CHAPTER FOUR

SABBATARIAN NON-CONFORMITY
IN RESTORATION ENGLAND

The trial and execution of John James in 1661, the first Seventh-Day man to suffer so publicly for his belief in the Old Testament law and the Sabbath, was a sobering tragedy that brought about a complete reorientation of the movement for the Saturday-Sabbath. Dr Peter Chamberlen, the most prominent among the founders of the Mill Yard congregation, was already back at court, showing himself unwilling to continue championing openly a cause which could have such fatal effects. The radicals, many of whom were Fifth Monarchy men or their supporters, withdrew from Mill Yard and began another Seventh-Day congregation at Bell Lane. But it was recognized with the departure of Chamberlen that what was lacking was a leader, a man not only of spiritual qualities but one who had the necessary authority and organizational abilities to weather the difficult years which all non-conformists knew stretched endlessly ahead of them.

Such a leader was found in Francis Bampfield (1615-1684), who not only would put the Seventh-Day men on a sure institutional footing, but whose personal interests would very largely determine the direction that Saturday-Sabbatarianism would take. Most importantly, Bampfield’s understanding of the question of the Saturday-Sabbath in the wider context of the validity of the Old Testament for Christians ensured that this would be an important theme in the next century and thereby fuel the revival of the Seventh-Day Sabbath itself by nineteenth-century millenarians who like him were unhappy about the ambivalent attitude shown by the Established Church and sects towards what had always been presented as an alienable part of Protestant tradition.

Francis Bampfield in any case is one of the most interesting figures in Restoration non-conformity, a member of a distinguished Devon family, a graduate of Wadham College, and a Royalist during the Civil War. Indeed, this last fact was still thought to be extraordinary in the eighteenth century when Thomas Crosby, one of the earliest Baptist biographers, noted that:

---

One thing was very remarkable, if not singular in him; that though he joined heartily in the reformation of the church in those times, yet he was zealous against the parliament’s war, and Oliver’s usurpation; constantly asserting the royal cause under all those changed, and suffering for it.  

Indeed, Bampfield testified in his autobiography that he read the prayer book service in his parish longer than any minister in the country until prevented from doing so by the army. After the Restoration, Bampfield suffered as a non-conformist, and was arrested for preaching at Shaftesbury in 1663, remaining a prisoner in Dorchester jail for nearly nine years. It was during this period of imprisonment that Bampfield became a Saturday-Sabbatarian, and managed to gather a church around him in Dorchester jail, preaching to visitors from his cell. After his release, Bampfield founded a Sabbatharian congregation which eventually settled at Pinners’ Hall in London.

Francis Bampfield, like Henry Jessey and Peter Chamberlen, exemplifies the essentially respectable quality of extreme Sabbatharianism. His brother Thomas was a speaker of the House of Commons and represented Exeter in three Cromwellian parliaments and in the Convention Parliament of 1660. His eldest brother Sir John Bampfield was created a baronet in 1641, and the latter’s son played an active part in promoting the Restoration. Bampfield was succeeded in his ministry by Edward and Joseph Stennett, father and son, who similarly were pillars of respectable non-conformity. Indeed, what is instructive about the Saturday-Sabbatarian movement in the period after the Restoration is the way in which this group adapted to the new and more oppresive conditions. During the Civil War and Interregnum, we saw a disparate group of men united only in their belief that the seventh day ought to be worshipped as the Christian Sabbath, linked with Fifth Monarchist plans for the reform of the law based on the Old Testament in which the divine commandments were first revealed. But after the Restoration, these hopes for change were dashed with astonishing clarity. The Fifth Monarchists were suppressed; the Quakers began to preach pacifism. The Saturday-Sabbatarians tried to make the difficult transition to respectable non-conformity.

---

4 Ibid., s.v. "Sir Coplestone Bampfield (1636-1691)".
5 Ibid., s.v. "Joseph Stennett (1663-1713)".