

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.*

On the 14th of Nov. 1532, Henry was secretly married to Anne Boleyn. On the 2nd of May, 1534, Archbishop Cranmer formally pronounced the sentence of divorce between the king and Queen Catherine; and on the 28th confirmed his marriage with Anne Boleyn, who had been delivered of the Princess Elizabeth, afterwards the illustrious Queen of England. The Pope excommunicated Henry, which so enraged him, that he resolved to break entirely with the pope, and abolish his authority in England for ever. The parliament confirmed those proceedings; and thus were our forefathers delivered from the tyranny of Rome.

About this time, Elizabeth Barton, called the Maid of Kent, assisted by several accomplices, fell into a pretended trance, and declared that she had seen a vision of the blessed virgin, who assured her that if she were taken to her shrine in the parish church, she would be miraculously healed of her sickness. Two priests, sons of Belial, made known the day she was to be carried to the church, and two thousand people assembled to see the miracle of healing. But the vile impostor having spoken many things against heresy and the king's divorce, was at length brought before the Star Chamber, where she confessed the whole plot, and with five others, was hanged for treason at Tyburn. Impostors, have appeared even in our days, and it is astonishing and even grievous to see how many easily become the dupes of hypocrisy and superstition! This act of treason being justified by the Popish clergy, paved the way for the ultimate destruction of all the monasteries in the kingdom. These sequestered habitations had become the scene of great abomination, where every kind of delusion was practiced to impose on the credulity of the ignorant multitude.

Many persons suffered persecution at this time, some for teaching their children the *Lord's Prayer* in English, and some for speaking against pilgrimages and image worship. But the most eminent person who suffered martyrdom about this period, was Thomas Bilney, a priest; who was first degraded from his priesthood, and then burnt on the 10th of Nov. 1530. And to strike a greater terror into the minds of men, James Bamham, a gentleman of the Temple, was brought to the stake; he was charged amongst other things, with going publicly to Church, with a *New Testament* in his hand! and burnt in Smithfield, in April, 1532. Hear this and blush, ye who in these days of free toleration are never seen going to church, much less to have a *New Testament* in your hands, although you can have one for a trifle, or even for asking some pious neighbour for one!—You are in no danger of being burnt in Smithfield in these peaceful times, if you are seen with the scriptures in your hands; but consider well on the other hand, how you are to escape the just punishment of God, if you neglect that precious volume which He has sent to instruct you in the way of salvation!

In Buckinghamshire, one Thomas Harding was observed to retire into the woods, for the purpose of reading. His house was searched, and the popish Bishop of Lincoln condemned him to be burnt at Chesham, because parts of the scripture were found in the house. How precious was the word of God in those days. But how deplorably do many in this day reject the word which is high unto them, even in their mouths. Oh that it were also in their hearts! then they would know its value.

The cruelty and horrible wickedness of the popish clergy of that gloomy period, are recorded by a proclamation, promising an indulgence of forty days' pardon to all who should carry a faggot to the burning of a heretic!! and this horrible principle of granting indulgences has never yet been renounced by the Romish Church. The preachers of the Reformation took courage from the example of the king; but, although he had shaken off the papal authority as to temporal things, he was still a devoted papist in religious matters. And therefore he held a two-edged sword in his hand; with one edge he punished those popish priests and laymen who denied his supremacy; and with the other the reformers, who, by their preaching and writings, attacked the doctrinal errors,

and exposed the superstitious and burdensome ceremonies of popery. Many of the latter description were burnt, for denying the corporal presence of Christ in the sacramental bread; and asserting, as our Church now declares, that "the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are verily and indeed taken, only by the faithful in the Lord's supper."—That is, they are spiritually received by true believers; and although others may take the symbols, yet, for want of faith in the atonement of Christ, they do not properly "discern the Lord's body," and consequently derive no saving benefit from the outward act of communion with spiritual worshippers.

The Reformation was brought about by men of very discordant views and motives, to show that the power was of God, and that He alone must have all the praise of that event. Some secret treasonable practices having been discovered amongst the different orders of monks, Lord Cromwell was appointed "general visitor" of all the monasteries and other privileged places in the kingdom. In October, 1535, he, with other commissioners, entered upon their duty, and such licentiousness was discovered in these sinks of iniquity, as cannot be named; and the people, being deprived of the scriptures, were easily made the dupes of the most unprincipled priestcraft. Amongst other schemes for raising money, the priests made great use of the doctrine of *Purgatory*, or a state of trial into which, they said, all entered between death and the general resurrection; and from which the soul of the most abandoned sinner might be released by paying money to the priests. When men are ignorant of salvation through faith in the righteousness of Christ, there is no absurdity too gross to be received by them. The guilty conscience must have some prop to rest upon; and if it be a stranger to true peace, through Jesus Christ, it will endeavour to be satisfied with a false one.

In 1536, an act of parliament was passed, which suppressed all the lesser abbeys to the number of 376, and not long after the greater ones also shared the same fate.

On the 19th of May, 1536, Queen Anne Boleyn was beheaded, on a charge of unfaithfulness to the king, which is by our law high treason. She died asserting her innocence, and her last words were, "to Christ I commend my soul." The very next day the king was married to Jane Seymour! What an idea does this transaction give us of the caprice and callousness of Henry!

Rebellions were every where promoted by the popish clergy, who had the consciences of the laity completely at their command, and who saw that the gradual strides of the Reformation were likely soon to subvert their authority, and deprive them of their riches. The civil power however was quickly found sufficient to suppress them, and as a consequence to diminish the influence of the priests. But now the most important change of all took place. The king, through the influence of Archbishop Cranmer, and in spite of all the papal threatenings, ordered the Bible to be printed in English, which was accomplished in the year 1538. He also granted his royal license for all persons to read it without controul; and other regulations were adopted for enlightening the minds of the multitude, who had for so many ages been kept in the grossest ignorance through the craft and subtily of the priests.

On the 12th of October, 1537, the queen was delivered of a prince, afterwards Edward the sixth, but died herself two days after, to the great grief of the king, and the reformers whom she favoured.

Through the baneful influence of Gardiner, the popish Bishop of Winchester, the King readily persecuted one John Lambert, a priest, for asserting that the "sacramental bread was not the body of Christ." He was burnt in Smithfield with circumstances of aggravated cruelty; but his faith and patience were triumphant, and he died crying out, "None but Christ, none but Christ."

On the 6th of Jan. 1540, the King was married to Anne, of Cleves. But when he first saw her after her arrival, he was so disappointed at her appearance, that he took a dislike to her, and under a frivolous pretence, soon obtained a divorce from her. And the lady was not sorry to be released from such a husband. Cromwell, the protestant secretary of state,

and now earl of Essex, having had the chief hand in promoting this match, on account of the protestant principles of the princess, fell under Henry's displeasure, and he basely and cruelly sacrificed him to the rage of his popish enemies. He was beheaded on Tower Hill, the 28th of July, 1540, deserv'ng both of his king and country a far better fate.

On the death of this great man, the Reformation was suddenly checked, and the Duke of Norfolk and Bishop Gardiner spared no pains in reviving the persecution against those whom they termed heretics.—Doctor Barnes, Mr. Gerard, and Mr. Jerome, three priests who had early embraced the protestant doctrines, were burnt at Smithfield, and suffered with patience and constancy: which being observed by others, who had been wavering, confirmed them in their faith, and made them more bold in an open profession of it. And thus, as in the apostles' times, the afflictions of the brethren only turned out to the furtherance of the gospel.

After he was divorced from Ann of Cleves, the king married Catherine Howard, niece of the duke of Norfolk, but being afterwards found guilty of adultery, she and her accomplices were executed on Tower Hill, the 12th of February, 1542; and in July, 1543, he married Catherine Parr, widow of the Lord Latimer; she was a secret friend to the Reformation, but had not sufficient courage or influence to avert the storm with which the reformers were again threatened by the popish councillors of the king. A priest and two laymen of Windsor, were found guilty of speaking against the mass, and condemned to be burnt. They suffered cheerfully at the stake, and died praying for their enemies. But Dr. London and one lawyer Symonds, and a common infidel, having perjured themselves on this occasion, they were put in the pillory at Windsor, Reading, and Newbury, which had such an effect on the good doctor, that he died soon after of shame and grief!

Gardiner and other popish advisers of the king now determined to strike at the root of heresy: and therefore resolved on a vigorous attack upon Cranmer. But the king had so great a regard for him, that he informed him of the plot laid against him, and screened him by his authority from the rage of his enemies. The good archbishop's deportment was truly humble and gentle on this occasion, as to excite the admiration of all impartial men. And indeed such was his forgiving Christian spirit on all occasions, that it was commonly said of him, "the way to his favour was to do him an injury." Yes, instead of "rendering evil for evil," we are admonished an apostle, to adopt the very contrary conduct of turning a blessing, and thus heaping coals of fire on the heads of our adversaries.

In the last year of the reign of this changeable violent monarch, he let loose his passions against the Reformers. Shaxton, Bishop of Salisbury, was condemned to be burnt, but shamefully recanted and pardoned; and this apostate prelate became a persecutor, and preached a sermon at the burning of Ann Askew, a lady of noble birth, who, for her religious principles, was turned out of her house by her cruel husband, and with three others, was burnt in Smithfield. They preferred a good conscience to themselves; and all died with triumphant joy. The attempts to punish both Cranmer and the queen were renewed by the papists, which so disgusted the title king, that he never after could bear the sight of Bishop Gardiner.

But the time drew near that Henry was to give account of himself to God; for death levels all distinctions, and both great and small must stand before His righteous bar, where all disguise will be stripped off, and the real motives of all our actions will be made manifest to men and angels. His dissolution approached rapidly: Sir Anthony Denny had at length the courage and fidelity to acquaint him with it, exhorted him to call on God for mercy through Jesus Christ. The King confessed that his sins had been great, but said that he trusted in the mercy of Christ which were greater. He soon became speechless, and died on the 28th of Jan. 1547, Henry been a peasant instead of a king, perhaps would have enjoyed from those around him, timely warning, more spiritual directions, more fervent prayers, and then have been able to leave

* Continued from our last number.