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John Traske and Theophilus Brabourne

THE effect of British and Continental antecedents on the development of Seventh-day views in seventeenth-century England appears to have been more indirect than direct. Arguments in support of the seventh day which recur in the literature are generally theological and biblical, reinforcing the conclusion that the English Seventh-day movement was more a spontaneous response to the recovered authority of the Bible than a historically or geographically conditioned phenomenon, important as the antecedents undoubtedly were in themselves, or as incipient catalysts of a later reaction. If English Sabbatarian writers looked for clearly defined beginnings to the Seventh-day movement, they looked to more recent times, to the Puritan-Anglican Sabbatarian controversialists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries perhaps, and in particular to the first known Seventh-day Sabbatarians of any significance, John Traske and Theophilus Brabourne.

In 1636 Peter Heylyn observed that the opinions of Traske and Brabourne 'so far as it concerned the Sabbath were the very same'.[1] The reality, of course, was a little different. While there is some truth in the assertion that in contemporary minds the two men were inextricably linked,[2] contemporary minds also recognized some differences. Traske left behind him a movement, small, controversial, and proscribed, to perpetuate his opinions, while Brabourne left a literature, reasonably extensive, likewise controversial, but destined to exert considerable influence on the wider Seventh-day movement until at least the turn of the century. The Seventh-day Men themselves were much more comfortable with the latter than the former. There are few references to Traske in the Seventh-day

[1] Heylyn, *History*, ii. 259–60.

[2] Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism*, 16. Cox regarded Brabourne as 'the founder in England of the sect at first known as Sabbatarians'; Cox, *Literature of the Sabbath Question*, i. 157.

literature, while Brabourne's arguments are frequently cited or recast in support of Seventh-day theology. When the dust had settled, and it became apparent that observance of the seventh day was not something ephemeral, Brabourne was taken more seriously than Traske, by antagonists as well as protagonists of Seventh-day views. Archbishop Ussher noted Brabourne's part in the wider Sabbatarian debate, remarking that it was he who 'gave occasion to the raising up of these unhappy broils'.[3] Brabourne's arguments were likewise noted by Fuller, White, Heylyn, Ley, and Cawdrey and Palmer, *inter alios*, as serious propositions in the Sabbatarian debate.[4] Traske, on the other hand, is dismissed as a propagator of 'Jewish doctrines', 'a seducing imposter . . . and cunning deceiver', 'the father of the Jewish sect of the Traskites'.[5] Even when allowance is made for the strength of contemporary invective, the difference in attitude to Brabourne and Traske is quite evident, even though Brabourne is also on occasion called a Jew.[6] Heylyn was right to suggest that what linked Traske and Brabourne was their insistence that the seventh day should be observed as the Sabbath, but to associate them more closely, and to suggest that Brabourne was a Traskite,[7] is not warranted by the evidence. Regardless of all such differences, however, both Traske and Brabourne are legitimately regarded as seventeenth-century proto-Sabbatarians, whose work was fundamental to the emergence and development of the Seventh-day movement as a whole.

JOHN TRASKE AND THE TRASKITES

The story of John Traske (Trask, Thraske, Trash, or Thrasco, 1585–1636) and his followers has been recounted, with varying detail

[3] Ussher to John Ley, cited in Nicholas Bernard, *The Judgement Of the Late Archbishop of Armagh, and Primate of Ireland . . . Of the Sabbath, and observation of the Lords Day . . .* (1657), 107.

[4] Thomas Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain, from the Birth of Jesus Christ until the year 1648* (1655), xi. 144; White, *Treatise, passim*; Ley, *Sunday a Sabbath, passim*, but esp. chs. 3 and 20; Cawdrey and Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum, passim.*

[5] Edward Norice, *The New Gospel not the True Gospel . . .* (1638), 1; *The History of King-Killers* (1719), 34.

[6] e.g. *CSPD* 1634–5, 126. White noted that 'this Jewish Sabbatarian finds already many idle and giddy-brained Christians to imbrace his book': White, *Examination . . . of a Lawlesse Pamphlet*, 3.

[7] *King-Killers*, 38; H.E. Phillips, 'An Early Stuart Judaising Sect', *TJHSE* 15 (1946), 65, 68.

and from various perspectives, on several previous occasions.[8] In view of its contextual significance for the development of Seventh-day Sabbatarianism, however, it must be repeated again, both to note its main features, and to emphasize aspects of Traske's work which warrant more attention. This is necessary even though Traske's Sabbatarianism was not typical of that which was to follow. Indeed, the continuing failure to note a distinction between the Traskites and the wider English Seventh-day movement is in itself sufficient justification for returning again to Traske and the early Jacobean Sabbatarians. It is imprecise to say, as D.S. Katz does, for example, that Traske was 'the first of a long line of seventeenth-century Judaisers and Saturday-Sabbatarians'.[9] Seventh-day Men may, or may not, have been among those whom K.L. Parker describes as 'judaising Christians who practised an extremely rigorous Sunday observance or reverenced Saturday instead of Sunday'.[10] The evidence from sources later in the seventeenth century indicates that while a few Seventh-day observers may have slipped back into Judaism the majority did not and were embarrassed and felt compromised by those who did. Traske himself was undoubtedly a Judaizer, at least during one period of his life, even though the charge may have been laboured by some of his enemies.[11]

Although the broad outline of Traske's life seems clear enough, the attempt to arrive at an accurate understanding of his theology and its development is complicated by two factors. In the first place, the contemporary evidence cannot always be relied upon as being objective. Of the five major seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century sources of information on Traske and the Traskites, four are to some degree evidently antagonistic or hostile.[12] B.R. White,

[8] White, *TCHS* 20/7: 223–33; D.S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603–1655* (Oxford, 1982), 18–34; Parker, *The English Sabbath*, 161–4. See also W.B. Trask, *The Traske Family in England* (Boston, Mass., 1900).

[9] Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 34.

[10] Parker, *The English Sabbath*, 169; cf. 'These judaizing Christians . . . observed Saturday according to the Jewish sabbath laws', 161.

[11] Cf. B.R. White's conclusion that 'Traske only held "Traskite" opinions, namely, that the Mosaic Law concerning foods and the Saturday Sabbath were binding upon Christians, during one brief period of his life in London'; White, *TCHS* 20/7: 223. This was a 'lapse into Judaism'. But these two doctrines of themselves may not be sufficient ground to sustain the charge. It would appear that Traske's Judaism consisted of more detailed observance of other Levitical laws.

[12] B.D. [John Falconer], *A Briefe Refutation of John Traskes Judaical and Novel Fancyes* (St Omer, 1618); Norice, *The New Gospel*; Pagitt, *Heresiography*; *King-Killers*; various references in *CSPD*, 1618 to 1639; cf. SM 581. In addition to the State

commenting on Traske's reported theology, fairly remarks, 'It is not clear how far such allegations were the garbled and inaccurate reports of enemies.'[13] All the more recent accounts of Traske's activity depend heavily on one or more of these early sources. This uncertainty impinges directly on the important matter of Traske's Sabbatarian theology and its origins. On the basis of these sources, Traske's Sabbatarian views have been traced traditionally to an esoteric experience of one of his disciples which Traske is alleged to have accepted somewhat credulously, and perhaps even without demanding the scriptural warrant he is reputed to have required for all doctrine and practice. Other evidence, as we shall see, suggests the equally plausible alternative that Traske may have advocated Sabbatarian views in various parts of the country before coming to London. Parker observes in this respect that he 'became notorious as a travelling preacher, spreading heterodox and judaical teaching'.[14]

Secondly, the attribution to Traske in the early literature of an extremely wide variety of unorthodox theological opinions must give rise to some caution. While it is impossible to ignore the early records, much of what they say of Traske's views and their impact would appear to be speculative, if not deliberately intended to paint a picture of the bizarre. Beyond the observance of Saturday and abstinence from the unclean meats of the Mosaic Law, themselves matters of heretical import as Traske discovered to his cost, he is also said to have maintained other views, which even by seventeenth-century standards would have to be regarded as extreme. According to one source, he held that a true minister of Christ could not teach error, and that to doubt the teaching of such a minister amounted to sin.[15] He is said to have regarded himself as the only 'Micaiah' beyond error, and Returne Hebdon, one of 'his distracted gang', as Antipas of the book of Revelation 'sent to discover Antichrist'.[16] Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of Christ should be celebrated annually on 'the fourteenth of March moon' to coincide with the Jewish Passover, and should

Papers, Falconer and Pagitt appear to be the most reliable. Evidence of the bias inherent in some of the sources is illustrated in the *King-Killers*, which includes Knox, Milton, Wyclif, and Hobbes among those worthy of condemnation, as well as John Owen, Obadiah Sedgwick, Nathaniel Homes, and Francis Rous.

[13] White, *TCHS* 20/7: 225.
[14] Parker, *The English Sabbath*, 162.
[15] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 188.
[16] *King-Killers*, 35–7.

be followed by the eating of unleavened bread for seven days.[17] Some of Traske's followers were reported to wear sackcloth and ashes, and some to eat bread with 'quaking' and drink water with 'trembling' after a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 12: 18.[18] This would no doubt have been in the attempt to reach the state of 'Grace', since those who had attained such a state could not sin any more. Traskites were said to be involved with the daily observation of various aspects of Jewish law which they applied to such commonplace activities as building, planting, weaving, and farming.[19] In complete contrast, the sources say that Traske eventually turned to Antinomianism and Familism,[20] thus repudiating the position he had taken after renouncing his 'Judaisme', and denounced preachers who 'made any use of the Law in their teaching . . . as legalists, justitiaries, messengers of Moses . . . and worse than Jews'.[21] To distinguish fact from fiction in relation to what Traske and his followers actually believed and practised is obviously not easy.

John Traske was born *c.*1585, in East Coker, Somerset.[22] Described later by a contemporary as 'a Puritan minister lately grown half a Jew', his first recorded occupation was that of schoolmaster.[23] It seems that he had been ordained *c.*1611 by the Bishop of Salisbury, after having earlier been refused by the Bishop of Bath and Wells on the grounds that he was unsuitable.[24]* At one point he referred to himself as having been a preacher at Axminster in Devon, which must have been prior to 1615.[25] In these early years he had become known to the episcopal authorities in Devon, where he claimed to have lectured and preached extensively, as a purveyor of 'erroneous fancies'.[26] In 1615 he appeared in London, where he published his first book *A Pearle for a Prince, or a Princely Pearl* (1615), a moderate defence of paedobaptism, and where he was imprisoned briefly

[17] [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 7, 57–8. [18] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 185.
[19] *King-Killers*, 36.
[20] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 198; Norice, *The New Gospel*, 7.
[21] Norice, *The New Gospel*, 2.
[22] 1585 is preferable to the earlier date of 1583 sometimes suggested. A John Traske, son of Lionell Traske, was baptized on 15 Oct. 1585 at East Coker, and married in the same parish in 1606. This accords with information given by Traske when remarrying in London in 1617; see Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 18.
[23] [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 3, 9; Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 184.
[24] White, *TCHS* 20/7: 223, citing PRO, SP/16/72, fo. 45; cf. Fuller *Church-History*, x. 76.
[25] John Traske, *The Power of Preaching* (1623), title-page.
[26] [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 10; *HMC*, Exeter (1916), 95.

in Newgate for 'going up and down as a wandering minister'.[27] The charge is significant.

In April 1616 William Cotton, Bishop of Exeter, refused to endorse the application of John Hazard as city lecturer because he had been 'a companion with Trasque' and had 'preached false doctrine'. Hazard protested, saying that at Lyme (Regis) he had twice publicly refuted 'the erroneous fancies of Trasque' and that the whole town could, if necessary, 'witness the same'.[28] Cotton had before this been concerned with evidence of 'Jewism' in the diocese, and a connection seems not impossible, particularly since Traske's London Judaizing may have included keeping the Passover.[29] Katz believes that a reference to Traske's 'aboad with Maister Drake in Devonshire'[30] alludes to this period in his life, and although direct evidence is lacking, it is certainly possible that the later, open appearance of Seventh-day views in Exeter and Tiverton may have stemmed from this period.[31]

Something similar may be said about events in the diocese of Ely. In 1614 several parishioners from five parishes were presented to the consistory courts for attending meetings held by 'a strange preacher, called Mr Traske' in Littleport, Chettisham, and Ely itself.[32] One reference in the diocesan records refers to a meeting at Littleport conducted by 'Mr Traske who had not a licence to preach'. Parishioners from Downham were also present at the meeting, and again it may be significant that Sabbatarianism was specified in Downham conventicles reported in 1669.[33] It may have been purely coincidental that it was the Bishop of Ely who was nominated by Charles I to produce an answer to Brabourne's second work advocating the seventh day, which he had boldly dedicated to the King.[34]

[27] W. Le Hardy (ed.), *Calendar to the Sessions Records (Middlesex)*, NS iii: *1615–1616* (1937), 107. Traske was detained by a warrant from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of London, Ely, and Rochester.

[28] *HMC*, Exeter, 95–6.

[29] *HMC*, Salisbury, x (1904), 450–1; cf. Phillips, *TJHSE* 15, 65.

[30] Possibly John Drake of Musbury (d. 1628), or one of his sons, William Drake of Colyton (d. 1639), or Sir John Drake of Musbury (d. 1635), whose eighth daughter, Anne, was the third wife of Sir Richard Strode of Cattistock, Dorset, who later employed Traske as chaplain; see below, 150, 153.

[31] Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 19; [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 10. On Seventh-day views in Devon, see below, Ch. 4.

[32] EDR B/2/35, fos. 3^{r}, 76^{v}–78^{r}, 113^{v}, 114^{r}, 190^{r,v}.

[33] EDR B/2/35, fo. 62^{r}; *OR* i. 35. Further details on Traske's work in the Ely diocese will be found in Ch. 9.

[34] F. White, *Treatise*, in reply to Theophilus Brabourne, *A Defence of that most Ancient, and Sacred ordinance of* GODS, *the Sabbath Day* . . . (1632).

By 1617 Traske had become established in London, where he gained a reputation for powerful preaching. 'He preached repentance so earnestly, that he caused many of his auditors to weep, yea to roar,' one account records.[35] Fuller remarked, somewhat uncharitably, that his voice had 'more strength than anything else he delivered'.[36] A key element in his work appears to have been that he adopted the practice of categorizing all men into one or the other of the three states of Nature, Repentance, and Grace. To recover the lost from the state of Nature, he preached Repentance, explaining that this condition was not to be maintained for the remainder of a believer's life, but only until the 'third estate was obtained . . . and that once gained, they . . . should have no more sorrow, but all Joy'.[37] Presumably this was because the third estate brought entrance 'into the Holy City' and a state of sinlessness.[38] The Calvinism implicit in Traske's theology is apparent here, and it is not difficult to see, given the general religious climate of the age, that he would have attracted a considerable following. From the meagre evidence that has survived it is impossible to determine precisely how large this following was, but the records that do exist suggest that Traskite congregations may soon have been established in several parts of the country. One contemporary account records that 'many people' had been 'confirmed' in Traske's 'Jewish opinions'.[39] At about this time, Traske selected four followers 'of the Third Estate' to assist him in his labours, and he ordained them by laying on of hands, 'in Wycliffe's style', to note the comment of one contemporary.[40] Three of the four were Hamlet Jackson, a tailor, Returne Hebdon (or Hebden), a 'gentleman's son', and Christopher Sands, whose name appears in most of the sources as having been instrumental in convincing others of Traskite views.[41]

Traske's determination to have scriptural authority for all doctrine and every aspect of daily life led him naturally enough to his

[35] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 184. [36] Fuller, *Church History*, x. 77.
[37] *King-Killers*, 34–5; cf. *Dissenters and Schismaticks Ex pos'd* (1715), 86.
[38] *King-Killers*, 34–5.
[39] [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 3. In 1636 Traskites were still holding meetings in London and many other parts, *CSPD* 1635–6, 242–3; Bodl. MS Add. C.303, fo. 39.
[40] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 190. According to Pagitt, Traske's mandate to his disciples included healing the sick by anointing with oil.
[41] Ibid. 189–90; *King-Killers*, 37–41. Cf. Returne Hebdon, *A Guide to the Godly* (1648), sig. A2. The name of Traske's fourth ordinand has not been preserved. *

'singular opinion concerning the old Sabbath', as well as to the 'Mosaical difference of meats'.[42] It has generally been held that Traske came to a knowledge of the seventh day in 1617 through Hamlet Jackson, who is said to have been convinced himself as a result of seeing 'a shining light about him' while travelling in the country on a Saturday. Jackson, who had already been convinced of the seventh day in theory, was now constrained to observe it, and is said to have persuaded Traske likewise. The Traskites were at this time already observing Sunday in a 'Judaical' manner, according to one source, as well as practising other requirements of the Mosaic Law, and were soon persuaded by Traske to abandon the first day in favour of the seventh.[43] This unusual and in some respects doubtful series of events has been accepted uncritically by both contemporary and later historians of the Traskite movement.[44] It should, perhaps, be reconsidered in the light of Traske's activities in Devon and Cambridgeshire prior to his appearance in London in 1615. One less well-known account of the period suggests that Traske, 'a violent Sabbatarian', may have adopted Seventh-day beliefs before his ordination.[45]

Whatever the origin of Traske's Sabbatarianism, his settled reasons for observing the Saturday Sabbath were threefold, namely, that the Seventh-day Sabbath had been instituted at Creation, that it was required by the moral law of the Ten Commandments, and that it had not been abrogated by Christ in the New Testament.[46] The essence of this was that the fourth commandment specified that it was the seventh day of the week which was to be observed as the Sabbath, an injunction which Traske regarded as a law 'unrepealed by Christ and necessarily now to be observed by Christians'.[47] On this basis Traske and his followers adopted the seventh day, accepting the authority of the fourth commandment *in toto*, both in its command to observe the seventh day and in its direction to work on the remaining six days of the week, including the first.[48]

[42] [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 3–4.

[43] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 189–91; *King-Killers*, 37, 39, 40.

[44] Cf. White, *TCHS* 20/7: 225; Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 21; Parker, *The English Sabbath*, 161–2.

[45] David Lloyd, *Memoires of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings & Deaths of those . . . Excellent Personages that Suffered . . . for the Protestant Religion* (1668), 164.

[46] Traske himself left no literature defending his Sabbatarian views. The information comes from [Falconer], *Briefe Refutation*, 21, 26.

[47] Ibid. 4. [48] *King-Killers*, 37.

The Traskites were thus established as part of the fringe element of the English Jacobean religious scene. One contemporary says that Traske's opinions were shared 'by many other men and women',[49] and early in 1618 John Chamberlain wrote to Lord Carleton, noting the main Traskite doctrines of Saturday observance and abstinence from swine's flesh, and commenting: 'You will not think what a number of foolish followers he hath in this town, and in some other parts.'[50] Evidently within a year Traske and his disciples had been successful in propagating their views within the city of London and, although the evidence is tantalizingly scarce, beyond it as well.

The names of only a few of Traske's followers have survived. Hamlet Jackson, who is said to have been barely literate, appears to have been his chief aide. Jackson, as we shall see, seems to have been more inclined to Judaism than Traske himself.[51] Returne Hebdon came originally from Holmeshurst in Sussex, leaving a family inheritance 'for the commandment of God's sake, by his desiring to rest on the seventh day'.[52] Christopher Sands is said to have converted a minister, Mr Wright, and his wife, and also a Mary Chester.[53] As late as 1635 Sands appeared before the Court of High Commission on a charge of Judaizing.[54] Mary Chester also appears in the records in 1635 as a 'Jewess' imprisoned in Bridewell on account of her 'errors in holding certain Judaical tenets touching the Sabbath and distinction of meats'. In December of that year the Court of High Commission ordered her release on bond subject to her 'acknowledgement and recantation' of the said 'errors'.[55] It seems that she reverted to her 'heretical views' soon after being released.[56] A glazier, James Holly, appears as a Saturday-keeper in 1618,[57]* and the anonymous author of the later *History of King-Killers* also mentions William Hilliard as a convert of Hamlet Jackson.[58] Edward Norice refers to a posthumous work by Traske published by Rice Boye, and John Taylor describes a widow Constable of Brentford 'turn'd from a Nonconformist to a Jew'.[59] Apart from a few incidental and unspecified references, this accounts for most of the Traskites currently known, with one exception.

[49] [Falconer], *Brief Refutation*, 3. [50] *CSPD* 1611–18, 521.
[51] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 189, 191.
[52] Hebdon, *A Guide to the Godly*, Ep. Ded., sig. A2[r].
[53] *King-Killers*, 41. [54] *CSPD* 1635–6, 88. [55] Ibid. 132.
[56] Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 195. [57] *CSPD* 1611–18, 548. [58] *King-Killers*, 41.
[59] Norice, *The New Gospel*, 4, 6, 50; John Taylor, *A Swarme of Sectaries and Schismatiques* (1641), 7. Norice also mentions a 'Mr G.', 7.