

## THE RISE OF ELIZABETHAN SEPARATISM

### *Introduction*

CARL BECKER once remarked that a professor is a man who thinks otherwise. Elizabethan Separatism was a consequence of men and women who thought otherwise. These persons resisted the pressures to return to Catholicism in the reign of Bloody Mary, and they were willing to pay the penalty for their convictions. Many fled to the Continent, and others paid the supreme price in the fires of Smithfield. When the exiles returned, the fires continued to burn in their souls as they read and reread John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose hour has come. When ideas become suffused with emotional power, they are translated into ideals. The ideas and ideals of the exiles and martyrs constituted the real strength of the nonconformists who made possible the rise of Elizabethan Separatism. These ideas came partly from the currents of thought in Lutheran Saxony and Calvinistic Geneva. But ultimately and essentially they came from the same source that Luther and Calvin had used—the Bible. Tyndale's New Testament of 1526, Coverdale's Bible of 1535, Matthew's Bible of 1537 and its revision by Taverner in 1539, the Great Bible of 1539-40, Whittingham's New Testament of 1557, the Geneva Bible of 1560, the Bishops' Bible of 1568, and the Rheims New Testament of 1582 made available the Scriptures in English to the people of Elizabethan England. Printers, Protestants, and translators caused Englishmen to become "the people of a book, and that book was the Bible." The spirit of Wyclif and Tyndale had triumphed, and no longer was it necessary to suggest that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." The discovery of the pure Word of God provided a

guide for faith, a pattern for worship, a standard for discipline, and a reason for separation.

Attempts at reform were evident in the Vestiarian struggle, the Admonition Controversy, the appeals to Parliament, the parliamentary debates, the controversy between Cartwright and Whitgift, and the Presbyterian attempt to establish a national church. These attempts failed because of the intervention of Queen Elizabeth, because of external threats to the national safety, and because of the successful efforts of those who believed in the Elizabethan Establishment.

History doesn't repeat itself, and it doesn't prove as many points as we glibly assert, but it does give evidence of probabilities. One strong probability is that the postponement of reform may be a costly business. In 1417, the Council of Constance ended the Great Schism, dealt with the problem of heresy, but postponed the issue of reform. One hundred years later the reform movement expressed itself in Martin Luther, and then spread rapidly into many countries. Reform was accomplished in the German states, in the cantons of Switzerland, in the Netherlands, and in the Scandinavian states. But in England there was no reform except at the top when Henry VIII replaced the pope as the head of the Anglican Church. Under Edward VI thorough-going reform was instituted, but these efforts were nullified by the counter-reforms in the reign of Bloody Mary.

From the ideas and pattern revealed in the Bible, and from the failure of the attempted reforms, there emerged the first Elizabethan Separatist groups. About May, 1566, a group of nonconformists assembled in Plumber's Hall and agreed:

That since they could not have the Word of God preached nor the Sacraments administered without idolatrous gear; and since there had been a separate congregation in London,

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and another in Geneva in Mary's time, using a book and order of Service approved by Calvin, which was free from the superstitions of the English Service: therefore it was their duty, in their present circumstances, to break off from the public churches, and to assemble, as they had opportunity, in private houses or elsewhere to worship God in a manner that might not offend against the light of their consciences.

On June 19, 1567, after more than a year of secret meetings, this congregation of about 100 persons was arrested by the authorities. Twenty-four men and seven women were imprisoned for a year in Bridewell, including such leaders as Thomas Bowland, John Smith, William Nyxson, and James Irelande. Another group which had been apprehended about the same time was in the Bridewell prison. Among its leaders were Richard Fitz and John Bolton. Despite arrests, both groups seemed to have maintained a precarious existence, up until 1572 at least.

It was possible to arrest and imprison nonconformists, but it was impossible to suppress the questions that were being asked. What is the proper role of the magistrate? Is the king the head of the church, its supreme governor, or is he arrogating to himself that which belong to Christ alone? What is the limit of the king's power? If the lawyers are correct in saying that in civil affairs the king is limited by the common law, then *a fortiori* is he not more limited in religious affairs? Heavenly things are less his prerogative than earthly things. Is it reasonable or right or consistent to suppose that he is limited in civil jurisdiction and unlimited in ecclesiastical power? Was Henry VIII within his rights in declaring that he might forbid the reading of Scripture? By implication was he claiming the power of deciding doubtful meanings, of establishing principles of interpretation? In short, could he decide what was heresy?

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As the Bible became the intellectual and spiritual property of Englishmen, the ideological and religious ferment increased. Who shall interpret the Word of God? The standard reply had been that the Roman Catholic Church shall decide, but the Act of Supremacy, the persecutions of Bloody Mary, and the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth by Pius V in 1570 had made such a reply ridiculous and intolerable. Dean Gabriel Goodman had asked his prisoners: "But who will you have to judge the Word of God?" And Bishop Lancelot Andrewes had asserted that the Word of God cannot speak. Who then will decide what is literal, moral, spiritual, anagogical, figurative, allegorical?

Although the new Biblical ideas existed in the minds of thoughtful readers, these thoughts did not eventuate immediately in altered institutions. Usually a generation or two is required before ideas have visible consequences. The result is that during the transition many of the "forward sort," the enthusiasts, and the quick-witted become impatient. For such persons the gap between the ideal and the actual is too apparent, too painful, and too costly. It is easy to understand, therefore, why leaders of religious thought would agree with Anthony Gilby when he wrote:

There was no reformation [under Henry VIII] but a deformation in the time of that tyrant and lecherous monster. That boar, I grant, was busy rooting and digging in the earth and all his pigs that followed him. But they sought only for the pleasant fruits . . . with their long snouts: and for their own bellies' sake they rooted up many weeds; but they turned the ground so, mingling good and bad together, sweet and sour, medicine and poison,—they made, I say, such confusion of religion and laws, that no good thing could grow, but by great miracle, under such gardeners. This monstrous boar must needs be called the Head of the Church, displacing Christ our only Head. Wherefore, in this point, O England, ye were no better than the Romish Antichrist.

*Robert Browne*

Robert Browne is the first great Separatist writer, and from his preaching and books the movement for separation from the established Elizabethan church had its beginnings. Browne was born in Rutlandshire about 1550, of a good family, and was distantly related to Lord Burghley. He was educated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he proceeded B.A. in 1572. At Cambridge he became a part of the exciting discussions on vestments, church polity, New Testament principles, episcopal authority, and ecclesiastical reform. During his undergraduate days the controversy between John Whitgift and Thomas Cartwright was raging, and Cartwright was deprived of his professorship. Undoubtedly, Browne was strongly influenced during these formative years, and during the following eight years his residence in London and Cambridge, his knowledge of the Admonition Controversy, his searching discussions with Richard Greenham at Dry Drayton and Robert Harrison at Norwich, culminated in a radical decision. He and Robert Harrison established a Separatist church in Norwich, based on the principle that "the kingdom of God is not to be begun by whole parishes but rather of the worthiest were they never so few." His frank avowal of this far-reaching principle, which violated the Act of Uniformity of 1559, is a testimony to his courage, and his refusal to be licensed or controlled by the Bishop of Ely or the Bishop of Norwich indicates the strength of his militant and defiant convictions. When the complaints and opposition became more bitter, when persecution and imprisonment became the price of his independent views, he and his congregation in 1581 migrated to Middelburg, on the island of Walcheren, a part of the Netherlands. Browne was the pastor or minister, and Harrison was the teacher or

doctor. In the following year three of Browne's most important works were published. By the autumn of the following year a serious schism had developed in the congregation, and Browne went to Scotland. He was not a tactful guest, and his stay with the Scottish Presbyterians was an unhappy one. Back in England in 1584, he suffered imprisonment, fought ill-health, and pondered the problem of Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Separatism. On October 7, 1585, he made his peace with the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift. From 1586 to 1591 he taught school in Southwark, and in Stamford, Lincolnshire, and in 1591 accepted the position of rector in the parish church of Achurch, Northamptonshire, thanks to the assistance of Lord Burghley. During the next forty-two years he remained in this church, nominally a conformist, actually at war with himself and a conforming society.

Although Browne was far removed from London during the latter half of his life, his ideas and books became more influential. Of all of his writings, the best known work is *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie*. Its purpose is fourfold: to refute accusations against the Brownists; to clarify the role of church and state; to urge the immediate reformation of the church; and to condemn those preachers who evade their responsibility for reform by pleading dependence on the secular authority.

The Brownists were criticized because they had left England to go to the Netherlands, because they had forsaken the true church, and because they had manifested ill-will toward their sovereign, Queen Elizabeth. On these charges, the position of the Brownists was that persecution and imprisonments had necessitated the migration to the Netherlands, and that the persecutors, not the persecuted, had forsaken the

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true church. So far as the Queen was concerned, Browne admitted that on this point the adversaries had wrought great trouble. He asserted the sovereignty of Elizabeth, declared that neither pope nor popeling had any authority over her, and that in all things civil she was the chief magistrate under God for all persons and causes.

Browne's emphasis on Elizabeth's civil power, and his denunciation of the pope as antichrist, were calculated to elicit general approval, but they were irrelevant to the real question—the role of the civil power in ecclesiastical affairs. Browne's position was that neither Queen Elizabeth nor Parliament had jurisdiction over the church. The spiritual kingdom is not subservient to earthly rules. Jesus Christ is superior to civil rulers, and the pastor is superior to the magistrate. The sheep do not lead the shepherd.

Browne certainly wishes the magistrates to wield the civil sword, but he denounces their usurpation of religious powers, which the clergy have surrendered so cravenly. This usurpation hinders the reformation of the church. The kingdom of Christ is not dependent on civil power. In fact, the church in centuries past has flourished most in the face of opposition. Therefore, the clergy should realize their obligation of reforming the church without tarrying for the commands of the magistrate. St. Paul tarried for no such command. If the clergy plead that times are troublous, let them remember that Jerusalem was rebuilt in dangerous times. If magistrates are in sympathy with the true pastors, there can be no tarrying. If they are out of sympathy with the true builders or oppose them, they are not Christians. Therefore, whatever excuse is offered, there can be no tarrying.

*A Treatise upon the 23 of Matthewe* is one of Browne's most readable works. Ostensibly, it is a discussion of how to

handle the Scriptures in preaching. Actually, it is rather a denunciation of current preaching, which is akin to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, and a plea for the kind of speaking exemplified by Jesus, who spoke as one having authority. Written in a vigorous style, this work is scarcely less trenchant than the Martin Marprelate tracts.

One fault of preaching, said Browne, was that it was wrongly motivated. Too many sermons reflected an ostentatious vaunting of the preacher's knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. When the Cambridge graduates stand in the pulpits, resplendent in their scarlet gowns and hoods, pride shines forth, and the speaker directs the attention of the audience not to the divine message but to the human messenger.

Another fault of preaching is the undue interjection of logic into the sermon. Browne admits that logic *per se* is good, but the light of Scripture is better. Graduates of Cambridge are so enamored with logic that they consider it a heavenly art. But their abuse and misuse of logic make it a mingling of filth with sweet water, a mixing of dross with gold. Browne is particularly scornful of the use of the syllogism in preaching. Job was an expert at disputation, but his proofs did not "walke uppon a major and a minor." Paul and Timothy were logical forthright preachers, but they warned men against vain philosophy and profane babblings. True preaching produces goodness and wisdom, prevents godliness and folly, but modern sixteen-century preaching displays kinds, sorts, species, genus, consentanie, dissentanie, differences, divisions, definitions, agreements, predicables, and predicaments.

Essentially, Browne's indictment of logic is that preachers have made it an end in itself. His criticism is reminiscent of



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Bacon's scornful denunciation of the scholastics, of Galileo's criticism of the philosophers who tried to spirit away the rings of Saturn by their logic-chopping incantations, and of Huxley's reminder that the end of life was not knowledge but action. Browne's own statement summarizes the danger to which the teaching of logic is prone: "But nowe their Logike hath helde them so long in learning what they shuld do, that they have done little or nothing at all."

Browne displays the same scorn for rhetoric as for logic, and is contemptuous of the kind of learning acquired at Cambridge. There is too much emphasis upon pseudo-terminology and mere vocabulary. Among the terms which he singles out for special derision are the following: anadiplosis, anaphora, aporia, aposiopesis, epanorthosis, epistrophe, epizeuxis, paranomasia, polyptoton, prolepsis, symploce, synecdoche. In mocking denunciation Browne cries out:

O Rhetorik farre fetched, even from the dunghills of Greece,  
those rotten divisings of vaine Philosophers . . . O mysteries,  
O Rhetoricke so faire and so glorious a Lady thou art.

The most interesting, the most valuable, and the worst printed of Browne's writings is *A True and Short Declaration, Both of the Gathering and Joining Together of Certaine Persons: and Also of the Lamentable Breach and Division Which Fell amongst Them*. The interest and the value of this treatise derive from the autobiographical details, the strong antiepiscopal bias, and the account given of the early history of his first significant experiments in Separatism. From this work the reader obtains details about Browne's student life at Cambridge, his early teaching and preaching career, his meeting with Robert Harrison, Richard Greenham, Richard Bancroft, and his leadership among the pioneer Congregationalists.

Browne's anti-episcopal bias is evident at the beginning of his career as a preacher, when he refuses to procure the bishop's license. The burden of his argument is that bishops are antichrists possessing usurped power. They practice popish government, force their own laws upon the people, compel devotion, and pollute the Lord's sanctuary by ministering to the spiritually unfit. Browne's denunciation of the bishops, which antedates the Martin Marprelate tracts by at least a decade, is historically significant, since the anti-episcopal attitude of the 1570's and 1580's becomes a national factor, which in the 1630's and 1640's is reflected in the policies of Laud, the writings and barbarous treatment of Bastwick, Burton, and Prynne, and the debates in the Long Parliament to extirpate episcopacy root and branch.

For the student of early Congregationalism, this writing is important, since it reveals the early stages of nonconformity. One learns of the early discussions of Browne and Harrison, of the new ideas, and the emergence of dissent. As the heavy hand of persecution makes itself felt, the dissenters consider exile to Scotland or the Channel Islands, but finally decide to migrate to the Netherlands. After settling at Middelburg, the exiles encounter difficulties, become homesick, quarrel with one another, and fall apart. Browne is in the thick of the fight, but though he considers himself in the right and the others in the wrong, he tells the story of these lamentable divisions with remarkable fairness and objectivity.

From Robert Browne came three great principles. One was that Church and State are separate, independent, but complementary institutions. This view certainly repudiated the Roman Catholic and medieval conceptions, and it upset the

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English theory that the Christian Commonwealth and the Christian Church are identical, as John Whitgift and Richard Hooker sincerely believed. A second principle, induced from the events of the 1570's, was that reformation should not tarry for the permission of Queen or Parliament. Religion should be independent of the wishes or whims of secular magistrates. The Word of God was more important than the ordinance of man. Brownists were rightly Puritans in a hurry. A third principle, eminently practical in showing how reform should be initiated and accomplished, was that the kingdom of God was not to be launched by entire parishes, by the blowing of trumpets, and by the enactment of parliamentary legislation, but rather by a select company of persons, the spiritually worthiest, "were they never so few," gathered into a Christian fellowship, consciously and clearly dedicated to Christ. Church membership was a serious, decisive, dedicated act, not a nominal affiliation. In a Christian Church one ought to be a Christian, not a gamester, not a tippler, not a mere hanger-on, not a reluctant participant seeking to avoid a non-attendance fine.

These were clear-cut principles, exciting and challenging, but they ran counter to tradition. They also upset the Queen and the Anglican hierarchy. Furthermore, to a seasoned statesman such as Lord Burghley, they tended toward division at a time when unity was sorely needed against Spanish threats and Catholic ambitions. Perhaps because of these arguments, partly by reason of ill-health, perhaps somewhat because of his experiences in Middelburg and Edinburg and Norwich, and partly from the sage advice of Lord Burghley, Robert Browne made his peace with the Archbishop of Canterbury on October 7, 1585.

*John Greenwood*

It is interesting to note that in the very year that Browne made his submission to Archbishop Whitgift, 1585, John Greenwood gave up his ministry in the Established Church, came to London, and in 1585-7 joined the Separatists. We do not know the exact time of the formation of this church, but it probably met regularly after Greenwood's arrival. We do know that on October 8, 1587, a worship service was held at the home of Henry Martin in St. Andrews in the Wardrobe. The congregation of twenty-one persons was arrested and brought to the Bishop of London's palace for interrogation. Greenwood was sent to the Clink, removed to the Fleet in 1588, and remained a prisoner until the spring or summer of 1592, was released or bailed for a few weeks, was elected teacher at the organization meeting of the Separatists in September, arrested again on the night of December 5-6. He remained in jail until his execution on April 6, 1593. During his long imprisonment he wrote *An Answer to George Gifford's Pretended Defence of Read Prayers and Devised Liturgies*. He collaborated with Henry Barrow in writing *A Collection of Certaine Sclaunderous Articles Gyven out by the Bisshops* and also *A Collection of Certain Letters and Conferences Lately Passed betwixt Certaine Preachers and Two Prisoners in the Fleet*. All three were published in 1590.

*Henry Barrow*

Henry Greenwood's collaborator, Henry Barrow, is one of the towering giants of Separatism. Even more than Robert Browne, he should be regarded as the father of the Independents or Congregationalists. Browne preached widely, organized Separatist congregations in Norwich and Middelburg, and wrote his books some seven or eight years earlier than

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those of Barrow. But Browne returned to the Anglican Church in 1585, and stayed and worked within it for the remaining forty-eight years of his life. Barrow's writings are more voluminous, more hard-hitting, more clear-cut, more decisive, and more uncompromising and unflinching. He spent the last five and one-half years in prison, in close confinement, without the usual prison privileges accorded even hardened criminals, and without bail. He feared no man, truckled to no authority, compromised not one whit, recanted nothing, and went to his death a true martyr.

The details of his early life are woefully inadequate. Born about 1549-1550 in Shipdam, Norfolk, educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, 1566-1570, he became a student of law and in 1576 entered Gray's Inn, although he seems never to have practiced as a lawyer. His youthful zeal and temper were expressed in riotous living, in sensual pleasures, and in idle luxury. But about 1582 he was suddenly and thoroughly converted.

Walking in London one Lord's day with one of his companions, he heard a preacher at his sermon very loud as they passed at the church. Upon which Mr. Barrow said to his consort, "Let us go in and hear what this man saith who is thus in earnest." "Tush," saith the other, "what—shall we go to hear a man talk?" But he went [in] and sat down. And the minister was vehement in reproving sin, and sharply applied the judgments of God against the same; and, it should seem, touched him to the quick in such things as he was guilty of, so as God set it home to his soul and began to work for his repentance and conviction thereby, for he was so stricken as he could not be quiet until by conference with godly men and further hearing of the Word, with diligent reading and meditation, God brought peace to his soul and conscience, after much humiliation of heart and reformation of life . . . and being missed at Court by his consorts and acquaintances, it was quickly hinted abroad that Barrow was turned Puritan.

After his conversion, Barrow, like St. Paul, went into seclusion to contemplate the new direction and purposes of his life. He became an avid student of the Bible, read widely in the field of theology, and perused the controversial literature of his own period. It is probable that in the period 1583-6 he met John Greenwood in Norfolk, and he may have attended some of the London conventicles in 1586-7. But in October, 1587, he was in Norfolk when he heard of the arrest of the London Separatists. Greenwood had been imprisoned on October 8, 1587. Six weeks later, on November 19, Henry Barrow visited Greenwood at the Clink. During the first fifteen minutes of the visit, the keeper of the Clink learned the identity of the visitor and placed him under arrest, without a warrant, on the basis of a standing order from Archbishop Whitgift. Barrow was taken that same day to Lambeth Palace and interrogated by the archbishop and Richard Cosin. He rejected the oath *ex officio mero*, refused to incriminate himself, and declined to enter into bond. Accordingly, he was committed to the Gatehouse prison. Eight days later, on November 27, 1587, Barrow appeared before the Court of High Commission. Again he refused to take an oath. When he bluntly told the archbishop that "there is more cause to swear mine accuser," Whitgift lost his temper and replied: "Where is his keeper? You shal not prattle here. Away with him; clap him up close, close; let no man come at him. I wil make him tel an other tale, yet I have done with him." The archbishop was human in his "choler" and exasperation, but there is no evidence of turning the other cheek, returning good for evil, or meeting defiance with kindness. Barrow was placed in "close" confinement and remained in jail until his execution five and one-half years later, April 6, 1593.

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During this long period of imprisonment, Barrow was examined five more times, subjected to special conferences, and finally brought to trial at Sessions Hall on March 21, 1592/3. Inasmuch as his examinations have been confused and wrongly dated, both in source materials and secondary accounts, it may be well to summarize them at this time. Barrow's first examination was held on November 19, 1587 (not 1586, as given in the earliest printed accounts), at Lambeth Palace, before Archbishop John Whitgift, Archdeacon John Mullins, and Dr. Richard Cosin. His second examination occurred on November 27, 1587, before the Court of High Commission. The third examination was held in the Fleet Prison on January 1, 1588/89, before Justice Richard Young and Dr. Robert Some, who had been commissioned by the Privy Council to interview him. On March 18, 1588/89, for his fourth examination, he was brought to Whitehall and examined before the Privy Council, which included Archbishop Whitgift, Lord Chancellor Hatton, Lord Treasurer Burghley, Bishop Aylmer, and Lord Buckhurst, among others. Six days later, on March 24, 1588/89, he appeared before a Special Commission, appointed by the Queen. Among those sitting in Judgment, during this fifth examination, were the highest legal officials of the land: Sir Christopher Wray, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench; Sir Edmund Anderson, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas; Sir Gilbert Gerrard, Master of the Rolls; Sir Roger Manwood, Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer; and Baron Thomas Gent, also of the Exchequer. Also present were Archbishop Whitgift, Bishop Aylmer of London, Bishop Thomas Cooper of Winchester, and Archdeacon William Hutchinson. Of other doctors and officials, it is highly probable that Sir Edward Stanhope, Chancellor of the London diocese, Dr. Richard Cosin,

Dean of the Arches, and Dr. Robert Some, special investigator, were present.

Four long years in close imprisonment followed his fifth examination. On March 11, 1592/3, he was examined for the sixth time by the two lord chief justices, Sir John Popham of the Court of King's Bench, and Sir Edmund Anderson of the Court of Common Pleas. His seventh examination, on March 20, 1592/3, was conducted by the same two lord chief justices, together with Attorney General Thomas Egerton, William Lewin, a judge of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, and Edward Stanhope, vicar-general of the province of Canterbury. On the following day, March 21; his trial began at Newgate; on March 23 he was found guilty of violating the statute of 23 Elizabeth, *caput* 2, on seditious writings. He was reprieved on March 24, again on March 31, and executed April 6, 1593.

Barrow's examinations and trial, together with those of his fellow Separatists, advertised the cause of ecclesiastical reform. Denunciations in the pulpits had the same effect. But the most effective agency was the written and printed word. Manuscript treatises by the Separatists circulated during 1587-1593, were read, studied, and copied. Use of the printed page was more difficult. Books needed to be entered in the Stationers' Company, and printers and publishers were subject to fines and imprisonment for violating the regulations. Consequently, Barrow's books were secretly printed in the Netherlands smuggled into England and furtively distributed. The first work that issued from a press at Dort was *A True Description out of the Worde of God, of the Visible Church*, a small tract printed by one Hanse or Hause in 1589. More important was *A Collection of Certaine Sclaunderous Articles Gyven out by the Bisshops*, published about April, 1590, and



followed by *A Collection of Certain Letters and Conferences Lately Passed betwixt Certain Preachers and Two Prisoners in the Fleet*, published in the summer of 1590, also at Dort by Hanse.

Barrow's most important book, *A Brief Discoverie of the False Church*, was printed at Dort near the end of 1590. Some copies seem to have been seized by the authorities, but the book was circulated and read. This was the volume used by the authorities to indict Barrow in 1593 for printing and publishing seditious writings. Another work by Barrow, *A Plaine Refutation of Mr. Giffard's Booke*, printed in 1591, was seized and burned by the help of Francis Johnson, who kept two copies for himself. Therefore, this book achieved no circulation during Barrow's lifetime. But Johnson read the book, was influenced by it, gave up his ministry in Middelburg, visited Barrow and Greenwood in prison, became a Separatist, was elected pastor of the church in September, 1592, suffered imprisonment in December, 1592, was released in 1597, went to the Netherlands, became pastor of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam, and republished at his own expense in 1605 the very book he had destroyed. Thus did he atone for his act of 1591.

Greenwood's book, *An Answer to George Gifford's Pretended Defence of Read Prayers and Devised Litourgies*, was published in Dort in the summer of 1590. Of Penry's nine books, eight were written before he formally joined the Separatists, but all of them were critical of the episcopal hierarchy and pleaded for the same reform which the Separatists ardently desired. Only one was licensed in England. It was printed at Oxford by Joseph Barnes—*A Treatise Containing the Aequity of an Humble Supplication*, and this entire edition was confiscated in London by the Stationers' Company,

evidently on orders of Archbishop Whitgift and/or the Court of High Commission. Most of Penry's books were secretly printed in England and openly in Scotland by the Puritan printer, Robert Waldegrave.

From Barrow's writings emerged a criticism of the Anglican Church and a new Separatist system of beliefs and principles. His criticism of the Establishment may be summarized in five heinous transgressions. First, the Anglican Church was based on a false membership. Since the parish was a civil and ecclesiastical division, since all were born and baptized into the national church, and since membership included nominal Christians—band-wagon adherents, as in the time of Constantine, the result was that membership was a profane rout, a medley of ignorant, unspiritual, pleasure-loving people. Secondly, the Anglican Church was composed of a false ministry, undemocratically appointed by a bishop, and wrongly called or not called at all. With William Fulke, the Separatists asserted that "it is agreeable to reason that he [who] should doe any service in the name of all, should be chosen and approved by the consent of all." Thirdly, the Anglican Church practiced a false worship. The *Book of Common Prayer* had been translated out of Antichrist's Mass Book, and contained errors, blasphemies, and abominations. Prayer was simply a mechanical exercise, a "reading over certeine numbers of wordes upon a booke from yeare to yeare, moneth to moneth, day to day," and in some churches the reading itself was so unfeeling and indistinct that a ten-year old boy could do better. The reading of men's writings was not the same as praying with the spirit, and therefore constituted false worship. Fourthly, the false government of the Anglican Church was unscriptural. True discipline, reprobation, repentance, and excommunication were lacking.

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The spiritual courts of the rural dean, the archdeacon, and the bishop should be abolished. Scripture knows nothing of metropolitans and archbishops, of chancellors, archdeacons and commissaries. Provincial courts, such as the Court of Arches, the Court of Peculiars, the Court of Audience, and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury should be eliminated. Above all, that hated engine of tyranny, that transplanted Spanish Inquisition, that usurper of civil jurisdiction, the Court of High Commission, should be extirpated.

Fifthly, there was little or no preaching of God's Word in the worship service. Too many clergymen were, in Isaiah's phrase, "dumb dogs," men who were unable to deliver a sermon. In one county thirty out of 210, or one out of seven, could be classified as preaching ministers. In other shires the situation was even worse. Homilies were canned sermons, safe, cautious, unedifying, uninspired, and patronizing. Like Lincoln, many Separatists wanted to see and hear a preacher who gave the impression of fighting bees.

On the positive side, the Separatists advocated that the church was an assembly of voluntary Christians, a gathered group of professed believers, "be they never so few." This church was subject to the democratic control of the majority, and its elected officers were the pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon. Religion was an intimate relationship between God and the worshipper. Therefore, worship should be free and spontaneous, guided by the Holy Spirit. True prayer was praise, thanksgiving, petition, not a stilted, mechanical recitation of set words. Adults should not be treated as spiritual babes newly weaned from the breast.

The Separatists prepared the way for, but did not attain to, the idea of complete separation of church and state. They would have welcomed the assistance of the magistrate in

accomplishing their purposes. But in professing respect and obedience to the prince, they nevertheless weakened his jurisdiction in ecclesiastical affairs by insisting that God, not man, must be obeyed. In effect, this meant that the prince could not prescribe vestments for the clergy; the State could not assume the function of excommunication through the spiritual courts; the Queen could not enforce the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* through the Act of Uniformity; the magistrate could not hinder the building of God's true church. Most Separatists were not tolerant, but by insisting on a free conscience and the right of dissent for themselves, they unwittingly created a situation from which there was no escape except by enforced uniformity, with persecution, or tolerant latitudinarianism, without repression. Barrow himself was not ready for toleration. That was indifferentism or negligence of duty. Since the pattern was laid out, perfectly, once for all, in the Scripture, he sincerely believed that it was "the office and duty of princes most carefully to advance and to establish in their dominions the true worship and ministry of God and to suppress and root out all contrary." He believed that he possessed the true worship, but he found it difficult to explain why Anglican, Catholics, Puritans, and Separatists all made the identical claim.

The culmination of Elizabethan Separatism occurred in 1592-3. In September, 1592, the London Separatist Church was formally organized, with Francis Johnson as minister, John Greenwood as teacher, Daniel Studley and George Kniveton as elders, and Christopher Bowman and Nicholas Lee as deacons. Unfortunately, three of the officers were captured by pursuivants in December, and on March 4, 1592/3, fifty-six members were arrested and imprisoned. Barrow and Greenwood were executed on April 6, and within a week the

“Act to Retain the Queen’s Subjects in Obedience” became the law of the land. For the Separatists the alternatives were conformity or exile. Consequently, the next chapter on Separatism is the story of the Brownists and Barrowists in Amsterdam, of Pilgrims from Scrooby and Austerfield and other villages in Leiden.

Before closing our account of Elizabethan Separatism, we should give a brief account of the zealous Welsh reformer who, late in life, became an ardent Separatist and a glorious martyr.

### *John Penry*

John Penry was born in 1563 at Cefnbrith, in the parish of Llangammarch, in Brecknockshire, Wales. His father, Meredith Penry, was a local squire of modest means, who made it possible for his son to receive an excellent education. He probably received his initial lessons from the local clergyman in the parish church, and most likely continued his work at the Grammar School at Brecon. In June, 1580, he arrived at Cambridge University, became an undergraduate at Peterhouse, and began his studies of languages, philosophy, logic, and rhetoric. He proceeded B.A. in 1584, journeyed to Wales for a few months, returned to Cambridge in 1585, and after a brief time at St. Alban Hall, proceeded M.A. at Oxford University in July, 1586.

During the years 1586-9, when the Separatists were holding conventicles in London and suffering persecution and imprisonment, Penry was active in promoting the cause of the religious reformation in Wales. Much needed to be done before the Welsh people would receive, understand, and practice the gospel. In the year of Penry’s birth, 1563, an Act of Parliament called for a translation of the Scripture in the

Welsh language, to be completed by 1566, but the five bishops entrusted with the responsibility did not fulfill their commission, perhaps because of the lack of funds. An inadequate Welsh translation by William Salesbury and two assistants appeared in 1567, but it was not until 1588 that William Morgan's translation became the first adequate and complete Bible in the Welsh language.

The lack of a Bible in the vernacular Welsh was not the only problem. Penry was painfully aware of the desperate need for preachers of the Word of God. Simony, absenteeism, pluralism, greed, ignorance, and spiritual decay were rife in the land. Idolatry, superstition, injustice, and indifference were real obstacles. What Wales needed was a thorough renovation, a spiritual revolution, a fervent evangelizing grass-roots movement. To accomplish this reform, Penry wrote his first book, *A Treatise Containing the Aequity of an Humble Supplication*, which called upon the Queen, Parliament, Oxford, Cambridge, translators, and laymen to assist in this mighty project. The book was printed by Joseph Barnes in Oxford, and it was placed on sale in London. Presented as a treatise and plea to Parliament, this work was not considered on its merits. Instead, the bulk of the edition was confiscated, and Penry was imprisoned. Brought before the Court of High Commission, Penry was berated by Archbishop Whitgift, Bishop Aylmer, and Bishop Cooper, and remanded to prison. Penry learned from hard experience what it meant to oppose or impugn the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and he became a confirmed reformer, more determined than ever to narrow the gap between the ideals of the gospel and activities in Wales and England.

In 1588 and 1589 Penry worked closely with the Puritan printer, Robert Waldegrave, and with Job Throkmorton, his

friend from Haseley, who represented Warwickshire in Parliament, and who supported Penry's *Aequity* when it was presented to the House of Commons. During this period Penry issued *An Exhortation, unto the Governours and People of Her Majestie's Countrie of Wales*, engaged in controversy with Dr. Robert Some of Cambridge University, and published a *Viewe of Some Part of Such Publike Wants and Disorders*. More important, he worked closely with Job Throkmorton in publishing the Martin Marprelate tracts, in obtaining printers and binders, in arranging for distribution of the dangerous pamphlets. Like Luther's three famous tracts, these publications expressed what was in the minds of many readers. Their popularity was immediate and widespread, and their effect on the hierarchy was devastating. No effort was spared to apprehend the printer, publisher, and author. When the wandering press was captured near Manchester on August 14, 1589, the printers were interrogated by the Earl of Derby and dispatched to London.

Sometime in September Penry fled to Edinburgh. Unlike Robert Browne, he was a tactful guest, and he enjoyed the hospitality and friendship of the Scottish Presbyterians. He remained in Scotland for three years, although he may have secretly visited London in the summer of 1591. Despite the efforts of the English ambassador, Robert Bowes, to have Penry banished, he enjoyed the protection of the Scottish clergy. In Scotland Penry published in 1590 *A Briefe Discovery of the Untruethes and Slanders (against the True Government of the Church of Christ) Contained in a Sermon, Preached the 8. of Februarie 1588 [February 9, 1588/9] by D. Bancroft, and Since That Time, Set Forth in Print, with Additions by the Said Authour*. He also issued during the same year *A Treatise Wherein Is Manifestlie Proved, That*

*Reformation and Those That Sincerely Favor the Same, Are Unjustly Charged to Be Enemies, unto Hir Majestie, and the State.*

In the following year, 1591, he translated a Swiss theological treatise, which originally appeared in Latin in 1586, with the title, *Propositions and Principles of Divinitie, Propounded and Disputed in the Universitie of Geneva, by Certaine Students of Divinitie There, Under M. Theodore Beza, and M. Anthonie Faius, Professors of Divinitie. Wherein is Contained a Methodicall Summarie, or Epitome, of the Common Places of Divinitie.* This was his first and only work of translation.

The story of John Penry belongs to the history of Elizabethan Separatism, inasmuch as he is rightfully considered as a Separatist martyr, but his close association with the Separatists is limited to the last year of his life, 1592-3. For most of his career, he was a Puritan and a Presbyterian, a fervent advocate of the revitalizing of the spiritual life in his native country, Wales; he was also a militant opponent of Archbishop Whitgift and the episcopal hierarchy, a true friend of the Scottish Prebyterians, a controversialist of no mean ability, and a manager and publisher of many of the Martin Marprelate tracts.

Sometime in September or October of 1592 Penry returned to London. He was not present at the organization of the Separatist church in September, but he joined with the Separatists shortly thereafter. This was a momentous decision for Penry and his wife Eleanor, and for a period of about five months they enjoyed fellowship with the saints. According to John Edwards, Penry preached for the Separatists in December at a garden house at Duke's Place, near Aldgate. According to a secret report, Dr. Richard Bancroft had



learned that Penry had entered "into this new kind of covenant." Perhaps Penry was persuaded by the words and decision of Francis Johnson, the newly elected pastor of the Separatist church. Undoubtedly, Penry had read the writings of Henry Barrow, especially his militant work, *A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church*. Furthermore, with the imprisonment of John Udall and Thomas Cartwright, with the collapse of the general classis movement, Penry could not hope for any success in the Presbyterian project.

During his brief association with the Separatists, Penry was able to render two outstanding services to his brethren. About January, 1592/3, there appeared a treatise, evidently in manuscript, entitled: "An Abstract of the Opinions Which the Brownists Do Mainteyn." These opinions were misleading and slanderous, and called for a refutation. Penry replied with "A Short and True Answer to the Partycular Slanders Conteyned in These—15—Most False and Malycyous Artycles Which Lately Were Cast Abroad in Reproach of the True Christians Whom They Unchristianly Call Brownists." In seven folios, and seventeen paragraphs, approximating thirteen printed pages, Penry answered each slanderous opinion with learning and dignity.

The occasion for his second service to the Separatist brethren was the arrest on March 4, 1592/3, of fifty-six members of the church while they were meeting in the woods near Islington. Among those arrested was Penry, who managed to escape on the same day. What should be done to help the brethren who were committed close prisoners in some nine jails in London and Southwark and Westminster? An immediate decision was made to petition the High Court of Parliament. Within three or four days Penry drew up "The Humble, Most Earnest, and Lamentable Complaint and Sup-

pication, of the Persecuted and Proscribed Church and Servants of Christ, Falsely Called Brownists." This was the last service that Penry was able to perform. For the next two weeks he was a hunted fugitive, and on March 22 he was captured in Stepney at the house of a friend, Mr. Lewes, because of the sharp eye and sleuthing activities of Anthony Anderson, vicar of Stepney.

After his imprisonment in the Poultry Compter, Penry was examined by Justice Richard Young on March 26, was visited by six preachers, re-examined on April 5 and April 10. His final letters to his wife and daughters, to the Separatist church, to Lord Burghley, and his protestations of loyalty, innocence and sincere faith are moving documents and a fitting commentary on the intolerance of the times. On May 25, he was brought before the Court of King's Bench, accused of publishing seditious or scandalous writings, as seen in his book published in Scotland, *A Treatise Wherein Is Manifestlie Proved, That Reformation and Those That Sincerely Favor the Same, Are Unjustly Charged to Be Enemies, unto Hir Majestie, and the State*. Four days later, on May 29, 1593, he was hanged at St. Thomas a Watering in Southwark. One of the finest sons of Wales had become a Separatist martyr.

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