

AS soon as King George the First was comfortably settled upon his throne, and the Whig party had come into power, it became a matter of concern to the Earl of Oxford and to Viscount Bolingbroke as to what their fate might be. They had been scheming vigorously for the restoration of the Stuarts, and now the Hanoverian had come in. They had not long to wait. Both men were impeached for high treason. Oxford soon afterwards practically disappeared from history ; not so Bolingbroke. His situation was a desperate one, but he was ever a man of resource. Putting a bold front on matters, he went about amongst his friends, chatted, affected to make light of the crisis, and plunged into social amenities. One evening late in March, 1715, he went to Drury Lane Theatre, witnessed the performance, and arranged to be at the theatre again on the following evening. That night he adopted a disguise, rushed off to Dover, thence across to Calais, and to Paris, where he flung in his lot with James, the Stuart claimant to the throne. The Duke of Ormond was also there. In due course Norroy King of Arms went down to the House of Lords, and struck off the names of Ormond and of Bolingbroke from the roll of peers. Bolingbroke affected to jest about the matter. His new King, James of St. Germain, created him an Earl. Ludicrous as the whole thing was, it was also serious. Bolingbroke — now raised from an English Viscount to a St. Germain Earldom — became Secretary of State to James, and gave himself up to Jacobite scheming.

At this stage Bridgwater came very near to being drawn into the Stuart net. For Ormond, whose influence in the West of England was great, was urged to join in a Stuart rising there, towards which some preliminary plans had already been made. The details of this Western Counties plot will probably never be completely known. Yet it proceeded as far as to induce Ormond to take ship, and sail from the coast of France to the south of Devonshire, in the hope of finding the nucleus of a body of Jacobite enthusiasts ready to strike a blow for James. He found no such thing, and promptly returned to France, whence the Chevalier was setting sail for the Scottish coast. There is a great difference between following the leader of a movement, and following his lieutenant. If James Francis had landed in Devon himself, the story of Bridgwater would have to be re-written, and possibly the story of the Stuarts too. He did not ; and the effort of 1715 ended in a fiasco.

The Bridgwater Jacobites must, they felt, possess their souls in patience, and wait for better days.

So Bridgwater went on its quiet way under the two first Georges, and the authorities contrived to keep it in all outward appearances a loyal town. George the First could speak no English, and his heart was always in Hanover rather than in England. He was glad to avail himself of the additional glory and status which the Sovereignty of Great Britain gave to him, yet he was ever relieved to be away in his Hanoverian home. He was wise enough not to meddle seriously or officiously in English affairs, and he allowed his ministers to do most of the governing. But towards the end his excesses in eating and drinking, his love for punch, and his generally erratic mode of living proved too much for a man who was drawing very near to seventy years of age. In June, 1727, he set out on what proved to be his last visit to Hanover. An attack — believed to be one of paralysis — seized him on the way, yet he continued to cry aloud in commanding tones the words *Osnabruck! Osnabruck!* So to Osnabruck, the home of his brother the Prince-Bishop, his terrified attendants hurried him. When the royal coach clattered into the courtyard they found the old King lying dead in his seat. In his will he is said to have left a large sum of money to his mistress, the Duchess of Kendal, and to other ladies. The Archbishop of Canterbury got possession of the will, and gave it to the new King. George the Second pocketed it, and the will disappeared, never to be heard of again. He had always hated his father, and his father bore no love to him.

The second George possessed one advantage over his father ; he could speak English. No one could, however, have called him either attractive or worthy.

He was avaricious ; he was parsimonious ; he was easily put out of temper, as some one truly said of him. His instincts, feelings, and passions were all purely selfish. These things, however regrettable in themselves, might not, it may be thought, have been of any great moment, seeing that he was King, and secure. They did, as it turned out, matter very much indeed. No Sovereign who has not some personal hold upon the affection of his subjects can, at least in England, count for much. It was just the moment when a popular English King was very sorely needed. This George was very soon to find

out.

The hubbub all arose, as was usual in those days, about the Stuarts. The method of its development was, however, a little complicated, and it needs a few moments' unravelling. At this period the Test Acts, in some of their various applications and restrictions, were in full force. One of the Acts provided that all magistrates should take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, as well as an oath renouncing the doctrine that it is lawful to take arms against the King. These officers were also bound to receive the Communion according to the rites of the Church of England within a year before their election. Another Act required that these conditions should bind holders of all public offices, civil and military, and also that the same individuals must abjure all belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation. It was through the meshes of the nets of these Acts that the doctrine and practice of what is known as Occasional Conformity had crept. Originally, long years before, there had been many moderate Dissenters — men of the highest possible character — who were removed by the very least distance from the doctrinal position of the Church of England. They would attend at the Church Communions now and then, and would thus maintain a partial connection with the old Church. Thus they were eligible for public office, yet great numbers would not have received the Communion in order merely to qualify themselves for such a distinction. On the other hand, the unhappy Test Acts came in and spoilt all. They prescribed that certain men must receive the Communion, and take certain oaths, before admission to office. Thus a sacramental test came to be, with not a few, the means and the road to public recognition. A man might present himself at his parish church at the Holy Communion, being in every sense of the phrase a devout Communicant, and a sincerely earnest Christian man. He was eligible for public positions. Again, another man, in no sense either earnest or devout, might similarly present himself to receive the Sacrament. He also would be eligible for public position. Who could distinguish between the one motive and the other? It placed, outwardly, the sincere worshipper on a par with the mere man of the world, who was ready to use any religious rite so as to attain his end. The Test Acts brought endless trouble; they were a hardship on the Dissenters, and a hardship on the Church of England too.

Never was a device more ill-advised, or more odious in principle.

In 1712 came another turn of the screw. A measure against Occasional Conformity was passed, under the title *An Act for preserving the Protestant Religion by better securing the Church of England as by law established*. This Act aimed at discouraging Dissent, primarily; and at prohibiting any manifestation in favour of the Stuarts, in the second place. It was a very harsh and unwise measure. The means adopted were these. Any person, whether he had occasionally conformed or not, who held a corporation or government office, was disqualified under the Act if he afterwards attended a meeting of a conventicle. A conventicle was described as being a gathering of ten or more persons, occupied in religious worship other than that authorised by the Prayer Book. And even if the Prayer Book were used at such conventicle, the full penalty must be enforced if the prayer for the Princess Sophia (the Electress of Hanover and heir-presumptive to the English Crown) were omitted. Thus the Stuarts were held to be past praying for.

Meanwhile, in Bridgwater and in many other English towns, the Stuart tide was rising. It rose in spite of all sorts of precautions and hindrances. William the Third had been burnt in effigy long ago, in several places. When the Loyalists met together (as they did pretty regularly, for it was highly politic to do so) to keep the birthday of their King, they were frequently assailed by mobs, who would assemble outside and sing all sorts of Jacobite songs. As we have seen, this was no unfrequent occurrence in Bridgwater. *The little gentleman in black velvet* would be toasted, although poor King William had lain in his grave now for some years. The health of a mysterious individual known as *Job* was boisterously drunk; *Job* not being the Biblical personage of renown for his patience, but a combination of the initials of the three names James, Ormond, and Bolingbroke. *Kit*, another popular toast, stood for King James III; *the three B's* signified *Best Born Briton*, or the Chevalier de St. George. So the feeling grew, and on June 10th, the Chevalier's birthday, the scenes of revelry grew frantic. The authorities had to wink at it; no doubt the Bridgwater rulers discreetly did so too.

All this had been going on for years, when, in 1720, an event occurred which made the Jacobites simply wild with delight. James Francis Stuart, the rejected of 1715, had

in the course of his travels met the beautiful and romantic Clementine Sobieski, and married her. She bore him a son, the famous Prince Charles Edward. The child was born in Rome, in the presence of many Cardinals from the great European powers, and amidst the greatest signs of rejoicing. It was just what was wanted. James Francis could never lead a cause, but now there was an heir. He, surely, should bring the Stuarts back to their own again. He would grow up strong and handsome and brave and true. He would restore the sad fortunes of his House. His father had tried, and failed. But young Charles would not fail. He had only to bide his time. Thus reasoned the enthusiastic followers of that exiled and unhappy race.

The Test Acts and Occasional Conformity left their mark upon Bridgwater, and some of their consequences are detailed in the old documents of the place. There are many rolls of papers dating from the eighteenth century, relating the working of these Acts, and of some other legal enactments. A vellum roll, dating from July 12th, 1723, to March 28th, 1725, gives a list of those persons who were fined for profane swearing, at the General Sessions of the Peace, in the Borough and Parish of Bridgwater. These were recorded before Edward Reymond Mayor for that year. There is a draft of *the Laws, Statutes, Ordinances, and Decrees founded, constituted, ordained, made and established* in the year 1729 by the Mayor, Recorder, and Aldermen of the Borough of Bridgwater *for the better government of the Goldsmiths, Tanners, Ropemakers, Upholsterers, White-Bakers, Tallow-Chandlers and others within the Borough*. A Register of Record exists containing the names of those who personally appeared in the Court of the King, at the Town Quarter Sessions, *who took and subscribed three several oaths of allegiance to the King* (George the Second), and who also signed an abjuration of *pretended King James the Third*. A large parcel of certificates is in existence, granted by the Minister and Churchwardens of the Parish Church of Bridgwater, showing that *the persons who are severally named in the respective documents received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper after Divine Service and Sermon, according to the usage of the Church of England*. This most interesting collection of papers bears various dates, ranging from 1728 to 1777.

There is also another collection of papers which can here be alluded to only with the strictest brevity, which, could we but know

all the story which they imply, would be of the most profound interest. They are parcels of affidavits, depositions, and other documents relating to *the dealings of the townspeople with the various regiments quartered at Bridgwater, having special reference to acts and words of disloyalty to the Crown, and a favour to the Stuart Pretender*. These papers have also another revelation to make. They speak of *the unwillingness of persons in office to take the oaths of allegiance, or to attend Divine Service in Protestant [sic] places of worship*. They vary in date from 1717 to 1755. In 1720 William Luffe was elected a Capital Burgess of the Borough, by the Mayor and other authorities in Common Council, and it is carefully recorded that *he took the oaths appointed*. In the same year Davidge Gould was duly elected and admitted to be a freeman and Common Burgess. He also *was duly sworn*. When the important office of gaol-keeper became vacant on October 14th, 1720, John Mounshiere of Bridgwater and two other gentlemen were called upon to unite in giving a bond of a thousand pounds to Samuel Smith and Matthew Criddle, the Bailiffs of the Borough, for the due performance of the duties of the post by the new custodian. There are also numerous cases of men surrendering public office. Samuel Darby, Schoolmaster of the Grammar School, resigns his office of Capital Burgess in 1703. John Everard had done the same thing in 1682. Other similar instances abound.

One quaint little document — dating from before the days of Queen Anne — is of interest in a different way. It is a grant by Gabriel Barber of the City of London, gentleman, *appoynted for the Councill of Virginia*, to the Mayor, Aldermen, and Burgesses of Bridgwater of the sum of fifty pounds *for the use and behoofe of tenn religious and honest handy craftsmen, tradesmen, Burgesses, and inhabytantes within the said Burrough, being noe Innkeepers neither Alehouse keepers neyther in scriree or retayner to any person, to be lent to every of them five pounds a peece for the better mayntenance of their craft or trade : and the Mayor and Burgesses hereby consent to carry out the conditions of the above grant, each of five pounds to be lent for a term of three years, sufficient sureties or pledges being taken from each recipient for the repayment of the money at the end of the term, without interest*. This grant is dated 1620. Four years earlier Christopher Francklyn of Bridgwater, yeoman, resigned his office of crier in the

Borough of Bridgwater, *granted to him for one year with such fees, tolle, wages and other duties as the cryer or cryers in tymes past (and tyme out of mynde) have annually hadd, received and taken in the Faïres and markets within the said Borough.*

Some of these documents bear testimony to the unsettled condition of things in the town in the eighteenth century. There was, it is evident, much local uneasiness as to the government of England, and how long it was likely to last under the Georges. Parliamentary rule had come in, but that alone did not satisfy the people. They wanted a King whom they could respect, or at any rate like in some measure. No one liked George the Second. All these elements of unrest made the Jacobites especially — and others inferentially — cast their longing looks across the water to where young Prince Charles was only waiting to sally forth to regain for himself and for his posterity the throne which his grandfather had lost, and from which his House was now excluded by his enemies, by the Hanoverian dynasty, and by bitter fate.

Then came 1745. Charles had grown up to early manhood ; even at the siege of Gaeta in 1734 — when a mere boy — he had shown undeniable proofs of real valour. He was, and long had been, on fire to conquer England for himself. At his own risk, against the advice of those who assured him that without at least six thousand troops, and a handsome sum of money, it was useless to expect the Scottish clans to rally to his call, he set out from France. In spite of all, he did inspire the Scottish clansmen. His proclamation, calling upon all persons to follow him as Regent acting on behalf of his father, and promising the soldiers of King George a free pardon if they would march with him under the Stuart colours, had its effect. After some natural hesitation at first, his friends poured in, and the faithful clansmen swore to support him. His crimson and white banner was set up in the Vale of Glenfinnan, and all promised well. Everything seemed to be in his favour. Sir John Cope, who led the Royalist forces in Scotland, made every conceivable blunder that a commander could make, and Charles first entered Perth in triumph, and then pressed on to Edinburgh. The Scottish capital had plenty of Jacobites within its walls, and soon Bonnie Prince Charlie was holding high revel within the walls of Holyrood Palace, receiving the loyal obeisance of his subjects,

and gaining new friends and new comrades each succeeding hour. The Scottish chivalry received him as their King ; everywhere was seen the white cockade ; surely the luck of the Stuarts had turned, and their hour of triumph was to come at last !

Southward he pushed, and he was right in doing so. Carlisle was gained, then Manchester, then Derby. Now he was only one hundred and twenty- seven miles from London, with victory almost within his grasp. In the English capital there was panic and dismay. The poor old Duke of Newcastle was thinking of joining the Stuart cause ; the Hanoverian party lay in bewilderment ; even King George, stolid being that he was, had made preparation, if need should arise, to flee to Hanover and leave England and her troubles to herself. Then Charles' evil star rose in the ascendant, and never set. Some madness made him accept the fatal advice to retreat from Derby. Sullenly and sadly he turned his horse's head northward, and lost all. Never was a man so near to gaining England, and fame, and glory, and in all human probability the English Crown, than the unfortunate and unwise Prince who listened to the counsels of hesitation when all was prospering, and who in that fatal moment ruined his splendid opportunity. Culloden followed ; then disaster, then flight ; then the bitter landing on the shores of Brittany. He might have been — at least for a time, and possibly for his life- time — King Charles the Third of England. He flung away his chance, and it never came again.

The Jacobite cause in England henceforth was dead.

All this was far away from Bridgwater, and our men had no opportunity of joining in the fray. News travelled so slowly then ; no one here had a chance of rallying to the crimson and white standard. Well it was that it ended thus. The Stuarts possessed a personal fascination which many men found to be almost irresistible ; they cast a glamour over their most reckless enterprises. Yet they lacked stability, and most of the qualities which go to make rulers and leaders of men. Many a tear, doubtless, was secretly and sorrowfully shed in our town for Prince Charles, after the day of his disastrous failure. His followers wept for him ; they could do no more. It was the last Stuart attempt ; it had failed miserably. The Hanoverian dynasty was now firmly seated on the English throne, and no further effort

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Bridgwater in the later days, by the Rev. A. H. Powell, 1908

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was made to dislodge it. Probably Bridgwater, with some other towns, was cured of its Jacobitism. The Royalists might henceforth keep the King's birthday at the Swan without disturbance, and the toast-list would need neither scrutiny nor revision.

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