Puritanism
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Puritanism.
Its Rise, Progress and Influence.

Puritanism assumes its place as an important factor in English history, during the reign of Elizabeth. Its real origin, however, dates back almost as far as that of the English Church itself. For even during the first year of its existence, there was an element within it which protested that its reforms were more apparent than real, and that they enjoyed no greater religious liberty than under the old regime.

Under Henry VIII, the Church was, really, a bastard offspring of the king superseding the pope. This, with few minor changes in form rather than doctrine, constituted its main distinction.

The disaffected party seem to have made objection principally to the retention, in the public service, of the rood-screen regalia and purify-nalia, although doctrinal questions had their bearing as well.
But while protesting, they went no farther. Creed and ritual were greatly modified in the next reign, but discontent still obtained in the Church. The re-introduction of popery under Mary, with scarce any opposition from the English Church, seemed greatly to increase the number of malcontents; for it not only showed the near alliance of the two churches, but also convinced many critics conservative that the only way to escape the clutches of Rome was by a real and complete separation, in doctrine and form. Persecution of Protestant extremists only strengthened this cause, and was the means of associating the ideas of ecclesiastical and royal prerogative: a combination of ideas which has at times proven a potent factor in English history.

Up to this point, the English church seemed to be little menaced by these dissensions. Upon the accession of Elizabeth, known as a zealous Protestant, both factions in the Church sought her co-operation; the one, to be re-established; the other, in addition, that the former abuses be blotted out. At this time, the controversy main
regard to the vestments to be worn, more than essential differences of doctrine. Elizabeth did, indeed, expose the protestant cause; but, it was the cause of the "high church." Through her influence, her first parliament passed measures, effectively re-establishing the English Church, and crushing the power of Rome. But through the same influence, the parliament also passed the "Act of Uniformity," compelling the clergy to conform to all the established usages; and these were made, if anything, more galling to the reform party. Their desires, their hopes, their prayers were unheeded. Elizabeth protected the Calvinists abroad; at home she persecuted them. The band of malcontents had only desired the abolition of romish customs, and a greater purity of doctrine, yet

The disputations over robes and surplices, or as it is called, the "vestiarist controversy," seems, at a casual view, to have been the only ground of contention, but other differences existed, which
came more prominently into light in after years. Many, who had fled to the continent, to escape the tyranny of Mary, had returned, strongly imbued with the Calvinistic principles of the continental reformers, which they lost no time in disseminating. Persecution, too, was inducing in the Puritan mind a strong undercurrent of feeling which demanded religious liberty. Constantly the Puritan numbers increased, and constantly was the established church, controlled by the queen, more merciless in its exactions. The Church established a rule of uniformity in all matters not expressly determined by the scriptures. The Puritan claimed the right to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience; and further, that what Christ had left indifferent, no human power should make compulsory. The Church adopted arbitrary rules of government; the Puritan recognized no rules but such as he found laid down in the Bible. The Church, through its head, the queen, attempted to enforce obedience to its regulations by compulsion. But the Puritan, though strong in his loyalty to his sovereign, was yet more loyal in what he considered
his duty to his God. When these motives conflicted, he followed the latter and would not conform. His resistance was long passive, for he hated disturbance; but it was none the less firm, and he suffered all things for opinions sake.

The act of Uniformity was not strictly enforced for some years after its passage. When at length the queen caused its enforcement, great numbers of those ministers who refused to conform were ejected from their preferments. Matters now rapidly approached a crisis. Either they had endeavored to reform the church by remaining within it, and seeking to inculcate their principles into its doctrines. They had only succeeded in calling down upon their heads the royal anger. They saw the futility of their efforts, but they could not relinquish their hopes. They recognized the principle that "Royalty, overwhelming the statute book of God, is royalty no longer; that loyalty may refuse to follow, but be loyal still." They urged their followers to separation, and their met opposition; but persecution continued so mercilessly,
that at last, in desperation, the step was taken. In 1561, the first Puritan congregation, as a distinct and independent organization, assembled. This move caused a division in the Puritan ranks, for many of them would not follow so far. However, they were yet united in working for a common end, and in after years they still were one, in the great struggles which shook the kingdom.

The establishing of a new congregation was, in itself, a matter of small importance; but considered as the nucleus around which gathered the greatest motives forces in the following century, it assumes the greatest prominence. It was "the seedling, which, though crushed in its infancy, afterward sprang up and flourished; and spreading everywhere its roots, completely revolutionized the nation; and its influence was felt throughout the Christian world."

Not content with forbidding the dissenters to dissent, they denounced within the pale of the established church.
Elizabeth now went so far as to forbid their preaching at all; and many were those who atoned for their disobedience by fines, imprisonment, and even worse punishments. But "persecution which does not kill, never fails to strengthen", and day by day the oppressed cause gained in numbers and influence among the people. The puritans cheerfully obeyed his sovereign in all save religious matters. Beneath this outward submission was springing up an intense hatred to tyranny and oppression, wherever it might be found. Sometimes openly violating the mandates of the queen, often in secret assemblies in unsuspected places, the puritan doctrines were promulgated, and the puritan numbers increased. The seeding was growing, although crushed to earth. The condition of religious affairs in the kingdom at this time was deplorable in the extreme. Despite the outward show of zeal, the established church was as a "whited sepulcher, full of rottenness and dead men's bones". The churches were neglected, and allowed to go to ruin, and public worship in the
country changes seemed to be almost forgotten. The clergy were largely ignorant and worldly men, caring more for the maxim of
unrighteousness than for the salvation of souls. All this showed
the need of a greater purity and of course augmented the puritan
ranks, and made them only the more bold in declaring their position.

Thus continued matters during the whole of Elizabeth's
reign. Puritanism was constantly gaining power, notwithstanding the ceaseless efforts of the queen to drive it from her
realm. But before the close of her rule, the long and ceaseless
curse of persecuting had begun to instill into the puritan nature
a new spirit, which attained its fulness in the two succeeding
reigns. As hitherto the puritan had represented religious
liberty, so now in the political arena, he began to represent the
party of liberty, and the indomitable rights of the people.
And in the panorama of history, this puritan, viewed in the
true light, after the lapse of centuries, stands out boldly and
clearly as the champion of liberty, civil and religious.
And as were matters when James I. came to the throne. He being educated a Presbyterian, the Puritians at last hoped to see the longed for reforms introduced. But they were doomed again to bitter disappointment. Deceived, terrified, insulted, they sadly returned to their old ways and customs. James was even more arbitrary and tyrannical than was Elizabeth. The history of his reign, so far as Puritanism is concerned, is only a record of fresh persecutions and larger growth. His arbitrary abuse of his prerogative, his self-conceit, his "divine right," and his expressed contempt for the parliament, armed the jealousy of the entire nation, and increased the movement to the popular or country party, the party of the Puritans. All saw that both civil and religious liberty were endangered. The Puritans became bolder in remonstrance. The arbitrary conduct of the king, armed in the minds of his subjects a deep and irrevocable jealousy, which persisted not till, in the reign of his son, it broke forth in its strength and overthrow the monarchy.
large number of the persecuted left the kingdom; some for Holland, some for America, but the greater number remained at home, to endure persecution and to share their party's triumph.

During this and the following reign, as has been well said, the English spirit was divided; their vast inheritance between them. One body remained at home, and established the English constitution; the other crossed the Atlantic, and founded the American republic — the two greatest achievements of modern times. With that body which remained at home, we have to do for the present. They were becoming a leading party in religion and state. They were retaining power in parliament, and that body was beginning to recognize the fact that the people, as well as the king, had rights. True, the country was becoming more and more agitated, and the crisis was rapidly hastening on.

For a time the threatening deluge was averted, by the death of James, and the accession of Charles I., in the meagre hope that all might still be amicably settled; but the great convulsion
was only delayed. Charles followed in the footsteps of his father. Having returned home, he continued the persecutions against the Puritans. He founded the parliament and arbitrarily exercised his prerogative, his "divine right," regardless of all save the gratification of his own selfish aims. Finally, the last barrier was swept away. The long restrained flood, in which was mingled the pent-up resentment of long years of oppression, religious zeal and fanaticism, longings for liberty, and the wrath of a people who had seen their dearest rights ruthlessly trampled under foot, burst forth in all its fury. Terrible was it, as it swept through the country, and brought upon the nation all the horrors of civil war. All were not Puritans who combined against the King; but the Puritans had brought it about, though not wholly intentionally. Against him was the persecution direct, though this was the principle of civil liberty developed, and he it was who controlled its every move. Long years the struggle continued, with no sign of its ending. The famous "long Parliament," in its determination to obtain new securities for
English liberty came into conflict and civil war with the king, that was ended Jan. 31, 1649. By the avowal of the throne, and the capital punishment of the deposed king as a traitor, the gone too far to retract, the nature brooded, reluctantly, to the newistic which its own course had made inevitable. Monarchy, the first principle of the English constitution, was abolished, and

the Commonwealth, the puritanic government, was established. Puritanism was at the summit of its glory. The puritanic mind, strongly imbued with republican principles, had established its ideal government. It had done as though the army, and through the army was its power maintained. It was not a popular government, at home or abroad. Based on liberty, it became a military despotism. It was feared and respected by other nations, for its placed England above them all. Its glory dazzled the eyes of the ruling party. The rest of the nation submitted because they could not do otherwise. The Royalty was opposed as the Puritan had been before. It was now that
private quarrels became sectarianism. They need the same measures with their oppressors, and were largely responsible for the failure of their own systems.

The success of the rebellion, and the endurance of the Commonwealth, were due to the masterly guile of one man, Oliver Cromwell. It was through his labor in the field that the royalist forces were overcome. He made of the army a body of religious enthusiasts. The army made him their idol. When puritanism, through its army, controlled the kingdom, the army placed their idol at its head. And here, as in the field, his genius was pre-eminent. He placed the country at the head of nations. He crushed out all opposition at home by mere force of arms. He and his parliament could not agree. He followed the course of the king beheaded, and ruled without it. The Puritan ideal, in his hands, became the sternest despotism. Some have said that all this was due to his unabridged ambition. He was ambitious for his country, honor, for the entire success of his party, religiously and politically.
and we believe that he always kept his personal ambition subordinate to these. His keenness and foresight enabled him to see beyond the outward show, and he saw that his and the party's fond ideal was a failure. Puriitaniere had gone too far, and had missed its course of greatest good.

And yet, the jealousy, yea, fanatical devotion to his ideal drove him to the utter extremity, to compel what he yet saw could never be. True, by his own personal power, he compelled the existence of the so called commonwealth. But scarcely was this great man dead, when the Puritanic government expired, without a struggle, and puritanism passed forever from the political arena. Even the army, the support of the puritanic commonwealth, was first to welcome back the kingley rule, and then the stern old "Dronedee" became the best citizen of England's realm.

Such is the history of that body of English puritans who remained at home. The triumph of their cause.
one of short duration, but its influence was and is manifest.
Its victories were great, but "none were so glorious as the victory
which it won over itself," when, seeing its failure in its cause,
its most devoted followers quietly acquiesced in the verdict of
all the nations. Not did a cause, to all outward appearances,
more fine and permanent, than that of puritanism, at its
height. Never before or since has a cause been honored with so
great an array of talent and ability in its support. And never
has another so great a cause so quickly and quietly passed away,
as the puritanical party in politics. In 1650, Puritanism was
at the height of glory and power, with all England at its feet.
Ten years afterward, it had passed away from the field of action,
and was seen no more.

That body which came to America, brought with them
those principles which had brought persecution upon them in
the mother country. Here they found a home, here they found
the longed-for liberty. Gambled and oppressed in England.
these principles found their full development in this country, and though, sometimes, fanaticism, as in England, gained the upper hand, yet the free air dispelled it there, and we have as their legacy to posterity these motive forces which today animate our republic.

We have endeavored to fairly delineate the rise and progress of the Puritan movement, and to bring out the leading facts in its history. A few words now to show its effect, then, and thereafter, particular and general, and its lasting and beneficial influence on the after history of events.

The ideal Puritan, we have already stated to be the champion of liberty, civil and religious. The influence of his creed, however, reached down to the very foundations of society. The home as we enjoy it today, was the creation of the Puritan. They instilled an intense love and purity into the family circle, in place of prevailing lawlessness. From the home, this influence went out through all society, as replaced meanness, hypocrisy,
and timely with a severe simplicity, yet with dignity and sincerity.
It tended to break down social barriers, making all men equal
before men as before God. The Puritans aimed not to banish
social enjoyment, but to free it from its evil tendencies.

Such is one view of his character. On the other hand, he came to
regard himself especially chosen, and while perfect love existed between
Puritans, outsiders were vilified and sternly shut out. It was
this sternness, and his great zeal, which often led the Puritans into
most glaring inconsistencies. He professed the cause of religious
liberty: And no sooner did he gain the power, than he forbade
priestly throughout the realm, and sought to force all to his belief.
He fled to America to escape religious persecution, but when there
he tortured and slew many innocent persons for witchcraft, and
banished Roger Williams for difference of belief. This was the
fruits of civil liberty; and yet he gave to England the most
despotism of governments.

But the evil part of puritanism was mixed with its
fall from political power. It's good lived after it. In the revolution of 1688, the Puritan influence, freed from fanaticism, accomplished all for the cause of civil liberty, which it failed to do amid the Commonwealth. And it is the old Puritan element still living in the hearts of the English people today, which ever guards sacredly their hard won rights from all encroachment. Its rich probably prevented the coalescing of all the reformed churches into one. But its influence throughout Christendom, true and pure, has given freedom of religious belief, which exists today.

Its purity and simplicity, without its intolerance, exists in the creeds of today. In every branch of human life and industry its results are real, and its purity has forced its way into every avenue. Historians, with one accord, give in saying that "the history of English justice since the Restoration has been the history of Puritanism." Nor will the work which it so nobly began, and carried forward, be completed, until the Millennial day shall dawn upon the earth.