



The
Nonconformists:
Puritans and
Other Dissenters
in England
~ Part III ~

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- The Puritans and other dissenting groups proved to be a thorn in the sides of English monarchs beginning with Elizabeth I and continuing through the reign of James I.
- Most rulers in Europe believed, as did James, that “The state of monarchy. . . is the supremest thing upon earth: for Kings are not only God’s lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon throne, but even by God himself they are called Gods.” (Psalm 82:6)



- James was a Calvinist, and he had once signed the Negative Confession of 1581 favoring the Puritan position.
- The “Negative,” or the Second Scots Confession, was a strongly anti-papal statement adopted by King James, his council and court and by all the Scottish people in 1581.
- In 1603 the Millenary Petition (which claimed 1,000 signatures) presented Puritan grievances to King James, and in 1604 the Hampton Court Conference was held to deal with them.
- The petitioners were sadly in error in their estimate of James, who had learned by personal experience to resent presbyterian clericalism.

- At Hampton Court James coined the phrase “no bishop, no king.”
- The Puritans wanted an end to the episcopal church structure of the Church of England.
- The episcopal church structure fit very well within the hierarchical social and political feudal system of royalty/aristocracy/nobility/gentry/commoners.
- The Puritans favored the presbyterian form of church government, much more in tune with the political and social structures favored by the emerging merchant and middle classes.

- While England, Scotland and Ireland were ruled by kings and queens, and had been for centuries, there had also been a strong desire of the aristocracy and even lower classes for representative government, dating as far back as the 1215 *Magna Carta*.
- Many Members of Parliament (MPs) during the reign of James I supported the Nonconformists and many of them were Puritans.
- These MPs argued that the canons of 1604 (Hampton Court Conference) had not been ratified by Parliament and therefore did not have the force of law.

- Moreover, men of Puritan sympathies remained close to the seat of power during James's reign.
- In the Convocation of 1604 James had ordered church authorities to draw up the Constitutions and Canons against Nonconformists.
- Conformity in ecclesiastical matters was imposed in areas where nonconformity had survived under Elizabeth.
- Yet, the Puritans argued, these Canons were not the law of the land, since they had not been ratified by Parliament.

- Despite the presence of controversy, Puritan and non-Puritan Protestants under Elizabeth and James had been united by adherence to a broadly Calvinistic theology of grace.
- Much of the Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift's restraint in handling Puritans, beginning in 1583, can be traced to the prevailing Calvinist consensus he shared with the Nonconformists.
- Even as late as 1618 the English (COE) delegation to the Dutch Synod of Dort supported the strongly Calvinistic decisions of that body.

- Under Charles I (reigned 1625-1649), son and heir of James I, this consensus broke down, creating yet another rift in the Church of England.
- **Anti-Puritanism in matters of liturgy and organization became linked with anti-Calvinism in theology.**
- Anti-Puritan, or Anglican, positions became associated with Arminian theology.
- The leaders of the anti-Puritan and anti-Calvinist party, notably Richard Montagu, whose *New Gagge for an Old Goose* (1624) first linked Calvinism with the abusive (as it was regarded at that time) term “Puritan,” drew upon the development of Arminianism in Holland.

- In contrast to Calvinists who emphasized God's predestination of the elect to salvation, and damnation to the rest of humanity, Arminians stressed God's offer of salvation to all humankind.
- English Arminians added to this an increased reverence for the sacraments and liturgical ceremony within the Church of England.
- Richard Neile, the bishop of Durham, was the first significant patron of Arminians among the COE hierarchy.
- London was regarded as the stronghold of Puritanism, and a policy of thorough anti-Puritanism was begun there by COE authorities.

- Charles I made William Laud the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, and he was clearly a favorite of Charles.
- Laud promoted Arminians to influential positions in the church and subtly encouraged the propagation of Arminian theology.
- His fortunes turned, however, when he attempted to introduce into the Church of Scotland a liturgy comparable to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.
- The staunchly presbyterian, and Calvinist, Scots rebelled.

- When “Laud’s Liturgy” was introduced at the Church of St. Giles at Edinburgh, a riot broke out leading to a popular uprising that restored presbyterian church structure in Scotland.
- Charles sought to put down the Scots in the so-called Bishops’ Wars (1639–1640).
- To wage war Charles needed to raise revenue, but the only institution that could approve new taxes was Parliament, which had feuded with Charles in the 1620s and was dissolved by him in 1629.

- In April 1640 the Short Parliament met but was quickly dissolved by Charles because its members wanted to discuss a list of grievances before approving funds for the war.
- Charles proceeded against the Scots but his armies were no match for Scottish forces.
- In 1640 he was faced with a Scots army of occupation in northern England demanding money as a part of its settlement.
- Short of funds, Charles was forced to call Parliament again, and this time he would be forced to deal with it.



- Charles I, second son of James I, was born on Nov. 19, 1600 in Scotland, and was not very popular with many in England.
- He ascended to the throne in Nov. 1612, in the care of regents until he reached adulthood.
- His marriage to the French Catholic Princess Henrietta Maria in 1625 made him very unpopular in England.

- At the time, the Parliament of England did not have a large permanent role in the English system of government.
- It functioned as a temporary advisory committee and was summoned only if and when the monarch saw fit.
- Once summoned, a Parliament's continued existence was at the king's pleasure since it was subject to dissolution by him at any time.
- Yet in spite of this limited role, Parliament had acquired over the centuries *de facto* powers of enough significance that monarchs could not simply ignore them indefinitely.

- For a king or queen, Parliament's most indispensable power was its ability to raise tax revenues far in excess of all other sources of revenue at the Crown's disposal.
- Charles I provoked further unrest by trying to raise money for the war through a "forced loan:" a tax levied without parliamentary consent.
- In Nov. 1627, the test case in the King's Bench, the "Five Knights' Case", found that the king had a prerogative right to imprison without trial those who refused to pay the forced loan.

- On May 26, 1628, Parliament adopted a Petition of Right, calling upon the king to acknowledge that he could not levy taxes without Parliament's consent, not impose martial law on civilians, not imprison them without due process, and not quarter troops in their homes. (148 yrs. later → American Declaration of Independence, etc.)
- Charles assented to the petition on June 7, but by the end of the month he had *prorogued* (discontinued with dissolving) Parliament and re-asserted his right to collect customs duties without authorization from Parliament.
- Increasingly, members in the House of Commons were Calvinist Puritans, eager to spread Puritan influence throughout the nation.

- Arminianism in theology, liturgy, and government was linked in the popular mind with Catholicism.
- Fears of a Spanish Catholic conspiracy to undermine Protestant England became widespread at this time.
- The first act of the Long Parliament (1640–53), as it came to be called, was to set aside November 17, 1640, as a national day of fasting and prayer.
- Charles, it had become apparent, was the patron of the Arminians and their attempt to redefine Anglican doctrine.

- Arminians in turn favored Charles's causes against Puritans and Parliament.
- This alliance held despite increasing pressure on Charles to cooperate with Parliament on economic and military matters.
- The resulting civil war between the forces of the king and those of Parliament was hardly just a religious struggle between Arminians and Calvinists.
- Social and economic forces involved class differences.
- However, conflict over religion played an undeniably large role in bringing about the Puritan Revolution.

- As Protestantism split, so did English society.
- Also at issue was the idea of the rule of law, or *lex rex*, versus the primacy of the king's personal rule, *rex lex*.
- Fighting broke out in 1642, and after the first battles members of Parliament called together a committee of over 100 clergymen from all over England to advise them on "the good government of the Church."
- This body, the Westminster Assembly of Divines, first met on July 1, 1643, and continued daily meetings for more than five years.

- Parliament, however, needed Scotland's military help. It adopted the Solemn League and Covenant, which committed the Westminster Assembly to develop a church polity close to Scotland's presbyterian form.
- A small, determined assembly group of "Dissenting Brethren" held out for the freedom of the congregation, or "Independency." (Separation of church and state.)
- Others, called Erastians, argued that the church was subordinate to the state and wanted to limit the offenses under the power of church discipline.
- Because both groups had support in Parliament, the reform of church government and discipline was frustrated.

- Dissent within the assembly was negligible compared with dissent outside it.
- Pamphlets by John Milton, Roger Williams, and other Puritans pleaded for greater freedom of the press and of religion.
- Such dissent was supported by the New Model Army, a Parliamentary force of 22,000 men led by Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612–71) as commander in chief and Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) as second in command.
- The army's support for this dissent was made all the more significant because its leaders had become the real power in England after their defeat of Royalist forces.

- In effect, the English Civil War was a war between Parliament, which had raised its own army, and the King of England, who formed an army primarily from the nobility who supported him, known as the Royalists.
- Scottish forces joined in, sometimes on the side of the Parliamentary forces, for religious reasons, and sometimes in support of the Royalists for money.
- Charles's forces controlled roughly the Midlands, Wales, the West Country and northern England. He set up his court at Oxford.
- Parliament controlled London, the southeast and East Anglia, as well as the English navy.

The Royalists or Cavaliers were loyal to the King and were primarily wealthy aristocrats. They dressed the part and often had long hair. They could afford horses and armor and muskets. But not all aristocrats were on the side of the Royalists.



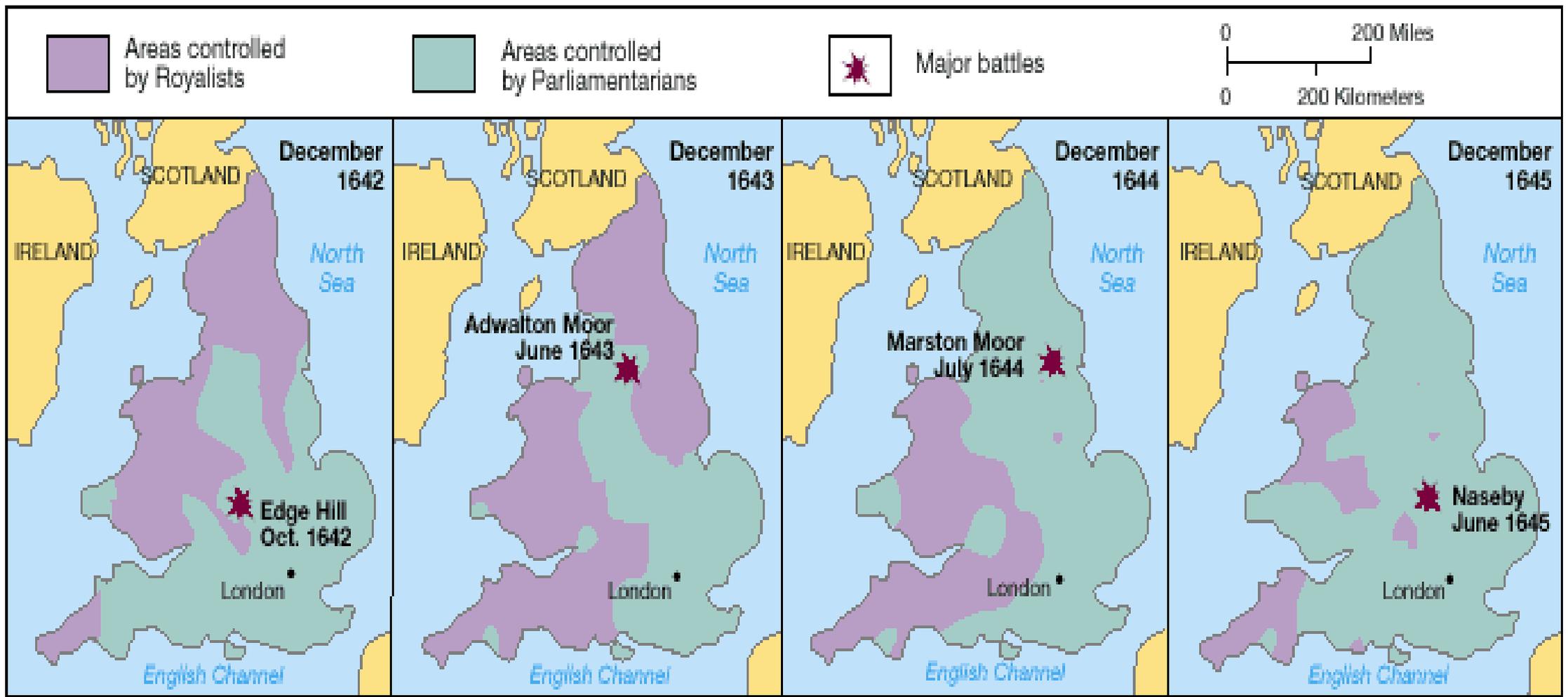


- The “Roundheads” were the Puritan supporters of Parliament.
- They came from the middle and working classes and were anti-COE and Calvinist in their religious outlook.

Roundhead generals and other officers had horses, but the majority of Roundhead soldiers were infantrymen, marching on foot into battle.



The Roundhead infantrymen, armed with long pikes and musketeers, were very effective in holding off the mounted Cavaliers.



The Parliamentarians controlled London and the coastal areas, giving them a profound logistical advantage during the wars.

- Late in 1648 the victors feared that the Westminster Assembly and Parliament would reach a compromise with the defeated Charles that would destroy their gains for Puritanism.
- Essentially, the Roundheads had achieved a military coup. Their leaders, some of whom like Cromwell had been MPs, came to control Parliament and the army.
- In December 1648 Parliament was purged of members unsatisfactory to the army, and in January 1649 King Charles I was tried and executed. This was the first time in history that a major European power had executed its monarch.

- The execution of Louis XVI in the French Revolution did not occur until 1793, 145 years later.
- Without the king, how would the new government of England be constituted?
- After the execution of the king, the House of Lords in Parliament was abolished.
- Both Parliament and the assembly continued to sit on a “rump” basis (containing of only a remnant of their membership after the purges).
- In May 1649 the government of England was constituted as a Commonwealth, and Oliver Cromwell, one of the leading Roundhead generals, emerged as England’s Lord Protector.



- Cromwell had a conversion experience in his early adulthood. He was a Puritan who saw the judgment and mercy of God operating in human affairs.
- He believed that his military success was a sign of God's blessing of his work.
- Cromwell came from the lower ranks of the nobility. He was a descendant of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister.

- Cromwell was the eldest surviving son of the younger son of a knight; as such he did not have the social, political and economic advantages that the descendant of the knight's eldest son would have.
- He inherited a modest amount of property but was brought up in the vicinity of his grandfather's estate, who regularly entertained the king's hunting party.
- His education was greatly influenced by evangelical Protestantism and a powerful sense of God's providential presence in human affairs.

- In his 30s Cromwell sold his freehold land and became a tenant on the estate of Henry Lawrence at St. Ives in Cambridgeshire, about 60 miles north of London.
- Lawrence was planning at that time to emigrate to New England, and Cromwell was almost certainly planning to accompany him, but the plan failed.
- Cromwell married Elizabeth Bourchier on Aug. 22, 1620 in London. Elizabeth's father was a London leather merchant who owned extensive lands in Essex and had strong connections with Puritan gentry families there.
- The marriage brought Cromwell into contact with Oliver St. John and with leading members of the London merchant community, and behind them the influence of the Earls of Warwick and Holland.

- A place in this influential network would prove crucial to Cromwell's military and political career.
- Cromwell had been elected to Parliament in 1628, but was only there for about a year when Charles I dissolved Parliament.
- He made one speech which was not well-received, and his tenure in Parliament at this time was not impressive.
- When Charles I called for Parliament in 1640, Cromwell returned, but the legislative body only met for 3 weeks.
- During the Long Parliament of 1640, Cromwell presented a petition for the release of John Lilburne, a Puritan.

- For the first two years of the Long Parliament Cromwell was linked to the Puritan aristocrats in the House of Lords and Members of the House of Commons with whom he had established family and religious links in the 1630s, such as the Earls of Essex, Warwick and Bedford, Oliver St John and Viscount Saye and Sele.
- At this stage, the group had an agenda of reformation: the executive (king) checked by regular parliaments, and the moderate extension of liberty of conscience.
- Cromwell also gave the second reading of the Annual Parliaments Bill and later took a role in drafting the “Root and Branch Bill” for the abolition of episcopacy.

- The “Root and Branch Petition” was a petition presented to the Long Parliament on December 11, 1640.
- The petition had been signed by 15,000 Londoners and was presented to the English Parliament by a crowd of 1,500.
- The petition called on Parliament to abolish episcopacy from the “roots” and in all its “branches”.
- Legislation was drafted in Parliament incorporating the key points of the petition in May 1641, but it was not voted into law.

- Parliament did exclude the COE bishops from the House of Lords and passed the Bishops Exclusion Act in Dec. 1641.
- The Bishops Exclusion Act became effective in Feb. 1642.
- The aims of the Root and Branch Bill would ultimately be achieved in October 1646, when Parliament passed the *Ordinance for the abolishing of Archbishops and Bishops in England and Wales and for settling their lands and possessions upon Trustees for the use of the Commonwealth.*

- Cromwell believed that the individual Christian could establish direct contact with God through prayer and that the principal duty of the clergy was to inspire the laity by preaching.
- He had contributed out of his own pocket to the support of itinerant Protestant preachers or “lecturers” and openly showed his dislike of his local bishop, a leader of the High Church party, which stood for the importance of ritual and episcopal authority.
- Cromwell, in fact, distrusted the whole hierarchy of the Church of England, though he was never opposed to a state church.

- He therefore advocated abolishing the institution of the episcopate and the banning of a set ritual as prescribed in *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- He believed that Christian congregations ought to be allowed to choose their own ministers, who should serve them by preaching and by extemporaneous prayer.
- As events drifted toward civil war, Cromwell began to distinguish himself not merely as an outspoken Puritan but also as a practical man capable of organization and leadership.

- In July 1642 Cromwell obtained permission from the House of Commons to allow his constituency of Cambridge to form and arm companies for its defense.
- In August 1642 he rode to the University of Cambridge to prevent the colleges from sending their silver and gold plate to be melted down for the benefit of the king.
- As soon as the war began he enlisted a troop of cavalry in his birthplace of Huntingdon.
- As a captain he made his first appearance with his troop in the closing stages of the Battle of Edgehill (Oct. 23, 1642) where Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, was commander in chief for Parliament in the first major contest of the war.

- During 1643 Cromwell acquired a reputation both as a military organizer and a fighting man.
- From the very beginning he had insisted that the men who served on the parliamentary side should be carefully chosen and properly trained, and he made it a point to find loyal and well-behaved men regardless of their religious beliefs or social status.
- Appointed a colonel in February, he began to recruit a first-class cavalry regiment.
- While he demanded good treatment and regular payment for his troopers, he exercised strict discipline.

- If the troops swore, they were fined; if drunk, put in the stocks; if they called each other “Roundheads” — thus endorsing the contemptuous epithet the Royalists applied to them because of their close-cropped hair— they were cashiered; and if they deserted, they were whipped.
- Although Cromwell was a gentleman farmer, with no military training in his background, he seemed to have a natural talent for leadership and his men appreciated his leadership.
- Due to Cromwell’s leadership, Parliament won the war.

- After the execution of Charles I and the conclusion of the war, as commander in chief appointed by Parliament, Cromwell believed that he was the only legally constituted authority left to rule.
- He therefore accepted an “Instrument of Government” by which he became Lord Protector, ruling the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland with the advice and help of a council of state and a Parliament, which had to be called every three years.
- His aim was to reform the law, to set up a national Puritan Church, to permit toleration outside it, to promote education, and to decentralize administration.

- Cromwell was able to carry out reforms in education and law. By 1655, however, relations with Cromwell and Parliament began to deteriorate.
- In the spring of 1657 Parliament voted to invite Cromwell to become king, since kingship was an office “interwoven with the fundamental laws” of the nation, as Cromwell himself stated, and there would be an end to constant innovation.
- Cromwell refused to become king, and his health began to decline, mainly due to malaria.
- He died on Sept. 3, 1658.

- Restoration of the monarchy in England took place in 1660. Charles I's son Charles II had lived as a fugitive in England throughout the years of the Commonwealth, finally fleeing to France in 1651.
- With the death of Cromwell and the return of Charles II, the bishops were restored to Parliament, which established a strict Anglican orthodoxy.
- The Church of England resumed its place of importance within English society.
- Although the Puritans returned to their former place of dissension to the established order, they continued their work of reform within England and the New World.