

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schilling Kralik Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz
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**History of the Catholic Church
from the Renaissance to the
French Revolution –Volume 2**

James MacCaffrey

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**HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FROM
THE RENAISSANCE TO THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION**

VOLUME II

by

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HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

From the Renaissance to the
French Revolution

CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF ENGLAND BEFORE THE REFORMATION

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/*Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries*/, 1888; /*The Old English Bible*/, etc., 1897; /*The Great Pestilence*/, 1893; /*Parish Life in Mediaeval England*/, 1906; /*English Monastic Life*/, 1904. Capes,

/*A History of the English Church in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*/, 1909. Seebohm, /*Oxford Reformers*/ (3rd edition), 1877.

Stone, /*Reformation and Renaissance Studies*/, 1904. Gairdner, /*Lollardy and the Reformation*/, vol. i., 1908. Lilly, /*Renaissance Types*/, 1901. Bridgett, /*History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain*/ (new edition, 1908). Rivington, /*Rome and England*/, 1897.

Lingard, /*History of England*/, 10 vols., 1849. Hunt-Poole, /*Political History of England*/, v., 1910. /*Cambridge Modern History*/, vol. i., 1902.

With the advent of Henry VII. to the throne (1485) a new era opened in the history of England. The English nation, weakened by the Wars of the Roses and tired of a contest that possessed little interest for the masses, was not unwilling to submit itself without reserve to the guidance of a strong ruler provided he could guarantee peace both at home and abroad. Practically speaking, hitherto absolutism had been unknown. The rights that had been won by the barons on the plains of Runnymede were guarded jealously by their descendants, and as a result the power of the king, more especially in regard to taxation, was hedged round by several restrictions. But during the long struggle between the houses of Lancaster and York many of the great feudal barons had fallen on the field of battle or by the hands of the executioner, and the power of the nobles as a body had been undermined. While the Lords could muster their own retainers under their standard and put into the field a strong army almost at a moment's notice, it was impossible for the sovereign to rule as an absolute monarch. It was because he recognised this fact that Henry VII. took steps to enforce the Statute of Liveries passed by one of his predecessors, and to provide that armies could be levied only in the king's name.

The day of government by the aristocracy had passed for ever to be succeeded by the rule of the people, but in the interval between the sinking of one and the rise of the other Tudor absolutism was established firmly in England. In selecting his ministers Henry VII. passed over the nobles in favour of the middle classes, which were gaining ground rapidly in the country, but which had not yet realised their strength as they did later in the days of the Stuarts. He obtained grants of tonnage and poundage enjoyed by some of his Yorkist predecessors, had recourse to the system of forced grants known as benevolences, set up the Star Chamber nominally to preserve order but in reality to repress his most dangerous opponents, and treated Parliament as a mere machine, whose only work was to register the wishes of the sovereign. In brief, Henry VII., acting according to the spirit of the age, removed the elements that might make for national disunion, consolidated his own power at the expense of the nobility, won over to his side the middle and lower classes whose interests were promoted and from whom no danger was to be feared, and laid the foundations of that absolute govern-

ment, which was carried to its logical conclusions by his son and successor, Henry VIII.

By nature Henry VII. was neither overbearing nor devoid of tact, and from the doubtful character of his title to the throne he was obliged to be circumspect in his dealings with the nation. It was not so, however, with Henry VIII. He was a young, impulsive, self-willed ruler, freed from nearly all the dangers that had acted as a restraint upon his father, surrounded for the most part by upstarts who had no will except to please their master, and intensely popular with the merchants, farmers, and labourers, whose welfare was consulted, and who were removed so far from court that they knew little of royal policy or royal oppression. The House of Lords, comprising as it did representatives of the clergy and nobles, felt itself entirely at the mercy of the king, and its members, alarmed by the fate of all those who had ventured to oppose his wishes, would have decreed the abolition of their privileges rather than incur his displeasure, had they been called upon to do so. The House of Commons was composed to a great extent of the nominees of the Crown, whose names were forwarded to the sheriffs for formal confirmation. The Parliament of 1523 did show some resistance to the financial demands necessitated by the war with France, but the king's answer was to dissolve it, and to govern England by royal decrees for a space of six years. Fearing for the results of the divorce proceedings and anxious to carry the country with him in his campaign against the Pope, Henry VIII. convoked another Parliament (1529), but he took careful measures to ensure that the new House of Commons would not run counter to his wishes. Lists of persons who were known to be jealous of the powers of the Church and to be sympathetic towards any movement that might limit the pretensions of the clergy were forwarded to the sheriffs, and in due course reliable men were returned. That the majority of the members of the lower House were hostile to the privileges of the Church is clear enough, but there is no evidence that any important section desired a reformation which would involve a change of doctrine or separation from Rome. The legislation directed against the rights of the Pope sanctioned by this Parliament was accepted solely through the influence of royal threats and blandishments, and because the Parliament had no will of its own. Were the members free to speak and

act according to their own sentiments it is impossible to believe that they would have confirmed and annulled the successive marriages of the king, altered and realtered the succession to meet every new matrimonial fancy of his, and proved themselves such negligent guardians of the rights of the English nation as to allow him to dispose of the crown of England by will as he might dispose of his private possessions. Henry VIII. was undisputed master of England, of its nobles, clergy, and people, of its Convocation, and Parliament. His will was the law. Unless this outstanding fact, royal absolutism and dictatorship be realised, it is impossible to understand how a whole nation, which till that time had accepted the Pope as the Head of the Church, could have been torn against its will from the centre of unity, separated from the rest of the Catholic world, and subjected to the spiritual jurisdiction of a sovereign, whose primary motive in effecting such a revolution was the gratification of his own unbridled passions.

It is not true to assert, as some writers have asserted, that before the Reformation England was a land shrouded in the mists of ignorance; that there were no schools or colleges for imparting secular education till the days of Edward VI.; that apart from practices such as pilgrimages, indulgences, and invocation of the saints, there was no real religion among the masses; that both secular and regular clergy lived after a manner more likely to scandalise than to edify the faithful; that the people were up in arms against the exactions and privileges of the clergy, and that all parties only awaited the advent of a strong leader to throw off the yoke of Rome. These are sweeping generalisations based upon isolated abuses put forward merely to discredit the English mediaeval Church, but wholly unacceptable to those who are best acquainted with the history of the period. On the other side it would be equally wrong to state that everything was so perfect in England that no reforms were required. Many abuses, undoubtedly, had arisen in various departments of religious life, but these abuses were of such a kind that they might have been removed had the Convocations of the clergy been free to pursue their course, nor do they justify an indiscriminate condemnation of the entire ecclesiastical body.

It is true that the Renaissance movement had made great progress on the other side of the Alps before its influence could be felt even

in educated circles in England, but once the attention of the English scholars was drawn to the revival of classical studies many of them made their way to the great masters of Italy, and returned to utilise the knowledge they had acquired for the improvement of the educational system of their country. Selling and Hadley, both monks, Linacre, one of the leaders of medical science in his own time, Dean Colet of Westminster whose direction of St. Paul's College did so much to improve the curriculum of the schools,[1] Bishop Fisher of Rochester described by Erasmus as "a man without equal at this time both as to integrity of life, learning, or broadminded sympathies" with the possible exception of Archbishop Warham of Canterbury,[2] and Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England and one of the earliest martyrs for the faith in the reign of Henry VIII., were but a few of the prominent men in a movement that made itself felt throughout the entire country. Nowhere did Erasmus find a more enthusiastic welcome or more generous patrons and nowhere were his writings more thoroughly appreciated than in England.

Nor is it true to say that the advocates of classical learning were animated by hostility to the Catholic Church in their demand for an improvement in educational methods. Some murmurs were, indeed, heard in certain quarters, and charges of unorthodoxy were formulated vaguely against Colet and others of his party, but these were but the criticisms levelled in all ages against those who are in advance of their time, nor do they require serious refutation. The English Humanists had nothing in common with the neo-pagan writers of the Italian Renaissance as regards religion, and they gave no indication of hostility to Rome. Whatever other influences may have contributed to bring about the religious revolution in England, it was certainly not due to the Renaissance, for to a man its disciples were as loyal to the Catholic Church as were their two greatest leaders Fisher and More, who laid down their lives rather than prove disloyal to the successor of St. Peter.

Nor was education generally neglected in the country. The lists of students attending Oxford and Cambridge[3] in so far as they have been preserved point to the fact that in the days immediately preceding the Reformation these great seats of learning were in a most flourishing condition, and that for them the religious revolt fell little

short of proving disastrous. The explanation of the sudden drop in the number of students attending the universities is to be found partially at least in the disturbed condition of the country, but more particularly in the destruction of the religious houses, which sent up many of their members to Oxford and Cambridge, and which prepared a great number of pupils in their schools for university matriculation, as well as in the confiscation of the funds out of which bishops, chapters, monasteries, religious confraternities, and religious guilds, presented exhibitions to enable the children of the poor to avail themselves of the advantages of higher education. Nor was England of the fifteenth century without a good system of secondary schools. It is a common belief that Edward VI. was the founder of English secondary colleges, and that during the first fifty years after the Reformation more was done for this department of education than had been done in the preceding three hundred years. That such a belief is entirely erroneous may be proved from the records of the commissions held in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., from which it appears that there were close on three hundred secondary schools in England before 1549, and that Henry VIII. and particularly Edward VI. ought to be regarded as the despoilers rather than as the patrons of the English colleges. Distinct from the universities and from the mere primary schools there were in existence at the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII. seven classes of educational establishments, namely, cathedral, collegiate, and monastic colleges, colleges in connexion with hospitals, guilds, chantries, and independent institutions. These were worked in perfect co-ordination with the universities, and in most cases exhibitions were provided for the poorer scholars. "The Grammar Schools which existed," says a reliable authority, "were not mere monkish schools or choristers' schools or elementary schools. Many of them were the same schools which now live and thrive. All were schools of exactly the same type, and performing precisely the same sort of functions as the public schools and grammar schools of to-day. There were indeed also choristers' schools and elementary schools. There were scholarships at schools and exhibitions thence to the universities, and the whole paraphernalia of secondary education. Nor was secondary education understood in any different sense to that in which it was understood up to fifty years ago. It was conducted on the same lines and in the main by instruments of the

same kind, if not identically the same, as those in use till the present generation." [4]

It cannot be said with justice that the English people at the time were either badly instructed in the principles of their religion or indifferent to the practices of the Church to which they belonged. The decrees of the Synod of Oxford (1281), commanding the clergy who had care of souls to explain regularly in simple language, intelligible to their hearers the articles of the creed, the commandments, the sacraments, the seven deadly sins and the seven works of mercy, were renewed more than once, and presumably were enforced by the bishops. The books published for the instruction of the faithful as for example, /The Work for Householders/, /Dives et Pauper/, /The Interpretation and Signification of the Mass/, /The Art of Good Living/, etc., emphasise very strongly the duty of attending the religious instruction given by the clergy, while the manuals written for the guidance of the clergy make it very clear that preaching was a portion of their duties that should not be neglected. The fact that religious books of this kind were multiplied so quickly, once the art of printing had been discovered, affords strong evidence that neither priests nor people were unmindful of the need for a thorough understanding of the truths of their religion. The visitations of the parishes, during which some of the prominent parishioners were summoned to give evidence about the manner in which the priests performed their duty of instructing the people, were in themselves a great safeguard against pastoral negligence, and so far as they have been published they afford no grounds for the statement that the people were left in ignorance regarding the doctrines and practices of their religion. Apart entirely from the work done by the clergy in the pulpits and churches, it should be remembered that in the cities and even in the most remote of the rural parishes religious dramas were staged at regular intervals, and were of the greatest assistance in bringing before the minds even of the most uneducated the leading events of biblical history and the principal truths of Christianity.

That the people of England as a body hearkened to the instructions of their pastors is clear enough from the testimony of foreign visitors, from the records of the episcopal visitations, the pilgrimages to shrines of devotion at home and abroad, from the anxiety for

God's honour and glory as shown in the zeal which dictated the building or decoration of so many beautiful cathedrals and churches, the funds for which were provided by rich and poor alike, and from the spirit of charity displayed in the numerous bequests for the relief of the poor and the suffering. The people of England at the beginning of the sixteenth century were neither idol-worshippers nor victims of a blind superstition. They understood just as well as Catholics understand at the present day devotions to Our Lady and to the Saints; Images, Pictures and Statues, Purgatory, Indulgences and the effects of the Mass. Nor were they so ignorant of the Sacred Scriptures as is commonly supposed. The sermons were based upon some Scripture text taken as a rule from the epistle and gospel proper to the Sunday or festival, and were illustrated with a wealth of references and allusions drawn from both the Old and New Testament sufficient to make it clear that the Bible was not a sealed book either for the clergy or laity. The fact that there was such a demand for commentaries on and concordances to the Scriptures makes it clear that the clergy realised sufficiently the importance of Scriptural teaching from the pulpits, and the abundant quotations to be found in the books of popular devotion, not to speak of the religious dramas based upon events in biblical history, go far to show that the needs of the laity in this respect were not overlooked.[5]

It is said, however, that the use of the Scriptures in the vernacular was forbidden to the English people, and a decree of a Synod held at Oxford in 1408 is cited in proof of this statement. The Synod of Oxford did not forbid the use of vernacular versions. It forbade the publication or use of unauthorised translations,[6] and in the circumstances of the time, when the Lollard heretics were strong and were endeavouring to win over the people to their views by disseminating corrupt versions of the Scripture, such a prohibition is not unintelligible. It should be borne in mind that French was the language of the educated and was the official language of the English law courts and of the Parliament till after 1360. The French or Latin versions then current were, therefore, amply sufficient for those who were likely to derive any advantage from the study of the Bible, while at the same time the metrical paraphrases of the important books of the Old Testament and of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, and the English prose translation of the Psalms, went

far to meet the wants of the masses. From the clear evidence of writers like Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England and one of the best informed men of his time, of Cranmer, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, and of Foxe the author of the so-called Martyrology, it can be established beyond the shadow of a doubt that prior to the Reformation there existed an English Catholic version of the Scriptures, which was approved for use by the ecclesiastical authorities.[7] It is true, indeed, that the bishops of England made extraordinary efforts to prevent the circulation of the versions made by Tyndale and Coverdale, but considering the glosses, the corruptions, and the mis-translations with which these abound no fair-minded person could expect them to have acted otherwise. Their action was not dictated by hostility to the reading of the Scriptures but by their opposition to heretical doctrines, which it was sought to disseminate among the people by means of dishonest versions of the Scriptures. The English bishops were not content merely with prohibiting the use of these works. They were most anxious to bring out a correct translation of the Scriptures for general use, and were prevented from doing so only by the action of Henry VIII. and of the heretical advisers, who urged him to make it impossible for the bishops to carry out their design.[8]

It would, however, be far from the truth to assert that everything was faultless during the years preceding the Reformation, or that all the clergy were as perfect as they might have been. England, like every other country at the same period, was afflicted with the terrible evils resulting from the appropriation of parishes by laymen and by religious establishments, a system which made it impossible for a bishop to govern his diocese properly, from the non-residence of both bishops and higher clergy, and from the plurality of benefices, which meant that a person might be permitted to hold two or more benefices to which the care of souls was attached, thereby rendering impossible the proper discharge of pastoral duties. More priests, too, were ordained than could be provided with appointments, and consequently many of the clergy were forced to act as chaplains and tutors in private families, where they were treated as servants rather than as equals, and where it was only too easy for them to lose the sense of respect for their dignity and for themselves, and to sink to the level of those with whom they were obliged to consort. It is not

to be wondered at if evidence is forthcoming that in particular cases, more especially in Wales, clerical celibacy was not observed as it should have been, or that in several instances the duty of preaching and instructing the people was not discharged, nor is it surprising to find that men who were comparatively unlearned were promoted over the heads of their more educated companions to the disgust of the universities and of those interested in the better education of the clergy. Considering the fact that so many of the bishops were engaged in the service of the State to the neglect of their duties in their dioceses, and bearing also in mind the selfish use made too frequently of the rights of lay patronage and the disorganisation to which even the most enlightened use of such patronage was likely to lead, it is little less than marvellous that the great body of the clergy were as educated, zealous, and irreproachable as they can be proved to have been.

As a result of the disorganisation wrought by the Black Plague, the civil strife which disturbed the peace of the country, and the constant interference of the crown and lay patrons, many of the religious houses, influenced to some extent by the general spirit of laxity peculiar to the age, fell far short of the standard of severity and discipline that had been set in better days. While on the one hand it should be admitted freely that some of the monastic and conventual establishments stood in urgent need of reform, there is, on the other side, no sufficient evidence to support the wild charges of wholesale corruption and immorality levelled against the monks and nuns of England by those who thirsted for their destruction. The main foundation for such an accusation is to be sought for in the letters and reports (/Comperta/) of the commissioners sent out to examine into the condition of the monasteries and convents in 1535. Even if these documents could be relied upon as perfectly trustworthy they affect only a very small percentage of the religious houses, since not more than one-third of these establishments were visited by the commissioners during their hurried tour through the country, and as regards the houses visited serious crimes were preferred against at most two hundred and fifty monks and nuns.

But there are many solid grounds for rejecting the reliability of these documents. The commissioners were appointed by Cromwell with the professed object of preparing the public mind for the sup-

pression of the monasteries and convents. They showed themselves to be his most obsequious agents, always ready to accept as testimony popular rumours and suspicions founded in many cases on personal dislikes, and, like their master, more anxious to extract money bribes from the religious than to arrive at the truth about their lives or the condition of their establishments. That they were prejudiced witnesses, arrogant and cruel towards the monks and nuns, and willing to do anything that might win them the approval of Cromwell and the king is evident from their own letters and reports, while if we are to credit the statements of contemporaries, backed by a tradition, which survived for centuries amongst the Catholic body in England, they were most unscrupulous and immoral in their attitude towards the unfortunate nuns who were placed at their mercy. Indeed the charges which they make are so filthy and repulsive, and the delight with which they revel in such abominations is so apparent, that one is forced to the conviction that they must have been men of depraved tastes quite capable of committing or of attempting to commit the crimes laid to their charge. Even if it had been otherwise, had the two commissioners been unprejudiced and fair in their proceedings, it is impossible to understand how they could have had an opportunity of making a really searching investigation into the condition of the monasteries and convents during the short time assigned for the work. They began only in July 1535 and their work was completed in February 1536.

In favour of the reliability of these reports the fact is urged that they were placed before Parliament, and that the members of both Houses were so impressed by the tale of corruption and wickedness which they disclosed that they decided on the immediate suppression of the monasteries. If this were true and if Parliament in the days of Henry VIII. enjoyed the same rights and privileges as it enjoys to-day such action would be in itself a strong corroboration of the veracity of the commissioners. But there is no sufficient evidence to prove that the reports or compilations made from them were ever submitted to Parliament. The king and Cromwell informed the Houses of the charges made by the commissioners, and demanded their consent to the bill of suppression. The whole measure was passed in a few days (11th to 18th March, 1536) and there is

no proof that the /Comperta/ or a "Black Book" were presented to the members. On the contrary, it is clear from the preamble to the Act that in the larger monasteries "religion was right well kept and observed," and that it was only in the smaller houses with less than twelve members that disorder and corruption existed, whereas in the reports of the commissioners no such distinction is observed, the charges being levelled just as strongly against the larger as against the smaller communities. Had Parliament been in possession of the reports or had there been any adequate discussion, it is difficult to see how such an arbitrary distinction, founded neither on the nature of things, nor on the findings of the commissioners, could have been allowed to pass. It is noteworthy too that many of the individuals, whose names were associated in the /Comperta/ with very serious crimes, were placed in the possession of pensions on the dissolution of the monasteries, and some of them were promoted to the highest ecclesiastical offices in the gift of the crown.

Besides, if the reports of Leigh and Leyton be compared with the episcopal visitations of the same houses or with those of the royal visitors appointed in 1536 to carry out the suppression of the smaller monasteries, it will be found that in regard to the very same houses there exists a very open contradiction between their findings. Unfortunately the accounts of the visitations have disappeared to a great extent except in case of the diocese of Norwich. In this diocese the visitations were carried out very strictly and very minutely, and although some abuses were detected the bishop could find nothing of the wholesale corruption and immorality discovered a few years later by the minions of Cromwell. Similarly the commission appointed in 1536 to superintend the suppression decreed in that year, the members of which were drawn from the leading men in each county, report in the highest terms of houses which were spoken of as hot-beds of iniquity only a few months before. Finally, if the monasteries and convents were really so bad as they are painted, it is a curious fact that although Leigh and Leyton were empowered by Cromwell to open the doors to many of the monks and nuns they could find in the thirteen counties which they visited only two nuns and fifty-three monks willing to avail themselves of the liberty which they offered.[9]