

To be Read First
for the Better Understanding
of
the Situation.

Over and above the defects of his own character, King Charles the First inherited many disabilities from his father's reign. These were an inefficient and dishonest set of public servants: financial chaos, a Navy falling to pieces, and bitter rivalry amongst religious parties striving for the pre-eminence. Concerned for the rehabilitation of the Navy, the King adopted the suggestion of one, Nye, a solicitor, to restore it through the revival of an old tax for ship-money. This was raised and used by the King to repair and re-equip old ships, and to build new ones, for the protection of the Channel against raids by Moslem corsairs. First, it was levied, as in the past, only on seaports; now, since everyone shared in the Navy's protection, the whole country was called upon to contribute. Against this demand on their pockets, the rich merchants of the towns and the country squires, particularly, rebelled.

Dispensing at last with his contumacious parliaments, for eleven years the King ruled without them, for they were bent on so starving Charles as to reduce the Monarchy to impotence. It was during this period of his personal rule that all those most in need of care received such help as they never knew before or since. The old and helpless were provided for in Almshouses (or so-called Hospitals), or boarded out in Devon, poor children were billeted on those able to support them: pensions were granted to the poor, and sometimes their rents were paid, and in winter fuel was given to them. Corn was sold at a lower rate to the needy than to others: in some places loaves were baked for, and given to, day labourers and the poorer inhabitants, whilst the unemployed were helped to employment by the creation of suitable work. All this was carried out by existing agencies, from the Privy Council down to the administrations of the smallest parish, but most of all, by the justices. None of the beneficiaries were subjected to any special control or inspection, so that it was not surprising to hear that when the Great Rebellion broke out, the poor folk were found mainly on the King's side.

In the forefront, however, of the King's offending in the eyes of the so-called "patriots", was his unswerving devotion to the Church of England. The country, and particularly London, abounded in Puritans, infected from Geneva, and they were not only without, but within, the Church. These, Presbyterians or Independents, (now known as Congregationalists,) would tolerate nothing in the Prayer Book which was in accord with Catholic teaching and practice - hence they opposed the whole of it. On the other hand, their Puritan's great protagonist, Laud, would tolerate nothing subversive of any of its contents, and insisted on the seemly conduct of public worship and the decent ordering of the Church buildings. Who had the more right on his side, the reader must judge. Laud was not only a good but a truly devout man, as his published devotions shew, nor ~~had~~ he ~~actually~~ by any ulterior motives. But he was hasty and impatient of temper, and wholly without tact, and these characteristics opposed to the stubbornness of the Puritans, naturally exacerbated the situation between them. For, in these days, tolerance was unknown. [Though there were other factors contributory to the Great Rebellion, the main one was religious: it resolved itself into a question as to whether the Church of England should be given over as a prey to either of the contending sects, or be maintained as an integral part of the Catholic Church. King Charles stood firmly by the Church, and by refusing to sacrifice her, he lost his life, and so gained his style of Martyr.

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