

The Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Rising of 1549

By A. VERE WOODMAN

WHILE the unrest rife throughout the country during the reign of Edward VI was due in the main to the economic effects of the enclosures, the dissolution of the monasteries, and the debasement of the currency, two of the revolts—the Western Rebellion, perhaps the most serious of them all, and the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Rising—were the direct outcome of the changes in religion introduced by the young King's Council, the immediate occasion in both instances being the promulgation of the First Prayer Book which came into use on Whitsunday, 1549.

There had been agrarian disorders in Buckinghamshire during the summer of 1548.¹ Somerset writing on 21 August to John Hales, one of the commissioners for the midland counties for the redress of enclosures, whose zeal may have outrun his discretion, says that the commons 'whether by words by you uttered or by some other upstirs, are at present in a marvellous trade of boldness, some of them not letting to say that, if other remedy be not had for the reducing of farms and copyholds to their wonted state, they shall not fail among themselves to attempt the reformation thereof'.² In his reply on 25 August, Hales acknowledges that he has heard that certain lewd words are supposed to have been spoken but he could not find them to be true. The like bruits were also declared to Lord Warwick when in Buckinghamshire, 'before, at the time, and after our sitting there'. He adds that, since writing, he had been with Lord Warwick 'who could say nothing but by report albeit he had been in the countries where these grievous offenses be surmised to be done'.³ It would therefore seem that the commotions of 1548 were of no great moment and they should not be confused with those of the following year.

The story of the Western Rebellion has been told by Mrs. Rose-Troup⁴; very little, however, is known about the simultaneous less serious rising in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and the little that is known is confined, almost exclusively, to the latter county.

It is possible that the question of the Papal Supremacy, fundamental

¹ These riotous commotions are mentioned in Henry Clifford, *Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria* (1887), pp. 44-5.

² B.M. Lansdowne MS. 238, f. 318b.

³ *Ibid.*, f. 319b.

⁴ F. Rose-Troup, *The Western Rebellion of 1549* (1913).

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE RISING

though it was, may have been a matter of indifference to the mass of the populace who, perhaps, cared little whether King or Pope was the supreme head of the Church so long as the old ancient service remained unaltered. But the innovations since King Henry's death had affected them far more directly. Their chantries had been suppressed, their roods and images plucked down, and the goods of their churches threatened with confiscation.⁵ These injuries might be tolerated, but that the venerated Mass, with its time-honoured ceremonial, should be superseded by a new service in English, which was but 'like a Christmas game',⁶ was not to be borne and latent resentment became manifest in open revolt.

Within a few days of its introduction on 9 June it was evident that opposition to the new service was widespread. Writing to the Marquis of Dorset and the Earl of Huntingdon on 11 June, the Protector apprises them that 'in the most parts of the realm sundry lewd persons have attempted to assemble themselves and, first seeking redress of enclosures, have in some places by seditious priests and other evil people set forth to seek restitution of the old bloody laws'.⁷ He bids them to be in readiness to suppress any such attempts.⁸

It would appear that in most quarters these disturbances were soon quelled, for on 10 July Somerset writes to Lord Russell, who was then in the West: 'You shall understand that nowe, thanks be unto God, they be appeased and thoroughly quieted in all places, saving only in Buckingham shyre there [are] a fewe lyght persons nuely assembled, whome we trust to have also appeased within two or three dayes'.⁹

Russell, finding himself too weak to encounter the Western rebels, had appealed for reinforcements and the Protector assures him that orders were being given to Lord Grey to join him with three or four hundred horsemen.

However, by 12 July the Council had realized that the situation was more serious than it had imagined and Somerset informs Russell: 'We had determyned to send downe to you the lord Graye with a band of horsmen and some hagbuters footmen. But that uppon occasyon of a sturr here in Bucks. and Oxfordshire by instigacion of sundery preists (kepe it to your self), for these matyers of religion, we have been forced to kepe him a while and

⁵ The purpose of the order, issued on 15 February 1549, to make inventories of all church goods, was obvious.

⁶ This singular phrase occurs in the articles of the Western rebels. Mrs. Rose-Troup suggests that it may refer to the parodies of miracle plays set forth, under Cromwell's direction, to ridicule sacred things. Like the new service, these plays were in English.

⁷ One of the demands of the Western rebels was that the Act of the Six Articles should be again enforced.

⁸ S.P. Dom. Ed. VI, vii, 31.

⁹ N. Pocock, *Troubles connected with the Prayer Book of 1549*, Camden Soc. (1884), p. 24.

A. VERE WOODMAN

yett we trust within a vj daies matyer shall he chaystice them, and then shall we send him unto you.' He adds that the only stay for the time is this 'lewde matier of Bucks. and Oxfordshire'.¹⁰

On 18 July Somerset was still deferring, 'partlye for the disorder of these parties', the dispatch of the 'almaynes' that Russell so badly needed, but later in the same letter he writes: 'Ye shall be furnished of ayde of a skylfull man on horseback, the lord Graie, who by advertysment even now we perceyve to have chased the rebells of Bucks., Oxfordshire, and these parties to their houses, and taken cc of them and a dosen of the ring leders delyverid unto him whereof parte at least shall suffer paynes of death to the example of all malefactors'.¹¹

King Edward notes in his Journal: 'To Oxfordshier the lord Gray of Wilton was sent with 1500 horsmen and footmen; whose coming with th' assembling of the gentlemen of the countrie, did so abash the rebels, that more then hauf of them rann ther wayes, and other that tarried were some slain, some taken and some hanged'.¹²

The engagement was probably at Enslow Hill on the Cherwell where, according to a tradition current towards the end of the century, there was in former time a rising of people who were persuaded to go home and were after hanged like dogs.¹³

On 19 July Lord Grey, who was then at Witney on his way to join Lord Russell in the West country, issued an order to certain gentlemen of the county of Oxford to cause further execution to be done in sundry towns within the same county on certain traitorous persons since he himself, being otherwise directed, could not proceed in the execution of the King's commission to him for the appeasing and execution of the evil disposed persons within the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Northampton and Oxford.

"First it is thought good by the said Lord Grey that these traitorous persons, whose names be underwritten, shall suffer execution in these several towns underwritten immediately, or else on the next market day following, according as the other like offenders have in other places suffered,¹⁴ and after execution done, the heads of every of them in the same towns to be set up in the highest place for the more terror of the said evil people. It is also ordered by the said Lord Gray that the said gentlemen shall be present with their aid to cause execution to be done accordingly.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹² *Literary Remains of King Edward VI* (Roxburghe Club, 1857), II, 228.

¹³ See the examination of Bartholomew Steere, 7 Jan. 1596/7 (*Cal. S.P. Dom.*, 1595-7, pp. 342-3).

¹⁴ Obviously far more than a dozen suffered.

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE RISING

The names of the gentlemen appointed by the said Lord Gray :
 S^r Antony Cooper, knight, sheriff, S^r John Williams, knight, S^r William Barandyn, knight, S^r William Raynsford, knight, Leonard Chamberlaine, esquire, Richard Fynes, esquire, William Fermor, esquire, S^r John Browne, knight, Sariant Pollard, esquire, William Dormer, esquire, Humfrey Ashfelde, esquire, John Crocker, esquire, Vincent Power, esquire, Thomas Gibbons, esquire, John Denton, esquire, Rafe Langton, esquire, John Ogle, esquire, John Arderne, esquire.

The names of the prisoners appointed and ordered to suffer and the names of the towns where they shall suffer.

George Raves	}	to be hanged at Banbury.
John White of Combe		
Richard Tomson, vicar of Donstewe		

S^r Henrie Mathew, parish priest of Dedington, to be hanged at Dedington.
 John Brookyns, a craftsman, to be hanged at Yslypp.
 William Boolar of Watlington, to be hanged at Watlington.
 Two of the most seditious which are not yet apprehended to suffer at Tame.
 Two others of the most seditious to be hanged at Oxforthe.
 Richard Whyttington of Dedington, weaver, to be hanged at Bysseter.
 The vicar of Cheping Norton, to be hanged upon the steeple there.
 John Wade, parish priest of Bloxham, to be hanged on the steeple there.
 Bowldry of Haseley to be hanged at Oxford'.¹⁵

The departure of Lord Grey for the West evidently marks the end of the rising and on 4 August 66s. 8d. was paid to Edmund Bluemantle, one of the officers of arms, for carrying the King's pardon into Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire and publishing the same there for about fifteen days.¹⁶

John Ab Ulmis, writing from Oxford to Bullinger on 7 August, says that 'the Oxfordshire papists are at last reduced to order, many of them having been apprehended, and some gibbeted and their heads fastened to the walls.'¹⁷

Contemporary accounts of the rising are neither numerous nor detailed. Holinshed says : 'About the same time that this rebellion began in the West, the like disordered hurles were attempted in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire ; but they were speedily appeased by the Lord Greie of Wilton, who coming down that way to join with the lord privie seal, chased the rebels to their houses, of whom two hundred were taken, and a dozen of the ringleaders to him delivered, whereof certain afterwards were executed.'

¹⁵ S.P. Dom. Ed. VI, viii, 32.

¹⁶ Augmentation Office. Misc. Books, 258, f. 80.

¹⁷ *The Western Rebellion*, p. 393.

A. VERE WOODMAN

Nor is the 'Commentarie of the Services of William, Lord Grey of Wilton' by his son Arthur, Lord Grey, more informative. It merely states that in 1549 Lord Grey was sent as lieutenant into the shires of Buckingham and Oxford, where having appeased all, he had commandment to go with his power into the West country, where he joined with the old Earl of Bedford and did great service at Clyst and elsewhere.

Sir Thomas Smith in a letter to Cecil, written from Eton on 19 July, says:

'Here we can learne no certaintye of my L. Grays doing, but if it had been for the campmen, as I perceive it was agaynst them, we shuld have hard enough of it. You must call upon my L. Graie to give him thankes and to animate hym to use severitie agaynst all those specially as came out of other shires thither. And if a great number of the boysters were dispatchid the realme had no losse. His doings is better then xm proclamacions or pardons for the quietyng of the people.'¹⁸

Grey needed little urging to use severity and William Forrest was doubtless an eye-witness of the scenes he describes in 'Grysilde the Seconde'¹⁹

'In tokne yeat more of infidelytee
Downe went the Crosses in every countraye,
Goddys servauntes used withe muche crudelytee,
Dysmembred (like beastes) in thopen highe waye,
Their inwardys pluckte oute and hartis wheare they laye
In suche (most grevous) tyrannycall sorte
That to to shamefull weare heere to reporte.'

The ringleaders of the revolt were parish priests and yeomen; no one of higher degree seems to have been implicated. Perhaps the chief captain was James Webbe, vicar of Barford St. Michael, who was apparently the only prisoner tried in London. He was arraigned at the Guildhall on 16 August and condemned for high treason as captain of the rebels of Oxfordshire. On 22 August he was sent to Aylesbury, there to be drawn, hanged and quartered.²⁰ Other leaders were probably Thomas Bouldry of Great Haseley,

¹⁸ S.P. Dom. Ed. VI, viii, 33.

¹⁹ William Forrest had been a monk of Thame. He was ministering there in 1551 and 1552 (F. G. Lee, *The History, Description and Antiquities of the Prebendal Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Thame* (1883), p. 401). He was vicar of Bledlow from 1556 to 1576, when he resigned. In 1558 he presented to Queen Mary, to whom he was sometime chaplain, 'Grysilde the Seconde', a narrative in verse of the divorce and death of Katharine of Aragon.

²⁰ Wriothesley's *Chronicle*, II (Camden Soc., 1877), p. 21. The Diocesan Register (f. 136) notes his attainder.

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE RISING

a wealthy yeoman,²¹ and Henry Joyes, the vicar of Chipping Norton, who on 31 August is mentioned as having been lately executed for high treason.²²

But not all those appointed to suffer were put to death. George Raves of Dunstew made his will in 1558; Richard Thompson, the vicar there, resigned the living in 1554²³; and local wills show that John Wade was still living at Bloxham in 1553.

Thame, where two of the most seditious were to suffer, had long been disaffected. Forrest tells how the townsfolk murmured when they saw Queen Katharine following in the train of the King and Ann Boleyn:

'Straunge is this sight whiche wee heere now see,
A Queene moste royall to come all behynde
And so meane before; this gothe out of kynde.'

In 1537 when it was remarked at the Whitsun ale 'lady Bolmere of the North country is attainted and shall die',²⁴ Robert Johns, one of the churchwardens that year,²⁵ said, 'it is the more pity; but a man may not say the truth lest he be blamed'. Johns was also alleged to have said, on another occasion, that he feared the King would have the crosses and jewels of their church and that he proposed selling them rather than that they should otherwise go.²⁶ Again, on Dr. Goodrugge, the vicar, being asked by what authority he had kept a solemn feast in the church on the day of St. Thomas the Martyr last, he replied that the people would have it so. And when he was told that within a mile and a half men were at work on that day, a bystander, Richard Child, retorted that he wished that 'their horses' necks had been "to brast" and their carts fired'. Whereupon the informer, Thomas Strebilhill, answered, 'I think thou art of the Northern sect, thou wouldst rule the King's Highness and not to be ruled'.²⁷

Robert Johns may have been concerned in the revolt, for on 20 May 1550 Robert Johnson and Thomas Jackson of Thame were examined by the Council touching insurrection and, appearing not to be guilty, were set at liberty, upon recognizances of £5 apiece.²⁸ Others, suspected of rebellion, had been sent up to London with them; their names and fate are unknown.²⁹

²¹ The will of his father, Thomas Bouldry, proved 9 May 1538, shows that he was possessed of a considerable estate.

²² *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1549-51*, p. 117. The Diocesan Register (f. 134) describes his death as natural!

²³ Diocesan Register, f. 155.

²⁴ Lady Bulmer was burnt at Smithfield on Friday in Whitsun Week 1537 for her participation in the Pilgrimage of Grace.

²⁵ *Lee, op. cit.*, p. 155.

²⁶ His proposal was adopted when their confiscation became imminent and, by 1553, little remained for the commissioners to seize.

²⁷ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, xii, ii, 357. The depositions are endorsed 'Touching the seditious persons of Thame'.

²⁸ *Acts of the Privy Council*, iii, 34.

²⁹ *Loc. cit.*

A. VERE WOODMAN

Two of the Oxfordshire rebels, Geoffrey Marshe and Richard Noddes, late of Blackthorn in the parish of Ambrosden, husbandmen, received a pardon on 14 August 1549 for all offences committed before 20 July.³⁰

Information concerning the Buckinghamshire insurgents is restricted to the pardon granted on 20 July 1549 to Thomas Kyghtley of London, leather seller, George Williatt, John Cowper, Thomas Williatt, John Warde and Edmund Barton of Little Horwood for all treasons and other offences committed before 18 July.³¹

That this rising, like that in the West, was wholly on account of religion can hardly be doubted in view of Somerset's specific assertion that it was 'by instigation of sundry priests for these matters of religion'. It may therefore be assumed that the insurgents' demands, if ever formulated, were much the same as those of the Western rebels. In brief, they 'would have the Mass in Latin as was before' and 'all other ancient old ceremonies used heretofore by our mother the holy Church'.³² And inasmuch as they were ready to hazard their lives in defence of the faith in which they were born and bred, they are not altogether unworthy of our respect.

³⁰ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1549-51*, p. 147.

³¹ *Loc. cit.*

³² *The Western Rebellion*, p. 220.