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JIX – MAN OF PRINCIPLE

By David Samuel

William Joynson-Hicks, the 1st Viscount Brentford, was one of the most distinguished laymen associated with our Society when it was known as the Church Association. Jix, as he was known throughout his parliamentary career, was born in 1865 in Canonbury. He was brought up in a godly home. His mother's faith made a deep impression upon him. He said of her that she shared the closest communion with her Creator and she believed implicitly in the verbal inspiration of the Bible.

Early Years

He began to develop his powers in public speaking first in the school debating society and later as a young man in the Highbury Literary and Debating Society. He showed early enterprise and initiative in starting his own business as a solicitor soon after completing his articles. He rented an office in the City, set up a brass plate, engaged an office boy . . . and waited. He did not succeed immediately, but he persevered and in the end built up a most successful business.

It was the same kind of determination that eventually enabled him to succeed in politics. He began his political career in 1892 when friends successfully persuaded him to stand as the Conservative candidate for Woolwich in the County Council elections. He was not elected but he did not give up; despite the failure he hoped very soon to be in the House of Commons.

Parliament

In 1898, soon after his marriage, he was adopted as the Conservative candidate for North Manchester, but ten years were to elapse before he entered parliament. In the 1900 election he lost to the sitting Liberal member by 26 votes. He said afterwards: "Those 26 votes affected my whole career. It took me eight years after that to get into parliament". When eventually he was elected for the North-West Division of Manchester, it was in a spectacular by-election victory over Winston Churchill.

After many reverses he became Home Secretary in 1923 at the age of 58. This was late to come to an important office in government. He carried a heavy burden of responsibility during the General Strike of 1926, acting with courage and resolution which won him praise from many sides. Had Jix not been Home Secretary at the time the outcome for the country might have been very different.

Moral Standards

His special contribution however, from the point of view of a Christian and Churchman, came from his attempt to arrest the decline in moral standards and his involvement in the Prayer Book Controversy of 1928. While Home Secretary he sought to prevent the import of obscene literature and instituted an enquiry into street offences, as well as seeing that the licensing laws were strictly adhered to. For this he came under attack from those who thought his standards were Victorian and outmoded. We, who have witnessed the moral landslide in our time, will wish that there had been more Home Secretaries like Jix, who would have given the moral leadership the country needed.

The Prayer Book

In 1928 Sir William, as he then was, led the opposition in parliament to the Revised Prayer Book and was responsible more than any other individual for its rejection. He later wrote a full account of this entitled '**The Prayer Book Crisis**', which is well worth reading today. The Anglo-Catholic section of the Church and their sympathisers who promoted the new measure believed that its

passage into law was assured. There is no doubt that the book would have been approved on its first submission but for the eloquent appeal made by Jix. When he resumed his seat, after a speech in which even his friends believed he had surpassed himself, he had defeated decisively the efforts of a large body of bishops, clergy and laymen to introduce into the Book of Common Prayer doctrines which were entirely contrary to the principles of the Reformation. Mr Churchill later said: “Joynson-Hicks made not only his finest speech, but a speech which, for its substance, its sincerity and its command, ranks among the best specimens of modern parliamentary art”.

Conviction

But it was more than art, it was the expression of deep religious conviction of the Truth which he was defending. It is sad now to recall that nearly all the points he resisted have since been incorporated into the Alternative Service Book (1980). Thus we have allowed our Reformation heritage to be squandered which only a short time ago cost such effort and sacrifice to maintain, for it was a costly fight. Shortly before Joynson-Hicks delivered his second speech on the Prayer Book (the measure was reintroduced six months after the first defeat) a friend who saw him crossing the Palace Yard said “his face was white, his eyes anguished”.

If the Church of England today is to be brought back to Biblical principles and standards, if society is to be reformed, we need again committed laymen of the stamp of the 1st Viscount Brentford who will take with them their convictions into private and public life, as he did. Church Society has in the past owed a great debt to dedicated laymen; we look to others to succeed them. We are honoured that we have as our president today the 4th Viscount Brentford.

David Samuel (at the time of publication) was Director of Church Society.