

A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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PREFACE

I HAVE no use for a preface save to return thanks which are due, even though the expression of my gratitude can only be inadequate. But for the untiring assistance of Miss D. L. Smith this book would never, I think, have been completed and perhaps would never have been begun. At the critical moment she took on herself much tiresome work for which I had neither leisure nor inclination. Only less valuable has been the help given me by my old pupil Miss Hilda Clapperton. To these two I owe a great debt. Other friends also have helped me with advice, with encouragement and in other ways: they will know that I am not ungrateful. Was there ever, I wonder, a book which was wholly and solely the work of one man or woman?

J. W. ALLEN.

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INTRODUCTION

THE sixteenth century was a period of relatively rapid and of formally revolutionary change. It may be compared in that respect with two other great periods of European history and with them only: the twelfth century and the nineteenth. It is mere truism to say that the great changes that took place were results of a long process. As in other such cases, their suddenness and their revolutionary quality were in part illusory. Essential psychological change preceded the formal revolution.

So long ago as the commencement of the fourteenth century it had been pointed out that the Empire of Christendom was a useless fiction. It had been declared that the Church and the Papacy constituted the main obstacle to the development of efficient secular government. It had been asserted that the clergy as such had no right to speak in the name of the Church. On these texts the thinkers of the fourteenth century had enlarged considerably. All through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the clergy and the Pope had been suffering loss of prestige and of moral authority. The actual constitution of the Church Catholic was increasingly undermined by heresy, by scepticism and by covetous jealousy of its property and its jurisdictions. It was increasingly menaced by the growth of nationalist sentiment and organization, at least in France and in England. A crash became inevitable, and in the sixteenth century the Church was torn to pieces. What we call the Reformation was, in one aspect, the definitive triumph of secular authority in a struggle with the Church already centuries old. In one country after another, the secular government established its local control of the Church, absorbing in the process much, at least, of its property and jurisdiction. In city after city, from Stralsund to Geneva, the Reformation appears as the last act of an age-long conflict between city and Bishop. Even in Catholic countries the same thing happened in some degree. When Francis I secured from the Pope in 1516 the right to appoint his own bishops and by the ordinance of Villers Coterêts in 1537, curtailed ecclesiastical jurisdiction, he was doing, so far as he could, what Henry VIII did in England. Ferdinand of Austria, like the Protestant Princes of North Germany, dissolved

monasteries and appropriated the property. In Spain the Inquisition set up by the King in defiance of the Pope, was, among other things, a royal instrument for the control of the clergy. The Reformation was part of the process by which Europe was resolved into a series of independent, secular, sovereign States.

Along with the efforts of Princes and Magistrates to master and to dispossess the Church, went, part cause and part consequence, a great religious revival. It is, perhaps, a little unfortunate that the term 'Reformation' has come to be so completely associated with Protestantism, that the Catholic revival is spoken of as Counter-Reformation. The religious revival of the century was Catholic as well as, and no less than, Protestant. A great effort was made by the Catholic Church to reform its discipline and administration and to define its doctrinal position. The intensity of the religiousness developed in Spain was at the least as great as appears in any Protestant country. Everywhere to the struggle over property and jurisdiction were added efforts to establish or maintain or propagate 'true religion'. Governments, however reluctantly, were compelled to take share and side in them. Confusion was confounded by the development of the Calvinistic ideal of a Church-State; a development peculiarly embarrassing to Protestant governments.

Enormous in extent and intensity was the resulting friction. The Reformation involved huge transferences of property and jurisdiction. It involved war, and, above all, civil war. It necessitated efforts on the part of governments to organize their conquests and to make of the reformed church an instrument of their purposes. It involved what is called religious persecution. And it involved, of course, a vast and many-sided literary controversy.

It is an error to suppose that the sixteenth century saw the development of much that was strikingly new in political philosophy. Controversy was, of course, mainly concerned with questions men were forced, by what was happening, to consider. Many old questions were, therefore, stated in new terms. But all through the century, except at least in Italy, political thought remained essentially medieval in character. All through the century the main divisions of late medieval opinion were reproduced. This was a necessary consequence of the fact that the basic assumptions made in the sixteenth century were the same that had been made by medieval thinkers. All sides assumed that the Scriptures were the very Word of God and all assumed the existence of a 'natural' moral law, recognized by all men alike and binding absolutely, world without end. Every one, too, saw or felt that, just as goodness in action is conformity with the Eternal Law, that is with God's purpose in creation, so a 'right' is something which cannot be denied without defiance of God. Every conceivable 'right' expresses Divine Will. Real

authority, whether in a king or in the father of a family, is a right to demand obedience as a duty to God. On the basis of these propositions, usually assumed as axiomatic, the political thought of the century as a whole may fairly be said to have proceeded. But the dominant tendency and the general character of such thought differed widely, with widely differing conditions, in every country in Europe. Little that we can say will be even approximately true of all of them.

At the beginning of the century England and France alike may be said to have but just reconstituted central government after long anarchy. In both countries the establishment of order and security absolutely depended upon the effectiveness of the new monarchy. In both, therefore, there arose not only strong monarchical sentiment, but a tendency towards formation of theories of unlimited sovereignty in the monarch. But in both cases that tendency was thwarted, more or less completely. The lines on which political thought proceeded in the two countries rapidly diverged.

The effort of the monarchy effectively to centralize government in France broke down over almost innumerable obstacles. The French monarchy in the fifteenth century had had to reconquer a large part of France, not merely from the English. The driving out of the English was a relatively easy matter. There remained a number of provinces and of towns, organized for self-government and accustomed to an almost complete freedom from outside interference. The resistance of provincial and municipal tradition was increased by the lawlessness of the mass of the nobles and by the ambitions of *grands seigneurs*. Protestantism, allying itself with provincial and municipal feeling, of which, indeed, it was largely an expression, complicated the position indefinitely. Under these conditions the centralizing effort of the monarchy resulted in civil war. The claims made for the monarch were countered, first, by constitutional theories and, later, by the development of theories of popular sovereignty and a sacred right of rebellion. Once such assertions were made there was no escape from the discussion of fundamental questions. Yet, in the long run, as the result of terrible and disillusioning experience, all such theories became, in France, more and more discredited. Before the end of the century a theory of absolutism in the King, conceived as deriving authority directly from God, was becoming dominant. By the end of the century effective centralization of government had, at last, become possible.

But England was not afflicted with the accentuated and organized provincial divisions of France. Nowhere in English towns or counties was there any real tradition of self-governing independence. Largely, I think, for that very reason, England escaped the worst forms of religious division. On the other hand, England was possessed of a

Parliamentary tradition which France lacked. Weak and inchoate as this was at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the action of Henry VIII's government confirmed and defined it. Fortescue's conception of a *dominium politicum* was actually far more true of England under Elizabeth than it had been at the time he wrote. Though, therefore, England accepted fully, and far more fully than for a long time did France, the doctrine that active resistance to the supreme authority is never justified, it did not, like France, develop a belief in the absolute sovereignty of the monarch. There is really hardly a trace of such belief in English writings of the sixteenth century. While in France controversy turned more and more on fundamental questions concerning the nature and derivation of political authority and political obligation, in England controversy turned mainly on the import and implications of royal supremacy in ecclesiastical causes.

In the political chaos that was called the Empire nothing at first was distinct. For Germany the Reformation was the main factor in an almost complete disintegration. For the Princes and cities at least of northern Germany, it became a means of consolidating their local sovereignties and establishing a practical independence of Emperor and Diet. The ancient and deep division, the old antagonism, between northern and southern Germany, which had above all else, wrecked the medieval monarchy, now again expressed itself in the history of the German Reformation. Despite the amount of strictly religious controversy in Germany, nowhere else did the struggle turn so completely upon property and jurisdiction. As a consequence political thought in Germany was in the main strictly religious or simply juristic.

Italy, again, stood almost completely apart: and this was partly due to the peculiarity of the political conditions there existing. Republican sentiment remained strong in some at least of the cities; yet almost everywhere republican government had broken down and been superseded. In the fifteenth century the cities had for the most part come definitively under princely government. But the Princes, adventurers and party leaders, condottieri or dominating capitalists, had behind them little or no vital tradition and little or no moral authority. Machiavelli could regard princely government in Italy as a necessary evil, a desperate remedy for a moral corruption that rendered a people incapable of governing itself. It would, indeed, have been difficult, in the early years of the sixteenth century, to think of the Italian prince as a viceroy of God. It was not very much less difficult at the close of the century.

It seems plain enough on the face of the facts that generalizations concerning the course or the character of political thought in western Europe as a whole, during the sixteenth century, can be but very

roughly accurate. It will be best to defer any further attempt at such generalization till the concluding chapter. Enough has been said already to suggest that such attempt is but doubtfully worth making.

It might be said that political thought, in the sense at least in which the term is used here, is concerned with questions independent of mere circumstance and of circumstantial change. The question how far I am bound to obey the political sovereign and in what sense and for what reasons, is a question of political thought; the question whether it be desirable to set up a new pump in the parish or introduce a system of State insurance, is not. Yet any attempt at definition on these lines is evidently futile. What is it that does not change?

There are, it may be said, things that change so slowly that, for practical purposes, they do not change at all. Even so the fact remains that there has been very little, if any, political thinking really independent of quite rapidly changing circumstances. Men are constantly engaged in an on the whole highly successful effort to adjust their ideas to circumstance and, also, in an effort, very much less successful, to adjust circumstance to their ideas. They are constantly engaged in justifying the actual and in protesting and revolting against it. Their thought about the State and about all the many questions that connect with it, is an adjustment the character of which is determined by desire. At any one moment there exists an immense tangle of multiform circumstance and of multitudinous desires, diverse and conflicting. Out of all that, issues thought about society and government, its authority, its functions and organization.

Explanation of the genesis of this thought, begotten by desire on circumstance, is strictly impossible: we can do little more than note suggestive correlations. But conditions change only slowly and partially and men more slowly and partially still. The continuity of political thought is rooted in, and is in fact but an expression of, circumstantial continuity. What differentiates the political thought of one period of European history from that of another is mainly, the differences between the questions that are asked and between the assumptions that are made in answering. Fundamental questions tend to be asked at all times, but at any one time there are always questions with which thought is above all occupied. They differ from age to age. It is perhaps its assumptions that most profoundly distinguish the thought of one age from that of another. But, whatever may be the dominant assumptions and the dominant questions at any one time, the fundamental questions of political thought remain always the same and always, strictly speaking, unanswered.

The study of the history of political thought seems to me to exhibit still some of the characteristics of extreme youthfulness; its crudity,

its haste, its readiness to jump to conclusions. A good deal of current generalization would seem to represent guess-work or impressions derived one knows not how. Such generalizations may be useful as working hypotheses, so long as the student remembers that he is in danger of reading his hypothesis into his texts. Yet this danger is not perhaps very great. It is quite probable that, if he reads his texts faithfully, his hypothesis will quickly be forgotten.

The easy fluency with which, sometimes, we generalize concerning the thought of whole centuries or even concerning something vague and vast called the Middle Ages, suggests that we have hardly as yet realized the enormous difficulty of generalizing on this subject. We even speak, sometimes, of 'medieval thought' as though that were a simple thing or a single system. It is useless to be content with half truths and injurious to state them as though they were more. Our frequent fluency in ambiguous suggestion and phrase, suggests that we do not realize that, in dealing with ideas, the utmost possible precision must be sought at all costs always. However difficult it may be to attain precision and definition, we have got nothing worth having till it is attained. We must for ever be asking not only what it was that our author meant, but what it is that we mean. Let us remember that guessing, after all, amounts to nothing, even though the guess by chance be correct.

There is, evidently, but one road to an understanding of the thought of any period; and it is by way of a close, analytic and comparative study of texts. Fragments of political thought, suggestions of current opinion and current assumptions, may be gathered from all manner of sources, but so far as the political thought of a period finds definite expression, it is expressed in definite texts. It will be quite futile to lighten our labours by picking out a few writers or a few books that for some reason have become outstanding. If we adopt that method of approach, it is probable that we shall barely get into touch. The political thought of a period is to be found rather in the writings of obscure or anonymous persons than in the work of writers whose real distinction and originality makes them untypical.

The student who aspires to write of the political thought of any period requires a thorough knowledge of the conditions, social, political and economic, under which that thought was developed. Such knowledge can hardly be too thorough; it is perhaps impossible that it should be thorough enough. But indeed when I come to consider the powers, qualities and qualifications that are needed by that ambitious student, I am painfully reminded of those sixteenth-century books which set forth the necessary virtues of the good Prince. Knowledge of texts, however exhaustive, patience, even indomitable, are not enough. He must possess power of accurate analysis, he

must miss no subtlety of argument or distinction or connection. To be an historian is not enough; he must be something, also, of a philosopher. He must sympathize with all points of view. He must, I think, love ideas for their own sake. His questioning must be ceaseless, his scepticism untiring, whatever his private faith. He needs above all that pure desire to understand which is the only defence against bewildering bias. He must never forget that his own opinion on questions discussed are completely irrelevant to his subject. Thinking of these things he may well be aghast at his own temerity.

Much of the work that has been done on the history of political thought seems to me to have been, to some extent, vitiated by an endeavour to exhibit ideas of the past in relation to something vaguely called 'modern thought'. Preoccupation with this something may amount to a distorting obsession. In some cases it might even seem that the thing called 'modern thought' is in truth simply the writer's own. The temptation to dub one's own thought 'modern', though one that should, surely, be easy to resist, is not, it seems, always resisted. In any case my thought and your thought and his thought which, however flatly contradictory, yet, taken together, actually make up modern thought, are all alike irrelevant to an understanding of the thought of a past century. It is, of course, true that the thought system of any thinker needs to be seen alongside other systems to be understood. Always for understanding we need comparisons. But the most illuminating comparisons are those between the thought of men concerned under similar conditions with the same problems and working on similar assumptions. The more time and change separate two thinkers the more difficult comparison and the more superficial and misleading it is likely to be. Only when the question discussed is detached completely from place and changing circumstance, can comparison between distant thinkers be of value.

I remember reading, once, a book on a certain thinker of old time, the writer of which seemed to regard his hero as having most meritoriously succeeded in anticipating certain of his own nineteenth-century conclusions. Such an attitude is, surely, not merely presumptuous. How is it possible rationally to believe that a thinker is meritorious or important because one happens to agree with him? It would be pleasant to entertain that comforting conviction; but I can see no ground for it. One cannot even, on that ground, claim that one's predecessor was 'advanced', except in a sense that refers merely to time. If I have written this book as I should have written it, no one will be able to say what my own opinion is on any of the questions discussed or whether I have one. I have only the right to point out incoherencies and make comparisons. All that can be

demanding of any system of thought is coherency and faithfulness to demonstrated fact.

One frequently meets statements to the effect that So-and-so made a valuable contribution to political thought. It is usually uncertain what is meant. The expression of any coherent system of ideas, unless it be simply a reproduction, is of course a contribution to thought. Possibly the reference is to this fact. Or it may be that all that is meant is, that So-and-so made a suggestion which was found, later on, to be practically useful in some way and in some sense. If this be all, the language used is not only ambiguous, but too pompous for the occasion. But, sometimes, there seems to be an implication that there exists a slowly accumulating body of ascertained truth concerning the problems involved in the existence of the State. It was to this body of truth that So-and-so made his contribution; he did not merely enrich imagination with yet another unverifiable conception. Now I am not concerned either to confirm or deny this very bold proposition. It attracts by its audacity and repels by its seeming improbability. But it is clear that no one has a right to imply such an assertion and then proceed to take its validity for granted. Anyone who makes or implies it, is bound to tell us clearly of what system of ideas he is thinking. And before the value of So-and-so's contribution towards it can be taken for granted, the validity of that system requires demonstration. I have an uneasy suspicion that the mere attempt to state it, would make tolerably obvious the impossibility of that demonstration.

No valid reason exists for writing about political thought in the sixteenth century except that there actually are people who desire to know how men thought in those days. But there are quite good reasons for that desire. The thought of the men of those days was ultimately concerned with questions no more satisfactorily answered now than they were then; and with questions that are, or may become, as practically important to us as to them. It may be that the assumptions with which their thought started are so unlike the assumptions we make, as to disable us from seeing their arguments and conceptions as other than fallacious and mistaken. So much the worse for us, I am inclined to say, if that be so. But even though their reasoning do not help us to solve their problems for ourselves, yet it is surely true that we can learn something from it of use to ourselves. We may learn, perhaps, to realize the extent to which conclusions depend upon assumption. We may learn to realize how many irreconcilable views may rationally be taken on the same question. We may perhaps learn, if we need to do so, to doubt our own possibly too glib assurances. If the old thinkers raise doubts in our minds on fundamental questions, that is all to the good. If they help us to see how much is involved in our own assumptions, that is all to the

good. It is good for us, too, to have questions that puzzle us stated in terms to us unfamiliar. We may even learn to see the thought of our own passing moment as a thing as ephemeral as theirs. But unless we study their thought without any sort of prejudgement, we shall be unlikely ever to understand them. And if we come to it with an assumption of superiority, or a notion that the problems that perplexed them have by us been solved, then we are likely to get no good of it at all.

Yet it is not true that our thought is merely ephemeral and it is not true that theirs was so. For thought abides and is independent of time and circumstance. The questions it deals with are always with us. It may be that no one in the twentieth century will believe in the truth of the answer that was given in the sixteenth; and it may be that in the twenty-fourth century no one will believe in the answers given to the same question now. The fact is irrelevant to the question of validity. A man's thought is not dead because he is dead and I am alive and think differently. In that sense, at least, my thought will soon be dead also. But the question will remain. It matters nothing when the answer was given or who believed it to be right. The question remains.

I am like other people; I have left undone things I ought to have done and have done things I ought not to have done. There exists much relevant literature, especially of the period of the civil wars in France, which I have not read; and more, almost certainly, than I even know of. I have sometimes referred to and even quoted from French pamphlets or treatises without having verified my references or quotations. I believe that in these cases my authority is fully sufficient: but this is a thing that ought not to be done. Concerning the Anabaptists I have expressed a view and an impression that I am conscious is founded on insufficient knowledge. This is a thing which should not, at least, be done without confession. Worse still, perhaps, I have altogether ignored the principles and implications of the theory of international law that was being developed in the sixteenth century from Victoria to Gentili. Fondly I have imagined that I should like best to deal with them in connection with the following century. In truth the thought of the sixteenth century is so rich and various and its literature so extensive, that perhaps it is wrong as yet for anyone to deal with it as a whole. To work out fully the political thought of France alone would require a book the size of this one. Work of this kind is, in the long run, of use or account only so far as it is thorough. All the evidence must be examined and collated, all the texts must be studied. Perhaps the right title for this book would be simply: 'Some of the Political Thought of the Sixteenth Century.' But nothing in the world is much more futile than apology. It were best, in concluding any book, to say simply,

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with the author of the Book of the Maccabees: 'If I have done well and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired; but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto.'

June 1928

J. W. A.

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A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

PART I LUTHERANISM AND CALVINISM

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY

AMBIGUOUS as are the words standing at the head of this section, they are far less ambiguous than the word Protestantism. Loose talk about something called 'Protestantism' is one of the more serious difficulties that students of the sixteenth century must contend with. It is a word used in many different senses and sometimes, it seems, with no precise sense at all. It is even possible to use it in two senses within the same paragraph, and that once done no sense remains. The word is often used to signify rejection by Christians of the claims of the Papacy. That is a use alluring in its apparent simplicity. But, in that sense, Anglo-Catholics, old and new, are Protestants for all their protests and the Eastern churches are equally Protestant. Also the question might well be asked: 'What claims of what Papacy?' Rejection may be partial; and the line between complete and incomplete rejection may be very fine. Cardinal Bellarmine certainly rejected the extreme claims put forth on behalf of Pope Sixtus V and he was rewarded with a place on the Index. The French Gallicans of the later years of the century went much further still in rejection; and it is not so easy to distinguish between the official view of King Henry VIII of England and the views of Louis Servin, 'Catholic' minister of Henry IV.¹ Even for the sixteenth century alone, and putting aside the ambiguity already attached to the word 'Christian', this use of the term 'Protestant' leads into difficulties.

Less superficially the word 'Protestantism' has been used to

¹ For Servin, see Pt. III, Chap. VII, p. 374.

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signify a rejection not merely of Papal claims but of the conception of the Church as an institution of divine ordainment, organization and inspiration, furnished with an apostolic succession of priests and bishops endowed by ordination with mysterious, sacramental powers. This use of the term attempts, at least, to go deeper than the other; but anyone who tries to make consistent use of it in this sense in reference to the sixteenth century, will find himself involved in hopeless difficulties. Was Luther himself in this sense a Protestant?

It has been suggested that the essential feature of Protestantism was its denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation. But, apart from the evident inconvenience of a definition of Protestantism by reference to a mere negative, the line between transubstantiation and consubstantiation is surely a fine one. If we say that what Protestantism as such denied was that any substantial or objective change took place in the sacramental elements after consecration, we are in little better case. We shall then be compelled to say that Luther, for instance, was not a Protestant. It will follow also that it was possible utterly to deny the validity of Papal claims and yet be a Catholic. It is surely evident that no dividing line can accurately or reasonably be drawn here.

Intellectually, perhaps, the deepest difference between Lutherans or Calvinists on one side and Romanists on the other was on the question of free will. It was Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* that made it for ever impossible for Erasmus to enter the Lutheran camp, whether or not other considerations would have restrained him. But to define Protestantism by reference to a particular doctrine of predestination would be to say that Hans Denck and Castellion and Coornhert were not Protestants. Also, and of course, very few people concerned themselves with this fundamental question or even understood what the question was.

What may be called the Protestant tradition, in this and in other countries, has been and is a serious stumbling-block in the way of understanding. There has even existed a tendency to use the word Protestantism as though, in the sixteenth century, all, or almost all, profound religiousness was Protestant. This illusion, just comprehensible in Calvin and Beza, has long been bereft of excuse. Protestantism has been represented as an effort to establish some kind of direct and personal relation between the individual soul and God. But within the Roman Church that effort was continuously being made; and of intense consciousness of God I do not think there was more to be found among Lutherans or Calvinists than among Romanists. The religion of St. Teresa was far nearer to Hans Denck's than his was to Calvin's. That Luther, as he professed, learned much from Tauler, merely illustrates the fact that one of the roots of early Protestantism was Catholic mysticism. It seems that in the deeps