

A Notable Quatercentenary

by Archdeacon DAVIES, B.D. (Cambridge), M.A. (Sydney), F.R.H.S. (London)

In these days of centenary and other similar celebrations & Commemorations I have been waiting for someone to call attention to a notable quatercentenary that fell due this year. But as the year went on and no one seemed to notice it I have felt emboldened to make the reminder that on April 19, 1529 (1529), a protest was read in the Diet - or Assembly - of the Holy Roman Empire held that year in Speier. This protest has given rise to the epithet applied to all those churches that profess admiration for and loyalty to the leading principles of the Great Reformation of the sixteenth Century, that religious revolution commonly called the Protestant Reformation.

The expert historian knows how difficult it is to assign a precise date to the beginning of any movement such as the Great Reformation. Some try to place it as far back as John Wycliffe, who died in 1384, & who undoubtedly, in any view, did much to prepare the way for it. Some have regarded All Saints' Day (November 1st.) 1517, as the significant date, for it was on that day at noon that Luther nailed ~~to~~ his famous Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg. Other dates have been suggested but 1529 is important, not only as yielding a name for ^{European} churches that refused to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, but it is the year in which the reforming movement definitely crystallized into an organic form. The revolt from medieval Rome had found a name & a party.

The circumstances of the original "Protest" are worthy of recall. Luther himself took no active part in the protest, but he is the

most outstanding figure of the whole Reformation movement, one of the world's great men, a maker of history. Yet he did not originate the Reformation; he was, as it were, the match that kindled the fire already laid. His action in ^{publicly} burning the Pope's Bull that excommunicated him was not so rash as might appear at first, for the papal agents found the German rulers and people strangely reluctant to accept the papal fulminations as formerly. Luther's Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German nation was a call to all Germany to unite against Rome. The Reforming movement evoked the rising nascent national sentiment of the German people who responded amazingly so that the publication of the Papal Bull became dangerous.

Charles V., newly crowned Emperor, held a Diet at Augsburg in 1521. Its most spectacular moment was when Luther was asked whether he was the author of certain books & whether he would retract what was written in them. He acknowledged the authorship, & after consideration, refused to retract unless what he had said could be clearly shown to be contrary to Holy Scripture. Both Pope & Councils had erred; his own conscience was fast bound to Holy Scripture & it was neither safe nor honest to act against conscience. The princes who attended the Diet tried negotiations but the Emperor, who had now patched up his quarrel with the Pope, would not give way & the ban of the Empire was pronounced against Luther.

Luther's friends however prevented his execution of the ban & at a Diet held in Speier in 1526 a decree was passed, unanimously it was said, asserting the principle *cujus regio, ejus religio*, namely

that the ruler of each country should decide the religion of his realm. This declaration of independence of Papal ^{supremacy} ~~authority~~ was the principle of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 which secured the position of Lutheranism in Germany by treaty arrangements.

It was also a declaration of independence of the Imperial authority ^{made when} ~~was~~ Pope & Emperor themselves were at loggerheads, for in 1527 the army of the most Holy Roman Emperor sacked the most Holy City of Rome and wrought more havoc than had been seen since the Vandals had run amok there eleven centuries before.

But Pope & Emperor picked up their quarrel again & their interests in Germany were almost identical & called for urgent attention. Hence in 1529 the Diet — held that year in Speier — in effect rescinded the decree of 1526 and reaffirmed the Ban of 1521. It was this rescission that evoked the famous "Protest" in which the Protestants affirmed their intention to abide by the Recess (or decree) of 1526. When their request that their protest should be incorporated in the Recess — or published decisions — of the Diet was refused, they published an appeal from the Diet to the Emperor, to the next General Council of Christendom, & a Congress of the German nation. The Princes who signed the Protest were the Elector John of Saxony, Margrave George of Brandenburg, Dukes Ernest & Francis of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, & Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt; and the fourteen cities which adhered to it were Strassburg, Ulm, Nürnberg,

Constance, Lindau, Memmingen, Kempten, Nördlingen, Heilbronn, Reutlingen, Isny, St. Gallen, Wissemburg, & Windsheim. These were the original "Protestants" on the one hand they repudiated the absolute sovereignty ^{claimed} of the Pope over not only the Church but the nation, and on the other hand they appealed to God & ^{to} conscience as transcending man-made laws and institutions, all the more when those laws and institutions were admittedly corrupt.

The Protestant revolution was not limited to Germany. It originated or stimulated similar movements in other countries where conditions were ripe for a revolt from Papal absolutism in religion. Spain & Italy were not ripe & there the Reformation took no root. In parts of ^{Germany} Switzerland, France & the Netherlands the movement won signal successes. In ~~England~~ Great Britain & the Scandinavian countries the national churches were reformed & ^{the} papal supremacy completely rejected. Since then through European migration, the development of trade & commerce & the efforts of Christian missions, Protestants are now found in every continent & country and are numbered throughout the world by the hundred million; somewhere about two hundred million is the result of one calculation. Roman Catholic Christians all over the world have been estimated at about fifty million more & Orthodox (Greek) and other Christians at about fifty million less. In Australia over 73 per cent profess to be Protestants and ^{not quite} 21 per cent Roman Catholics so that from an Australian point of

view the Protestant Reformation is an event or movement whose quatercentenary is one to be remembered & celebrated with due publicity and "advertisement" in the widest sense.

This is the obj. It is therefore quite appropriate that there should arise this year in the Church of England in Sydney, a vigorous propaganda to celebrate a "Reformation Sunday" on the first Sunday in November. The originator of this move may not have had the quatercentenary in mind, but it occurs very conveniently for his purpose which is to remind the present generation of the many advantages and benefits secured to them by the Protestant Reformation, & to expound & re-affirm the basic principles of that great movement as applicable to the circumstances of today. Incidentally it will demonstrate the essentially Protestant character of the Church of England in spite of attempts in recent years to deny it. Archbishop Laud in the seventeenth century and Archbishop Benson in the nineteenth century both strongly affirmed the Protestant character of the Church of England after it had passed through the period of the Reformation, and neither of these archbishops could be described as a "Low" Churchman. Archbishop Laud was one of the formers & outstanding leaders of the real "High" Church party in the Church of England & is the real martyr of Anglicanism at the hands of the Puritans. Archbishop Benson was the typical Anglican dignitary of the late nineteenth century. Hence the agreement of two

such independent witnesses is a sufficient answer to those Anglicans who seem so pitifully anxious to deny ~~the~~ at least to diminish the essentially Protestant character of the Church of England.

It might be worth while to add that in the Bill of Rights of 1689 which gave Parliamentary recognition & security to the Revolution of 1688, England is described as "this Protestant Kingdom", & "papists" were debarred the Crown. The term "Protestant" is clearly used as the opposite of "Roman Catholic". It is used also in the same sense in the Toleration Act of the same year, 1689, which gave a limited recognition & liberty to "dissenting Protestants" as a reward for their help in the Revolution. The Act of Settlement of 1700 was passed with the main object of securing "the succession of the Crown in the Protestant line", and enacts "That whosoever shall hereafter come to the possession of the Crown shall join in communion with the Church of England as by ^{the Revolution was} law established." The singular unanimity with which these Acts were passed accomplished shows that these acts of Parliament accurately reflected the trend of public opinion, & demonstrate the fact that in the eye of the law and in the mind of the people the Church of England was Protestant in character.

Hence arises the move towards celebrating November 3rd. next as Reformation Sunday, a proposal which the Sydney Diocesan Synod will be called upon to endorse with its approval and one which will have a reach wider ^{an appeal much wider} than the Church of England

It should appeal to about three fourths of our people in Australia, to Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Salvation Army followers, & "Church of Christ" members, and others, as well as to the great majority of Anglicans.

For the Reformation was a great movement, great as regards the obstacles & forces it had to overcome & great as to the results it accomplished. But the distinctive features of the Reformation - the great Reformation it might well be called - and an estimate of its gains & losses is a subject large enough for another article, which would appropriately be entitled "Gains & Losses from the Great Reformation".

One more remark may be permitted just now, namely that our Roman Catholic brethren of the stricter sort naturally deny the term "Reformation" to the movement we have had in mind, & apply it rather to that which began ~~within the~~ with the "working of Divine Love" in Rome itself and eventually passed into that reflex action of the Protestant Reformation upon the ^{British} Roman church that is usually described by ^{English} historians as "The Counter-Reformation".

David J. Davis