

James II and the Seven Bishops (Part I)

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The reign of James II is a period of English history which has left a greater mark on this country than any period since the Reformation. It is a period to which we owe our civil and religious liberties, and the maintenance of our Protestantism, and as such it deserves the attention of every true-hearted Englishman. I propose in this Paper to give a general sketch of the leading events in the reign of James II., and a more particular account of the famous trial of the Seven Bishops. If the whole subject does not throw broad, clear light on our position and duties in the present day, I am greatly mistaken.

The reign of James II was a singularly short one. It began in February, 1685, and ended in December, 1688. Short as his reign was it is no exaggeration to say that it contains a more disgraceful list of cruel, stupid, unjust, and tyrannical actions, for which the Sovereign alone can be held responsible, than the reign of any constitutional monarch of this land with the single exception of Bloody Mary. It is a reign, in fact, in our English annals without one redeeming feature. Not one grand victory stirs our patriotic feelings; not one first-class statesman or general, and hardly a bishop beside Ken and Pearson, rouses our admiration; and the majestic name of Sir Isaac Newton among men of science stands almost alone. There were few giants in the land. It was an era of mediocrity; it was an age not of gold, or silver, or brass, or iron, but of lead. We turn away from the picture with shame and disgust, and it abides in our memories as a picture in which there is no light and all shade.

The chief explanation of this singularly disgraceful reign is to be found in the fact that James II was a narrow-minded, obstinate, zealous, thorough-going member of the Church of Rome. As soon as he ascended the throne he surrounded himself with priests and Popish advisers, and placed confidence in none but Papists. Within a month of his accession, says Evelyn in his diary, "the Romanists were swarming at Court with greater confidence than had ever been seen in England since the Reformation."¹ At his coronation he refused to receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. He set up a Popish chapel at his Court, and attended Mass. He strained every nerve throughout his reign to encourage the spread of Popery and discourage Protestantism. He procured the visit of a Popish nuncio, and demeaned himself before him as no English sovereign ever did since the days of King John. He told Barillon, the French Ambassador, that his first object was to obtain for the Romanists the free exercise of their religion, and then at last to give them absolute supremacy.² All this was done in a country which, little more than a century before had been freed from Popery by the Martyred Reformers, and blessed with organized Protestantism by the reign of Elizabeth. Can any one wonder that the God of Providence was displeased, and refused to show the light of his countenance on the land? James II's reign was an unhappy and discreditable time in the annals of England because the King was a thorough-going Papist.

The second explanation of the disgraceful character of James II's times is to be found in the low moral condition of the whole nation when he came to the throne. The mis-government of James I. and Charles I., the semi-Popish proceedings of Archbishop Laud, the fierce civil war of the Commonwealth, the iron rule of Oliver Cromwell, the rebound into unbridled licentiousness which attended the Restoration and reign of Charles II., the miserably unwise

and unjust Act of Uniformity, the unceasing persecution of true religion, under the pretence of doing God service, and making men of one mind—all these things had borne their natural fruit. The England of James II's time was morally vile and rotten to the core. The Court seems to have thrown aside common decency, and to have regarded adultery and fornication as no sin at all. Evelyn's description of what he saw at Whitehall the very week that Charles II died, is sad and disgusting.³

Charles Knight (History of England) truly says:—

“The high public spirit, the true sense of honour, which had characterized the nobles and gentry of England during the Civil War, was lost in the selfishness, the meanness, the profligacy, of the twenty-eight years that succeeded the Restoration. Traitors were hatched in the sunshine of corruption. The basest expediency had been the governing principle of statesmen and lawyers; the most abject servility had been the leading creed of divines. Loyalty always wore the livery of the menial. Patriotism was ever flaunting the badges of faction. The bulk of the people were unmoved by any proud resentments or eager hopes. They went on in their course of industrious occupation, without much caring whether they were under an absolute or a constitutional government, as long as they could eat, drink, and be merry. They had got rid of the puritan severity; and if decency was outraged in the Court and laughed at on the stage, there was greater license for popular indulgences.”

The leading statesmen were too often utterly untruthful, and ready to take bribes. The judges were, as a rule, mean, corrupt, ignorant creatures of the Court. The Church of England, which ought to have been a bulwark against wickedness, had never recovered the suicidal loss of its life-blood caused by the Act of Uniformity in 1662, and was a weak, timid, servile body. The bishops and clergy, with a few brilliant exceptions, were very unlike the Reformers, and always unwilling to find fault with any great man, or to dispute the divine right of kings to do as they pleased. The Dissenters were crushed to the earth by petty intolerant restrictions; and, between fines, imprisonments and persecutions were little able to do anything to mend the times, and could barely keep their heads above the water.

Last, but not least, we must not forget that for at least a hundred years England had been incessantly exposed to the untiring machinations of the Jesuits. Ever since the accession of Elizabeth, those mischievous agents of Popery had been compassing sea and land to undo the work of the Reformation, and to bring back our country to the thralldom of the Church of Rome. Disguised in every possible way, and professing anything by the Pope's permission and dispensation, in order to accomplish their end, these Jesuits throughout the days of the Stuarts were incessantly at work. To set Churchman against Dissenters, Calvinists against Arminians, sect against sect, party against party, and so to weaken the Protestant cause, was their one constant employment. How much of the bitter divisions between Churchmen and Nonconformists, how much of the religious strife which defiled the early part of the seventeenth century is owing to the Jesuits, I believe the last day alone will declare. Those only who read “Panzani's Memoirs,” or Dean Goode's “Rome's Tactics,” can have any idea of the mischief they did. In short, if there ever was an era in modern history when a Popish King of England could promote Popery, and do deeds of astounding cruelty and injustice without let or hindrance, that era was the reign of James II. What might have been the final result, with such a king and such a field, if he had not gone too fast and overshot his mark, is impossible to say. God in His infinite goodness had mercy on England, and delivered us from his wicked designs. But the things that he did, while he reigned,⁴ and the singular manner in which he at last over-reached himself by the trial of the Seven Bishops, and lost his throne, ought never to be forgotten by any Englishman who is a true Protestant and loves his country.

There are five leading events, or salient point's, in this reign, which are specially worth remembering. They follow each other in regular order, from the accession of James to his abdication. One common aim and object underlaid them all; that aim was to pull down Protestantism and to plant Popery on its ruins.

(I.) The first disgraceful page in the history of James II's reign is *his savage and brutal treatment of the Nonconformists and Dissenters*. Our great historian, Macaulay, says: "He hated the Puritan sect with a manifold hatred, theological and political, hereditary and personal. He regarded them as the foes of heaven as well as the foes of all legitimate authority in Church and State."⁵ The plain truth is, that James, with all his natural dulness of character, had sense enough to know that for many years the most decided and zealous advocates of Protestantism had been the Nonconformists, and that when Churchmen under Archbishop Laud's mischievous influence had become lukewarm, Nonconformists had been the most inveterate enemies of Popery. Knowing this, he began his reign by attempting to crush the Nonconformists entirely. If his predecessors had chastised them with rods, he tried to chastise them with scorpions. If he could not convert them, he would silence them by prosecutions, fines, and imprisonments, and make their lives grievous by hard measures. He argued no doubt that, if he could only stop the mouths of the Nonconformists, he would soon make short work of the Church England, and he cunningly began with the weaker party. In both cases, happily, he reckoned without his host.

To describe how the unhappy Nonconformists at that period were summoned, fined, silenced, driven from their homes, and allowed no rest for the sole of their foot, would be an endless task. Two pictures will suffice to give an idea of the treatment to which they were subjected. One picture shall be taken from England and the other from Scotland. Each picture shows things which happened with James' sanction within three months after he came to the throne.

The English picture is the so-called trial of Baxter, the famous author of "The Saints Rest," a book which is deservedly held in honour down to this day. Baxter was tried at Westminster Hall before James' detestable tool, Chief Justice Jeffreys, in May, 1685. He was charged with having published seditious matter reflecting on the bishops in his "Paraphrase on the New Testament." A more absurd and unfounded accusation could not have been made. The book is still extant, and any one will see at a glance that there was no ground for the charge. From the very opening of the trial it was clear which way the verdict was intended to go. The Lord Chief Justice of England behaved as if he was counsel for the prosecution and not judge. He used abusive language towards the defendant, such as was more suited to Billingsgate than a court of law; while the counsel for the defence were brow-beaten, silenced, and put down, or else interrupted by violent invectives against their client. At one stage the Lord Chief Justice exclaimed: "This is an old rogue who hath poisoned the world with his Kidderminster doctrines. He encouraged all the women and maids to bring their bodkins and thimbles to carry on war against the King of ever blessed memory. An old schismatical knave! A hypocritical villain!" By-and-by he called Baxter "an old blockhead, an unthankful villain, a conceited, stubborn, fanatical dog. "Hang him!" he said, "this one old fellow hath cast more reproaches on the constitution and discipline of our Church than will be wiped off for a hundred years. But I'll handle him for it; for he deserves to be whipped through the City." Shortly afterwards, when Baxter began to say a few words on his own behalf, Jeffreys stopped him, crying out: "Richard, Richard, dost thou think we'll hear thee poison the court? Richard, thou art an old fellow, and an old knave; thou hast written books enough to load a cart, every one as full of sedition, I might say of treason, as an egg is full of meat. Hadst thou

been whipped out of thy writing trade forty years ago, it had been happy.” It is needless to say in such a court as this, Baxter was at once found guilty. He was fined five hundred marks, which it was known he could not pay; condemned to lie in prison till he paid it, and bound over to good behaviour for seven years. And the issue of the matter was that the holy author of “The Saints Rest,” a poor, old, diseased, childless widower, lay for two years in Southwark gaol.

The Scotch picture of the Nonconformists’ sufferings under James II is even blacker than the English one. I shall take it substantially from Wodrow’s and Macaulay’s history. In the very same month that Baxter was tried, two women named Margaret Maclachlan and Margaret Wilson, the former an aged widow, the latter a girl of eighteen, suffered death for their religion in Wigtonshire, at the hands of James II’s myrmidons. They were both godly women, innocent of any crime but Nonconformity. They were offered their lives if they would abjure the cause of the insurgent Covenanters, and attend the Episcopal worship. They both refused; and they were sentenced to be drowned. They were carried to a spot on the shore of the Solway Firth, which the tide overflowed twice a day, and were fastened to stakes fixed in the sand between high and low watermark. The elder woman was placed nearest to the advancing water, in the hopes that her last agonies might terrify the younger one into submission. The sight was dreadful. But the courage of the young survivor did not fail. She saw her fellow-sufferer drowned, and saw the sea draw nearer and nearer to herself, but gave no signs of alarm. She prayed and sang verses of Psalms, till the waves choked her voice. When she had tasted the bitterness of death, she was, by cruel mercy, unbound and restored to life. When she came to herself, pitying friends and neighbours implored her to yield. “Dear Margaret,” they cried, “only say, God save the King.” The poor girl, true to her theology, gasped out, “May God save him if it be God’s will.” Her friends crowded round the presiding officer, crying, “she has said it, indeed, sir, she has said it.” “Will she take the abjuration?” he sternly demanded. “Never,” she exclaimed, “I am Christ’s; let me go.” And once more bound to the stake, the waters of the Solway closed over her for the last time. Her epitaph may be seen to this day in Wigton churchyard.

Such were the dealings of James with Protestant Nonconformists at the beginning of his reign. I make no comment on them. These two examples speak for themselves; and they do not stand alone. The story of the murder of John Brown, of Priesthill, by Claverhouse, is as sad as that of Margaret Wilson. No wonder that a deep dislike to Episcopacy is rooted down in the hearts of Scotch people to this very day! They never forget such stories as Margaret Wilson’s. Even in England I wish I could add that vile prosecutions like that of Baxter had called forth any expression of disapproval from English Churchmen. But, alas! for a season, James persecuted and prospered, and no man opposed him.

(2.) The second black page in the history of James II’s reign is *the detestable cruelty with which he punished those English counties which had taken any part in Monmouth’s rebellion*, in the autumn of 1685. Concerning that miserable rebellion there can of course be but one opinion among sensible men. It is vain to deny that the brief insurrection, which, ended with the battle of Sedgemoor, was an enormous folly as well as a crime. We all know how Monmouth, its unhappy leader, paid for it by dying on the scaffold. But it is equally vain to deny that the bloodthirsty ferocity with which James avenged himself on all who had favoured Monmouth’s cause, or taken arms in his support, is unparalleled in the annals of English History.

The proceedings of that military monster, Colonel Kirke, immediately after the defeat and dispersion of the rebel army, surpassed anything that we heard of in the Indian Mutiny, or even in Bulgaria. At Taunton he is said to have hanged at least a hundred so-called rebels within a week after the battle of Sedgemoor, and many without even the form of a trial. Not a few of his wretched victims were quartered, and their heads and limbs sent to be hanged in chains in the neighbouring villages. "So many dead bodies were quartered," says Macaulay (i. 629), "that the executioner under the gallows stood ankle deep in blood."

But even the diabolical cruelties of Colonel Kirke were surpassed by the execrable sentences of Judge Jeffreys, when he went on Circuit to the Assizes in Hampshire, Dorsetshire, and Somersetshire, two months after the battle of Sedgemoor. In Dorsetshire he hanged about seventy, in Somersetshire no less than two hundred, and thirty-three. The number of those transported for life was 841. The greater part of these were poor ignorant rustics, many of them men of blameless private character, who had taken arms under the idea that Protestantism was at stake, and they died for no other offence than simply following Monmouth, a political adventurer, for a few short weeks. The Assize was long known as the bloody Assize. "In Somersetshire" says Macaulay, "on the green of every large village which had furnished Monmouth with soldiers, ironed corpses clattering in the wind, or human heads and quarters stuck on poles poisoned the air, and made the traveller sick with horror. In many parishes the peasantry could not even assemble in God's house without seeing the ghastly face of some neighbour's skull grinning at them on the porch." In Hampshire, Jeffreys actually sentenced to death a venerable old lady named Lady Lisle, aged above seventy, for no other crime than that of affording temporary shelter to an insurgent; and nothing but the indignant remonstrance of the Winchester clergy prevented her being burned alive. Lord Feversham, the conqueror of Sedgemoor, and Lord Clarendon, the King's brother-in-law, in vain interceded for her. Jeffreys was allowed to work his will, and she was actually beheaded in Winchester market-place.

For all this abominable cruelty, James II must always be held responsible. The vile agents who shed this blood were his tools, and he had only to speak the word and the work of death would have ceased. Hallam, the historian, expressly says (iii. 93) that the King was the author of all this bloodshed, and that Jeffreys afterward declared "he had not been bloody enough for his employer." But the real secret of his savage and detestable conduct was a determination to put down Protestantism by a reign of terror, and deter men from any future movement in its favour. And, after all, the truth must be spoken. James was a bigoted member of a Church which for ages has been too often "drunken with the blood of saints and the martyrs of Jesus." He only walked in the steps of the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands; in the steps of Charles IX at the massacre of St Bartholomew; in the steps of the Duke of Savoy in Piedmont, until Cromwell interfered and obliged him to cease; and in the steps of the hateful Spanish Inquisition. One thing is very certain: there never was a petty insurrection so ruthlessly quenched in blood as Monmouth's rebellion was quenched by James the Papist. Blood makes a great stain. He found to his cost one day that the blood shed by Kirke and Jeffreys with his sanction had cried to heaven, and was not forgotten. When the Prince of Orange landed at Torbay, the western counties joined him to a man, and forsook James.

(3.) The third black in the history of James II's reign was *his daring attempt to gag the pulpit, and stop the mouths of all who preached against Popery*. Preaching in every age of the Church has always been God's chief instrument for setting forward religious truth, and checking error. Preaching was one principal agency by which the great work of the Reformation was effected in England. The Church of Rome knows that full well, and

wherever she dares she has always endeavoured to exalt ceremonials and to depreciate the pulpit. To use old Latimer's quaint words, "Whenever the devil gets into a church, his plan is to cry, 'Up with candles and down with preaching.'" Next to an open and free Bible, the greatest obstacle to the progress of Popery is a free pulpit, and the public exposition of God's Word. That James II, like all thorough-going Papists, knew all this, we cannot doubt for a moment. We need not, therefore, wonder that in 1686 he commenced an attack on the English pulpit. If he could once silence that mighty organ, he hoped to pave the way for the advance of Popery. "He took on himself," says Macaulay (ii. 91)—

To charge the clergy of the Established Church to abstain from touching on controverted points of doctrine in their discourses. Thus, while sermons in defence of the Roman Catholic religion were preached every Sunday and holiday in the Royal chapel, the Church of the State, the Church of the great majority of the nation, was forbidden to explain and vindicate her own principles.

William Sherlock, Master of the Temple, was the first to feel the royal displeasure. His pension was stopped, and he was severely reprimanded. John Sharpe, Dean of Norwich, and Rector of St. Giles, gave even greater offence. In reply to an appeal from a parishioner, he delivered an animated discourse against the pretensions of the Church of Rome. At once, Compton, the Bishop of London, was ordered to suspend him, and on his objecting to do so, he was himself suspended from all spiritual functions, and the charge of his diocese was committed to two time-serving prelates named Spratt and Crewe. Compton was already famous for his dislike to Popery. When James came to the throne he had boldly declared in the House of Lords that "the Constitution was in danger." We can well understand that James was anxious to suppress him (Ranke, iv. 277).

Singularly enough, this high-handed proceeding worked round for good. For the first time since his accession to the throne, James received a distinct check. The attacks on Sherlock, Sharpe, and Bishop Compton, roused the spirit of the body of the English clergy. To preach against the errors of Popery was now regarded as a point of honour and duty. The London clergy set an example which was bravely followed all over the country. The King's prohibition to handle controversial subjects was everywhere disregarded. It was impossible to punish an offence which was committed every Sunday by thousands of divines from the Isle of Wight to Berwick-upon-Tweed and from the Land's End to the North Foreland. Moreover, the spirit of the congregations was thoroughly roused. There were old men living in London whose grandfathers had heard Latimer preach, and had seen John Rogers burnt at Smithfield. There were others whose parents had seen Laud beheaded trying to Romanize the Church, and prosecuting Protestant Churchmen. Such men as these were thoroughly stirred and disgusted by James's movement; and if the clergy had been silent about Popery, they would have resented their silence as unfaithfulness and sin.

The printing-presses, besides, both at London, Oxford, and Cambridge, poured forth a constant stream of anti-Popish literature, and supplied all who could read with ample information about every error of the Church of Rome. Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Sherlock, Patrick, Tenison, Wake, Fowler, Clagett, and many others wrote numerous treatises of all kinds to expose Popery, which exist to this day, and which at the time produced an immense effect. Many of these are to be found in the three huge folios called "Gibson's Preservative," and Macaulay estimates that as many as 20,000 pages of them are to be found in the British Museum.

The whole affair is a striking instance of God's power to bring good out of evil. The very step by which this unhappy Popish monarch thought to silence his strongest foe, proved the first step towards his own ruin. Up to this date he seemed to carry everything before him. From this date he began to fall. From the moment he put forth his hand to touch the ark, to interfere with the Word of God, to silence its preachers, he never prospered, and every succeeding step in his reign was in the downward direction. Like Haman, he had dared to meddle with God's peculiar servants, and like Haman he fell never to rise again.

(4.) The fourth black page in the history of James II's reign is *his tyrannical invasion of the rights of the two great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1687*. The influence of these two venerable bodies in England has always been very great, and I trust they will always be so governed that it will never become less. But it is no exaggeration to say that it never was so great as towards the end of the seventeenth century. Beside them there were no universities or colleges. King's College, London; University College, Durham; St Aidan's, Highbury; Cuddesdon, did not exist. Oxford and Cambridge stood alone. They were the fountains of all the learning of the day, and the training school of all the ablest divines and lawyers, poets and orators of the land. Even among the Puritans it would be hard to find any man of ability who had not begun his career and picked up his first knowledge at some college in Oxford or Cambridge. In short, the two Universities were the intellectual heart of England, and every pulsation of that heart was felt throughout the kingdom.

All this, we need not doubt, even the dull mind of James II clearly perceived. He saw that he had little chance of Romanizing England until he could get hold of the two Universities, and this he resolved to try. He was encouraged, probably, to make the attempt by the notorious loyalty to the House of Stuart which Oxford and Cambridge had always exhibited. Both the Universities had suffered heavily for their attachment to the King's side during the unhappy Commonwealth wars. Many a Head of a college had been displaced and his position filled by one of Cromwell's Puritans. Owen had ruled at Christ Church and Goodwin at Magdalen. Many a college plate-chest was sadly empty compared to its state in olden times, having given up its silver to be melted down in aid of Charles I and to buy arms and ammunition. Ever since the Reformation, the two Universities had exhibited the most obsequious subserviency to the Crown, had stoutly maintained the divine right of kings, and had often approached the throne in addresses full of fulsome adulation. I believe that James flattered himself that they would go on yielding everything to his will, and fondly dreamed that in a few years they would be completely under the Pope's command, and the education of young England would be in the hands of the Church of Rome. It was a grand and intoxicating prospect. But he reckoned without his host. He little knew the spirit that was yet left by the Isis and the Cam.

James opened his campaign and crossed the Rubicon by attacking the University of Cambridge. The law was clear and distinct, that no person should be admitted to any degree without taking the "Oath of Supremacy," and another oath called the "Oath of Obedience." Nevertheless, in February, 1687, a royal letter was sent to Cambridge directing that a Benedictine monk, named Alban Francis, should be admitted as Master of Arts. Between reverence for the King and reverence for their own statutes, the academical officers were naturally placed in a most perplexing position. To their infinite credit they took the right course, and steadily refused to admit the King's nominee unless he took the oaths. The result was that the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge was summoned to appear before the New Court of High Commission, presided over by Jeffreys, together with deputies appointed by the

Senate. When the day arrived, Dr. Perchell, the Vice-Chancellor, a man of no particular vigour or ability, accompanied by eight distinguished men, of whom the famous Isaac Newton was one, appeared before this formidable tribunal. Their case was as clear as daylight. They offered to prove that they had done nothing contrary to law and practice, and had only carried out the plain meaning of their statutes. But Jeffreys would hear nothing. He treated the whole party with as much vulgar insolence as if they were felons being tried before him at the Old Bailey, and they were thrust out of court without a hearing. They were soon called in and informed that the Commission had determined to deprive Pechell of the Vice-Chancellorship, and to suspend him from all the emoluments to which he was entitled as Master of a College. "As for you," said Jeffreys to Isaac Newton and his seven companions, with disgusting levity, "I send you home with a text of Scripture, 'Go your way and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.'"

From Cambridge, James turned to Oxford. Here, it must be avowed, he began his operations with great advantages. Popery had already effected a lodgment in the citadel, and got allies in the heart of the University. Already a Roman Catholic named Massey, had been made Dean of Christ Church by the nomination of the Crown, and the House had submitted. Already University College was little better than a Romish seminary by the perversion of the Master, Obadiah Walker, to Popery. Mass was daily said in both colleges. But this state of things had caused an immense amount of smouldering dissatisfaction throughout Oxford. The undergraduates hooted Walker's congregation, and chanted satirical ballads under his windows without the interference of Proctors. The burden of one of their songs has been preserved to this day, and you might have heard at night in High Street, near the fine old college, such words as these:—

Here old Obadiah
Sings Ave Maria.

In short, any careful observer might have foreseen that Oxford feeling towards the King was undergoing a great change, and that it would take very little to create a blaze.

Just at this crisis the President of Magdalen College died, and it became the duty of the Fellows, according to their statutes, to elect a successor, either from their own society or from New College. With an astounding mixture of folly and audacity, the King actually recommended the Fellows to elect to the vacant place a man named Anthony Farmer, a person of infamous moral character, utterly destitute of any claim to govern a college; a drunkard, a Papist, and a person disqualified by the statutes of Waynflete, as he was neither Fellow of New College nor of Magdalen. To their infinite credit the Fellows of Magdalen, by an overwhelming majority, refused to elect the King's nominee, resolved to face his displeasure, and deliberately chose for their President a man named John Hough, a Fellow of eminent virtue and prudence. At once they were treated with the utmost violence, injustice, and indignity. The King insisted on their accepting another President of his own selection, and commanded them to take a mean creature of the Court named Parker, Bishop of Oxford. The Fellows firmly refused, saying they had lawfully elected Hough, and they would have no other President. In vain they were threatened and insulted, first by the King himself, and then by a Special Commission sent down from London. They stood firm, and would not give way one inch. The Commission finally pronounced Hough an intruder, dismissed him from his presidency, and charged the Fellows no longer to recognize his authority, but to assist at the admission of the Bishop of Oxford. It was then that the gallant Hough publicly addressed the following remarkable words to the Commission:

“My Lords, you have this day deprived me of my freehold. I hereby protest against all your proceedings as illegal, unjust and null, and I appeal from you to our sovereign Lord the King in his Courts of Justice.”

But though thus driven from his office by force, Hough was backed by the general feeling of the whole University, and of almost every one connected with Magdalen. At the installation of his successor (Parker) only two Fellows out of forty attended the ceremony. The college porter, Robert Gardner, threw down his keys. The butler refused to scratch Hough’s name out of the buttery books. No blacksmith in all the city of Oxford could be found to force the locks of the President’s lodge, and the Commissioners were obliged to employ their own servants to break open the doors with iron bars.

But the matter did not end here. On the day that Hough was expelled from his presidency and Parker installed, the Commission invited the Vice-Chancellor of 1687 to dine with them. The Vice-Chancellor that year was Gilbert Ironside, Warden of Wadham, and afterwards Bishop of Hereford. He refused. “My taste,” he said, “differs from that of Colonel Kirke’s. I cannot eat my meals with appetite under a gallows.” The scholars of Magdalen refused to pull off their caps to the new ruler of Magdalen. The demies refused to perform their academical exercises and attend lectures, saying that they were deprived of their lawful governor, and would submit to no usurped authority. Attempts were made to bribe them by the offer of some of the lucrative fellowships declared vacant. But one undergraduate after another refused, and one who did accept was turned out of the hall by the rest. The expulsion of the Fellows was followed by the expulsion of a crowd of demies. A few weeks after this Parker died, some said of mortification and a broken heart. He was buried in the antechapel of Magdalen; but no stone marks his grave. Then the King’s whole plan was carried into effect. The College was turned into a Popish seminary, and Bonaventure Giffard, a Roman Catholic Bishop, was made President. In one day twelve Papists were made Fellows. The Roman Catholic service was performed in the chapel, and the whole work of violence and spoliation was completed.

Such were the dealings of James II with Oxford and Cambridge. Their gross injustice was only equalled by their gross impolicy. In his furious zeal for Popery, the King completely over-reached himself. He alienated the affections of the two most powerful educational institutions in the land, and filled the hearts of thousands of the ablest minds in England with a deep sense of wrong. And when the end came, as it did within eighteen months, he found that no places deserted his cause so readily as the two over which he had ridden roughshod, the two great English Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

(5.) The fifth dark page in the history of James II’s reign is his *rash attempt to trample down the English nobility and gentry in the counties*, and substitute for them servile creatures of his own who would help forward his designs.

In order to understand this move of the misguided king, it must be remembered that he wanted to get a new House of Commons which would do his bidding and not oppose his Romanizing plans. He knew enough of England to be aware that ever since the days of Simon de Montfort every intelligent Englishman has attached great importance to an elected Parliament. He had not entirely forgotten the iron hand of the Long Parliament in his father’s days. He rightly judged that he would never succeed in overthrowing Protestantism without the sanction of a House of Commons, and that sanction he resolved to try to obtain.

“Having determined to pack a Parliament,” says Macaulay, “James set himself energetically and methodically to the work. A proclamation appeared in the Gazette” (at the end of 1687) “announcing that the King had determined to revise the Commissions of Peace and of Lieutenancy, and to retain in public employment only such as would support his policy.” At the same time a Committee of Seven Privy Councillors sat at Whitehall, including Father Petre, an ambitious Jesuit, for the purpose of “regulating,” as it was called, all the municipal corporations in boroughs:—

The persons on whom James principally relied for assistance, [continues Macaulay] were the Lord Lieutenants. Every Lord Lieutenant received written orders directing him to go down immediately into his county. There he was to summon before him all his deputies, and all the Justices of the Peace, and to put to them a set of interrogatories framed for the purpose of finding out how they would act at a general election. He was to take down their answers in writing, and transmit them to the Government. He was to furnish a list of such Romanists and Protestant Dissenters as were best qualified for commissions as magistrates, and for command in the Militia. He was also to examine the state of all the boroughs in his county, and to make such reports as might be needful to guide the London board of regulators. And it was intimated to each Lord Lieutenant that he must perform these duties himself and not delegate them to any other person.

The first effect of these audacious and unconstitutional orders might have opened the eyes of any king of common sense. The spirit of the old barons who met at Runnymede proved to be not extinct. Even before this time the Duke of Norfolk had stopped at the door of the Popish chapel which James attended, and when James remonstrated and said, “Your Grace’s father would have gone farther,” had boldly replied, “Your Majesty’s father would not have gone so far.” But now it became clear that many other peers beside the Duke of Norfolk were Protestant to the backbone. Half the Lord Lieutenants in England flatly refused to do the King’s dirty work, and to stoop to the odious service imposed on them. They were immediately dismissed, and inferior men, of more pliant and supple consciences, were pitchforked into their places.

The list of high-minded noblemen who resisted the King’s will on this memorable occasion is even now most remarkable, and deserves to be had in remembrance. One great name follows another in grand succession in Macaulay’s pages, until one’s breath is almost taken away by the sight of the King’s folly. In Essex, the Earl of Oxford; in Staffordshire, the Earl of Shrewsbury; in Sussex, the Earl of Dorset; in Yorkshire, the Duke of Somerset in the East Riding, and Lord Fauconberg in the North Riding; in Shropshire, Lord Newport; in Lancashire, the Earl of Derby; in Wiltshire, the Earl of Pembroke; in Leicestershire, the Earl of Rutland; in Buckinghamshire, the Earl of Bridgwater; in Cumberland, the Earl of Thanet; in Warwickshire, the Earl of Northampton; in Oxfordshire, the Earl of Abingdon; in Derbyshire, the Earl of Scarsdale; and in Hampshire, the Earl of Gainsborough—all were summarily sent to the rightabout; and for what? Simply, as every one knew, because they preferred a good conscience to Crown favour, principle to place, and Protestantism to Popery. The gallant words of the Earl of Oxford, who was turned out in Essex, when the King demanded an explanation of his refusal to obey, spoke the sentiments of all: “Sir, I will stand by your Majesty against all enemies to the last drop of blood; but this is a matter of conscience, and I cannot comply.”

A viler piece of ingratitude than this move of James can hardly be conceived. Most of the noblemen whom he dismissed were the representatives of great families who in the

Commonwealth wars made immense sacrifices in his father's cause. Some of them, like the Earl of Derby, could tell of fathers and grandfathers, who had died for King Charles. Many of them could show swords and helmets hanging over their Elizabethan fireplaces which had been notched and dented in fighting against the Parliamentary forces at Edgehill, Marston Moor and Naseby. Not a few of them could point to ruined castles and halls, to parks despoiled of their timber, plate-chests emptied of their contents, and properties sadly impoverished in the days when Cavaliers fought against Roundheads. And now forsooth the son of the martyred Charles, as they had fondly called him, turned round upon them, trampled on their feelings, and required them to lie down, and let him walk over their consciences. Can we wonder that they keenly resented the King's conduct! At one fell swoop he destroyed the affection of half the leading men in the English counties, and from being his friends they became his foes.

In fact the ingratitude of the King was now only equalled by its folly and impolicy. No sooner was his new machinery for packing a subservient Parliament put in motion, than it broke down and utterly failed. From every corner of the realm there came the tidings of failure. The new Lord Lieutenants could do nothing. The Magistrates and candidates for Parliament evaded inquiries, and refused to pledge themselves to do the King's will. Arguments, promises, and threats were alike in vain. A deep rooted suspicion had got into men's minds that James wanted to subvert Protestantism, and re-introduce Popery, and they would not give way. From Norfolk, the Duke of Norfolk reported that out of seventy leading gentlemen in the county only six held out any hopes of supporting the Court. In Hertfordshire the Squires told Lord Rochester that they would send no man to Parliament who would vote for taking away the safeguards of the Protestant religion. The gentry of Bucks, Shropshire, and Wiltshire, held the same language. The Magistrates and Deputy-Lieutenants of Cornwall and Devonshire told Lord Bath, without a dissenting voice, that they would sacrifice life and property for the Crown, but that the Protestant religion was dearer to them than either. "And Sir," said Lord Bath to the King, "if your Majesty dismisses them, their successors would give the same answer." In Lancashire, a very Romish county, the new Lord Lieutenant reported that one third of the Magistrates were opposed to the Court. In Hampshire the whole of the Magistrates, excepting five or six, declared they would take no part in the civil or military government of the county while the King was represented there by the Duke of Berwick, a Papist.

The sum of the whole matter is this. The attack of James on the independence of the county gentry and nobility was as completely a failure as his attack on the pulpit and the Universities. It was worse than this. It sowed the seeds of disaffection to his person from one end of England to the other, and alienated from him thousands of leading men who under other circumstances would perhaps have stood by him to the last. And the result was that when the Prince of Orange landed at Tor-Bay a year afterwards he found friends in half the counties in England. By the over-ruling providence of God and his own judicial blindness, James paved the way to his own ruin. The thanes fell from him. The nobility, one after another forsook him, and he was left friendless and alone.

(To be continued. – See Churchman 002/5 1880 for Part II)

J. C. RYLE

Endnotes:

- 1) Knight, "History of England," iv. 383.
- 2) If any one doubts this, I refer him to the Histories of England, Hallam, ,iii. 73; Ranke, iv. 216, 218, 219; Stoughton, ii. 108.
- 3) On Sunday evening, the 1st of February, 1685, Evelyn was at Whitehall. A week after he recorded his impressions of the scene which he then witnessed: "I can never forget the inexpressible luxury and profaneness, and as it were total forgetfulness of God, it being Sunday evening. The King sitting and toying with his concubines, Portsmouth, Cleveland, Mazarin, &c.: a French boy singing love songs in that glorious gallery; whilst above twenty of the great courtiers and other dissolute persons were at Basset around a large table, a bank of at least two thousand in gold before them." On Monday morning the 2nd of February, the king was struck with apoplexy.
- 4) Those who wish to make themselves acquainted with the reign of James II, would do well to study Burnet, Hallam, Macaulay, Charles Knight, Ranke, and Stoughton's "History of the Church of the Restoration."
- 5) Macaulay, i. 494.