

## THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

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The year which came to a close but a short time ago witnessed among many other events the fourth centenary of that revolutionary religious movement of the sixteenth century known as the Protestant Reformation. Much was written and spoken during the course of last year concerning the effects this so-called Reformation had on the several nations of continental Europe, and it is now our purpose briefly to outline the introduction and final settlement of a similar movement in one of the fairest provinces of the Church—"Our Lady's Dowry"—England.

When in 1520 Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism, published his "Babylonian Captivity," an attack on the sacramental system of the Church, he was ably refuted in the following year by the "Assertio Septem Sacramentorum," edited by the then reigning king of England, Henry VIII. This work merited for Henry the title "Defender of the Faith," from the Roman Pontiff, Leo X. However, under the influence of his passions and cupidity the English king soon changed from a defender into a violent persecutor of the Church when, in 1532, Pope Clement VII ordered him to put away Anne Boleyn and take back his lawful wife, Catharine of Aragon, whom Henry had divorced without awaiting judicial sentence from Rome, which he knew only too well would be contrary to his illicit desires. An open attack was begun on Papal jurisdiction and Henry, by intimidating the Parliament, secured the passage of laws forbidding the payment of annates and Peter's Pence, and on March 30, 1534, the Oath of Supremacy was ordered to be taken throughout the entire realm. This was but the beginning, for by the time Henry died, January 28, 1547, the powers of the clergy had been weakened, the monasteries suppressed, their lands and revenues confiscated, and spiritual as well as temporal supremacy was made a prerogative of the crown. At this juncture England was schismatic only, it being left to the following reign to make the country heretical as well.

During the brief reign of Henry's son, Edward VI, from 1547 to 1553, the work of protestantizing England was begun in earnest. The Acts of Uniformity, passed in 1549 and 1552, introduced the Book of Common Prayer, and the Mass was abolished. A new code of belief, known as the Forty-nine Articles, was

drawn up by a commission of the Council. Light again shone for a moment in the midst of darkness when the old Faith was restored by Queen Mary the Catholic on November 30, 1554. Mary's noble efforts to bring back her people to the Faith of their fathers were but short-lived and were doomed to be brought to naught when, on November 17, 1558, her half-sister and successor, Elizabeth Tudor, ascended the throne.

The new monarch had never been of a truly religious turn of mind, and while she secretly favored the new religious teachings of the Reformers, she outwardly conformed to the old Faith during the reign of her sister, attending Mass and frequenting the sacraments as if she were a good Catholic. But when she took up the reins of power there came a change. Open support and encouragement were extended to the Reformers and England was almost literally overrun by the heretics who flocked thither from the Continent, to which they had been banished or had fled during the previous period of the Marian restoration.

The position of Elizabeth at this time was most peculiar. Her illegitimacy of birth was the bar sinister which prevented the public recognition of her title to the throne. Canon law would of necessity have to be suspended in her favor before she could be formally recognized as Queen by the Papal Court. Rome refused to do this, and it was soon evident to Elizabeth that Papal supremacy and her claims to the succession could not stand together—the former was an open denial of the latter. The means she chose to obviate this difficulty were characteristic of the Tudors, having been employed before by her father Henry VIII when the Holy See had refused his petition for a divorce. Parliament was constrained to frame a statute which placed Elizabeth securely on the throne, and a complete renunciation of all Papal authority in her dominions was closely followed by another complete separation of the Church in England from its communion with Rome.

This separation was effected in 1559 by means of two bills passed by the first Parliament convened during Elizabeth's reign. The first, the Oath of Supremacy, by which the Queen was declared to be supreme ruler in England not only in things temporal but in things spiritual as well, was to be taken by all ecclesiastics and other persons holding office under the government under penalty of forfeiture of these benefices and offices should they refuse. The other Act passed by this Parliament, that of Uni-

formity, brought back into use the Book of Common Prayer, first introduced during the reign of Edward VI and abolished by Queen Mary. When this oath was tendered to the bishops of England, sixteen refused to take it, one, Kitchin of Llandaff submitted, while ten dioceses had been left vacant upon the death of their last occupants, before the commencement of Elizabeth's reign, and cannot be here considered. The clergy was next approached, and although many of them subscribed to the Oath that thereby they might retain their holdings, yet there were many others who refused to do so and, with the bishops, suffered exile or imprisonment. Having rid herself of the orthodox, but to her, stubborn, clergy, Elizabeth filled the vacancies caused by their refusal to submit to her usurpation of spiritual powers with men whose vital interests were subservient to her good pleasure. Thus, in 1559 was the English Church finally separated from the mother of all Churches, which separation has continued even to the present.

It is not to be supposed that Elizabeth had been allowed to follow her course of changing the religion of England without remonstrances from the Papal Court. Pope Pius IV used the utmost kindness and forbearance in dealing with Elizabeth and wished to settle these religious difficulties by means of a compromise. In 1560-61, he sent his nuncio, Parpaglia, to England in an attempt to win the Queen back to the Faith. Another mission, led by Martinengo, was despatched for the same purpose in the following year. They were unsuccessful. The legates were refused admission to the country and Elizabeth assumed a more bitter anti-Roman policy. Many English Catholics who had been exiled because of their Faith attempted to influence the Fathers of the Council of Trent, which was then nearing its close, to pronounce a sentence of excommunication against Elizabeth. But the policy of Pius IV, seconded by the efforts of Philip II of Spain and the Emperor Ferdinand, prevailed, and nothing was then done in the matter.

Pius IV was succeeded, January 7, 1566, by the Dominican Cardinal, Michael Ghisleri, who assumed the name of Pius V. He had been enrolled in the Sacred College on March 15, 1557, and thus was in a position to follow with care the course of events, both political and religious, which was then engrossing the minds of all. His predecessor had sought by the use of kindness to recall Elizabeth from her erring ways. These same

means had been used before by the Papacy in dealing with Martin Luther with calamitous results, and Pius V realized that sterner measures must now be brought to bear against Elizabeth. By her conduct she had shown herself the avowed friend of the Reformers—the enemies of the Roman Church; she had obstinately refused all overtures to peace which had been made; and she had imprisoned Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, the hope of the Catholic party and heiress to the throne Elizabeth herself now occupied. Believing that he would prove false to his trust should he hesitate longer, Pius V at last issued the command to commence proceedings against the obstinate queen. The bull of excommunication, entitled “*Regnans in Excelsis*,” was forthwith drawn up, but the Pope was prevailed to delay its publication. In September-October, 1569, the Northern Rising occurred in England in favor of the old Faith. It was put down with much severity, many of those participating in it being summarily executed. This action of Elizabeth caused all hesitancy to leave Pope Pius V, and on February 25, 1570, he signed the bull of excommunication and ordered its immediate promulgation.

A copy of the document soon found its way into England, where it was the cause of much excitement. Elizabeth at first thought of despising it, but soon, considering it as a direct challenge to her to do her worst, retaliated by a new persecution of the Catholics. More stringent laws were passed, forbidding any intercourse of the Catholics with Rome, and the reception or publication of any Papal document; and, finally, statutes were framed against the possession of any religious article which had come into the country from Rome. No longer were the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, together with the Oath of Allegiance, to be subscribed to by the clergy and office-holders alone, but every citizen, of whatever rank or office, had to bow to the queen's will or suffer the consequences of his refusal—death. Other statutes were passed making the practice of the old Faith tantamount to treason, and it was under this head that the Catholics suffered and died. For them it was now a choice between their God and their sovereign. Queen Mary had persecuted heretics during her reign just because they were heretics, dangerous to the work of restoration, upon which she had set her heart. This had caused among the people such a feeling of abhorrence of religious persecution that Elizabeth thought it a wiser and a



safer plan in dealing with the Catholics to rid herself of them under the guise of political rather than religious motives.

These briefly stated, are the events which led to the rise, development and final settlement of the English Reformation. It differed from that inaugurated by Martin Luther, in so far as its authors were temporal rulers and not ecclesiastics. The ultimate end of both, however, was the same—separation from Rome and the establishment of an independent, national Church. And while it is true that this Reformation was influenced in a great degree by the preaching of the continental Reformers, still, Henry VIII and Elizabeth are always to be considered the foundation stones upon which English Protestantism rests., Their own pride, cupidity and laxity of morals led them to throw off the salutary influence of the Church's restraining laws, which sought to curb their wild ambition or their illicit desires., Fear of foreign domination or of another civil war caused the English people to submit and let their Faith be torn from them, almost without resistance, instead of taking strong and decisive action against the tyrants.

And what of Pope Pius V, who by his decree of excommunication had so unwittingly brought such an amount of sorrow and suffering to the English Catholics. Many have blamed him for this act, calling it rash and untimely. But the saintly Pontiff was not concerned with what judgment men might pass upon his action. He had been called to the guardianship of the Church by the will of God and was responsible to Him alone. Men whose ideals and aspirations were worldly, or who personally were either to profit or lose by the outcome of the Pope's act, attempted in vain to alter his policy, pointing out to him the harm which would result to the Church should he excommunicate Elizabeth. They thought that time would bring about the desired results. But Pius could not act otherwise—he had no alternative. The Church by her laws demands the punishment of heretics, be they nobles or peasants, and once Pius was convinced that Elizabeth was a heretic he did not falter in what he saw was his only course of action. She had spurned the Papal kindness and was now to feel the effects of Papal severity. The teachings of Luther and the other continental reformers, however, had so undermined Papal influence and authority over rulers and subjects that the decree of excommunication releasing the subjects from their oath of allegiance to the heretical sov-

ereign, and with its accompanying injunctions to proceed against the excommunicate as against a common enemy, both of Church and State, met with no response and was allowed to lie unheeded and without effect. But Pius had done his duty. He had upheld the honor and integrity of the Church at a time when with a man less strong than himself on the Fisherman's throne this honor might have been compromised in the face of an alluring temptation to obtain material gain by the sacrifice of spiritual principles.

But perhaps the greatest lesson taught us by the now almost twenty centuries of the Church's history is the fact that her divine Founder Who has promised her His infallible assistance, raises up in times of special stress and danger men whom He Himself has prepared beforehand, who by their example of apostolic zeal and fortitude when assailed by the forces of this world and of hell, have safely piloted the Church through all dangers to safety and peace. And this protection has been assured, not for one year or one thousand years only, but even unto the consummation of the world.

—Benedict M. Allen, O. P.