

CHAPTER 9

THE GRAND REMONSTRANCE - NOVEMBER 1641

The Grand Remonstrance grew out of the work of a committee of 24 appointed on 10th November 1640, of which Hampden was a member, to consider the "State of the Kingdom"¹. On the 2nd April 1641 it was enlarged and ordered to collect grievances. When it met on 28th April the chairman, George, Lord Digby, was ordered to bring in the report on the 30th.² It was not discussed with any sense of urgency until the 3rd of May. For, as Sir Gilbert Gerard said "If it should be known to the (King's) evil councillors they would endeavour to dissolve us, and therefore before we go hence let it be done".

A special committee was created of the leading reformers (with Hampden) who "after their several protestations for secrecy, went forth into the Inner Court of Wards to draw up a declaration of the unanimous consent and resolution of this House for the defense of the King's person, the religion established, and the liberty of the subject, be it by oath or otherwise as they shall think fit"³. They then proceeded to formulate an oath:-

"I John Moore, do in the presence of Almighty God promise, vow and protest to maintain and defend, as far as lawfully I may with my life, power and estate the true reformed Protestant religion...against popery, ...His Majesty's royal person....rights of parliament....and the subject ...etc"⁴. This protestation oath was eventually taken by most of the members, and the majority of the Country.

The Grand Remonstrance as reproduced in Gardiner's *Constitutional Documents* consisted of a long preamble and 204 clauses giving in great detail all the grievances of the King's reign from his accession in 1625 to the present time. It was formally presented to the House on 8th November 1641 and considered the next day when several changes were made⁵, as on subsequent occasions. The final draft was presented to the House on Saturday 20th November, but it was decided owing to shortage of time to defer debate on it till the Monday. According to Clarendon, on going out, Cromwell asked Lord Falkland "Why he would have it put off, for that day would quickly have determined it?" Falkland replied "There would not have been enough time, for sure it would take some debate"; to which Cromwell replied "A very sorry one".⁶

So the debate started at noon on Monday 22nd November and continued all day until candles were called for and several members left either through boredom or fatigue; it went on till after midnight "with much passion"; eventually the House divided and the Remonstrance was passed by 11 votes: 159 to 148.

What happened next is uncertain; according to Clarendon, Hampden immediately rose and moved "an order for present printing"⁸. Gardiner on the other hand asserts that it was Peard, the member for Barnstable, who demanded its printing.⁹ Hyde (Clarendon) and others asked that their objection to this should be recorded; this was unconstitutional in the Commons though normal in the Lords. The vote on the printing was lost by 124 votes to 101. During the debate on this, which went on till 3 o'clock in the morning, Verney gives Hampden a curious speech:-"The moon is not so useful to the church as the stars. When the woman shall be clothed with the sun, the moon shall be under her feet. When we find ill councillors, we may say they are, and may complain of ill councillors. Any man when he is accused may say he hath done his endeavour, and we say no more than this. The party is prevalent against us, and therefore we may say it openly, 'we have given our best advice. No counter remonstrance can come against us, being 'tis wholly true'.¹⁰ What Hampden was trying to say (if he did) is quite obscure. Perhaps with his "serpentine subtlety" Hampden put Peard up to it; whatever the truth, the move was absolutely unconstitutional; it had ever been the case that no declaration ever emanated from Parliament without the concurrence of both houses.

When the possibility of printing and publishing the Remonstrance was raised that night it produced a furious debate; Palmer, the member for Stamford, rose to say that if the motion was passed he would press for the entry of a protest "in the name of himself and all the rest"; cries of "All, All" arose from all corners. Members took their swords in their scabbards out of their belts. "I thought" wrote one member "we had all sat in the valley of the shadow of death...had caught at each other's locks, and sheathed our swords in each other's bowels"¹¹. "From this terrible catastrophe the House was saved by Hampden who asked 'How Mr Palmer could know other

men's minds' ". It was now 4 o'clock in the morning and the exhausted House decided to defer further discussion to another day. As they left Falkland asked Cromwell "whether there had been a debate", to which the latter replied he "would take his word for it another time; but that if the Remonstrance had been rejected he would have sold all he had the next morning, and never have seen England more; and he knew there were many other honest men of the same resolution". So near, commented Clarendon, was the poor Kingdom at that time to its deliverance!¹²

The following day was taken up with other business, but on the 24th November it was resolved that Mr Palmer should "be required to answer the charge against him for words spoken in the House last Monday"; this was debated the next day, when it was voted by 169 votes to 128 that Palmer should be sent to the Tower during the pleasure of the House, but not expelled from the House.¹³

Thus ended one of the most memorable debates ever held in Parliament. The Grand Remonstrance was presented to the King at Hampton Court on 1st December by Sir Ralph Hopton and printed and published at the end of December. It was, apart from being an exposition of the "State of the Kingdom", a propaganda exercise to elicit general support for the reformers. What part it played in Charles' impeachment and attempted arrest of Hampden and four other members, and Lord Mandeville in the next month we do not know.