A Puritan Work by Robert Browne

Among the documents printed by the Puritan leaders in *A Parte of a Register* in 1590 was one entitled *A Viewe of Antichrist his lawes and ceremonies in our English Church unreformed*. This work was of composite authorship and the first section was by "A. Gilbe". The first section was composed of four parts made up as follows:

(i) Page 55, Introduction.
(ii) Pages 56-7. A table headed "The booke of the generation of Antichrist the Pope . . ."
(iii) Pages 57-9. A table headed " . . . of the displaying of the Pope and poperie in our vnreformed Church of Engande . . ."
(iv) Pages 59-65. A table headed " . . . an hundred pointes of poperie, remayning . . ."

This last part, in which in sober fact 149 "pointes of poperie" were listed, also appeared in Antony Gilby's *A Pleasavnt Dialogue* published in 1581. It would appear, however, that some, at least, of this first section was written before the death of Archbishop Parker in 1575 since there was a reference to "The Pope of Lambeth . . . Matthewe of Canturburie." Gilby, an extreme Puritan, who had been one of the Frankfurt exiles, died in 1585. Another of his writings *A godly and zealous letter written by Mai. Antony Gilby, about anno 1570* was also printed in *A Parte of a Register*.

The second section of *A Viewe of Antichrist*, from the hand of one signing himself "T.W.", was also compiled in the form of a table "Of the bringing in of diuers of the popish corruptions, yet remayning in our Eng. Church." This too had also appeared in *A Pleasavnt Dialogue* with a note that it was "not put too of the authour."

The third and final section was unsigned and is transcribed in full below. (Transcript "A.") It seems possible to date it approximately from two pieces of internal evidence. A *terminus a quo* is given by the reference to the "article of the Bishop of Londons" which was published, according to Strype, on January 29th, 1581. In addition, the *terminus ad quem*, the close of the 23rd year of
the reign of Queen Elizabeth I mentioned in the concluding prayer, was on November 17th, 1581.

The fact that the last section of *A Viewe of Antichrist* was written between the early spring and late autumn of 1581 became far more significant when it was noted that a lengthy portion of it, from line 7 of the transcript, “First, we are taught . . .” to line 102, “newe and (y)early iniunctions” was reproduced, with certain modifications, in Robert Browne’s undoubted work of *A True and Short Declaration*.

Two main lines of reasoning indicate that Browne was not merely incorporating a Puritan anti-episcopal tract by another writer but that, in fact, he was reproducing, and significantly modifying, an earlier work of his own.

The first is chronological. Dr. Albert Peel shewed that Browne was still a Puritan during the early days of his stay in Norwich since he signed the Puritan “Supplication of Norwich men to the Queenes Matie” (c. 1580). On the other hand, the first dated reference to Browne as a Separatist was in a letter of Bishop Freke of Norwich in April, 1581. Freke said that Browne had been “lately apprehended, on complaint of many godly preachers, for delivering unto the people corrupt and contentious doctrine. Furthermore, his supporters among “the vulgar sort of people” were “assembling themselves together . . . in private houses and conventicles.” The “godly” preachers were the Puritan party of the day. Into such a chronological framework this writing, if it were produced in, perhaps, March 1581, would quite neatly fit.

The second, and more conclusive, reason for ascribing this work to Browne, is based on his own writing *A True and Short Declaration*. Throughout that work he insisted that the prime cause of his separation was hostility to the authority and office of the bishops. Secondly, Browne claimed that before the final act of separation and the taking of the covenant at Norwich he not only sought to win assent for his views by spoken argument but that he “also set downe in writing his principles.” Above all, far from giving any hint that he was interpolating the writing of another man, he appeared to stress that the whole of the parallel section in his own work was his. The following is the passage which preceded without any break between, the introduction of the excerpt from the earlier work. “He first considered the state of Cambridge, howe the church of God was planted therein. For he judged that the church was to call and receive, if he should be there chosen and appointed to preach. Then did he thinck on this, whoe should be chiefest, or have charge before others, to looke to such matters. For the bishops take vpon them the chieftie, but to be called and authorised by them, he thought it vnlawfuefull. And why he vwas of this minde, he had these & such like vwarraantes: namelie thei
should be chiefest, which partake vnto vs the chiefest graces, and use of their callinges. And that doeth Christ . . ."

No one reading this passage would doubt that what followed was the fruit of his own thinking. Furthermore, in his version of lines 37-8 of the transcript from *A Viewe of Antichrist* which there read "This is not only against the wickednes of the Bishops," he rephrased the clause 21 "This he ivdged, not onelie toe be against the Vvickedness of the bishopes . . ." This was surely an explicit claim to the authorship of the passage.

Two further comments may be added. First, no one has ever accused Brown of being incapable of composing his own invective and abuse, and it seems, a priori, highly unlikely that he would adopt the work of some unknown Puritan whose writing was not entirely satisfactory for his purpose, modify it where necessary, and yet slavishly copy whole paragraphs of the remainder almost verbatim. On the other hand, if the author of this last section of *A Viewe of Antichrist* were Browne it would certainly explain why the editors of *A Parte of a Register* allowed the other two sections to retain their authors' identity and suppressed it in the third. It were better that the work appeared, without father and without mother, than that it should have so notorious a parentage.

In Transcript "B" is given the section of the parallel passage from *A True· and Short Declaration* where significant modifications were made to the original in *A Viewe of Antichrist*. The remainder of this passage was closely reproduced by Browne. In Transcripts "A" and "B", spelling oddities apart, the close verbal parallels are italicised. Although a comparison of the two versions will shew that in some degree the correspondence of thought between the two is even greater than the verbal parallels indicate there are, nevertheless, certain important differences.

The fundamental difference between the two versions is in the definition of "the church" in the quotation of Mt. xviii 17 "Tell the Church." In Transcript "A" it was stated, in lines 17-18, "By this Church is meant the Ministers and Elders that are chosen out of the Congregatiō to watch over the rest of the flocke." In the same context, in Transcript "B" lines 13-14 "the Church" is evidently "the voice of the Vvhole people, guided bie the elders and forwardest." Thus, in his interpretation of this classic passage for the seat of final authority in the Church, Browne had moved from a Presbyterian position to a Congregationalist.

This change of view was reflected in other parts of the passage. The omission from Transcript B of the passage in Transcript A (lines 22-29) from "The proceedings of this Church . . ." to " . . . but Christ from one to more" is partly due to its substance being compressed into Transcript B (lines 16-17) "Therefore the meetinges together of manie churches, also of euerie Vvhole church, &
of the elders therein . . ." But the compression also involved a change of emphasis similar to that noted above, namely from the equation of the Church, in this matter, with the Elders alone to the Church as the body of members guided by its Elders. Again a change in the same direction was made from lines 39-40 in Transcript A which read: "if the authoritie of the Church be aboue the Bishops" to lines 27-28 of Transcript B which read "if the authoritie of the church, & of the forvvarest breethren or elders therein, be aboue the bishopes." The insertion of "& of the forvvarest breethren or elders therein" both altered and qualified the meaning of "Church" in that context.

In the light of these examples another small variation between Transcript A and Transcript B gained in significance: in the latter, in the quotations of John i 16 and of Psalm cxlix 9 the word "all" correctly appears in each case whereas in the former it was in both cases omitted.

One conclusion to be drawn from this is obvious: the alterations made by Browne when he reproduced this passage in A True and Short Declaration reflect a profound change of meaning in the references to the seat of authority within the Church. Two other conclusions may also be drawn at this stage which are borne out by further study of Browne's concept of the nature of the Church and the Ministry. First, though the body of the Church was the final seat of Church authority, its decisions were to be guided and shaped by the Elders. Browne did not believe that one Christian's voice or vote was necessarily as valuable or as divinely guided as another. Secondly, the almost purely "functional" view of the ministry which he took, that is that the authority of the ministry was derived less from office than from spiritual gifts can be illustrated from his revision in Transcript B lines 1-2, of his earlier views: "Thei shoulde be chiefest, vvhich partake vnto vs the chiefest graces, and vse of their callinges." It should, however, be added that the word "functional" is not derived from his vocabulary and that it is quite possible that he would have recognised no essential opposition between authority of office and spiritual gifts.

This passage has a further value for, not only does it illustrate the precise nature of Browne's shift of opinion concerning the seat of Church authority, but also it shews how he moved from one position to the other.

The argument concerning the seat of Church authority in both versions follows substantially the same lines and the differences serve to make clear the line of reasoning Browne was using.

In Transcript A (lines 1-39) the argument went as follows: Browne began by pointing out (lines 1-2) "we haue shewed the Antichristian authoritie vsurped by one, and so from one to one
continewed to this day in gouvernement and ceremonies." He then
established by citing proof texts that (lines 11-12) "none but Christ-
oney hath full and sole authoritie to make lawes vnto his Church."
Next he pointed out that no single person had the right to exercise-
discipline in the Church on his own (lines 12-16) "but together-
with those that are authorised by the Church, accordinge to the
direction of our Sauiour, who warmeth vs, that if our brother will
not be admonished of his faulte by one, nor by two, then we should
tell the Church, Mat. xviii 17." If the matter could not be settled
within the local congregation it should be taken to a meeting of the
Churches in a province and even, if necessary, to a national assem-
bly (lines 25-26) "if it be a matter of greater weight, to proceede to a
greater number." His position was summed up (lines 28-29) "Anti-
christ . . . in his proceedings goeth from one to one, but Christ
from one to more."

In Transcript B the same texts were called to testify to Christ's
unique authority then again the authority of a single person was
denied (lines 6-12) "Novve next vnder Christ, is not, the bishop of
the dioces . . . nether anie one vvhich hath but single authoritie,
but first thei that haue their authoritie together: as first the church,
vhich Christ also teacheth . . . If he vvill not vouchsafe to heare
them tell it vnto the church." In fact the same trend of argument,
with the further extension of it setting the final authority not in the
Elders as in Transcript A but in the body of the Church, was re-
tained in *A True and Short Declaration*. It will be noted that the
pivot of the argument is a literalistic application of *Mat. xviii 17*
where the progress is from private rebuke, to rebuke before wit-
nesses and finally, when the offender's defiance has become most:
grave, rebuke and, if necessary, excommunication, in the presence
of the whole congregation. It is this logical and wholehearted
application of *Mat. xviii 17* which led Browne to abandon the
Presbyterian position he had formerly held. This verse contains the
core and kernel of Browne's doctrine of the final seat of authority
in the Church: the interpretation followed in both the versions-
discussed above makes clear precisely why he came to hold it and
how.

To sum up it must be confessed that this article is only by nature-
of a prolegomenon to the full study of Browne's doctrine of the
Church and of his place in the development of English Separatist
thought. On the other hand, it explains and expounds an essential
moment in his thought and in his own development.

**BROWNE'S PURITAN WRITING**

(Transcript "A")

Nowe that we haue shewed the Antichristian authoritie vsurped by one,
and so from one to one continewed to this day in gouvernement and cere-
monies, it will be necessary briefly to declare the power and authority of Christ Jesus our Lawgiver, King, and Prophet, which he received from God his Father: and then to shew the authority our Saviour hath delivered and left unto Christ our Lord, and hath appointed him over all things, to be the head of his Church, which is his body, Eph. i. 22. And that of his fulness have we received grace for grace, John i. 16. Even the fulness of him which filleth all things, Eph. i. 23. Whereby it appeareth, that none but Christ onely hath full and sole authority to make laws unto his Church: neither is it lawful for any to exercise the Censures of the Church him selfe alone, but together with those that are authorised by the Church, according to the direction of our Saviour, who warneth us, that if our brother will not be admonished of his fault by one, nor by two, then we should tell the Church, Matt. xviii. 17. By this Church is meant the Ministers and Elders that are chosen out of the Congregation to watch over the rest of the flocke: by such approbation as the word requireth, Acts xiv. 23. This is that Church, which is called by the Apostle, The pillar and ground of truth, 1 Timoth. iii. 15. This is that great honour which the Lord hath bestowed on his Saints, Psal. 149. The proceedings of this Church in matters of difficulty, if it can not be determined in their Congregation, is to call a meeting of the rest of the Churches in that province: and if it be a matter of greater weight, to proceed to a greater number: yea a general meeting of the whole Churches of the lande, and there with fasting and prayer to enter into the causes, and to end the same, example Acts xiv. 23. So that we may see this order to be contrary to Antichrist, who in his proceedings goeth from one to one, but Christ from one to more: This Church or Consistorie hath authority above the Apostle above the Prophete, the Evangelist, the Pastor, the Teacher, and every particular governour in the Church. For, the joining and partaking of many Churches together, and of the authority which many have, must needs be greater and more weightie than the authority of any single person. And this also meant the Apostle, Paul, 1 Corin. ii. 22. We are yours, and you are Christes, and Christ is Gods. So that the Apostle is inferior to the Church, and the Church is inferior to Christ, and Christ concerning his manhood and office in the church, is inferior to God. This is not only against the wickednes of the Bishoppes, but also against their whole power & authority. For if the authority of the church be above the Bishoppes, howe should it not followe, but that the Bishoppes may be commanded, accused, and charged by the church: yea also discharged and separated as is their desert? But now because of their popishe power, canon lawes, and commission, they have lift upp their authority more high, then the Church can take accounts of them: and not onely by force doth thrust (sic) out and trouble who they list, but also raigne as Lords and Dukes in their Dioces, their authority must needs be usurped. For the Apostles did give accounts (sic) to the church of all their doings, as we reade in Act. xi. 4, Act. xv. 2, 3 and Rom. xv. 31. But these being got above the Apostles, will sit in the throne of Christ: and as Christ is not inferior to the Church, no more will they be. For Christ hath chosen vs sayeth the Scripture, & not we him, John xv. 16, and therefore he is greater then vs all. And seeing the church can not chuse the Bishoppes, nor those hyrelinges, whom the Bishoppes thrust vpon them, thefore (sic) they also will be greater then the church, and with whom then doe they compare them selues in degree but with Christ? and so make them selues antichristes. Nay they presume further then Christ, which would not thrust his Apostles vpon any congregation, nor suffer them to take charge of any which did not willingly receive them, Luc. x. 10. But these doe force vpon the people every where, and in sundrie places against their wills, not onely Ministers vknownen, but also such as are known to be blinde bussardes, wicked fel-
lowes, and idoll shepheardes. Likewise Christ hath all rule in his hande, as it is written, that we are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power, Col. ii, and he can not sinne, nor offend the law of God, nor be accused by the same. For so the scripture testifieth, that none could reproove him of sinne, though hee offered him selfe to them to accuse him if they could, John viii. And he is that high Priest, as againe it is writte, Heb. vii, which is holy, harmless, vndefeiled, separate from sinners, and made higher then the heauens. Howe high then doe they lift them selues, whiche will rule alone as lorde ouer the flocke, though the worde hath said, It shall not be so, Luke xxii. 26, 1 Pet. v. 3. Which will be Rabbies, Doctours, and reuerende Fathers, though we haue but one doctor Christ, Mat. xxiii, which also take vpon them, not as seruantes in the house as was Moses, Heb. iii, but haue sent after him that is Sonne and heire in his owne house, saying, They will not haue him to raigne ouer them, Luc. xix. 14. For they haue refused his gouernement, and chosen their owne popishe disciplines in steade thereof. This appeareth, because they enter and take on them their offices in popish wise, and as that lawe prescribeth them, and also doe misguyde the people by that popish tyrannie. For who knoweth not, but that they watche for the liuing, or Bishoprike, when it shall fall, and then sewe & paye well for the same, if they obteyne it: So are they rauenous and wicked persons, as sayth the Scripture, Zacha. iii. They are make-shifts and troublers, seeing they rule rather because they seeke their own advauntage, or glorie, or mischievous purpose, then the welfare and benefit of the Church. Yea they all looke to their owne waye, as sayeth the Propheete Esai. lvi. 11 euerie one for his advantage and for his owne purpose. Who knoweth not also, but that they which are not duellie receyued and called to guyde, and that by due consent and agreement, they are eyther Antichristes in the church, or Tyrants in the common wealth, because they usurpe in the church or common wealth. Such are they of whom Paul speaketh, 2 Cor. xi. 20, that the Corinthians did suffer them to much. For they did suffer if a man brought them into bondage, if a man deuoured, if a man tooke, if a man exalted himself, if a man smote them on the face. For in deede the people doe suffer the Bishops, though they take from them their libertie of chusinge good Pastors and refusinge euill: yea they suffer them selues to be robbed, and be beaten by those spiritual courtes, they suffer the great vntowardnes and wickednes of the Bishops to be coloured and hidden by their pompe, authoritie, tytels, and power, and some times by their flattering sermons and pleadings: For they rule by three sortes of lawes, to say, by the ciuill, the Canon, and their commissions, which are three kingdomes vnto them, or as the Popes triple crown, and by pretending the fourth lawe, which is the word of God, they ouer-rule to toe (sic) much: they spare not to come vpon the people with force and power, and they care not to briddle them with newe and yearely injunctions, and articles, to intangle the best Preachers, as in one article of the Bishop of Londons, that the church wardens shall present all Preachers which doe in their Sermons name the vunread Ministers, dumbe dogges, although they haue the prophet Esai usynge the same words, Esai lvi. 10. And our Saviour also calling them blinde guydes, Mat. xv. But to extoll them selues, they doe giue commandements, That what Preacher soeuer doeth not praye for the Bi. of the Dioces in his sermon, shalbe presented: with diuers other such articles, to vpholde their owne glorie. Whereby we plainly see, they seeke to justifie them selues in all their proceedings, not minding to procure with vs, any other reformation, then that they presentlie possesse, which is the very plotte to put out the light of the Gospell amongst vs, and to increase the deeds of darkenes: Beholde howe vnder the dumbe ministerie, the Jesuites and all maner of rebellious persons are bredd vpp, to the great daunger of her Maiesties person, & all her best subiects. Therefore they are no better to be thought of, then enimes to the Gospell of Christ, her Maiestie and people, that seeke to keepe Christ
his holy Discipline from amongst vs. Wherefore lette vs neuer suffer our eyes to take rest, nor eye liddes slumber, till they beholde Christ Jesus in his chutch (stc), & antichrist quite thrust out: Let vs crye out with the poore Widowe in the Gospel, vntill wee be hearde, Luc. xviii., so shall wee thorough Gods mercie, obtayne our sute in the ende, to his glorie, and the good of all his people.

125 A Prayer

O Lord God, graunt for thy mercies sake, that as Iehoshaphat in the thirde yeare of his raigne, destroyed the high places & groues out of Iudah, and sent his Princes and Priestes, and gauie them the books of the Lorde with them, for to reforme Religion by, and so feare came vpon euery citie, that they made not warre against Iehoshaphat. So Lorde, we humbly beseech thee, to strengthe the Queenes highnes with thy holy spirite, that in the 23. yeare of his raigne shee may cast downe all the highe places of Idolatrie within hir land with the popish Canon lawe, and all superstition and commandements of men, and to plucke vpp all filthie ceremonies partaying to the same: And that hir highnes may sende forth hir Princes and Ministers, and give them the booke of the Lorde, that thereby they may bring home the people of God to the puritie & trueth of the Apostolike church. And then shall the feare of the Lorde come vpon euery Citie and Countrey, that they shall not make warre against our Iehoshaphat, the very enemies that be without, shall be compelled to bring presentes to hir grace. Thus, O Lord, graunt that hir highnes may not onely haue, a happie, longe and prosperous raigne with peace of conscience in this life, but also in the life to come, hir highnes man enjoye, by the merites and death of Christ our Sauiour, life everlasting: to whom with the Father, and the holy Ghost, be all honour 1 and glorie, for euer and euer, Amen.

And let hir Maiesties true subiectes say, AMEN.

A TRUE AND SHORT DECLARATION

(Transcript "B")

"Thei shoulde be chiefest, vvhich partake vnto vs the chiefest graces, and vse of their callinges. And that doeth Christ, as it is vvritten, of his fulnes haue all vve receaued, and grace for grace. Ioh. i. 16. And to him hath God made all thinges subject saith Paul, Ephes, i. 22, eue vnder his feet, and hath appointed him over all thinges, to be head of the church, vvhich is his bodie, even the fulnes of him, vvhich filleth all in all thinges. Novw next vnder Christ, is not the bishop of the dioces, by vvhoe so manie mischiefes are vrought, nether anie one vvhich hath but single authoritie, but first thei that haue their authoritie together: as first the church, vvhich Christ also teacheth, vwhere he saieth, If he vwill not vouchsafe to heare them tell it vnto the church, & if he refuse to heare the church also, let him be vnto the(e), as an heathen mâ & a publican, Mat. xviii. 17. Therefore is the church called the pillar & ground of trueth. 1 Tim. iii. 15 & the voice of the Vvhole people, guided bie the elders and forwardest, is saied to be the voice of God. And that 149. Psalme doth shewe this great honour, Vvhich is to all the saincts. Therefore the meetinges together of manie churches, also of euerie Vvhole church, & of the elders therein, is above the Apostle, above the Prophet, the Evangelist, the Pastor, the Teacher, & euerie particular Elder. For the joining & partaking of manie churches together, & of the authoritie Vvhich manie haue, must needes be greater & more Vvaughtie, then the authoritie of anie single person. And this alseo ment Paul Vwhere he saith. 1 Cor. ii. 22. Wee are yours, & you are Christes, & Christ is Godes. Soe that the Apostle is inferior to the church, & the church is inferior to Christ, & Christ coecerning his manhood & office in the church, is inferior to God. This he judged, not onelie toe be against
the Vvickednes of the bishopes, but also against their Vwhole power & authoritie. For if the authoritie of the church, & of the forvvardest breethren or elders therein, be above the bishopes, howe should it not followe, but that the bishopes maie be commauded, accused & charged bie the church, yea also discharged & separated as is their desert?"