friends to go to Geneva, the dismal accounts we daily had of those who had been murdered or taken prisoners in their passage, was still a plausible excuse to which I could give no satisfactory answer. In this perplexity, considering with myself that I was losing my time to no manner of purpose, and that I was so much taken notice of as to receive a visit from my tutor, with a very kind invitation to the college, I earnestly entreated my father to send me to Nismes, to a merchant, an acquaintance of his, under the notion of a 'prentice, that I might be secure from further persecutions.

This scheme succeeded beyond all my expectations. Under this disguise I contrived all proper ways and means to get out of the kingdom. I communicated my design to a few faithful friends who were very instrumental to my happy deliverance :

they made me acquainted with an honest man who knew all the bye paths and ways from Nismes to Savoye; and because the passes of the mountains were carefully guarded by soldiers during the summer season we fixed our departure for Saturday morning, the 6th January, 1700, N.S., when the mountains were all covered with snow. The boldness of such an attempt could not be but very surprising to my tender parents, to whom, therefore, I sent the following letter:—

“Most honoured Father. I doubt not but that the news of my sudden and unexpected departure from Nismes will be very surprizing to you and fill your minds with terrible fears of approaching dangers. I have weighed all the consequences more than once, and upon the whole I find such an impulse upon my mind as cannot be resisted. I have often desired your consent and approbation, but always in vain; let no displeasure of yours, most honoured father, retard the pious designs of a son who has nothing in view but the honour of God and the salvation of his soul. You may suppose that a rambling humour or some discontent at home has engaged me in this hazardous design, but God is my witness that the satisfaction of serving Him in the most acceptable manner is my only aim. I am not so young or so void of common sense as to suppose that the pleasure of travelling or an advantageous refuge can make me amends for the loss of my parents, friends or country. I expect in my pilgrimage to be exposed to many troubles, fatigues and disappointments. This was the case with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of all the saints that went before us, and if we fall into the same trials and afflictions we must not be surprised if some strange thing happen unto us. As for dangers we must despise them in the performance of our duty, and I am persuaded in my own mind that God who opened a way for his people to escape from the persecutions of Pharoah, will also provide one for me by which to escape the persecution of my enemies. In this expectation I beseech you, most honoured father, to accompany

me with your prayers rather than with your tears, and to persuade yourself that my enterprise was not to withdraw myself from your obedience, but to obey the voice of God ; thrice happy if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the just, though I should be called upon to seal the profession of my faith even with my blood. I conclude by begging your blessing with tears, hoping that you will not refuse this consolation to a son whom you lose for a short time that you may recover him for ever."

This letter was sent by a proper hand, and I set out from Nismes with all the cheerfulness imaginable at the time appointed and in the company of my guide and a bosom friend, who was willing to share my danger as well as my purse, his circumstances not suffering him to bear the expenses of a long journey, though on foot, that we might avoid all the great roads. The fear of pursuit made us so diligent that we passed through a place called Usez early the same morning, and came to Bagnols heartily fatigued. Nevertheless, starting two or three hours before daybreak we came to a bridge over the Rhone called Pont Saint Esprit, secured day and night by a strong guard. To prevent suspicion my guide went boldly to the sentinel to enquire of him at what time mass was to begin, and by this stratagem we passed unobserved into Dauphiné, and without any delay proceeding to Pierrelat we came to Montel-mart with much difficulty, finding myself so tired that I could no longer stand upon my feet.

In this place I passed a very uncomfortable night, nothing appearing to me so horrible as the thought of being obliged to return back again ; but by the assistance of God, finding myself much refreshed, the next morning we pursued our journey to Loriol, when some friends represented our passage as impracticable, considering the strict orders lately given to guard with care all the frontiers. But these difficulties signified nothing to persons resolved to venture at all hazards without consulting flesh and blood. We came into the great road to Lyons, but

left it the next morning, and turning to the right hand, towards Beaumont, we had the happiness to meet with a young man who offered to lead us a surer way than that proposed by my guide. I accepted his offer thankfully, having first been assured by our friends that he always had the character of an honest and zealous Protestant.

In this place it was we learned a piece of news which gave us great satisfaction. A clergyman, whose name was Romans, had for some time preached to the poor distressed Protestants in France contrary to the King's edict, but being betrayed by a false brother, he was taken by some officers and taken to a place called Bouquervan, proposing to stay there all night for fear of a rescue. But this very precaution was the cause of his happy deliverance, for the news of his being taken was no sooner known in a country where Protestants had the advantage of numbers, but a company besieged the house and demanded the liberty of the clergyman, threatening fire and sword to any one who should dare to oppose them. Instead of complying with their request, one of the officers fired two pistols out of a window and in exchange received a musquet shot which killed him on the spot. This so enraged the guards that they threatened to kill Mr. Romans by way of reprisal, and they certainly would, had not their own danger put them in fear of their lives. This worthy clergyman, to prevent the effusion of blood, gave them to understand that every one of their lives must fall a sacrifice to these young men if they took away his, but that if they delivered him into their hands not one of their hairs should fall to the ground. The conditions were accepted and faithfully executed on both sides, and the young men taking Mr. Romans out of the house carried him off, and passed with him through the place where I was then, but a few days before.

This news made us proceed on our journey with courage, but we had scarce left Beaumont when a gentleman on horseback suspecting our design, cautioned us not to pass by Turin, where

several fugitives had been arrested. We gave him our thanks, and taking his advice left the great road and came to the side of the mountains of Grenoble by paths exceedingly troublesome and difficult from the snow. This, however, was but the beginning of sorrows, for when we came to Miribel the mountains appeared inaccessible from its depth, so that in a few hours we were almost spent and in danger of perishing through weariness and cold. Nevertheless, the desire I had of leaving my unfortunate country was so prevailing in my mind, that going foremost I encouraged my fellow travellers by clearing the way before them, assuring them that God would enable us to overcome all difficulties and discouragements. This was in the night, for we durst not pass the hills by day, and to make it more dismal they were covered by so dense a fog that we could scarcely see one another. In this perplexing condition I led the way without being dismayed till the ice breaking under the snow, I fell into a pool, but by good fortune the water was not above three feet deep. And now, I confess, I began to think that we must inevitably perish, but God's providence seasonably interposed, by bringing us to a little hut upon the hill where we found an honest old man who put us in the way to a town called Eschelles, in the utmost borders of Dauphiné. In this place there is a bridge, but strictly guarded by a company of soldiers; leaving, therefore, the common road we turned to the left-hand and came upon the banks of the river, two miles below the bridge, and waded through the water the 12th of January, after a successive march of twenty hours without any other sustenance than a little bread and brandy.

And now being passed the river, our greatest danger was over; nevertheless, fearing a pursuit, we walked several miles into Savoy in our frozen clothes before we would venture to take any rest. As soon as we came to the inn we made a good breakfast, stripped ourselves and went into a warm bed and slept twelve or fourteen hours, while our clothes were drying by the fire. The next day, finding ourselves much



refreshed, we proceeded by short journeys through Savoy, came to Chambery, and, without losing any time, hastened towards Geneva, which was the place we had so much desired to see; we had that happiness the sixteenth day of the same month (January, 1700), about eight in the morning, where we had the satisfaction to meet those Protestants that had been taken at Turin, and who by a special Providence had found means to escape out of their prisons.

I was no sooner at Geneva, but without loss of time I wrote the following letter to one of my uncles in France, not daring to address myself to my father for fear of his displeasure:—

“Most honoured Uncle. Not knowing how my honoured father will relish my going out of the kingdom without his leave, I take the liberty to address myself to you to desire you, in the most humble manner, to intercede in my behalf. If my father is in any way displeased, I could not propose to myself any temporal pleasure or advantage in leaving my own country and exposing myself to so many dangers. God is my witness: I had no other view besides the satisfaction of serving Him according to the motions of my own conscience. This blessing once obtained I will cheerfully submit to the meanest condition in the world. These things I beg you to represent to my honoured father in the most engaging way, beseeching him to favour me with a letter as soon as possible, that I may know what course I am to take.”

Between hope and fear I waited some days at Geneva for an answer, but to no purpose; my father contenting himself with writing to a merchant in that town to furnish me with the necessary supplies, without giving me any directions. Being thus disappointed, I consulted all those who had any knowledge of our family, and particularly the merchant above-mentioned, whose name was Cardonet, about what course I was to take, who unanimously advised me to proceed in my travels towards Germany, to a place called Schwabach, be-

longing to the Principality of Anspach, where one of my uncles was first minister of the French Church.

Nothing was more suitable to my inclinations. I was so well pleased with the thought of seeing him in a place of liberty, that I set out on the 22nd of the same month, in the company of one Vauthier, who was going to Erlang, about twenty miles beyond Schwabach. We embarked on the lake of Geneva; but had like to have perished through a sudden storm of wind which lasted several hours, but by the grace of God we regained the shore at a place called Coppet, and the next day came to Morges, where we waited some time for a chariot.

It cannot be expected that travelling under such disadvantages I should give any account of places, persons, and things, this requires longer time than I was willing to spare, expedition being much more suitable to my circumstances.

From Morges we came to Lausanne, and from thence setting out on the 28th (January) we passed through the Swiss Cantons of Berne, Solure, Zurich, and Schaffhausen. In this place we tarried some days, waiting for a chariot that was going to Nuremburg, not far from Schwabach. This chariot was exceedingly expeditious from the advantage of the snow, which being frozen hard made the way smooth and even. We made no stay in any city or village, but proceeding in our journey with all diligence, arrived in Schwabach about the latter end of February. In our progress through Switzerland, we were treated courteously, the Switzers being a kind free-hearted people, of a cheerful pleasant humour; but when we came into Germany we found the reverse. The Germans are a proud morose people, despising all nations but their own, using all strangers with a haughtiness not to be found in any other civilized nation. Except in cities, you find no beds; in all other places one common room with some straw in the place of your rest, without any respect of persons.

I was now happily come to my uncle's house were I was received with all imaginable demonstrations of joy, and with-

out loss of time applied myself diligently to the reading of the Holy Scriptures with a good commentator and other books of divinity, such as my uncle recommended to me. In these studies I applied myself with so much diligence that I grudged the least interruption and complained of the shortness of the days, but my constitution could not bear long with such intense application, and I fell insensibly into such a languishing illness, which the physicians supposed would end in a consumption if I pursued my studies with so much zeal, I was obliged to discontinue them, and in the meantime wrote the following letter to my mother in France :—

“Most honoured Mother. In the distressed condition the persecution has reduced us to, I can do no less than present myself before the Throne of Grace, beseeching God, with many sighs and tears, to direct your way as by some special providence, that you may be able to serve God, according to the purity of His Holy Gospel. It is in vain to promise ourselves a restoration if we have no concern for the honour of God, no zeal for His Holy Religion : He will have no regard for our tribulations. Our happy escape out of France, most honoured mother, is an argument to you that the ways are not impossible if you have but courage to undertake the journey. God will have the goodness to conduct you safely under the shadow of His wings.”

Some days after this letter was written, I had the satisfaction to hear not only that my father highly approved of what I had done, but also disposed himself to follow me in some short time. Never was news received with greater joy. The pleasure of his approbation had such an influence on my health that from this time I began to recover strength and the hopes of a perfect cure, to which the news I received the beginning of August contributed much. By one letter I was informed that my father was gone from Nismes on his way to Geneva, and by another that he was come thither without any hindrance. I waited with impatience his coming to

Schwabach, and that the time might seem shorter I went to see the city of Nuremberg and another place called Erlang, which the French refugees were building within the Principality of Bayreuth. The journey was pleasant and some days after my return I had the satisfaction of seeing my honoured father and one of my brothers, who being bred up to business found no great difficulty in escaping, the ways being always open to merchants.

My father being out of danger I turned all my thoughts upon the ways and means of persuading my mother to follow his example and accordingly wrote her the following letter :—

“ Most honoured Mother. God of His infinite mercy and goodness, having heard our prayers in behalf of my most honoured father, let us renew our most earnest supplications, beseeching Him day and night to bring you from the kingdom of darkness into His light, that we may with one heart and voice shew forth His praise. My most honoured father engages you by the most sacred ties to come to us, and Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, makes use of our pens to bring you into these happy countries, where the light of Righteousness shines with healing on His wings. Consider, dearest Mother, that an eternity of happiness or misery is of the utmost consequence, and what we propose and so earnestly desire is the only sure means of obtaining the one and escaping the other. I am sensible that your infirmities represent such an undertaking as impracticable, but I am fully persuaded that if you have but faith enough to throw yourself into the arms of God’s providence, He will support your fainting spirits and give you a prosperous issue out of all dangers.”

About this time, finding myself recovered out of my languishing, I resumed my studies under my uncle with great satisfaction, but, forasmuch as Germany was a country noways suited either to my constitution or inclinations, I prevailed upon my father and uncle to let me pass into England, which, by all

other churches, is considered as upon the most complete model of the Reformation. This resolution was taken in the winter, and the 29th May following (1701), I set out from Schwabach and took coach from Nuremberg, the 2nd June, and came to Frankfort upon the Maine, on the 7th, when taking boat we came down to Mentz (Mayence), where the river falls into the Rhine. In going down the Rhine I saw a great many fine cities and strong castles on both sides, which gave us a very agreeable prospect, but without making any long stay at any of them, I came to Nimiguen, in Holland, the 21st instant, and two days after to Rotterdam, where embarking in a packet boat, I came to London, the 29th June, after we had been five days upon the water.

I had letters of recommendation to several gentlemen in London who had received favours from my father and uncle; nevertheless, I was so ill-received by them, that my heart began to fail, finding myself in a strange country without any friends and acquaintance. Of this I gave timely notice to my father, in these words :—

“ Most honoured Father. As soon as I came to London, I waited upon Mr. Duchenoy, who received me with all the civility I could expect from so hearty a friend, and I can safely say he is the only one I can trust. I wish I had never seen any others in this city, for instead of encouraging me with the hopes of some tolerable settlement in England, they have more than once intimated to me that my wisest way was to return back into Holland or Germany. This is the advice of these you had the greatest dependence upon. But since my coming to this famous city I have made some friends, by whose means I still hope to get into one of the Universities, or some gentleman’s family, wherein I may pursue my studies to qualify myself for the sacred priesthood. If I may but gain this point I shall not refuse to submit myself to the meanest condition.”

During the time I was in London I left no stone unturned to forward my design. I had many offers, but none that suited me, till a gentlewoman, a clergyman's widow, whose name was Charnier, as remarkable for her piety as she was for many other excellent qualities, proposed to me to go to Barbadoes to take the tuition of two young gentlemen of considerable fortune in that island. Of this I gave my father the following account :—

“Most honoured Father. After waiting long in vain for a settlement in England I have found one in America. I doubt not that the thought of such a long and dangerous voyage will give you abundance of uneasiness, but I desire you to remember that all countries are at an equal distance from Heaven, and that God's providence reaches as far as the whole creation. I have agreed with a gentleman who has a very large estate in Barbadoes to pass into that island, where he has engaged to give me £40 a year (and bear all my expenses besides), for the tuition of his two sons. If I perish death will put an end to all my troubles, if I escape I shall be like those ancient saints who had no city to dwell in, but went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people. What I earnestly desire is the assistance of your prayers, that among all the changes and chances of this uncertain life, I may always behave myself as becomes the holiness of my profession.”

From this time I prepared all things necessary for so long a voyage and the 4th of October went to Gravesend and embarked in a ship bound for the West Indies, called the “Mary Ann,” commanded by Captain Bain. From thence we fell down the Thames, and keeping close to the English shore we came to an anchor at Dover, where we tarried four days waiting for a fair wind. The 14th October a fair wind arising, we soon lost sight of England and came into the main sea, but about the eighth day a tempestuous south wind arising we suffered a storm of three weeks, which exposed us to the

utmost danger, the circumstances of which are as follows :—

The 22nd of October, about midnight, a south wind arose, which was succeeded, the next day, by a calm of twenty-four hours, after which the same wind growing stronger and stronger, became at last so furious that we were forced to leave the ship in great measure to the mercy of the waves. In this condition we were tossed to and fro till the 10th of November, when a whirlwind in the night beat so violently against the right side of the ship, that a piece of eight feet in length and four broad, was shattered in pieces, and from this moment the water running into the ship seemed to forbid us any further hopes of safety.

In this place I cannot forbear to mention a remarkable dream which I had the same night, which gave me no small consolation. I thought I was riding upon a flying horse, whose intention seemed to be fully bent to throw me into some dismal precipice, and as I was looking about for the means of deliverance, I saw at a distance a tree of prodigious size, whose branches reached into the clouds, and as I was carried that way with particular swiftness, I flattered myself that I should be enabled to quit my horse by the assistance of its boughs, but to my great surprise, when I took hold of the branches, I found they were so rotten as to moulder into dust and smoke at the least touch. Despairing then of help from secondary causes, I applied myself by prayer to the great Creator and Preserver of mankind, and the words were no sooner out of my lips, but my flying horse left me between heaven and earth, supported by a cloud which, by a perpendicular but gentle motion, came down into the ruins of an old house and vanished out of my sight. I returned thanks to God for my happy deliverance, nevertheless, I found soon after that I was taken up again into the air, when a venerable old woman coming to my assistance, put a pair of scales into my hand and rescued me from any further danger.

I was never inclined to place any confidence in dreams, but this seemed to have in it something so remarkable and so suitable to my present circumstances, that I conceived great hopes from it of a favourable issue out of our present troubles. I supposed that our ship was the flying horse, the seamen the rotten tree, and the venerable old woman, justice, and concluded that the proper means of escaping our present danger was by constant prayer to God and by the practise of righteousness.

The wind began to abate but we had no sooner escaped this danger than we fell into another far more terrible to us. We discovered at a great distance from us a vessel, which in some hours after, we found to be a pirate, mounted with twelve pieces of cannon. We immediately prepared ourselves to fight, for having the wind of us there was no possibility of escaping. They came up to us full sail, but we gave them such a warm reception, that after the first fire we found them out of reach of our guns. But they had, I believe, double the number of hands; however, the thoughts of slavery gave us such courage that we entered into an agreement, that the first man who should lay down his arms should be cast into the sea. On the 18th November, a gentle north wind arising, gave us an opportunity of refitting our vessel, so as to be able to proceed on our voyage. We touched at Madeira, where we laid in a good provision of water and wine, of which we had great need, and, after three days, came into the trade winds, which never failed us till we arrived at Barbadoes.

After we had passed the tropic of Cancer, we were delighted with a prodigious variety of fishes, for besides dolphins and flying fish, I saw two of an extraordinary shape and size. The first was a whale, which followed the vessel three successive days; the other was a flat fish, in size, shape, and stripes, resembling a thornback: I could perceive no head, but horns of a great length. It swam upon the surface of the water, and gave our sailors an opportunity of diverting them-



selves with their cramping irons for a whole day. At last one of them fastened his iron into the back of the fish, which had nearly proved fatal, for six or seven of the sailors had like to have been drawn into the sea through the violent efforts the fish made after it was wounded. The rest of the voyage was exceedingly pleasant, and we landed at Barbadoes, the 8th December, 1701, to our unspeakable joy and satisfaction.

We came ashore at Bridgetown, the most convenient place in the island, when I met with an English gentleman, who had travelled some years in France, and he assured me he had received so many civilities from my countrymen, that he would willingly do me any service in his power; and when he understood that my business was to wait upon Councillor Lillington (the gentleman who by his agents had contracted with me in London) he immediately ordered his horses and servants to convey me to his house at some distance from Bridgetown. When I came to his house I found the family in great affliction; the two young gentlemen I was appointed to instruct being exceeding ill of the bloody flux. By the grace of God after a time they recovered, and I soon found that my good fortune had placed me in a family where I could pass my days with much satisfaction, as you may perceive by the letter I wrote to my father.

“Most honoured Father. After so many dangers escaped I have now landed upon the island of Barbadoes, where I can promise myself some rest after the many fatigues I have undergone in our tedious voyage. We have been in dangers by robbers, as well as of the sea. We had no sooner launched into the ocean, than a furious tempest, which lasted nearly three weeks, gave us a dismal prospect of inevitable destruction. This danger was no sooner over, than we found ourselves engaged with a pirate ship; but by the assistance of God and the help of our arms we made them fly with some precipitation. The rest of our voyage was pleasant, and we came upon the island the 8th of December, 1701. In

this island the days are of an equal length all the year round, being about fourteen hours; and a perpetual summer divides all the four quarters. The natural inhabitants are almost black, having but little notion of any Divinity, and without worship. They have upon the island abundance of oranges, lemons, pineapples, mellons, and other fruits, exceedingly good and sweet. They have also plantains, potatoes, and cabbage trees of a surprising tallness. Beans are not very scarce; and as for fowls of many kinds, they are exceeding plenty and fat. The Europeans (for the most part English) are exceedingly affable and courteous to strangers. In the family in which I had the happiness to live, I have as much freedom as in my own house. I will take care not to abuse any of the many favours I daily receive, and endeavour to behave myself in such a way as not to be altogether unworthy of them. Councillor Lillington has built a very good room for a school in one of the wings of his house, with a design to invite the neighbouring gentlemen to send their sons to me, which in some time is likely to prove exceedingly advantageous, none offering less than £20 a year for the education of a son."

But such is the uncertainty of all our schemes, that a sudden change of providence does in a moment break all our measures. I was not long in Barbadoes, when I was afflicted with sore legs, so that I was no longer able to go abroad, and when I was pretty well recovered from this illness, I was troubled with a continual indigestion, so that I was informed by all my friends, that unless I recovered in a short time, I must never expect to see England again. Councillor Lillington, seeing my case so desperate, told me that he proposed going to England in a short time, and that if I would go with him, he would take his two sons and leave them under my care in London, upon the same terms that were agreed upon when I came to Barbadoes. I accepted this kind offer with abundance of thanks, and accordingly we embarked

at Bridgetown some time in June, and had a favourable passage, but when we came over a hundred leagues of the English shore, we were informed that war was proclaimed against France, and that the Channel was full of French privateers. This was dismal news to all, but especially to me, who, if I had been taken and known, must at least expect to be confined for life.

In this perplexing case, the master of the vessel proposed to get into the islands of Scilly, not far from the west of England, and we were so happy as to meet with a pilot by whose assistance we got into the Bay waiting for a Convoy; while we were there, we saw the confederate fleet of English and Dutch pass by, which made a terrible, as well as a glorious show to all beholders. About a month after we came into Plymouth under the shelter of a man of war. My joy was unspeakable in seeing myself delivered from so many dangers, till one evening Councillor Lillington told me he had no further occasion for my services, and that he would convey me to my own friends at his own expense by any way that I might choose. A piece of news so unexpected gave me abundance of uneasiness. I put him in mind of his promise at Barbadoes, but all to no purpose. His friends at Plymouth informed him that for £20 a year, he might find an able man to take charge of his sons. Being thus disappointed I came to London about the latter end of August, 1702, fully resolved to go to Oxford some time in the winter. I was preparing myself for this journey, when a friend of mine made me acquainted with a west country gentleman, whose name was John Strachey, a Justice of Peace for the county of Somerset. This gentleman had a considerable estate and a large family. His house was called Sutton Court, about half way between Bath and Wells.

In the circumstances I was then in, I readily accepted the offer he made me of £20 a year, his table, and a horse whenever I should be willing to go abroad. Some time before

Christmas I went into the country with him, and came to Sutton Court, where I had a considerable time of rest after so many fatigues, and began to taste the pleasures of life. In this place my time was divided between the care of my pupils and my studies, the former by day and the latter generally by night, allowing myself one day in the week for exercise, either in hunting, shooting, or fishing. In this manner I spent three or four years with great satisfaction to myself; when supposing myself qualified for the sacred ministry, I applied myself to the Right Reverend Father in God, George Hooper, Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells, who after examination was pleased to admit me into the order of deacons, 19 May, 1706.

This success was an encouragement to me to pursue my studies with greater diligence, that after the year of my probation, according to the canons, I might without danger of a refusal, offer myself as a candidate for priest's orders; and I was not disappointed in my hopes, for when I presented myself before his lordship the 6 June, 1707, I not only passed my examinations, but was ordained priest the Sunday following, with some particular marks of favour.

And now I was, in a great degree, at the end of all my wishes; nevertheless, my God had provided something better for me. I had not been long in priest's orders, when my kind bishop sent for me and desired me to take charge of a living there in his own hands till his return from London, whither he was then going, when he would think of a proper person to give it to, promising me that I should have £30 a year for my pains. I need not say how thankfully I received these distinguishing marks of his lordship's favour. I served the cure for about half-a-year, when the bishop returning from London, I was agreeably surprised by another message. His lordship sent a servant and a letter to Mr. Strachey, to inform him that if he could with conveniency provide for the education of his children, he would take it as a favour if he would allow me to wait upon him at Wells. This letter was not so welcome to

the gentleman as to me, nevertheless, considering the many advantages I was likely to receive, he communicated the contents of the letter to me, and sent back word that I should wait upon him the following day to receive his lordship's commands. I was in Wells the following day by ten in the morning, and was received with much affability and condescension.

He told me that I should go into his family in the capacity of his secretary, lest being called his chaplain I should move the envy of some of the English clergy, who are but too apt to look with a jealous eye on any favours bestowed upon foreigners; but that I was to officiate in his family as both, and that as an earnest of his future favour, he gave me the Rectory of Chillwood, worth £50 a year, to which I was instituted the same day, 13th June, 1709. The next day I returned to Sutton Court, and stayed there till the latter end of July, when taking my leave of the good family, with abundance of thanks for the many civilities received from them, I came to Wells just as his lordship was beginning his visitation, and here for ten days I lived as happily as any mortal could wish on this side of the grave.

On the 3rd Dec. his lordship gave me beside, the Prebend and Rectory of Dinder, which on the 16 April, 1718, I exchanged for the Prebend of Henstridge, which was better.

Whilst I had Dinder, I became intimately acquainted with a virtuous gentlewoman of the place, Mrs. Margaret Bisse, of a good and creditable family, and was married to her by the bishop, the last day of December, 1713. I had by her four sons and one daughter, whereof only two (Katherine and Elias) lived some time with me. All this time I continued at the palace as before, a favour seldom if ever granted, having a house in Wells, where I retired every night after the service of the day was over, till I had the rectory of Axbridge, where Thomas Prowse, Esq. (grandson to the bishop), has a pleasant seat; he was sometime under my care at the palace. This falling into the bishop's hands, I had the offer of it, together with the prebend of Wivilscombe.

I can safely say I never asked this or any other preferment of his lordship: whatever I had before, or now enjoy, came to me unexpectedly.

Now Axbridge, being a corporation town, required my presence, and in June, 1720, I removed from Wells and settled in Axbridge; and on the 25th October, 1721, I had the misfortune to lose my wife; and on the 28th of September, 1728, my son Elias also departed this life, reducing my family to my daughter Katherine and myself.

This affliction was certainly great and my condition dismal, till, falling into the company of Mrs. Elizabeth Chorley, my losses were happily repaired by a happy marriage with her on the 13th March, 1728.

---

The autobiography ends here, but the Rev. Elias Rebotier lived for some thirty-seven years after his marriage with Elizabeth Chorley.

His daughter Katherine married John Speed, of Shepton Mallet.