

## CHAPTER III

### A CUNNING LETTERED TRAITOR

One member of the family in the past five hundred years who caused more controversy than any other was Dr. Nicholas Sanders. A Jesuit Doctor of Divinity as well as a papal politician, he was so unpopular in England that his History of the Reformation - although used in the original Latin as a standard work on the Continent from the time he wrote it, was not published in English until 1875 - three hundred years after it was written.

The causes of the Reformation in England cannot aptly be included in this brief biographical sketch of the life of Nicholas Sanders, but at the village level its effects were profound. For the dissolution of the monasteries not only removed the great seats of learning and art, but also took away the only source of welfare and security to the poor and needy; and it had an overbearing effect on the life of people in the villages scattered through the country. Its effect on the inhabitants of Charlwood has been explained elsewhere, and amongst the inhabitants of that village who were too high-principled to change their views to suit the religious whims of Henry VIII's three children, was Dr. Nicholas Sanders. He had been educated at Winchester and New College Oxford, and, unlike his cousin, Sir Thomas Sanders King's Remembrancer of the Exchequer to Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary Tudor, changing his religious coat deftly to suit the changes of King or Queen, Nicholas considered no compromise to save his property or position.

J. B. Black, writing of him in "The Reign of Elizabeth" points out that many recusants at this time continued (very

understandably in view of the severe penalties prescribed for non-attendance in Church), to attend Church out of duty or habit, but, he continues, "the Pope, the Council of Trent and leading English Catholics like Dr. Sanders and William Allen were unanimous in their verdict that attendance at heretical services was a heinous sin."

Nicholas Sanders was later to stand by his convictions so steadfastly that he would lose his life defending them. But now, with Queen Elizabeth on the throne less than a year, he knew he was being watched and must immediately flee the country to rejoin his mother on the continent. By this time not only Dr. Sanders and his mother were in exile on the continent, but also his sisters Margaret (who died in 1576) and Elizabeth, who were both sisters of the Bridgettines of Syon. Elizabeth had been on a visit to England in 1580 to raise alms for the Syon community - a task which was filled with danger, and she was arrested twice, but escaped both times - on the second occasion from the stronghold of Winchester Castle. After this she rejoined her community in Rouen and died in Lisbon on 1st August 1607.

His career in England had been one of outstanding success, having been sent to be educated "in the grammar learning at Wykeham School near Winchester" at the age of ten, he became a scholar there in 1540 and a scholar at New College Oxford in 1546. In 1548, shortly before his father became High Sheriff of Surrey (for which he was knighted in 1564), he became a fellow of New College. Nevertheless, for all his own personal success and the power of his father's title and position might have afforded him in England, his conscience ruled him, and in 1559 he left England, where he would never return except for one furtive visit to the

village where he was born.

Later in the same year, Sanders reached Rome, where he was created Doctor of Divinity, and as Dr. Sanders he is perhaps the most famous past member of the family. He is mentioned in every standard history of the Reformation and of Queen Elizabeth's struggle with the great catholic Empire of Spain. His career is a mixture of academic, theologian, eminent historian, papal rebel leader and emissary between the courts of the Pope in Rome and Philip II in Madrid.

Sanders's arrival in Rome in 1559 was regarded as an event of the greatest significance. Here was one of the leading English catholics defecting to the capital of the catholic world. He was offering to the Papal cause his extensive knowledge of conditions in England as well as his academic distinction and fame as leader of the exiled English catholics on the continent. Within a few weeks of his arrival he was ordained and given a doctorate of divinity. He had great ability and it was obvious to the Vatican authorities that here was a man whose worth was too great to be wasted on provincial university life. However, although they realised this now, later on his value to them was forgotten and his life wasted on one of the most foolhardy military expeditions ever undertaken by a Pope.

In 1561, Dr. Sanders attended the Council of Trent with a watching brief for the Pope, and was engaged directly in the service of the Vatican as personal attendant to Hosius, Cardinal Bishop of Ermland. During the next four years, as well as attending the Council of Trent, he escorted Cardinal Hosius to Poland, Prussia and Lithuania. In 1565 he returned to Louvain to become Regius Professor of Theology: Louvain at this time was probably the chief

centre of English catholicism on the continent, and there was an English university in that "true city of refuge to the English persecuted by the heretics." There books which in England were suppressed as subversive, treacherous and Papist, were printed freely: Louvain was close enough to England for them to be shipped and sold to those who were not afflicted with the heresy in England.

Dr. Sanders' time at Louvain was spent in academic pursuits. While he was there he wrote the first ten of his fifteen or so known published works. Although this was the most productive time of his life as a writer, it was not until he was living in Madrid, ten years later, that he wrote the great History of the Reformation for which he is now remembered. Of the books written and published at Louvain during this period, the most substantial is his six volume work on the last supper, "the supper of Our Lord set foorth in six books according to the Truth of the Gospel". All his works written at Louvain were learned treatises in doctrine and scripture.

But during this time at Louvain, Sanders was not out of touch with the Vatican. In 1566 he was appointed an apostolic delegate by the Pope with a commission to empower English priests to "absolve the heresy". Nor did Sanders get out of touch with opinion. At this time he wrote to Cardinal Morone on the causes of the English break with Rome, attributing it almost entirely to politics, and practically not at all to religious reasons. He reported to Morone:

"The English people consist of farmers, shepherds and artisans. The two former are catholics. Of the others none are schismatic except those that have sedentary occupations, as weavers

and shoemakers and some idle people about the Court. The remote parts of the kingdom are still very averse from heresy. As the cities in England are few and small and as there is no heresy in the country nor even in the remoter cities, the firm opinion of those capable of judging is that hardly one per cent of the English people is infected."

This lucid account reflects the true position more accurately than most better known contemporary histories of the Reformation. From it was compiled the most important of Sanders' works, his history of the Anglican schism, "De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani." This work, published in Cologne in 1585, was in the next few years translated into French, Italian, Spanish and German and formed the basis of all histories of the English Reformation written on the continent in the next 250 years.

When the work was published, it caused an outrage in England, earning Sanders the name of "Dr. Slanders". In England, the Reformation had been firmly established for nearly 20 years, the penalty for Papism increased ten-fold, so that it is not surprising that critics were unstinting in their condemnation of Sanders' history. One of the most outspoken was Fuller, who wrote two damning works on Sanders - "Drs. Hoskins, Sanders and Rastel accounted, three pillars and Archpatriarches of the Popish Synagogue overthrown and detected of their severall blasphemous heresies." Not satisfied with this, the next year he published his "Retentive to stay good Christians - a discoverie of the dangerous Rocks of the Popish Church commended by N. Sander." Unpopularity and adverse criticism were not new to a man in Dr. Sanders' position. Years before he had been

described by Dr. Cox, tutor to Edward VI, as a mercenary employed by certain cardinals aided by the assistance of others and decked out like Aesop's Jackdaw. Although it is not surprising that his history of the Anglican schism did not get a fair hearing at the time of its publication, it is amazing that this book, regarded by historians on the continent as both accurate and authoritative, was not translated into English until 300 years later. Part of the reason for this may be that one of the facets of the causes of the Reformation which Sanders examines in great detail is Henry VIII's alleged incest. Sanders did not, contrary to the opinion of contemporary writers in England, originate this unsavoury information, but he elaborated on it in the context of his historical study.

So it was not until more tolerant times that this History was published in English. David Lewis's translation in 1877, together with his own lengthy but not very authoritative introduction, proved that even 300 years later the same controversy could flame up again almost as heatedly. However, at last Sanders's reputation was vindicated and modern historians accept the accuracy and integrity of his factual observation. At the time of its publication a Victorian writer and critic, Thomas Collett Sanders, took Mr. Lewis to task over his introduction to "The Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism."

After what may be termed his academic years at Louvain, Sanders was suddenly summoned to Rome by the Pope in 1572. At the time it was expected that he was to be "raised to the purple" and made Cardinal. Once more events turned against him, and Pius V died before the appointment was made. His successor, Gregory XIII, knew of his capability, but had different plans in store for him. Although it was Pius who issued

The Papal Bull of 1570 excommunicating the Queen and "all who continued to obey her laws and mandates," Pius had realised that politically he must recognise and live with a reformed Church in England. Not so Gregory, whose greatest ambition was to overthrow Elizabeth. To this end he enlisted the aid of Philip II of Spain, whom he knew to have a personal interest in carrying out the same task both to restore Catholicism in England and to ensure the continued subjection of his colonies in the Netherlands, and their plan was based on the idea of an invasion of England by Spanish troops under cover of a law-abiding troop movement between the Spanish Netherlands and Spain. This idea failed because of its discovery by the English in Flanders, and thereafter the Pope relied on Philip II to conduct his own scheme and supply ships and troops, in return for which Gregory agreed to finance the expedition from the Vatican treasury.

Dr. Sanders was by now appointed Papal emissary to the Court of Philip II. Pope Gregory knew that when the time came for direct intervention in England, he would need a leader with an intimate knowledge of both the geography of England and the condition and temper of the people. For this Sanders was eminently suitable. Philip however, was not so competent a planner, and clearly did not fully appreciate the nature of the problem of overthrowing the status quo in England. He summoned Dr. Sanders to Court especially to counsel him against entertaining any idea of claiming the throne for himself. He advised Sanders to content himself with a regency in the name of Mary Queen of Scots.

After a year occupied in fruitless diplomacy between the Vatican and Madrid, Sanders became disillusioned with Philip as a champion of the cause of reconverting

England. He writes that "the King is as fearful of war as a child of fire .... the state of Christendom depends on the stout assailing of England." As events cooled, Sanders turned again to writing, and it was at this point that history of the Anglican Schism was written, in Madrid.

However, the die was cast and Gregory's determination on his original idea of direct intervention in England was unshaken. In 1578, he summoned Dr. Sanders to Rome once again and instructed him to undertake an armed expedition to Ireland. The moment was far from ripe - relations between Rome and Madrid were deteriorating and when the expedition departed from Civita Vecchia it consisted of only one very ill-equipped ship. The leader of the expedition was an Englishman, Philip Stukeley, a mercenary soldier and adventurer of the most spirited and fearless type, but even he realised that the expedition was doomed to failure before it set sail from Spain; he described the ship to be used by the invasion force as the most dilapidated, ill-conceived and badly-fitted ship that ever left the coast of Europe. In the event it hardly did leave Europe, getting no further than Lisbon. Stukeley's judgment was correct and he decided to join the King of Portugal's invasion of Morocco - perhaps a wise decision to leave the Pope's ship, but Stukeley himself fared no better and was killed in Morocco a few months later.

Sanders, however, was now bent on the Pope's scheme and shortly returned to Spain. He and the Papal Nuncio in Spain, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, themselves undertook to reorganise, equip and restart the expedition to Ireland, and in July 1579 they continued from Lisbon. Their mission was to raise a holy war in the Irish province of Munster, to gain the support of the Irish, who were thought to be sympathetic

to the defeat of Queen Elizabeth, and from Ireland lead an invasion of England itself. Late in 1579 the puny, ill-equipped force landed and planted the Papal colours at Smerwick.

But the diplomats and politicians in Rome and Madrid had not reckoned with the apathy and disinterest of the Irish people and their leaders. Only two Irish peers, Viscount Baltinglas and Lord Desmond, gave the expedition any support. For a short time things went their way, and in 1580 Baltinglas defeated an English force at Glenmalure, but in the autumn of 1580 the insurrection was broken up with heavy losses by Lord Grey and the Earl of Ormonde, the fort at Smerwick recaptured and the King of Spain's expeditionary force routed. Dr. Sanders' fate is in some doubt and several different accounts exist. Lord Burghley, whose opinion of Sanders was not likely to be favourable, records that "the lewde scholar" died "wandering in the mountains in Ireland without succour, raving in a phrensy." He may also have been responsible for attaching to him the label of the "cunning lettered traitor". More sympathetic accounts give a picturesque description of the Jesuit perishing after the capture of his goods and his servant "with a breviary and a Bible under his arm." It is certain, however, that he died in 1581, probably from the effects of dysentery and starvation.

The expedition had a disastrous effect on Pope Gregory's plans for reimposing catholicism in England, ruining any chances of reconciliation or constructive debate when Edmund Campion's mission set out from Rome to England the following year. Catholicism, however, was greatly strengthened in Ireland as a result of the martyrdom caused by the extensive purge ordered by Queen Elizabeth and Burghley, as a reprisal

after the rising. Ignominious though the Papal expedition to Ireland in 1579 was, one cannot but respect Sanders for his unflagging faith in the justification of what he was doing: the state of Christendom depends on the stout assailing of England. The other facets of his career prove that he was most sincere in his religion and a far-sighted, impartial judge of the events of his own lifetime. His reputation as a historian and scholar can best be illustrated by the following extract written by Thomas Collett Sandars in The Saturday Review on October 3rd, 1868, ten years before the first translation of De Origine Schismato into English. It forms a fitting conclusion and summary of the life and work of one of the most single-minded and fearless adversaries of the Reformation.

"Sanders' work on the English Schism created a considerable sensation in its day; it was translated into French and Italian and passed through six editions in the original Latin between 1585 and 1628. It is remarkable that it should have created less interest in the Country to which its author belonged, and of whose religious and political changes it treats, than in other European countries. Its reappearance in a new form as translated into French by Mancroix, Canon of Reims, in 1676 was the proximate cause of Bennets writing his more celebrated and more elaborate history of the same transactions. Englishmen have merely been content to take for granted that Bennett's view of the reformation was, on the whole, a just and adequate account of the matter, tinged, it may be, by certain prejudices on the author's part, and perhaps a little wanting here and there in historical truth. Nevertheless, in spite of Sander's prejudices in favour of Catholicism which, however, were by no means stronger than those of Bennet for Protestantism, we

would recommend any one who wishes to get a clear idea of the political and religious movements of the 16th century to read Sanders' work, *De Schismatis Anglicano*, as presenting a more discriminating account of the various disturbances in Church and State than can be found in so small a compass anywhere else. We hope some day to see it translated into English - partly on this account, partly, or perhaps principally, because of the truthfulness of the narration of fact which it contains.

"We have no doubt that we shall very much surprise many persons by this announcement. It has been customary to regard Sanders as a man who would not sample anything which should damage the Protestant or uphold the Catholic side; but recent publications tend to verify Sanders' facts even in cases where he was thought to be lying most outrageously.

"Sanders lived nearly all through the times which he described from 1527 to 1551, and he had opportunities of knowing what was going on, especially during the changes of Edward's and Mary's reigns, such as few other historians have enjoyed, being himself deeply interested in the matter. If, therefore, he can be shown to be trustworthy in his facts, his work must take rank as a first-class authority in historical matters ... as to the views which pervade the work, no doubt he may be described as a bigoted Roman Catholic.

"... Even those who cannot throw themselves into the author's (no doubt prejudiced) view of the transactions of the period, will learn more of the mode of the changes in the Establishment than ever he gathered from any other history of the Reformation."