

QUEEN MARY TUDOR AND THE MARTYRS OF THE REFORMATION.

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II.

THE second Parliament of Mary met on April 2, 1554. It was, however, of short duration. Acts for sanctioning the persecution of heretics were carried in the Commons, but thrown out in the Lords, and so postponed for the present. The Queen dissolved Parliament on May 5. That being done, she permitted or required Convocation to summon before it Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, who were now in the Tower. A mixed Commission of Oxford and Cambridge men were to sit at Oxford for this purpose, and thither the Archbishop and the two Bishops were brought.

They were examined separately so that each might stand alone against the many opposed to them, and they were condemned. How such an uncatholic course of action could have been allowed to themselves by Convocation, or permitted by the Queen, passes the comprehension of orthodox historians, for the members of Convocation who took part were only priests, and it was quite uncatholic for priests to pass condemnation on Bishops, who should have been tried before Bishops. The Pope regarded this trial as nugatory and required another, in which men of episcopal rank acted on his behalf.

The three main articles should be noticed.

It was maintained by the Romans and denied by Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer—

- (1) That the natural body and blood of Christ are present on the Altar ;
- (2) That no other substance remains after consecration ;
- (3) That in the Mass there is a lively sacrifice for the dead and the living.

But though condemned, the three Bishops were remanded to prison for a long while, and we shall come by and by to their second trial at the instance of the Pope.

Hearing of what had taken place at Oxford, those of the Reform-

ers who were imprisoned in London, of whom the principal were Hooper, Bradford and Philpot, put out a declaration, stating what they believed and what they rejected (A. p. 218) and they addressed it to Parliament. It contained the following words:—

“To your tribunal we appeal against the infamy of the reproach of heresy, which our adversaries unjustly fix upon us. This they do, because we retain the true substance of bread and wine in the Holy Supper, on the plain testimony of the Word of God, and of all the old Fathers; because we take away the corporal presence of Christ from the signs of the Supper, acknowledging only a spiritual and sacramental presence in them who use the signs with true and proper rites, a presence received by faith only in them who use the signs rightly; because we follow the Scriptures in assigning the corporal presence to heaven alone; because we allow of no propitiatory sacrifice for sin other than the death of Christ.”

But the third Parliament had met (November 12), the House of Commons had been packed by the Queen, and they now passed Acts for the punishment of heretics, which came into operation in January in the next year (1555). At the same time the Acts of Henry VIII against the See of Rome were repealed. Yet with a singular irony it was not considered a heresy to hold to the estates of which the monasteries and the Church had been robbed, and every landowner was confirmed in the ownership of the property to which he had no moral right. An attempt to recover these, as Mary with proper consistency desired, would have cost her her throne, and perhaps her life.

Therefore the position of affairs was this:—On the one hand an exact definition of the mode of our Lord's presence in the Eucharist, a most abstruse and mysterious subject, and one never defined at all by the early Church, was now required of all men on pain of being burnt to death, while if you happened to be an owner of stolen goods, that is, of the monastic and Church property, you were given a formal right to retain them. As long as you accepted the Roman formula of transubstantiation you might keep your stolen goods.

It was in this Parliament, May 3, that the Reconciliation with the Holy See of Rome was effected. This ought to have preceded the Queen's imprisonment of heretics, in which she had acted with autocratic disregard of proper order; but the reconciliation had long been her great object, and now it was to be carried out by the arrival in England of Cardinal Pole, the Papal Legate. The Houses of Parliament had been reduced to the attitude of penitence, and a great ceremonial took place: Philip, the Queen and the Cardinal

rejoicing over the prostrate multitude of Lords and Commons, who humbly knelt to receive absolution from the Legate. The formal reunion of schismatic England with the Holy See was declared, and the Queen shed tears of happiness.

Two members of the House of Commons, to their honour be it said, had the courage to vote against the reunion. One gave a silent vote; the other, Sir Ralph Bagnall, protested that he had sworn to obey King Henry's laws, who had laboured like a worthy king for twenty years to expel the Pope from England, and he would keep his oath.

All had now been got into order for the suppression of the Reformers. Nearly 300 burnt offerings were about to expiate the years of schism, besides the numerous victims who died of want and misery in loathsome prisons. Was this reign of cruelty due to the Spaniard Philip and his companions? Some historians have thought so, as the Spaniards were far more cruel than English people, and the Inquisition had developed in Spain its most fiendish tortures. On the other hand, the Emperor Charles V had constantly been warning Mary of the danger of proceeding to extremities with a people newly recovered for Catholicism. Philip was an excellent son; he had married to please his father, and to advance his policy; he knew the English hated the marriage; he had done all he could by money and manner to please the nobles; and to win the populace he had been seen to drink flagons of strong ale without flinching. It was his true policy to do all he could to win and not to offend. He conciliated Elizabeth, who was supposed to lean to the side of the Reformers and was supported by prominent nobles. But the Protestants, except Cranmer, were not politically influential; they were chiefly studious Bishops, parochial clergymen, now deprived of their posts, or humble artisans. They would have been content had they been let alone. There was no adequate object in rousing the execrations of the nation on their behalf. Philip was a man of the world; to him religion was a matter of externals, what course would answer best for politics was the great question with him, as it was with his father. Would he be likely then to adopt a needlessly unpleasant policy? Moreover, he had allowed a Spanish friar, de Castro, to preach in London against severity to heretics. All these considerations make against the supposition that Philip stimulated the persecution. There is only one symptom, as far as I am aware, that tells on the other

side. Philip joined the Queen in addressing a letter to the Bishops, admonishing them to make search for heretics in their dioceses. Such are the considerations for and against Philip ; we must leave them as they stand. Probably the question will never be settled with entire certainty.

But—to pass on—the mention of the Bishops leads to another point. Gardiner of Winchester and Bonner of London have usually been represented as monsters of iniquity. It must be admitted that recent researches do not bear out the accusation. They were not personally anxious for the Reformers to be severely treated, but when called upon to act they behaved roughly to them. The English Bishops as a rule were glad to shut their eyes to troublesome opinions ; they, most of them, wished to have a comfortable life in the enjoyment of their wealth and dignity ; to be called upon to burn heretics was a troublesome interruption to a pleasant existence.

The English nobility did not desire the persecution of their inferiors. They were rather afraid of too much zeal, lest those among them who had abbey lands should become objects of attack. Their attitude might be expressed by the motto “ *surtout point de zèle.* ”

Taking all these aspects of the matter, I am inclined to regard the Queen as the prime mover, from first to last, in the suppression of the Reformers. Her inconvenient conscientiousness made it a point of duty to burn everyone alive who was opposed to the Holy See. Duty, she thought, could never be carried too far ; she had no fear of being “ righteous overmuch.” What she held to be right must not be shrunk from, be the consequences what they might.

Hence, from mistaken motives, she set going the most widespread cruelties that ever disgraced the soil of England.

Moreover, while intending to bring England back to Rome, she took the best means for spreading the influence of the Protestant martyrs. She sent every victim back to his own neighbourhood to be burned, making them the heroes of their friends and neighbours. Crowds gathered round the local hero, their own martyr, and ringing cheers went up when he fought through his agony with unshrinking courage. She desired to suppress the Protestants ; in effect she lighted the beacon-fires of the Reformation, and as the souls of the martyrs went up to heaven through the flames, a deadly hatred of the religion of the Pope settled in men's hearts, and a conviction

that a Gospel for which so many were content to die must indeed be the truth of God. The burnings of the Protestants were the missionary beacons of each neighbourhood.

A few words may be said here as to the general character of the persecution. Its most remarkable feature was the enormous number of persons of the humbler classes on whom vengeance fell. The country was mapped out into districts and a complete organization arranged for enforcing conformity. Justices of the peace were to look up doubtful persons, and were bidden to employ secret informers, a most un-English proceeding, reminding one that Mary was half a Spaniard herself. The sheriffs were ordered to institute search, and to be present at the burnings. The Bishops also were urged on, not showing much alacrity for the horrible task. A few gentlemen were among the victims, but we read chiefly of artisans, of callings still familiar to us, as, for instance, such humble persons as weavers, barbers, butchers, bricklayers, blacksmiths, tailors, shoemakers and labourers ; harmless persons such as a cripple and a blind man. Women were not spared ; wives and widows and quite young girls, and even a blind girl, were sent to feed the flames. The blind girl went to the fire holding her little brother in her hand to guide her.

Sixty-nine persons were burnt in the latter part of the year 1556 alone—altogether the numbers were not far short of 300. The Court was much incensed by the report that reached the Queen of the uproarious cheering that welcomed every martyr who bore his sufferings with courage. As a rule, the crowd was in favour of the sufferer and against the authorities, and well they might be. In some places loud exclamations of prayer were heard from bystanders, that God would strengthen the victims in their agony. So much was the Government annoyed by these results that stringent orders were sent round, forbidding such demonstrations. But the sturdy English crowd, and moreover in a good cause, proved beyond control. The burnings, as I have said above, had exactly the opposite effect to what was intended ; they rendered numbers of persons who, if let alone, would have been of no account, conspicuous by the honours of a glorious endurance, witnessed by many who otherwise might have made small account of religion at all, or of doctrinal differences.

Moreover, and this made the matter worse for the persecutors,

most of these persons simply died for the faith in which they had been brought up. Ever since the days of Henry VIII and through the reign of Edward VI younger persons were brought up regardless of the Pope's supremacy; they looked upon themselves usually as Catholics of the ancient Church of England, as King Henry VIII did, or as Protestants taught from early years to deny transubstantiation and to say the services in the English tongue. They were not deserving the name of heretics at all. The views they now maintained were those which learned divines had taught them in their youth. This reason of the faith that was in them was not infrequently brought forward by the accused ones in their own defence. And a most reasonable defence it was. They indeed were the very best of the nation; unlike many others, they would not be of one religion under one ruler and of another under the next. Of what value could a conversion be, if they yielded to it on a sudden because the fire was in sight? Many recanted, but they could not prove worthier citizens than those who were too conscientious to do so. But thus has a persecuting spirit always defeated its own best interests. The French nation lost its best men by driving out the Huguenot families, and England under Mary had cause to be proud, not of the characters of those who conformed, but of the heroes who were faithful unto death. And it was they who made the Reformation.

The principal objections made by the adherents of the Reformation when brought to trial were, first, that they rejected the Papal supremacy, considering that the Bishop of Rome had no rightful authority over this realm of England; such authority not having been recognized in the primitive Church of Christ. Secondly, they desired to retain the Book of Common Prayer in English, as being intelligible for public worship, and therefore objected to the restoration of the Latin service book. Thirdly, they disapproved of the Mass, and the doctrine of transubstantiation which went with it, denying, what the Romans affirmed, that a propitiatory sacrifice for the quick and dead was offered in the Sacrament.

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(To be concluded.)