

# Books and Authors

## The Pilgrim in Old England<sup>1</sup>

By the Rev. Robert F. Horton<sup>2</sup>

It is very natural that Americans should wish to know how the Pilgrims in Old England regard the charming and interesting book which Dr. Bradford has written about them. Confident as the readers of *The Outlook* are in the fairness, the ability, the charity, of its editors, they may yet desire to have such a book as this estimated from the English standpoint, confirmed or corrected by the opinion of those who are immediately concerned. Now, I ventured to say, when I was in New York last April, that Dr. Bradford's forthcoming volume would tell us in England a good deal about English Congregationalism which most of us had not learnt from our own leaders. That prediction is substantially verified. The truth is, notwithstanding the author's flattering estimate that Congregationalists on this side of the Atlantic "emphasize their loyalty to their ecclesiastical principles," we are, as a rule, much nearer to our American brethren in this respect, who "pride themselves on their lack of denominational enthusiasm." Those of us, perhaps, who have loyalty to our ecclesiastical principles do emphasize it; but that is partly because comparatively few have any such loyalty, and the stalwarts are grieved by the apathy and indifferentism of the rest.

Thus we seldom hear anything about our own denomination. Probably not more than a dozen English ministers could have written Dr. Bradford's book without engaging in the laborious and specific inquiries in which the author from over the ocean had to engage. And among the average members of our churches the whole book will read like a novel, with that delicious flavor in it which we generally find in a story which places its scene in our own locality.

It is not necessary to follow the author in his historical sketch of English Nonconformity. He has carefully studied the sources which are open to the student. And he certainly has not exaggerated the significance or value of the work which has been done by those generations of Free Churchmen who have been following out their principles for these two centuries and a half in the Old Country side by side with their brethren in the New. Where confirmation or correction is more needed is in the account of the present situation and the probable future of the denomination in England. On this topic Dr. Bradford sees matters in the rosy light of his own genial optimism. As an American Congregationalist, with all the buoyant hopes which American Congregationalists are justified in cherishing, he is apt to credit our churches here with a good deal that the similar churches in the United States possess. But it is perhaps deeply significant that the American churches, with, I suspect, about the same aggregate number of members as the English churches, have over two hundred more students than we have in training for the ministry. The future of our Congregational churches depends upon the number, the quality, the equipment, of their coming ministers. The expectation of expanding and progressive work sends men of the right stamp to the colleges. And it is only fair that Americans should understand the significance of such a body of young men as I saw in the Yale Divinity School last spring—a body to which we in England could furnish no parallel at all. The Pilgrim in New England has a future greater than his glorious past. He is aware of it. The note of confidence is in his ranks. Notwithstanding his freedom from denominational prejudice, he feels instinctively that he has in his possession great principles which may well hold in fee the future of an educated democracy. In England the future is more problematical, and the conflict is much sterner. Perhaps Dr. Bradford feels this when he says that, in the event of disestablishment, there will be such a movement from the chapels to the churches as has never yet been seen. "Disestablishment will be the beginning

of power for the Episcopalian Church in Great Britain." Now, I am not one of those who think that disestablishment is at hand. The result Dr. Bradford prophesies does not come, therefore, within my purview. But the Episcopalian Church in Great Britain has made its beginning of power already, and a most curious and complex power it is. Here is a solid force constantly at work in English life. Side by side, arm in arm, all equally bent on the maintenance of this Establishment, are the fervent and zealous Churchman, who desires the kingdom of God with all his heart, if only it may be episcopally governed; the simple and sincere Christian, who desires only to spend and to be spent in seeking the salvation of souls; the great landowner who has half a dozen "livings" as part of the family property, in which he wishes to settle his younger sons; the great brewer, who feels instinctively that his right of property in poisoning the British people stands on the same footing as the rights of property in the "Church," and accordingly defends the Establishment, with the implied understanding that the Establishment will defend him; the rising manufacturer with half-educated children, who finds attending church a more simple way into society than the laborious process of culture and intelligence; besides the vast forces of endowed schools and colleges and charities, with their hosts of interested officers, who all feel that their very life is bound up with the Established Church. Such an army never stood, so linked man to man, on any field. If the good men and true withdrew from it, victory over it would be rapid. If the base and interested withdrew, we should all desire its victory over forces opposed. But the good and the evil buttress one another. And, personally, I expect to see England herself disestablished before her Church.

Now, the presence of this powerful, persistent, and pitiless corporation is crushing to the heart and the spirit of Congregationalism. It may be said that its existence makes Congregationalism necessary. Yes, indeed it does. God-sustained, Congregationalism will certainly hold its own. But a force that has to be maintained in the face of subtle and untiring persecution—a force in which probably three out of four suffer pecuniarily for their principles, and every minister has to live in the land he loves as if he were not of it, snubbed, ignored, insulted, by the Established Church—such a force must, in the nature of things, be constantly decimated by desertions and weakened by cowardice. And, while Dr. Bradford's generous estimate of the men who are sustaining this weary conflict is not only generous but true, he has not, I think, seen how really, in many senses, it is a forlorn hope that is led by these men. Persuaded that they are doing God's will, with that word of Luther's constantly on their lips—"Here stand I, I can no other"—they do not permit themselves any illusion. They say, with our great countryman Edmund Burke, "We know the map of this country sufficiently well, and we know that the course we take is not in the direction of preferment or honor."

It is for this reason that Dr. Bradford's presence among us and his large, buoyant hopes about us are peculiarly helpful and stimulating to us; and America and Montclair must forgive our earnest though half-despairing effort to get him back among us himself as a Pilgrim in Old England.

Before closing this grateful notice of an interesting and valuable book, it may be well to observe what good is likely to result from the free interchange of ideas and experiences between the two bodies of Congregational churches on the two sides of the Atlantic. Dr. Bradford is good enough to commend two features of our ecclesiastical life which he thinks worthy of imitation in America. Certainly the autumnal Union Meetings of the delegates from the churches are an incalculable blessing to us all. Two years ago, for instance, at Southport, the Spirit of the Lord came upon us at those meetings in a way which no one present will ever forget. Since then a remarkable change has passed over our churches, which may in part account for Dr. Bradford's optimistic view of them. New faith in prayer, new sympathy between pastors, new energy in adapting and working improved methods, new missionary enthusiasm, have manifested themselves in the churches

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which had a part in those meetings. The vast extent of the United States may make such national gatherings impossible over there. But it is certainly an advantage to hold these meetings, and it is an advantage to have an annually elective president who acts as the mouthpiece of the whole denomination. The other feature which Dr. Bradford commends for imitation is our freedom from creed tests in ministerial appointments and in the reception of church members. That is sure to come as America receives more fully the spirit of modern theological thought. On the other hand, Dr. Bradford's counsel to us to adopt the American Council system in order to protect the churches from designing and ignorant men is very pertinent; though the practical effect of that system is secured more than our visitor saw by the Fraternal Societies of ministers in the several towns. We do not, it is true, keep out all incapable and insincere men. But it is amazing how, in our present free system, they for the most part keep themselves out. I question whether any body of clergymen in Christendom, making allowance for the sources from which the ministry is supplied, would show a smaller proportion of impostors and spiritual incapables than the English Congregational ministers.