

**PARISH CHURCH GOODS IN BERKSHIRE, A.D.
1552: INVENTORIES OF FURNITURE AND
ORNAMENTS REMAINING IN CERTAIN OF THE
PARISH CHURCHES OF BERKS IN THE LAST
YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
KING EDWARD THE SIXTH, TRANSCRIBED
FROM THE ORIGINAL RECORDS**

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Remaining in Certain of the Parish Churches of Berks in the Last Year of the Reign of King
Edward the Sixth, Transcribed from the Original Records by Walter Money

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WALTER MONEY

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PARISH CHURCHES OF BERKS
IN THE LAST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
KING EDWARD THE SIXTH:

Transcribed from the Original Records,
WITH INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY
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INTRODUCTION.

IT would be superfluous, and beyond our scope, to attempt but slightly to review the great religious change of the sixteenth century; but in these days, when we are passing through many struggles both of religious thought and of national policy, not unlike those with which our forefathers grappled, there must, for all thoughtful men, be a peculiar interest in studying anew the history of this great religious revolution.

The Reformation divided once and for all the sterner thinkers of Teutonic descent, as a body, from the more impassionable races of Latin origin. To these latter, the gorgeous ritual of the Roman Catholic Communion was, however full of error, more congenial than the simpler form of worship to which the Northern sections of the once universal Church leaned. The wide-spread dissatisfaction with Papal misrule, and the general desire for reformation in the Church, had long been seething in men's minds, when Martin Luther, the son of a working miner in Saxony, boldly struck the first determined blow for freedom of religious thought. It had, in fact, become quite active as early as the fourteenth century, when Wycliffe, the "Morning Star of the Reformation," protected by John of

Gaunt—"time-honoured Lancaster," the brother, father, and uncle of kings,—openly preached against the corruptions of the Roman Church. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the rapidity with which this desire for liberty of conscience extended to almost every class of society in Europe. Though the commencement of the Reformation in England was purely political, and rather forced on an unwilling people by their governors, and liberty of conscience rather repressed than otherwise, witness the act for abolishing diversity of opinion,—it certainly advanced by huge strides. It had on its side the affection of the young Edward (whose education was wholly in the hands of zealous reformers) and of the Protector Somerset, the wise counsels of Cranmer, the firm and bold arguments delivered from the pulpits of Latimer, Hooper, and many other well-wishers to reformation, and, in general, the good-will of the people. It was still more essentially served by the allurements which the confiscation of Church property held out to the cupidity of those courtiers who had shared so largely in the spoils of the previous reign. Indifferent to all religion, they dreaded the return to the ancient régime, as it must bring with it a severe account for them to settle.

And this cupidity was not confined to one class of persons; beginning with the highest, who shared in the confiscation of lands, we find it spread down-

wards to those who took the opportunity of possessing themselves of a chalice to melt down, or a portion of a vestment or altar-cloth to serve for adorning their own houses, without respect either to the source whence it was derived, or the means by which it was obtained.

The splendour of the Roman Catholic forms of worship no doubt, where they were associated with gross ignorance on the part of the people, led to superstition; and in the later years of Henry the Eighth's reign, we find attempts made, if not to take away wholly such sources of superstition, at least to get rid of those which were more directly fraught with danger.

In the early part of 1539-40, some fourteen years before these inventories were taken, Miles Coverdale (the translator of the first complete English Bible) was engaged under Cromwell's directions in the detection of Popish books, and in the promotion of other reforms connected with religion, in this neighbourhood. The following letter, amongst others, was addressed from Newbury by Coverdale to Cromwell, in pursuance of these directions*. It will be seen that we have here the beginning of that general destruction of painted glass, which, under the name of rooting out superstition, has despoiled our churches of thousands of works of

* "Remains of Bishop Coverdale," Parker Soc., p. 501.

art, which this generation attempts, frequently in vain, to imitate, and absolutely fails to surpass:—

“ Myles Coverdale to Lord Cromwell.

“ Dated from Newbury, March 5th (1539-40).

“In my most humble wise, with like salutation to your right honourable lordship. This is to signify unto the same that this fourth day of March, one Nicholas Hyde, and one John Gryesse of Henley-upon-Thames came to me unto Newbury, reporting that in a glass window of our lady chapel in the chancel of the said Henley, the image of Thomas à Becket, with the whole feigned story of his death, is suffered to stand still. Not only this, but all the beams, irons and candlesticks, wherupon tapers and lights were wont to be set up unto images, remain still untaken down; whereby the poor simple unlearned people believe that they shall have liberty to set up their candles again unto images; and that the old fashion shall shortly return.

* * * * *

“It is my duty also to signify unto your good lordship the great oversight of the Stationers of London, which for their lucre and gains are not ashamed to sell still such primers as corrupt the King’s subjects. A great number of them have mine neighbours brought unto me, and a great sort of other most ungracious popish books (both contrary to God and the King’s highness) have I taken up within the precincts of Newbury, and will do more, if your good lordship do give me authority, or bid me do it; whereof I humbly beseech you, my most dear and singular good lord, to have your loving answer by the mouth of this bearer, young Mr. Wynchoombe, and to know your good pleasure, what I shall do with these popish books

that I have already, whether I shall burn them at the market cross, or no. Thus the everlasting God preserve your good lordship long to endure. Amen. From Newbury, the 5th day of March.

"Your Lordship's humble and faithful servant,

"MYLES COVERDALE.

"To the right honourable and my very singular especial good Lord, the lord privy seal, this be presented. Ad manus."

The "young Mr. Wynchcombe" here mentioned was a son or grandson of "Jack of Newbury." John Winchcombe, the eldest son of the great clothier, received from Henry VIII. a grant of the manor and rectory of Bucklebury, being part of the possessions of the dissolved abbey of Reading, and appears to have been very zealous at this time in promoting the principles of the Reformation^b.

The importance of the following series of Inventories will best be understood by taking into consideration the chief acts of the legislature, upon the subject to which the Inventories relate. It will

^b Foxe gives the name of "H. John Winchcombe," as one of the Commissioners at the trial of Julius Palmer and other martyrs in Newbury Church, July, 1556; but it is not clear whether it was the John Winchcombe, the grantee of the Bucklebury estates, or a Henry Winchcombe, who died in 1562, as appears by an epitaph given by *Ashmole*, on a brass formerly in Newbury Church.