

The Parliament of King Henry VI at Reading Abbey.

A.D. 1455.

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THE historical development of Parliament must always possess the deepest interest for the English people; such development, on the one hand, is a product of the genius of the nation and, on the other hand, has helped to evolve that genius. The importance of such development however extends far beyond the limits of this country or even of the British Empire, since, as Pollard has well pointed out, "Parliamentary institutions are incomparably the greatest gift of the English people to the civilization of the world."¹ The interest attaching to such institutions is therefore not merely national, but international, and extends to every community enjoying representative government.

There is unhappily a lamentable absence of trustworthy illustrations of early British Parliaments, although a few pictures have survived in which the Sovereign is represented in conference with some of his councillors, and which are correctly described as 'The King in Parliament.' Such pictures are valuable as illustrating the fact that the early Parliaments were simply parleys of the King in Council. The first historical and contemporary illustration of a complete Parliament, showing the three estates of the Realm, dates from 1523.² In the Middle Ages Parliament was not located at Westminster as it is nowadays, but was itinerant, meeting frequently in provincial towns as well as in the metropolis. On several occasions it met at Reading, the Session represented in this picture being the 19th Parliament of King Henry VI, which was opened on March 6th, 1453.

¹ A. F. Pollard, *The Evolution of Parliament*, 1920, p. 3.

² A reproduction and detailed description are given by A. F. Pollard, l.c., frontispiece and p. 380.



THE PARLIAMENT OF KING HENRY VI. HELD AT READING ABBEY, A.D. 1453.
Painted by Stephen Reid and presented to the Borough of Reading by Dr. Hurry.

The picture³ which forms the subject of these notes has been painted by Mr. Stephen Reid and is based generally on the historical details given in the illustration already referred to, with such modifications as to personalities and costumes as chronology required, and with the addition of such environment as the famous Refectory at Reading Abbey would supply. Even a cursory glance suffices to show how different was the appearance of Parliament in the Middle Ages. King Henry VI is seen seated on his throne, the Bishops and mitred Abbots being arranged in rows on his right hand, the Abbot of Reading, John Thorne I, being placed third in order. The Lords temporal are in rows on the left hand of the King, marshalled according to their degrees. In the front row of the Lords temporal are the Dukes, Earls and Viscounts, headed by the Duke of Norfolk who holds in his hand the Lord High Treasurer's Staff. In the back row are the Barons of the Kingdom, some of whom occupy the cross bench extending across the picture and ending with the Premier Baron Robert Botyll, Prior of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, wearing a black habit, a white cross and the golden chain of office. Lower down are grouped the Commons, with their Speaker, Thomas Thorpe, at the bar.

In the centre of the picture may be observed an inner square composed of four woolsacks, the higher and empty one forming the seat of the Chancellor, who is addressing the House, while the others are occupied by various judges, including the Master of the Rolls, the chief Baron of the Exchequer and the Masters in Chancery. Behind them are the clerk of the parliament and the clerk of the Crown in the act of writing. It is this inner square which formed the original core of Parliament, of which the spiritual and temporal Peers, as well as the Commons are accretions. Amongst other important dignitaries may be seen, on the King's right, Cardinal John Kemp, Archbishop of Canterbury, and William Booth, Archbishop of York, while near to them is the Chancellor, John Chedworth, Bishop of Lincoln, in the act of speaking ; behind the Chancellor is a Peer

³ This Picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1924, and at the House of Commons in the Autumn Session of the same year.

bearing the Cap of Maintenance. On the King's left stand other Officers of State, the Sword-bearer and Garter King of Arms, all standing on the cloth of state. The group in the extreme corner includes the sons of peers, foremost of whom are the two half-brothers of the King, Edmund and Jasper, who were created Earls at this Parliament.

Puritan Ministers at Wokingham.

By ARTHUR T. HEELAS.

THE seventeenth century was a period of ecclesiastical strife. On the one side was Puritanism, on the other what we should call to-day Anglo-Catholicism, of which Archbishop Laud was the leading exponent. In Wokingham Puritanism was predominant, if we may judge from what is known of some of its ministers. Among them was William Benn, 'preacher for some time at Okingham in Berks,' says Calamy. This must have been in the earlier years of the century, for in 1629, Benn became rector of 'All Hallows,' Dorchester, where he remained until he was ejected in 1662. He was 'an eminent devine, famous in all the West of England.' 'He was bred up in Queen's College, Oxon.' Calamy also mentions two other Puritan ministers who preached at Wokingham for a short time. These were the inseparable friends, John Whitlock and William Reynolds, afterwards ministers at Nottingham. About 1647, they were living at Leighton in Bedfordshire. 'Okingham in Berkshire being vacant, they undertook to supply both Leiton and that place, by turns. When Okingham was supply'd at the end of half a year, they afterwards did the same between Leiton and Ailesbury.' John Whitlock ¹ writing of Reynolds ²

The Rev. A. G. Matthews has been of great assistance in the research work required for these Notes. I am grateful to him for his kindness and the trouble he has taken.

¹ John, son of Richard Whitlock, Merchant of London, Emmanuel Coll., Cambs, B.A. 1646, M.A. 1649. Jointly with W. Reynolds, Vicar of St. Mary's, Nottingham, 1651-62. They were both ejected in 1662.

² W. Reynolds, joint Vicar of St. Mary's, Nottingham, 1651-62. Ejected 1662.