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Hitler's Forerunner

BY THE REV. A. W. PARSONS.

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THE title of this article recently appeared outside my Church as a subject for a Men's Meeting. I based what I wanted to say about it on a text in Deut. viii. 2 : " Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God hath led thee." I began by explaining that when I was in Leicester I was invited by a body of Trustees to preach a special sermon. The invitation to do so was accompanied by this little note. " Thomas Hayne of Christ Church, London, by his will dated the 28th September, 1640, gave 20s. yearly for a preacher in Leicester, for a sermon to be preached in some Church near the midst of the Town of Leicester, near the time of the year in which the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1588, for a thanksgiving to God for that great victory to this land."

I wondered whether Thomas Hayne had served as a very young man in the fight against Philip of Spain. Did he leave money fifty-two years afterwards because he felt that the people of his own day had already forgotten one of God's greatest interventions in English history? Did he recall the words of Shakespeare : " God's goodness hath been great to thee. Let never day nor night unhallowed pass but still remember what the Lord hath done " ? At all events Thomas Hayne left his money, and so a poor preacher now gets more than one pound to remind Leicester people of the way the Lord their God had led them. At that time Leicester only boasted of a military force of ten pikemen, yet two thousand men of Leicester Town and County were fitted out and sent to Tilbury Camp! Whether Thomas Hayne was one of them or not he was quite right in taking steps to have such a marvellous deliverance from invasion remembered. There is a religious use of memory. Not only in the time of Moses but to-day God is calling His people to recollection. " O God, we have heard with our ears, and our Fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that

thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them," is the best foundation for our further prayer: "*O Lord, arise, help us, and deliver us for thine honour.*" I believe if we are faithful as a nation to God that He will do for us in these days what He has done in the past. Our statesmen go on warning us of the danger of invasion. Our gallant and high-hearted airmen go on bombing the invasion ports; our seamen and our soldiers and home guards keep watch and ward. It may hearten some of us to remember what happened over three hundred and fifty years ago. It should help us to realize the guiding hand of God. Religion simply means the guiding of God in History and in the Individual Life. The late Bishop Creighton once wrote something like this: "The best cordial for drooping spirits is a good dose of history." History is His Story. Readers of **THE CHURCHMAN** believe that "God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year." This is clearly seen in the remarkable event which happened in the last week of July, 1588.

Queen Mary of England breathed her last on November 17th, 1558. Dr. Wylie, in his *History of Protestantism*, gives the following account: "The Parliament was then in session, and Heath, Archbishop of York and Chancellor of England, notified to the house the death of the Queen. The members started to their feet and shouted out: 'God save Queen Elizabeth.' The news of Mary's decease speedily circulated through London: in the afternoon every steeple sent forth its peal of joy: in the evening bonfires were lighted, and the citizens rejoiced. Men, as they met on the highways, grasped each other by the hand and exchanged mutual congratulations. The nation awoke as from a horrible nightmare. It saw a future approaching in which there would be no more spies prowling from house to house, officers dragging men and women to loathsome gaols"—England it seems, under a Catholic Queen, had its own Gestapo—"executioners torturing them on racks and binding them with iron chains to stakes and burning them; no more Latin Litanies, muttered masses, and shaven priests; it saw a future in which the Gospel should be preached in the mother tongue of old England and quiet and prosperity would again bless the afflicted land."

In the following year, 1559, the Prayer Book, then only

ten years old, was restored and for the next eleven years Protestantism gradually took root in England. Then in 1570 the Pope (Pius V), struck a blow at Queen Elizabeth by excommunicating her, and deposing her from her throne. These are some of the words of the Bill: "Supported, therefore, by His authority whose pleasure it was to place us, although unequal to so great a burden, on this supreme throne of justice; we do, out of the fulness of our Apostolic power, declare the aforesaid Elizabeth, being a heretic, and a favourer of heretics, and her adherents in the realms aforesaid, to have incurred the sentence of anathema, and to be cut off from the unity of the Body of Christ; and, moreover, we do declare her to be deprived of her pretended title to the Kingdom . . . and we do command all and every the noblemen, subjects, people and others aforesaid, that they presume not to obey her, or her monitions, mandates, and laws, and those who shall do the contrary, we do involve in the same sentence of anathema." One John Felton, was caught in the act of affixing this Bill on the gate of the palace of the Bishop of London. He was hanged as a traitor; but Pope Leo XIII, selected the Jubilee year of Queen Victoria, to beatify this man branded as a traitor, as a martyr of the Roman Church.¹

Plot after plot to murder the Queen was discovered and Lord Acton, a Roman Catholic, in a letter to *The Times*, of November 9th, 1874, says: "Pius V, the only Pope who has been proclaimed a Saint for many centuries, having deprived Elizabeth, commissioned an assassin to take her life." In a second letter dated November 24th, Lord Acton adds that he had "long been tempted to doubt the accuracy of the story" (the suggested assassination of Queen Elizabeth by an instrument of the Papacy), but he adds that the objections to it are not valid.

On December 21st, 1585, a remarkable scene took place in the House of Commons. Sir Christopher Hatton proposed that before the members separated they should join him in a prayer for the Queen's preservation. The four hundred members all rose and knelt on the floor of the House repeating Hatton's words after him, sentence by sentence. Almost at the same time as this scene took place in Parliament, the famous Jesuit, Father Parsons, drew up an account

¹ See Art. John Felton: *Dict. of National Biography*.

of the condition of England, for the use of the Pope and Philip II of Spain. Here are some extracts: "There is now no orthodox Catholic in the whole realm who supposes that he is any longer bound in conscience to obey the Queen. Books on the occasion have been written and published by us, in which we prove that it is not only lawful for Catholics, but their positive duty, to fight against the Queen and heresy *when the Pope bids them.*" Again, he wrote: "Various Catholics have tried to kill her at the risk of their own lives and are still trying." It is hoped that Herr Hitler may not believe the next statement: "An invading force can be landed with ease." . . . "The expenses shall be repaid to His Holiness and the Catholic King out of the property of the heretics and the Protestant clergy." In response to this appeal, for the next three years a stream of prayer ascended from the churches, cathedrals, and oratories of Spain and Rome. Every noble family in Spain sent one or more of its sons to fight against Elizabeth. The King of Spain, assisted by the Fuggers, emptied his treasury. The Pope contributed his blessing. Neither time, nor toil, nor money was spared to fit out such a fleet as the world had never before seen. Hume tells us that the long line of coast extending from Cape Finisterre to the extreme point of Sicily was converted into one vast building yard. At intervals along this line of 1500 miles, might be seen keels laid down of a size deemed colossal! The entire seaboard rang without intermission with the clang of hammer and axe, and the voices of myriads of men employed in building the mightiest navy yet known to bear the legionaries of Spain, the soldiers of the Inquisition, over the seas to heretical England. The English navy consisted of about twenty-eight sail. The Armada numbered more than one hundred and thirty vessels, great and small, equipped and provisioned for six months. On board the vessels were about 8,000 sailors, 2,088 galley slaves for rowing, 20,000 soldiers besides noblemen and gentlemen volunteers and 2,650 cannon. There were also 180 priests on board the ships, but only 85 surgeons and surgeon's assistants for the whole fleet! The Armada set sail on May 14th. Froude says: "Infinite pains had been taken with the spiritual state of everyone on board." In *English Seamen* (p. 247) he remarks: "No impure thing, specially no impure woman, was to approach the yards or

ships. Swearing, quarrelling, gambling, were prohibited under terrible penalties. The galleons were named after the apostles and saints to whose charge they were committed, and every seaman and soldier made his confession and communicated on going on board." Katherine Anthony in *Queen Elizabeth* (p. 201) says: "Hundreds of camp-followers went on board, as they would have done in the Middle Ages. But at the last moment the Duke of Medina, though himself a court gallant, ordered all the prostitutes on land. The tears of the frivolous 'were comforted with the report that there were comely wenches in England,' the Pope's vicar gave his blessing, and the Armada sailed."

In spite of the pains taken to make the expedition spiritually worthy of its purpose there was much less care taken of its material provision. Nobody had thought of the possible carelessness and roguery of the contractors and purveyors. The water had been taken in three months before the fleet sailed. It was found foul and stinking. The salt beef, pork and fish were putrid, and the bread was full of maggots and cockroaches. They had to put back for fresh supplies and thus it was not until July 23rd, 1588, that the proud Armada streamed across the Bay of Biscay with a fair wind for the mouth of the English Channel. News was brought of the approach of this fleet, disposed in the form of a crescent, the horns of which were seven miles asunder. When this news arrived the English naval officers were playing bowls. Drake's reply to the messenger: "There will be time to finish our game and beat the Spaniards too," is typical of the cool courage of our people. There was no panic, for all were filled with the desire to fight for home and faith and freedom. The Queen herself visited the troops stationed at Tilbury, under the command of the Earl of Leicester, and in a speech declared that she would perish in battle rather than survive the ruin of the Protestant faith, and the slavery of her people.

On July 29th the Armada was off the Lizard. Warning beacons blazed on every hill to announce its approach.

"Far on the deep the Spaniards saw
Along each southern shire,
Cape beyond cape in endless range,
Those twinkling points of fire."

The last Sunday in July broke (July 31st), and on that day the little navy of Old England manned by about nine thousand hardy seamen, hung on the rear of the great fleet, and : "The feathers of the Spaniard were plucked one by one." "We shall miss the meaning of this high epic story," writes Froude, "if we do not realize that both sides had the most profound conviction that they were fighting the battle of the Almighty. Two principles, freedom and authority, were contending for the guidance of mankind." So history repeats itself to-day.

The Armada was not a navy ; it was a transport fleet carrying soldiers to fight in England. The Spanish soldiers expected to board our vessels and fight on deck ; afterwards they hoped to land and give battle on shore. They had no idea of English vessels, English strategy, or even of Englishmen themselves. They were as unaware of what they had to meet as Herr Hitler has proved himself to be. The little English ships outsailed the great Spanish galleons and their guns could fire five shots to the Spaniards' one. Had it not been for the Queen's parsimony over rations and powder, the battle in the Channel would have been fought to a finish. As it was, the English vessels followed until their food and ammunition gave out. But there was, in fact, no longer any need to continue the pursuit. In the words of Katherine Anthony : "A great storm had arisen and the south wind had become a tearing, racing hurricane whose dread anger far outran the wrath of the Englishmen. The superstitious Spaniards ceased to struggle against their fate. They were half dead in spirit before they perished by shipwreck on the shores of Scotland and Ireland. In hundreds and thousands their naked bodies, robbed by the barbarous natives of the last stitch of clothing, lay, like white enormous larvae, thick along the beach. Only one third of the vessels and one half of the men ever reached Spain. The flower of Spanish chivalry had perished never to revive again."

The tragedy of the Armada was a great sermon preached to all nations of Europe as, in our day, the heroism of the small Greek army is proclaiming to a decadent Europe that men whose institutions are free will prove victorious over men who are simply regarded as pawns and puppets in the hands of a dictator. The text of that sermon was that

England had been saved by a Divine hand. All acknowledged the skill and daring of the English admirals, sailors, and soldiers, but all confessed that these alone could not have saved England. The Almighty arm had been stretched out. When the Queen went in State on the appointed Day of Thanksgiving to St. Paul's Cathedral, Dr. Pierce, Bishop of Salisbury, preached from the text: "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters."

To-day we are inclined to refuse to see the Hand of God in natural phenomena. The late Professor David Smith thought otherwise. He wrote: "Survey the course of history, and see if there has ever been a physical convulsion which did not synchronize with moral and spiritual commotion. There was an earthquake when the Lord was crucified; and even as He predicted, so contemporary history records that in the ensuing generation the Empire far and wide was visited by frequent earthquakes and "incessant dearths." England was seething with indignation at misrule and the humiliation which it had brought upon her, when the Great Plague, "a pestilence surpassing in horror any that during three centuries had visited the island, swept away in six months more than a hundred thousand human beings." It was in 1755, on the very eve of the Seven Years War, that Lisbon was engulfed by a tidal wave and an earthquake. In 1923, when humanity was shuddering at the devastation of the Great War, Japan was wrecked by an earthquake, and seven years later New Zealand was likewise visited; and other nations, rent with civil strife, were swept by floods and wasted by want. The outbreak of the present war was followed by one of the worst winters Europe has ever experienced. Herr Hitler recently pounced on Roumania's oil wells and God intervened with a destructive earthquake. We are learning to appreciate the declaration of Holy Scripture that when man sinned the very ground was cursed for his sake, and ever since "the whole creation has been groaning and travailing in pain together." It is no mere devout imagination but a law of nature, attested by age-long experience, that only when the peace of God possesses the hearts of men will the whole earth be quiet and at rest. Writing as I do on the verge of the Advent season I do not forget that earthquakes, eclipses, tempests, and other

natural phenomena are to be the heralds of His approach.

"Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord Thy God hath led thee." In the same book (Deut. xxv. 17), we find: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way." Amalek had tried to do to Israel what Catholic Spain tried to do to England, and Catholic Italy is doing to-day! Israel was not to forget it; it was to be remembered not for vengeance but for wisdom. There are persons and peoples and institutions that have shown their true character in history and they are not to be trusted any more. We know that in our own day there are parties and movements which, in the very soul of them are powers of darkness and of bondage, and can never be anything else, and that the Lord will have war with them from generation to generation. And it is not uncharitable to remember that and to make no terms with them. During the last war the editor of the *National Review* wrote a little known book, packed with facts, about the Pope, under the title: *The Roman Mischief Maker*. In Elizabeth's day there was treachery in Ireland, and we know how it is with the South of Ireland to-day. Catholic Italy also is against us, and if the Pope has not blessed their arms at least he is afraid to curse them. That is not uncharitableness or unchristian. It is just getting the heart of wisdom, which God means us to get from our experience.

Thou shalt remember! To remember is to feel gratitude. The Israelites were always forgetting. "They forgot God their Saviour." That was the burden of their prophets. Let us not forget. Let us remember that God's goodness hath been great to us and let us yield to Him thanksgiving. Then we shall await the onslaught of Hitler's hosts with trust in Almighty God and confidence in the courage of British men on sea and land and in the air, for "God is with us."

SPIRITUAL RELIGION

By Sir James Baillie, M.A., D.Phil. (Allen & Unwin) 1s. net.

A study of this essay, reprinted from *The Hibbert Journal* of April 1932, will be a help to many people. It falls into three parts, seeking to answer three questions: What is Spiritual Religion? What is the Procedure of Spiritual Religion? What is the Primary Condition of its maintenance? The answers to these questions are set out clearly and concisely with a conviction that in the bosom of the Christian Faith Spiritual Religion can best be realized.