
THE VICAR'S A POET!

George Herbert is a name to put alongside Will Shakespeare or Ben Johnson. For those who are muttering 'never heard of him', just think of the hymn 'Let all the world/ In every corner sing', which he wrote, along with several other hymns which are still popular, even if they are well over 300 years old. In the course of his short life he was a graduate of Cambridge University, a favoured politician of King James, a distinguished poet of the so-called 'metaphysical' school, and most crucially a much-loved parish priest at Bemerton.

He was born in Wales but grew up in a wealthy family in England. As a student he felt called to ordination, but when he graduated he was drawn instead into the government of the time. As a protégé of King James

he could have pursued a career in government, but that youthful call persisted and after a while he turned instead to the ministerial priesthood of the Church. It was an era when many clergy were absentee incumbents, paying someone else to do the parish work while they lived elsewhere, but Herbert set himself to be a true parish priest, noted for his pastoral care and practical support of his parishioners. The whole of his ministry was fulfilled in that one parish, until he died at 39 from what we would now call tuberculosis. It is of course his hymns for which he is chiefly remembered today, though his Collected Poems are also regarded as jewels of English poetry.

