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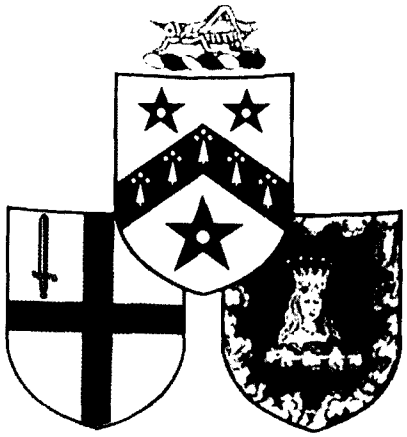

GOD SPEAKS FIRST TO HIS ENGLISH MEN: THE ARMADA OF 1588

Two Lectures from a Series given by

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GOD SPEAKS FIRST TO HIS ENGLISH MEN: THE ARMADA OF 1588

Lecture - 22 March 1988

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I had been equipped with a comprehensive understanding of history which for those concerned illuminated the cosmic drama which lay behind contemporary events and also gave them a sense that history or providence was on their side. We only need to see in our own time the unforeseen character of events in Iran totally misread by people in the West, certainly by people in this country, often in full retreat from compulsory chapel at their public schools. They were not able to understand how explosive this religious and ideological force could be and largely discounted it before it actually changed the grammar of politics in the Middle East. We can understand something therefore, perhaps, with our recent experience, of what was happening the 16th century in a way that wasn't so possible perhaps only fifty, sixty or seventy years ago.

Last week we also gave some attention to the notable part played by John Foxe the martyrologist in providing English Protestants with this new comprehensive sense of history. He provided not only the vivid and copious examples of the sufferings of the godly in the reign of Queen Mary, especially Archbishop Cranmer and the Bishops Latymer and Ridley. He also fitted these vignettes, and their accompanying woodcuts, into a vast historical scheme which embraced the whole of human history and owed a very great deal to the scheme of history first worked out by St. Augustine of Hippo in his book 'The City of God' - in which he saw history as a contest between two churches; the one ideal and eternal, and the other earth- and time-bound. A contest which John Foxe and his friends believed was moving to a great climax in his own time.

We have also seen how in working out his own version of this great historical scheme with its deep and ramifying Christian roots, Foxe assigned a place of especial significance and honour to the Protestant 'Deborah' herself - Queen Elizabeth I. She was the 'great white hope' of this particular way of understanding history. It was a role, however, which she was never entirely comfortable to be playing, but it was one with which she colluded when it suited her convenience to do so. However when she came to the throne, she did not only have to consider the views of her zealous Protestant supporters because when her half-sister Mary died in 1558, Elizabeth was called to rule over a realm for the most part inhabited by conforming Catholics!

We always have to remember the small numbers of the Protestant exiles who had such a great influence on English history. These exiles who had fled to the continent during Mary's reign probably only amounted to about eight hundred people and that included women, children and servants. But of course using the printing presses of the low-countries of the Rhine valley and of Switzerland as their megaphones, they had an impact upon English thought out of all proportion to their numbers. Their zeal was confirmed in its fervency by exile and their cause had been watered by the blood of the martyrs, Cranmer, Latymer, Ridley and a large number of others less notable. They were faced by the supporters of the old regime, the supporters of Queen Mary's policy, who had been forced to put most of their effort into suppressing dissent and had got very little left over for any attempt to stimulate and revive popular devotion. At the same time many of Mary's Bishops and Ministers were compromised people. They had acquiesced to, or in some cases they had even been the major agents in the profound changes in Church and State which had been introduced under King Henry VIII. So, many of her leading supporters were compromised, tired, and in the case of her leading Minister, Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and Cardinal Poole, they were dead.

The returning exiles in 1559 found that they had therefore a weary establishment with which to contend. They had patches of enthusiastic Protestant support mainly in the seaports of Southern England, in East Anglia, and above all their great citadel was the City of London. The Protestants they found in these places were energised and equipped as a missionary force by the preaching of the returned exiles and their allies, by the products of the printing presses and, as we have seen, perhaps most significantly of all, by the work of John Foxe, 'Acts and Monuments', popularly known as the Book of Martyrs. We looked in some detail last time at the contents of this great work. We looked at his first Latin edition published in Switzerland in 1559, at the first English edition in 1563, and then at the definitive edition of 1570 greatly enlarged in that year of great menace for the Elizabethan regime.

Last time I was asked how many copies of Foxe's Book of Martyrs were in circulation by the end of the 16th century, and because there is no actual evidence of how many were printed in each edition, I was vague. I think I over-estimated the number. I have been looking at that great source book for the history of the printing trade in the 16th century, Bennett's 'The English Printing Trade and English Printers' and I see that the usual size of editions in this period was about 1,500. So if you imagine there being six great editions of Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and in addition some abridgements, you can see that 10,000 copies is really a very generous estimate of the number of copies in circulation. Of course, you have to remember these 10,000 copies had an impact on a much smaller political nation. Their message was incorporated in a lot of other publications, the 'Chronicles of Hollingshead' for instance, which we perhaps chiefly remember because of their impact on Shakespeare's history plays. Hollingshead took a very great deal of his material from Foxe almost verbatim. As well as there being a smaller political nation to influence, in an England and Wales whose population was probably less than 4 million, you have got to remember that most of those 4 million were still scattered around in the countryside. The book had its impact in the great centres of political power, in the towns and above all in London, which had a community of considerable size. London was in a class of its own. By the order of the Lord Mayor, Foxe's Book of Martyrs was set up in public places, purveyed from the pulpit, even established in orphanages in the City and so there was a good deal of access to it, although perhaps we cannot think of so many actual copies being in circulation.

I was also asked a very interesting question about the penetration of the North by Foxe's Book of Martyrs: the North, where a different sort of English was spoken from the English which obtained in London. Obviously it is true that the North in Tudor times was, on the whole, a conservative stronghold. Recent studies for example of Western Lancashire by Dr. Christopher Haig, show the comparative failure in Tudor times of Elizabethan Protestant preachers to evangelize that part of Lancashire. However, some of the Protestant reformers were themselves Northerners and had wide-spread Northern connections and Northern roots. Bishop Ridley himself was from the Borders. Grindle, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1575, was a Cumbrian from St. Bees on the coast, and he showed a very great interest in stimulating the Protestant cause in those parts, particularly after becoming Archbishop. One way of looking at the history of Elizabethan England is to note the steady expansion and the conquest of the whole land of England by London political ideas and London English. This was one of the great themes of the latter part of the 16th century and the preachers drawing their

material from the English Bible, the Prayer Book and the Book of Martyrs were among the principal and significant agents in this transformation which occurred throughout the latter part of the 16th century. By 1570, only twelve years into Elizabeth's reign, large areas of the country were still predominantly Catholic in sentiment. There was only a very limited coercive power at the disposal of Queen Elizabeth's Ministers even if they had wanted to use it, and the Queen herself was wary about committing herself to any kind of Protestant crusade, or becoming the sort of enthusiastic 'Deborah' of the sort described for her by the author she called "Father Foxe". 1570 was an exceedingly difficult and perilous year for the Queen and for her regime. The rebellion in the North (which had as one of its focuses Mary Queen of Scots, who had been forced to flee from her own Scottish kingdom and was settled in England) which involved much of the nobility of the North, was suppressed in 1570 only with considerable difficulty. The presence on English soil of Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic heir to the throne, was to stimulate plots and alarms for years to come. The international situation more widely viewed was extremely threatening.

A rupture had occurred between England and her chief trading partner, the Netherlands. The great outlet for the English wool and cloth trade, on which the finances of the City of London and the finances of the monarchy itself depended, was Antwerp. In the troubles of the Low Countries, the arrest by the Spanish-supported government of English merchants, and the closure of Antwerp to English trade, created an enormous trade and economic crisis for Elizabethan England. There was a frantic search for new markets, new ways of disposing of the cloth and the wool, because the solvency of the City and the Crown was at stake.

When Elizabeth I came to the throne the grammar of English foreign policy had been quite obvious and it was spelt out for her by Lord Paget. He gave her some very wise advice in a written memorandum which we still have, "Fear France". France is the great and eternal enemy. Fear France and keep faith and keep your alliance intact with whoever rules in the Netherlands". That was the grammar of English foreign policy. By 1570 those accepted and tried ways of understanding how to manage the international scene were shattered. 1570 did not see any of the great international powers actually able to take advantage of the considerable difficulties experienced by Elizabeth's regime. But there was some hysteria among her Protestant subjects, and certainly among those who, while not themselves being vastly pious, had done well out of the Reformation. This was true for quite a section of the gentry who had moved into the great inheritance of monastic and episcopal lands which had been up for sale in the previous decade. In February Pope Pius V had issued his Bull which is known as 'Regnard in Excelsis'- Bulls are known, as you know, by the first words that appear in them - and that Bull appearing in February 1570 excommunicated the Queen and deprived her "of her pretended right to the throne".

Before 1570 not a single Catholic had been executed for the faith in England. After 1570 nearly two hundred priests and laymen were to suffer the extremes of torment and the foul way of disposing of human beings which the 16th century knew, before Elizabeth herself died in 1603. The crucial watershed was this year of 1570. Instructed by Foxe, whose words seemed to be confirmed by the gathering storm, English Protestants were not only alarmed at the trend of events, they had a sense of living in the last age, a sense that events were moving to an apocalyptic climax. This was none more true than of Francis Drake who was, of course - and we tend to think of him like

this - a cheerful pirate who looted great sums from the maritime trade of the Spanish empire, but he was also an enthusiastic Protestant and a totally convinced one, who had learnt his faith at his father's knee. His father was a very simple Devonshire lay-preacher and enthusiastic Protestant. We know, of course, that Drake took Foxe's great folio volumes on his sailing expedition round the world in 1577, he read them to Spanish prisoners whom he caught by the way and whiled away boring afternoons by colouring in personally the woodcuts showing the feat of the martyrs under Queen Mary. Even on a man like Francis Drake, the quintessential Elizabethan man of action, this idea, this scheme, had a very great impact.

The centre of so many of the alarms of this period (a very dangerous period for Elizabeth herself and for her Government) was Mary Queen of Scots and the pressure grew on Queen Elizabeth to order her execution. The story of how Mary came to be executed is very well known. The pressure was building up on Elizabeth and she signed the document which later she said she had never meant to be put so brutally and so speedily into effect. She exhibited immense shock when she heard the news that Mary Queen of Scots had actually been executed, but whether this was for international consumption and what her private thoughts were, there is no way of telling. She showed her displeasure with her over-zealous servants by sending her secretary Davison who had passed on the fatal document, to the Tower of London for exceeding his commission. Rash and politically unwise Mary may have been, particularly in her youth, but she made it clear that she died as a martyr and as happened before with the Protestant martyrs under Queen Mary of England, the story of her martyrdom was soon making its way around Europe in a very telling and effective way which energised the English Catholic exiles on the Continent and their allies. It is really a very moving scene that is presented for us. Mary composed enters the hall of the great castle of Fotheringhall and then the Dean of Peterborough begins to preach at her. He is nervous, so he muffs the beginning of his sermon no less than three times and Mary cuts him short and seizes the initiative. She knows she is about to be executed. One can only have enormous respect for her calm and repose, her capacity to dominate the scene. She cuts him short with these words which have come down to us "Mr Dean, I shall die as I have lived in the true and holy Catholic faith, all you can say to me on that score is but vain and all your prayers, I think, can avail me little" and she held the crucifix aloft. She prepared for death with dignity repeating last of all the words "In manos tuas domina" - "Into thy hands O Lord". The axeman brought down the axe and then bent down to pick up the severed head with a shout of "God Save the Queen". But Mary had reserved her last stroke for beyond the grave, because all that the headsman managed to grasp was her auburn wig, and that came away in his hand. The whole thing looked fatuous while Mary's severed head with its cropped grey hair rolled to the edge of the dais. She had died as a martyr.

The story was soon circulating through Europe. The Spanish Ambassador in Paris in reporting the event to his master King Philip II of Spain, said "It would seem to be God's obvious design to bestow upon your majesty the crowns of these two kingdoms England and Scotland". Although Mary Queen of Scots had been a champion of the Catholic cause, she was not necessarily an instrument which the Spanish super-power felt that it could use to its own advantage. Her connections of course were French. Her relations were the leaders of the Holy League in France, the Catholic party in France and any success of Mary Queen of Scots in England would be a success for the French crown, which is the last thing that any ruler of Spain wanted to see. In a way, although her execution lit the tinder and caused great indignation and

energised the Catholic cause throughout Europe, her removal was in many ways convenient for the Spanish King. As Queen Mary of England's husband he had visited England. He had been present, Foxe tells us, behind the curtains at that great interview between Mary and her half-sister Elizabeth. Philip's way to inheriting the crown of England was opened up by the execution of Mary Queen of Scots and Philip, as Mary's husband proceeded to press his claim to the English throne.

Whatever his secret thoughts in the monastic privacy of his great palace, the Escorial, Philip II by the end of March 1587 - the month after Mary Queen of Scot's execution - had indeed ordered that rapid progress on 'Enterprise England' should be undertaken and preparations really began in earnest. Also at the end of March 1587, men of equally strong convictions about the Will of God, were making their preparations. Drake was ready to sail at the end of that month in the confidence that he had Heaven's blessing to spoil the Philistines. He wrote to one of Queen Elizabeth's chief ministers, Walsingham, about his intended expedition against the Spaniards "I thank God that I find no man in this fleet but as all members of one body to stand for our gracious Queen and our country against anti-Christ and his members". At the same time he also wrote a letter to John Foxe asking for Foxe's prayers, "That we may have continued peace in Israel. From your loving friend and faithful son in Jesus Christ, Francis Drake" This letter is still preserved. You can still see in Drake's own hand written on this letter to John Foxe the phrase "Our enemies are many, but our protector commandeth the whole world". This confidence had been deepened, built up and expressed by Foxe's work.

We know that at the end of April Drake was off Cadiz, where a great store of ships and munitions in preparation for the descent upon England was burnt. Drake said that he had singed the King of Spain's beard. On the way home he captured a great ship homeward bound from Goa, laden with the fruit of Portugal's eastern empire - Portugal at this time was one of the subject territories of the Spanish crown, and he carried back a prize worth £114,000. Elizabethan England had hardly seen wealth from piracy on that sort of scale. At the same time that England was having successes by sea there were reverses on land. There was the humiliation of an English army in the Low Countries by that immensely able General, the Duke of Palma, probably the most able soldier of his time. It was an enormous success on land which was also accompanied by a debacle at sea. Leicester, Elizabeth's favourite, had led some ships to support the English and Dutch forces and they had cruised off the coast impotently while Palma had had his way with them. So there was in 1587 a balance, there was success in Cadiz singeing the King of Spain's beard and there was failure in the crucial strategic theatre of the Netherlands. The stage was set for this great confrontation. The Armada recovered from the set-back administered by Drake and continued its preparations. By November 1587 Burleigh and Walsingham were absolutely convinced that the plan was to put Palma's army of seasoned veterans from the Low Countries across the Channel into England, whilst their Channel crossing would be protected by the arrival of a great fleet from Spain. They read the plan correctly. By November 1587 they knew what to expect. Spain was still collecting this huge fleet to protect the crossing, not only from Spain itself, but from all the Mediterranean dependencies of the Spanish crown.

At this point the issue seemed to intelligent contemporary observers to be very doubtful. The English fleet was the most formidable fighting force in the Atlantic, everybody was clear about that, including the Spaniards. But on land the country levies, particularly if they were to be commanded by

Leicester who had really shown no very great conspicuous abilities, were certainly no match for Palma and his veteran solders. If a Spanish army had landed in England there were hardly any fortifications around English cities - they were in decay, and there was also the possibility that there would be sympathetic risings by Catholics. The stakes were high, the outcome was very dubious and if it had gone against the English forces the prospects beyond for the Protestant cause were not good. The Dutch would not be able to fight on if England was in hostile hands. England had supplied troops and money to stiffen Dutch resistance, but strategically it would be a very great blow if the ports of England were in hostile hands. It would be a decisive step on the way to Spanish hegemony in the Mediterranean and in the New World.

It was widely believed among the learned that history was divided into a number of cycles which pointed to a culminating crisis in 1588. The very famous and significant Lutheran Divine, Melanchthon, said that the penultimate cycle had ended in 1518 with Luther's defiance of the Pope, and that there would be a final cycle of ten times seven years. That was the length of the captivity of the people of Israel in Babylon until the seventh seal would be opened, anti-Christ would be defeated and everything would be set for the last judgement. Popular versions of this prophecy were circulating. We know of them in German, French, Dutch and English, so the scriptural prophecies pointed to 1588 as a year of crisis as well.

There was also an even more venerable prophecy of the 15th century by the mathematician, Regiomontanas. He was the man who had provided Columbus with his astronomical tables. In the course of this work he had become very interested in the picture of the heavens for the year 1588. He predicted for that year an eclipse of the sun in February, and two eclipses of the moon in March and August. He also noted that Saturn, Jupiter and Mars would be in conjunction ominously and he asked himself, of course, what all this portended. He put it down in cautious but clear Latin verses which reverberated around Europe and had a very wide circulation. Those Latin verses which began "post mille exactus ab partu virginis annus" have been translated by Professor Garrett Mattingley, whose book on the Spanish Armada, 'The Defeat of the Spanish Armada', presents the best picture of that event seen in the international diplomatic context of the time. He translated this prophecy in the following terms: "A thousand years after the Virgin Birth and after five hundred more allowed the globe, the wonderful 88th year begins and brings with it woe enough. If this year total catastrophe does not befall, if land and sea do not collapse in total ruin, yet will the whole world suffer upheavals, empires will dwindle and from everywhere will be the sound of great lamentation". That was a prophecy in very wide circulation in Europe in the years before 1588 - it reminds us obviously of the oracle of Delphi to Croesus, the King of the Lydians - "If you set out on this campaign and cross the river a great empire will be destroyed." - the question he should have asked, but didn't was "which empire?" So there was an immense amount of controversy about what this prophecy actually meant. An English Catholic correspondent writing to one of the leaders of the Catholic exiles, (William Allen, soon to be named a Cardinal - living in Rome at this time) said that "In the ruinous foundations of Glastonbury Abbey an upheaval of the earth had disclosed a marble slab buried for centuries. On the slab were written words beginning with 'post mille exactus ab partu virginis annus' and this proved that that prophecy therefore could not have been by the 15th century mathematician Regiomontanas, but was probably written by Merlin himself. That was one of the stories in circulation.

The Preachers of Paris, the leaders of the Catholic party there, were quite clear what scripture meant and what this prophecy meant. The year 1588 was going to be a year of come-uppance for the English 'Jezebel' and for the rebellious Dutch.

In England the prophecy was well known, mentioned in the second edition of Hollingshed's chronicles which, as we have seen, took much of its material from Foxe and was a great influence on the plays of Shakespeare. Hollingshead talks of this ancient prophecy so rife in every man's mouth and there were pamphlets published, probably encouraged by the Privy Council in order to counteract any ill-effect that the prophecy might have had. The most substantial of the pamplets being by a doctor called John Harvey and entitled 'A discursive problem concerning prophecies; how far they are to be valued or credited' devised especially to the abatement of the terrible threatenings and menaces peremptorily denounced against the kingdoms and states of the world, this present famous year 1588, supposed the great wonderful and fatal year of our age.' They did not believe in the 16th century in the pithy commercial title."

The Theatre was prepared. The attention of the audience was attracted by these prophecies and preparations for the drama about to be played out. The antagonists were more evenly balanced than later accounts sometimes allow. Sometimes you hear it said that the number of the English ships and their diminutive size made this into a kind of David and Goliath contest. You have to remember however, that by 1588 Queen Elizabeth I was the mistress of the most powerful navy Europe had seen. She had 18 powerful galleons built and armed in quite a new fashion, capable of out-manoeuvring and out-gunning anything afloat. The great John Hawkins was largely responsible for the look and the power of the English fleet. He changed the proportions of the Atlantic galleons, he made them longer in proportion to their width so that they could carry more guns and they could sail closer to the wind - more manoeuvrable. He had also reduced the great castles at either end of the ships from which in previous times soldiers had fought sea battles as if they were just land battles on a fluid element. He had really built a fleet of much sleeker and cleaner lines. At the same time his rival and collaborator, Sir William Winter was working on the ordnance, reducing the number of small man-killing guns in the English fleet and building up the number of ship-destroying cannons which could bombard the enemy without running the risk of your ship being boarded.

The Queen has real difficulty in restraining these captains who had enormous confidence in their ships and in the fleet. The Spanish were not unaware of the magnitude of the task that was before them. The second rank commanders of the Armada were experienced sailors, there is nothing about the Portuguese or the Basques that could be described as fair weather inexperienced sailors, they were not contemptible in their abilities, or certainly in their courage. Indeed when it came to it, the tactics the Spanish fleet pursued on its way up the Channel, were remarkably successful in keeping the English off and the English (as we know from contemporary letters, especially from Lord Howard of Effingham, the Commander of the English Naval forces) were awed by the size and power of the Spanish fleet. In more recent times people said "Oh it was so obvious, they had better canons, these design innovations made it a very unfair fight, of course the English were going to win, it was obvious". It certainly was not obvious to contemporaries. Fleets of this size and this character had never clashed before, nobody knew what tactics were going to work, nobody knew how the new weapons were going to operate

actually in war, nobody was really confident about the outcome except the religious enthusiasts on both sides.

Certainly the supreme Commander of the Spanish Fleet, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, was very inexperienced. When Philip II first appointed him he wrote back complaining about his bad health and inexperience and saying that "I know from my previous experiences of going to sea that I am always sea-sick and always catch cold", but he threw himself into the final preparations for the Armada urged on by Philip II - normally so cautious King Philip but he would not brook any delay in the enterprise on England.

On April 25 Medina Sidonia went to Lisbon Cathedral to receive at the altar of the Cathedral the blessed standard of the expedition. The spiritual preparations were an advertisement of the nature of this armada as a holy crusade; every soldier and sailor made his confession, received the sacrament; the ships were searched for women. Then the Cardinal Archbishop of Lisbon blessed the enterprise and Friars went among the kneeling soldiers and sailors reading a papal absolution promising a full indulgence to all those who took part in this crusade and the troops were shown the banner which depicted the arms of Spain supported on the one side by Christ crucified and on the other side by the Virgin. There was a scroll underneath written with the words of the psalmist 'exorte domine et vindica causam tuam' "Arise O God and vindicate thine own cause. The Pope had a representative there in Lisbon watching what was going on. His Holiness Sextus V had been urging this expedition on Philip from the first year of his Papacy and for just as long King Philip had been trying to borrow from the Pope on the basis that he was going to do it. The Pope said now he would give Philip a million golden duckets but only (this was a very shrewd occupant of the Chair of St. Peter) when Spanish troops had actually landed on English soil, until then Philip was given permission to tax the clergy throughout his dominions.

This emissary reported back to Rome on a very fascinating conversation with one of the most experienced Spanish captains. The Pope's emissary had asked this captain, whose identity we do not know, very bluntly, if you meet the English armada in the Channel do you expect to win the battle? The captain had said, "Of course, it is well known that we fight in God's cause so when we meet the English, God will surely arrange matters so that we can grapple and board them. Either by sending some strange freak of weather or more likely just by depriving the English of their wits. If we can come to close quarters, Spanish valour and Spanish steel and the great masses of soldiers we shall have on board, will make our victory certain. But unless God helps us by a miracle, the English who have faster and handier ships than ours, and bearing more long range guns and who know their advantage just as well as we do, will never close with us at all but stand aloof and knock us to pieces with their culverins without our being able to do anything about it. So we are sailing against England in the confident hope of a miracle."

One does not quite know, of course, from the page of this report whether it is all said with a sardonic smile by this Spanish captain who, very accurately pointed out the English naval advantage, or in what tone this was said. It is a fascinating despatch which is still preserved in Rome.

Almost as soon as it set out, and this for us is almost inconceivable, the details of the strength of this armada were actually published by authority in Spain (probably to terrify and impress the enemy) but there we have a document published in Madrid giving the fullest details of any naval force

that we know of in the 16th century; 130 ships, 123,792 cannon balls. I will not weary you with the rest of the agenda. The Armada is the name by which we know this great naval expedition but, of course, the Spaniards who do have an irony of their own, christened the fleet the 'invencibile' (the invincible) and Spanish humour has ensured that this name has stuck in Spanish ever since.

Bad weather delayed the Armada, it was only on 29 July (As you probably know, the English had not gone on to the new calendar which most of the rest of Europe had adopted. The Gregorian calendar was actually 10 days ahead of English dates. You must remember this as it causes a lot of misunderstanding. In England it was 19 July, but everywhere else in Europe it was 29 July) that news came to Plymouth, where Francis Drake was playing bowls, that the Spanish Armada was approaching and, as every schoolboy used to know, Drake said "We have time enough to finish the game and beat the Spaniards too!"

It is for others in this year, particularly in the lectures being organised by the Maritime Museum, to describe the details of the engagements. Suffice it to say that as it sailed up the Channel little damage was done to the Armada. The Spanish formation, a sort of crescent shape which so awed Howard of Effingham, worked well and held the English off. Martin Frobisher (and for those of you who were here last time, he was the second person who is to be discovered in the church of St. Giles Cripplegate, in the Barbican) was very nearly caught by the Spaniards off Portland, where sometimes you can stand on those cliffs and imagine the scene, one of the crucial episodes in the Armada story taking place offshore. The English ships managed to avoid, as the Spanish captain predicted, being boarded, but they stood so far away that their superior cannons did less damage to the Spaniards going up the Channel than perhaps expected. There was cause for uncertainty. Nobody knew how the tactics and how the new weapons were going to work. On the front of the stage today there is an illustration of one of the vital episodes - the launching of the fireships. These did some damage to the Spanish fleet and more seriously caused them to cut the cables of their principle anchors. This caused them terrible difficulties later when the English learnt to shorten the range and use their cannons with greater advantage. The Duke of Palma was boxed in by the Dutch and could not get his troops through the galleys and channels out to sea to rendezvous with the Spanish fleet. By August 9th it was true that the vital link-up which Burleigh had known about all those months before and which King Philip II had planned, was not going to work. But by August 9th the Armada was not destroyed and Drake was calling urgently for more and more supplies and ammunition even after the fireships and the failure of the link-up, the greater damage being done as the English learnt to shorten their range. It looked as if the Armada was going to be destroyed by the wind which was blowing the Spanish fleet onto the Zeeland sands where it would very soon break-up. However, on Tuesday 9 August the wind shifted and the Armada was saved. This is not the popular recollection of the whole event. The wind was such that Medina Sidonia and his Chaplain on board the flagship believed that the fleet had been saved by a miracle of God.

The English stayed in pursuit until 12 August and then turned back on the Friday when they had reached the Firth of Forth to patrol the Harwich and Margate area because Palma was still there on the other side of the Channel with his immensely powerful army. Once they had checked that the Spanish fleet was not going to make a landing further up the coast, they turned back

and reached Harwich on August 18th. On that same morning, Thursday, Queen Elizabeth set off in the royal barge from St. James's. Just picture in your mind's eye the scene down the River Thames. There was a barge going in front of her with trumpeters blowing silver trumpets, the barges behind her full of the Yeoman of the Guard. The situation was still critical. She was going down to Tilbury to inspect the Royal levies who would have to oppose Palma's veteran troops if ever they landed. She left London behind, defended by the 10,000 men of the trained bands. The chains were up in the streets where they had last been put up for the rebellion of Wyatt, but elsewhere in the Kingdom there was immense confusion and lack of preparation. The Queen got down to Tilbury and you perhaps have in your mind's eye the scene between Leicester, her favourite of so many decades, and the handsome 23 year old Essex, Leicester's step-son and Master of the Horse. She inspected the troops and the following day she made that marvellous speech, the Tilbury Speech "I have the body of a weak and feeble women, but I have the heart and stomach of a King and of a King of England too!" Superb theatre!

This is where I end today, at Tilbury. At this great scene, news came in from the fleet which had anchored at Harwich and off Margate, of how things had gone. It is very important for our theme, the reflection of contemporaries and the importance of ideology in making shape of history and energising groups of people in the process, to realise that at the time on Thursday August 19th and Friday 20th the estimate of what had happened between the Spanish fleet and the English fleet was unenthusiastic. The Queen's fleet was not seriously damaged. Possibly seven or eight, as far as they knew, of the big Spanish ships, had been put out of action or seriously damaged. Howard and Drake, although they did not encounter the Armada again, were not sure that the Spanish fleet would not again materialise out of the northern mists where they had been driven. Drake was of course, pressing for more supplies, for ammunition because he thought it was not over. There was the terrible Duke of Palma the other side of the Channel waiting for his chance on the high tides.

The Captains' thought at this point when Queen Elizabeth was visiting the troops of Tilbury, (when we know it was all over really) was that a great opportunity had been missed for want of powder and shot. Henry White, one of the Captains of the English fleet wrote this to Walsingham "Your honour may see how our parsimony at home hath bereaved us of the famousest victory that ever our navy might have had at sea." Walsingham in his turn wrote that Friday night, 19 August, back to London: "So" he said "our half doing doth breed dishonour and leaves the disease uncured".

It was actually all over, a legend was in the making, but Walsingham writes as though a defeat had been sustained.

Next time in the third and last lecture we shall see what happened to change this estimate and how the defeat of the Spanish Armada became for Englishmen a reality, what Henry White said that it had missed being, and that is "the famousest victory" in our naval history.

GOD SPEAKS FIRST TO HIS ENGLISH MEN: THE ARMADA OF 1588

Lecture - 29 March 1988

Last week we left Queen Elizabeth the First reviewing the troops at Tilbury and we saw the arrival of the English fleet back at their base at Harwich, after pursuing the Spanish Armada as far north as the Firth of Forth. It was Thursday, August 18th, or August 8th in England, because England was still ten days behind the rest of the continent. But to avoid any confusion, I'll keep on referring to new style dates, the ones that were in use on the continent of Europe. On Thursday, August 18th, the English fleet had returned to its base at Harwich and the extent of their victory over the Spanish Armada by no means clear, even to the Captains of the fleet itself. They were talking in their reports to Walsingham, more in terms of opportunities missed, than a great victory having been gained. On Thursday, August 18th, Walsingham wrote gloomily to Hatton, his friend and colleague in London, "So our half-doing doth breed dishonour and leaves the disease uncured". Of course, at that time, they didn't know whether the remnants of the Spanish fleet were going to descend out of the northern mists and the formidable Duke of Palma was still poised a short distance away, waiting in the Netherlands, near Dunkirk, for a favourable opportunity to strike. If he did strike and was successful in landing some of those hardened Spanish veterans in England, it was by no means clear what sort of effective resistance could have been offered by the raw levies from the Shires which the Queen was reviewing at Tilbury. If the English fleet and its Captains were unclear about what had happened at this point in the story of the Spanish Armada, the rest of Europe was even more in the dark. This was a period of conflicting rumours which circulated around the capitals of Europe, including one which was widely credited, which said that Drake had been killed and a great victory had been won by the Spaniards. This was believed a long time after the Armada had experienced more disaster on the coast of Ireland. We get indication of how difficult it was to collect reliable intelligence in the 16th century by looking at a fascinating collection of newsletters which had been published. These newsletters were exchanged in the great network set up by the banking house, the Fuggers. They had correspondents stationed in the principal cities and they tried to (as was necessary for their business and their financial dealings) keep up to date with contemporary affairs.

One of their despatches from Prague (where, of course, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph lived - it was a important political centre then) dated September 8th 1588, some weeks after our first scene at Tilbury, talks about the arrival of a special messenger with news that the English and Spanish Armadas had met and the English tried to escape to land, but the Duke of Medina Sidonia (the Spanish Admiral in command) had stopped this. He had attacked and defeated the English. He had taken sixty English vessels, small and large, and among these vessels was the English flag ship. The remainder of the English ships together with Sir Francis Drake had escaped, but the Duke of Medina Sidonia had sailed into the port of Plymouth. He had landed 8,000 soldiers and 30 large guns (it is amazing how precise these details are for what was a total fantasy) and then he had sailed off from Plymouth to join the Prince of Palma and in company with him would try to land further troops in England. Now that was a despatch picked up by the correspondent of the great Fugger banking house in Prague on September 8th. Disinformation, rumours and bizarre stories were circulating throughout Europe and the outcome of this great encounter was unclear for a considerable time.. As late as October 7th in Constantinople (another very important centre of political intrigue and in-fighting and the headquarters of the Ottoman Sultanate), the French and

the English Ambassadors were still brawling and arguing in public about who had won. However, the news that came in from the West coast of Ireland and gradually began to percolate through England conveyed the news of a major Spanish disaster. The news revealed that the Spaniards had lost more men drowned, and more ships damaged because of its difficulties on the coast of Ireland, than had happened during the battles in the Channel. The news gave a feeling of hope in England and dispelled any lingering hopes in Spanish hearts. These losses on the Irish coast were very much greater than during any of the battles which the Armada had to endure in the Channel or the North Sea. But it has to be remembered even after the Irish disasters, the disaster was not complete. The Duke of Medina Sidonia who has been much blamed by subsequent historians, did manage to bring back a sizeable part of his force. At the beginning of the engagement as the Armada had neared Cornwall, he commanded 68 major fighting ships, not counting ancillary vessels. On September 3th after wreckage and difficulties on the Irish coast and other disasters he still was in command of 44 ships and 44 ships eventually returned to home. The disaster for the Armada could well have been worse. In the face of defeat, King Phillip the Second of Spain was dignified and composed. He had a long suit in constancy and dignity, and in writing to the Spanish Bishops on October 13th he tried to make the best of what had happened. "We are bound to give praise to God for all things which He has pleased to do and now I give thanks to Him for the mercy He has shown in the storms through which the Armada sailed. It might have suffered a much worse fate and that its ill fortune was no greater must be credited to the prayers for its good success so devoutly and continuously offered." You will remember in the matter of who got the best of the wind and the weather that God sent, the Spaniards had a rather different view. Medina Sidonia himself, the Spanish Admiral and his Chaplain in the aftermath of that change of the wind which saved the Armada (as we saw last week) from breaking up on the great sandbanks of Zeeland were convinced that it was a miracle. They gave thanks to God and they undoubtedly believed that God had saved the fleet from total destruction on those sands. So weather as a way of interpreting divine will and the side that God favoured, was a notoriously fragile way of understanding whose side God was on. As the news of the extensive Spanish losses in Ireland came in, the English and Dutch began to have a rather different interpretation of the part God had played in the battle. One of Elizabeth the Great's Armada medals bears the legend "God breathed and they were scattered". Emboldened by this success, the English themselves in the following year attempted a similar landing in Portugal, under Drake's immediate command rather than that of Howard of Effingham. The expedition to Portugal was almost as much of a disaster and a failure as the Armada had been in the previous year and the war between Spain and England was to drag on for fourteen years. The defeat of the Spanish Armada was not decisive in the sense of ending the war between Spain and England. This war went on as long as Queen Elizabeth lived. What precisely did the defeat of this Armada decide? Some have said that it really marked the beginning of the decline of the Spanish overseas Empire, but by the time Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 none of Spain's colonies had been lost to the English, whereas the English had to postpone their own attempt to colonise Virginia.

Did the defeat of the Spanish Armada finally deliver mastery of the sea into the hands of England? Well as we've seen in previous talks the English fleet was always superior in Atlantic waters. The Armada was actually to be the beginning of a more formidable Spanish naval effort and a more professional programme of building ships and casting cannon was undertaken by the Spanish

King in the wake of this reverse. The English margin of superiority at sea probably actually diminished between 1588 and 1603. In those fifteen years more American treasure reached safety and home in Spanish ports, than in any other fifteen years in Spanish history. So it didn't even decide the mastery of the seas, but it did have a major impact in the realm of ideas and what we might call morale. Many people in Europe had seen the Spanish super power advance from victory to victory and it seemed that providence, God's design, and the wave of the future, really was on the side of Spain. Protestants were naturally alarmed by this, but even Catholic Frenchmen, Catholic Venetians and Catholic Germans feared the consequences of further Spanish successes. John Foxe had taught Protestant Englishmen like Drake and Walsingham to see the wave of the future rolling their way. The decision to send the Armada to challenge the English fleet on its own home ground in the Channel in these circumstances, with both sides feeling that they had God on their side, that they were the agents of the providential scheme for world history, took on the appearance of a judicial duel. A generation which on both sides was steeped in divinity and understood affairs by reference to primary causes, God's actions rather than any secondary causes, expected that in such a conflict, God would defend the right. This was the conviction of both sides in this conflict. The momentous character of the crisis, as we've seen, was also accentuated by all the prophecies from scripture, and the prophecies astronomical, which pointed to 1588 as being what a contemporary author called, "A great wonderful year, a year of disaster for someone". The defeat did reinforce a sense in England of her special destiny as a Protestant nation and confirmed the growing sense of an English identity bound up with the person of the Queen herself and the religion of the 'Book'. It was in this realm of ideas and identity and morals that the Armada really had its greatest impact. Almost as soon as the Armada was home in its port, there were plans to issue an abridgment of Foxe's great Book of Martyrs and that came out in 1589. By the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign there were no less than five more editions of the full text. "There is not a book", the compiler of the abridgment said, "under the scriptures more necessary for a Christian to be conversant in than this book of Foxe's, "Acts and Monuments". Here mayest thou read not only what hath been suffered of the old fathers of the Church, who have with their blood purchased unto us this freedom of the gospel, but of late time, what thy fathers, thy mothers, thy brother and thy friend hath suffered for the right testimony whereby the sincerity of the gospel standeth as at this day."

The defeat of the Armada was seen within the context of this history and in the following century the events of the year 1588, the great wonderful year, were actually incorporated into the text of Foxe's great work. Foxe himself had died the year before, in 1587, but the revisers and future editors of his work wove in the events of 1588 to fill out his version of the scheme of history. In 1632 for example, his work 'Acts and Monuments' was issued yet again, its seventh edition in three great folio volumes. In the third of those volumes a long section was added entitled 'A continuation of the histories of Foreign Martyrs from the happy reign of the most renowned Queen Elizabeth to these times - with sundry relations of those bloody massacres in the cities of France in the year 1572 whereunto are annexed the two deliverances of the English nation. The one from the Spanish invasion in 1588 and the other from gunpowder treason in the year 1605. The account of the Armada was concluded in this revised version of Foxe's great book with a report, attributed to a Spanish spy, of Elizabeth's appearance at Tilbury and a translation of a great poem addressed to Queen Elizabeth and sent from

Geneva by the reformed divine Theodore Besa. At the centre of Foxe's story is the figure of the godly prince, Elizabeth herself who, having passed through her own time of trial, became the champion of the gospel and the Reformation. The anticipations generated by this kind of interpretation of history, which gave a special place to England and the ruler of England in the divine plan, lies behind the outburst of great popular enthusiasm particularly in London, which greeted the ascension of James 1. Very soon the gunpowder plot was to rekindle all the old fears and apprehensions and confirm the sense of God's special protection for the nation and for her Ruler. But here things change, because James 1 and his son, Charles, found it very difficult to live up to the image of the great Queen Elizabeth, the 'Deborah' of the English reformation built up by the historians who followed in the wake of John Foxe. They also stirred up old fears and prejudices by negotiating for peace with Spain and even contemplating a marriage between Charles and the Spanish princess. At the same time, of course, James, when his staunchly Protestant daughter Elizabeth of Bohemia and her husband were hard pressed by religious wars in Germany, seemed to fold his hands and do very little. James was unwilling or unable to take any measures against the Puritan preachers who were demanding a more radical reformation of the English Church and things did not come to a point of crisis during his reign. Charles' attempts to impose his will on this fraternity of preachers (who were preaching the same message about the meaning of English history that had been formulated by John Foxe) via Archbishop Lord, led to an exodus of religious exiles much greater in extent that anything which had happened under Queen Mary Tudor.

In the crisis year of 1641 Foxe's great book was published again and as Charles' difficulties mounted, the figure of Elizabeth the Protestant 'Deborah', guiding England in her special mission and destiny loomed ever larger, fed by the successive editions of this great work and the Niagara of sermons, histories and plays which depended upon it. A very important example of the kind of publications which were produced in this class and very much dependent upon Foxe's work was William Camden's "Annals of the English State in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth". (He is much more famous now of course, as the author of the topographical classic, Britannia). He published his work on the reign of Elizabeth in 1615 in the decent obscurity of Latin. He took the story down to the aftermath of the defeat of the Armada of 1589. After his death, work that he had done continuing the story to the ascension of James 1 was also published.

After Camden's death in 1621 the final part of his work that brought the story down to ascension of James 1 was published and crucially, just as Archbishop Lord, with the king's approval, was trying to reassert the authority of Bishops over the English Church - an English translation of Camden's Annals was published. Camden had been a sound Protestant, and though no Puritan, he had followed the main lines of Foxe's story which once again proved its power to make a contemporary point. In Camden's work we have the conventional review of recent history. Henry VIII presented as a magnanimous prince - this is very judiciously put, "In whose great mind were confusidly mixed, many eminent virtues, with no less notorious vices". Edward was described as the saintly reformer, but ambition and emulation among the nobility, disobedience among the common people, grew to extravagant and insolent lengths, so that was not an unmitigated success either. Mary is commended for her piety and for her sympathy with the poor, but her reign was scarred by, and I quote Camden, "The barbarous cruelty of the Bishops",

Now that the Catholic threat to the religious establishment in England is receding somewhat, the whole tradition of interpreting English history is turned as a great engine against those, particularly the Bishops, in charge of what would seem to be only a half-way house reformation. This tradition of interpreting English history becomes revolutionary in its tendency and Camden's central figure is the great Queen herself with her motto "Always the Same"; which was actually the motto of my College and it was usually held to refer to the food on offer. It had much more noble associations in the seventeenth century and this English translation (which appears just as Lord is getting under way trying to impose the authority of Bishops once again in the Church) tells the readers of Charles' time. "That no oblivion shall ever bring the glory of Elizabeth's name, for her happy and renowned memory still liveth and shall forever live in the minds of Englishmen to all prosperity as one who in wisdom and filicity of government surpassed all the princes since the days of Augustus" The memory and the image of Elizabeth is used as an engine against what was seen to be the illegitimate attempts of the monarchs and their Bishops of Stuart, to enforce their own settlement on Church and state. With the memory of the great Queen, the legend of England herself, that specially favoured land grew apace. Before Elizabeth's time, you would have had very great difficulty in finding such an exuberant celebration of England as appeared in the work of one of Camden's friends and disciples, John Speed. He wrote a theatre and a history of Great Britain. We remember him as the great map maker, perhaps, but he was also a very significant historian, who was in this apostolic succession from John Foxe. His theatre and history of Great Britain appeared in two huge folio volumes in 1611. He was a friend and associate, as I've said, of Camden. I mentioned him because in lecture One we talked about the four burials in St. Giles Cripplegate Church in the Barbican which were going to be particularly significant in our story. The burials were, of course, of John Foxe, who was the Rector of St. Giles; of Martin Frobisher, who played such a gallant part in the battle with the Spanish Armada; of John Speed and, perhaps greatest figure of all, Milton. This is Speed talking about England, "England whose beauty and benefits, not afar off as Moses saw Canaan from Pisgah, but by my own travels through every province of England and Wales, mine eyes have beheld. Whose climate and temperature, plenty and pleasures, make it to be as the very Eden of Europe. Pardon me I pray if affection passes limits, for the store of corn in the champagne, and of pasture in the lower grounds, presseth the cart under the sheaves, to the barn, and filleth the coffers of the possessors. Neither are the faces of the mountains and hills only spread over with infinite herds and sorts of cattle, but their entrails also are in continual travail and continuingly delivered of their rich progenies of copper, lead, iron, marble, crystal, jet, alabaster, and the wonder-working lodestone. Briefly every soil is so enriched with plenty and pleasures as the inhabitants think there is no paradise in the earth but where themselves dwell". Now, his history was punctuated with instructions, which refer back to Foxe, pointing us back again and again to that seminal interpretation of English history. His work has its climax in a great paean of praise to Queen Elizabeth who "for her royal actions and princely qualities of mind may be singled out for an Ideal", capital I, "platonic reference of an absolute prince". Now these histories and a host of minor imitations did much to shape the public understanding of Protestants about where history should be moving on the eve of the revolution. Once a check had been given in 1640 to Lord's attempts to muzzle press and pulpit, when Parliament took away the Archbishop's right to license pulpit and press, then the preachers were ready and they were free to invoke once again what had become that familar story of

England's appointed and special place in the providential scheme. But now it was in a revolutionary version and it was aimed at the existing hierarchy in Church and of course at this time Church and state was still seen as coterminous as a whole. England, the preachers said, was the place where anti-Christ would be overthrown and this was explosive material. When Parliament reassembled in November 1640 almost the first thing that happened was that services were organised for members of the House of Commons at St. Margarets, Westminster. It happened on the anniversary of Elizabeth's accession that the preacher at the morning service reminded his hearers that "This very day 82 years since, began a new resurrection of this Kingdom from the dead, our second happy reformation of religion by the auspicious entrance of our late royal 'Deborah', unto her blessed and glorious reign". Deborah you remember, was one of the Judges of Israel, she was a prophetess; you can read all about her in chapters 4 and 5, of the Book of Judges. Very often when modern scholars talk about the cult of Elizabeth, they fascinate us with tales of her being regarded as a Gloriana, or some other mythical figure. But it was far more common to describe her as the English Deborah and she herself when she spoke to Parliament most frequently described herself as the "Nursing Mother" of Israel. These Old Testament themes were the ones that reverberated both then and in the revolutionary situation of 1640. Now the afternoon preacher at St. Margarets Westminster also invoked this tradition, and described England as "Another land of Goshen where light hath still shined and all others hath been in darkness".

Elizabeth was the glorious 'Deborah', although her heart was upright and she loathed the idolatry of the former reign, yet she found work enough to restore anything at all and to make any beginning of a reformation. "She had such a strong party of stout Popelings to grapple with" (wonderful word, that, a Popeling) "to grapple with at home, as well as their abetters abroad and she was also thwarted" (and this is a fascinating new note) "she was also thwarted by the Protestant exiles who'd been in Frankfurt because of their addiction to the Book of Common Prayer and came back to this country and hampered her efforts at a total reformation of the Church". This interpretation of what had happened at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign would have astonished the Queen herself, and she of course was lying in her tomb next door in Westminster Abbey when this sermon was being preached in St. Margarets. MP's were being told that they had to finish the work left unfinished at Elizabeth's death and thwarted ever since by the villains of the peace, the Bishops. Soon an even more famous voice was raised in the service of this version of English history - John Milton, the fourth and last of our burials at St. Giles, Cripplegate. He had been considering the composition in 1640 of a great epic poem on the theme of British history using some of the themes of Foxe's work. Instead in that year he began to compose a series of revolutionary tracts urging further reformation in England which concluded with his great work, Areopagitica, from which the title of this little series of talks is actually a quotation. Milton of course was a formidable and penetrating intellect. In his later historical work, he was quite capable of being critical about details of a received story. In particular he cast doubt on the motivation of some of Foxe's martyrs, especially the Bishops and really wondered whether they died for something rather less than the true faith of the word and the book. He was also quite clear about that side of Elizabeth's reign which was particularly to the fore in the name of Archbishop Whitgift and what part the Queen herself played in supporting the Archbishop's efforts to hinder, what he, Milton, regarded as true reformation. However, in 1640 in the revolutionary

situation the familiar code was inescapable, the enormous strength of this tradition was at his disposal and the code was that the chosen people of the Old Testament equal the elect nation of England. This view had been so assiduously propagated in the reign of Queen Elizabeth and in whose story Elizabeth herself played such a very notable and significant part. Addressing the Lords and Commons Milton said "God has appointed England to give out reformation to the world. Let England not forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live". This is a tradition that went back even to the time of Cardinal Poole. As we indicated in the first lecture, it was Cardinal Poole who introduced this theme when he first set foot again on English soil in Mary's reign. Milton went on "Lords and Commons of England, consider what nation it is whereof ye are the Governors. For now that God is once more decreeing some new and great period in His Church, even to the reforming of reformation itself, what does He then but reveal Himself to His Englishmen. I say as His manner is, first to us". Milton recalls the Armada at this moment and reminds Parliament that anti-Christ had come sailing up the Channel in 1588 and that God had scattered him all over the northern sea as far as frozen Thule. Now we can't explore further the revolutionary appeal of this doctrine and its history, but the use made by the radicals of 1640-41 and subsequently is actually reflected in the history of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. While the danger to the religious establishment was largely from Catholics, Foxe's Book of Martyrs enjoyed a good deal of official sanction and support. It was officially published with commendations from the Archbishop and great trumpets from the City of London. It was ordered to be set up in Orphanages and in Livery Halls in 1571. Again, when there was the threat of the accession of a Catholic sovereign, James II, there was an official publication of Foxe's book. At other times and increasingly, certainly in the 18th and 19th centuries, Foxe's book came to be a truncated work, shorn of its great cosmic interpretaton of history, which as we've seen owed so much to St. Augustine. Truncated just to give the familiar tale of sufferings inflicted on Protestants under Queen Mary Tudor and issued in the interests of those who had suffered themselves at the hands of the Protestant Anglican hierarchy, like the early Methodists. Many of the truncated editions which came out in the 18th century were produced in fact by Methodists. However, some of the general elements of Foxe's work passed into English history and became the property of everybody. Through Holinshed, who depended on him, and Shakespeare a great tradition of devotion to Queen Elizabeth, and even a sense of a special destiny of England (although later on it was transmuted into a special responsibility to spread the benefits of the Westminster constitution and democratic government all over the world) certainly survived until my boyhood. I can remember with immense excitement reading H.E. Marshall's "Our Island Story", which contains many echoes of the vignettes, the stories, the emphases, first selected by Foxe.

Some of the details of the interpretation of history we've been discussing, (which had such a considerable impact, first in steadying nerve and raising morale in the 16th century and then in a revolutionary sense in the 1640's) as given by Foxe are suspect. Even the central event of the Armada's defeat itself was by no means immediately seen in very clear cut terms. We remember the Spanish-English debate on who had the best of God's wind and whether there was a miracle on the Zeelands sands which actually saved the Armada. The Armada was perhaps not in terms of economic or political history quite the significant event it later appeared. However, I wouldn't want to suggest that there was any conscious and cynical falsification involved here. There

was certainly propoganda organised by Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council, but there was also a fascinating dialectic, there was a dialogue between events and a scheme of interpretation (based on biblical categories, notably on the existence of a chosen people), which disposed those in the tradition of Foxe to read contemporary events in the light of a cosmic drama. They discerned this drama being played out in every age, when there had been, and was in their own age, a contest between the false Israel and the true Israel, a drama which was moving to a climax in time quite unlike the theories of history which depend on the idea of a great wheel of fate and cycles of time returning over and over again. There was a fascinating dialogue between these events and the people who came to look at history with the categories supplied by the Holy Scriptures. Whatever else you say, this gave what was happening in their own time vast significance. It imparted a dignity and a responsibility to the activities of individuals, to their decisions about contemporary conflicts and issues and this actually released energy. Now we rightly want to correct any errors in say Foxe's account. Many of which, as we've seen by looking at the Fugger newsletter actually arose from the sheer difficulty of collecting accurate information in the 16th century. But we have to understand, it seems to me, that our own view of history which has tended to discount the significance and even the reality of spiritual forces in human affairs, may actually have induced equally serious distortions in our view of the past and the present. The Reformation, under the influences we've been discussing took a very different form in England than it did in the rest of Europe. There were no great reformers or theologians in England of the stature of Luther or Calvin or Zwingli or several of the other continental figures. Instead the great achievement was the Bible in the English language, an English Prayer Book and a version of English history in biblical terms accessible in their own language to the people of the country and widely diffused by the press and from the pulpit among the population. This ferment bred, not many great theologians, not many great reformers, but a host of self confident, obstinate, sometimes self-righteous merchants, soldiers, sailors, emigrants, obstinately metaphysical people who took their language and their book and even their religious quarrels all over the world, most significantly of course to the United States. It may be that our divorce from this source of energy that flows from a living relationship with the Divine, explains much about West European demoralisation, the absence of hope that you find in so many parts of Europe now. It may also explain our failure to understand or reckon with, the explosive energies of a phenomenon like the Ayatollah's revolution in Iran which the secularised Western analysts said was impossible. I remember someone telling me "Don't bother, to go into the bazaars and listen to all that silly talk from the Mullahs. It won't come to anything." That sort of comment was made because our understanding of history has been partial just as we must acknowledge that Foxe's vision was partial. It is one of the great mysteries of history, why some cultures and centuries find certain questions significant and kinds of explanations satisfying, whilst others do not, and how changes in these areas take place, as they undoubtedly did in England and in France in the 18th century. There was a very good example of this in a missionary's account of his first week in India, where soon after his arrival he was involved in a bus accident. He reflected that a European would want to know whether the brakes had failed or whether the driver was drunk or what had gone wrong, but instead he heard the Indians ask about how fate had lead to an accident involving those people at that precise moment. Different questions unlock different areas of experience, point to different events as being significant, and lead to different patterns of understanding. The men of the

16th century on both sides of the religious divide were nourished by a Hebrew view of the world which referred everything to the 'First Cause' and displayed sometimes less interest in secondary causes. As we've seen in the hands of Foxe, just as in the history of the Jews, this way of looking at events can produce formidable, creative and destructive energies. It may be that our habitual way of observing the historical process deprives it of meaning to a degree that proves very debilitating to our culture; but these are questions for another series of lectures. I was reminded only yesterday that perhaps I'm quite wrong about our modern European world having a view of history that finds it very difficult to symphathise with Foxe and his ilk. I heard about a very distinguished Russian popular cultural figure whose great enthusiasm at the moment is the interpretation of the Book of Daniel and his great hope is in the Archangel Michael, (Secretary General of the Party this day, an apocalyptic figure) This man was excited by the coherence that he saw, by this consonance between the events described in scripture and things that were happening in his own country. Perhaps some of us would find that rather difficult to take in or appreciate. But it may be that our own feeling that spiritual forces are really just a top dressing, a superficial cloak for what's really happening, and what's really happening is at the level of economic self interest and that things spiritual are just as mould-grown-on- the-rock economics, will prove just as partial. It may be blown away and be contradicted by what is happening in Poland, in Russia, in South America and in the Middle East. Just as certainly some details of what Foxe said and what Queen Elizabeth I, and John Milton stood for. Just as some details of their interpretation of the real forces at work in human history are ones which our own century finds it very hard to accept.