JOHN DRYDEN'S CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

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1949

JOHN DRYDEN'S CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

1949

Content

Preface

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the circumstances under which Dryden's conversion was made, in order to come to some definite conclusion as to the motives which prompted him, and the sincerity of the experience which prompted his conversion to the Catholic Church. This will involve a study of Dryden's politico-religious poems, "Religio Laici," and "The Hind and the Panther." For an interpretation of these two crucial poems is an essential part of any attempt to discover the nature and value of Dryden's religious thought.

The subject of Dryden's religious sincerity has been studied by many writers and scholars to date, and this paper undertakes, as a necessary preliminary, a detailed outline of their works. Among the early critics I have referred to Johnson, Scott, Macaulay, Christie, Saintsbury and Verral; and among the later critics to Mark Van Doren and L.I. Bredvold. I am particularly indebted to L.I. Bredvold's Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden for information concerning Dryden's political and philosophical thought.

From the Restoration forward, Dryden moved steadily in one direction, and that was towards authoritarianism in politics and religion. Therefore, this study of his conversion is concerned with those political and philosophical ideas which led him to seek an infallible church.

I wish to make grateful acknowledgment to the graduate faculty of the English Department, and in particular to Dr. Anders Orbeck and Dr. A.J.M. Smith, for their kind assistance in the preparation and final presentation of this thesis.

E. M. B.

East Lansing, Michigan
April 30, 1949

I

Introduction

1.

John Dryden became Catholic in 1686. He was severely criticised by his contemporaries, and since that time he has had many critics who have accused him of insincerity. His religious ideas are important in considering his poetry; for the value of a poem like "The Hind and the Panther" is lessened if the author was writing without sincere conviction. In tracing the poet's ideas which led to his conversion, it is probably best to begin with his childhood and Puritan surroundings.

Dryden was born in 1631 at Aldwinkle in Northamptonshire. His mother's family, the Pickerings, had been staunch Puritans from the time of James I, as were his father's family. We have no information concerning Dryden's childhood, either from himself or others.

The first records of his education are as a King's scholar at Westminster under Richard Busby. Although Busby was a Royalist, he was retained as headmaster of Westminster during the Commonwealth because of his excellent qualities as a teacher.[1] Dryden received his foundation in the classics from Busby, and he always wrote of this teacher with kindly respect.[2]

In 1650 Dryden entered Cambridge where he remained until 1657. Here he continued his study of the classics, particularly the Roman classics, which he had begun at Westminster. We have little information regarding his

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1. George Saintsbury, Dryden (London, 1930), pp. 1-5.

2. Scott-Saintsbury, The Works of John Dryden (Edinburgh, 1882), Vol. XVIII, pp. 99-102.

university life, but Churton Collins had this to say of Dryden's academic life:

> Like Milton before, and like Gray, Wordsworth, and Coleridge after him, he appears to have had no respect for his teachers, and to have taken his education into his own hands.[1]

In 1657 Dryden went to London where he was in the service of his cousin, Sir Gilbert Pickering. Sir Gilbert Pickering (1613-1668) had been in the Short Parliament of 1640, and throughout the Long Parliament he represented the county of Northampton. It was said that he was a zealous Puritan having been a Presbyterian, an Independent, a Brownist and finally an Anabaptist. Apparently Pickering was enthusiastic in his service to the Commonwealth. He sat as one of the judges in the trial of Charles I, but he did not sign the death warrant. He was a member of five councils of state and of an army council, besides being a member of three Commonwealth Parliaments. In 1655 he was appointed to a committee for the advancement of trade, and in 1657 he was made lord chamberlain to Cromwell. It was when he received the office of lord chamberlain that John Dryden probably served as his secretary.[2] Thus Shadwell in "The Medal of John Bayes" taunted Dryden because of his Puritan connections:

> The next step of advancement you began, was being clerk to Noll's lord chamberlain, a sequestrator and committee man,[3]

Sir Gilbert was not in a position to do much for his relative even if he had wished to, for Cromwell died in 1658, and the Commonwealth had not long to live. Dryden commemorated Cromwell's death by writing the "Stanzas

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1. Churton Collins, The Satires of Dryden (London, 1936), p. xi.

2. Leslie Stephan, Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XLV, p. 242.

3. Scott-Saintsbury, I, p. 34, Op. cit.

on the Death of Cromwell." This was his first important work as a poet. Shortly afterwards he wrote "Astraea Redux" to celebrate Charles' restoration.

After 1661 Dryden did hack work for Herringman, the bookseller. Then he aquired the patronage of Sir Robert Howard whose sister he married in 1663. He was elected to the Royal society in 1662, and wrote his "Epistle to Dr. Walter Charleton" for the occasion.[1]

However, after 1661, Dryden's main source of income was the theatre. He and Sir Robert Howard collaborated in several plays, one of the best being The Indian Queen presented in 1664. The Indian Queen was followed by The Indian Emporer which was one of Dryden's first plays to attain popular approval. The theatres were closed during the year of 1666 as London suffered the great fire and England was engaged in a war with Holland. Dryden commemorated the events of that year with the poem "Annus Mirabilis."[2]

In 1668 Dryden wrote his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" which did much to raise his reputation as a writer. About this same time Dryden formed an agreement with the King's Theatre in which he agreed to write three plays a year. This contract kept him applied to writing plays until 1682.[3]

In 1670 Dryden received the post of Poet Laureate. He was now a part of the court circle, having for his friends such nobles as Dorset,

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1. Saintsbury, Dryden, op. cit., p. 28.

2. Ibid., pp. 29-33.

3. Ibid., pp. 38-67.

Etherage, Mulgrave and Rochester.[1]

The political excitement stirred up by the Popist Plot occured in 1678. In the four following years Shaftesbury had incited the Exclusion measure. Dryden turned from drama to begin writing his important satires. In November of 1681 "Absalom and Achitophel" appeared championing the king's cause against the Exclusionists. After Shaftesbury's aquittal Dryden continued the attack with "The Medal." Then in 1682 the second part of "Absalom and Achitophel" appeared, and several weeks later, "Religio Laici." From "Religio Laici" it is a short step to "The Hind and the Panther." These last three poems have a combined political-religious importance in Dryden's thought.[2]

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1. Ibid., p. 68.

2. Ibid., pp. 73-93.

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Before tracing the development of Dryden's thought in relation to his conversion, it is necessary to review the early and modern criticism of his conversion. This subject, Dryden's conversion, has been treated by writers with viewpoints ranging from harsh reproach to sympathetic apology. The early criticisms based upon political prejudices were often inclined to degrade the writer. Modern scholarship with the aid of hindsight does Dryden more justice.

Dr. Johnson's "Life of Dryden," was written in 1779. In it Johnson made allowance for the poet's religious sincerity, but he passed over the apostasy as not having too much importance. Johnson saw nothing discreditable in Dryden's apparent political changes. He noted that if Dryden changed his political beliefs, he changed with the nation.[1]

Johnson, for whom Catholicism had no attraction, seems to have felt that Dryden was a target for ambitious priests. Not having any definite religious convictions, and being constantly applied in more worldly pursuits, the poet was ill equipped to contend with the skillful Jesuits.[2] Undoubtedly Catholic propaganda was well organised and wide-spread at the accession of James II. Yet Johnson recognised that any convension at that advantageous time was subject to questioning, but a man's sincerity was not necessarily to be oppugned for that reason. Besides, Johnson was not inclined to pass judgement on this point:

> I am willing to believe that Dryden, having employed his his mind, active as it was, upon different studies, and

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1. A. Milnes, Johnson, Select Works (Oxford, 1885), pp. 2-5.

2. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

> filled it, capacious as it was, with other materials, came unprovided to the controversy, and wanted rather skill to discover the right than virtue to maintain it. But enquiries into the heart are not for man; we must now leave him to his judge.[1]

Johnson disregarded the concomitant hardships of Dryden's faith after the deposition of James II as proof of the poet's sincerity. Inured to a precarious financial status himself, Johnson felt that Dryden was too fond of causeless complaints. After all, at the loss of the Laureate, Dryden was supposed to have received a compensation of £100 a year from Lord Dorset. He should have been grateful for that, for while playing the sycophant to James, he received only a miserly compensation.[2]

Scott's life of Dryden was published in 1808. Scott was a literary man and a Tory, and because of this Macaulay, later, accused Scott of being biased in favor of Dryden.[3] In regard to Dryden's political alignments, Scott felt that Dryden might have been influenced by literary ambitions. With the restoration he had an opportunity to use his poetical talents in a way which would have been impossible while under the patronage of his Puritan relatives and the Commonwealth. In order to gain prominence any writer had to be among the courtly circle, so Dryden found it propitious to become a member of that group.[4]

Although Dryden's activity and temperament were not compatible with religious speculation, Scott felt that disappointment and age may have,

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1. Ibid., p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

3. Macaulay, History of England (London, 1946), Vol. I, p. 653.

4. Scott-Saintsbury, I, pp. 42-48.

however, prompted such thoughts; for "Religio Laici," as he says, "evinces that, previous to composing that poem, the author had bestowed serious consideration upon the important subjects of which it treats."[1] Scott also saw the political tendency of the poem which was evident in the defence of the state church against the anarchy of the sectaries.[2]

Scott summed up his defense of Dryden's conversion in this way:

> Dryden did not, therefore, except in outward profession, abandon the church of England for that of Rome, but was converted to the Catholic faith from a state of infidelity, or rather of Pyrrhonism ... Dryden's sincere aquiescence in the abstruse points of Christianity did not long precede his adoption of Roman faith.[3]

Bredvold has pointed out that Scott in speaking of Pyrrhonism or philosophical skepticism, failed to distinguish it from religious skepticism or freethinking. Dryden's skepticism led him to seek authority in religion, and therefore was anti-rationalistic, but not freethinking.[4]

Finally Scott believed that Dryden could have regained his post as Laureate under William if he had been willing to recant. Later Christie opposed this view, but Scott pointed out that many Tory nobles and Lord Dorset among the Whigs, were friends of Dryden, showing that his religion had not ostracized him. Furthermore, it must be remembered that religious apostacy in Dryden's circle was commonplace, and probably in most cases it was regarded as expedient.[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 257.

2. Ibid., pp. 257-258.

3. Ibid., p. 263.

4. L.I. Bredvold, Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, 1934), p. 121.

5. Scott-Saintsbury, I, p. 263.

Lord Macaulay, writing in 1848, had nothing good to say of Dryden's character and conversion.[1] But Macaulay's views of Dryden, and on Dryden's age, are always reflected upon a Whiggish glass, consequently the appearance of many seventeenth century theological and political ideas are unattractive. Dryden's literary servility, a regrettable condition of that period, influenced the poet's political and theological decisions. Macaulay, believing that all men are formed by their age, considered Dryden as a most notorious and completed product of the seventeenth century:

> Amidst the crowd of authors who, during the earlier years of Charles the Second, counted notoriety by every species of absurdity and affectation, he speedily became conspicuous ... on no man did the age exercise so much influence.[2]

From Macaulay's viewpoint, Dryden appears to have been a helpless victim in the maëlstrom of seventeenth century Toryism and literary patronage. Macaulay stated bluntly that Dryden was wholly unprepared to dispute on political and theological questions, thereby removing any responsible value to his decisions on these subjects! According to Macaulay, then, Dryden's conversion was prompted only because of an added pension of 100 a year from James.

"Finding that, if he continued to call himself a Protestant, his services would be overlooked, he declared himself a Papist."[3]

This is the frankest, boldest and most barefaced statement impugning Dryden's good faith that any historian or critic has dared to make. Later authorities proved that Dryden never received an emolument upon his conversion, but that this was merely a renewal of his former pension

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1. Macaulay, History of England, Vol I, op. cit., p. 658.

2. Lady Trevelyan, Miscellaneous Works of Lord Macaulay, Vol. I, (New York, 1880), p. 132.

3. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 658.

and a payment of pensions in arrear. Indeed the work of modern critics and historians has been concerned with absolving Dryden of this charge.

After Macaulay's criticism of Dryden came W.D. Christie's edition of the poems. This was introduced by a memoir, and was published in 1870. Christie, like Macaulay, was a Whig and biased in his interpretation of Dryden's political views: he could see no consistency in Dryden's political alignments. He was also partial in his praise of Shaftesbury; and his sympathies were with Shaftesbury at the outset, rather than with Dryden. Christie's attack on Dryden's character was Victorian in the worst sense of that word. The imputed wickedness of the poet, based upon such flimsy evidence as Dryden's having tea with a certain actress, caused Christie to remark that "Dryden was a libertine,"[1] These attacks on Dryden's character were justly rebuffed by professor Saintsbury, and are entirely irrelevant in deducing the poet's religious sincerity.[2]

Christie, to some extent, did recognize the unity of political and theological ideas, admitting that it was not unusual for the author of "Absalom and Achitophel" to later write "Religio Laici."[3] Yet while accepting Dryden's independent spirit, he felt that Dryden wrote "Absalom and Achitophel" in order to recompense for his anti-papist play, The Spanish Friar, and to procure further aid from the King, thus enabling him to devote time to an epic poem.[4] In the latter attempt, if such it was,

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1. Ibid., p. xxiv.

2. Saintsbury, Dryden, op. cit., pp. 178-181.

3. Christie, op. cit., p. Lii.

4. Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

he never succeeded.

Christie readily conceded that Dryden would never have changed his religion for a mere pension of £100 a year from James II, but he adds, "Dryden's life was a perpetual struggle for income; and his character and career do not oppose the notion which the time of his conversion suggests, that his becoming a Roman Catholic was in a great measure a movement of calculated expediency."[1] He explained Dryden's later constancy by denying a possibility of recantation, saying that if Dryden had renounced his faith he could never have recovered the Laureateship, as he would have been totally dishonored.[2]

Saintsbury, who published his life of Dryden in 1900, was, unlike Christie, a Tory. Therefore his political notions were not so foreign to a sympathetic study of Dryden's political ideas, and his discussion of the conversion is much more impartial.

He recognised the philosophical skepticism and the desire for the stability of an infallible church in "Religio Laici."[3] However, Saintsbury failed to see the impossibility of separating religious and political motives. If he had, he would not have said this concerning "Religio Laici":

> The poem therefore, as it seems to me, must be regarded as a genuine production, expressing the author's first thoughts on a subject which had just presented itself to him as interesting and important.[4]

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1. Ibid., p. Lviii.

2. Ibid., p. xxiv.

3. Saintsbury, Dryden, op. cit., p. 101.

4. Ibid., pp. 92-93.

Saintsbury regarded Dryden, first and last as a man of letters, and as such it was only to be expected that he remained loyal to a court which promised patronage. With Macaulay, Saintsbury saw Dryden strongly influenced by his age, and subject to public taste; but these were unconscious factors and no points for stricture.[1] As it was obvious by Saintsbury's time that Dryden had never made any substantial financial gains by his conversion, this motive could be discarded.[2]

To Saintsbury, the political views of "Absalom and Achitophel" and the religious insecurity of "Religio Laici," lead up to, and prepared the mind for "The Hind and the Panther." Dryden's subsequent firm adherence to the Catholic faith in face of hardships was good proof of his religious sincerity.[3]

A.W. Verrall delivered his Cambridge lectures on Dryden in 1911. He was distinguished as a student of the classics, his preference being Greek drama. He had also served as critic and contributor to The Classical Review and other scholarly journals. Verrall was an eager student of the classical period in English literature, and Dryden as a translator of Virgil interested him.

Verrall was a pioneer in the close analysis of the text as preliminary to any critical conclusion, and that detailed study of the texts of Dryden's poems led him, in the first place, to take a more favorable view of Dryden's political and religious ideas. Verrall refuted Macaulay's

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1. Ibid., pp. 102-103.

2. Ibid., p. 104.

3. Ibid., p. 106.

charge that Dryden was a literary slave to the court. However, Verrall insisted that Dryden held no definite principles in regard to religion, politics or even criticism.[1] Verrall was dissatisfied with the superficial and biased attack of Macaulay. It was not that he was convinced of Dryden's sincerity, or even of his deep interest in religious matters, but he believed that Dryden's clear, logical and practical mind which concerned itself with politics and the theory of authority in the state was consistent, and if it changed it showed a logical and orderly development. Thus Verrall did not concern himself much with Dryden's sincerity, but he regarded all his work as essentially occasional.

"But Dryden, we must not forget, is always apt to speak for the occasion, and his sentiments however strongly expressed often represent but a momentary feeling."[2]

In spite of the above statement, Verrall felt that from 1680 on, Dryden moved steadily towards Catholicism, and that even though he knew little about religion, he considered it important after the political events of 1680.[3] Even in "Absalom and Achitophel" Verrall believed that Dryden showed himself as a half-hearted Anglican for in that poem he evinced his distrust of reason and his entirely political approach to the religious problem.[4]

This attitude of Verrall's points the way to the attitude of modern

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1. A.W. Verrall, Lectures on Dryden (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 17-18.

2. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

3. Ibid., p. 22.

4. Ibid., p. 151.

critics such as Van Doren and Bredvold. However this new attitude towards Dryden is not confined to one or more isolated, if brilliant scholars and critics. It is the reflection of a revolution in taste.

In the thirty years that have passed since the work of the last critic we have reviewed, a change has come over the critical temper of the age, and modern criticism, both in its general attitude and its scholarly equipment, has been prepared to take a more sympathetic and more scholarly view of Dryden's career.

The Romantic and Victorian critics, on the whole, discredited the eighteenth century, and particularly Dryden, refusing to acknowledge his work as true poetry. Naturally this type of criticism lowered appreciation of Dryden, and not until recent times has his value been rediscovered. Indeed, the form, regularity and clarity of the correct neo-classicists has at last found appreciation in the twentieth century. The admirers of Dryden and Pope no longer feel alienated from sound taste as they did when the Romantics and Victorians dominated poetic criticism. R.S. Crane has said that the classicists are no longer on the defensive:

> It is not they but the surviving disciples of Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold who are out of harmony with the movement of modern criticism and taste.[1]

One of the foremost advocates in Dryden's cause has been T.S. Eliot. He explained Dryden's neglect as a result of nineteenth century criticism which thought of poetry as an illusive something coming under Arnold's definition of "conceived and composed in the soul." Those who held this limited conception of poetry regarded Dryden as prosaic.[2]

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1. R.S. Crane, A Collection of English Poems, 1660-1800 (New York, 1952), Introduction, pp. V-VI.

2. T.S. Eliot, Homage to John Dryden (London, 1927), pp. 13-23.

Hazlitt, whom Eliot reproved for his rash judgement of Dryden, had criticised Dryden with the romantic idea of a poet in mind:

> The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathizes with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature.[1]

However a poet to Dryden was one

> who to his natural endowments, of a large invention, a ripe judgement, and a strong memory, has joined the knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, and particularly moral philosophy, the mathematics, geography, and history, and with all these qualifications, is a born poet; knows and can practise the variety of numbers, and is master of the language in which he writes.[2]

The difference in standards is obvious, and anyone attempting to judge Dryden by Hazlitt's criteria will fail to appreciate him. Dryden was not only a master of satire and heroic couplet, but he made the English language useful and clear. Dryden's writing covered a wide range, drama, satire, essay, and translation. As Mark Van Doren has pointed out, poets ranging from Keats and Byron down to Edgar Allen Poe have expressed their indebtedness to Dryden.[3]

Besides this difference in literary criticism in the nineteenth century, another drawback to understanding Dryden had been an ignorance of his age, or his "climate of opinion." Modern scholarship has advanced in this field, and through careful research has given us the historical, political and philosophical background of the eighteenth century. L.I. Bred-

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1. William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Poets (Oxford, 1930), p. 106.

2. W.P. Ker, Essays, Vol. II (Oxford, 1900), p. 56.

3. Mark Van Doren, John Dryden (New York, 1946), pp. 233-266.

vold's study of Dryden is an excellent example of this scientific scholarship, and will be reviewed later.

Mark Van Doren's study of Dryden is illustrative of the new literary criticism, which based upon broader levels, seeks to bring Dryden to a full appreciation in the twentieth century.

Mark Van Doren's study of Dryden's conversion is concerned with the mind and learning of the poet. Van Doren believes that Dryden was well-read in various fields, and that although he was not a thorough scholar, he possessed an intellectual curiosity which was never inactive.

> But pleasure for him meant the satisfying of intellectual curiosity as well as it meant diversion; from the beginning, there can be no doubt, he was pleased to read widely and was avid of information.[1]

After leaving Westminster School where he received a decent foundation in the classics, Dryden entered Cambridge, then under Commonwealth guidance. It was there, says Van Doren, that he furthered his argumentation, and began to read Descartes and Hobbes.[2]

Dryden was devoted to the Latin classics -- Virgil, Lucretius, Ovid, Juvenal and Persius were his companions in "male virtue." His writing and thought were "tempered" say Van Doren, "with a rare Augustan awe," therefore, "Declarations of Indulgence and Test Acts were intrusive trifles, and the necessity of choosing between a James and a William but a dwarfish dilemma."[3]

Dryden practised scholastic discourse; he possessed a mind that was attracted to ratiocination as is evinced in his many plays and satires. It

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1. Ibid., p. 4.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

3. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

was the form that he perfected not the content. Dryden became familiar with the new science and philosophy; but as Van Doren points out he had little competence in critical evaluation of ideas.[1] The influence of Hobbes was widespread, especially after the Restoration. Dryden knew Hobbes' mechanism and the dogmatic materialism of Lucretius; and Van Doren thinks that he was attracted to them by disposition rather than by doctrine. He sums it up thus:

> He was by disposition rather than by doctrine a skeptic ... He never altogether capitulated to any system of politics or morals or aesthetics. He was born and died with an Olympian indifference to principles. YetHobbes and Lucretius both made powerful, permanent impressions upon his imagination. It was Hobbes who inspired his deep distrust of human beings in the mass and his lifelong intolerance of movements that threatened to disturb the peace.[2]

Dryden was consistent in his fear of democracy or any kind of innovation, despising any individual, priest or politician, who made such endeavors.[3]

As for the controversial poems, Van Doren thinks that they were occasional, but not trumped up for the moment. The pressing political and theological problems of the day were a normal stimulus to a man who was so much a part of his time.[4] Van Doren sees him as a party writer aligned to the court, but lacking any hard convictions on either church or state. He frequently emphasizes Dryden's lack of conviction and fear of disturbance:

> Such principles as he did possess were not so much principles as prejudices, all of which can be summed up by saying that he hated and feared disturbance of any kind.[5]

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1. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
2. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
3. Ibid., p. 16.
4. Ibid., p. 141.
5. Ibid., p. 143.

> He came it must be admitted at once, without conspicuous principles of his own concerning church or state.[1]

> Nor is it to be believed that he ever possessed a set of nicely distinguished, carefully pondered political ideas.[2]

In answering charges brought against Dryden's religious apostacy and political meanderings, Van Doren concludes that there is little need for discomposure as Dryden never held any principles that he would have died for, and he never made a pretense of so-doing.

> The better view seems latterly to be that there is little reason to be sorrowful over the behavior of a canny man of letters who never at any time pretended to be equipped with principles worth dying or becoming a pauper for.[3]

K.I. Bredvold's Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden was published in 1934, and is probably the most thorough work of its kind on Dryden, relating the poet's thought to his age. He studies the poet's thought from the standpoint of philosophical skepticism and political conservatism in the seventeenth century.

The philosophical skepticism so prevalent in the seventeenth century was founded upon the philosophy of the ancient Greek, Pyrrho, who had reached this period through the writings of Sextus Empiricus. This philosophy, especially as used by Dryden, was essentially anti-rationalistic. It did not entail religious unbelief, but on the contrary, since it abolished faith in man's reason it led to a reliance upon religious authority and conformity to national law.[4]

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1. Ibid., p. 142.

2. Ibid., pp. 142-143.

3. Ibid., p. 255.

4. Bredvold, Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, op. cit., pp. 16-46.

Montaigne was one of the most important sixteenth century exponents of this fideism or philosophical skepticism. Apparently Dryden was well read in montaigne; he referred to him several times in terms such as the "honest Montaigne."[1] Montainge's "Apology for Raymond Sebond" enjoyed a widespread popularity in England and France. The result of this essay was to destroy faith in man's intellect and reason, and to base religious certainty solely upon faith and revelation. Montaigne's utter depreciation of reason led him to a state of doubt:

> Appearances are everywhere equal; It is equally possible to take either side; Nothing seems true that may not seem untrue.[2]

However this state of doubt led Montaigne to a strong religious belief. His explanation of Pyrrhonism is also an expression of his religious faith:

> It presents man naked and empty confessing his natural weakness and ready to receive from on high some power not his own ... supressing his own judgement to leave more room for faith; neither disbelieving nor setting up any teaching contrary to the common observances; humble, obedient, docile, zealous, a sworn enemy to heresy and consequently free from the vain and irreligious beliefs introduced by the false sects. He is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave upon it.[3]

This was the argument used by seventeenth century Jesuits in counteracting Protestantism. Dryden used this argument against the Deists in "Religio Laici," thus aligning himself with the Roman Catholic apologists. The Roman church never sanctioned anti-rationalism, yet nevertheless, as Bredvold noted, it was the Catholics more than any other group who made use of fideism.[4]

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1. Works, V, Preface to All for Love, p. 355, Scott-Saintsbury.
2. J.M. Robertson, Essays of Montaigne (London, 1927), vol. I, p. 501.
3. Ibid., p. 502.
4. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 73.

According to Bredvold, Dryden was not an original thinker, but he studied the ideas of his age, and gradually developed consistent political and religious stands. His conversion to Catholicism was a natural outgrowth of fideism and Toryism. Bredvold considered that Dryden reached the culmination of his thought in 1682 with "Absalom and Achitophel" and "Religio Laici."

> "Religio Laici" and "The Hind and the Panther" are so closely allied in their philosophy that the earlier poem might be regarded as a sort of prelude or introduction to the later; both are basically skeptical and fideistic.[1]

After examining all the critics, early and modern ones turn with renewed interest and even with a sense of relief to the writings of Dryden himself. A fresh look at Dryden's own writing will throw light on the problem, and reveal the consistency of his thought, showing how his natural skepticism and political conservatism were prerequisites to his acceptance of Catholicism.

Political thought in Dryden and in the men of his age could not be separated from religious thought. Even Dryden's earliest, and apparently purely political poems are based upon assumptions of a religious sort and make allusions to theological and religious concepts.

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1. Ibid., p. 121.

II

Dryden's Political and Philosophical Thought

If Dryden's early poems are based upon religious assumptions, in a study of his thought it is fitting to begin with "Stanzas on Cromwell," and "Astraea Redux." The first was written for the leader of the Commonwealth, the second for the restored king, yet they are really not inconsistent. Both poems praise one thing: a strong leader, an authority that can maintain peace. Cromwell was praised as a strong leader, but his political doctrines are never mentioned. As Scott has said, Dryden treated Cromwell with a "singular and happy delicacy."[1] Dryden did not touch upon the civil war or any of the methods by which Cromwell had attained his power, but he did compliment the effects of that power. In this early poem Dryden expressed the desirability of public peace above all other good. He repeated this idea frequently in his later works.

> Peace was the Prize of all his Toil and Care,
> Which war had banish'd and did now restore:
> (Stanzas on Cromwell, ll. 61-62)

> No civil Broils have since his Death arose,
> But Factions now, by Habit, does obey;
> (Stanzas on Cromwell, ll. 141-142)

Sir Walter Raleigh has said that "Dryden believed in authority in religion, and monarchy in the State, even when the monarch's name was Cromwell."[2]

Dryden with the nation rejoiced at Charles' restoration. He undoubtedly had reasons other than political for joining the Royalist ranks. Dryden was above all things a man of letters, and as Charles II and his court

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, I, p. 6.

2. Walter Raleigh, Some Authors (Oxford, 1923), p. 166.

offered opportunities for literary pursuits which the Commonwealth had denied, this was an added reason for writing "Astraea Redux."[1]

Dryden probably never sympathised with the Puritan belief in which he was reared. Even in "Astraea Redux" Dryden associated Puritan dissent and political unrest.

> For his long absence Church and State did groan;
> Madness the Pulpit, Faction seiz'd the Throne:
> (Astraea Redux, ll. 21-22)

It is more likely that Dryden experienced a strong reaction against his Puritan background. Sir Walter Raleigh has suggested that this was the case, as a study of the history of Puriten dissension in the seventeenth century was "enough to make an anarchist sick of freedom."[2] It may have been this early reaction against Puritanism which started Dryden in the direction towards conservatism and authority.

The ideas behind the political poems give evidence of a skeptical point of view, part of which was rooted in Dryden's personality and experience, and which was nourished by his reading and conversational familiarity with the works of Hobbes.[3]

The critic will find Hobbes' philosophy of great importance in treating Dryden's skepticism. Hobbes' skeptical and sophisticated defence of authority was well-suited to the eclectic aristocrats of Charles II's court, and Dryden became familiar with it early in his career, for it was congenial

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, p. 42.

2. Walter Raleigh, op. cit., p. 165.

3. Besides evidence in Dryden's plays of Hobbes' philosophy, his mention of Hobbes in essays, shows that he had read Hobbes. See his "Preface to the Fables" in W.P. Ker's Essays, Vol. II, p. 252. However this essay was written in 1700, and we have no earlier evidence of Dryden's attitude towards Hobbes.

to his own temperament as well as to that of the age. Although Hobbes' philosophy destroyed rationalism and often led to free-thinking, Hobbes, himself, submitted to the state church. He, like Montaigne, sought sanctuary in conforming to traditional law and religious authority. To Hobbes, religion was essentially an instrument, subservient to government.[1] Dryden's treatment of the church in "Religio Laici" was in agreement with the ideas of Hobbes.

Courthope has pointed out that Dryden was concerned with the political consequences of religion; and from this couplet in "Religio Laici" one can see that the purpose or end of church and state was to preserve peace.[2]

> For points obscure are of small use to learn,
> But common quiet is mankind's concern.
> (Religio Laici, ll. 449-450.)

This "common quiet" or peace, was what Hobbes considered the main objective of government. Thus Courthope made this comment upon the preceeding couplet: "Thus Hobbes' conclusion is reached from different premises."[3]

Hobbes regarded men as creatures guided only by their passions and an over-whelming desire for power. Government was necessary, then, as a means of self-protection and peace.[4] Men by common consent made a covenant in which they relinquished certain rights for their own benefit. This government, in order to preserve peace, needed to be absolute, for Hobbes

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1. W.G. Pogson Smith, Hobbes's Leviathon (Oxford, 1929), Introduction, pp. vii-xxxi.

2. W.J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (London, 1903), Vol. III, p. 514.

3. Ibid., p. 516.

4. William Molesworth, Hobbes' Works (London, 1861), Vol. III, p. 153.

said, "Covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."[1] After the covenant was once made, the subjects were bound to obedience, for obedience to an absolute power was the only way to obtain freedom from insecurity and war. These views, Hobbes summed up in his definition of a Commonwealth which was "one person, of whose acts, a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the authors, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defense."[2]

It is obvious, then, that Dryden with his bent towards skepticism and authoritarianism, found Hobbes' philosophy agreeable in many ways.

Perhaps the most frequently quoted evidence of Hobbes' influence on Dryden, is Dryden's distrust of mankind en masse. In his very first poems Dryden revealed his dislike for the mob and democracy. However it must be remembered that democracy in the seventeenth century had much the same stigma attached to it that Communism has today. Democracy in the seventeenth century was associated with the lower classes and religious dissension.[3]

Dryden never disliked men individually, but collectively he saw them as a threat to peaceful living which was his main concern. In his old age Dryden expressed his ideal of a peaceful life in an epistle to his kinsman, John Driden.

> How Blessed is He, who leads a Country Life,
> Unvex'd with anxious cares, and void of Strife!
> Who studying Peace, and shunning Civil Rage,
> Enjoy'd his Youth, and now enjoys his Age.
> (To My Honour'd Kinsman, John Driden, ll. 1-4)

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1. Ibid., p. 154.

2. Ibid., p. 158.

3. New English Dictionary (Oxford, 1897), Vol. III, p. 183, "1664. H. More, Myst. Iniq. 514. 'Presbytery verges nearer toward Populacy or Democracy."

Dryden praised Cromwell as a peace-maker and he hailed Charles II as a restorer of order. In welcoming Charles, Dryden described a rather terrible political situation which had developed under mob rule.

> The rabble now such freedom did enjoy,
> As Winds at Sea, that use it to destroy:
> Blind as the Cyclops, and as wild as he,
> They own'd a lawless savage Libertie,
> Like that our painted Ancestors so priz'd
> Ere Empires Arts their Breasts had Civiliz'd.
> (Astraea Redux, ll. 44-49)

Yet many of the phrases Dryden used to describe the mob such as "the many headed beast," the "rabble" and "drawn to the dregs of a democracy," were commonplaces of an aristocratic court. In political poems such as "Absalom and Achitophel," Dryden changes these commonplaces of courtly speech into something larger and more meaningful. The common man was not of the "rabble" because of his lowly station, but because he was a threat to the king, law, and peace of the country. When Dryden, in "Absalom and Achitophel," called the English "headstrong, moody, murm'ring race," he referred to the factions who took advantage of the Popish Plot to exclude the rightful heir from the throne. He also referred to the many other instances in their past history at which times they had caused public turmoil. He expressed his contempt of them when he said that he would mention only the nobility or prominent persons who had shared in the scheme to exclude James from the throne.

> Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place,
> Whom kings no title gave, and God no grace.
> (Absalom and Achitophel, ll. 579-580)

As these poems reveal certain inclinations towards Hobbism one can find further and earlier evidence in the plays which served in a way, as Dryden's poetical apprenticeship.

Many traces of Hobbes' philosophy may be found in Dryden's plays,

two points of which are particularly important: monarchial absolutism and necessitarianism. The presence of Hobbesian ideas in the plays which were mostly written in the 1670's, shows that Dryden was alert to contemporary thought, and that he gave preference to skeptical thought. As Dryden wrote his plays under the patronage of the courtly circle, it probably was only natural that he included Hobbesian material as Hobbes was popular with the court. Bredvold remarked that monarchial absolutism was a necessary part of heroic drama, and therefore, could not be taken as inconclusive evidence of Dryden's belief.

> A narrow political outlook was almost inevitable in heroic drama and is common enough in the plays of Orrery, for instance, who has hardly, been suspected of an admiration for Hobbes.[1]

It is also true that in drama, certain statements may be the expression or delineation of a character. For instance, Dryden in his preface to Tyrannic Love, defended himself against the charge of irreligion by explaining that Maximin, the hero, was merely speaking in the character of a heathen prince when he defied the Gods of Rome.[2] The appearance of certain ideas in his plays, therefore, does not mean that Dryden accepted them.

The Conquest of Granada was written in 1669. In this play the hero, Almanzor, frequently gives expression to Hobbesian absolutest principles. In the first act Almanzor says:

> My laws are made but only for my sake;
> No king against himself a law can make.[3]

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1. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 66.

2. Scott-Saintsbury, II, p. 377.

3. Ibid., IV, Act I, sc. 1, p. 43.

To Hobbes any division of power in the Commonwealth was fatal. The king being absolute was not subject to the laws of the State:

> For to be subject to laws, is to be subject to the Commonwealth, that is to the sovereign representative, that is to himself; which is not subjection, but freedom from the laws.[1]

In the second part of this play the king gives expression to what have been referred to earlier as the commonplaces of aristocratic speech. These lines are also typical of the Hobbesian distrust of the people.

> Boeb. "See what the many-headed beast demands-
> Cursed is that king, whose honour's in their hands.
> In senates, either they too slowly grant,
> Or saucily refuse to aid my want;
> And, when their thrift has ruined me in war,
> They call their insolence my want of care.[2]

These sentiments were probably very clear to a court suffering from the intrigues of a Parliament that tried to control the king by limiting his grants.

There are some passages in The Conquest of Granada which reveal Dryden's distrust of reason or his conception of a limited reason. This is further evidence of his interest in skepticism.

> Abdal. — Ah, why did heaven leave man so weak defence,
> To trust frail reason with the rule of sense;
> 'Tis overpoised and kicked up in the air,
> While sense weighs down the scale, and keeps it there;
> O'er, like a captive, 'Tis borne away,
> And forced to count nonsense its own rebels' sway.[3]

Almanzor makes another statement in regard to reason that was later used by Dryden in his argumentative poems.

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1. Molesworth, op. cit., p. 313.

2. Ibid., Iv, Part II, Act I, sc. ii, p. 130.

3. Ibid., Part I, Act III, sc. i, p. 61.

By reason, man a godhead may disern,
But how he would be worshipped cannot learn.[1]

In The Spanish Friar (1681) Dryden made use of Hobbes' theory of necessity. Hobbes' theory denied free-will as he considered man as the victim of his passions, and guided solely by his desire for power. These same appetites were the only criteria of good and evil, "for these words of good, and evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves."[2] These ideas are recognised in these lines from The Spanish Friar:

Leo. O that it were! I would not do this crime,
And yet, like heaven, permit it to be done.
The priesthood grossly cheat us with free-will:
Our actions then are neither good nor ill,
Since from external causes they proceed;
Our passions, -- fear and anger, love and hate, --
Mere senseless engines that are moved by fate.
Like ships on stormy seas, without a guide
Tossed by the winds, and driven by the tide.[3]

The Spanish Friar is also of interest as a satire upon the Catholic priesthood. This play appeared soon after the Popish Plot when anti-Catholic feeling was high. The play was dedicated to a Protestant, Lord Haughten. Christie felt that Dryden may have written this play out of resentment to the court which had failed to pay his pension regularly; but Scott believed that he merely chose a popular subject which had appeal to his audience.[4] This was the only play prohibited by James II after he came to

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1. Ibid., Part II, Act IV, sc. iii, p. 190.

2. Molesworth, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 41.

3. Scott-Saintsbury, VI, Act III, sc. iii, p. 467.

4. Ibid., pp. 397-398.

the throne, for it was a strong satire on the Catholic priesthood. Dryden distrusted all priests as he regarded them as trouble makers and a threat to peace. Lord Macaulay has said that, "if any sentiment was deeply fixed in him, that sentiment was an aversion to priests of all persuasions, Lewites, Augurs, Muftes, Roman Catholic divines, Presbyterian divines, divines of the Church of England."[1] However, Dryden's Friar Dominic is made to appear as a witty and entertaining rascal who evokes laughter rather than hatred. All the satire is levelled at the friar's rather dissolute character, rather than at religious doctrine. This is a typical example of Dryden's treatment of the Friar:

> Ped. I met a reverend, fat, old gauty friar, —
> With a paunch swoln so high, his double chin
> Might rest upon it; a true son of the church;
> Fresh-coloured, and well thriven on his trade, —[2]

Drydens plays, which were his early work, prepared him for his later poetical achievements. Mark Van Doren said that it was while writing his plays that Dryden "became fully aware of the energy which is latent in the heroic couplet."[3] It is true that he perfected his metrical and augumentative techiniques while writing drama, but he also worked with all the important philosophical, political and religious ideas of his time. During this playright apprenticeship, then, he prepared the ground for the thinking which he was to turn to in his mature religious poetry.

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1. Macaulay I, op. cit., p. 657.

2. Scott-Saintsbury, VI, pp. 417-418.

3. Van Doren, op. cit., p. 85.

III

1

Historical Background

In the seventeenth century a man of letters like Dryden could not possibly separate his literary output, his plays, his poems, and his critical essays, from the political and religious situation. Both their underlying philosophy and the practical purpose for which they were written were intimately connected with politics. In order, therefore, to understand Dryden's work as a man of letters as well as to know the truth about his religious and political convictions, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the political history of the period. It is also necessary to understand the position of English Catholics during the reigns of Charles II and James II. When Dryden became Catholic he attached himself to a group that had been persecuted in the past, and that had only a doubtful future to look forward to. This historical summary is a background and preparation for "Religio Laici" and "The Hind and the Panther."

The proportion of Catholics to the population of England at this time is difficult to determine. However there are no definite figures on the number of Nonconformists during the seventeenth century but it appears that there number was significant. G.L. Turner in his Original Records of Early Nonconformity made this estimate based on an early report of Bishop Sheldon:

"There final result is to give the proportion of conformists to protestant nonconformists as about twenty-two to one, and papists as about 178 to one. They are, however, very incomplete and they were put together in the different dioceses in various quite different ways. Worse still it was known that Sheldon's purpose was to prepare for new repression by proving how few

were the dissenters?[1] Because of the harsh penal laws the number of Catholic priests was also difficult to estimate. The Catholic Record Society Miscellanea, vii (1911) estimates the number of priests at about one hundred. Of course there were English Catholic religious establishments on the continent which were a potential Catholic power?[2] Trevelyan stated that the Whigs exaggereted the number of Catholics and that fear of their uprising was ridiculous.[3] These Catholics were exclusively members of the aristocracy and strong royalists. In 1642 they had been among the foremost to shed their blood for Charles I.[4]

Hilaire Belloc considered that even though the number of Catholics recorded was incorrect and small, Catholicism was an important force in this period. Penal laws made the practice of the religion impossible except for a very few aristocrats who could afford to risk it in secret. Yet there was a large group that could be termed "Catholic minded." This group attended the Established Church, yet they would have practiced their original faith if the law had permitted them to.[5] It was not unusual that this group was large as up until 1615 England had been Catholic in thought. The English reformation was primarily political in that the king became titular head of the state church rather than the pope. It was not doctrinal differences that had caused this break, but nationalism. Later on in the reigns of James I and Charles I Calvanistic thought crept in and caused a doctrinal division. But this division had not occured long ago, and during the reign

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1. Clark, op. cit., p. 26.
2. Ibid., p. 26.
3. Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 389.
4. Feiling, op. cit., p. 44.
5. Hilaire Belloc, Cromwell (London, 1934), p. 85.

of Charles II there were many who secretly held to the remnants of Catholic thought.[1] Trevelyan had this to say about the "Catholic-minded" group:

> The 'Church papists,' as those were called who consented to attend the national worship, could not legally be distinguished from the Protestants, and were therefore a wholly incalculable force.[2]

Penal laws against Catholics during the reign of Charles II were generally extensions of laws established during the reign of Elizabeth. The most important Elizabethan penal law was the Act of Uniformity which fined everyone a shilling who failed to attend the state church.[3] Then in 1585 all priests were outlawed, and anyone protecting them was liable to death.[4]

These laws, however, were never very stringently enforced. In the time of James I, in the agricultural districts of Trent and Avon there were entire villages protected by Catholic aristocrats. Poor Catholics who could not afford to pay the uniformity fine sought protection under Catholic landlords.[5] These landlords, however, were excluded from any office in local or national government. They were also forbidden to travel five miles from their estates without a magistrate's permission.[6] It should be recalled that although any priest in England along with his harborer was legally subject to death, James I never approved of the few hangings that did occur.[7]

In dealing with the English Catholics of this period it is necessary to make a distinction between the Jesuits and the secular clergy. From the

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1. Ibid., pp. 82-90.
2. Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 87.
3. Stephan, op. cit., p. 483.
4. Ibid., p. 485.
5. Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 83.
6. Ibid., p. 85.
7. Ibid., p. 86.

time of Elizabeth the secular Catholics were always moderate and willing to submit to the law for the sake of peace and their existing freedom. The Jesuits, on the other hand, were actively intent upon converting England. After the reformation, a Catholic reaction had set in Europe, and the Jesuits were occupied with making new converts. James I by making peace with Spain renewed the hopes of the Jesuits for a Catholic England. However this era of good feeling was spent after a group of fanatical Catholics were discovered in an attempt to blow up Parliament. This plot was in accord with the Jesuit teaching that even the overthrowing of government was commendable if it served as a means of conversion.[1] After this Gunpowder Plot, the penal laws were rigorously enforced. An oath of supremacy was enacted which was to distinguish between seculars and the Jesuits. This oath demanded the renouncing of the supremacy of the pope, and his right to depose kings. The Jesuits refused to take this oath, but the seculars led by the priest, Blackwell, submitted to it.[2] This distinction between the moderate and Jesuit remained through the reign of James II.

The Jesuits from 1660 to 1688 continued their proselytizing activities. However, after the Restoration, Catholicism, and particularly Jesuit Catholicism, was always associated with the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV of France. Charles, as it will be explained later, attempted to mitigate the penal laws against Catholics, and although he failed in his attempts, the penal laws except for the few years after the Popish Plot, were never strictly enforced. Regardless, the most important point to make concerning the status of Catholics, even in the reign of James II, was that they lived under a continual insecurity, fearing a possible reaction against their group. This fear was real, and based upon many unfortunate experiences in their past history, the

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1. Ibid., p. 88-89.
2. Ibid., p. 89.

latest being, of course, the Commonwealth persecutions. Catholics, then, along with Royalists welcomed the restoration of Charles.

Charles was restored to his throne in 1660. The new king was hailed with a display of flowers, flags and fountains of wine. This popular enthusiasm was more than any of his successors had known.[1]

When Charles ascended to the throne, the Parliament was predominantly Presbyterian, and while the army remained, it was Monck rather than Charles who held sway. One of the kings first acts was to propose an indulgence measure. Parliament led by the Latitudinarian, Baxter, downed the measure. Parliament was dissolved and elections held in 1661. The new Houses were composed of members who were cavalier adherents of the Church of England. Under the chancellor, Clarendon, they proceeded to pass a number of laws alien to toleration; laws calculated to supress the Nonconformists.[2]

Two laws of the Clarendon Code, the Act of Uniformity and the Corporation Act, excluded the Presbyterians from a legal position as part of the Established Church, and made them dissenters. These Acts demanded that all who wished to be members of a municipal body should renounce the Covenant and conform to the Anglican liturgy and Book of Common Prayer, all of which a conscientous Presbyterian could not do. The Book of Common Prayer had been recently revised, and in its new form it contained material objectionable to the Low Church party. Episcopal ordination, as opposed to Presbyterian classical ordination, became necessary for the securing of any office in the Church of England.[3] Those who had been dissenters or those who were made dissenters

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1. Macaulay, History of England, op. cit., p. 156.

2. Osmund Airy, Charles II (London, 1904), pp. 165-176.

3. J.F. Stephan, History of the Criminal Law of England (London 1883), p. 481.

by the Uniformity and Corporation Acts, were confined further by the Conventicle Act. This act, a renewal of an earlier act, was reinforced in 1670 with the pretext of putting down a Quaker disturbance.[1]

1: Ibid., p. 21.

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Regardless of whether Charles approved of these acts or not, he was continually under such pressure that time and again he was forced to submit to Parliament. The 1660 Parliament fixed a hereditary revenue for Charles from too sources, the Customs and Excise. This revenue, though secure for the lifetime of Charles, was never sufficient to meet his expenditures, or to pay off the pre-restoration debts.[1] At first the revenue supplied Charles with between £600,000 and £700,000 yearly, and even under Danby's surveillance in 1674 and 1675 it did not exceed £1,400,000.[2] Parliament held the purse-strings and sought to keep Charles under control by limiting his grants. It was probably for this reason that Charles turned to other sources for money. His entire foreign policy was guided by the desire to gain freedom from parliamentary restrictions.[3]

Early in his reign Charles had tried to get aid from Holland through a trade alliance in return for which he would have received two million pounds. But Parliament renewed the Navigation Act of 1651, preventing the alliance. Charles' relations with France began with his marriage to the Infanta Catherine of Portugal. Louis XIV favored Portugal in her fight for independence from Spain, but the treaty of the Pyrenees prevented him from directly doing so. When Charles married Catherine, England promised arms and ships to Portugal, and Louis gave Charles £80,000 to meet this promise. Charles also sold Dunkirk to the French, at this time, for £200,000.[4]

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1. David Ogg, England in the Reign of Charles II (Oxford, 1934), p. 158.
2. Keith Feiling, A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714 (Oxford, 1924), p. 156.
3. Airy, op. cit., p. 185.
4. Ibid., pp. 185-187.

At the time of Charles' restoration France under Louis XIV was the dominant power in Europe. The absolutism of Catholic government could be seen in Italy, Austria and Spain, but the all-over influence of France was greatest. This French influence was especially strong in England where the court of Charles II reflected French taste in drama, poetry and manners.[1] Charles himself had a French Catholic mother, and during his exile he was in close contact with the French. He, no doubt, envied the military prowess and stability of Louis' government. He saw that the Catholic religion was more condusive to a scheme of absolute monarchy than the Protestant which was always splitting into recalcitrant republican factions. His own father met his death at the hands of such dissenters, and Charles would have subdued them if it had been possible for him to do so.[2]

Therefore, early in his reign, Charles negotiated with Pope Innocent concerning a plan whereby the Church of England might enter the Catholic Communion, yet maintain its national authority. The Pope was not anxious to make such an agreement as he saw the insubordination of the Gallicon Church in France. Louis XIV and his Jesuits chase their own bishops and made their religion serve state ends.[3]

Then in January of 1669 Charles met with James and three ministers, Clifford, Arundel and Arlington, to initiate his Grand Design which was brought forth in the Treaty of Dover. Henrietta, Charles' sister, who was married to the brother of Louis XIV, encouraged Charles to negotiate with Louis. By the terms of the secret treaty of Dover, England and France were to divide Holland; and Louis was to provide money and arms to Charles when

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1. Courthope, op. cit., pp. 452-455.
2. F.C. Turner, James II (New York, 1948), pp. 371-372.
3. G.M. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts (New York, 1924), p. 365.

he should announce his conversion to Catholicism with the intention of making it the state religion.[1] Charles' cavalier Parliament had passed the Clarendon Code against his wishes, and had limited his grants, so he was in need of Louis' subsidies. Two members of the Cabal, Shaftesbury and Buckingham, were kept ignorant of the secret treaty. A public treaty was signed in 1671 in which the terms of the conversion were omitted.[2] Thus Charles' reliance upon French subsidies was begun. Charles may have been honest in his religious convictions at this time, but he was far too intelligent to risk a declaration of conversion which would certainly have been fatal; he realized fully the impossibility of making England Catholic.[3] Even English Catholics as a whole would not have favored this design as they had already suffered enough during the last revolution, and they were not willing to throw away their last possessions on an impossible scheme.[4] Besides, Louis XIV was forewarding his own plans for domination by this alliance. For, by binding England to aid in crushing the Dutch, he would reduce the power of Spain, his powerful enemy.[5]

From the time of the Treaty of Dover, the English nation was united in the fear of Catholicism, France, and absolute monarchy. Parliament acted upon this fear, and the English people were stirred up by anyone or anything that held connection with these three factors.[6] It is also significant that from the time of the Treaty of Dover down to 1678, Charles received regular

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1. Ibid., p. 365.

2. Ibid., p. 372.

3. Turner, op. cit., p. 99.

4. Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 368-369.

5. G.N. Clark, The Later Stuarts; 1660-1714 (Oxford, 1934), p. 72.

6. Ibid., p. 76.

grants from Louis, for which he was forced to make large concessions.[1]

Because of these concessions to France, among other things, Charles' character has been severely criticised. Lord Macaulay censured the character of Charles, not only denouncing him as a libertine, but asserting that he was not capable of assuming state duties.

> He was utterly without ambition. He detested business, and would sooner have abdicated his crown than have undergone the trouble of really directing the administration.[2]

Burnet was somewhat more leniant in his description of Charles. Burnet acknowledged Charles' capability in state affairs and his wide learning, but he also felt that the king's preoccupation with unsanctioned pleasures contributed to the failure of his reign.[3] Of the modern historians, Arthur Bryant disagrees with the former interpretations. Bryant presents Charles as an assiduous worker who was wholly capable of dealing with state affairs, particulary because of his keen insight into men and politics. According to Bryant, unless Charles was present at committee meetings nothing was accomplished. He was also tireless in his attention to interviews. When Lauderdale was having difficulties in Scotland in 1663, the king, himself, read all the numerous dispatches in that regard.[4] Osmund Airy, another modern biographer, has this to say of Charles' character: "His guide was not duty; it was ease, and amusement, and lust. The cup of pleasure was filled deep for him, and he grasped it with both hands."[5] Because of his insight into human nature, Charles was willing to make concessions which the stubborn James considered a weakness, but which was probably the only course to be taken if he was to retain his throne and preserve a semblance of order in those chaotic

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1. Ibid., pp. 72-73.
2. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 159.
3. Thomas Stackhouse, An Abridgement of Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Times (London, 1922), pp. 32-33.
4. Arthur Bryant, King Charles II (New York, 1931), pp. 162-164.
5. Airy, op. cit., p. 416.

times.[1]

At the beginning of the Third Dutch war in 1672, Charles had declared an Act of Indulgence while parliament was not conveyned. This Act was declared illegal when Parliament reconveyned in 1673. Toleration instead of furthering the war effort, endangered it. The French alliance was suspect, and all England feared the Catholic menace. This Indulgence Act allowed Protestant Dissenters freedom of public worship, and Catholics freedom to worship in their homes.[1] Lord Macaulay believed that the controversy over the Indulgence Act involved the question of the King's right to the suspending power which was to decide whether England was to go in the direction of a limited monarchy or a despotism. The majority opinion in the House of Commons was that the king's suspending power could be applied only to secular affairs; but as the king was also head of the state church this was not a valid objection. Charles was within his rights in using the suspending power, as other kings had done so before him; but Macaulay said, "all Englishmen who valued liberty and law, saw with uneasiness the deep inroad which the prerogative had made into the province of the Legislature."[2] Turner felt that the Catholicity of James, who was heir to the throne, was one of the foremost causes for the failure of the Indulgence Act.[3] Parliament had voted a grant for the Dutch war, but refused to deliver it until the Indulgence Act was withdrawn. Counseled by Louis and Arlington, Charles withdrew the act in favor of the war.[4]

Having done away with the Indulgence Act, Parliament under the guidance of Shaftesbury proceeded to pass the Test Act which provided that every person

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1. Turner, op. cit., p. 93-94.
2. Turner, op. cit., p. 224.
3. Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 206-207.
4. Turner, op. cit., p. 91.

holding a civil or military office should receive communion in the Church of England and take the oaths of supremacy and allegiance. No Roman Catholic could take this oath. Therefore the Duke of York was forced to resign his position as Lord High Admiral of the English fleet.[1]

The first attempt to exclude James from the throne were made at this time. Buckingham and Arlington regarded James as their personal enemy and feared revenge at his accession to the throne. They encouraged Charles to divorce his childless queen, and to marry again so that he might provide an heir to the throne.[2] James was forced to admit his faith by refusing to take the Test Act. Even the Anglicans were disturbed by James' defiant attitude.[3]

All authorities seem to agree that the Duke of York was above all thing obstinate and unrelenting in his actions, particularly in his insistence upon the absolutism of monarchy. It was for this reason, said Burnet, that he held securely to the Catholic faith; he saw it as the best insurance against rebellious subjects. James, through his stubborness and lack of insight, failed to see the impossibility of establishing Catholicism in England.[4] Sir James Mackintosh felt that James' political ambition and his religious convictions were so combined that it would have been difficult to determine which motivated his actions.[5] Lord Macaulay who decried Charles' lack of industriousness, had this to say of James: "though a libertine, James was diligent, methodical, and fond of authority and business. His understanding was singularly slow and narrow, and his temper obstinate, harsh

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1. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 208.

2. Turner, op. cit., p. 90.

3. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 186.

4. Burnet, op. cit., p. 2.

5. J. Mackintosh, History of the Revolution in England in 1688 (Phil.,1835),p.197.

and unforgiving."[1]

James appears, from the Restoration forward, to have been unpopular in England. His personality coupled to his religion probably accounts for his unpopularity.[2] Even before his conversion he was under suspicion for his religious beliefs. Early in 1659, Father Talbot and other Jesuits felt that James would be more suitable for their purposes than Charles.[3] James did not share Charles' diffidence to the Grand Design. He accepted it as his life's work; and it was his stubborn adherence to this design that finally caused his downfall.[4] Therefore those characteristics which distinguished James as Duke of York were hardened and completely narrowed when he ascended the throne as James II. It would probably not be asserting too much if one was to say that it was solely James' stubborn, fanatical policy that brought about the revolution in 1688. Returning to James as Duke of York, it is significant to notice the part he played in the Popish Plot, and the effect it had upon him.

Anti-Catholic feeling culminated in the Popish Plot of September, 1678. Titus Oates was the prophet who exposed this Jesuit connivance. Oates, the son of an Anabaptist minister, had spent some time in the continent in the service of the Jesuits; at the time of the plot he was Chaplain to the Duke of Norfolk. Oates said that while in Europe he aided the Jesuits in their plans to convert England. A great meeting of Jesuits was said to have been held in London, at which time plans were made to kill Charles and to give the throne to James. Burnet stated that all the evidence was rather on the wild

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1. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 160.

2. Turner, op. cit., p. 97.

3. Ibid., p. 96.

4. Ibid., p. 98.

and unsubstantial side, but the public, so enraged at Popery, was anxious to believe the most lurid testimonies that supported their hate.[1] The day before Oates presented his testimony to the council he presented it to Sir Edmondbury Godfrey, Justice of Peace. Some days later Godfrey was found murdered. Oates brought forth witnesses who accused the Jesuits of the murder. Chief Justice Scroggs moved by public zeal prosecuted the accused; but it was significant that all of them went to the scaffold protesting their innocence.[2]

At the time of this plot James was more unpopular than ever. He had not attended the Established Chruch for two years, remaining as firm as ever in his Catholic convictions. Oates' friend Kirkby warned the king of a plot against his life. Charles merely told Danby to investigate, and then went to Windsor with James. During James' absence, his confessor, Father Bedingfield received some forged letters which were intended to incriminate the priest. Bedingfield took the letters to James who may have spoken to Charles on the subject. At any rate James was aware of the plot, and he warned his wife's former secretary, Coleman, to destroy his correspondence with French Jesuits. Coleman was an ambitious Catholic who had kept in close contact with the French delegates who paid him to report the proceedings in Commons and to apply bribes. He was fully devoted to the task of converting England through French channels. Coleman unwisely refused to burn all his correspondence and it was discovered, bringing him to the scaffold. There was nothing in them that intimated a plan to kill the king, they contained statements involving James and verifying a scheme for the introduction of Catholicism in England. According to Turner, James' actions since the

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1. Burnet, op. cit., pp. 152-155.
2. Ibid., pp. 150-160.

Restoration were primarily responsible for the Popish Plot and the subsequent Exclusion Bills.[1] Lord Macaulay affirmed this hatred of Catholicism which James symbolized. "But neither national pride nor anxiety for public liberty had so great an influence on the popular mind as hatred of the Roman Catholic religion."[2]

When the Plot had reached the point that the Queen was accused of planning to poison the King, Charles dissolved Parliament. Shortly before Parliament was dissolved, it suspended James from the bill preventing Catholics from sitting in parliament by only two votes.[3] Burnet's statement that "Parliament was totally persuaded of the thing," seemed true.[4] The next Parliament was elected in 1679, the elections going against Charles and James. Charles sent James to Brussels as a precautionary measure, assuring him that he would uphold him as his rightful successor.[5]

This new Parliament introduced the first Exclusion Bill. Shaftesbury took advantage of popular sentiment and pushed on the Exclusion measures. Shaftesbury's party, Trevelyan said, "was a combination of part of the aristocracy with the middle class to wrest political power from the Crown and to force the squirearchy and the bishops to grant toleration to dissent. To obtain these ends the Whigs played upon the popular fear of Catholicism which they themselves shared."[6]

Shaftesbury, the leading figure in the Exclusion party, was described thus by Burnet: "a man of popular eloquence, who could mix the facetious and the furious way of arguing very agreeably, and who had got the art of governing parties, and making himself the head of them, just as he pleased ...

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1. Turner, op. cit., pp. 144-146.
2. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 180.
3. Feiling, op. cit., p. 175.
4. Burnet, op. cit., p. 162.
5. Ibid., p. 162.
6. Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 389.

After all, his chief strength lay in knowing mankind, their understandings and tempers, and in applying himself to them so dexterously that though, by his changing sides so often, it was visible he was not to be depended upon."[1] Shaftesbury argued that exclusion was admissable through precedence, and that it was particularly admisseable in the present case because James' Catholicism was a danger to the common good. Government, he believed, was designed for the benefit of the subjects rather than for that of the ruler.[2]

Those who opposed Shaftesbury felt that exclusion was unlawful regardless of precedent. If James' religion was dangerous, Parliament could limit his powers respectively. The proposed limitations would prevent James from using his prerogative of veto, from making appointments to offices, and from raising any military forces without the permission of Parliament.[3] The Tories also felt that an attempt at exclusion could lead to civil disorder, as James' followers and the Scotch royalists might come to his aid.[4]

The first Exclusion Bill was introduced in November, 1679. Only three members of Commons opposed it, but the Lords downed it by thirty-three votes.[5]

It was in 1681 that Shaftesbury and Buckingham took the Duke of Monmouth under their care and appointed him the successor to Charles. Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles, was a favorite of his father, and popular with his countrymen. Shaftesbury's party compaigned with vigor, and Monmouth toured England in the cause. About this time a Presbyterian plot to assassinate Charles was discovered. This plot served to weaken the Whig position along with other factors: Shaftesbury had threatened Ormonde, Charles' faith-

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1. Burnet, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
2. Ibid., pp. 164-165.
3. Feiling, op. cit., p. 183.
4. Burnet, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
5. Feiling, op. cit., p. 183.

ful director in Ireland, and Lord Russell had intimated that would be better if James were to suffer death than that the country should suffer from his accession. All this made for a Tory reaction; even moderate Whigs were driven to the Tory party.[1] Charles had reached the limit of his leniancy. Shaftesbury was saved from being arraigned for treason by the London Whigs; but the reaction against his party was so strong that he fled to Holland where he died. Monmouth was forgiven, but he was soon at his former activities again, after which he went into voluntary exile.[2] James who had been sent to Scotland during the Exclusion uproar, returned to England. Charles, made bolder by the Tory reaction, reinstated James in his council.[3]

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1. Ibid., pp. 176-180.

2. Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

3. Ibid., pp. 211-212.

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Charles died in 1685 while the nation still felt the Tory reaction; therefore James' accession was rather well received in spite of his unpopularity. The first problem that confronted James was the matter of revenue. Parliament had settled the customs revenue upon Charles only for his lifetime. James needed money and Parliament was not in session: merchants complained that their goods remained in storehouses because the taxes were not collected. James, advised by Jeffreys, used his prerogative by declaring that he would continue to collect the customs as Charles had done. Along with this declaration he found it necessary to announce the forthcoming elections for Parliament.[1]

Not only did James regret having to call Parliament because of the restrictions it would place upon him, but he also feared to displease Louis XIV. James, like Charles, found it necessary to appeal to French aid. Louis soon came forward with money, for he was accustomed to the parsimonious English Parliaments. Part of the French money was to be used to bribe members of the Commons.[2] Lord Macaulay avowed that James made himself a slave to France, but if so he was a reluctant slave. James believed in the prerogative and in the absolute monarchy, yet Parliament made its function that of restricting his power by refusing grants. Thus James was forced to seek foreign aid. Louis was anxious to keep the English king in this precarious position as it prevented England from becoming a threatening power to France.[3]

The elections for the new Parliament were extremely favorable to the

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1 Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 349-350.

2. Ibid., pp. 350-355.

3. Ibid., pp. 356-357.

court. The customs revenue was settled upon James with little discussion. However the kings plans to abolish the Test Act and the Habeas Corpus Act were quite impossible for the Houses were Tory with a definite attachment to the Established Church. Some of these Tories tried to pass a measure calling for strict execution of the penal laws against all Nonconformists. James expressed his extreme displeasure with the measure. Parliament agreed to forget it when James promised to protect the rights of the state church. James through the use of his suspending power was able to relieve members of his faith from the persecution of the penal laws, but he was never satisfied with anything less than complete toleration for his faith.[1] This was his fatal mistake, for all the prominent Catholic families would have been satisfied with a gradual mitigation of penal laws in a manner which would have insured public calm.[2] James had good intentions, according to Bredvold, for he did not want to force Catholicism on his subjects, but he wanted toleration for Catholics in preparation for the day when the Protestant, Prince of Orange, would succeed to the throne.[3]

In March of 1685 James prorogued his Parliament as a means of thwarting the anti-toleration movement.that had been gaining force. The Houses were firmly set against the repeal of the Test Act and penal laws. In the following April James declared an Indulgence Act which suspended the Test and penal laws for all Nonconformists, Catholic and Protestant alike. All were allowed freedom of public worship. Even though toleration should have been a blessing to Nonconformists, it was overshadowed by the fear of absolutism in an illegal declaration. This Indulgence Act was a source of great alarm to the Church of

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1. Ibid., pp. 396-397.
2. Feiling, op. cit., pp. 212-213.
3. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 166.

England. The Church suspected that the king was attempting an alliance with the Protestant Nonconformists in opposition to them. At this point, Latitudinarian members of the Church of England made appeals to the Dissenters in the hope that they could prevent this alliance.[1]

Only a minority of the Nonconformists came to the court's side. The far greater number of Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists remained cold to toleration. It may also be noted that William of Orange, the king's son-in-law, who was growing in importance as a possible successor to the throne, disapproved of the Indulgence Act. William now tried to align the opponents of the Act under his leadership.[2]

Many prominent Englishmen and Scotsmen who had been Exclusionists fled to the continent upon the accession of James. Here they united under Monmouth and Argyle in 1685 to invade England. At this Particular time James was on friendly terms with William, there being some talk of an English alliance with Holland and Austria against France. William made an attempt to prevent the embarkation of the English forces, but was unsuccessful. However, Monmouth's invasion plans proved to be unsuccessful in the end. The king's forces defeated the rebels, and Monmouth and Argyle were hanged. James' revenge even extended to the peasants in Monmouth's ranks, three hundred of whom were sentenced to hanging by Jeffries.[3]

Monmouth's rebellion added to the fears of the Catholics, for it was obvious that there was a large group of Englishmen who were antagonistic towards the government, and who would take arms against it if success was reasonably to be hoped for. Trevelyan remarked that the only reason that Monmouth's men held

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1. Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 667-672.

2. Ibid., p. 690.

3. Ibid., pp. 411-439.

the field as long as they did was because of the half-hearted attitude of James' troops. They hated Catholics almost more than they did the rebels.[1] And, of course, James' thorough revenge upon the rebels did nothing to heighten his popularity with the people.

After the rebellion James saw that Parliament was not going to pass his first Indulgence Act, he dissolved it. Government officials were sent out to question candidates for office in order to find out the sympathies of a new Parliament. The results of the study were so discouraging that a new election was not held. The Church of England held this as another grievance against the Crown, and James was disappointed again in his plans for union with the Church.[2]

James hoped from the beginning that he could reconcile the Church of England to the Roman Church. In 1685 a papal nuncio was received at court and plans made for a possible union of the two churches. In 1686 an Ecclesiastical Court was established, composed of three bishops, three officers of state and a chief justice. This court was the king's instrument for controlling the Church of England clergy and their universities. The court had power to excommunicate members of the clergy, and it also used its power to remove anti-court individuals from university offices.[3] James turned out the Fellows of two Oxford Colleges to convert the colleges into seminaries. Then he told the Church of England clergy to cease all controversialist activities. Bishop Compton of London refused to suspend one of his clergymen for this offence, and the Court thereupon relieved him of his function.[4] These actions naturally incensed the Church of England, causing a definite break between James

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1. Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 431-433.
2. Clark, op. cit., pp. 119-120.
3. Ibid., pp. 118-119.
4. Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 434-448.

and the state church. By 1687 James had lost all hopes for a reconciliation.[1]

He continued to antagonize the Established Church, and by 1686 he had succeeded in filling most governmental and military offices with Catholics. Lord Sunderland who became a Catholic, took the office of the Council's president from the Anglican "Trimmer," Halifax.[2] Ormonde who had served faithfully for many years as commanding chief of the military forces in Ireland, was replaced by the Catholic, Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnel. Tyrconnel purged the army of Protestants: Lieutenant Congreve, the father of the playwright, was one of those who lost his commission.[3] Bredvold has pointed out that James intended to have these appointments approved by Parliament upon the repeal of the Test Act, which, of course, never happened.[4] He also stated that Tyrconnel was sent to Ireland to prepare that country as a possible refuge for Catholics when and if a Protestant should take the throne. Moderate Catholics were frightened by the king's rash actions, as they feared another period of revenge and persecution with a Protestant succession, which seemed inevitable as James had no heir. By the end of 1685 some of these Catholics were making plans to flee to the continent for safety.[5]

The second Indulgence Act was announced in May of 1688. It allowed entire freedom of public worship and removed the Test from all Nonconformists. This Declaration was to be read publically by all bishops and by the clergy in their dioceses for two successive Sundays. Out of the hundred or more parish churches in London there were only four in which the Declaration was read.[6]

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1. Feiling, op. cit., pp. 212-213.
2. Feiling, op. cit., p. 212.
3. J.C. Hodges, William Congreve the Man (New York, 1941), p. 29.
4. Bredvold, op. cit., Appendix D, p. 171.
5. Ibid., p. 176.
6. Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 771-774.

The six bishops who had previously petitioned the king, explaining that they were bound by conscience not to read the Declaration, because of its illegal nature, were sent to the tower. Public indignation was high. James could have placated the populace by pardoning the bishops, but he was determined to prosecute them fully. On the following Sunday a further attempt was made to have the Declaration read, but it was also unsuccessful. The few clergymen who dared to read it had their congregations walk out on them. The bishops were sent up to trial and as the proceedings took place it became clear that the central issue was whether or not the king's prerogative was legal. But in spite of the court's attempts to pack the jury, the bishops were acquitted.[1]

The public rejoiced at the acquittal of the bishops, showing clearly where their sympathies lay. Yet the average Englishman was willing to put up with James as long as he had no heir, and the Protestant, William of Orange, was next in line. However in 1687 Queen Mary gave birth to a son. Popular opinion conceded the child to be a Jesuit trick to retain a Catholic succession. The Dutch ambassador wrote to William that not one Englishman in ten believed the child to be the Queen's.[2] These were dark days for the Catholics, and James was on his way out.

This, then, was the state of affairs when Dryden became Catholic. As a man who was close to the court and conscious of public affairs, he must have been fully aware of his situation; his political and religious satires show that he was. This historical background has been a preparation for those mature poems which contain evidence of his conservative and authoritarian thought.

In 1681 Dryden had written "Absalom and Achitophel," an excellent satire upon Shaftesbury and the Exclusionists. In this poem Dryden defended the

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1. Ibid., pp. 775-797.
2. Ibid., pp. 781-783.

lawful, hereditary succession against the claims of monmouth. He upheld the authority of the state church and the monarchy against the Dissenters. A second part to "Absalom and Achitophel" was published in November of 1682 and several weeks later "Religio Laici" appeared.

lawful, hereditary succession against the claims of monmouth. He upheld the authority of the state church and the monarchy against the Dissenters. A second part to "Absalom and Achitophel" was published in November of 1682 and several weeks later "Religio Laici" appeared.

IV

Religio Laici

"Religio Laici" coming, as it did, so shortly after "Absalom and Achitophel" appears to be an abrupt transition from political to religious thought, but as we have mentioned before, political and religious thought were closely united in the seventeenth century.

Some Critics, among them, Macaulay and Van Doren have claimed that Dryden was entirely wanting in adherence to principles of any kind.[1] If this was the case, he must have written solely for the occasion. "Religio Laici," of course, owed its being to a definite set of circumstances. It was the sensation in religious and philosophical circles occasioned by the publication of Henry Dickinson's English translation of Richard Simon's Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament, that turned Dryden's attention to this subject. In the preface to the poem he had this to say about Father Simon's book:

> It remains that I acquaint the reader, that the verses were written for an ingenious young gentleman, my friend, upon his translation of,'The Critical History of the Old Testament,' composed by the learned Father Simon;[2] The verses therefore are addressed to the translator of that work, and the style of them is, what it ought to be, epistolary.[3]

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1. Macaulay, Miscellaneous Works, VI, op. cit., pp. 108-157; Van Doren, John Dryden, op. cit., pp. 141-143.

2. Father Richard Simon (1638-1712) was the forerunner of modern biblical criticism. Through use of interval evidence, Father Simon came to the conclusion that the Mosaic books were written by several inspired annalists. His views were not accepted during his lifetime, but his method of scholarship has gained appreciation in modern time. Catholic Encyclopedia, IV, New York, Robert Appleton Co., 1908.

3. Scott-Saintsbury, op. cit., vol. X, pp. 31-32.

Thus Father Simon's book was an immediate cause of "Religio Laici," but that Dryden came to this subject without previous religious reading or thought is very unlikely.

Scott believed that Dryden's religious feeling was an underlying motive for the poems, and that added to this motive was a political desire to defend the Church of England against the recalcitrant sectaries. Scott thought that disappointment and age may have induced religious speculation in an otherwise secular mind.[1] Verrall agreed with Scott on this point. Verall also made the interesting supposition that, to Dryden, Dickinson's translation was an opportune pretext for engaging in the religious controversy. Dryden felt that his groundwork in theology was insecure so he covered it by means of a complement to a friend's book. However, in spite of his lack of theological training, he was urged on by the preplexity of certain religious problems; and this Verrall said, was his reason for writing "Religio Laici."[2]

Saintsbury also was convinced of the religious sincerity of the poem. Dryden considered the church as an integral part of the Tory system so if he argued for the Tory party, he would naturally have upheld the Established Church too.[3] The continuity of the political and religious issues made it easy for Dryden to move quickly from a political satire to a religious poem. These two issues had resolved out of the Popish Plot: politically there was the struggle for and against the Exclusion Bill; and religiously there was

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, Works, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 257-258.

2. Verrall, op. cit., pp. 151-155.

3. Saintsbury, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

the struggle between the State Church and the Nonconformists. Dryden dealt with the first issue in "Absolam and Achitophel" and with the second issue in "Religio Laici."[1]

Bredvold believed that Dryden did not collect any new ideas for the express purpose of writing "Religio Laici." Father Simon's book awakened him to a more complete realization of those ideas which he already held, but nevertheless, he was following a consistent train of thought.[2]

Reviewing the poem from the standpoint of religion and politics may demonstrate the author's motives and sincerity.

The introductory lines, which Bonomy Dobrée has described as "magnificent,"[3] are an earnest expression of the individual and universal desire of man to reach a divine, guiding principal. Dryden is saying that the dim light of reason may put us on the right path, but it is only the light of revelation that can bring conviction. Reason is limited, therefore God has provided men with the unfailing light of revelation.[4]

> So pale grows reason at religion's sight,
> So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.
> (ll. 10-11)

The argument of the poem as it develops from this magnificant beginning is clear and consistent.

The poet gives an exposition on the attempts of ancient philosophers to reach truth through reason. These exceptional men by exercising a superior reason perceived a first principle, but they could go no farther. Epicures, Lucretius, even Aristotle, was unable to determine the nature of this first principle, and least of all to find the means by which ~~man could~~

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1. Ibid., p. 92.

2. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 107.

3. Bonomy Dobree, Poems of Dryden (London, 1934), p. xiii.

4. Works, op. cit., X, "Religio Laici," ll. 1-11, Scott-Saintsbury.

achieve true happiness.[1] This is a skeptical exposition similar to that found in Montaigne's essays on the three schools of classical philosophy.[2] Dryden may have relished Montaigne's retort: "Now trust to your Philosophy; boast that you have found the bean in the cake, after hearing this racket from so many philosophical brains!"[3]

Dryden sums up this skeptical paragraph with these clear lines:

> Thus, anxious thoughts in endless circles roll,
> Without a centre where to fix the soul.
> In this wild maze their vain endeavours end:—
> How can the less the greater comprehend?
> Or finite Reason reach infinity?
> For what cou'd Fathom God were more than He.
> (ll. 36-41)

The argumentative section begins with an attack against Deists who presumed to find the principles of God and His laws by reason alone. Denying revelation, the Deist considered himself capable of gaining salvation simply by repentance and obeying the laws of nature.[4] Here Dryden uses a skillful argument against the Deist. He claims that what the Deists attribute to reason is actually the unconscious memory of what had once been revelation.[5] In the preface to "Religio Laici," Dryden proposes that the revelation announced to Noah and his generation was gradually diminished and corrupted with the passing of time; thus "Deism, or the principles of natural worship, are only the faint remnants, or dying flames, of revealed religion, in the posterity of Noah ... So that we have not lifted up ourselves

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1. Ibid., ll. 12-41.
2. J.M. Robertson, Essays of Montaigne, op. cit., pp. 495-515.
3. Ibid., p. 514.
4. "Religio Laici," op. cit., ll. 42-60.
5. Ibid., ll. 64-77.

to God, by the weak pinions of our reason, but He has been pleased to descend to us; and what Socrates said of Him, what Plato writ and the rest of the heathen philosophers of several nations, is all no more than the twilight of revelation, after the sun of it was set in the race of Noah."[1] Furthermore the pagan religions attempted to expiate sin by sacrificial offerings, but the bloody offerings were an abomination from a people who had not the purity of contrition. The Deists are assuming that they, mere men, should make the terms of their salvation. This independent attitude could have upsetting political consequences. Dryden compares God to a weak king who must submit to the vagaries of his willful subjects. Dryden always insisted on the necessity of authority.

> Then thou art justice in the last appeal,
> Thy easy God instructs thee to rebel;
> And, like a king remote and weak, must take
> What satisfaction thou art pleased to make.
> (ll. 95-98)

Dryden was Scholastic in his conception of man as a limited, finite being who was marked by original sin.[3]

> Darest thou, poor worm, offend Infinity?
> And must the terms of peace be given by thee?
> (ll. 93-94)

Pope in his "Essay on Man" reflected the same attitude.

> All this dread order break for whom? for thee?
> Vile worm! -- oh madness! Pride! Impiety![4]
> (ll. 257-258)

Both poets were declaiming the sin of pride; the sin which man incurred by venturing on forbidden places. It is an idea probably familiar to most religions; but it was especially a part of the medieval scheme of

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1. Ibid., ll. 64-77.

2. Ibid.,

3. Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven, 1932), p. 7.

4. Elwin and Courthope, Works of Alexander Pope, Vol. II (London, 1871-89)

things.[1] Here was the most dreaded of all sins, because by it man separated himself in all respects from the Eternal Love. He thereby relegated to himself, an infinite creature, those qualities which God alone possessed. By severing himself from God, man makes himself a god in his own right, and as such he commits the most detestable of sins. Consequently to the medieval mind, any presumptuous inquiry into the nature of God or his Universe was assuming a part for which he had no sanction. The Promethean fire was not meant for man. God had given man both intelligence and reason, and they were good although limited. Therefore the function of intelligence was "to demonstrate the truth of revealed knowledge, to reconcile diverse and pragmatic experience with the rational pattern of the world as given in faith."[2]

Pope said that man should limit himself to the study of mankind, and not venture to forbidden heights through a false faith in his faculties. Reason to Pope seems to have been a discerning judgement or a controlling element, rather than any active intellectual process.[3]

> Two principles in human nature reign;
> Self-love, to urge, and Reason, to restrain...
> (II, ll. 54-55)

To Dryden, reason may have had more significance than it had for Pope, but regardless, he aligned himself with the Roman Catholic controversialists of his time by decrying reason.[4] This is the very basis of his discourse against the Deists.

To return to Dryden's attack on the Deists; what was his answer to

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1. J.H. Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind, (New York, 1940), pp. 53-54.
2. Becker, op. cit., p. 7.
3. Elwin and Courthope, op. cit., Epistle II ll. 1-2.
4. Bredvold, op. cit., Chap. IV,

the problem of man's indebtedness to God? It leads directly to the revelation of a miraculous Incarnation, Christ being both man and God was able to satisfy the infinite justice of His Father. Man by uniting himself to the manhood of Christ thereby offers an infinite and sufficient reparation to God. This was the efficient method by which Dryden backed the Deist against the wall. Dryden, was not, as Scott has said, "sceptical concerning revealed religion,"[1] for his whole argument against the Deists is a traditionally Christian argument based upon revelation. Bredvold assumed that Scott failed to distinguish between religious skepticism or "free-thinking" and philosophical skepticism or Pyronnism the latter of which most frequently led to firm conservatism.[2]

Dryden now turns to the discussion of the Bible as a written record of Revelation. The Deists raised a significant objection against the authority of the Bible: of what value was a revelation that reached only a limited group of mankind? Were all men from the beginning of time, who had no access to Revelation, to be condemned?[3] To Dryden, this was a serious objection, and his only answer was his faith in God's mercy.

> But boundless wisdom, boundless mercy, may
> Find even for those bewildered souls a way.
> (ll. 188-189)

Dryden always hoped for a means of salvation that was universal in scope. For this reason he disliked the creed of St. Athenasius which apparently limited salvation to a select group. However this was a misunderstanding of the Athenasian creed and the teaching of the Roman Church which never denied a universal salvation. Indeed this same fact implies, nevertheless, that

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1. Works, op. cit., I pp. 257-258, Scott-Saintsbury.
2. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 121.
3. "Religio Laici", op. cit., ll. 168-183.

Dryden was looking for a universal church, a Catholic authority.[1]

Dryden then makes a digression to Henry Dickinson, the translator of Father Simon's scriptural treatise. Father Simon's scholarly criticism proved the unreliability of the Bible as a sole means of revelation.[2] The Catholics, therefore, asserted that as the Scriptures were erroneous it was necessary to rely upon the authority of the church tradition for guidance. Dryden questions this tenet:

> If written words from time are not secured,
> How can we think have oral sounds endured?
> (ll. 270-271)

He boldly goes on to another objection against the Roman Church: Why is this church not also infallible in separating the true from the false elements in the scriptures? However, these arguments against the Catholic Church do not have the assured strength of those against the Deists.[3]

After these arguments, he makes a forth-right statement of his solution to the problem; and this is the essential idea of the poem:

> More safe, and much more modest 'tis, to say
> God would not leave mankind without a way;
> And that the scriptures, though not everywhere
> Free from corruption, or entire, or clear,
> Are uncorrupt, sufficient, clear, entire,
> In all things which our needful faith require.
> (ll. 295-300)

This is strictly a compromise in favor of the state church, although in reaching it he denies the basic element of rationalism so important to the Church of England tenets. From this point to the end of the poem he defends the Church of England against the Catholics and the Protestant sectaries. By

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1. "Religio Laici", op. cit., ll. 212-224.

2. Ibid., ll. 225-275.

3. Ibid., ll. 284-294.

hopping over the hedge of reason, he landed on the compromise and made the best of it.

Tradition does have some value, he insists, but only in so much as it can be interpreted by those men of learning whose talent fits them to instruct. But as always, the Bible is "plain and clear" in all things necessary to salvation, and as such it belongs to all men regardless of their intellectual ability.[1] These opinions are in accord with Broad Church teaching as can be demonstrated by observing the sermons of John Tillotson, one of its eminent divines.[2] Tillotson possessed an evangelical spirit, and a belief in a universal religion.[3] It must be remembered however, that Tillotson based his conclusions regarding the clarity of the Scriptures on his firm belief in the rational powers of man.[4] This is his explanation of the clarity of the Bible; "So when we say that the Scriptures are plain in all things necessary to faith and a good life, we do not mean that every man at first hearing or reading of these things in it shall perfectly understand them; but by diligent reading and consideration if he be of good apprehension and capacity, he may come to a sufficient knowledge of them, and if he be of meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains."[5]

Dryden then defends this proposition, that the Bible is "a common largess to mankind," against the Catholics who held that their infallible

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1. Ibid., ll. 318-355.

2. Moffat, J., The Golden Book of Tillotson (London, 1926),

3. Ibid., p. 69,151.

4. Ibid., p. 100,224,226

5. Ibid., p. 68.

Church alone had the right to interpret scripture. The most that he does is to lash priestcraft which he detested in any form, Catholic or Protestant.[1] His treatment is comparatively light and satirical in relation to the poem as a whole.[2] The main objection to the church is that she denied the laity access to the Bible.

> God's word they had not, but the priests they had.
> (ll. 385)

With the reformation the Bible was handed to the laity, and the consequences were equally disconcerting. One feels that, to Dryden, the consequences of this procedure were more disastrous than if the laity had remained ignorant. His criticism of the sectaries is much more serious than that levelled at the Catholics.[3] Here his fear of mob rule, and his political conservatism are obvious:

> The book thus put in every vulgar hand,
> Which each presumed he best could understand,
> The common rule was made the common prey
> And at the mercy of the rabble lay.
> (ll. 400-403)

Both the Catholics and the Sectaries were politically disruptive forces: witness the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Bill. Therefore Dryden accepted the compromise, that is, he accepted the Church of England as the best means to preserve "common quiet." In accepting this compromise he had to hop some more hedges, as his entire argument against the Deists was fought by denouncing reason. Yet in his conclusion he accepted a faith which definitely ~~was~~ rationalistic. He even advances one of their rationalistic tenets when he says,

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1. Hatred of priestcraft has never been absent from Catholic literature, for example, Chaucer and Dante. While Dryden disliked priests, he disliked the Puritan preachers and divines much more than the Catholics. It is significant also that he even lashed Bishop Burnet who was of the Church of England.
2. "Religio Laici," op. cit., ll. 371-394.
3. Ibid., ll. 399-420.

> Nor can we be deceived, unless we see
> The scripture and the fathers disagree.
> If, after all, they stand suspected still,
> (For no man's faith depends upon his will)—
> (ll. 439-442)

These lines assent the necessity of reason, particularly the last line which states that no man can will to believe something which his reason does not consent to. Tillotson said it this way: "But a man cannot believe what he will: the nature of a human understanding is such that it cannot assent without evidence nor believe anything to be true unless it see reason to do so, anymore than if a man can see a thing without light."[1]

Dryden then turns about-face and denies his fealty to reason by saying that those religious points which cause doubts are superfluous anyhow, and may be disregarded. Thus it appears that Dryden did notadhere to the rationalism of the Church of England, but his political conservatism led him to submit to the Church. The conclusion of the poem which announces a willingness to leave interpretation of disputed points in theology to specialists in theology and men of authority is sharply at variance with Protestant individualism and indicates a frame of mind leaning towards Catholic authoritarianism.

Dryden became Catholic in the early part of 1686. Saintsbury has noted that Evelyn's diary for January 19, 1686, stated that Dryden and his wife were known to attend mass.[3] There is no information regarding the details of his conversion. However we know that the Catholic, Duke of York, ascended to the throne in February of 1685, and it was soon afterwards that Dryden became Catholic. The entry in Evelyn's diary is the closest date we have for

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1. Tillotson, op. cit., p. 99.
2. "Religio Laici," op. cit., ll. 443-350.
3. Scott-Saintsbury, I, op. cit., ft. p. 270.

determining the exact date of his conversion.

After assuming the throne in 1685, James made plans to cooperate with the Established Church. He proclaimed an Indulgence Act in the same year which, however, met with disapproval from both the Church of England and the Protestant Dissenters. He continued his efforts to court the Established Church, and it was not until 1687 when he proclaimed his second Indulgence Act, that he had ceased his efforts and turned to the Dissenters.

V

Hind and the Panther

1

"The Hind and the Panther" appeared a fortnight after James had proclaimed his 1687 Indulgence Act. Dryden states in the preface to the poem that it was intended to satirize only those members of the Church of England and of the dissenting sects who had remained hostile to the Indulgence Act.[1]

In the preface which was written after the Declaration, Dryden defended the king's action. In this act James promised to defend the Church of England; to suspend all penal laws against Nonconformists; to allow freedom of public worship to all Nonconformists, Catholics and Protestant; to abolish the oaths of supremacy, allegiance and the tests; to pardon the former offences against the penal laws; and to assure the possession of abbey and church lands to their present owners.[2] Dryden praised James for his tolerance, contrasting James' Indulgence Act to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. Dryden always believed in the freedom of the individual conscience, Each man, he said,"is absolute in his own breast, and accountable to no earthly power for that which passes only betwixt God and him. Those who are driven into the fold are, generally speaking, rather made hypocrites than converts."[3]

Lord Macaulay, believing that Dryden became Catholic in order to receive preferment from James, felt that "The Hind and the Panther" was written

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, X, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

2. Ibid., p. 275, n.

3. Ibid., p. 112.

to support the king's current policies. Macaulay noted that in the first part of the poem the Church of England was referred to with kindness as at this time James was still hoping to bring it to his side. But by the time Dryden reached the end of the poem and the preface, he had given up his plans for the Established Church and had turned to the Protestant Dissenters for friendship. This change of policy was reflected in Dryden's poem, and Macaulay's observations were correct. However, this does not destroy Dryden's sincere motives, for as a Catholic, loyally serving a Catholic king, he still nourished the hope, in the first years of James' reign, that order and stability might be achieved by appealing to the royalist sentiments of the Church of England.

In spite of Macaulay's caustic criticism of Dryden's character, and his political and religious ideas, he considered "The Hind and the Panther" as Dryden's best work:

> In none of Dryden's works can be found passages more pathetic and magnificent, greater ductility and energy of language, or a more pleasing and various music.[1]

Scott saw Dryden's purpose as a more limited one, and indeed a very praiseworthy one, which was simply to secure under a Catholic king the privileges for Catholic Englishmen which were accorded to other citizens. He said,

> 'The Hind and Panther' was written with a view to obviate the objections of the English clergy and people to the power of dispensing with the test laws, usurped by James II.[2]

James in the Indulgence Act of 1687 sought to give Catholics equal privileges with the Church of England, but because of the antipathy of the

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1. Macaulay, History of England, I, op. cit., pp. 660-661.

2. Scott-Saintsbury, X, op. cit., p. 273.

Church of England, he was forced to grant the same priveleges to the Protestant Dissenters whom he intended to use to fill up the middle-class gap in his administration.[1] Dryden, therefore, in "The Hind and the Panther" followed the policy of James by advocating Catholic equality with the Church of England.

Christie considered the poem to be, primarily Dryden's defense of his own conversion. The main issue of the poem was the defense of the Catholic Church against the Church of England; Christie also regards this poem as Dryden's best:

> Power of argument and beauty of language and verse are equally conspicuous in this fascinating poem.[2]

To Bredvold "The Hind and the Panther" was an argument against rationalism in religion. This method of Catholic apologetics, Dryden had adapted for "Religio Laici," and Bredvold says, "but in 'The Hind and the Panther' the polemic is Roman Catholic and directed against the rationalistic principle inherent in Protestantism."[3]

The "Hind and the Panther" beginswith brief descriptions of the Catholic Church and the various Protestant sects. The discourse is begun by a criticism of the Socinion or rationalistic heresy.

> False Reynard fed on consecrated spoil;
> The graceless beast by Athanasius first
> Was chased from Nice, then by Socinus nursed;
> His impious race their blasphemy renewed,
> And nature's king through nature's optics viewed.
> (ll. 53-57)

"False Reynard" was the Unitarian group which had its foundation in the Arian heresy that denied the coexistence of the Son with God. The heresy,

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1. Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 435-436.

2. Christie, op. cit., p. LX.

3. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 124.

though condemned at the Council of Nice, was taken up by Socinus who taught belief in one God, denying the trinity and the divinity of Christ.[1] Dryden begins his former arguments against reliance upon individual reason. The Protestant sects through constant division were slowly eliminating even the most cherished doctrines of Christianity. At this point Dryden repeats an argument used in "Religio Laici":

> What weight of ancient witness can prevail,
> If private reason hold the public scale?
> (ll. 62-63)

One might note here that the argument against the Socinians,[2] who were extreme rationalists, was aimed at certain of the Church of England divines, the party known as Low Church, some of whom were accused of Socinianism. Tillotson whom we have mentioned in regard to "Religio Laici" was one of these divines. In his sermons, Tillotson frequently had to defend himself against the charge of Socianianism. He stated his position in this way:

> But if this be Socinianism, for a man to inquire into the grounds and reasons of Christian religion and to endeavour to give a satisfactory account why he believes it, I know no way but that all considerate, inquisitive men, that are above fancy and enthusiasm, must be either Socinians or atheists.[3]

Dryden rejected this faith in reason and sought to substitute an infallible authority in its place. In "Religio Laici" he had said:

> Such an omniscient church we wish indeed;
> 'Twere worth both Testaments, and cast in the creed.
> (ll. 282-283)

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, X, op. cit., p. 128.

2. Socinianism was originated by Faustus Socinus, an Italian theologian (1539-1604). Socinus denied the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and believed that salvation was to be achieved by the imitation of Christ's virtue. He also taught that the Bible was to be interpreted by, and as being in accord with, human reason.

3. Tillotson, op. cit., p. 100;

Now in "The Hind and the Panther" he has found the infallible guide:

> But, gracious God, how well dost thou provide
> For erring judgements an unerring guide!
> (ll. 64-65)

One might contrast the opening lines of this poem to those in "Religio Laici" which were also an attack upon reason. Although the substance of the passages are not different, the spirit is, for "Religio Laici" cold, philosophic and reasonable, but "The Hind and the Panther" strikes a new note of intensity and sincerity of feeling that can only be accounted for by some geniune religious experience which had intervened. Then Dryden proceeds to explain his own conversion in these familiar lives which have had several interpretations:

> My thoughtless youth was winged with vain desires;
> My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
> Followed false lights; and, when their glimpse was gone,
> My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
> (ll. 72-75)

Scott interpreted the "vain desires" of Dryden's youth to be merely the indifference of a young man to spiritual things; the "false lights" of his manhood were the Puritan beliefs which he held during the Commonwealth; and the "new sparkles" were Deistical ideas which he held from the Restoration to his conversion in 1686.[1] Bredvold has shown that it was doubtful that Dryden adherred to Deism during 1660-1686. "Religio Laici," above all, gives clear evidence that Dryden rejected the rationalism necessary to Deism; and furthermore the first part of the poem is a criticism of Deism.[2] In "The Hind and the Panther" Dryden not only rejects reason, but he, like Hobbes, even questions the sense faculties in his discussion of

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, I, op. cit., pp. 256-262.

2. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 109.

transubstantiation.

> And after that trust my imperfect sense,
> Which calls in question his omnipotence?
> Can I my reason to my faith compel,
> And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebel?
> (ll. 83-86)

Another significant distinction between "The Hind and the Panther" and an earlier poem "Absalom and Achitophel" is Dryden's treatment of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. "Absalom and Achitophel" was a completely secular and political poem written in anger and in a time of excitement, and in it Dryden did not see anything incongruous in making a number of blasphemous remarks on the religious practices of his enemies, and indeed of the Catholics. He associated the doctrine of transubstantiation with the Jesuits and the Popish Plot. His treatment of the doctrine, then, is completely political and serves as satire against a clergy who disturbed public peace.

> The Egyptian Rites the Jebusites embrac'd,
> Where Gods were recommended by their taste.
> Such sav'ry Deities must needs be good,
> As serv'd at once for worship and for Food.
> (ll. 118-121)

However, "Absalom and Achitophel" marks a middle stage in the consistent development between the completely secular political satires and "The Hind and the Panther" which has, unlike the other poems, passages of genuine religious feeling. In this poem he presents the Catholic arguments for transubstantiation.

After defending this doctrine, he repeats this thought from "Religio Laici":

> How can the less the Greater comprehend?
> Or finite Reason reach Infinity.
> (Religio Laici, ll. 39-40)

In "The Hind and the Panther," he says:

Let reason then at her own quarry fly,
But how can finite grasp infinity?
(ll. 104-105)

The answer to all the questions of faith, reason and sense Dryden sums up in two couplets.

God thus asserted, man is to believe
Beyond what sense and reason can conceive,
And, for mysterious things of faith, rely
On the proponent, heaven's authority.
(ll. 118-121)

He has no longer to fear because of human frailty for God through Revelation and His infallible Church has provided man with an unfailing guide.

Dryden next gives a history of the Presbyterian wolf whom he traces back to Wisliff and the Lollards. Here he suggests the political consequences of sectarianism. Dryden considered the Lollards to be dangerous to the crown.

Because of Wicliffe's brood no mark he brings,
But his innate antipethy to kings.

(ll. 176-177)

But Dryden felt that a policy of toleration towards Dissenters was the divine method rather than cruel persecution; and he states again his belief in intellectual freedom.

Of all the tyrannies on humankind,
The worst is that which persecutes the mind.
(ll. 239-240)

In this first part of "The Hind and the Panther," Dryden makes the Church of England the ally of James II and his faith. James was working to combine the Church of England and the Catholics in an alliance against the Dissenters for whom he had little love. The Panther, on the Church of England is next in purity to the Hind. Dryden gives a history of the Established Church, beginning with the schism of Henry VIII. After this history

Dryden praised the church for her support of the crown, and assured her that James would protect her rights. The main weakness of the Church of England was her lack of authority. Since the Panther rebelled against the true faith, her members have an equal right to separate from her.

> Thus is the Panther neither loved nor feared,
> A mere meek queen of a divided herd;
> Whom soon by lawful power she might control,
> Herself a part submitted to the whole.
> (ll. 497-500)

Thus if the Church of England were to submit to the Catholic Church, she would enjoy absolute authority and rescue herself from the dangers of dissent and rebellion.

At the moment the first part of this poem was published the country was little inclined to arguments such as these, and if Dryden, as his Whig critics have maintained, were seeking to feather his nest, this was certainly not the way to do it. James, through his obstinate insistence to carry through a plan for Catholic emancipation, was gradually alienating both the Dissenters and the Established Church. However, the complete break had not yet come when Dryden was writing the second part of the poem.

2

The second part of "The Hind and the Panther" was as Dryden said, mainly a dispute concerning Chruch authority.[1] He reviews the Popish Plot, keeping in mind the fact that the Church of England as a confederate of the court, suffered with the Catholics. The Puritan Dissenters even accused the Established Church of harboring Catholic doctrines because of her adherence to certain rituals.[2] However, the Church of England proved that it held no Catholic sympathies by passing the Test Act of 1678 which required that all persons holding public office renounce belief in transubstantiation which was a basic Catholic doctrine. Dryden, again, reveals the weakness in doctrinary instability, and the tendency towards change.

> There changed your faith, and what may change may fall.
> Who can believe what varies everyday,
> Nor ever was, nor will be at a stay?[3]
>
> (ll. 35-37)

Dryden proceeds to defend the infallibility of the Catholic Church against the Panther who asks for proof of that infallibility. Dryden gives the Gallican Councils who guided by "God's unfailing grace" could not err in matters of faith or morals.

This need for authority is basic in all Dryden's thought. In his argument against the Protestant groups who allowed individual interpretation of the Bible was that it resulted in religious anarchy and political disturbances.

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, X, op. cit., p. 117.

2. Ibid., ll. 1-28.

3. The source of these ideas is to be found in Lucretius and in the ancient concept of the permanence of the elements.

No matter what dissension leaders make,
Where every private man may save a stake;
Ruled by the scripture and his own advice,
Each has a blind by-path to Paradise.
(ll. 122-125)

Previously in "Religio Laici," Dryden had affirmed with Tillotson and Stillingfleet that the scriptures were plain and clear in all things necessary to salvation. This was the Anglican "via media," and he rejects it in "The Hind and the Panther," for this was a compromise which also lacked an absolute authority for interpretation.

The sacred books, you say, are full and plain,
And every needful point of truth contain,
All who can read interpreters may be.
(ll. 108-110)

The political and religious motives are intertwined, and Dryden always wanted authority in government for the same reason that he later wanted religious authority, and that was his desire for "common quiet."

It was intimated by Macaulay and Christie that Dryden did not foresee the coming revolution, and that if he had, he would never have changed his faith. There are evidences in "The Hind and the Panther" that Dryden did foresee the revolution, but his own personal conviction and his religious experiences led him to disregard the consequences it might have for him. One of the first instances of Dryden's recognition of a possible disaster in the future comes after his discussion of tradition and the scriptures when the Panther makes this threatening statement:

------ since lucre was your trade,
Succeeding times such dreadful gaps have made,
'Tis dangerous climbing: To your sons and you
I leave the ladder, and its omen too.
(ll. 224-226)

Dryden was aware of a possible overthrow of the government and the revenge consequent with the accession of a Protestant king. He reveals this fact again in the third part of the poem when he claims that the Hind has no fear

of the Panther because of the Indulgence Act which forced the Panther to remain peaceful in order to retain the king's protection. But he also adds that the Church of England was waiting to avenge herself when Parliament, which had been prorogued since 1685, should meet again.

> The wary savage would not give offense,
> To forfeit the protection of her prince;
> But watched the time her vengeance to complete,
> When all her furry sons in frequent senate met;
> (ll. 22-25)

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In the third part of the poem, which was written later with the preface, Dryden defends himself against the charge that he became Catholic for the express purpose of receiving preferment from James. The Panther has just accused James of buying his converts, and the Hind makes this answer:

> Now for my converts, who, you say, unfed,
> Have followed me for miracles of bread.
> Judge not by hearsay, but observe at least,
> If since their change their loaves have been increased.
> The Lion buys no converts; if he did,
> Beast would be sold as fast as he could bid.
> (ll. 221-226)

He goes on to say that converts to Catholicism have nothing but fear and insecurity before them. The Church of England being stronger, always threatened with her penal laws, and even though James suspended these laws, they could be inforced again in the future. Dryden again proves that he had no illusions about his security as a Catholic.

> My proselytes are struck with awful dread,
> Your bloody comet-laws hang blazing o'er their head;
> The respite they enjoy but only lent,
> The best they have to hope, protracted punishment.
> (ll. 380-383)

The third part of "The Hind and the Panther" was written after James had entirely given up hopes for an alliance with the Church of England. He found it necessary to turn to the Dissenters for support against the State Church, and so he passed the Indulgence Act in 1687. Dryden's attitude changed with Jame's policy. The Hind reminds the Panther of their mutual sufferings in the past, and regrets that they should part now. The Panther replies that her charity had reached its limits and that she had been friendly merely out of deference to the crown.

If to the lawful heir she had been true,
She paid but Caesar what was Caesar's due.
(ll. 59-60)

The Hind retorts that the Panther had reached the parting of the way because she had allowed Presbyterian doctrine to influence her; and because she had a stronger backing than the Hind she was asserting her force.[1] The Hind reminds the Panther of her doctrine of non-resistance. In 1683 the University of Oxford had passed a decree which strongly denounced any resistance to the crown as heretical. This decreed demanded strict obedience to a lawful king, even if he were a tyrant.[2] The Hind tells the Panther that although she may support the Oxford decree, there are certain members of her church who do not follow this teaching: they are the Latitudinarians who had absorbed Presbyterian teaching. The Latitudinarian or Broad Church group was led by Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and Burnet. These men were willing to abolish bishoprics for the Presbyterian form of church government, and they also put less emphasis on liturgy and the sacraments. Burnet became influential in guiding the plans for the accession of William of Orange.

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence that Dryden was aware of the precarious position of Catholics when he entered the Chruch is the fable of the swallows and the martins in the third part of "The Hind and the Panther". In this fable the swallows represented the English Catholics who were preparing to migrate before the approaching winter. But the martins or Father Petres, the leader of the radical and Jesuit Catholics, urged the swallows to remain. They were assured by the false promises of a miraculous spring. Unfortunately they remained and the swallows or moderates died of

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1. Scott-Saintsbury, X, op. cit., "Hind and the Panther," ll. 99-122.
2. Ibid., ll. 135-143.

winter cold and the Martins were all killed by the town mob. Scott believed that Dryden was referring to a meeting of Catholics at Savoy in the fall of 1686. Bredvold found that Scott based his interpretation upon Ralph's history which had as its source a pamphet entitled, A Full and Imperial Account of all the Secret Consults, Negotiations, Stratagems and Intrigues of the Romish Party in Ireland, From 1660, to this Present Year 1689, London, 1690.[1] The information in the pamphlet was hearsay, and Bredvold points out that as the Savoy Consultation was never mentioned in other places such as the reports of ambassadors, it must have been a minor affiar. Therefore Bredvold believed that the fable of the martins and swallows referred to every consultation of the Catholics from the accession of James. In this fable Dryden shows that he favored the moderate Catholic party rather than Father Petres and the extremists who pushed James to dangerous lengths.[2] Bredvold substantiates his claim by referring to Dryden's letter to Etherage of February 16, 1687, in which Dryden regrets James' policy of filling army posts with Catholics.[3] This is Bredvold's interpretation of the fable:

> In its light we may safely regard the fable of the swallows as the discreet expression of Catholic disapproval of James and his policies, and the tragic end of the swallows as symbolizing what the Catholic were expecting with deep apprehension.[4]

As it is known that Dryden gained nothing financially by his conversion, and that he was fully aware of his doubtful future, it would seem that he received the Catholic faith with sincere conviction.

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1. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 181.

2. Ibid., p. 182.

3. Ibid., p. 183.

4. Ibid., p. 182.

We have noted how Dryden's poem followed the policies of James, how the first two sections of the poem were devoted to a friendly attitude towards the Church of England and the third part and the preface in favor of the Dissenters. This last attitude was characterized in the tale of the doves and pigeons in the third part of the poem. The doves were the Church of England clergy, and Dryden's treatment of them is much harsher than that given them in the first part of the poem. Here he presented a flattering character sketch of James, "a plain good man" whose generosity led him to forgive the injustice done him by the Church of England and the Dissenters. Yet there was an ominous foreboding in the person of Burnet who was a prominent dove.

> Nor can th' usurper long abstain from food,
> Already he has tasted Pigeon's Blood;
> And maybe tempted to his former fare,
> When this Indulgent Lord shall late to heav'n repair.
> (ll. 1279-1282)

Dryden did change his interests with James, but the most important fact to keep in mind is that he never changed his fervant partisanship in favor of Catholicism. "The Hind and the Panther" is a Catholic poem and the culmination of Dryden's political and religious thought.

VI

Dryden's character and the Conclusion

1

Perhaps the last objections to the sincerity of Dryden's conversion are those charges brought against his character. These are of little value in judging his sincerity. Dryden's character, on the whole, seems to have been above serious reproach. Indeed he possessed some admirable qualities for the age in which he lived. He was remarkably tolerant of the intellectual beliefs of others. An example of this has been already cited in the preface to "The Hind and the Panther," where he disapproved of the use of force to inculcate religion, because it was contrary to his conception of the rights of men. There is another fine expression of this tolerance in a letter written to the poet, Dennis, in 1693.

> For my principles of Religion, I will not justifie them to you. I know yours are far different. For the same Reason I shall say nothing of my Principles of State. I believe you in yours follow the Distates of your Reason as I in mine do those of my conscience. If I thought myself in an Error, I would retract it; I am sure that I suffer for them; and Milton makes even the Devil say, that no Creature is in love with Pain.[1]

Along with this tolerance, Dryden possessed a quick wit and an orderly mind which was well-suited to satire. His skeptical outlook tempered by his generous and tolerant nature, led him to an elevating conception of the art of satire. His strong sense of order, he quick rational mind, and the wonderful technical device which he had perfected in the heroic couplet made him the most powerful satirist of his time. It is his use of this powerful instrument of satire which reveals as much as anything else his

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1. Charles E. Ward, The Letters of John Dryden (Durham, N.C., 1942), p. 73.

strength of character. Saintsbury has said, "There never perhaps was a satirist who less abused his power for personal ends."[1] Among our modern critics Van Doren had this to say of Dryden's satire:

> He bitterly hated few persons, perhaps none, but he was capable of a sublime contempt, and it was contempt that he knew perfectly how to put into meter.[2]

And finally Bredvold has paid him this tribute:

> He had too much dignity to be egotistically valuble, but he often spoke incidentally about his work and himself with admirable candor, without either false modesty or false pride.[3]

Dryden clarified his position in "The Original and Progress of Satire." In this essay written in 1693, he stated those principles which forbid him the abuse of satire. He revealed his generous, upright nature when he said, "We have no moral right on the reputation of other men."[4] He rarely defended himself or returned the abuse that was sent his way. The only time that he ever went to any great lengths to answer an attack was in his satire on Shadwell and Settle. These writers had attacked him violently in "The Medal of John Bayes" which appeared after Dryden's "The Medal." Saintsbury has said that this work of Shadwell and Settle was "perhaps the most scurrilous piece of ribaldry which has ever got itself quoted in English literature."[5] Dryden answered with "Mac Flecknoe" in October of 1682 and later in the same year with the satire of Doeg and Og in the second part of "Absalom and Achitophel."

Dryden used satire as a political weapon and he used it skillfully. Yet, as Saintsbury has said, he treated the objects of his satire with a

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1. Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 80.
2. Van Doren, op. cit., p. 145.
3. Bredvold, op. cit., p. 6.
4. W.P. Ker, Essays of John Dryden, Vol. II, (Oxford, 1900), p. 79.
5. Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 85.

"good-humoured scorn" rather than with a vicious cruelty.[1] Dryden made this statement of his method of character satire:

> How easy is it to call rogue and villain and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ any depth of shadowing ... Yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place.[2]

Dryden was never a "slovenly butcher," and perhaps the best illustration of this fact is his "Zimri" in "Absalom and Achitophel." He, himself, stated that he thought this character to be worth the whole poem.[3] He did not deviate from the true character of Buckingham, but presented those sides of his character that were, in a way, trivial and ridiculous. It was this quality in Dryden's satire that made Dr. Johnson say, "his complaints are for the greater part general; he seldom pollutes his page with an adverse name."[4] Those attributes of Buckingham's character described by Dryden are generalities that apply to men in any age. This universal quality of his satire made it rise above that of his contemporaries, and has made it appreciated in the twentieth century. Sir Walter Raleigh in his essay on Dryden has observed this admirable quality of the poet's satire:

> One of the great fascinations of Dryden's satire is its perfect ease of application to our own time. The divisions of opinion, the foibles, and the characters that he describes are alive among us to-day. Only the power and the will to satirize them have grown feebler.[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 76.
2. Ker, op. cit., pp. 92-93.
3. Ibid., p. 94.
4. Milnes, op. cit., p. 53.
5. Raleigh, op. cit., pp. 167-168.

Thus we have touched briefly upon the merits of Dryden's satire which was written during his most active years and represents his mature work. His period of political satire ended with the deposition of James in 1688.

2

After the Revolution of 1688, Dryden was deprived of his Laureteship and forced to turn to writing again as his means of livelihood. He devoted himself mainly to the translation of the classics. In 1693 he published his translation of Persius and Juvenal with some Ovid and Homer. Later he translated Virgil, Theocritus, Lucretius, Horace, and Chaucer's Fables.[1]

Evidence from his letters shows that he was frequently under financial strain. Apparently his publisher Jacob Tonson made things somewhat difficult for him. In a letter of October 29, 1695, Dryden demanded his thirty shillings for each book of Virgil, and complained of his publisher's parsimony.[2] In spite of this trouble with Tonson, Dryden obstinately refused to dedicate his Virgil to King William. Saintsbury felt that this was strong proof that Dryden meant to stand by his principles.[3]

It seems that the final and best evidence that Dryden was sincere in his religious faith is the fact that he never wavered in his faith when he lost his Laureateship and suffered the hardships which being a Catholic demanded. He had found what he considered to be the true faith; he had accepted it intellectually and for that reason he refused to relinquish it. In his intellectual acceptance there were two factors upon which we can base his sincerity: religion and politics.

The fact that religion and politics were closely connected must never be forgotten in dealing with Dryden's conversion. Therefore as an ardent

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1. Saintsbury, op. cit., pp. 134-172.

2. Ward, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

3. Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 123.

Royalist he wanted order, peace and law firmly established in the state. He had made clear in "Absalom and Achitophel" and "The Medal" that an unbroken tradition of succession was the most effective way of securing order and stability.

Evidence seems to show that the accession of James, the Catholic Duke of York, was the event which brought about Dryden's final decision. However, the evidence does not show at all that it was sordid motives or practical financial considerations which prompted Dryden's conversion. All his intellectual and personal motives were prepared to accept Catholicism, but it was the accession of a lawful king who was Catholic, that induced him to take the final step. Questions of personal advantage, no doubt, helped to influence him, but it was the coalescing of Dryden's political and religious convictions in support of a Catholic ruler who was to bring unity to the church and state, that brought about his conversion.[1]

While the king was ostensibly a Protestant and head of the Established Church, all the political arguments acted as a break upon Dryden's Catholic tendencies and kept him a loyal member of the Church of England, a position he had defended in "Religio Laici." But the moment the traditional and lawfully established king was a Catholic, the political attitudes and arguments which held Dryden fast to the Church of England began to work in favor of a Catholic conversion. This is what happened when the Catholic Duke of York became king in 1685.

The final result of this study of Dryden's thought must be to vindicate his intellectual honesty and to see him in a light that is as favorable as that in which any man of letters in the seventeenth century surrounded

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1. Such impeccably devout figures as Donne and Herbert were not above considering the advantage of personal advancement in planning their careers.

hi self with. His consistency is no less certain, though it has been maligned than is that of Milton, while his character is certainly more attractive than that of the harsh and crabbed Puritan genius.

To the liberal mind of the twentieth century, it is true, Dryden may seem reactionary and undemocratic. It may also be urged that he was a spokesman for a political group that hindered the normal progress and freedom of English Parliamentarian government. But such people fail to place themselves in the seventeenth century atmosphere, and are judging Dryden by standards that would have been meaningless even to his opponents. If he feared innovation and loved peace, he arrived at those ideas through actual experience and hard historical fact. The truth of the matter seems to be that Dryden's conversion was sincere, that it was persistent even when it meant hardship and penury, and that it was the logical if not inevitable outcome of his love of order and his desire for the unity of Church and state under the constitutional king.

VII
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