"Archbishop Laud"

by

H. R. TREVOR-ROPER

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A SURVEY BY THE REV. C. SYDNEY CARTER, D.D.

FUTURE historians will probably describe the present age as the most critical and transitional in the history, not only of this country, but of mankind. As to what the "new civilization" will be is as yet in the balance! But there is little question that the seventeenth century in England was a transitional period in thought and ideas between mediæval and modern political and constitutional ideals and progress. It is essential to bear this in mind in estimating the character and achievements of such an outstanding personality as that of William Laud who was born well inside the period of despotic Tudor rule and who spent all his active career when the clash of the old and new order was at its height. The seventeenth century saw the rise to prominence of the "third Estate" with its determination to challenge the despotic exercise of power permitted by the necessities of the times to the Tudor Sovereigns. This rising spirit of independence was displayed in the House of Commons in the struggle for the right of parliamentary and popular control of the Executive. Parliament then made the modern claim, now long recognised, that sovereignty must reside in the "King in Parliament" through the responsibility of His Ministers to the Legislature. Laud, however, soon gave his full allegiance to a party of sycophantic courtiers who were backing up the mediæval and absolutist principles of the Tudors made more dangerous by the special Stuart theory of the supreme divine right of kings. It was in effect a clear contest, in the language of Prof. Seeley, as to whether Parliament was really the "Government-making organ?" Laud's aim and policy was in practice, virtually to dispense with Parliament and make the Sovereign the sole source and fountain of all executive authority both political and ecclesiastical. Because in his

" ideology " the Church was the spiritual part of the State, while the State, or the Crown which embodied it, was the absolute and supreme Governor of mankind to whom all must be subject. As Lord Acton declared of this period, " the State oppressed for its own sake," and as Laud regarded the Church as part of the State, he looked to the State to oppress all men so as to achieve his great ideal of one uniform and rigid type of worship and doctrine and of religious and social discipline.

Mr. Trevor-Roper, in his faithful and comprehensive delineation of Laud's career, shows clearly that its success was largely due to his deliberate policy of intrigue and backstairs influence which at length enabled him to secure Royal favour and obtain coveted ecclesiastical positions and promotions. He proves, however, that Laud sought these commanding positions not for personal or avaricious self-aggrandisement or outward pomp and splendour, but for his sincere and single-minded aim of restoring the wealth and dominating influence of the Church and especially of its hierarchy. Laud had evidently been a close student of Bishop Gardiner's book on " True Obedience," for in similar language to Gardiner's he asserted that " the King was God's immediate vice-regent on earth so that one and the same action is God's by ordinance and the King's by execution, and the royal power is God's power." But in spite of these almost blasphemous claims for Kingly authority and also of the ardent sponsorship of George Villiers—the royal favourite, it was with great misgiving that at length James I gave Laud his chance to achieve his later fame. His first patron, the Earl of Devonshire, proved an unfortunate venture, since Laud rashly married him to a guilty adulteress. But Bishop Neile, of Lincoln, befriended Laud and made him his Chaplain and gave him preferment. In this cure, however, he figured far more as a non-resident place-hunter than as a faithful parish priest or diligent shepherd of souls.

By rather doubtful practices Laud became Vice-President of St. John's College, Oxford, in 1611. In 1616 he became Dean of Gloucester, and Bishop of St. David's in 1621 and of Bath and Wells in 1626. He secured London in 1629, and finally reached the Primacy in 1633 on the death of Archbishop Abbott. Laud was installed by proxy at St. David's

and apparently only spent a month in residence there, while his increasing immersion in State affairs at Charles I's court left him practically no time to shepherd the flock in Bath and Wells.

Having been a conspicuous delinquent himself, Laud was determined to enforce residence most stringently on other Bishops. He required them to live permanently in their dioceses and (contrary to his own example) not to hang about Court angling for preferment.

Mr. Trevor-Roper's story enables us to follow not only the detailed steps of Laud's rise to power, but also his arbitrary and despotic methods of government for the Church during the eleven years of Charles I's absolute rule of "Thorough." Laud regarded the bishops as little more than Erastian agents for the centralization of government enabling them to enforce their authority with their own Courts and legal powers. Through their pressure and his own high-handed actions he silenced, often in a cruel and heartless manner, all opposition to his own special Church views and principles. Even the order for the removal of the Communion Tables to the East End of the church was procured by the personal authority of the Crown. Puritan and Calvinist clergy were deprived, fined and imprisoned. Their Private Chaplainces and Lectureships were suppressed and their endowments confiscated. All religious disputation was forbidden. On account of his bitter hatred of Calvinism he tried to deprive the Foreign Congregations of their rights of separate worship in England and he had little sympathy with the distressed and persecuted "Reformed" pastors of the Palatinate. He even presumed to alter the phraseology of the Royal Briefs which ordered collections for their relief. As a Judge in the Star Chamber and High Commission Courts his partisanship was displayed in a peculiarly discreditable manner. He concurred in the most severe and brutal sentences on those who had dared to challenge his views. Cases like those of Alexander Leighton, Henry Sherfield and William Prynne are specially revolting. His exertions to secure the downfall and ruin of Bishop Williams and his shameless rejoicing at his success, show a most vindictive and fanatical spirit. The quaint contemporary historian, Thomas Fuller, certainly no enemy of Laud's, admits that "he always concurred with the severest

side and infused more vinegar than oil into all his censures." From a very thorough and impartial survey of Laud's life and actions Mr. Trevor-Roper can only describe him as a man of very narrow outlook, and he declares that he had "not a mind which could appreciate the advantages of the innocence of diversity."

But in all fairness this verdict should be tempered with the recollection that Laud had fully imbibed the spirit and outlook, not by any means then dead, of the intolerant mediæval churchman. He had inherited as a "damnosa hereditas" the intolerant persecuting spirit of the Middle Ages and he secured a position of pre-eminence and power which enabled him to apply it. Apparently also his personal character was not specially attractive. He was, says our biographer, "neither an agreeable nor a convivial character" and "lacked any common humanity." It is also singular that one who was such an unrelenting oppressor of the Puritans should have been in his own personal life as severe and ascetic as any of them.

Mr. Trevor-Roper is, however, only re-affirming the verdict of older historians on Laud when he describes him as "having a little mind which could not brook any opposition or disagreement with his own views or treat any such offender as a friend." This is a similar conclusion to that of S. R. Gardiner's, who says, "Genius he had none, no power of sympathy with characters opposed to his own, no attractive force whatever. Men were to obey for their own good and hold their tongues." It would not seem over severe to assert that Laud with his absolutist and almost totalitarian methods, displayed all the intolerant fanaticism of a Jesuit champion of the Papacy and that probably only the accident of birth, time and country prevented him from being a second Ignatius Loyola.

But there is distinctly also a credit side to be considered. Laud was very devout, even if somewhat superstitious, and his industry and energy, and sincere zeal for the advancement of the Church as he envisaged it, were unceasing. As Hallam says, "he had placed before his eyes the aggrandisement first of the Church and next of the royal prerogative as his end and aim in every action."[1] He did much, therefore, to enrich individual benefices and bishoprics by

[1] Const. Hist. 322

recovering tithe impropriations and property from those who had inherited the Church lands alienated by Henry VIII.

He was tireless in his efforts to raise funds for the repair of St. Paul's Cathedral, and he was most generous with his own private benefactions to charitable and worthy objects. At Oxford when Vice-Chancellor, he restored, in his usual high-handed and severe way, much-needed discipline, and promoted scholarship by the founding of valuable Lectureships. Although some of his actions seemed to indicate, especially to those who were naturally apprehensive and perhaps over suspicious of Popish principles and propaganda, a leaning towards the Roman Faith and worship, Laud was not really a Papist, but a convinced and well-instructed Protestant, even if of a strong anti-Calvinist type. He twice refused the offer of a Cardinal's hat, because, as Fuller graphically puts it, "the fashion thereof could not fit his head who had studied and written so much against the Romish religion."[1] There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his protestation at his trial: "I will die with these words in my mouth that I never intended, much less endeavoured the bringing in of Popish superstition upon the true Protestant religion established by law in this kingdom." It is scarcely possible that Laud should have possessed any serious Romish leanings when he concurred in the Canons of 1640, the seventh of which declares that "at the time of Reforming this Church from that gross superstition of Popery it was carefully provided that all means should be used to root out of the minds of the people the idolatry committed in the Mass." That Laud was no coward was clearly evident from his refusal to escape from the Tower and so avoid his trial and certain condemnation.

Mr. Trevor-Roper's excursions into the history of the English Reformation leave us with the distinct impression that he has been content to rely on partisan "Anglo-catholic" treatises which usually consist of startling but quite erroneous dogmatic assertions unsupported by any real evidence. Mr. Trevor-Roper almost invariably employs this deceptive but discreditable method of misrepresenting actual historical facts. Even his ecclesiastical terminology is scarcely that of the strictly impartial historian. He nearly always incorrectly confuses the terms Puritan and

[1] Ch. Hist. 3.280.

Calvinist and bestows the epithet "heretic" on them, and "orthodox" on the Arminians whom he describes as "high Churchmen," a term not then in current use.

It was the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford who declared that it was due to James I's "experienced wisdom" "that Popery hangs its head, that Arminianism is repressed and that Puritanism does not lay waste our borders."[1] Even Heylin, Laud's admirer, denies that "Puritan and Calvinian are convertible terms—all Calvinians are not to be counted as Puritans, whose practices many of them abhor and whose inconformities they detest."[2]

The House of Commons declared in 1626 concerning Montague's writings that he had "endeavoured to raise factions among the King's subjects by casting the odious and scandalous name of 'Puritan' upon those who conform to the doctrines and ceremonies of the Church."

Mr. Trevor-Roper asserts that Henry VIII's legislation "implied that the Crown could dictate doctrine," whereas Henry expressly declared that "Christ is indeed *unicus et supremus* as we confess Him in Church daily; it was *nimis absurdam* for us to be called *caput ecclesiae representans Corpus Christi mysticum.*" "As to sacraments and spiritual things," Henry freely admitted, "they have no head but Christ."[3]

Mr. Trevor-Roper's assertions concerning the indefinite nature of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement are almost gems of inaccuracy and mis-statement. The following are typical specimens: "The ecclesiastical forms so loosely prescribed in her reign had been issued on the most indeterminate authority"; "The Advertisements which ordered the use of Cope and surplices were enacted simply by the Queen and Archbishop"; "Elizabeth's Church was so comprehensive that it was capable of any inconsistency without exceeding the limits of its jurisdiction"; "The Thirty-nine Articles managed to sanction almost any known doctrine"; "Between the Scylla of a hostile Roman Church and the Charybdis of Genevan doctrine Elizabeth and her obedient bishops cruised with agility and success." This is followed by the amazing assertion that the Elizabethan

[1] *Works of A. Toplady* 249.
[2] *Life of Laud* 119.
[3] *Cranmer's Works* 2.224.

Bishops "did not greatly care whether the Communion Table was or was not an altar."

Now the chief "ecclesiastical form" ordered in Elizabeth's reign was the 1559 Prayer Book, which instead of being "loosely prescribed on most indeterminate authority" was passed by the 1559 Act of Parliament under most stringent penalties for "any whatsoever Minister who dared to use 'any other rite, ceremony, order or form' of services than those mentioned and set forth in the said book." "The Advertisement was certainly enacted simply by the Queen and the Archbishop," but in direct conformity with a concluding Clause of the same Act of Uniformity directing her "with the advice of the Metropolitan to ordain and publish such further ceremonies or rites" for edification and due reverence, in order that Elizabeth's Church should *not*, as Mr. Trevor-Roper grossly misrepresents it, "be capable of any inconsistency," but that, as Elizabeth herself ordered, "the whole realm should be brought to one manner of uniformity"[1] For as Bishop Jewel declared, "She was unable to endure the least alteration in matters of religion."[2] Elizabeth herself was certainly a little more "comprehensive" than her "Church" which desired to exclude specific Lutherans, whereas she sought an invitation to join in the Lutheran Synod of Magdeburg in October, 1577, and so express the unity of "Christian Princes who profess the Gospel against the errors and heresies of the Pope," and "though there be some slight discrepancy in the nature of our teaching . . . in the substance of the Faith and truth of things we do not differ."[3] Such a definite statement of her "Religious Settlement" completely disproves Mr. Trevor-Roper's extraordinary statement that "Elizabeth and her obedient bishops cruised with agility and success between the Scylla of a hostile Roman Church and the Charybdis of Genevan doctrine," while the still more startling misstatement that "they did not care whether the Communion Table was an altar and whether the sacrament were or were not the body and blood of Christ" is contradicted by definnite and clear contemporary evidence. Bishop Guest, about the only bishop credited with Lutheran sympathies, strongly

[1] "*Parker's Corres.*" 224-6.

[2] *Zurick Letters* 1.149.

[3] *Troubles at Frankfort.* 225-6.

objected to a suggestion in 1559 to restore the 1549 Consecration Prayer because "it prays that the bread and wine may be Christ's body and blood: which is a doctrine which has caused much idolatry."[1] Moreover, Parker and his brother bishops presented learned petitions to the Queen against the use of Altars as "contrary to the Scriptures and the Primitive Church" pointing out the inconsistency of "taking away the sacrifice of the Mass and leaving the Altar standing."[2] This resulted in a Royal Injunction ordering the substitution of Communion Tables for Altars in Churches.

It was certainly not the view of contemporary Churchmen that the "Thirty-nine Articles managed to sanction almost any known doctrine" since the first Commentary on them by Thos. Rogers (Archbishop Bancroft's Chaplain) was written to prove the unity of the Church of England with all neighbouring Reformed Churches "in the most important and fundamental points of religion." Bancroft evidently accepted this view as he circulated Rogers' "Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England," as the Commentary was styled, throughout his Province. Moreover, he condemned the Papal system as drawing people "from the sure trust and confidence in Christ's death to Masses, pardons, and I know not what intolerable superstition and idolatry."[3] Similarly, Archbishop Parker in the ninth of his "Eleven Articles" of 1561, condemned the "propitiatory Sacrifice of the Mass as most ungodly and injurious to Christ's one sufficient sacrifice." There is not a line of reliable historical evidence to prove Mr. Trevor-Roper's statement that the Elizabethan Bishops took up a via media position between Rome and Geneva on the crucial doctrines implied by the terms "altar," "sacrifice of the Mass" and transubstantiation. Archbishop Whitgift declared that all who resort to the Mass "offend God in being present at an idolatrous service."[4] Rome fully realised that Elizabeth had taken her stand definitely on the Reformed side in doctrine. Pope Pius V in his Bull of 1570, declared that Elizabeth "hath abolished the Sacrifice of the Mass... and hath commanded books

[1] Cardwell *Hist. of Con'fces* 2.53.
[2] Strype Annals 1.160-2.
[3] Sermon p. 36 1588.
[4] Works 2.234.

containing manifest heresy, drawn up according to the precept of Calvin—received and esteemed by herself—to be observed also by her subjects."[1] Mr. Trevor-Roper asserts in spite of all this clear evidence that " Elizabeth's Government refused to yoke itself to any body of doctrine." Yet it was this very Government which passed the Act of Uniformity and required the clergy to subscribe the Articles of Religion and made all Popish recusants recant " the Mass as abominable sacrilege being a scarifice for the quick and dead," and even imprisoned all who " willingly heard Mass."

Mr. Trevor-Roper is most unsympathetic and sarcastic concerning the apostolic and Christ-like life-mission of John Durie, to bring about Christian Reunion, and does his best to discount the cordial appreciation of Laud for this noble project. He also never fails to express caustic and cynical criticism of Calvinism, but he can scarcely correctly claim Hooker or Whitgift as " Arminians," if he will trouble to read the former's Sermons, or the latter's strong approval of the " Lambeth Articles " of 1595. We might add that in several of his " obiter dicta " Mr. Trevor-Roper's language might well be interpreted, although we hope mistakenly, as if he regards religion merely as a hypocritical but useful camouflage for self-seeking and material advantage.

We must, however, thank him for a most careful and interestingly written account of a life and character usually too highly praised or too fiercely condemned. His contribution to the general history of the early Stuart period is one of real merit and it certainly gives abundant evidence of laborious and painstaking research amongst contemporary State papers and trustworthy documents. It will undoubtedly be of very real value to the ecclesiastical historian, and is likely to be a standard and comprehensive source of information for students on the life and activities of an outstanding post-Reformation Primate.

C. SYDNEY CARTER.

[1] Cardwell *Doct'y Annalls* 1.364-5.