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## PREACHING AND THE REFORMATION IN HENRICIAN KENT

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Some dioceses are more fortunate than others in the materials which they afford to the student of the English Reformation. A most valuable source for the diocese of Canterbury is a well-known MS volume kept in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.<sup>1</sup>

Given to his college by Archbishop Matthew Parker, the volume contains three documents, presumably bound together for the archbishop himself. All are written on paper measuring, for the most part, 12¼ in. by 8½ in. The pagination, which is in red crayon, is thought to be in Parker's own hand. After p. 1 and its verso (unnumbered) the pages run from 5 to 441. The second of the documents, which begins at p. 365, is entitled, 'The book of the expenses of D. Cranmer, Latymer, and Ridley, for the time of their imprisonment in Oxford and of their execution'. Preceded by a letter and petition which refer to them, the accounts are dated December 1566. The third item in the volume, beginning on p. 405, is believed to have been written for Parker by Ralph Morice, Cranmer's secretary, and bears the title, 'A declaration concerning the progeny with the manner and trade of the life and bringing up of that most reverent Father in god Thomas Cranmer'. However, it is the first and longest document on which this paper is based. Untitled, it consists mainly of evidence collected in various ways during the enquiries in the summer and autumn of 1543 following the so-called Prebendaries' Plot, in which a number of conservative clergy and laity of the Canterbury diocese had conspired to denounce Archbishop Cranmer to the King's Council. An index of persons at the beginning, which relates to the first part of the text, is in Cranmer's own hand, as is the corresponding foliation. The testimony itself is recorded in his hand

<sup>1</sup> Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS. 128.

as far as p. (16) and again from p. 29 to p. 38. Both here and elsewhere in the document he added laconic marginal notes and other interpolations. The remainder of the first portion of the evidence appears to have been taken down by three other investigators. From p. 95 onwards there is greater variety, because the evidence of the conspirators themselves, of which the remaining 300-odd pages of text largely consist, is in their own handwriting. Cranmer is among the writers recording the 'interrogatories' administered to them.

Copied in part, not very accurately, by John Strype,<sup>2</sup> this rich source became widely available when the evidence was printed almost verbatim in the 'Letters and Papers of Henry VIII', under the curious heading, 'Cranmer and the heretics of Kent'.<sup>3</sup> Since then it has often been used by historians as a quarry. However, it is seldom considered as a whole. The fullest discussions of it are by James Gairdner<sup>4</sup> and a modern American scholar, Sister Mary Justine Peter;<sup>5</sup> both of whom might be accused of a measure of conservative bias.

This paper will use the evidence which this document provides as the basis for a consideration of the place of the Prebendaries and Six Preachers of Canterbury, their sermons and those preached against them, in the history of the Henrician Reformation. In all, there is evidence against about 240 clergy and 60 laity throughout the diocese, as well as the testimony mustered against Cranmer himself and his unpopular Commissary, Christopher Nevinson, who had married the archbishop's niece. As explained above, much of the material concerns the activities of the conservative clergy. That part of the documentation which really does concern alleged 'heretics' gives rise to some uncertainty about the means whereby it was collected. No doubt the conspirators themselves were willing contributors, but the fact that much of it is dated tells against the suggestion

<sup>2</sup> J. Strype, *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford, 1848-54).

<sup>3</sup> *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII*, (Eds.) J.S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, R.H. Brodie (1862-1932), XVIII (ii). Hereafter abbreviated to *L and P*, XVIII (ii). Page references are to this version of the text. However, where this departs from the MS, I have used the original wording (modernising the spelling). In such cases I have added the word 'revised' to the reference.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation in England: an historical Survey*, (1908), ii.

<sup>5</sup> Sister Mary Justine Peter, *A study of the Administration of the Henrician Act of Supremacy in Canterbury Diocese* (Ph.D. thesis, Loyola University, 1959). There is a copy of this in Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library (Additional MS. 116). It contains a great deal of useful information, including an appendix listing the 'Parishes and incumbents in Canterbury Diocese, 1540-1541'.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

that it was found among their papers when their houses were raided.<sup>7</sup> It may well be that the investigation was a fairly impartial inquiry into religious irregularities in the diocese. Certainly, Cranmer's annotations, in which the word 'seditious' is prominent, show disfavour towards conservatives and 'heretics' alike.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING

Many historians have written of the propaganda campaign which Henry VIII's government mounted to explain the Reformation statutes. It was apparently discussed at a Council meeting on December 2, 1533,<sup>8</sup> and the control of preaching necessarily formed a part of it. Although in many parish churches sermons were infrequent, the potential for good or ill was there. As Archbishop Grindal was to put it much later, paraphrasing the Book of Proverbs: 'where preaching wanteth, obedience faileth'.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1534, Cranmer himself and the Bishops of London, Winchester and Lincoln agreed to inhibit all their diocesan clergy from preaching and then issue new licences. While this was in progress, the archbishop sent instructions to all preachers to deliver a sermon on the papacy and the King's marriage, and to refrain for the time being from discussing purgatory, the saints, pilgrimages, miracles, clerical celibacy, or the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. Their licences were reviewed twice in 1536, and the Injunctions of that year contained further regulations about sermons. As well as expounding the doctrines in the Ten Articles, which had just been issued, the clergy were to give regular sermons on the Royal Supremacy. The Injunctions of 1538 emphasised that a preacher must be heard if he had a licence.

Studies have been written describing the efforts of Archbishop Lee to control preaching in Yorkshire and Lancashire,<sup>10</sup> and of Bishop Longland of Lincoln to do the same throughout his extensive diocese.<sup>11</sup> Notable pulpit controversies arose in Doncaster in 1534<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police* (Cambridge, 1972), 211.

<sup>9</sup> P. Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal, 1519-1583* (1979), 240. I am grateful to Professor Collinson for his guidance when I was preparing this paper in its original guise as a diploma dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558* (1959); C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> M. Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: the Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland, 1521-1547* (Cambridge, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Dickens, *op. cit.*, 141.

and in Bristol in the previous year,<sup>13</sup> the antagonists in this earlier case being Hugh Latimer and the eccentric William Hubberdyne.

Turning to Cranmer's policy in the diocese of Canterbury, we find Cromwell telling Latimer (after his consecration as Bishop of Worcester) to write to the archbishop urging him to take firmer action.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps because of this letter, Cranmer spent three months at the end of 1535 in east Kent, preaching in the cathedral twice. In January 1536, he wrote to Cromwell that he had employed one Francis Mallet 'preaching within my diocese all this quarter last past'.<sup>15</sup> On two occasions he sent the Canterbury schoolmaster John Twyne to read a lecture in Sandwich. The difficulties which Cranmer encountered in controlling his diocese are illustrated in his angry correspondence with a leading Kentish justice, possibly Sir John Baker, in 1537. But a number of clergy, conservatives as well as reformers,<sup>16</sup> did get into trouble. In 1539, William Sandford, Rector of St. Peter's, Canterbury, was presented by a Grand Jury for his use of the Ave Bell. A more serious case was that of William Jerome, Vicar of Cheriton, a prominent advocate of reform, who was burned at Smithfield in 1540 for preaching what appear to have been Lutheran doctrines.<sup>17</sup> The evidence which has been found mostly concerns offenders who were brought before the King's Council.

Not the least useful instrument available to Cranmer was ecclesiastical patronage. There were just under 400 institutions to benefices in the diocese between 1534 and 1552, mostly on the death of the previous incumbent, and about a quarter of these were to archiepiscopal livings.<sup>18</sup> It is known that many of Cranmer's nominees were graduates, but the accusation by the Prebendaries that he brought reformers to the diocese has not been adequately confirmed. In 1538, he appointed his Cambridge friend Nicholas Ridley as Vicar of Herne. (It is probably coincidence that a notorious conservative sermon had been preached there by a Canterbury Franciscan named Friar Arthur on Easter Sunday 1535).<sup>19</sup> Cranmer's secretary Ralph

<sup>13</sup> Elton, *op. cit.*, 112-17.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer*, (Oxford, 1962), 93.

<sup>15</sup> P. Clark, *English provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Hassocks, 1977), 47.

<sup>16</sup> I have employed the term 'reformer' rather than 'radical' or 'Protestant' to avoid giving the impression that men like Nicholas Ridley, whose views were not far from Cranmer's, were extremists, or had already, in 1543, ceased to be Catholics.

<sup>17</sup> Sister Mary Justine Peter, *op. cit.*, ch. 6, deals with Jerome's connection with Cheriton, and mentions a few other controversies of the 1530s.

<sup>18</sup> M.L. Zell, 'The Personnel of the Clergy of Kent, in the Reformation Period', *English Historical Review*, lxxxix (1974), 513-33.

<sup>19</sup> Elton, *op. cit.*, 16.

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Morice appointed Richard Turner, an energetic reformer, as Vicar of Chartham; and his Commissary, Christopher Nevinson, presented John Bland, the Marian martyr, to the living of Adisham in 1541. Bland, however, was already in the vicinity, having held the vicarage of Ospringe, which was in the gift of his former college (St. John's, Cambridge), since 1537. Cranmer himself appointed the conservative Arthur St. Leger, formerly Prior of Leeds, to the valuable rectory of Hollingbourne.<sup>20</sup>

When the Cathedral foundation was reconstituted in 1541, of the twelve Prebendaries who were chosen most were conservative in outlook. The Act of Six Articles of 1539 had ushered in a period of reaction, so this imbalance was in keeping with the government's policy. However, King Henry seems to have wanted a certain amount of debate among the Six Preachers. In answer to the criticism that by choosing three of the Old Learning and three of the New he was fostering controversy, Cranmer declared: 'The King's pleasure is to have it so'.<sup>21</sup>

### THE CATHEDRAL STATUTES OF 1541

It was natural that the new statutes for Christ Church, Canterbury, should deal, among other subjects, with preaching. Sermons were later regulated at other cathedrals, too, for instance, in the Injunctions issued by Archbishop Holgate at York in 1552 and by Grindal at St. Paul's in 1562. The Canterbury statutes<sup>22</sup> require the Dean and Canons to preach only four times a year and on certain special occasions, mentioning nowhere but the cathedral. That the requirement was actually more taxing is suggested by the testimony against Prebendary Richard Parkhurst: 'He hath not made yearly the ten sermons in the country, which he is bound to do by that he is prebendary'.<sup>23</sup> To the 120 sermons apparently demanded every year of the twelve Prebendaries we must add the further 120-plus with which the Six Preachers were charged. The creation of the unique office of Six Preacher was the most important single contribution to the gathering debate in the pulpits of the diocese, and it is worth quoting from the relevant statute at some length:

<sup>20</sup> A rather cursory account of the career of St. Leger is given by C.R. Councer, 'A Child of his Time: Canon Arthur St. Leger', in (Ed.) A. Detsicas, *Collectanea historica*, (Maidstone, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> *L* and *P*, XVIII (ii), 348.

<sup>22</sup> Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library. Literary MS. E34.

<sup>23</sup> *L* and *P*, XVIII (ii), 295.

'Finally we do will and appoint that each of these Preachers shall deliver and preach twenty sermons every year in the country, in villages and towns near to our Church, or elsewhere in parishes and villages where the Manors and estates of the same Church are situate, or in the City of Canterbury outside our Cathedral Church, and that besides these sermons they shall preach in our Cathedral Church in their order and turn every year on these days following:— namely, on All Saints' Day, the Nativity, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, the Purification of Blessed Mary, on Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday, on the Rogation days at Ascensiontide, on the third day of Whitsun week, on Corpus Christi Day, on the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . unless it should happen that one of these aforesaid days be celebrated on the Lord's Day . . .'

Nothing comparable seems to have been introduced in other dioceses. There is some evidence, however, of preaching being encouraged by different means. In 1550, Ridley, as Bishop of London, appointed to the foundation at St. Paul's three men — Edmund Grindal, John Bradford, and John Rogers — who proceeded to tour the diocese as preachers. There was also the creation in 1551 of six new posts of royal chaplain, of which four were to be held by itinerant preachers visiting conservative regions of the country; but it is not clear how far this plan proceeded.

#### THE PREACHERS AND PREBENDARIES

The original Six Preachers were Robert Serles, Michael Drum, Lancelot Ridley, John Scory, Edmund Shether and Thomas Brooke.<sup>24</sup> Curiously, only two of the six proved to be active defenders of the old learning: these were Serles (who was also Vicar of Lenham) and Shether, both Oxford men. The other Oxford-trained preacher, Drum, was to deliver some notable reformist sermons, but according to Foxe later 'fell away'. The other three had all been at Cambridge. Brooke, the least-known, was to be denounced for a sermon against fasting preached on Palm Sunday 1542. Appointed Vicar of Herne in 1549, he was deprived in 1553–54.

Of the twelve prebendaries of the new cathedral foundation, at least eight were ex-religious and only three have ever been described as reformers. Of these last, Richard Champion died almost immediately after his appointment, and Hugh Glasier, whatever his

<sup>24</sup> C.E. Woodruff, *A List of the Six Preachers of the Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Christ in Canterbury* (privately printed, Canterbury, 1926). J. Le Neve lists the Prebendaries in *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1541–1857* (1969–) 3, Canterbury, Rochester and Winchester dioceses. Biographical details are mostly from: A.B. Emden, *A biographical Register of the University of Oxford, A.D. 1501–1540* (Oxford, 1974); J. and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922–54).

views, managed to obtain the rectory of Deal in the reign of Mary. The only major figure was Nicholas Ridley. The conservatives (in varying degrees) were Richard Thornden (or La Stede), Arthur St. Leger, Richard Parkhurst, John Meines, William Hunt (or Hadley), William Gardiner (or Sandwich), John Milles (or Warham), John Daniel (or Chillenden), and John Baptist de Casia. Both Thornden and Gardiner had held the post of Warden of Canterbury College, Oxford; Milles had been a member of the College during Gardiner's term of office. Gardiner had been a monk of Christ Church ever since 1512, Milles since 1524, and Parkhurst also had long experience of Canterbury, having been Vicar of Ashford since 1519 (and latterly of Lyminge as well). Others with livings in the diocese were St. Leger (Hollingbourne and Ulcombe) and possibly Hunt, who may have been the William Hunt who was Rector of Stowting and Curate of Great Chart.

There is a considerable body of hostile but credible evidence about the sermons which some of these men preached up to the autumn of 1543; also, about other sermons in the diocese at this time. In general, the reformers concentrated on such familiar topics as the Bible, the rôle of the clergy, and the dubious value of holy water, fasting, various ceremonies, services in Latin, and prayer to saints. But Scory apparently declared in the cathedral on the fourth Sunday in Lent in 1541 'That only faith justifieth, and he that doth deny that only faith doth justify would deny, if he durst be so bold, that Christ doth justify'.<sup>25</sup> Two other clergy of the diocese are recorded as touching on this subject, Hugh Cooper of Tenterden and the colourful Thomas Dawby, Curate of Lenham and subsequently incumbent of Wychling.<sup>26</sup> Nor is this the only doctrinal innovation attributed to Scory. In a sermon in St. Alphege's, Canterbury, he apparently spoke these words: 'Ye have a saying, the child which is born between man and wife, it is born in original sin, and so it is: and ye say that the sin is taken away by the water of baptism, but it is not so. But look how that the wife that occupieth the fire all the day and at night covereth it with ashes to preserve the fire; so doth the sin remain under the Sacrament'.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most forceful sermons by a reformer at this time was delivered in the cathedral by Michael Drum:

'We may not pray in an unknown tongue',

<sup>25</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 304.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 315

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-5.



he declared,

'for if we do, we do but mock with god and of god we be mocked, as if a man do come to a lord and babble to him words he knoweth not. The lord will but mock him, and account him for a fool. So thy prayer with not understanding is but babbling, and for that before god thou art but a fool . . . Item that the material church is a thing made and ordained to content the affections of man, and is not the thing that pleases god, nor that god requireth, but is a thing that god doth tolerate for the weakness of man. For as the father contenteth the child with an apple or a hobby horse . . . So almighty god condescending to the infirmity of man and his weakness doth tolerate material churches, gorgeous bright and richly decked, not because he requires or is pleased with such things.'<sup>28</sup>

More remarkable in some ways were the sermons of certain of the conservatives; not all were as reticent as Parkhurst. Here are some of the depositions against Serles in the evidence taken after the Plot:

'In a sermon made on the day of the Assumption of Our Lady last past in the Church of Lenham. He said that as the moon is in the full at xiv days. Even so Mary was conceived fully with Christ when she was xiv years old . . . Item he preached then and there. That all the whole faith of the world, remained in Mary only for the space of 3 days and 3 nights. Item that faith was dead in the apostles, and in all the world from the death of Christ till his resurrection, and remained in Virgin Mary whole and only. Item he preached that the sorrows that she had were greater and more painful than Christ's but for death only. Item he preached that Christ descended into hell and rose the third day, and ascended into heaven . . . many bodies did ascend with Christ that they might bear witness of his Ascension. Item the xii day of August anno precedent in the parish church of Ashford he preached. That prayer was not acceptable to God but in the church only and no where else . . . He preached in Kennington ch. on Good Friday 1542 "that as a man was creeping the cross upon Good Friday the image loosed itself off the cross and met the man before he came at the cross and kissed him" . . .'<sup>29</sup>

It may be that the witnesses to these examples of popular preaching were less than fair to Serles. But Richard Thornden, himself no reformer, gave apparently serious evidence against Gardiner:

'Upon Easter last past he did again inveigh against preachers, beating into the people's heads that some had called Our Lady a saffron bag, and that they would Our Lady to have no honour, and that some did take upon them to minister which were no priests, and that some did utterly deny absolution; and then he made such exclamations, crying out "Heretics! Faggots! Fire!" as though these things had been committed here indeed.'<sup>30</sup>

Whether there was any reaction in the cathedral to this display is not recorded.

There are several other examples of the conservatives attacking the

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 306, revised.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 304, revised.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

opposing party in their sermons. Thornden was moved to complain of Shether that 'in all his sermons he commonly useth to make invectives against the other preachers of this Cathedral Church . . .'.<sup>31</sup> Cranmer may have had this observation in mind when he wrote of Serles: 'He preacheth no sermon but one part of it is an invective against the other preachers of Christ's Church'.<sup>32</sup> This was a situation the archbishop could scarcely be expected to tolerate. He was disturbed to hear of a visit to the Isle of Thanet by Serles, Shether, Gardiner, and Milles. There they had preached in all the parish churches in a single day, taking two each. The plan had been devised over dinner at Parkhurst's house, presumably in the Precincts.<sup>33</sup> It was in the same house that meetings were later held to discuss the collection of books of evidence against Cranmer. Meanwhile his patience was wearing thin. On one occasion he said to Gardiner: 'You and your company do hold me short. I will hold you as short'.<sup>34</sup> And on another, to Arthur St. Leger: 'Ye be there knit in a bond amongst you which I will break'.<sup>35</sup>

At some stage, probably in 1542, two of the conservatives were temporarily imprisoned, Serles for a sermon at Hothfield and Shether for one preached at St. Mary Northgate, Canterbury. The two sides attended each other's sermons to collect evidence. Parkhurst was present when Scory preached against ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, when he talked in the cathedral of justification he was heard by Gardiner and Hunt.<sup>37</sup> Shether heard him say at St. Alphege's, Canterbury, that there was none in heaven but Christ only, a statement both cryptic and unwise.<sup>38</sup> In Rogation Week 1540, Nicholas Ridley preached a sermon at St. Stephen's, Hackington, which included attacks on ceremonies and auricular confession.<sup>39</sup> The witnesses who later testified against him included Parkhurst, Hunt, Gardiner, and John Clarke, the conservative Vicar of St. Paul's, Canterbury. A

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 336, 341, 355.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 322, 375.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 378. The sermons of Serles and Gardiner confirm tendencies noted among preachers of the old learning by J.W. Blench in his *Preaching in England in the late fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1964). Blench observes that the reformers were normally less given to moralising and to drama, more concerned with theology and the actual words of Scripture. He also comments: 'Most studies of sixteenth century church history are, I believe, vitiated by neglect of the detailed evidence provided by the sermons about the "spiritual climate" of the times'.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

sermon by Shether, on an unidentified occasion, in which he contrasted the 'one straight way' with the new learning, was witnessed by Nicholas and Lancelot Ridley, Drum, Scory and Brooke.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE WIDER CONFLICT AND LAY INVOLVEMENT

Questioned about the rôle of important laymen in the Plot, John Milles claimed that the justices of the county 'did greatly fear that seditious preaching and occupying of corrupt books, by the which two things schism did engender among the people, open disputation was in ale houses, and in households reasoning among servants, of the which did also arise much debate and strife, a commotion would or might be among the people in this shire by such evils not then thoroughly looked on'.<sup>41</sup> If this was indeed a prevailing fear, one can see why. Both in Canterbury and in certain other places, the pulpit controversies were heated, with other clergy, including such zealous Protestants as John Bland, Richard Turner, and Thomas Dawby, becoming involved. The evidence under review also contains a great deal of information about the activities and opinions of laymen, and some of this can be used to illustrate the formation of factions in one or two towns.

A particularly notable conflict arose in 1541 at Lenham. This parish was for a time in the extraordinary position of having Serles as vicar with Thomas Dawby as curate. It may perhaps have been at Dawby's instigation that Robert a Stotte, Curate of Davington, came and preached an anti-clerical sermon on All Hallows Day 1541. Serles, it appears, retaliated with a sermon of his own, probably on the following Sunday. A week later, Stotte came back. 'And incontinent he went unto the Bible and turned to the same gospel that Mr. Serles had preached the Sunday next before and expounded the contrary to Mr. Serles in every word with threatening words towards him, saying, "All pickpurses' ears are not set on the pillory as yet". Whereupon divers were offended . . . divers persons thought there should have been a fray'.<sup>42</sup> Stotte came six or seven times in all within six months, always preaching against Serles and Shether. On the other hand, the Vicar of Stalisfield said at Lenham 'that it was no error to preach the bishop of Rome Supreme head of the Church until the King had

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 365. The important part played by some justices in the Plot is described in M.L. Zell, 'The Prebendaries' Plot of 1543: a Reconsideration', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxvii (1976), 241-53.

<sup>42</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 316.

enacted the contrary'.<sup>43</sup> As for Dawby, he took down most of the images in the church, deprecated fasting and various ceremonies, and arranged for his supporters 'to read the Bible even at the quire door where divine service was sung or said'.<sup>44</sup> He it was who later, in a conversation at Sittingbourne, described certain Kentish justices as 'pope-holy knaves' and said of the King's new foundation at Canterbury, 'He hath made a very den of thieves'. To a certain Thomas Huxley he allegedly declared, rather wildly:

'That knave thy master, the parson of Boughton, is a false heretic and a popish knave and thou also, and I shall make forty in the parish of Doddington to bar (?) at thee, and I shall make 10,000 of my set against thee in Kent and thou shall not tarry here this month.'<sup>45</sup>

The case of Lenham was not an isolated one. At Faversham, where the prominent conservative Clement Norton was vicar, Scory preached a sermon at the Dedication Festival in 1542 in which he asserted 'That the dedications of material churches was instituted for the Bishop's profits'.<sup>46</sup> John Bland also preached there, as he did at Boughton, whose vicar was Edward Sponer. In Canterbury itself, William Kempe, the conservative Vicar of St. Mary Northgate, was obliged to receive both Bland and Richard Turner. It is recorded that the latter also taught some children in Northgate parish to say the Ave Maria in English.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that a licensed preacher had a right to be heard is scarcely enough to account for all these intrusions. The likeliest explanation seems to be that rival factions existed in these localities. Each faction would invite preachers of its own persuasion, and when they came they would probably be escorted by a number of supporters. There is clear evidence of this kind of activity in Elizabethan Cranbrook. A Puritan party including the schoolmaster, Thomas Good, brought an excommunicated printer named John Strowd over from Yalding to preach in the absence of Richard Fletcher, the incumbent, whom they disliked.<sup>48</sup> A number of itinerant preachers visited the area, including a blind man named Dawes, who was seen in Headcorn 'coming through the street with divers honest men with him'.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 309, revised.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 315, revised.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 316, revised.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>48</sup> P. Collinson, 'Cranbrook and the Fletchers: popular and unpopular Religion in the Kentish Weald', (Ed.) P.N. Brooks, *Reformation Principle and Practice*, (1980), 191.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

The atmosphere was particularly tense in Canterbury. In his evidence Milles claimed that he and others had been afraid to speak their minds after being accused of sedition, and being called 'knaves' by a brewer from St. George's parish named Jerome Oxenbridge.<sup>50</sup> When Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, visited Canterbury in 1541, William Gardiner told him about the pulpit controversy that was in progress and his fear that his opponents were collecting evidence against him. He was advised to write his sermons down and not deviate in preaching them.<sup>51</sup> The imprisonment of Shether following a sermon at St. Mary Northgate was just one symptom of the strife which was going on in this contentious parish. Dr. Clark has written<sup>52</sup> of the lay reformers who were active there, including the attorney John Toftes and his family, who afforded hospitality to Bland and Turner as well as to two 'priests' of doubtful standing and the very unorthodox Joan Boucher.<sup>53</sup> It is also possible to discover a conservative faction in the parish of Northgate.

It should be mentioned, however, that there are difficulties in using the evidence about party allegiances. These are partly due to the lack of information about the methods used by Cranmer's investigators, Cox, Hussey, Bellasis, and Leigh. It may be that some of the depositions are idle gossip, volunteered out of malice. On the other hand, some of the individuals named in the lists of witnesses found in the Corpus MS may have been summoned before the inquiry and compelled to tell all they knew. Some historians believe that the preamble to a will in this period can be an indicator of whether the testator is a conservative Catholic, though it is not conclusive. Obviously, the lists of beneficiaries and witnesses can tell us who some of his friends are. Two Canterbury wills are of particular interest for the light they shed upon the links between clergy and laity on the conservative side. Canon William Gardiner,<sup>54</sup> who died in 1544, made bequests to three conservative clergy: Richard Crosse, Rector of Harbledown; William Okinfield, Vicar of Blean; and John Clarke. Clarke, who was for many years Vicar of St. Paul's, Canterbury, was described by Gardiner as his 'ghostly father'. During Cranmer's investigations, witnesses had accused him of dissuading a parishioner from eating white meat in Lent; failing to declare his use of ceremonies on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and other occasions; and saying, 'This is now the 3d time that England

<sup>50</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 312.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 312.

<sup>54</sup> Kent Archives Office, C.19.28.

hath been out of the faith'.<sup>55</sup> Like Gardiner himself, he was subsequently imprisoned for a time.<sup>56</sup> However, by the time of his death in 1556 he had apparently modified his views, and taken a wife.<sup>57</sup> Another beneficiary of Gardiner's will was John Thatcher, junior, a layman. He had been accused by Starkey of asserting that the Bible was made by the devil.<sup>58</sup> He was Gardiner's nephew, and in November 1543, during the enquiries into the Plot, had been of service to him in a dramatic if unproductive way.<sup>59</sup> This young man's father, John Thatcher, senior, of the parish of St. Alphege, which adjoined that of Northgate, died in 1554.<sup>60</sup> One of his executors was the evergreen John Clarke.

Clarke was one of many conservative parish clergy in and around the city of Canterbury. Crosse and Okinfield both attended meetings in Parkhurst's house, as did Thomas Cokes, Vicar of Sturry.<sup>61</sup> Thomas Shirwade, the incumbent of Westbere, was accused of failing to declare various ceremonies and of preaching 'that there were 3 heavens, one for very poor men, the second for men of a mean state and condition, the 3rd for great men'.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore he was 'a common dice-player, and a common haunter and resorter to taverns and alehouses'. William Kempe, Vicar of St. Mary Northgate, was continually at odds with a number of his parishioners. He was supported, however, by another priest in the parish, Thomas Bradkirk, and presumably by at least some of the laymen who gave evidence against the Toftes family.<sup>63</sup> Thomas Smyth, Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, seems to have been involved with the plotters in some way;<sup>64</sup> while the curate of Stodmarsh, Nicholas Langdon, who was also Master of the Poor Priests' Hospital, was denounced for various conservative activities, including a sermon at St. Dunstan's.<sup>65</sup> Apart from Richard Turner at Chartham, the only important reformer among the local incumbents seems to have been Humphrey Jordan, Vicar of St. Alphege's. Jordan denounced Shether for his

<sup>55</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 296.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 323

<sup>57</sup> Sister Mary Justine Peter, *op. cit.*, 169.

<sup>58</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 308.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 369-70.

<sup>60</sup> Kent Archives Office, C.25.57.

<sup>61</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 369.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 304, 307, for Bradkirk. The lay witnesses included Henry Hayhowe, John and Alice Boyden, Nicholas and Maud Raynolds, and the Mantell family.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 301. Some account of Langdon is given by Sister Mary Justine Peter (*op. cit.*, 169).

Northgate sermon,<sup>66</sup> but was himself brought before Cranmer at Lambeth to answer accusations made by some of his parishioners. It is curious that his release is attributed not to the archbishop's favour but to the efforts of two influential supporters, Thomas Bathurst and William Salter.<sup>67</sup>

No less interesting than the conflicts in Canterbury is the situation at Faversham. Dr. Clark has described some of the events which occurred here,<sup>68</sup> showing that Clement Norton, the vicar, enjoyed great influence for a time, supported by local landowners and other conservative clergy; but he was silenced by a church court in 1550, following the rise of a reforming faction led by Thomas Arden (who became senior churchwarden in 1547 and mayor in 1548) and the advent of extremists like Henry Hart. There is, in fact, further evidence available which adds colour to the picture.

Norton was an Oxford man. He was made a Fellow of All Souls in 1522, three years before Shether, and remained there until his presentation to the living of Faversham by the monks of St. Augustine's in 1535. That he was a strong conservative can be seen from the testimony which Cranmer's commissioners elicited. He was among the parish clergy who attended the meetings in Parkhurst's room at which the Plot was discussed. There he was with friends, but at Faversham, even before the arrival of Arden, he had opponents as well as supporters. Among the former can be reckoned Bland, as Vicar of Ospringe, and Robert a Stotte, Curate of Davington. Whether Stotte was as active in his own parish as in Lenham is not recorded, but it is known that one Ro. Strawghwyn preached at Davington that 'You be not bound to believe anything which is not written or contained in the Holy Scripture, nor ought to believe any other thing than God's word found in Holy Scripture'.<sup>70</sup> Norton was one of the witnesses to this sermon. It would be pleasant to be able to produce details of sermons delivered by the Vicar of Faversham himself, but this is not possible. However, his collecting of evidence is enough in itself to entitle him to a place of some prominence in the story of the pulpit controversy in this part of Kent. When Scory preached in Norton's own church, as recounted above, Norton was there with pen and paper. But it was against John Bland that his

<sup>66</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 346.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>68</sup> P. Clark, 'Reformation and Radicalism in Kentish Towns c. 1500-1553', in (Ed.) W.J. Mommsen, *The urban Classes, the Nobility and the Reformation*, (Stuttgart, 1979), 107-27.

<sup>69</sup> *L and P*, XVIII (ii), 293-4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

energies were chiefly directed. An unidentified correspondent, one of the plotters, wrote to Cranmer afterwards:

'All these things or else the very same effect I showed to Mr. Doctor Willoughby and to Master Serles, and they desired to have it in writing; and so I did give to them all the writings that I had written straight after the vicar of Ospringe had preached, except only the speaking of the mass . . . Also, I communed with the vicar of Faversham of most part of this same thing before written, but he regarded them not greatly, for he said that he had matters too many which the vicar of Ospringe had spoken in his church, and showed me a bill of like matters.'

The words 'his church' must refer to the parish church of Faversham, not Bland's church, since the same witness – himself obviously a strong opponent of Bland – goes on to emphasise: 'Mr. Vicar of Faversham said he would meddle with nothing but that was preached and spoken in his parish . . .'.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps it was Norton who compiled the following evidence (he certainly endorsed it):

'Bland. In a sermon made at Faversham the xxiii Sunday after Trinity anno 1539. He said that the mass is no satisfaction for sin, neither doth any thing help against sin, and that it is but a remembrance or memory of the passion of Christ. He said that the sight of the image of St. Michael with the balance is enough to bring a man to the Devil. That no man may pray to saints for anything. He said that it was not necessary nor convenient that men should confess their offence particularly but that it was sufficient to say I am a sinner and have offended in thought word and deed. He said that, to kneel or bow unto a cross, yea, though it were the very cross that Christ died on, it was idolatry. He said that bishops did make priests for money yea although they could scanty read, and he knew it so to be. He said that they did nought that did set up or offer any candles before the Sacrament, and if they were well taught they would not use such superstitions.'<sup>72</sup>

One local clergyman likely to have supported Norton is the Vicar of Sheldwich, whose name was Swan. It was claimed that in the previous year, 1542, he had said in a sermon: 'Christ did not die, neither for you nor me, nor your fathers nor my fathers, but for the fathers of the old law, and left us to be saved by our works'.<sup>73</sup> A more notable conservative was Edward Sponer, vicar of nearby Boughton. It was Sponer whom Thomas Dawby characterised as 'a false heretic and a popish knave'. He had subscribed to a list of charges against Christopher Nevinson.<sup>74</sup> He was Rector of Old Romney, as well as incumbent of Boughton, and witnesses from both parishes testified that he had not declared the proper use of ceremonies, had not preached against the pope and in favour of the Royal Supremacy, and had failed to declare that 'the evens of such saints whose holy days be

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 311, revised.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 318, revised.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.



abrogated, be no fasting days'.<sup>75</sup> Sponer, like Norton, was obliged to yield his pulpit to the ubiquitous Bland. On 18 April, 1541, Bland preached at Boughton that 'The mass did not profit for sins, for then Christ had died in vain'.<sup>76</sup> He came again on 4 February, 1543, and attacked fasting and auricular confession.<sup>77</sup> It may have been as a result of this sermon that Bland and Sponer apparently entered into a written controversy. Robert Serles was subsequently asked whether Bland had delivered to Sponer in writing his opinion that auricular confession was unnecessary.<sup>78</sup>

#### THE CRISIS OF 1543

The Prebendaries' Plot of 1543 can be seen as the culmination of a period of intense controversy in the diocese of Canterbury. The Six Preachers and the Prebendaries of the cathedral were at the centre of a radiating network of zealous partisans, conservative and reformist, clerical and lay. It may well be that Robert Serles, Edmund Shether, William Gardiner, Richard Parkhurst, John Milles and the other authors of the evidence against Cranmer sincerely believed that, by bringing down the archbishop, they would restore peace where otherwise dissension might flame into civil disorder. But the implementation of their plan in March and April 1543 led, of course, to their own downfall, and this was a serious setback to the conservative cause. Not that it was the conservatives alone who found themselves in trouble. Scory was arrested in the autumn, apparently because of a sermon about the Eucharist;<sup>79</sup> while Bland and Turner had been indicted for heresy at the Sessions of the Six Articles in September.<sup>80</sup> The charges against John Bland seem to relate to his preaching at Boughton. Cranmer, however, was naturally more interested in the conspirators. Serles, Shether, Gardiner and Milles were among those who were imprisoned and required to ask the archbishop for pardon. Like the reformers, they were soon released, but Milles was unwell in custody,<sup>81</sup> and it may be that Gardiner's punishment contributed to his death in 1544.

The defeat of the Plot was a victory for Cranmer and a reprieve for

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 300, revised.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 312, revised.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 295, 312.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 339, 347.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

the reformers in his diocese. But it is difficult to be specific about the consequences of the crisis. No subsequent period can provide us with the wealth of evidence about the Reformation in Kent that is available for the years leading up to 1543. It is possible to keep track of the lives of some of the principal actors in the story. The career of Nicholas Ridley is too well known to require any exposition here. His cousin Lancelot enjoyed a long tenure as a Six Preacher. Deprived under Mary, he was restored in 1559 and carried on until his death in 1576. John Scory achieved greater prominence. Appointed to the sees of Rochester and Chichester in quick succession by Edward VI, he chose exile when the Catholic reaction struck. On his return, he took part in the consecration of Archbishop Parker, and ended his days as Bishop of Hereford. Unlike John Bland, Richard Turner escaped the ultimate penalty for his reforming zeal, dying peacefully as Vicar of Dartford in about 1565; it has been suggested that he was also a Six Preacher.<sup>82</sup> Of the conservatives, Richard Thornden acquired a measure of notoriety. Created Suffragan Bishop of Dover in 1545, he later turned against Cranmer, and he presided at Bland's trial. Serles became Vicar of Monkton in 1552; he died at Wye in 1570.<sup>83</sup> The career of Milles was similarly mundane: he ended his ministry as Rector of Chartham, where his parishioners must have found him bewilderingly different from Turner. All these biographical facts are known. What cannot be proved is whether the pulpit controversies in the diocese of Canterbury subsided after 1543. For in the succeeding years the sermons of active reformers and die-hard conservatives alike are largely lost in the same obscurity which at all times hides from us the innumerable clergy and laity who were too moderate, too ignorant, or too prudent to attract the attention of any enquiry.

<sup>82</sup> Emden, *op. cit.*, citing Cranmer's register. Woodruff, *op. cit.*, does not include him, but does list a William Turner, giving no details except 'depr. 1553, restored 1559, d. 1569'.

<sup>83</sup> (Ed.) C.H. Ridge, *Index of Wills and Administrations now preserved in the Probate Registry at Canterbury*, ii, (British Record Society, 1940).

