

6th July

Memory Verse:

**If God be for us,
who can be against us?**

He that spared not his own Son,
but delivered him up for us all,
how shall he not with him
also freely give us all things?
Romans 8:31b-32

A story from history¹

Have you ever been to Somerset? Perhaps you even live there. Did you know that the last battle ever to be fought on English soil was fought in Somerset on 6th July 1685? Here is the story and it fits in with all sorts of events and people we have read about in earlier lessons.



On the 15th June the handsome young Duke of Monmouth rode into Axminster town at the head of a thousand enthusiastic troops. The town was abuzz with excitement. Here was the deliverer! Here was the leader that would rescue the country from the spectre of Roman Catholic domination for ever!

Ever since King James had come to the throne people had been worried, but they were prepared to put up with James II though his persecution and oppression distressed them. They thought that when James died, they would be liberated. The heir to the throne was Mary, wife of William of Orange, great grandson of William the Silent,² the Protestant champion of Europe. She would set them free. All they had to do was endure with patience. But how long would they have to wait? Maybe there was a quicker route to freedom.

The townspeople and country labourers flocked to Monmouth's banner. True they had no proper weapons, just whatever they could gather from the farms and workshops: scythes and bill hooks – but what of that? There were six thousand of them now! Six thousand loyal hearts to send James II packing for good, to end the rack and the thumbscrews, to end the fines, imprisonment and transportation for those who would not attend the Church of England! James himself, head of that Church, was a Roman Catholic. Already in Scotland he had tortured and killed people for refusing to attend a church he did not himself believe in! He did not uphold the doctrines of the Church of England either though he punished those who did not attend. Gradually, by degrees, he aimed to reintroduce Roman Catholicism in England. But his people had been brought up on Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*; they knew what Catholic Monarchs did to those who did not agree with them.

But there were some who counselled caution. Who was Monmouth after all? Hadn't his own father promised “liberty to tender consciences”³ when he became king and then gone back on his word? Could Monmouth be trusted even if he succeeded? And what were his chances of success? King James would call up his clever generals, Churchill and Feversham. No one had joined Monmouth from the ranks of the well-to-do; what could plough boys and weavers do against trained troops?

1 Adapted from *The Story of God's Dealings with our Nation* Volume 2 which is available here: <https://www.creationresearchstore.com/s/search?q=The%20Story%20of%20Gods%20Dealings%20with%20our%20Nation> and *After the Puritans* ed. KWH Howard.

2 See 16th April's lesson.

3 Freedom of religion.

But Mr Stephen Towgood, the pastor of the Axminster Independent Church,⁴ joined up and so did other members: Thomas Lane, Henry Noon, Thomas Smith, John Spiring, Samuel Rampson and John Ashwood, son of the former pastor. No doubt they swallowed Monmouth's tall story of a mysterious black box containing proof that his mother, Lucy Walters had been married to King Charles I, making him rightful King of England. Did Monmouth's loose morals not put them off? Perhaps they did not know much about what he was like. Here was a glimpse of an escape from meeting in secret or in the woods, always at the mercy of informers greedy for the reward offered for betraying dissenters⁵ conventicles⁶ to the authorities. They snatched the chance and marched off with Monmouth.

At Taunton they were received with rapturous enthusiasm. Monmouth was proclaimed king. But Monmouth himself was becoming uneasy, as though unwilling to go on. He could not go back however; his Uncle James II was now blocking his escape by occupying Lyme Regis where Monmouth had landed and where his transport ships were. It was on to victory now or death.

At first the sun shone and the rebel army did well. Then the weather changed to soaking rain. There were defeats and reverses. Samuel Rampson was killed in a skirmish with the enemy while out with a scouting party. Then there was a battle and Henry Noon was killed too.

Monmouth planned to attack Bristol but on hearing that King James' troops under the Duke of Beaufort were in command of the city he withdrew. Now some of the rebels became anxious. Why would Monmouth not show more resolution and decision? Did he think he was going to be defeated? Among the Axminster men, Pastor Towgood decided to go back and with him the church elder, Thomas Lane. King James had offered a pardon to any who left Monmouth and reported to a magistrate within a few days. Despite the difficulty of hiding from King James' troops who by now were all over the place, they got back safely. Young John Ashwood and Thomas Smith were not so fortunate. They tried to return too but were caught by King James' soldiers.

About the 6th day of the 5th month there was a terrible battle in which many of the enemy were slain, and yet the victory was on their side; for the whole body of this great army belonging to the Duke of Monmouth was broken and routed and the Duke himself fled away, and was a few days after taken, and being carried to London, was there beheaded. A sore rebuking providence, by that very way in which salvation for the interest of Christ was expected, greater distress came in. Multitudes were under dreadful amazement of spirit, great trouble of soul and failings of heart for fear what the issue [outcome] of these things would be.

Thus reads the old Axminster church record book's description of the Battle of Sedgemoor, 6th July 1685, near Weston Zoyland where the kings troops were encamped. From other sources we know that the rebels nearly succeeded.



Monmouth had been observing James' army from the tower of the Church of St Mary at Bridgewater. He decided on a surprise night attack. At about ten 'o clock that night he and his army marched out of Bridgwater with the horses' hooves and bridles muffled with rag to avoid giving the alarm. They had a guide – and they certainly needed local knowledge. The area was full of drainage ditches called “rhynes” and the routes across them were anything but obvious in the gathering darkness. Despite the difficulties, this huge

4 See 19th May's lesson.

5 Those who “dissented” i.e. disagreed with the teachings of the Church of England.

6 Illegal meetings.

7 People often used an old calendar in those days that counted the year as beginning in March so that July worked out as the fifth month.

body of men managed to move through the awkward terrain in such absolute silence that a royal patrol passed quite close to them without realising they were there.

Then disaster struck. The men were crossing the Bussex Rhyne when somehow a shot rang out! At once a horseman was flying from the royal patrol to Weston Zoyland to alert Lord Feversham and his forces. Monmouth's men had lost their surprise advantage. Feversham's men formed up quickly. They outflanked⁸ the rebels, cutting them down in their hundreds; capturing and killing them as they struggled in the Moor Drove Rhyne.

The rebellion was over. Monmouth's supporters, many godly men among them, were rounded up and treated with great harshness and cruelty. James sent his Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys down to the South West to punish the rebels. This brutal, and drunken man has gone down in history as one of the most cruel, unreasonable men that have ever lived. He unleashed a fierce persecution on the Christians in the area, sending 800 of the rebels to be slaves in the West Indies. He sentenced another 300 to death. He even put to death two women whose only crime was hiding escaping rebels who were fleeing from the battle. James was so pleased with the cruel way Jeffreys had acted that he made him Lord Chancellor.

And what happened to Thomas Smith, John Spiring and John Ashwood? You must read the book to find out!⁹

The people of the little church in Axminster did not stop trusting God even though this terrible thing had happened. And they were right to do so. God had someone far better than Monmouth in store for them, someone who had a real right to be king and whose reign would see the beginning of true



freedom of religion in England. In the end, wicked King James II did lose his throne. William of Orange, landed in **Torbay** in 1688 and once again the men of the West country flocked to support someone who offered freedom. This time there was no battle. James ran away and William and Mary became King and Queen. We have already read about the Act of Toleration that followed in 22nd May's lesson. The little church in Axminster, and thousands of others like it all over the country, were to gain the freedom to worship without persecution – without any battle being fought at all!¹⁰

⁸ Moved round the side and so outmanoeuvred

⁹ You can buy a brand new, hard back, 250+ page, copy from the Mayflower Bookshop here: <http://mcbs.springroad.org.uk/mayflower-classics-after-the-puritans/> for £2.50!

¹⁰ My story about the Axminster Church and those associated with during these times, *Heart of Rebellion*, can be purchased here: <https://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk/product/heart-rebellion> or from you local Christian Bookshop.

Map Work

The places in the story are marked in **green** so that you can trace the route the rebels took. Remember that you will need to start with Lyme Regis where Monmouth landed. How far away from the places involved in Monmouth's rebellion is Torbay?

A game to play

Have you ever played “Grandmother's Footsteps”? You need quite a bit of space to play it ideally so maybe the garden would be a good venue.

One person must be “Grandmother” and stands facing the wall at one end of the room. The other player(s) must start from the opposite end of the room. Their objective is to creep up on Grandmother and tap her on the shoulder. However, Grandmother may turn round at any point. If she sees you moving you are out!

Here is a variation on the game that may help you understand just how hard it was for Monmouth's men to creep up to Lord Feversham's army without being heard.

“Grandmother” stands facing the wall as before but this time, instead of being allowed to turn round she must use her ears. If she *hears* a movement she puts up her hand and the person moving is out. To make the game more interesting you can handicap yourself with something e.g. borrowed shoes that are too big, or some jingly item like jewellery. Another handicap would be to place some items on the floor/ground that have to be picked up such as a plate with small stones on it or a toy rattle etc. In this version of the game you are only allowed to tap Grandmother on the shoulder if you have collected one of the items.

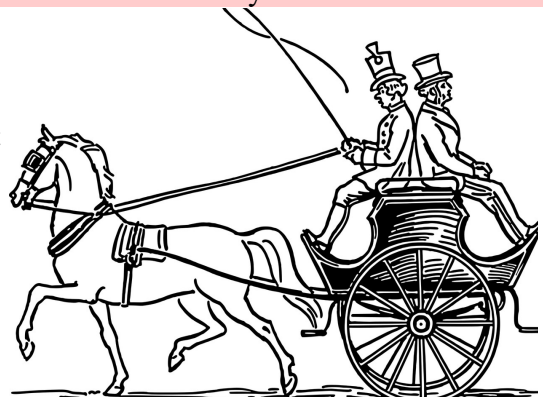
Now imagine doing this on horseback, in the dark, over unfamiliar country riddled with ditches – carrying pitchforks and scythes!

Something to write about

On **July 6th 1834**, Thomas Carlyle, wrote in a letter, describing London's traffic:

There is such a torrent of vehicles and faces: the slow-rolling, all-defying waggon, like a mountain in motion, the dejected Hackney-coach, “that has seen better days”, but goes along with a tough, uncomplaining patience, the gay equipage with its light bounding air, and flunkies hanging behind it; the distracted Cab, which always some blackguard drives with the fury of Jehu; the huge Omnibus, which runs along all streets from all points of the compass towards the Bank of England; Butchers' and Brewers' and Bakers' Drays; all these with wheelbarrows, dogcarts, and a nameless flood of other small trash, hold on unweariedly their ever-vexed chaotic way.

Carlyle's writing is lively and interesting. Can you find out what the vehicles he is describing looked like? Which one is pictured on the left? Can you write a short description (Carlyle's is just over 100 words) of traffic you might see where you live? Make it as interesting as you can by describing not only what the vehicles look like but how they move. Who was Jehu and why does Carlyle mention him? Some answers are on the last the page.



Something to find out

Why not conduct your own traffic census and find out exactly what vehicles pass a certain spot during a given interval of time? Local authorities carry out traffic censuses from time to time by means of those little rubber tubes you sometimes notice fixed across the road.¹¹

You may be able to do your own census just by looking out of the window. It may take two of you if there is a moderate amount of traffic, one to call out a vehicle type and another the note it down. If the volume of traffic is too heavy to note every vehicle, try to note every fifth or every tenth vehicle over a predetermined time. You can classify the vehicles by type, function, size or even colour! Decide what you are going to look for before you start. When you have collected enough data you could make a bar graph to present your findings.

[Answers: The picture shows a dogcart. Jehu can be found in 2 Kings 9:20.]

¹¹ You can see how they work on this US video here – I expect ours are similar. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4RUnJ0EiFk>