

The First Elizabeth

ELIZABETH I AND HER PARLIAMENTS: 1559-1581, by J. E. Neale; Jonathan Cape. English price, 25 ..

(Reviewed by W. F. Monk)

THE theme of this new work of our greatest Elizabethan historian is that Elizabethan times were extraordinarily like our own. To the world-embracing ideologies of our time, with their fifth columns, cold wars, and intolerance, Professor Neale compares the "Holy War of Catholicism against Protestant England—the Enterprise" (as it was called), in which an "overwhelmingly Puritan" England, "enviored with the sea," pitted itself behind its wall of ships and staunch hearts against Philip of Spain and the Indies and the Pope's abominated creed. Little wonder that, thus pressed, Elizabeth's Parliaments tended in their consciences increasingly to the "Left," organising themselves through a Puritan revolutionary "conspiracy" to impose, if need be, a loyalty oath on the entire nation.

It was against this second danger that, Neale argues (and here, closely documenting, he breaks new ground) the Queen set herself, and in so doing

saved Protestant England not only in its territorial and cultural integrity but equally in its constitutional and civil liberties. That she was able to do this was because these people loved her more than they feared her, because her very ministers were themselves Puritan revolutionaries whose "dynamic" she harnessed to her service without succumbing to its "doctrinaire philosophy."

Professor Neale's mind is strongly English and his book not for scholars only, but for all lovers of Elizabethan England. Scholars will find in it probably the final ore of research into those Elizabethan parliaments out of whose roots the Roundhead programme was to grow. Elizabethan lovers will discover in the earliest English translator of Homer the irascible Arthur Hall, M.P. for Grantham, in Lincolnshire: in the co-author of *Gorboduc* none other than brave "Master Norton the Parliament man." If in Paul and Peter Wentworth they awaken to a more than Miltonic touch: "and how can the truth appear (so Peter to the Commons) and conquer until falsehood and all subtleties that should shadow and darken it be found out?" in their Queen is uncovered a courage, resilience and power unfamiliar in the legend of her womanly



QUEEN ELIZABETH I

"In reaching after future good, peril not the present"

fickleness: "I stood in danger of my life, my sister was so incensed against me: I did differ from her in religion, and I was sought for divers ways. And so shall never be my successor" (1566). "I know I am but mortal. . . Mine own experience teacheth me to be no fonder of those vain delights than reason would: nor further to delight in things

uncertain than may seem convenient. But let good heed be taken that, in reaching too far after future good, you peril not the present, and begin to quarrel . . ." (1576).

Thus Elizabeth to her Parliament men, whose own lives and the future of their faith hung, an entire generation, on the frail and threatened thread of hers.

This volume ends with the Parliament of 1581, with Elizabeth by the mere passage of time and her own inspired *insouciance*, confirmed in her virginal state; with Mary Queen of Scots, already 13 years a prisoner, preserved from Puritan wrath by one woman's magnanimity; with all the forces of Catholic Europe massing against the realm of the excommunicate Queen. Professor Neale is English, Protestant, and conservative, and he is a victim (who isn't?) of Elizabeth's charms. This does not detract from his scholarship. It does give his pen a precision and warmth that brings the great past vividly to life and whets the appetite for the volume still to come.

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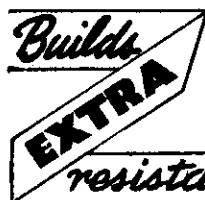
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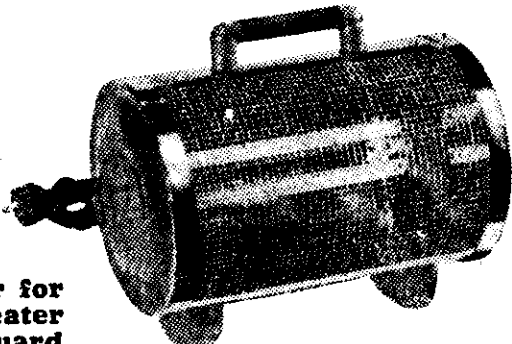
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