

A Study in Origins.

ALTHOUGH the attitude of the modern historian is to suggest that there are no sharply dividing lines in history and no cataclysmic events, yet when we pass from the study of one epoch to that of another we cannot fail to be struck by the complete change in intellectual, political, social and moral outlook and atmosphere which has taken place between the age of one and the age of the other. The very fact that we talk of "the waning of the Middle Ages" shows that we cannot set a date to the end of that epoch; and though we have no doubt that what we understand as the Middle Ages came to an end three hundred years ago, some of the elements in the life of that time, some of its buildings and some of its pageantry, for instance, can still be found in the national life of to-day. On the other hand, what look to us like epoch-making events do seem to result and arise naturally from the wider and more general movements and trends of national life from which they are born.

This "Study in Origins", *Broadmead Church, Bristol, 1640-1690*, by Robert L. Child, B.D., B.Litt. and C. E. Shipley, (Kingsgate Press, 1s. net. paper, 2s. net. cloth) serves a twofold purpose. It commemorates the birth of a church, and tells the story of its earliest years with the vividness and authenticity born of first-hand acquaintance with original documents. But it shows, too, how the rise of this Bristol church was related to larger movements of English life and thought, was to a great extent consequent upon events which preceded its founding; and how, by the heroic spirit and passion for freedom in religion of its earliest members, it, in turn, was instrumental in the struggle for religious toleration which, within fifty years of its foundation, had been won.

To the modern man, the universe is an "expanding" one: his horizons are almost limitless; but men of the fifteenth century had an almost completely shut-in view of the world; they had a common religion and a common form of worship, and they did not readily accept new ideas. Then came the invention of printing and the multiplication of books; new lands were being discovered, and new theories of the world and its relation to the solar system advanced; an intellectual renaissance was taking place in Europe, and its influence was felt in England, where the ferment of new ideas began to stir the leaven of national consciousness; and at the beginning of the sixteenth century Tyndale's English New Testament which was "to

liberate into English life at the popular level a spiritual force of the first magnitude" was published.

Soon after the publication of Tyndale's Testament, Henry VIII began the process by which England severed her connection with Rome, and her monarch became head of the English Church. The result of this separation—not finally achieved till the reign of Elizabeth—was the authorisation by Parliament of the Book of Common Prayer, of the Thirty-nine Articles, of services in the vernacular, and the recognition of the monarch as supreme head of the English Church. This "Reformation Settlement" was not, however, a final solution, and Elizabeth's successor, James I, found on his accession in 1603 three distinct and antagonistic religious parties in England. There were the Church party, which included the great mass of the people who thought it represented a reasonable compromise with regard to the religious questions of the time; the Catholics, who, strong opponents of Protestantism, persisted in non-attendance at Church and were fined accordingly; and the Puritans, who considered that the Reformation was only half accomplished, that the Church was not Protestant enough, and who wished to abolish images and vestments and institute a simpler form of worship. It must be remembered that at this time toleration was hardly thought of; nearly all religious bodies persecuted if they could those who disagreed with them, and the Puritans were no more tolerant than the Church from which they began to separate. Not that separation came immediately; reform meant improvement within the Church, and there had been constant efforts to reform throughout the ages.

In many European countries at this time the theory of Divine Right was regarded as the basis of true kingship, and James I laid claim to this prerogative. The Tudors may have believed and acted as if they ruled by the will of God, but they managed to do so without alienating their people. The crown was, in fact, more secure at the death of Elizabeth than it had been for generations; and yet, within less than fifty years, a Stuart king was to be put to death by his people, his downfall having been brought about, to some extent, by his belief in this doctrine with its far-reaching implications. The theory was generally accepted, and James's Scottish subjects spoke of him as "God's silly vassal"; it was incorporated in the doctrine of the Church of England, and James, as head of the Church and a deeply religious man, clung to his authority and soon showed that he had no sympathy with the reformers, that he was, in fact, determined to "harry them out of the land". Many of them fled abroad, notably the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans, who fled to Holland.

During the reign of James, also, "affairs were silently but steadily moving towards that trial of strength between the Crown and the people of England which culminated in the Civil War." And now the struggle was becoming political as well as religious. Parliament passed a law declaring monopolies, a means employed by the king for raising money, to be illegal; it asserted its right to discuss all state affairs, a claim strongly disputed by James; but it had not secured the right of meeting regularly and the king could always win the semblance of a victory by dissolving Parliament. Thus the struggle between Crown and Parliament had begun when, in 1625, James was succeeded by his son Charles I, who, after four years of disputes, chiefly about taxation, dissolved his third parliament and decided to rule without calling another. During the following eleven years, as he could get no grants without calling Parliament, Charles resorted to various expedients for raising money, all within the existing law, but often harsh, unreasonable, and vexatious, among them the levy of Ship Money, which caused the trial of the Puritan, John Hampden, for his refusal to pay it. The case went against Hampden, but popular sympathy was with him and public opinion was hardening against the king, though open rebellion had not yet broken out. In religious matters Charles, using Archbishop Laud as his tool, secured the support of the Church party, but Laud was bitterly criticised by the English Puritans for his use of such courts as the Star Chamber and the Council of the North, for his indulgence in the matter of "lawful sports" on Sundays, and by the Scottish Puritans especially for his attempt to thrust the Prayer Book on them. The situation in Scotland was, indeed, so serious that open warfare was imminent, and in November, 1640, Charles summoned what was afterwards called the Long Parliament.

It was at this point in the national history, during the year 1640, that the Broadmead Church came into being by five people "covenanting that they would, in the strength of the Lord, come forth of the world and worship the Lord more purely, persevering therein to their end." Although there were not many Puritans in Bristol as yet ready for so drastic a step, by the date of the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, the new church had added some hundred and sixty to its membership.

As the second largest city in the kingdom, Bristol was perforce affected by the tides of thought and feeling which flowed through the nation as a whole, and by the momentous events which were shaping the future of England. Early in 1642, the king wrote to the mayor complaining of certain "upstarts in religion" and exhorting the citizens not to join his enemies. When the war broke out, however, the city was favourable to

the Parliamentary cause, and when the Royalist troops threatened its defences, Mrs. Dorothy Hazzard, one of the founders of Broadmead, helped to barricade the Frome Gate. During the course of the war, the city did fall to the king, and the members of the church fled to London, but when later it was recaptured by the Roundheads, "the church came home again".

A manuscript by Edward Terrill in the church archives has been drawn upon for the narrative of the early history of Broadmead. It tells of the "halcyon days of prosperity, liberty, peace" which the church enjoyed after the Civil War, and during the Commonwealth under the rule of Cromwell, with his belief in "liberty of conscience and liberty of the subject, two glorious things." But at the Restoration in 1660, the tide turned, and for some years the history of the church is an almost incredible story of suffering and persecution under the Clarendon Code, the "Disabilities of Dissenters". These faithful people were fined, imprisoned, and harried from one meeting place to another; and on November 29th, 1685, four years before religious toleration was incorporated in the Bill of Rights, they have to record: "Our Pastor died in Gloucester Jail, having been kept there for about two years and nine months, a prisoner unjustly and maliciously for the testimony of Jesus." The scenes of distress portrayed in the *Broadmead Records* typify suffering which was widespread and deep, and as well as being an inspiring record of the beginnings of an historic and famous Baptist Church, this book is of special interest to all Free Churchmen. As it points out, the main power of the Puritan movement was the "passion for freedom" and for "the Crown Rights of the Redeemer."

In a charming essay on *The Muse of History* Augustine Birrell says: "The historian's end is truthful narration. As for a moral, if he tell his story well, it will need none"; and one cannot do better than say at once that this book exemplifies the truth of Birrell's aphorism. One might, at the same time, draw attention to the significance of the parallel with the present times noted by Mr. Child in the Epilogue, when he points out that not only Free Churchmen, but every branch of the Christian Church is in common danger of destruction at the hands of a new and ruthless paganism. "It may be," he says, "that in the providence of God, this far-reaching and deadly challenge will prove the means whereby the Church will recover something of the unity which was wantonly sacrificed three centuries ago to the false ideal of uniformity."

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