

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

BOOK III

THE FALL OF THE MONASTERIES

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I

FURTHER TRIALS OF THE FAITHFUL

MORE's writings, we may well believe, were not altogether ineffective in the discouragement of heresy, although it was so much encouraged by the Court. It was, no doubt, essential to the King's purpose that the Pope and the clergy should be reviled and their authority impugned as much as possible. But this did not make the divorce of Katharine or the marriage with Anne Boleyn more popular; and the enforcement of the Act of Supremacy, though it made resistance hopeless, did not reconcile Henry's subjects to an unprecedented breach in the unity of Christendom. On the contrary, it aroused a deep sympathy with the patient victims of tyranny, of which the King himself was not by any means unconscious; and the leading note of his whole policy from that time was an effort to convince himself and others that in throwing off his allegiance to Rome he was merely vindicating the independence of his realm, and that he made no breach whatever in the spiritual unity of Christendom. He had his own spiritual advisers in his own kingdom, and whatever was done as regards religion and the faith was done after full consultation with them. Nor did either he or they impugn one vital doctrine.

Resentment of the King's tyranny.

To vindicate this position, while it was necessary, for the sake of his policy, to put to cruel deaths the most saintly men in his kingdom, was of course not

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 LOLLARDY AND THE REFORMATION BK. III

an easy matter; and, in fact, the very cause which led him on to his peculiar line of action had become the greatest obstacle to its success. "Thou art the cause of this man's death," he might very well say to Anne Boleyn of Sir Thomas More; only he should have blamed his own infatuated passion rather than the poor weak woman who at first had really withstood its vehemence for a considerable time. But she, or her influence, was undoubtedly the cause of the death, not only of Sir Thomas More, but of Bishop Fisher and Reynolds and the three Carthusian priors. Nor was the legal butchery even yet at an end, though the passion for Anne Boleyn had long been on the wane; for the law, however tyrannical, must be upheld, else respect for him who got it passed would very soon pass away. It was no secret to him, nevertheless, that he had greatly lost the esteem and affection of his subjects; he could not be ignorant of that, when he was ruling by terror and not by love. Yet he could not have imagined—what was unknown till our own day—how privy conspiracy, even among the courtiers whom he least suspected, was endeavouring to procure an invasion of the kingdom.¹

Arrogance
of Anne
Boleyn.

As a means of establishing better feelings between him and his subjects the sacrifice of Anne Boleyn was sure to take place before many years were over. Her indiscretions and her insolences aggravated the general feeling against her. Even her uncle, Norfolk, spoke of her with utter disgust.² She hated the Princess Mary, and even ventured to tell the King he would have to get rid of her one day, as he had got rid of Bishop Fisher. "She will be my death or I hers," she would say; "but I will take care that she shall not laugh at me after I am dead."³

This insolence of an upstart for whose sake the old order of Church and State had been completely

¹ See *L. P.*, VIII. Pref., pp. ii. iii.

² *L. P.*, VIII. 1.

³ *L. P.*, IX. 873.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. I FURTHER TRIALS OF THE FAITHFUL 5

subverted did not make men warm upholders of change in matters of religion. Even before royal supremacy over the Church had been vindicated by such cruel martyrdoms there was deep disaffection everywhere. Lord Hussey and Lord Darcy had been eager to inform the Imperial ambassador in secret that everybody in England would gladly welcome an invasion by the Emperor, even to rescue from danger Queen Katharine and her daughter Mary, and restore them to their proper positions as queen and princess. Indeed, Darcy was confident that he could raise the North against the Lutheran policy that the King seemed bent on pursuing; and if the King of Scots at the same time would invade the northern counties, while the Emperor sent a force to the Thames, it would be so much the better.¹ Other noblemen confirmed the statements of general disaffection; and even the King's Chamberlain, Lord Sandes, pretending sickness as an excuse for retiring from Court, sent a secret message to Chapuys to say that the King had lost the hearts of all his subjects, and that if the Emperor only knew the state of matters in England he would surely not delay to come to the relief of an oppressed nation.²

Secret dis-
affection of
noblemen.

Now, if this was the state of matters even before those cruel and savage executions done to vindicate royal supremacy, what was it likely to have been after they had taken place? Men spoke, of course, with bated breath as far as they dared speak of it at all. England was tongue-tied, and we need look for no direct expression of her feelings; but abroad, we know perfectly well what was thought of those brutalities. The news of the execution of Prior Houghton and his companions seemed very outrageous to the papal nuncio in France, who was informed besides that the whole of London was displeased at it.³ From Venice, too, the English ambassador reported

Public
feeling
shocked, at
home and
abroad.

¹ *L. P.*, VII. 1206.² *L. P.*, VIII. 48.³ *L. P.*, VIII. 726.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 LOLLARDY AND THE REFORMATION BK. III

that it was considered extreme cruelty and against all honest laws of God and men. He had never seen Italians so vehement about anything.¹ At Rome, of course, it was most deeply felt of all; and it aroused a feeling not only of indignation against the tyrant, but also of such admiration for his victims that some of the cardinals said that they envied such a death.² Such was the feeling for the first martyrs of the new Act, even before the further butcheries of More and Fisher. Yet in England men could say nothing. The King's power was irresistible; and if he insisted on vindicating his ecclesiastical supremacy by such savage methods, what was to be done?

It was a perplexing question. A whole nation could not be expected to imitate the example of Reynolds, and Hale, and the three Carthusian priors, and Bishop Fisher, and Sir Thomas More. How many could calmly face the prospect of strangulation, the ripping knife, the block, to yield their testimony to the belief that there was a law above the laws of Parliament and the will of a despotic king? The great majority could retain that belief, yet give a qualified oath with which the authorities were content. Even More's noble-hearted daughter, Margaret Roper, did that, and would have persuaded her father to do it too. What was compulsory surely could not be wrong, especially with the reservation, "as far as lawful." Even Convocation had made a somewhat similar reservation when it acknowledged the royal supremacy, though the reservation was afterwards treated as nil by Parliament, which cited the acknowledgment without the qualification as a warrant for "the Act of Supreme Head." Churchmen might repent too late the concessions that they had made; but Convocation, under Warham's guidance, had not really sanctioned in full the supremacy which Henry claimed. There was something, no doubt, in the

¹ *L. P.*, VIII. 874.

² *L. P.*, VIII. 786, 807.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH I. FURTHER TRIALS OF THE FAITHFUL 7

way they recognised it, too much akin to that religion of casuistry by which Henry himself would fain have justified his divorce ; and, indeed, it was the religion of casuistry which now was on its trial. But what else but casuistry was at the bottom of this whole divorce question, which ended in acts of schism? The supreme authority of the Roman pontiff was an authority to determine cases of conscience before an external tribunal. Sweep away the casuistry of the canon law and the Pope's authority was gone. Put down the Pope's authority by the strong hand, and casuistry might still fairly plead that the subjects of a realm could not be condemned for doing the best they could under trying circumstances. Besides, royal authority, as well as papal, had always been regarded as sacred, and it was hard to leave it to the individual to draw the line between them.

So when the King's authority came in conflict with the Pope's, very serious and perplexing questions were raised, even in regard to ethics. Prior Houghton himself sought the best advice, and Father Fewterer, the head and confessor of the great monastery of Sion, was entirely against his yielding to royal supremacy. But when he saw the result of the counsel he had given him, Father Fewterer deeply reproached himself. "I beseech you to forgive me, most gentle brethren," he said, when on his death-bed, to eight of the remaining Charterhouse monks, who, indeed, had been sent to him on purpose that he might cure their obstinacy : "I am guilty of the death of your reverend Father, of which I was the cause ; for I encouraged him in his resolution to die in the cause for which he suffered, and for which you are brought hither. Now, however, I am of another mind, and I perceive that the cause is not one for which we are bound to suffer death."¹

Questions
of con-
science.

The Carthusians had remained singularly steadfast

¹ Chauncy's *Historia aliquot Martyrum Anglorum* (ed. Doreau), p. 114.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 LOLLARDY AND THE REFORMATION BK. III

Efforts to
bring the
remaining
Charter-
house
monks to
conformity.

even after the awful death of their venerated prior. The daily services continued as of old in that quiet retreat outside the city and Smithfield. The convent, indeed, could not think of proceeding to elect a new prior;¹ for even on the day of Prior Houghton's martyrdom they were visited by Thomas Bedyll, clerk of the Council, who brought with him a bundle of books and "annotations," written against the primacy of "the Bishop of Rome" and even of St. Peter, showing that all the Apostles were equal by the law of God. He conversed for an hour and a half with the vicar and procurator of the House (Fathers Humphrey Middlemore and William Exmew, two of the three who were afterwards tried with Fisher and suffered three days before him), and he left the books and annotations for the edification of the convent to bring them to conformity; but the vicar and procurator sent back the books next day without any message either by word or writing. Bedyll was then confined to bed by a fever, and, sending for the procurator to come and speak to him, asked whether he and the vicar and others had examined the books. The procurator said that he and the vicar and Newdigate (the third of the above-mentioned trio) "had spent the time upon them until 9 or 10 of the clock at night, and that they saw nothing in them whereby they were moved to alter their opinion." Bedyll pointed out the danger of this opinion, "which was like to be the destruction of them and their house for ever," but they showed themselves quite unmoved and ready to meet the fate that they were soon to undergo. Worse still, when he asked the procurator whether the rest of the brethren were of like opinion, he said he was not sure, but believed that they were all of one mind. Bedyll then told him he believed they were inspired by "the spirit which appeared before God and said

¹ *L. P.*, VIII. 585 is out of place. It was in 1536 that Father Trafford was forced upon the convent as prior.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. I FURTHER TRIALS OF THE FAITHFUL 9

he would be a false spirit in the mouths of the prophets of Achab," and he wrote to Cromwell with remarkable unction :—

Finally, I suppose it to be the will of God that as their religion had a simple beginning, so in this realm it shall have a strange end, procured by themselves and by none others. And albeit they pretend holiness in this behalf, surely the ground of their said opinion is hypocrisy, vain-glory, confederacy, obstinacy, to the intent they may be seen to the world, or specially to such as have confidence in them, more faithful and more constant than any other."¹

These disgraceful words are at least a tribute to the high repute in which the Carthusians were held for constancy to their profession. The King undoubtedly felt that if he could only succeed in getting such men on his side he need hardly fear serious opposition from any other quarter. And a curious report got abroad shortly after this that the King himself had gone in disguise to the Charterhouse to persuade the monks to compliance—a statement which, strange though it be, seems really to be tolerably well authenticated. For not only was it believed by Francis I., who told it as a fact to the papal nuncio at his Court, but the same nuncio read a statement to the like effect in a letter shown him by the Imperial ambassador at the time.² It seems also to be corroborated by some later traditions to be mentioned presently, notwithstanding an important discrepancy. For it would appear that there was at least one of those Carthusian monks on whom the King might hope to bring his own personal influence to bear. Sebastian Newdigate had been, in past years, a gentleman of his privy chamber, "and not a little favored by him"—in so much that his sister, Lady Dormer, greatly feared that he would be corrupted by a dissolute Court. But when he himself perceived its moral dangers, to which the

The King said to have visited the Charterhouse himself.

¹ Wright's *Suppression of the Monasteries*, pp. 40, 41.

² *L. P.*, VIII. 837.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 LOLLARDY AND THE REFORMATION BK. III

King's determination to seek a divorce fully opened his eyes, he resolved to take refuge in a monastic life under the habit of a Carthusian.¹ Coming to the Charterhouse, therefore, with the memory, doubtless, of pleasant hours of social intercourse in the past, the King seems to have made one effort to rescue at least Newdigate from the awful fate by which he was determined to vindicate his law of supremacy. But not only had the sunshine of royal favour lost its power over Newdigate's mind, but the terrors of Prior Houghton's fate were counterbalanced to him by the prospect of that "crown of life" which faithfulness unto death would secure for him.

The Carthusian Chauncy, who lived through those terrible days and reproached himself afterwards for not having had the courage to be a martyr like some of his brethren, says that three weeks after the slaughter of Prior Houghton and his fellows, some ignoble men got authority from the King's Vicar-General Cromwell still further to afflict the monks, and seized the persons of Middlemore, Exmew, and Newdigate, whom they threw into a prison reeking with filth, where they were bound with iron chains about their necks and legs to posts and pillars.² Chauncy's narrative, though written from memory many years after, is for the most part minutely accurate, and bears the test of comparison with contemporary documents to a degree almost beyond expectation. But one little point is here omitted, and its omission really attests his accuracy still further. Three weeks from the date of Prior Houghton's martyrdom bring us to the 25th day of May; and from the indictment of Middlemore, Exmew, and Newdigate it is clear that they were taken from the Charterhouse to Stepney, where Cromwell had a

Seizure of
three more
Car-
thusians.

¹ See the *Life of Jane Dormer* (edited by J. Stevenson), pp. 19-23.

² Chauncy's *Historia aliquot Martyrum Anglorum*, p. 107. The statement is confirmed by a fragment among the collections of Camden and Stow. See *L. P.*, VIII. 895. See also what the Bishop of Faenza says, No. 846.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01772-5 - Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey, Volume 2

James Gairdner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. I FURTHER TRIALS OF THE FAITHFUL 11

mansion, on the 25th day of May, and there each of them, in reply, of course, to a question put to them all, declared severally, "I cannot, nor will, consent to be obedient to the King's Highness as a true, lawful, and obedient subject, to take and repute him to be Supreme Head in Earth of the Church of England under Christ." These are the words charged against them when they were brought to trial on the 11th June;¹ and it must have been immediately after this repudiation of royal supremacy that they were thrown into the Marshalsea prison—for that was their place of confinement.²

There, in their horrible dungeon, chained in an upright position, which allowed no rest for the body, they spent dismal days and nights for a whole fortnight; and it was there, according to later tradition, that the King went to visit them in disguise. So it is stated in the *Life of Jane Dormer*, and also in the MS. of Father Transam belonging to the English Carthusians now at Parkminster,³ both of which, though written in the middle of the seventeenth century, appear to be generally trustworthy. It is not likely, however, that the nuncio in France, writing at the time, was misinformed about the place; for though it is probable enough that the news of an incident which took place after the 25th May in London would have reached Abbeville, where the nuncio was with the French Court, before the 6th June, and that the place might have been misreported, yet it is much more credible that the King should have visited the Charterhouse than have entered a noisome prison to reason with a man who was actually suffering from the horrors of such a constrained position.

After a fortnight of this misery it must have been a real relief to the three monks to be transferred, as

¹ *L. P.*, VIII. 886.

² *Life of Jane Dormer*, p. 27, where, besides the place of confinement being named, it should be noted that the date is given quite accurately, 25th May.

³ See Hendriks, pp. 99, 170, 310.