

**The Dissent and Nonconformity Series**

**Number 9**



# **The Early English Dissenters**

**Volume 1 of 2**

**Champlin Burrage**



***Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem.***

The Latin, *Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem*, translates, "... they loved not their lives unto the death." Revelation 12:11

**On The Cover:** *Massacres at Salzburg* took place in 1528 when Prince-Archbishop Cardinal Matthaus Lang of Salzburg issued mandates sending police in search of Anabaptists. Many were captured and killed. This engraving illustrates the sufferings and sacrifices these Dissenters endured when their government, in conjunction with established religion, attempted to coerce and impose uniformity of religious belief. Hence, this picture is a reminder of the cost of religious liberty and the ever-present need to maintain the separation of church and state. We use this art to represent our Dissent and Nonconformity Series.

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**EARLY ENGLISH DISSENTERS**

IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH

(1550-1641)

VOLUME I

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TITLE-PAGE. (Facsimile.) Date 1548.

See Vol. I., page 55.



THE  
**EARLY ENGLISH DISSENTERS**

IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH

(1550-1641)

BY

CHAMPLIN BURRAGE

HON. M.A. (BROWN UNIVERSITY), B. LITT. (OXON.)

IN TWO VOLUMES

*Illustrated*

VOLUME I

HISTORY AND CRITICISM

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1912



**The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.**

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

-- *Psalms 60:4*

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**THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM**

*lux lucet in tenebris*

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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TO  
MY WIFE



## PREFACE

**H**ERETOFORE, even the best histories of the Church of England have been noticeably lacking in adequate information relating to our subject, while the average history written by Nonconformists is not unnaturally apt to be somewhat partial in its treatment. English Church history as a whole, however, cannot be said to be satisfactorily studied, unless the story of Dissent is fully and fairly presented. In the past, it is true, English Church historians may have felt that the record of organized separation from the Established Church was not of sufficient interest or importance to justify any detailed presentation. The modern student, however, who wishes as far as possible to know all the facts of English Church history, cannot be satisfied to remain largely in ignorance or doubt as to the salient points of Dissenting history.

To the student who desires, in particular, to know more of the story of early English Dissent, it is hoped that the present work may prove useful. As here presented, it is intended to be complete in itself for the period treated; but it is also designed as the first section of a larger treatise for which the author has been making investigations for a number of years. If completed as planned, the entire work will contain, besides a continuation of the historical and critical information to be found in these two volumes, an extended bibliography of between two and three thousand items, which has already been prepared as a supplement to Dr Henry Martyn Dexter's "Collections toward a Bibliography of Congregationalism", but which will be chiefly concerned with the literature of the English Anabaptists and Baptists before 1745.

On examination it will readily be seen that the present publication is not intended as an exhaustive history of English Dissent during even the period treated, but rather as an introduction to the study of that history and its literature. Furthermore the author has sought as much as possible to limit himself to the discussion of points which have not been previously treated, or which appear to have been handled with insufficient care. Accordingly some subjects that ought at least to be mentioned in a complete history will scarcely be referred to here, because on them more or less adequate work seems already to have been done.

In the following pages the author has also endeavoured to follow the trend of primary evidence, irrespective of his own preconceptions or of what has previously been written by others on the subject. His ideal has been to rely on secondary evidence as little as possible, and to amplify and correct the studies of earlier writers (including his own previous writings), in the belief that such further critical investigation was absolutely necessary, if the subject was ever truly to be understood. He therefore asks the reader to keep these necessary limitations and this ideal in mind, and to give him a patient hearing.

The author does not doubt that mistakes will be found in his work, but he has sought to make their number as few as possible, and here and elsewhere to correct any errors of the presence of which he has become aware. For any others which may be found, he asks the reader's indulgence. In one instance the title of a manuscript has been expanded without a statement to that effect, viz., "The second parte of a Register", mentioned on page 24. In a note on page 96 it is incorrectly asserted that the patronage of the Rectory of Achurch belonged to the Browne family at the time of Robert Browne's presentation. On the contrary Lord Burghley presented it to him, but the main point made in the note remains unaltered. Again, the death of Samuel Howe, or How, occurred in 1640, not in 1634 or 1635 as suggested on page 201. Definite evidence concerning that event is given in section XXIII of volume II. Contrary to what is said on pages 264-65 the Anabaptists' "Humble Supplication" to King James I evidently was printed in 1620. This



point is at any rate asserted on the title-page of the edition published in 1662, though not found in the "Supplication" itself. On page 275 the name Isabel Toppe should read Israel Toppe (see Vol. II., pp. 248 and 257). On page 279 the author of "The Personall Reigne of Christ vpon Earth", 1642, has been given as John Archer, whose name appears in the work, but it seems that his real name may have been Henry Archer. Finally, I have recently discovered that Leonard Busher's last book to which reference is also made on page 279 was written in English and published in 1647, while he was still alive. It bore on the title-page the words: "Printed with priviledge of the heauenly kinge Christ Jesus the Messiah and onely son of the moste high God Matt: 28. 29. Gen 14. 18. 20. Anno Domini Syons style 1663. Romes style 1647." James Toppe's manuscript reply, of which the title has been given on the same page and the text of which the present author hopes soon to publish, was accordingly not written until about 1648. That treatise is fortunately not imperfect. Busher appears to have left Delft after printing his work, and one naturally wonders if at that favourable time he may not have returned to London, his native home. It should further be stated here, that any rare manuscripts or books to which reference is made in this work, but of which the present location is for special reasons withheld, will all be included in a later bibliographical volume, if adequate support can be secured, and there be definitely located.

Brief allusion should also have been made in the Introduction to the articles relating to various early English Dissenters in "The Dictionary of National Biography", in Dr James Hastings' "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics", and in the eleventh edition of "The Encyclopædia Britannica". Some of these articles have features of distinct value, but not a few invite revision in later editions.

Since the Introduction went to press, a copy of the English edition of Professor W. J. McGlothlin's "Baptist Confessions of Faith" has come into the author's hands. Though the work was only very recently published at Philadelphia, it has already been found advisable to enlarge and thus improve it. Such a

book has long been needed, and this undoubtedly contains much useful information; but in various respects it is as yet disappointing, and as a whole can still hardly be said to compare favourably with Professor Williston Walker's volume on a similar subject, viz., "The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism," New York, 1893.

Three other books have lately been published which require mention in these pages. One of them is the Rev. William Pierce's edition of "The Marprelate Tracts", London, 1911, a painstaking and thorough work in which, however, the text has been unfortunately modernized. The second is the first volume of Mr Henry W. Clark's "History of English Nonconformity from Wiclif to the Close of the Nineteenth Century", London, 1911. This volume covers the period from Wiclif to the Restoration. In his prefatory Note (p. v) Mr Clark says that what "has been here attempted is not so much the discovery and presentation of fresh facts, but rather the bringing of the recorded happenings into the light of one general principle to be estimated and judged...the underlying idea is the testing of events as to their success or failure in manifesting a changeless spirit and ideal." Consequently, though Mr Clark has read widely and with some discrimination, his book does not contain such information as requires special mention here.

The third work to which reference should be made is the Rev. Walter H. Burgess's "John Smith the Se-Baptist Thomas Helwys and the first Baptist Church in England With fresh Light upon the Pilgrim Fathers' Church", London, 1911. This book, though a popular treatise, is of real historical value, as well as written in a pleasing style. On account of its late appearance and its subject-matter it requires rather extended comment.

With some qualifications and corrections Mr Burgess's work very well supplements a portion of the contents of the present book, in which it was found inadvisable to insert such a detailed presentation of the views and controversies of Smyth, Helwys, and Murton. On pages 212-19 and 239-69 also the early Anabaptist Confessions of Faith published respectively by Helwys' and by Smyth's followers are wisely given in good part,

thus making their reproduction in the present treatise less necessary.

Mr Burgess's best services, perhaps, have been rendered on what for convenience may be called the genealogical side of his subject. Here he has achieved signal success. He gives a number of fresh details concerning the University life and later career in Lincoln of John Smyth (pp. 43-52), and various interesting points relating to the ancestry, station in life, and education of Thomas Helwys of Broxtowe Hall "overlooking Basford" in Nottinghamshire (pp. 107-17). Last but not least he proves that John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, was the son of John and Ann Robinson of Sturton le Steeple, Nottinghamshire, and had a brother William and a sister Mary; and that his wife, Bridget White, was the second daughter of Alexander and Eleanor White likewise of Sturton, both of the families represented being those of substantial yeomen (p. 317).

Of the details found in Mr Burgess's book not already or elsewhere mentioned in the present work, the following are perhaps among the most important: viz., that a fifth copy of John Smyth's "A Paterne of True Prayer", London, 1605, has recently been acquired by the British Museum (p. 54); that Smyth was "town lecturer" at St Peter at Arches, Lincoln, and is referred to as "clericus conscionator" before the beginning of his troubles there (p. 62); that Geoffrey Helwys, "'Merchant Taylor' and alderman of the City of London", was Thomas Helwys' uncle, not his brother as suggested on page 256 of the present volume (p. 289); that John Wilkinson was deceased by 1619 (p. 302); and that [John Murton], while a close prisoner in Newgate, "having not the use of pen and ink", wrote the Anabaptists' "Humble Supplication" of 1620 "in milk, in sheets of paper brought to him by the woman his keeper from a friend in London as the stopples of his milk bottle", which were later read "by fire" by this friend, transcribed, and preserved (pp. 308-9).

With the historical views maintained in the introductory and concluding chapters of Mr Burgess's book, and with a good many minor details other than those mentioned above, the present author finds himself unable to agree. The opinions

advanced in those chapters are in general the traditional ones which have long been popular with writers of Dissenting history, and with which any student is already more or less familiar, only the influence of the early English Anabaptists is here more highly rated than has hitherto been customary,—and in the present writer's opinion somewhat exaggerated.

Naturally there are a number of minor inaccuracies in the volume, such as every researcher in this field is likely to make for years to come. Some of them need to be noticed here. On page 157 Mr Burgess asserts his belief that "I.H.", the author of "A Description of the Church of Christ", 1610, was a Familist. On the contrary there is practically no reason to doubt that he was Joseph Hall, later Bishop of Norwich, who was personally acquainted both with John Smyth and John Robinson. On page 226, at the suggestion of the Rev. Alexander Gordon, Mr Burgess gives a new reading for the word hitherto usually read as "Fryelers" in the title of one of Helwys' publications, taking it without question to be "Fryesers", i.e., according to his interpretation, Frisians. The correct reading, however, is certainly "Fryelers", for while an imperfect letter is used for the "l", it is not a broken "s", as a careful examination will plainly reveal. Furthermore, "Fryelers" ("Free-willers") is just the word required by the contents of the work, while Frisians is as manifestly out of place, to say nothing of the difficulty of finding the word Frisians in this imaginary word "Fryesers". On page 318 it is said that Henry Ainsworth's "A Seasonable Discourse or a Censure upon a Dialogue of the Anabaptists" "remained in manuscript for some years,..." This was not the case. The work was first printed in 1623 shortly after it was written, and the title of this edition may be seen on page 267 of the present volume. On page 322 Mr Burgess speaks of the exceptional interest attaching to the Bodleian copy of Edmond Jessop's "A Discovery of the Errors of the English Anabaptists", 1623, "because it has been profusely annotated with marginal notes in a contemporary hand", and supported by the purport of some of these annotations ventures to express the view (p. 327) that "in or about the year 1625" "attention was being paid

[by the English Anabaptists] to the more limited meaning of the word 'baptize' in the sense of 'dip'." The present writer has consulted this copy of Jessop's work, and does not hesitate to say that practically all of the annotations therein contained were written after 1640. The dating has largely to be determined by the style of writing employed and by the use of one or two exceptional words which evidently began to be used about 1650 or just after. It may be well to call attention also to the fact that Mr Burgess has unfortunately incorporated in his book some of the blunders which occur in Dr B. Evans' "Early English Baptists". For instance, on page 333 mention is made of Cornelius Aresto (Cornelis Claesz. Anslo), on page 334 of Thos. Denys ("thomas elwijs" [Helwys]), and on page 335 of James Joppe (James Toppe). Further, a mistake has clearly been made in associating this last name with that of a "certain John Joope" who "was a member of Henoeh Clapham's Separatist Church...at Amsterdam in 1598" (p. 335 note 1). But these are comparatively small blemishes in an otherwise excellent book, which will be welcomed by students as well as by the general reader.

Two further notable discoveries relating to the early English Dissenters have recently been made. For information regarding them the author is indebted to the courtesy of the Rev. F. Ives Cater of Oundle, to whom belongs the credit of having done more than any other person to elucidate the later years of Robert Browne's life. These most recent discoveries have been made by the Rev. R. M. Serjeantson, M.A., F.S.A.<sup>1</sup>, who, it seems, following suggestions made by Mr Cater has succeeded in finding records relating to Browne's excommunication by William Piers, Bishop of Peterborough, about December, 1631, and also a nuncupative will of Browne's which was exhibited and proved in April, 1634, and in which he speaks of "my deare and loveinge wiefe Elizabeth Browne, who hath ever bine a most faithfull and a good wiefe unto me",—an entirely unexpected and welcome statement. Thus we have at last definite evidence of the fact and time of Browne's excommunication, and of his ultimate reconciliation with his wife.

<sup>1</sup> In "A History of the Church of St Giles, Northampton", 1912, pp. 198-202.

In the course of his studies the author has been greatly indebted to many for courtesies shown him. In some instances he has had exceptional opportunities for examining unique treasures at first hand; and he now extends his hearty thanks to all those who have thus aided him. Among others he would specially mention Principal George P. Gould, M.A., of Regent's Park College, London; Henry Guppy, M.A., Librarian of the John Rylands Library, Manchester; Principal Sidney W. Bowser, B.A., of the Midland Baptist College, Nottingham; Canon John Watson, Librarian of York Minster Library; Professor Dr S. Cramer of the Mennonite Archives, and the assistants in the University Library, Amsterdam; Francis J. H. Jenkinson, M.A., Librarian of the University Library, Cambridge; Falconer Madan, M.A., Sub-Librarian of the Bodleian Library, Oxford; S. Wayland Kershaw, M.A., late Librarian, and Rev. Claude Jenkins, M.A., present Librarian, of Lambeth Palace Library; John A. Herbert, B.A., formerly Superintendent of the Manuscript Reading Room in the British Museum; Dr G. K. Fortescue, Keeper of the Printed Books in the British Museum; and Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, K.C.B., etc., late Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum.

Recently, through the kindness of Messrs Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge, the author has enjoyed the very exceptional privilege of viewing and transcribing four printed leaves which up to that time probably no modern student had seen, containing the lost "Ten Counter Demands" of Thomas Drakes, concerning which Dr Edward Arber has said ("The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers", p. 242) that it "is apparently totally lost". The discovery of this tract not only modifies Dr Arber's statement, but also corrects an opinion expressed on pp. 191-2 of the present work. The entire text of this long-lost writing is now given, probably for the first time since its original publication about 1618 or 1619, in the volume of documents.

Excluding minor improvements, omissions, and additions (some of which have been made for the purpose of bringing the book up to date), the material here presented was offered under another title, in the autumn of 1908, as a dissertation for



## *Preface*

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the B.Litt. degree at Oxford University. To the examiners appointed to report thereon, namely, Professor C. H. Firth and Dr Frederick J. Powicke, the author desires to acknowledge his indebtedness for various helpful criticisms and suggestions. To the former of these he owes thanks also for encouragement given by him as the author's supervisor for the B.Litt. course, as well as for commending his work to the Cambridge University Press. Finally, he wishes to express to the Secretary and Syndics of the Cambridge University Press his grateful appreciation of their willingness to undertake the production of the book, and of the attractive form they have given it; while for generous assistance in bringing about an early publication, he has to make further special acknowledgement to various persons, and in particular to his friends Dr J. Vernon Bartlet and Henry Guppy, M.A., and to Sir G. W. Macalpine.

C. B.

OXFORD,

16 *December* 1911.



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The coalition of church and state (corpus Christianum) has continually had outspoken opponents since its inception in the 4th century under Constantine. All through the long medieval night of papal terror and up to the present day of accommodation and compromise, there has never been a time when the voice of dissent and nonconformity was not heard, protesting against established religion and coerced uniformity. The most prominent target of that protest has been the arrogant usurpation of Christ's Kingly Authority and Headship over His churches and the souls of men, whether that usurpation was Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or any other. As it has been, so shall it ever be. This enduring testimony of dissent, this genuine Christian nonconformity arises as the inevitable response of the Christian soul to the internal witness of the Spirit toward the truth and supreme authority of God's Word. Consequently, the origin, nature and history of Christ's churches can never be adequately discerned or explained apart from some grasp of the Biblical Truths advocated and defended throughout the history of genuine Christian Dissent and Nonconformity. As Dr. J. S. Whale, former Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Mansfield College, Oxford University and President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge University, said, "*Dissent, not only from the centralized absolutism of Rome, but also from the State establishments of Protestantism in the Old World is an historic fact of enduring influence. To account for the tradition of liberty in the 'free world' of today without reference to dissent would be to read modern history with one eye shut.*"

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