

CHAPTER II

THE PURITANS

IT is the nature of reformers to be impatient of delay and compromise, and to underrate the immense inertia and conservative instincts of mankind.

The Puritan exiles who returned to England with the accession of Elizabeth were eager to continue the work of Reformation so rudely interrupted by the death of Edward VI. They were soon to discover, to their great chagrin, that the new Geneva, like the old Rome, was not to be built in a day.

The new Queen was a Protestant as much by necessity as conviction. During her sister's reign she had conformed to the old religion. Imperious as her father before her, she had no desire to yield her ecclesiastical supremacy to the pope. Nor did she relish the imputation of bastardy and usurpation, born of the refusal of Clement VII to sanction the marriage of her mother, Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth could scarcely be a Roman Catholic. But her Protestantism was lukewarm. She realised that the majority of her subjects still had leanings towards the old faith, though few wanted the pope, and many preferred a service in English. Neither the crude gangster politics of the Protestant Northumberland, nor the fanatical persecutions of the Catholic Mary had appealed to the nation. Then, as now, the English distrusted extremes of conduct, and had little confidence in logic.

There can be no doubt that many of her subjects shared with Elizabeth a sentimental attachment to the old ways. The Queen was inordinately fond of pageantry, and much approved of the high state that Archbishop Whitgift, 'her little black husband' as she called him, restored to his office. Elizabeth approved of episcopacy, and had no liking for the democratic republicanism of the Church of Geneva. Nor did she wish to lose the countenance of the powerful Catholic princes of the

Continent, upon whose friendship, more politic than genuine, the security of her throne to no small degree depended.

The Elizabethan settlement was fashioned from these circumstances. The Church of England became Protestant, but retained continuity with the ancient *Ecclesia Anglicana*. The papacy, the monasteries, and the Mass were set aside. But the historic episcopate remained. Finally, a Book of Common Prayer was adopted which retained not only Catholic rites but doctrine.

The Puritans were quick to resent a policy that had some appearance of treason to the Reformation. No doubt many shades of opinion were to be found among them. But all had a common loyalty to the Bible, a common hatred of Rome, and a common conviction that nothing should find a place in a prayer book not authorised by the Scriptures. Some, indeed, were of the opinion that the Prayer Book would be better out of the way. Their preference was for some godly liturgy such as the Book of Geneva. But the majority would have been happy enough to accept a Prayer Book purged of Romanism. Such were the opinions of an influential and prosperous group in the community, comprising many members of the rising middle class, the seafaring folk, and the squirearchy.

Elizabeth regarded her policy as a revival of her father's, but the age of the Counter-Reformation required a sterner Protestantism. The Act of Uniformity of 1559 restored, with modifications, not the First but the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. As such it increasingly won the affections of the nation as a whole. It could not, however, be acceptable to extreme Catholics and Calvinists whose principles forbade adherence to a *via media* compromise.

The extreme Calvinists hoped much from the new reign. The fourth edition of the Book of Geneva (1560) speaks fervently of God's favour, 'in that He hath given us a most virtuous queen, such one as is most desirous herself to set forth God's glory in all her dominions, and most earnestly requireth of all her subjects that with all diligence they embrace the same'. They were speedily disillusioned. The Act of Uniformity put upon the clergy the duty of conducting public worship in strict accord with the Prayer Book, and made it compulsory for all to attend their parish church on Sunday.

THE ANGLICAN TRADITION

It would be wrong to assume that uniformity of worship was attained by the Act of Uniformity. Many clergymen honoured the Act more in the breach than the observance. Nor was it easy for the government to take action. The England of Elizabeth was not a modern totalitarian state. There was no regular army or police force, and the local administrators of government, the justices of the peace, allowed themselves much latitude in their remote country districts. Many of these justices had Puritan sympathies. For some years the greatest disorder prevailed in the Church of England. Sometimes the Prayer Book was strictly observed, sometimes the psalms in metre were added. Sometimes the communion table stood in the middle of the chancel, sometimes altar-wise near the wall. At the celebration of the Holy Communion, some clergymen officiated in a surplice, others recoiled from the 'livery of Antichrist'. Sometimes a chalice was used, sometimes a common cup. Sometimes unleavened bread was taken, sometimes leavened. Some clergymen baptized in a font, others in a basin. Some made the sign of the cross, others thought it one of the 'dregs of popery'. In 1566, Archbishop Parker in his *Book of Advertisements* sought to enforce uniformity by prescribing fixed rules for the conduct of public worship. A number of ministers who refused to submit were deprived. Many more yielded a contemptuous compliance. They were to give a dangerous direction to the attack on the Elizabethan settlement by challenging the whole hierarchical organisation of the Church. Their demand was for the equality of the ministry. 'Bishops must be unlorded.'

The Church of England as established under Elizabeth was a national Church held to be in legitimate and faithful descent from the Undivided Church. As such it was the English branch of the Holy Catholic Church freed from the superstitious errors and accretions of the Middle Ages. But, increasingly, the Puritans challenged this appeal to historical precedent. Under the tutelage of Thomas Cartwright, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, they sought for a return to the apostolic age and an ecclesiastical polity based upon the Scriptures. Cartwright demanded a root and branch abolition of 'unscriptural' diocesan episcopacy. He advocated a return to the primitive church, the removal of archbishops and archdeacons, the substitution of presbyteries, and the restoration of bishops

to their true apostolic functions of preaching and teaching. This attempt to introduce Calvinistic discipline met with the resistance of John Whitgift. As Master of Trinity College he deprived Cartwright of his fellowship: as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University he deprived him of his chair. But Whitgift was to discover that ideas are not so easily liquidated. Cartwright fled abroad in 1574, but by this time Presbyterianism had become the militant creed of very many Puritans. Their attitude was set forth in the Admonition to Parliament of 1571, and in the Second Admonition of 1572. Two years later Cartwright's translation of Walter Travers's *Ecclesiasticae Disciplinae . . . Explicatio* appeared. This was to become the canonical book of Presbyterian nonconformity.

The Elizabethan settlement was based upon Parliamentary authority. Increasingly the Puritans came to feel that what Parliament had sanctioned, Parliament could change. This attitude became the more important as the House of Commons became more Puritan. In 1571 a Bill to reform the Prayer Book was introduced into the Commons by Walter Strickland. But the Queen considered the meddling of the Commons with the Church an outrageous infringement of her prerogative. The Tudor Parliaments were not strong enough to resist the Crown, and the Puritans sought other means to give expression to their views.

Increasingly they promoted 'prophesyings'. These meetings for the study of the Scriptures and the improvement of morals soon became popular, especially in the south-eastern dioceses. The clergy were stimulated to greater zeal and study by the 'exercises', and the laity, who were invited to attend as hearers, were suitably edified. But religious discussion and debate may lead to dangerous attacks on authority. Elizabeth took alarm, and in 1577 gave peremptory orders to her primate Grindal to suppress these meetings, and to discourage preaching. With amazing intrepidity he declined. Thereupon he was suspended from temporal jurisdiction. This was the reprisal lamented by Spenser in his *Shepherd's Calendar*. Grindal is the good Algrind, 'whose hap was ill'.

Edmund Grindal was renowned for his Puritan sympathies. A Royal Chaplain under Edward VI, he had fled to Strasbourg in Mary's reign. At this time the troubles at Frankfort were

beginning. Grindal and the Strasbourg divines were shocked by the religious radicalism of their Frankfort brethren. These revolutionaries had abolished the surplice, the Litany, and the versicles. Their service consisted of Scripture sentence and exhortation, a Calvinistic confession of sins, not taken from the Prayer Book, but adapted from the Hagenau Missal, a metrical psalm, the minister's prayer for the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, followed by Scripture readings and the sermon, a general prayer for all estates, particularly for England, with the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, psalm, and the blessing from the Prayer Book Communion. The Frankfort congregation commended this order to the Strasbourg congregation as being more agreeable to Scripture order than King Edward's book. The Zurich divines protested.

The Strasbourg theologians were far from satisfied. Grindal went to Frankfort to urge them to preserve the 'substance and effect' of the Prayer Book. It was pointed out that this book was already sealed with the blood of the martyrs, and that deviation from its use would lay the exiles open to a charge of inconsistency. To this reply was made that the martyrs were not dying in defence of ceremonies. But Bishop Ridley, writing to Grindal from his English prison, exclaimed, 'Alas! that our Brother Knox could not bear with our Book of Common Prayer.' Grindal's attempts to compose these differences were unavailing.

The accession of Elizabeth brought him back to England and high honour. He was made one of the commissioners for the revision of the liturgy, and succeeded Bonner as Bishop of London. His position was now most difficult. He was not an extremist. But he had the Puritan's objection to the surplice, and the Puritan's fervour for the Word. As such he could not conscientiously carry out the policy expected of him by Elizabeth and her Primate Parker. In 1570 the Archbishop of Canterbury was relieved of an embarrassment by Grindal's translation to York. In the northern province the kindly prelate won golden opinions for sincerity and tact. His work was congenial. There was much Roman Catholicism to root out.

The subsequent appointment of Grindal to the See of Canterbury is one of the astonishing acts of this reign. Only the extraordinary convolutions of Elizabethan politics will account

for it. It so happened that in 1575 foreign affairs made some concession to the Puritans advisable. The Queen's minister Cecil was of the opinion that the time had come to attempt a real reconciliation with the Puritans, and that the Archbishop of York was the man to do it. It was Grindal's misfortune that his accession to the primacy of all England was followed by a new approach of Elizabeth to the Catholic princes of the Continent. Hence his brief tenure of power. His dignified protest against the royal interference in Church affairs brought suspension in 1577. Full restoration to authority did not come till the end of 1582. Next year he died. But his influence on the religious life of the nation was considerable. For it was during his primacy that the Geneva Bible came to be printed in England in 1576.

The Geneva Bible, sometimes called the Breeches Bible, had been published by the Genevan exiles in 1560. It was in the main the work of William Whittingham, assisted by Thomas Sampson and Anthony Gilby. Whittingham had been Knox's chief supporter in his troubles with Cox, and had succeeded him as minister at Geneva. In 1563 he became Dean of Durham. The superiority of the Geneva Bible to the Great Bible, appointed to be read in churches, was obvious. It was a better translation and cheaper. It embodied the latest results of biblical criticism. It was convenient to read, being divided into chapters and verses. It had a finer diction than the Great Bible. But the Geneva Bible did not commend itself to Elizabeth and her hierarchy. This was because of the subversive nature of the highly popular marginal notes. The pope was attacked. In a note on Revelation ix, 2 he was described as 'Antichrist', 'King of Hypocrites', 'Satan's ambassador', and more simply elsewhere as 'the villain'. The episcopate was not spared. The locusts which issued from the smoke of the pit, in the apocalyptic vision, were declared to be 'worldly subtle prelates . . . with Archbishops, bishops'. The equality of the clergy was proclaimed in the heading of a page, 'St. Luke, Chapter XXII, 26. God's Ministers Equal'. One reason which prompted James I to promote the publication of his authorised bible was his dislike of the politics preached on the margins of the Geneva Bible. For the notes did not spare kings. Elizabeth's first primate Matthew Parker did his best to meet the challenge of

this new Bible, and under his direction the Bishops' Bible was published in 1568. This version was never popular, although it continued to be the official Bible of the Church of England till 1611. Parker successfully withstood any attempt to publish the Geneva Bible in England. But Grindal offered no opposition, and it was printed by Christopher Barker, *cum privilegio*. The Geneva Bible became a great favourite. Between 1560 and 1640 no less than 150 editions were published. Scotsmen loved it. It was the Bible of their reformed church. Shakespeare and most Elizabethan Englishmen read this version. Even after 1611 it remained the Bible of Puritan households.

It was not uncommon for editions of the Bishops' Bible to be combined with the Book of Common Prayer. In 1578 a Geneva Bible was published with a revised edition of the Prayer Book. Other revisions followed. The issue of these Puritan editions has given rise to problems. In his *History of the Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 61–2) Thomas Lathbury writes, the Puritans 'endeavoured to introduce changes into some editions of the Book. A bold, though silent, attempt of this kind was made in 1578. In that year an edition of the Geneva Bible was published in a large folio volume, and to this book was appended a new impression of the Book of Common Prayer, beautifully printed. The Bible was intended by the Puritans to be used in churches instead of the Bishops' Bible of 1568, which had been introduced by royal authority; and as the Book of Common Prayer, in large type, was prefixed to the volume, it was imagined that the clergy might in their ministrations make use of this edition. Still it did not attract much attention at the time. This is evident from Heylyn who, though he mentions a book with the peculiarities of this volume, yet had never seen a copy. The design is apparent from its contents; and the Puritans imagined that a silent and gradual change might be accomplished. Some entire services are altogether omitted, as the office for Private Baptism, that for Confirmation, and that for the Churching of Women. These services were especially obnoxious to the Puritans, and from their Book they are excluded. The first four rubrics in the Communion Service and the introductory rubric in the office for Public Baptism are omitted; and the word "priest" does not occur once in the whole Book.'