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## A NOTABLE TERCENTENARY

*"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."*—*Matt. xxii. 21.*

(Sermon Preached in Brighton Presbyterian Church,  
Nov. 3, 1940).

TO-DAY is a great and glorious anniversary in English history. Precisely three hundred years ago, on the 3rd of November, 1640, the Long Parliament met. Securely did that Parliament lay the foundations of the civil and religious liberty which we treasure, and for which to-day we are fighting.

For almost a dozen years England had been despotically ruled by Charles I, advised in matters of State by the Earl of Strafford, who summed up his totalitarian policy in the one word "Thorough", and in Church matters by Archbishop Laud, who aimed at a rigid state-imposed uniformity in the church. It was by no means unlike what exists in some countries to-day; prisons were full, informers flourished, appeals to impartial courts were disallowed.

This Long Parliament is the most famous in English history. Why? Not for the length of its sittings; not even because it executed Charles, for that it did not do. In December 1648, Colonel Pride, with a band of soldiers, turned out by force 143 members, and left what was scornfully and justifiably called "the Rump". This Rump Parliament it was which appointed a court to try the king. No:—the place of the Long Parliament in English history is due to the immovable stand it took for government by law, and not by dictatorship, and for liberty from ecclesiastical tyranny.

Yet the true secret of its greatness lies deeper still. Never in our history has there been a parliament so deliberately determined that its policy should be in accord with the will of God, and so desirous to understand that will. Year after year, on the last Wednesday of each month, it held a Fast Day; on that day the members went to St. Margaret's, Westminster to pray and

to hear two sermons, one morning and one afternoon. These sermons are remarkable for the fact that they concern themselves first and foremost with personal religion, with readiness to serve God in individual lives; only at the end do they come to the special responsibilities and duties of the hearers as members of parliament. From these sermons and from other sources as well, one learns the fact that there was a volume of earnest and spontaneous prayer throughout the land for the deliberations of parliament; the preachers claimed that this fact both added to the responsibility and helped the determination of the members.

It is but little remembered what were the first words spoken in debate in this Long Parliament. Yet they were most memorable; their significance is weighty; they struck indeed the key-note of its greatness. After the election of the Speaker, and the transaction of some formal business, Sir Benjamin Rudyerd rose, and said, "Mr. Speaker, we are here to do God's business and the king's." "God's business and the king's"! Sir Benjamin was no genius, not even a man of much force of character, but in that dozen of words he minted an immortal definition for the policy of a Christian parliament.

The task was no simple one, nor was it easy: the time came when they found it impossible to do both God's business and the king's. Yet, in the midst of civil war, they accepted a remarkable definition of a constitutional monarchy, probably the first that ever found place in any state document. It was drawn up by Alexander Henderson, a Scottish Presbyterian minister: every member (save those who had gone off to the king at Oxford) solemnly swore to it. "We shall endeavour," they swore, "with our estates and lives, to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliament, and the liberties of the kingdom; and to preserve and defend the king's Majesty's person and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdom, that the world may bear witness with our consciences of our loyalty, and that we have no thoughts or intentions to diminish his Majesty's just power and greatness." This was honestly tried, with a pathetically sincere and persevering attempt to find in Charles the making of a constitutional monarch, an ideal that no Stuart was able to fulfil.

But it has been fulfilled in England in a way which has

astonished the world, and which became an example to other nations, never seriously challenged until the rise of totalitarian dictatorships after the Great War. It is admitted by historians that it was the Christianity of England, poor though that was, which in contrast to the infidelity of France saved our land from the horrors of the French Revolution. We stood firm, alone, against the huge aggression of Napoleon. There is one great distinction between him and the aggressor of to-day, Napoleon declared explicitly, "My authority ends where the authority of conscience begins". Hitler would scorn any such dictum.

Once again it is our lot to try and do God's business and the king's; we must stand undaunted in our obedience to Christ's command, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's". For Christ recognised that there were things that were Caesar's. How like His constant practice was this reply! The first half of it was enough to confound His adversaries, the inscription on the coin was a complete answer to their question. But He always enunciated great principles; and the second part of His reply was like a two-edged sword, dividing even unto the bone and the marrow. It dared them, so to speak, to give Caesar too much.

In His saying there is implicit Paul's declaration, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God". Christians are not anarchists; they are revolutionaries only in a moral and not a political sense. Does Paul's doctrine seem to imply that Christians are to give an immoral acquiescence to any despotism, however debased, that may curse our world? Men have emphasised the fact that when Paul wrote this, Nero was on the throne. But Christ's formula makes absolutely clear that obedience has limits. Christianity preaches obedience, not civil disobedience; the limit of obedience arrives when the commands of man are contrary to the word of God. If we render unto God all that belongs to Him, there may come a time when we find that we cannot render unto Caesar all that he claims.

It is worth quoting the careful and unhesitating words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up by authority of the Long Parliament, and used by English-speaking Presbyterian churches to-day. "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him

over the people, for His own glory, and the public good; and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers. . . . It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honour their persons, to pay their tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience sake. Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him." This is a sound statement of Christ's principle, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

What about the other half? The German evangelical Church has gone as far as it dare in obeying the state; but there came a point when some of them dare go no further. They dare not hold their peace about the persecution of the Jews; they dare not refrain from preaching a gospel of love. They are in prison for it. Japanese Christians have had a problem to face which is precisely the same as the early Christians had to face in the Roman Empire; they would be at liberty to worship as they liked, if they would offer but one little pinch of incense on the altar of the emperor-god. But that was not Caesar's to have; they refused it, and they died for their refusal. In Japan the government has tried to quiet the consciences of the Christians by declaring that the ceremony they demand has no religious element, but is purely a state recognition of the emperor, even though it must be done at an idol shrine. Some have accepted this as absolving their consciences; but the Church is naturally uneasy. In Scotland in the "killing time", men were imprisoned and executed because they would not swear unlimited allegiance to Charles II. They were willing to do so, if they might add words to the effect that it did not encroach on their allegiance to God.

What has this, you say, to do with us here in England to-day? Well, it is true that we enjoy religious liberty; and on this 3rd of November we should remember the Long Parliament whose debates began with the words, "Mr. Speaker, we are here to do God's business and the king's". It has been said, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance"; and it is against one of the most powerful attempts of the devil to rob us of that hard-won right that we are fighting to-day. Totalitarianism and religious liberty cannot live together in the same land, perhaps not even upon the same globe. "All for the state" is the cry

of Nazis, of Fascists, of Bolsheviks, and of Japanese militarists. The Church must fly at masthead her pennon, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's". Some vessels of her fleet may have to go down with the flag flying; but the fleet is bound to be victorious if all refuse to strike the flag to the enemy.

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." Here in Britain, when we have won the war, we must still watch, lest by carelessness we fritter away our liberty. We may be in the happy position that the law of the land claims no obedience that we cannot readily give. There is another more subtle tyrant, the law of custom, to whom we may have to refuse our conformity. The acorn of liberty, planted by the Long Parliament, has grown to be so sturdy an oak that it is difficult to imagine a storm that could uproot it. Yet it might decay and die if it be not sound at heart.

It is the little things that we must watch; there are innumerable details in daily life, in our social relations, which seem so unimportant. Let me give you two examples, which are to the point precisely because many of you will think of them as trivialities. A man who is convinced that alcohol is a bad thing for him and for others, and who knows that his example tells, does not ordinarily take it. Yet on social occasions, such for example as a wedding, he takes it. He deludes himself by saying, "I desire freedom to do so"; but he is in fact a slave to custom, and is giving to that Caesar just the one little pinch of incense to which he has no claim. Or the man who stays away from service because his friends drop in to tea on a Sunday afternoon, and he does not like to say that he has an appointment which he must keep. He is rendering to the Caesar of social custom an hour which is God's. It was quaintly said three hundred years ago, "The cry of our age is for liberty so much that the most are for God's enclosures to be made commons". No:—render unto God that which is God's.

Other Caesars there are who may make difficulties for us, when peace comes. Our government may be swayed over much by a wrong patriotism, thinking of the world-importance of our own country, rather than of its world-usefulness. To the Caesar of imperialistic ideas we must not sacrifice; "The Kingdom of God is the only thing that can make patriotism good for the world".

In a real sense, in such a democracy as ours, the duty of rendering to God the things that are His makes it incumbent on every Christian to take a steady interest in politics. For the one final solution of the problem would be that at which with magnificent courage the Long Parliament aimed, to make Caesar's demands the same as those of God. By the influence of the Church of Christ, the state should be enabled to enact laws expressing such a care for the estates, bodies, and souls of men as a true brother would have for his brother: laws which would make not cold justice, but kindly mutual help, the foundation of its citizens' relations one to another.

That should be our political ideal; but till the two regions coincide, if ever they shall do so, let us remember that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and let us faithfully do God's business and the king's, rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.

S. W. CARRUTHERS.

*Brighton.*