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Puritans and Puritanism

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Chapter 7: Puritans and Puritanism¹

Bryan W. Ball

In his classic account of the early development of the English Puritan movement, William Haller makes the following observations:

To the modern mind, judging hastily and with animus irrelevant to the facts, the sixteenth-century Puritan may seem a morbid, introspective, inhibited moral bigot and religious zealot. To the common man of the time this was not so . . . In spite of the restrictions placed upon their activities, they incessantly preached the Gospel and published books. . . and no one can wisely ignore them who desires to understand what Puritanism was and what it came to mean.²

It should be noted at the outset that Haller's comments relate specifically to the early Puritan movement in the latter years of the sixteenth century. He was describing the rise of Puritanism. We know, of course, as Haller himself did, that Puritanism only came to its maturity in the seventeenth century and that to understand it more fully we must read what seventeenth-century Puritans wrote and preached about. This we shall attempt to do, at least to a limited extent, in the chapters immediately following.

It is also worth noting that people were still reading Puritan books in the nineteenth century and finding them relevant to their day. One such reader was Ellen G. White, one of the early pioneers of the Adventist Church, who in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, which was widely read in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numbered among the outstanding English religious leaders of the past three eminent Puritan divines, Richard Baxter, John Flavel and Joseph Alleine.³ We shall find occasion to refer to each of these three noted writers as we examine some of the biblically based beliefs of mature Puritanism and Nonconformity as they were taught and practised in England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But it is first necessary to address more basic issues.

Who precisely were the Puritans? And what was Puritanism? Why did it exist, and what did it seek to accomplish? These are questions that are still debated by historians and although the answers given vary according

1 Adapted from *The English Connection; The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 2nd edition, 2014 (1st edition, 1975).

2 William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1957), 5, 36.

3 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 252-53.

to viewpoint, one thing is beyond question. The word 'Puritan' has been persistently misunderstood and misused. Even after the careful efforts of scholars to provide a more objective understanding of Puritanism, it is difficult to dissociate the term in the popular mind from the implications of John Pym's neat phrase 'that odious and factious name of Puritan'. Plainly speaking, Puritans were early regarded as dour, straight-faced kill-joys, opposed to pleasure of any kind and intent on shaping the unwilling majority of their fellow-citizens according to their own narrow whims and fancies. They have become accordingly and understandably unpopular. This image has persisted to the present even though it was less than objective, and frequently cried up by those with their own agendas.

This concept of narrowness, bigotry, even hypocrisy, is far from the true character of Puritanism, as those who are familiar with Puritan thought in its wholeness continue to point out. Inevitably, this jaundiced view owes something to the origin of the term, which it will not be amiss to recall. Like many names which have come to have a lasting religious significance, Quaker and Methodist among them, the term 'Puritan' arose as a derisive comment on the attitudes and actions of a small and vocal group in the Anglican Church during the latter part of the sixteenth century. It was initially applied to those within the Church of England who were dissatisfied with the extent to which the Reformation in England had been carried and who wanted a more thorough-going reform of the national Church. Their chief concern appears to have been with the structure and liturgy of the Anglican Church and with the desire that it should be remodelled according to the Presbyterian pattern of the Calvinistic Reformed Church at Geneva. Few historians would now insist on such a narrow definition of Puritanism, although it is true that at this early stage the concern of the Puritan faction was less with Christian life and doctrine than it was with the structure and organisation of the Church.

This early emphasis was soon to give way to something more fundamental, and as the seventeenth century began to unfold it is clear that there existed in England a much wider body of opinion, both within and without the Anglican Church, whose chief concern was for purity of doctrine and holiness of life. A concern over the nature of the Church remained, as we shall shortly observe, but with this broader group it was not an end in itself, but rather a means for the recovery of true doctrine and the preservation of the true Christian way of life. As such, Puritanism came into its own early in the seventeenth century and continued with remarkable vigour through many vicissitudes for a hundred years or thereabouts, thereafter to be disseminated in various channels, of which some would persist until the present time. Haller, whose *Rise of Puritanism* is indispensable for all who would truly understand the Puritan impetus, points out that Puritanism "was nothing new

or totally unrelated to the past but something old, deep-seated, and English, with roots reaching far back into mediaeval life".⁴ That comment must be allowed its due place in our thinking if we are to understand Puritanism in its essence, grasp its fundamentally English character and what is undoubtedly of greater importance, sense its significance to the later development of religious and political thought in the Western world.

If a date is required for the formal beginnings of Puritanism, it will not be inappropriate to suggest 1570, when Thomas Cartwright, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, was removed from his chair for advocating the abolition of the Episcopal system of government in the Church of England in favour of Presbyterianism.⁵ What may appear on the surface as a technical matter of little consequence was, in fact, a matter of some considerable significance at the time, particularly for those whose main court of appeal was the Bible. In Puritan eyes it was a question of whether the Anglican Church was willing to accept a more scriptural form of Church organisation, or persist with a system which could not be supported from the Word of God and which savoured too strongly of Rome and Antichrist. Matters of worship and liturgy were also far from satisfactory to the Puritan mind, since they retained too many features of the Roman system. Again, it was a question of origin and authority. If Scripture supported such practices, let them be retained. If not, they should be rejected and replaced by practices more in harmony with the Bible. The debate over organisation and worship was to continue for a good many years into the future and although it was always fraught with the question of national sovereignty, it would always come back in the end to the more basic question of biblical authority.

These issues went back to the earliest days of the English Reformation. Henry VIII had finally broken with Rome in 1534, although many historians feel that this was essentially a political and personal move,⁶ and that compared with what would transpire later, it scarcely affected the doctrine of the Church or the life of the individual believer. There were changes, of course, and research has shown that there were evidences of genuine reformation during Henry's reign and earlier. A. G. Dickens has described the work of Wycliffe and the Lollards as "the abortive reformation" and demonstrated that Lollard influence persisted well into the sixteenth century.⁷ For all that,

4 Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 5.

5 Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London & New York: Methuen, 1967), 124.

6 E.g., M. Powicke, *The Reformation in England* (London: OUP, 1961, 1-3; W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1959), 358-60.

7 A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London; Batsford, 1964), 22, 27.

it is probably true that the formal Reformation which took place in the reign of Henry VIII was largely political and that the religious life of the age saw little practical improvement.

The reigns of Edward VI and Mary were accompanied by more definite changes, with a move towards more thorough-going Protestantism under Edward and a severe return to Rome under Mary. By the time Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 the country was bewildered and torn. Some preferred the old way and wanted to retain the Catholic faith and its manner of worship. Others wanted reformation and wanted it to be as thorough as that which had taken place at Geneva under John Calvin. Here, from the Puritan viewpoint, was a true Utopia, a practical demonstration of godly rule in action. Many, perhaps the majority, had no strong convictions, except that they be left in peace to live a life of their own choosing.

Elizabeth's religious policy was to follow the *via media* between these two extremes, with the object of maintaining a united kingdom at the expense of returning to Rome or going on to a more thorough form of Protestantism. The Elizabethan Settlement, as it has come to be known, was her attempt to establish a national Church which would appeal to the majority of her subjects and keep in subjection the extremists on either wing.

It was with a similar compromise in the reign of Henry VIII that Thomas Cartwright and his followers in the 1570s showed their dissatisfaction. They had waited impatiently for ten years or more for the changes which they believed necessary. When it became clear that such changes were not going to materialise, they took matters into their own hands and began in earnest a war of words which manifested itself in sermons, tracts and other forms of literature calculated to demonstrate the strength of their arguments and the need for true reformation. Increasingly thereafter the call for reformation in England was heard in pulpit and press. Although time revealed that it would not be until 1643, with the calling of the Westminster Assembly, that Presbyterianism would be seriously considered, albeit briefly, as an alternative to the Anglican Church, seeds had been sown which would take firm root and which would grow and bear fruit of a kind which even Cartwright could not have foreseen. Before the turn of the century, advocates of total separation from the Anglican Church had arisen, and little groups of Separatists met secretly for worship, or emigrated to Holland where they were able to meet freely to pursue their religion according to the dictates of conscience. By the time Elizabeth came to the end of her illustrious reign in 1603, the Puritan tide was well on its way in.

What had taken place under the Tudor monarchs in the sixteenth century, momentous as it undoubtedly was, served merely as a prelude to what would transpire under the Stuarts in the century which followed. Now the nation

was to witness civil war, the execution of an archbishop and a king, a republican government, the Protectorate under Cromwell, the Restoration of the Monarchy and severe religious persecution, all to some extent consequences of religious convictions, to say nothing at this stage of the nature of those convictions themselves. Not without reason may the seventeenth century be regarded as the most momentous era in the history of England and as seminal to the subsequent development of Western society as a whole.

The accession of James I in 1603 was an event which Puritans in general heralded with some expectation. In Scotland, James had presided over the establishment of a Presbyterian system, in theory at least, and many hoped that he would be favourably disposed to the Puritan cause in England. On his journey south to take up residence in London, he was met by a large delegation of Puritan clergymen who petitioned him to press on at once with the re-organisation of the English Church. But, as Haller says, although James continued to champion Calvinistic theology,⁸ “he had had more than enough of Presbyterianism”.⁹

Those who had clung to the hopes of a Puritan breakthrough were soon to be disillusioned and we are left with the unhappy record of James threatening to harry Puritans out of the land. From then until 1640 the Puritan impetus was driven to seek expression in less conspicuous ways. It did so through preaching and notably through the production of a vast corpus of literature which grew in quantity, and generally in quality, as the seventeenth century continued to unfold. It is this body of literature – largely books, but also sermons and pamphlets - that we shall refer to in the chapters which immediately follow¹⁰ and which, if nothing else, will surely convince of us the essentially spiritual and irenic nature of mainstream Puritan thought and, of course, of the biblical basis on which it was all founded.

With the events which began in 1640, it seemed as though an avalanche had been precipitated which no man or group of men could contain. In that year, Parliament impeached the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, for high treason and committed him to the Tower of London from where, five years later, he was led out and beheaded. A similar fate awaited Charles I, whose execution in 1649, following the verdict of a court constituted by the House of Commons, was an event of unprecedented boldness. Charles had declared war on the Parliamentary armies in 1642 and for some six years civil conflict was waged up and down the land. It was a traumatic time for Englishmen and their families.

8 Puritans in general followed the theological system of John Calvin, which required a measure of commitment to the doctrine of predestination.

9 Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 49.

10 We recall that this was initially written in the Introduction to *The English Connection*.

In 1643 a summoned body of Puritan divines, mostly Presbyterian by conviction but still nominally Anglican, met at Westminster for the purpose of advising Parliament in the matter of reforming the Church. They produced the well-known Westminster Confession of Faith¹¹ and two catechisms, all of which in their own way influenced Puritan doctrine and devotion in succeeding years. Before they met for the last time in 1649, they also produced a Presbyterian directory for worship which, though approved by Parliament, was never put into practice. That all this could transpire whilst Royalist and Parliamentary forces confronted each other on the battlefield is some indication of the religious nature of the age and of the undertones which ran through the conflict itself.

With the cessation of armed hostilities, the imprisonment of the king and the demise of high churchmanship, the way was opened for a unique experience in English history. For twelve years from 1648, with no ruler claiming as his authority the divine right of kings, the government of the land proceeded by a succession of experiments, which Oliver Cromwell, to give him his due, attempted to guide for the good of the nation as a whole. From the broad Puritan position, the experiment reached its high-point in July 1653 when the Nominated Parliament met for the first time. It consisted solely of members appointed by Cromwell and his advisors for their religious convictions and evident godliness, "saints" to use the contemporary word. It was known more generally as the 'Barbones' Parliament, after Praise-God Barbones, one of its members. Cromwell addressed the new Parliament in significant terms as they began their work: "Truly you are called by God to rule with Him, and for Him, . . . I confess I never looked to see such a day as this . . . when Jesus Christ should be so owned as He is, at this day".¹² It was, many felt, the beginning of the long-awaited reign of the saints on earth, prior to the glorious coming of Christ and the promised millennium.

But, alas, it was not to be. For reasons which it is not possible to examine here, the experiment ended in failure, the Nominated Parliament lasting less than six months and giving way to Cromwell's Protectorate, itself a form of government which in principle was less than ideal and which in practice proved less than popular. By 1660 most Englishmen were ready for Anglicanism and the monarchy to be restored and a return to stable government. Perhaps the greatest lesson which these years re-emphasise is that the kingdoms of this world are not to be confused with the kingdom of God. It was a lesson, nonetheless, that many at that time were unwilling, or unable,

11 For an outline of the thirty-three articles of the Westminster Confession, see Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London and Oxford: OUP, 2nd edition, 1967), 244-27.

12 W. C. Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Cambridge, MA: 1937-1947), III, 61.

to learn.

Many of the religious developments of these years were of equal significance to the subsequent growth of Protestantism in England and in America as they were to the Church in their own day. This is particularly true of the years between 1640 and 1660, which beyond question were the high-water mark of pre-Restoration Puritanism. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, Puritanism, in both senses in which it has been defined, became a powerful and growing force in the religious life of the nation. The ecclesiastical Puritans, intent as always on reforming the structure of the national Church, pressed on with their aims until, as we have observed, they formed a majority in the Westminster Assembly called to advise Parliament on Church reform. Only with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 did it finally become clear that there was not to be a Presbyterian Church in place of the Episcopal Anglican Church. The more spiritual Puritans, both inside the established Church and among the independent, separatist groups which had sprung up throughout the land, while not ignoring the importance of correct discipline and order, were chiefly concerned to find the way of salvation for themselves and for their families, and to lead a godly life while on earth. Although prior to 1640, due to the repressive measures of Archbishops Bancroft and Laud and the antipathy of James I and Charles I, both streams of the Puritan movement were held in check, Puritan preachers, as they were permitted, continued to make use of the pulpit and the press to propagate their ideas, so laying a foundation for the tumultuous years which lay just ahead.

Between 1640 and 1660 this outwardly stable situation changed almost beyond recognition, not only in the political arena but, more significantly for our purposes, in the realm of religious belief and religious activity. Ideas which had lain dormant for decades, or which had been discussed in secret, suddenly burst forth with amazing vitality. Mention must be made in this respect of the eschatological convictions which came to play such an important role in the religio-political events of the 1640s and the 1650s. From the earliest days of the English Reformation men had looked forward to the second coming of Christ and the kingdom of God on earth. An increasing interest, during the latter part of the sixteenth century, in the books of Daniel and Revelation, which grew to intensive study during the seventeenth century,¹³ provided new eschatological understanding and gave fresh hope for the future.

That many of the interpretations of these prophetic books were incorrect and many of the conclusions reached unfounded, particularly among the less qualified expositors, it is hardly necessary to point out. What is beyond

13 See later, chapter 8, 'Early English Apocalyptic Interpretation'.

doubt is that eschatological expectation ran high for much of the first half of the seventeenth century, reaching its zenith between 1640 and 1660, and affecting during those years not only the religious views of the population as a whole but also the political activity of men in high office. Combined with these hopes of a coming millennium and the kingdom of God were revived fears and convictions concerning the Papacy and the Antichrist. Few doctrines had been more calculated to propel Englishmen in the direction of Protestantism than those which identified the Papacy with the Antichrist, particularly at times when the sovereignty of the state was threatened by papal decrees and intrigue. With Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* always available and read avidly and with the reported Romanising tendencies of Laud and Charles I realities with potentially serious consequences, it is not surprising that in the years we are considering those who studied Scripture carefully found justification for a renewed preoccupation with the dreaded Antichrist.

These years also saw the emergence of religious groups hitherto unheard of, many of which were to pass into obscurity as rapidly as they had arisen, but some of which, containing elements of a more enduring nature, were destined to influence the religious scene in Europe and America for centuries to come. From the beginning of the seventeenth century the Independents grew in strength as the century unfolded and although never numerically as strong as the Presbyterian party, nonetheless counted among their adherents some of the most influential clergy of the day. These early years had also seen the beginnings of a movement towards complete separation from the national Church. Guided by bold spirits who saw an irreducible connection between Rome, the Church of England and Antichrist, little groups of believers, impatient with the slow progress towards reform, sought to make a thorough break with the establishment by instituting a Church and pattern of worship totally divorced from that of the Church of England. These were the Separatists and from them and their Independent brethren, religious communions such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists were to arise, reaching down to the twentieth century and out into the whole world.

It is quite impossible, in the limited space available, to give an account which would be less than confused of the bewildering number of sects which mushroomed almost overnight from 1640 onwards, to say nothing of their equally bewildering beliefs. If we mention only the Fifth Monarchy Men, who were in their own day and have since been recognised as one of the extreme religio-political groups of the time, and say that judged by the views of some of the other sects their opinions were comparatively sane, we have said much.¹⁴ The Fifth Monarchists believed that the four kingdoms of Daniel chapters 2 and 7 had already been fulfilled in history and that the

14 On the Fifth Monarchy Men see B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

kingdom of the stone, the fifth kingdom of prophecy, was about to be established on earth. They were also convinced that they had been called by God to bring that kingdom into existence by political activism, even by the use of the sword, should that prove necessary. Bizarre as that may seem today, in comparison with groups such as Muggletonians, Behmenists, Ranters, Diggers and the Family of Love, their ideas were not extreme. The existence of these groups serves as a reminder of the new freedom which now prevailed, and which was equally appreciated and exploited by the wider and more sober body of Puritans.

For our immediate purposes the most significant religious development after 1640 was, perhaps, in the area of literature. When William Laud succeeded to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633 he set himself the task, among others, of rectifying the laxity which had crept into the regulations which controlled printing and publishing, especially those concerning censorship. It was too late to prevent the dissemination of Puritan ideas by the press, but not too late to make a determined stand against anything which savoured of heresy or of an attack on the existing order. As one writer points out Archbishop Laud, like most of his contemporaries, did not distinguish words which merely expressed ideas from words which actually incited rebellion or violence. To Laud and his colleagues words were words, whether spoken or written, and, if the need was such, should be punished for what they were.¹⁵ It was this understanding, or lack of it, which prompted Laud to direct his keenest attention to the Puritan preachers and pamphleteers, who ever sought to go into print. As a consequence, the years immediately preceding 1640 are noticeably lacking in printed material other than strictly devotional works by established Puritan preachers and similar works by Anglican authors. This should not be taken to suggest that prior to 1640 religious works were infrequently published. Any representative bibliography will prove that this was not the case. It is intended to suggest that there was a prodigious increase in the output of literature of all kinds and of Puritan literature in particular, after Laud's removal from the scene in 1640. That, too, will be evident from the publication dates in the end-notes to this and other chapters.

With the accession of Charles II and the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the course of English history took another sharp turn. From the Puritan viewpoint it was decidedly a turn for the worse. The heady days of Cromwell's England were now past and Puritans were soon to learn the harsh realities of a system intolerant of nonconformity, to say nothing of open dissent. In 1662 Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity which required all clergymen to take an oath of loyalty and non-resistance and to

¹⁵ Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 235.

declare their total assent to the Book of Common Prayer. It was a cruel dilemma for hundreds of clergymen throughout the land who had espoused Puritan ideals, particularly as the date for compliance was set to coincide with the anniversary of the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of French Protestants. The outcome must have been predictable to the government and is known in English religious history as the Great Ejection, when between 1,700 and 2,000 clergymen, many of them the cream of the nation's spiritual and intellectual leadership, refused to abjure their consciences and were summarily ejected from their livings. It is estimated that in London alone at least forty graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, including six doctors of Divinity, were removed from their pulpits and forced to eke out a living for themselves and their families as best they could, in common with their ejected brethren throughout the land. The sufferings of the ejected clergy have been variously described, but C. E. Whiting's brief account is probably as near the truth as any: "Some lived on little more than brown bread and water, many had eight or ten pounds a year to maintain a family. . . . One went to plough six days a week and preached on the Lord's day".¹⁶ Even that was a privilege which was soon to be denied.

Further legislation against Puritan and Nonconformist dissent quickly followed. Collectively known as the Clarendon Code, after the Earl of Clarendon, Charles II's Chancellor and chief minister, it included the Corporation Act, which effectually excluded from national or local public office all who refused to conform; the Conventicle Act, which prohibited all private meetings for worship which were attended by more than four persons beyond the immediate family; and the Five Mile Act, which prevented ejected clergy from living within five miles of a corporate town or any town in which they had preached in recent years. The Test Act of 1673 reaffirmed that every Nonconformist, whether dissenter or recusant, should be excluded from all public office, stipulating that those who wished to be considered eligible should receive the sacrament according to the Anglican rite at his parish church. It is quite clear that the years between 1660 and 1690 brought the most severe restrictions upon the Puritan ministry and laity alike. These were the years of real hardship and active persecution, particularly between 1681 and 1687 and notably under the notorious Judge Jeffreys, following the accession of James II in 1685.

According to one contemporary record, Jeffreys executed hundreds of Dissenters in Dorset and Somerset and sent hundreds more as convicts to the West Indies.¹⁷ While it is true that these punishments were inflicted for

16 C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism, 1660-1688* (London, 1931), 20.

17 *The Western Martyrology or The Bloody Assize* (1705), *passim*, cited in W. T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London: Charles Griffin, 1923), 149.

rebellion rather than for religious belief for its own sake, and that not all who were involved in the rebellion were Dissenters, it is also true that many acted from religious motivation and that the effects of Jeffreys' directives were felt most keenly among dissenting communities. Whole congregations were decimated, some reduced virtually to non-existence. Mercifully, circumstances compelled James to adopt a change in policy and the Declaration of Indulgence of 1687 and also the Toleration Act of 1689, effectually brought to an end the various repressive measures which had been levelled against Puritan dissent in the preceding thirty years. Thenceforward, freedom of worship was guaranteed to Protestants who found themselves unable to confirm to the doctrine, liturgy or constitution of the Anglican Church.

These latter years may be regarded as the time of Puritanism's maturity and nowhere is this more evident than in the literature of that era. The bulk of Richard Baxter's enormous output belongs to this period. John Bunyan's immortal *Pilgrim's Progress* and his scarcely less renowned *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, both came from these years. John Flavel's works of divinity and devotion, six volumes in all, warm and practical to the end, were also the product of Puritanism's later years. And Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*, which appeared in a modern edition as recently as 2000, was first published in 1672, selling 20,000 copies. So popular did this book prove to be that another edition in 1675 reached 50,000 copies and numerous further editions continued to appear throughout the following two hundred and fifty years. Many of these writings we shall have occasion to sample as our investigation of selected Puritan beliefs proceeds. It has been argued that the literature of Puritanism's mature years holds the secrets of England's past greatness, the principles of a free society, the motivation for the Church's world mission and, some would add, the key to a revived Protestantism and a completed Reformation.

It is not possible to offer an exhaustive account of any of the Puritan beliefs which are surveyed in the next few chapters. To provide that would almost certainly require a separate volume for each doctrine and, in any case, some of the topics examined have in fact received more extended treatment elsewhere, as, for example in E.F. Kevan's *The Grace of Law* and the present author's *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660*. In examining the Puritan beliefs selected for inclusion in this book, emphasis has been placed on the reasons for those beliefs which exegesis of the biblical text clarified and necessitated. This has often been at the expense of their historical and chronological development and of personal biographical information concerning the men who advocated those beliefs.¹⁸ These omissions are readily acknowledged and they will no doubt

18 Information concerning many of the individuals referred to can be found in Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* as well as the *Oxford Dictionary of National*

disappoint some readers. The nature of these studies suggests, however, that it is more important to understand the doctrines themselves than the men who proclaimed them, and that in order to understand the men it is necessary first to understand the ideas which made them what they were. Having understood the beliefs of the men and women who were called Puritans we shall then be able, hopefully, to understand Puritanism itself, why it existed and why it came to be such a force in English history in the seventeenth century and in the development of later Nonconformity in much of the English-speaking world.