

A PAPER FROM A FAMILY DEED-CHEST.

THE document, of which a copy follows, was found among a number of old deeds and papers relating to the family of Garrett, formerly Nevill, of Hudnal, in the parish of Eddlesborough, and subsequently of Chesham.

This branch of the Nevills does not appear within the period comprised in its records to have had any pretension to political or military distinction; and a simple yeoman family living quietly upon its small estate in a village at a distance from the main lines of communication through the country was not likely to have much to do with public affairs outside its own very restricted local circle. Hence, as was to be expected, its papers, which seem to have been very carefully preserved from generation to generation, mostly relate to dealings with property or to the personal matters of members of the family. But that which is here published has some little historical interest, and it may be worth bringing to light for the sake of the illustration it affords of some of the conditions under which our ancestors lived at the end of the sixteenth century.

A brief sketch of the circumstances of the time, so far as they explain the contents of the document, may be desirable by way of introduction.

At the outset, it is necessary to bear in mind that in the history of this period religion and politics are inseparably connected. So intimate is the relation between them, and so closely do they appear to act and re-act upon each other, that it is generally impossible to say where the influence of the one ends and that of the other begins. It seems clear, however, that Queen Elizabeth was a Protestant on political much more than on religious grounds. If she could have had her own way, she would probably have established as the national religion a sort of "popery without the pope," such as her father had in effect established. But the bloodshed and misgovernment of the preceding reign had divided the nation against itself, and she saw that

the only safe course open to her was to consolidate it by adopting a policy of comprehension and compromise, which might in time bring together Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans on terms of mutual toleration and concession. Hence, her demeanour towards her subjects of the old faith was at first forbearing and conciliatory. The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, though passed in deference to the Protestants at the beginning of her reign, were not pressed with harshness; and the religious sentiment of the nation was for a time left free to develop. But, before many years had passed, the Catholics forced the Queen's hand. They struggled against the loss of the ascendancy they had enjoyed under Queen Mary. They rose in futile rebellion in the north. The Pope issued a bull of excommunication and deposition against Elizabeth. She was harassed by the successive plots which had for their object the restoration of a Catholic sovereign in the person of her cousin, Mary of Scotland. It was partly in the interests of the Roman Church that Philip of Spain made his vain attempts to add England to his already world-wide empire. And, among other efforts to stem the advancing tide of Protestantism, the College of Douay was founded for the training of English Catholic priests, to take the place, as vacancies should occur, of those who had come into office during Mary's reign.

Throughout the country the adherents of the old faith warmly welcomed these "seminary priests," as they were called, and their influence soon made itself felt in checking the gradual reconciliation of the Catholic gentry to the English Church. Elizabeth resented their coming, both because it clashed with her policy of comprehension, and because she could not but regard the Douay priests as political emissaries. As to the nation, though the Protestants were probably still the less numerous, they were the abler and the more vigorous party, and the operation of the Test Act of 1563 had given them almost absolute control in Parliament. Events had inspired them with bitter hostility and profound mistrust towards the Catholics, on both religious and political grounds. The landing of a few Douay priests was readily magnified into an invasion by an army of Papal emissaries, commissioned in the

interests of Spain to sow treason and revolt throughout the land, while at the same time they re-introduced the hated Roman ritual. And the arrival of a Jesuit mission under Campian and Parsons confirmed and intensified the anti-Catholic feeling.

Elizabeth suspended her policy of toleration and compromise. The Court of High Commission was formally established, with almost unlimited power in spiritual matters, and the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity were strictly enforced. Seizure, torture, and execution of priests; imprisonment of recusants; prohibition of mass even in private houses; deprivation and fines for non-attendance at public worship, were among the results. For many years the Catholics were treated with a severity that equalled, if it did not surpass, the persecution of the Protestants under Philip and Mary; while, on the other hand, the intolerance of the Anglican despots of the High Commission brought more or less suffering upon the extremists amongst the Puritans also.

Rigorous search was made in all parts of the country for the emissaries from abroad, who adopted all sorts of disguises, and who, when concealment failed them, could only by flight escape death, torture, or imprisonment. Those who tried to protect or screen them were severely punished. To harbour a felon was less of a crime than to give shelter to a hunted Catholic priest. The statute-book and the state-papers of the period contain many references to the arbitrary and inquisitorial measures that were adopted to discover the hiding places of the fugitives, and to intercept communication between them and those who sympathized with them.

How far this persecution was due to religious animosity, and how far to motives of patriotism or political expediency, it is impossible to determine. No doubt many of the seminary priests were animated by a devout missionary spirit, and aimed simply at bringing England back to what they regarded as the true faith. But, as certainly, many others used their cassocks only as cloaks to cover their designs against the Queen's person or government. And this was especially the case during the period when Philip of Spain was secretly planning, for the second time, an invasion of this country, and inciting the disaffected English

Catholics to rise in arms in his favour as soon as, by making himself master of France, then apparently opened to his ambition by civil war, he should be able to pour in his forces from a base of operations within a few leagues of our shores.

The document now under notice is an original Order, in the handwriting of the time, issued in pursuance of a proclamation made by Elizabeth in the circumstances I have attempted thus shortly to sketch. The date of the proclamation was Oct. 18, 1591, but it was renewed for the County of Buckingham on Jan. 14 following. It may be interesting to know the terms in which it was expressed, and I therefore quote *verbatim* the entry relating to it in the Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1591-1594, pp. 112-115:—

“Oct. 18. 42.—Proclamation by the Queen for remedy of the treasons which, under pretext of religion, have been plotted by seminaries and Jesuits, who have been sent secretly into the kingdom. Hoped that, being now in the 33rd year of her reign, the malice of her enemies, especially the King of Spain, would have weakened, and he would have lived in concord with her and other Christian Princes; but finds the contrary by his present attempts. But as God permits the ruin of those who do not content themselves with peace, so now He permits this King, who possesses already more kingdoms and riches than any of his progenitors, or any other Christian Prince, to begin a war against the present King of France, as he did two years ago against her, when assaulting England at the same time that he treated of peace; but God caused him and his Armada to repent.

“1st. He has now, to strengthen his cause, seated a Milanese, his subject, in the Papacy, and induced him, without consent of the College of Cardinals, to exhaust the treasures of the Church in raising the Italians, under the Pope's nephew, to make war in France, which has always defended the Church in its calamities. This war with France is most dangerous to Her Majesty's dominions, and this preparation of force the greatest ever made. To advance this he has, by authority of this Pope, practised with certain heads of sedition, her unnatural subjects, and many dissolute youths,

traitors, and rebels, for whom there are receptacles in Rome and Spain, where they are instructed, and then they are sent secretly into her dominions, with authority from Rome to induce subjects to renounce their obedience, in hopes of enriching themselves by the Spanish invasion. They bind her subjects to obey the King of Spain, bringing from the Pope indulgences for those who comply, and condemnations for those who refuse. Their attempts have been in some degree repressed by the execution of the laws, and their authors punished, not for religion, as they pretend, but for *lese majesté*. The truth of this appears in that many rich persons who profess a contrary religion preserve their lives and possessions, only paying fines for not coming to church.

“ Yet the heads of the seminaries and Jesuit colleges assure the King of Spain, that if he will renew his attempt, thousands of her subjects will be ready to assist his forces, though, from his former experience, he should not hope to disembark safely. The King is thus persuaded by Parsons, his confessor; and the Pope by Allen, lately made a Cardinal. They give catalogues of persons in different places, especially maritime towns of her dominions, who are declared, by seminaries and Jesuits placed in divers parts, to be ready to receive the Spaniards when they arrive. Some of their messengers have been taken, and confess that the King of Spain is preparing an invasion next year, intending, if his attempt be ineffectual, to employ the forces against France, the Low Countries, or Scotland, where also a number have been sent from Spain.

“ 2nd. Doubts not of the Almighty’s protection, but wishes to use all just means to augment her forces, and to hinder sedition by the execution of the laws, etc.

“ 3rd. Requires that the ministers of the Church use diligence in setting the people good examples by their lives, and influencing them, as the seminaries are always occupied in influencing a multitude of ignorant people.

“ 4th. Hopes to have greater forces by sea than ever, to oppose these Spanish boasts; as to the land forces, wishes the lieutenants of counties, personally or by deputy, after the musters lately ordered, to take care that the companies be entirely furnished with arms and munition, and be ready to defend their country; wishes all subjects to aid, with hands, purses, and prayers, to

defend their country, wives, families and goods against foreign traitors.

"5th. A remedy must be provided against the designs of Jesuits and traitors, who, on pretence of sanctity, draw men and women by conscience into treasons, and are so secretly entertained that, without severe punishment, they would remain, as a concealed infection, in the entrails of the kingdom. Has determined, therefore, to employ Commissioners of good repute, in each province, city, and port, to inquire after those suspected of being employed to persuade the people to treason, and after those who have been so seduced, and who are to be treated according to the Commissioners' instructions.

"6th. These traitors have come indisguised, some as soldiers, mariners, merchants, or escaped prisoners; some as gentlemen who have been to see the world, in order that they may not be taken for monks, Jesuits, or popish students. Many return to the colleges whence they came, and read law; some enter the service of nobles or knights, and so infect their masters and families, and reconcile them [to the Church of Rome]; therefore all who receive them should be suspected.

"7th. To discover and banish these, orders all persons, of whatever age or rank, to inquire into the condition, state, and country of all who have been permitted to reside in their houses, as to how they spend their lives, what church they frequent, etc., registering the questions and replies, for their more suitable examination, if needful, by the Commissioners. Those who answer unwillingly or doubtfully are to be sent to the Commissioners; those who fail to make the proper inquiries are to be sent to the Commissioners or the Privy Council for chastisement. All who have intelligence of persons coming from beyond sea are to reveal it, within 20 days after publication of this edict, on pain of punishment as abettors of treason. No favour to be shown to any grade, and no excuse allowed for non-compliance, this edict being in accordance with the most ancient laws and customs of the kingdom."

"Oct. [18 ?] 43.

"Articles annexed to the Commission for recusants.—
The [County] Comrs. are to divide the shire amongst them, meet frequently, and every 40 days all meet

together. To certify all recusants to the Bishop and his chancellor. To require from the clerks of peace or assize of the county, the names of and proceedings against recusants. To enquire secretly after the receivers of seminaries, priests, and Jesuits, but retain the names unless they summon the parties before them. Not to question persons on religion further than about their not coming to church, devotion to the Pope or King of Spain, or maintenance of any Jesuit or seminary priest, sent to dissuade subjects from their obedience. Those suspected are to be examined on oath, whether and by whom they have been moved to aid or adhere to the forces of the Pope or King of Spain, if they should invade the realm. Those suspected to be priests, seminaries, etc., should be examined as to whether they are such, and as to their residence at Rome, Rheims, Spain, in the seminaries, or elsewhere.

‘The Comrs. are to enquire into the fulfilment of the late proclamation about making inquiries into lodgers, and see whether among the lodgers there be any suspected persons. To give information to the Commissioners of neighbouring shires, if any suspicious persons go from one county to another; and to select honest and loyal persons in every town or large parish, joining the parsons with them, if they are faithful and careful men, to report such as will not go to church. These they are to call before them, and, without dealing with them for their recusancy, (for which they are punishable by law), to require them to answer the questions relative to the King of Spain, etc.’

This proclamation strikes one as having been somewhat unnecessarily discursive. The long preamble is suggestive of a feeling that the measures ordered to be taken needed considerable justification. And it will be noticed that there is what reads like an attempt to excuse the past treatment of the Catholics. The close connexion, already adverted to, between politics and religion, is throughout made very evident.

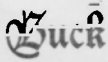
Oldmixon (*History of England*, 1739, p. 598,) quaintly describes the same proclamation as follows:—“A Declaration of the manifest Troubles intended against the Crown and State, by Seminaries and Jesuits, suborn’d by the Pope and King of Spain, to infect her Majesty’s Subjects with the Poison of their seditious

Religion. Special Commissioners were appointed in all Shires, Cities, and Port Towns, to inquire into this viprous Brood, and such as may be reconcil'd by their Enchantments."

It will be seen that the Commissioners did not think it necessary in their Order to follow very closely the wording of the proclamation or the instructions of their commission. They seem to have summarized in their own way the duties that were required of those to whom the Order was addressed.

It would be interesting to know what return was made to the Commissioners from the parishes of Eddlesborough and Ivinghoe. But if any list of suspected persons was sent in, it has no doubt long since been destroyed. The records of the time in details of this kind are very incomplete, and even when they exist it is very difficult to find and to identify them.

The copy of the Order follows.



To the Ministers of Edisburroughe
and Ivingoe cum membris to Thomas
Sankey gent Richard Stanbridge,
Edmonde Doncombe gent and willm
Howe & Willm Garrett and to euy of
them beinge of the same pishes

By vertue of the Queenes ma'c Comission sealed vnd^d the
greate seale of England to vs and others Directed theis are
to Require & Chardge yoⁿ that yoⁿ make dilligent inquisition
& exaicon wⁱn yo^r pishes what psons nowe or late there being
haue come from beyonde the Seas into this Realme Since the
Feaste of S^t mychaell tharchanngell in the xxxijth yere of the
Queenes ma'c Raigne, or of any oth^r psons that Reside in yo^r
pishes or els where, that pbably by their behauior & mann^r
of life or oth^rwise maie be suspected to haue come from beyond
the Seas in the qualitie & vocacon of Semynaries, Prieste,
Jesuite or Fugytiues thoughte Disguised to hide their qualities
& vocacons, or that are instrumente sent by the Pope or by
any of the English Semynaries or Colledge to labo^r or corrupte
her ma'c people in matter of Religion contrarie to the Queenes

ma^{tes} lawes established for that purpose or to move or Styrr them to adhere to the Pope or Kinge of Spayne or any theire Confederatē Or dependantē enemyes to her ma^{te} state Or that any waie haue ben assistandē Succo^{res} or Relevers of the said malefactors And also that yo^u Dilligently obserue & marke all such p^{er}sons as obstinatly refuse to resorte to the church, And that of all yo^r Inquisicons exai^ons & ob^{er}vacons in the pointē & articles aforesaid yo^r Doe Ttife vs or three of vs Distinctly & playnely in writinge ¹at winsloe the 20 daie of Marche next coming¹, That we maie further p^{re}cede in that behalf as is lymytted and appoincted by the said Comission, As yo^u tender her ma^{te} svce and will aunswere for the contrarie at yo^r pill Geven at Little Brickhill the thirtinth Daie of march in the xxxiiijth yere of the raigne of o^r souaigne Ladie Queene Elizabeth &c.

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EDWARD TIRELL

HENRY LONGEVYLE

THOMAS SPARKE

The first of the four signatures is not legible.

J. W. GARRETT-PEGGE.

¹ These words appear to have been scored through.