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James Gairdner

Excerpt

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BOOK VII

QUEEN MARY'S FIRST HALF-YEAR

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CHAPTER I

MARY'S FIRST TRIALS

THE change which took place on the accession of Queen Mary was of such profound political and religious importance, both at home and abroad, that it requires to be considered from many points of view. But first of all we must consider what it was to Mary herself. Her father, as we have seen, had turned the English Constitution into a despotism, and it continued to be a despotism under her brother. Even the provisions of Henry VIII. himself to prevent abuse of the high powers of the Crown during a minority had been set aside, and more despotic powers than ever were ultimately usurped by the most unscrupulous statesman of the day, who saw no safety for himself except in a perfectly unparalleled outrage on all received principles of government. The great conspiracy, however, collapsed after Edward's death, and not only the royal title, but all the powers of the new despotism came, alike by inheritance and by statute law, to his sister Mary.

Mary's difficult position as inheriting a despotism.

Yet no woman inheriting a despotism was less despotic by nature, and no woman, if she had wished to be a despot, could have been worse educated for such a position. Even an autocrat requires training, and also requires advisers. What training had Mary? And what advice had there ever been within her reach? Almost from childhood she had been completely cut off from every advantage that would

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naturally have attached to her position. She was but eleven years old when it was known that her father was seeking a divorce from her mother, and when that divorce was effected she was seventeen. At that time every one wished her well except Anne Boleyn; even her father had some natural regard for her. But Anne Boleyn succeeded in estranging her own father from her. She was separated also from her mother lest the two should give each other comfort. She was told she was a bastard and must yield precedence to her infant sister Elizabeth, until, on Anne Boleyn's fall, her sister was declared a bastard also. Still she was not spared the full bitterness of an unjust humiliation, and, her mother being then dead, she was told that the only way to recover her father's favour was to sign a paper declaring untrue that she was the child of an unlawful and incestuous marriage. Unless she complied with that monstrous condition her very life was unsafe under the statutes, and when she for a long time resisted, several persons got into trouble owing to a suspicion that they had encouraged her obstinacy. At last, making, by advice of the Imperial Ambassador, a secret protestation that she acted only under compulsion, she signed the required document with averted eyes.¹ After that she was treated better and restored by her father and by Parliament to her natural place in the succession.

But under her brother Edward's government, as we have seen, she was again persecuted, and in a way that she had not been under her father. She was the very last person to wish to create trouble, and yet she was told she must not have Mass in her own private household as she had in her father's day; and even the Emperor's ambassador could not procure toleration for her in things necessary to her own peace

¹ *Letters and Papers*, xi. pp. 7, 8. Comp. x. 1134, 1137, 1203, 1204; xi. 9, 222. The story revealed in these documents seems almost incredible.

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of mind. A law that she could not respect, and which many agreed with her in thinking unconstitutional, was pressed against her conscience as against theirs; and the Great Conspiracy against her succession was but another measure to protect the perpetrators of injustice and carry it further.

On the Sunday before Edward's death (the 2nd July) Dr. Hodgkin, who had been suffragan of Bedford, preached, no doubt at Paul's Cross, and it was remarked that he "did neither pray for Lady Mary's Grace nor yet for Lady Elizabeth." He had evidently been instructed by the Council to omit doing so; for the next Sunday (the 9th) when Edward was actually dead, though the fact was yet unknown, Bishop Ridley did a still bolder thing by their direction, for preaching at Paul's Cross, he "called both the said ladies bastards, that all the people was sore annoyed with his words so uncharitably spoken by him in so open an audience."¹ Further, he expressly pointed out to his hearers "the incommodities and inconveniences" that might arise if they accepted Mary as Queen, "prophesying, as it were before," says Foxe, "that which after came to pass, that she would bring in foreign power to reign over them, besides the subverting also of all Christian religion then already established; showing, moreover, that the same Mary being in his diocese, he according to his duty (being then her ordinary), had travailed much with her to reduce her to this religion, and notwithstanding in all other points of civility she showed herself gentle and tractable, yet in matters that concerned true faith and doctrine, she showed herself so stiff and obstinate that there was no other hope of her to be conceived but to disturb and overturn all that which, with so great labours, had been confirmed and planted by her brother afore." Preaching like this was a dangerous duty, if duty it could justly be considered. Shortly

Ridley's
sermon,
9th July
1553.

¹ *Grey Friars' Chronicle*, p. 78; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vi. 389.

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afterwards, when Queen Mary was proclaimed, the bold orator repaired to Framlingham to make his peace with her, but met only with a cold reception.¹ On the 23rd July the Council directed a letter to Sir Thomas Cheyney and Sir John Gage "to receive into the Tower of London, as prisoners to be safely kept, the Marquis of Northampton, the Lord Robert Dudley, and Dr Ridley."²

Ridley's
past
relations
with Mary.

The allusion made by Ridley in his sermon to the way he had tried once, as "her ordinary," to convert Mary to his religion deserves a little fuller elucidation to do it justice, and it may be well to give the whole story as recorded by the Martyrologist in a previous chapter :—

About the 8th of September 1552, Dr. Ridley, then Bishop of London, lying at his house at Hadham in Hertfordshire, went to visit the Lady Mary, then lying at Hunsdon, two miles off, and was gently entertained of Sir Thomas Wharton and other her officers till it was almost eleven of the clock; about which time the said Lady Mary came forth into her chamber of presence, and then the said Bishop there saluted her Grace, and said that he was come to do his duty to her Grace. Then she thanked him for his pains, and, for a quarter of an hour, talked with him very pleasantly, and said that she knew him in the Court when he was chaplain to her father, and could well remember a sermon that he made before King Henry, her father, at the marriage of my Lady Clinton, that now is, to Sir Anthony Brown, etc.; and so dismissed him to dine with her officers.

After dinner was done, the Bishop, being called for by the said Lady Mary, resorted again to her Grace, between whom this communication was. First, the Bishop beginneth in manner as followeth :

Bishop. Madam, I came not only to do my duty to see your Grace, but also to offer myself to preach before you on Sunday next, if it will please you to hear me.

At this her countenance changed, and after silence for a space, she answered thus :

¹ Foxe, *u.s.* p. 390.

² *Acts of the Privy Council*, ed. Dasent, iv. 302.

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CH. I

MARY'S FIRST TRIALS

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Mary. My Lord, as for this last matter, I pray you make the answer to it yourself.

Bishop. Madam, considering mine office and calling, I am bound in duty to make to your Grace this offer, to preach before you.

Mary. Well, I pray you make the answer (as I have said) to this matter yourself; for you know the answer well enough. But if there be no remedy but I must make you answer, this shall be your answer: the door of the parish church adjoining shall be open for you if you come, and ye may preach if you list; but neither I nor any of mine shall hear you.

Bishop. Madam, I trust you will not refuse God's word.

Mary. I cannot tell what ye call God's word: that is not God's word now that was God's word in my father's days.

Bishop. God's word is all one in all times, but hath been better understood and practised in some ages than in others.

Mary. You durst not, for your ears, have avouched that for God's word in my father's days, that now you do. And as for your new books, I thank God I never read any of them: I never did, nor ever will do.

And after many bitter words against the form of religion then established, and against the government of the realm and the laws made in the young years of her brother (which she said she was not bound to obey till her brother came to perfect age,¹ and then she affirmed she would obey them), she asked the Bishop whether he were one of the Council. He answered "No." "You might well enough," said she, "as the Council goeth nowadays."

And so she concluded with these words: "My Lord, for your gentleness to come and see me, I thank you; but for your offering to preach before me, I thank you never a whit."

Then the said Bishop was brought by Sir Thomas Wharton to the place where they dined, and was desired to drink. And after he had drunk, he paused a while, looking very sadly; and suddenly brake out into these words: "Surely, I have done amiss." "Why so?" quoth Sir Thomas Wharton. "For I have drunk," said he, "in that place where God's word offered hath been refused: whereas, if I had remembered

¹ As we have seen in the last volume, this was not only Mary's view but that of many others. But Foxe here appends a note full of his own peculiar grace:—"It is like she was persuaded by witches and blind prophecies that King Edward should not live so long."

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my duty I ought to have departed immediately, and to have shaken off the dust of my shoes for a testimony against this house." These words were by the said Bishop spoken with such a vehemency that some of the hearers afterwards confessed their hair to stand upright on their heads. This done the said Bishop departed, and so returned to his house.¹

The way Bishop Ridley repented his lack of bad manners is truly edifying. He made up for it afterwards in that sermon at Paul's Cross, which was really rather a close imitation of the "shameful sermon" of Dr. Shaw, preached from that very pulpit seventy years before to smooth the way for Richard the Third's usurpation. And if an Edwardine bishop was capable of such things, can we wonder that there was a large amount of disloyal bigotry among the multitude? To understand the difficulties which beset Mary's government from the first we must ask ourselves how was it possible to expect peace within the kingdom when a considerable section of the people were imbued with such a spirit.

Mary herself was by no means unconscious of those difficulties. And even apart from the temper of many of her subjects, the responsibilities which had come upon her as a sovereign were peculiar. She was the first Queen Regnant England had ever seen, and she had no such ministers at hand as the Constitution has since provided for every succeeding sovereign—men who are willing to be answerable for every act of State and whose position depends upon the public favour. A Tudor sovereign, indeed, could choose his own advisers and dismiss them when they ceased to give him satisfaction. But whom could Mary choose? Almost every English statesman had been against her in the past; and though she was willing to weigh what was said to her by men of so much experience as Gardiner and Paget,

¹ Foxe, vi. 354-5. To this story is appended the note, "Testified by a certain reverend personage yet alive, being then the Bishop's chaplain."

Mary the
first Queen
Regnant.

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she naturally looked more for counsel and guidance to her cousin the Emperor, who had befriended her in past troubles, and whose advice came to her now through experienced and well-chosen Ambassadors.

There was one subject, first of all, on which she desired the advice of those Ambassadors some time before she came up to London. It was about the burial of her brother, whom she wished to inter with the old Catholic rites. This they felt rather a difficult point. When so much heresy was abroad the Emperor was anxious that she should not be too hasty in restoring the old religion, and to begin now with dirge and requiem might alarm the Council. The ceremonies at interments, they suggested, did not touch religion closely, and as the late king died in the new religion, they would be superfluous in his case. These arguments, however, did not satisfy her, and a day or two later she replied that during all King Edward's time she had told both him and the Council that she would never change her religion; that they knew quite well that she had heard Mass in secret; and that now when she had so much reason for gratitude to God, she should feel it against her conscience to inter her brother otherwise than her own religion required. She even felt bound to do so, she said, by the will of her father, which directed the particular ceremonies, Mass and prayers, that he desired in his own case; and if she showed so much timidity as to refrain, it would encourage her subjects to become more audacious, and to say openly that she had not dared to use the ancient rites. She intended, therefore, to have a Mass, which would show that she did not regard as binding the religious change initiated by the Protector Somerset.¹

Her difficulties about her brother's funeral.

On receiving the report of his Ambassadors on this subject the Emperor fully approved of the advice

¹ Imperial Ambassadors to the Emperor, 24th July 1553, R. O. Transcripts, ser. ii. 146, pp. 184-5, 187.

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they had given her, and added a still stronger reason to dissuade her from using the funeral rites that were sanctioned by Catholic usage. She could dispense with them all the better, and with an easy conscience, as her brother had died in a wrong religion, that in which he had been brought up.¹ Mary, however, had by this time made up her mind; and though she allowed Edward to be buried at Westminster with the rites of the Edwardine book on the 8th August, she had Mass said for him in the Tower on the very same day. No one was compelled to attend the service, but there were three or four hundred persons present. And it must be admitted that the cautious advice of the Imperial Ambassadors and of the experienced Emperor himself, who knew too well about religious difficulties in Germany, was fully justified by the sequel. Indeed, even at the time there were unpleasant symptoms. For the fact that Mass was actually revived, even within the seclusion of the Tower, and as something special for the occasion, did not please the Londoners who favoured the new religion. The French Ambassador, indeed, was of opinion that it would do good, and that conformity with the Queen's religion would gradually become more general, notwithstanding the objections entertained by many; but meanwhile it did not look well that the Queen had been unable to persuade her own sister Elizabeth to attend that Mass.² Elizabeth, from the very circumstances of her birth, was a general favourite with the heretics.

Two days later, on Friday the 11th August, Mass was actually said in one city church.³ But the

¹ The Emperor to his Ambassadors, 29th July; *Papiers d'État du Cardinal de Granvelle* (Docs. inédits), iv. 60.

² *Ambassades de Noailles* (Vertot), ii. 108-9.

³ St. Bartholomew's in Smithfield; see *Chron. of Queen Jane and Queen Mary*, p. 14. Noailles says at the horsemarket ("en une église qui est au marché aux chevaux et bien près de mon logis"). There was a market for horses in Smithfield of no very good repute. See Kingsford's edition of Stow's *Survey*, ii. 29, 361.

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service was really illegal, and popular indignation showed itself in a most objectionable form. Some seized the chalice; others laid hold of the habits and tore in pieces the ornaments of the altar. A crowd of two or three hundred persons had gathered, and the Lord Mayor came to restore order.¹ The Lord Mayor then repaired to the Queen's presence to report the occurrence, with a notification that if Mass were permitted it would lead to very serious trouble.²

Mass at
St. Bar-
tholomew's
causes a
riot.

The remonstrance grated on the Queen's feelings. Yet the warning was fully justified, not only by the general temper of the public, but also by the fact that from a statutory point of view Mass was at this time illegal. From Mary's own point of view, indeed, the law of the land was of no authority, being in conflict with the law of Christendom.³ But she felt it necessary to commit the priest to prison to appease the people, though immediately afterwards she allowed him to escape. Next day, before leaving London for Richmond, she summoned the Mayor and Aldermen to come to her in the Tower, and, commending to their care the administration of justice within the city, felt it necessary to make an explicit declaration of the principles which she desired to maintain in matters of religion. It was her wish that all who desired to follow the rule laid down by her father should be at perfect liberty to do so; and likewise that others who preferred either the old religion before his day, or that instituted during the late reign, should have equal protection. No one should be forced. She herself had had Mass sung, and she intended to do so in her Court in future

¹ Ambassadors to Emperor, 16th August, R. O. Transcripts, u.s. p. 280; *Ambass. de Noailles*, ii. 110, 111.

² *Ib.*

³ This is a point easily lost sight of, or, we may rather say, difficult to understand at all in these days. But it was the very ground on which Sir Thomas More justified himself for disobeying an Act of Parliament. See Vol. I. pp. 495-6.