

BEACON LIGHTS OF THE REFORMATION

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01 – INTRODUCTION

By the Reformation is often understood the great religious movement of the sixteenth century – the greatest since the dawn of Christianity. But there were “reformers before the Reformation,” and in this book we shall give the word a wider meaning. We shall use it to include the revival of primitive Christianity in a corrupt church, in many lands and extending through long centuries. The light of the Gospel had become dim and had well-nigh flickered to extinction. But he that walketh among the golden candlesticks was to rekindle their dying fires, and to send forth his light and his truth into all lands and to the end of time.

“The Reformation,” says Dr. Schaff, “was neither a political, nor a philosophical, nor a literary, but a religious and moral movement; although it exerted a powerful influence in all these directions. It started with the practical question, How can the troubled conscience find pardon and peace and become sure of personal salvation? It brought the believer into direct relation and union with Christ as the one and all-sufficient source of salvation, in opposition to traditional ecclesiasticism and priestly and saintly intercession. The Protestant goes directly to the Word of God for instruction, and to the throne of grace in his devotions.

“The three fundamental doctrines of Protestantism are: The absolute supremacy of the Word of Christ; the absolute supremacy of the grace of Christ; and the general priesthood of believers; that is, the right and duty of the Christian laity, not only to read the Bible in the vernacular tongue, but also to take part in the government and all the public affairs of the Church.”

It is frequently asserted that the Reformation was the offspring of political events; that it resulted from the ambition of princes, their rivalry with the Pope and the avidity of laics to seize upon the property of

the Church, rather than from a deeply-felt spiritual necessity of the age; that, in fine, it was more a consequence of temporal expediency than of religious principle. We shall try to show, on the contrary, that it was a great providential movement; that it was a moral necessity of the period; that it was a mighty effort of the mind to emancipate itself from ecclesiastical authority; and that, instead of spreading from a central source, it was indigenous in almost every country where it now prevails.

The beginnings of great reforms are to be found not amid the loud bustle and great events of the age, but in the mental conflicts of humble seekers after truth, groping their way in loneliness, and surrounded by doubt and darkness, towards the light which an unerring instinct tells them somewhere shineth. The growth of thought may be slow; its seed-truths may be long in germinating; they may be deposited in an unfriendly soil, and have a late and chilling spring; but a golden harvest shall wave at last upon the stubborn globe.

Primitive Christianity was an Arethusan fount, which had disappeared for ages, and, though not destroyed, flowed darkly underground, only to burst forth with the Reformation, and again with its sacred waters to revive and fructify the dead and barren nations. Or, like a smoldering fire, covered and smothered by the gray ashes of accumulated rites and ceremonies, till it had become dark and cold, it now kindled afresh, to illumine the darkness and to cheer the souls of men.

Among the prominent causes of the Reformation were: The corruptions of religion; the vices of the clergy; the great schism of the West; and the revival of letters. Upon each of these we shall slightly enlarge.

In the course of ages religion had departed from her primitive simplicity. One fatal step was the union of temporal and spiritual power. The aggregation of political influence around the Bishop of Rome increased the danger of Christianity losing its original purity. The Gothic as well as the Latin nations generally submitted to the spiritual claims of Rome, and thus increased her political prestige. But with every increase of power came a decrease in piety, and a further departure from the primitive faith.

Auxiliary to these corruptions in hastening the Reformation were the vices of the clergy. These had become notoriously flagrant. Especially had the mendicant friars, by their sloth, their ignorance, their effrontery, and their rapacity, fallen under general odium. Begging monks thronged the taverns and places of viler resort. The monastic houses were often dens of corruption. Even the regular clergy were inconceivably ignorant and depraved. Instead of being the patterns of virtue, they were too often patrons of vice. Many of them could not read the offices of the Church, and few ever preached an original sermon, or, indeed, a sermon of any kind.

But, perhaps more than any other cause, the great schism of the West in the fourteenth century, conduced to lessen the influence of the Papacy. The spectacle of three claimants to the chair of St. Peter, as Christ's vicars on earth, hurling anathemas, excommunications, and recriminations at each other, necessarily, during the long period of anarchy and confusion which ensued, awakened deep questionings as to the validity of their claims, and as to the reality of their boasted infallibility.

The last of these general causes that we shall mention is the revival of letters, greatly accelerated as it was by the fall of Constantinople and by the discovery of printing. The press is confessedly the guardian of liberty, and pre-eminently of religious liberty. By means of the press those seed-truths, of which true liberty is but the fruit, are wafted lightly as thistle-down to the world's end, and they bring forth in every land their glorious harvest.

Yet, corrupt as the Church had become, it was never without seekers after truth. Many were the earnest prayers, like that of Ajax, for the light; many the watchers for the dawn. Many were those who,

“Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touched God’s right hand in the darkness,
And were lifted up and strengthened.”

The English Reformation, like the land of its origin, was insular, and was comparatively unaffected by foreign influence.

The church planted by St. Columba on Iona’s rocky island, in the seventh century, continued to flourish till the beginning of the ninth century, uncontaminated by the errors which had already corrupted the less secluded churches, and long after the rest of the western churches had submitted to the Pope of Rome. The light of departing day illumines those northern crags longer than lands nearer to the sun, and earlier does the dawn return. So the light of primitive Christianity lingered in the “isle of saints,” and the dawn of the Reformation arose sooner there than elsewhere; and there has it attained its brightest day. But never was the darkness total; refracted gleamings continued to shine till the twilight of the evening mingled with that of the dawn.

We shall not attempt in these pages a consecutive history of the Reformation in the many lands in which it arose, and during the long periods in which it was in progress. That would require many volumes. We shall endeavor to sketch briefly the life work of the great men who, throughout the ages of religious darkness and superstition, were beacon lights blazing with the fire of divine truth, illumining the gloom of night and heralding the dawn of day.

We enrich these pages with a quotation from Milton, in which he sets forth with stately eloquence the unspeakable blessings of the Reformation:

“When I recall to mind, at last, after so many dark ages, wherein the huge overshadowing train of error had almost swept all the stars out of the firmament of the Church; how the bright and blissful Reformation, by divine power, struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and antiChristian tyranny, methinks a sovereign and reviving joy must needs rush into the bosom of him that reads or hears, and the sweet odor of the returning Gospel imbathe his soul with the fragrancy of heaven. Then was the sacred Bible sought out of the dusty corners, where profane falsehood and neglect had thrown it; the schools opened; divine and human learning raked out of the embers of forgotten tongues; the princes and cities trooping apace to the new-erected banner of salvation; the martyrs, with the irresistible might of weakness, shaking the powers of darkness, and scorning the fiery rage of the old red dragon.”

02 – JOHN WYCLIFFE, THE MORNING STAR OF THE REFORMATION

It was with reverent interest that the present writer visited the famous Lambeth Palace, London – for over seven hundred years the residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury, the primates of England. But not the beauty of St. Mary’s venerable chapel, nor the grandeur of the stately hall, guard-room, or battlemented gateway presented the chief attractions to our mind. It was the tragic memories of the picturesque Lollards’ tower that most deeply enlisted our sympathies. In its narrow cell many prisoners for conscience’ sake saw the weary days drag on, while the iron entered their very souls. Here are the rings in the walls to which the prisoners were bound, the brands burned by the hot irons used in torture, the notches by which the victims of tyranny computed their calendar of wretchedness, and the trap-door in the floor by which, as the tide rose, they could be let down unseen into the river. Here the destined martyr, Cranmer, who had dispensed a sumptuous hospitality in this very palace, languished in mental and bodily misery before he atoned, amid the flames, for the weakness of his recantation.

It was an easy transition from this memory-haunted prison of the Lollards, in Lambeth, to the chief scene of the public life of Wycliffe, the father of Lollardism, at Oxford. It was with peculiar interest that we visited the quadrangles and chambers of Queen Philippa’s and Merton colleges where, as a

scholar, he studied, and the stately halls of Balliol where, as master, he taught. The venerable shade of the first and greatest of the English Reformers seemed yet to haunt their cloistered seclusion.

Of the early life of Wycliffe [1] but little is known. He was born near Richmond, in Yorkshire, about the year 1324, and was descended of good old English stock. His ancestors for three hundred years had occupied the same land, and had given its designation to the obscure village of Wycliffe – a name destined to become famous to the end of time. The lad was designed for the Church, almost the only sphere of intellectual activity in that age. Nearly all the lawyers, physicians and statesmen, as well as the instructors of youth in school and college, were ecclesiastics. He was, therefore, early sent to Oxford, the great seat of learning of Western Europe.

“England,” says Milman, “was almost a land of schools; every cathedral, almost every monastery, had its own; but youths of more ambition, self-confidence, supposed capacity, and of better opportunities, thronged to Oxford and Cambridge, now in their highest repute. In England, as throughout Christendom, that wonderful rush, as it were, of a vast part of the population towards knowledge, thronged the universities with thousands of students, instead of the few hundreds who have now the privilege of entering those seats of instruction.” Anthony a Wood states that about this time there were 30,000 scholars attending the University. But this must be a great exaggeration. The course of study, too, was far less comprehensive than at present.

This was emphatically the “growing time” of England’s history. We quote in illustration the picturesque phrase of the most vivid depicter of this period, the Rev. J. R. Green:

“The vigor of English life showed itself socially in the wide extension of commerce, in the rapid growth of the woollen trade, and the increase of manufactures after the settlement of Flemish weavers on the eastern coast; in the progress of the towns, fresh as they were from the victory of the craft-guilds; and in the development of agriculture through the division of lands, and the rise of the tenant farmer and the freeholder. It gave nobler signs of its activity in the spirit of national independence and moral earnestness which awoke at the call of Wycliffe. New forces of thought and feeling, which were destined to tell on every age of our later history, broke their way through the crust of feudalism in the socialist revolt of the Lollards, and a sudden burst of military glory threw its glamour over the age of Crecy and Poitiers.”

At Oxford Wycliffe became as distinguished for erudition as for piety. “The fruitful soil of his natural ability,” writes quaint old Fuller, “he industriously improved by acquired learning. He was not only skilled in the fashionable arts of that age, and in that abstruse and crabbed divinity, all whose fruit is thorns, but he was also well versed in the Scriptures, a rare accomplishment in those days.” His study of the Scriptures and of the early Fathers created a disgust for the logic-chopping divinity of the schoolmen, and won for him the name of the Evangelic Doctor.

“Wycliffe’s logic, his scholastic subtlety, some rhetorical art, his power of reading the Latin Scriptures, his various erudition, may be due to Oxford; but the vigor and energy of his genius, his perspicacity, the force of his language, his mastery over the vernacular English, the high supremacy which he vindicated for the Scriptures, which by immense toil he promulgated in the vulgar tongue – these were his own, to be learned in no school, to be attained by none of the ordinary courses of study. As with his contemporary and most congenial spirit, Chaucer, rose English poetry, in its strong homely breadth and humor, in the wonderful delineation of character with its finest shades, in its plain, manly good sense and kindly feeling; so was Wycliffe the father of English prose, rude but idiomatic, biblical in much of its picturesque phraseology, at once highly colored by and coloring the translation of the Scriptures.” [2]

One of the most dreadful plagues which ever devastated Europe was the pestilence known as the Black Death, which, in the early part of the fourteenth century, swept away, it is estimated, more than half the

inhabitants. This scourge of God made a profound impression on the devout mind of Wycliffe. In his first treatise, "The Last Age of the Church," he describes these evils as a divine judgment for the corruptions of the times. "Both vengeance of swerde," he wrote "and myschiefe unknown before, by which men thes dais should be punished, shall fall for synne of prestis."

A characteristic feature of the times was the multiplication of religious orders. The White, Black, Grey and Austin friars swarmed throughout the kingdom. "They invaded," says Milman, "every stronghold of the clergy – the university, the city, the village parish. They withdrew the flock from the discipline of the Church, intercepted their offerings, estranged their affections, heard confessions with more indulgent ears, granted absolution on easier terms." These sturdy beggars who argued that Christ and his disciples, like themselves, were mendicants, [3] Wycliffe unsparingly denounced. He branded the higher orders as hypocrites, "who, professing mendicancy, had stately houses, rode on noble horses, had all the pride and luxury of wealth with the ostentation of poverty." The humbler he described as "able-bodied beggars, who ought not to be permitted to infest the land."

The eloquence and learning of Wycliffe won him fame and honors. He was made warden of Balliol College, lecturer in divinity, and rector of Fylingham. He was soon chosen, too, as the champion of the realm against the encroachments of the Pope of Rome. Urban V. demanded the arrears of 1,000 marks [4] of Peter's pence alleged to be due the pontiff. This Edward III. Refused to pay. The sturdy English Barons answered on this wise: "Our ancestors won this realm and held it against all foes by the sword. Let the Pope come and take it by force; we are ready to stand up and resist him." "Christ alone is the Suzerain. It is better, as of old, to hold the realm immediately of him." Wycliffe, with much boldness and learning, vindicated the independence of the kingdom of the temporal authority of the Pope.

Another grievance was, that foreign prelates and priests, who never saw the country and could not speak its language, were presented to English dioceses and livings; and the country was drained of tithes, to be squandered in ecclesiastical profligacy at Rome and Avignon. A parliamentary remonstrance states that "The taxes paid to the Pope yearly out of England were four times the amount paid to the King." Wycliffe was sent as a delegate to Bruges to protest against this wrong. Justice he failed to obtain; but he learned the true character of the Papacy. On his return he did not scruple to denounce the Pope as "Antichrist, the proud worldly priest of Rome – the most accursed of clippers and purse-kervers."

Another evil of the times was the engrossing of all civil offices by ecclesiastics, from the Lord Chancellor's down to that of clerks of the kitchen and keeper of the king's wardrobe. To this piers Plowman refers in the lines:

Some serven the kinge and his silver tellen,
In the Checkere (Exchequer) and the Chauncelrie,
chalengynge his dettes.

One of these worldly prelates was able to equip three ships of war and a hundred men-at-arms for the king. Against this secularizing of the clergy Wycliffe strongly inveighs, and sets forth as an antidote his "Christian Rule of Life." "If thou art a priest," he says, "live thou a holy life. Pass other men in holy prayer, holy desire and holy speaking; in counseling and teaching the truth. Ever keep the commandments of God, and let his Gospel and his praises ever be in thy mouth. Ever despise sin, that man may be withdrawn therefrom, and that thy deeds may be so far rightful that no man shall blame them with reason. Let thy open life be thus a true book, in which the soldier and the layman may learn how to serve God and keep his commandments. For the example of a good life, if it be open and continued, striketh rude men much more than open preaching with the Word alone. And waste not thy goods in great feasts for rich men, but live a frugal life on poor men's alms and goods. Have both meat and drink and clothing, but the remnant give truly to the poor; to those who have freely wrought, but who now may not labor from feebleness and sickness, and thus shalt thou be a true priest, both to God

and to man.”

Wycliffe’s antagonism to the Papal party in the realm soon brought upon him their persecution. He was cited to appear before the Bishop of London on the charge of “holding and publishing erroneous and heretical doctrines.” Appear he did, but not alone. His powerful friends,” Old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,” and Lord Henry Percy, Lord Marshal of England, stood by him in the Lady Chapel of old St. Paul’s. The Lord Marshal demanded a seat for Wycliffe: “He hath many things to answer, he needs a soft seat.”

“But,” writes Foxe,” the Bishop of London cast eftsoons into a furnish chafe with those words, said ‘He should not sit there. Neither was it,’ said he, ‘according to law or wisdom that he, who was cited there to appear to answer before his ordinary, should sit down during the time of his answer, but he should stand.’ Upon these words a fire began to heat and kindle between them, insomuch that they began to rate and revile one the other. Then the duke, taking the Lord Percy’s part, with hasty words began also to take up the bishop. To whom the bishop again did render and requite, not only as good as he brought, but also did so far excel him in this railing art of scolding, that the duke blushed, and was ashamed, because he could not overpass the bishop in brawling and railing.”

A tumult arose in the city between the partisans of earl and bishop, and in the larger contention the case of Wycliffe, for the time, passed out of view.

Soon two Papal bulls, nay three of them, were dispatched against Wycliffe. The University of Oxford was commanded to prohibit the teachings which, “in his detestable madness,” he promulgated. In a special letter the Pope lamented that tares were suffered to grow up among the pure wheat in that seat of learning, and even to grow ripe without any care being applied to root them up. The reformer was cited before the Archbishop of Canterbury, and appeared at the episcopal palace of Lambeth. Old John of Gaunt was no longer by his side, nor the Lord Marshal of England. But he was environed by the true hearts of the English people.

The sturdy citizens of London, always the bulwark of liberty, were now openly attached to his teaching. They forced their way into St. Mary’s chapel, and by their menaces deterred the prelates from the condemnation of the “Evangelic Doctor.” “These were,” writes the contemporary historian, “as reeds shaken by the wind; they became in their speech as soft as oil.” The death of Gregory XI. And the great schism of the Church, with its rival Pope and anti-Pope hurling anathemas at each other, put an end for a time to the persecution of the champion of English liberty.

Amid his manifold travails and tribulations, Wycliffe fell ill, and was brought seemingly to death’s door. The leaders of the mendicant friars, whose wickedness he had denounced, thought this a fitting opportunity to procure the reversal of his severe condemnation of their order. In his mortal weakness they invaded his cell and urged the retraction of his judgments before himself passing to the tribunal of the great Judge of all. Rising on his couch, and summoning all his strength, the heroic soul exclaimed: “I shall not die, but live, and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars!”

The strong will triumphed. The craven monks hastened from the cell, and Wycliffe soon rose from his bed to proclaim anew with tongue and pen the doctrines of the Cross. To antagonize the false teaching of the mendicant friars, he himself sent forth itinerant preachers, who, at market cross and in village church, and on the highway, declared in plain, bold English speech the glorious evangel of the Gospel.

“The novelty, and, no doubt,” says Milman, “the bold attacks on the clergy, as well as the awfulness of the truths now first presented in their naked form, shook, thrilled, enthralled the souls of men, most of whom were entirely without instruction, the best content with the symbolic teaching of the ritual.” So greatly did his doctrines prevail that it passed into a proverb -- “You cannot see two men together but one of them is a Wycliffite.”

Wycliffe was now engaged upon the greatest work of his life – the translation from the Latin Vulgate of the Bible into the English tongue, finished in 1380-over five hundred years ago. This book it was that shook the Papal throne, that stirred the thought of Christendom, that roused the Anglo-Saxon mind, that opened in the common speech a fountain of living water, and for all times a well of English undefiled, the true source of England's liberties and England's greatness. In the "Kings' Library" of the British Museum, we examined with intensest interest a beautiful copy of that first English Bible. [5]

This, doubtless in separate portions, must have been widely copied; for one of the reformer's adversaries bitterly complains, as though it were a dire calamity, "that this Master John Wycliffe hath so translated the Scripture that laymen, and even women, who could read, were better acquainted therewith than the most lettered and intelligent of the clergy. In this way," he continues, "the Gospel pearl is cast abroad and trodden under foot of swine; and that which was before precious, both to clergy and laity, is rendered as it were the common jest of both! The jewel of the Church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the principal gift of the clergy and divines is made forever common to the laity."

Even Lingard, the Roman Catholic historian, states that "in the hands of Wycliffe's poor priests this translation became an engine of wonderful power." The new doctrines acquired partisans and protectors in the higher classes; a spirit of inquiry was generated, and the seeds sown of that religious revolution which, in a little more than a century, astonished and convulsed the nations of Europe.

The cost of a complete copy of the Scriptures, all written out by hand, was so great that only the wealthy could afford to possess one. But the sacred evangel was brought within the reach of all by means of a great brass-and-leather bound copy, chained to the desk of the parish church. Here, at stated times, some learned clerk or layman would read the oracles of God to the eager group assembled to hear them. In the old church at Chelsea, and elsewhere, may still be seen these ancient desks. In 1429, the cost of a New Testament alone was 2 Pounds 16s. 8d., equal to more than \$100 of our present money. At that time 5 Pounds was a sufficient amount for the yearly maintenance of a tradesman, yeoman, or curate. It required half a year's income to procure what can now be had for sixpence.

The Bible-hating prelates brought forward a bill in the House of Lords for suppressing Wycliffe's translation. Bold John of Gaunt stoutly declared: "We will not be the dregs of all, seeing that other nations have the law of God, which is the word of our faith, written in their own language," and the bill was thrown out.

The famous uprising of the people against odious tyranny, known as Wat Tyler's Rebellion, now took place. It had no connection with religion, but the prelates used it as a ground for casting odium upon Wycliffe. A synod assembled at the Grey Friars, London, formally condemned ten articles drawn from his writings as heretical, and an Act was passed by the House of Lords – the first statute of heresy enacted in England – commanding the arrest and imprisonment of all Wycliffe's preachers, that they might answer in the Bishops' courts.

The toils of fate seemed gathering around the intrepid reformer. Even sturdy John of Gaunt advised submission to the bench of bishops. But Wycliffe shrank not from the danger. He was again condemned by a convocation of clergy at Oxford. He boldly appealed, not to the Pope, but to the King. There was as yet no statute in England for the burning of heretics, and under the protection of the civil law he defied his adversaries. He was excluded from Oxford, but from his pulpit at Lutterworth he boldly proclaimed the doctrines of salvation by faith, and controverted the Romish dogma of the real presence in the Eucharist.

In his humble rectory hard by, his busy pen wrote volume after volume, [6] in strong, plain English speech, that all men might understand – expounding, enforcing, unfolding the teachings of that blessed book which he had first given the people in their own mother tongue. By the hands of rapid copyists

these were multiplied and scattered abroad on all the winds – seeds of truth immortal, destined to bring forth a glorious harvest in the hearts and lives of future generations of English confessors, ay, and martyrs, for the faith.

Wycliffe himself failed of the honor of martyrdom, not from the lack of courage on his part, or of the evil will on the part of his enemies, but through the good providence of God. His closing years passed in hallowed and congenial toil at Lutterworth. For two years previous to his death he suffered from partial paralysis; but his high courage, his earnest zeal, his fervent faith, were unpalsied to the last. While breaking the bread of the Lord's Supper to his beloved flock, the final summons came. Standing at the altar with the sacred emblems in his hand, he fell to the ground, deprived at once of consciousness and speech. He left no words of dying testimony, nor needs there such. His whole life was an epistle, known and read of all men. His spirit passed away from earth on the last day of the year 1384.

Yet he did not all die. In the hearts of thousands of faithful followers his doctrines lived. In the troublous times that came upon the realm, his disciples bore the glorious brand of "Gospellers," or Bible-men. Ay, and in the Lollards' Tower, on the scaffold, and amid the fires of Smithfield, they bore their witness to the truth that maketh free. The first of the noble army of martyrs, the smoke of whose burning darkened the sky of England, was William Sawtre, rector of St. Osyth's, in London. Then followed John Badbee, a humble tailor, who, denying the dogma of transubstantiation, avowed his faith in the Holy Trinity. "If every Host," he declared, "consecrated on the altar were the Lord's body, then were there twenty thousand Gods in England; but he believed in the one God omnipotent."

The lofty as well as the lowly, in like manner bore witness of the truth. Among the most illustrious victims of Papal persecution was the gallant knight Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. As his sentence was read, he answered, "Ye may judge my body, but ye have no power over my soul," and, like his Master, he prayed for his murderers. As he walked to the stake he refused the aid of an earthly priest: "To God only, now and ever present, would he confess, and of Him entreat pardon." His last words, drowned amid the crackling of faggots and the roar of the flames, were of praise to God. Such were some of the glorious fruits of Wycliffe's teaching in the generation following his own death.

Although removed by God's providence from the evils of those troublous times, yet the malice of his enemies suffered not the bones of Wycliffe to lie quiet in the grave. Thirty years after his death, the Council of Constance – the same council which, in violation of a plighted faith, burned the two most illustrious disciples of Wycliffe, Jerome and Huss – wreaked its petty rage upon the dead body of the English reformer, by decreeing that it should be disinterred and cast forth from consecrated ground. But not till thirteen years later was this impotent malice fulfilled. At the command of Pope Martin V., his bones were dug up from their grave, burned to ashes, and strewed upon the neighboring stream.

"And so," observes Foxe, "was he resolved into three elements, earth, fire, and water; they think thereby to abolish both the name and doctrine of Wycliffe for ever. But though they digged up his body, burned his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the Word of God and truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn, which yet to this day do remain, notwithstanding the transitory body and bones of the man were thus consumed and dispersed."

"The ashes of Wycliffe," to quote the words of Fuller, "were cast into a brook which entered the Avon, and they were carried to the Severn, from the Severn to a narrow sea, and from the narrow sea into the wide ocean; the ashes of Wycliffe thus becoming an emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all over the world."

“The Avon to the Severn runs,
The Severn to the sea;
So Wycliffe’s ashes shall be borne
Where’er those waters be.”

03 – JOHN HUSS AND JEROME OF PRAGUE

In the summer months of the year 1414, all eyes and all minds in Europe were directed towards the fair city of Constance, a free town of the German Empire upon the Bodensee. From all parts of Christendom were assembling here whatever was most august in Church and State for the greatest Ecumenical Council of Latin Christianity ever held. During the three years and a half of its continuance there were present, though probably not all at the same time, one Pope, four patriarchs of the Eastern Church, twenty-nine prince-cardinals, thirty-three archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, one hundred and thirty-four abbots, and in all, including patriarchs, cardinals, abbots, bishops, archbishops, doctors, provosts, and other ecclesiastics of various ranks; no less than eighteen thousand clergy.

The Emperor Sigismund, princes of the empire, dukes, burgraves, margraves, counts, barons and other nobles and deputies of the free cities and the representatives of the great powers of Christendom, with their numerous retinues, swelled the population of the little city from forty thousand to one hundred and forty thousand persons. Now shrunken to a town of only ten thousand, it gleams with its crown of grey-stone towers, surrounded by the waters of the Bodensee, like a pearl set in sapphires.

Far different was the aspect of the busy scene in those bright summer days well nigh five centuries ago. Down the chestnut-covered slopes of the Alps wound, day after day and week after week, the stately cavalcades of sovereign princes and the ambassadors of kings, of cardinals and prelates, with glittering escorts of gallant knights and mail-clad men-at-arms, or with splendid and numerous retainers. Bands of pilgrims in humbler guise, on horse-back or on foot, chanting Latin hymns or beguiling the way with jest or story, swelled the train. Chapmen and merchants brought goods of every sort on the backs of mules or in lumbering vehicles, to supply every demand of luxury or necessity. The blue lake was gemmed with snowy sails, wafting their contingent of priests or laymen, of pride and pomp, to that strange assemblage.

“It was not only, it might seem,” writes the graphic pen of Milman, “to be a solemn Christian council, but a European congress, a vast central fair, where every kind of commerce was to be conducted on the boldest scale, and where chivalrous or histrionic or other amusements were provided for idle hours and for idle people. It might seem a final and concentrated burst and manifestation of mediaeval devotion, mediaeval splendor, mediaeval diversions; all ranks, all orders, all pursuits, all “professions, all trades, all artisans, with their various attire, habits, manners, language, crowded into a single city.

“Day after day the air was alive with the standards of princes and the banners emblazoned with the armorial bearings of sovereigns, of nobles, of knights, of Imperial cities, or glittering with the silver crozier, borne before some magnificent bishop or mitred abbot. Night after night the silence was broken by the pursuivants and trumpeters announcing the arrival of some high or mighty count or duke, or the tinkling mule-bells of some lowlier caravan. The streets were crowded with curious spectators, eager to behold some splendid prince or ambassador, some churchman famous in the pulpit, in the school, in the council, or it might be in the battlefield, or even some renowned minnesinger or popular jongleur.” [7]

Booths and wooden buildings were erected without the walls, and thousands of pilgrims encamped in the adjoining country. All the great nations were represented: Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Hungary, the Tyrol, the Black Forest, Thuringia, Brabant, Flanders, the distant North, England and Scotland, and even Constantinople and Antioch.

The great object of this council was threefold: First, to put an end to the great schism which for six-and-thirty years had rent Catholic Christendom. During that time Pope and anti-Pope – at one time three rival Popes – had hurled their anathemas and recriminations at each other's heads, to the great scandal of the Church and the relaxation of the bonds of discipline, and indeed of all ecclesiastical authority, and to the consequent corruption of morals. Second, to reform the state of religion, which had greatly suffered through this chronic strife and schism. And thirdly, for the suppression of heresy—a task for which the Churchmen of the day were always eager and alert. To give the history of the council is not the purpose of this brief sketch, but to trace the course and far-reaching consequences of its heresy-quelling efforts in the judicial murders of John Huss and of Jerome of Prague.

Of the many thousands of priests or laymen assembled in the city of Constance at this eventful period, probably not one seemed in appearance less likely to attract the attention of the great council or to transmit his name to after times than the humble priest from the distant kingdom of Bohemia, who rode quietly into the town, and took up his lodgings in the house of a poor widow. Yet to thousands throughout Christendom this august assembly is known only through the heroic martyrdom of Jerome and Huss; and multitudes of pilgrims are drawn, by the spell of their moral heroism, from many lands to visit the scene of their sufferings. Not the scenes of stately pageantry, of Imperial pomp and pride, but the dismal dungeons in which the martyrs languished, and the rude rock which commemorates their death at the stake are the most sacred places and are invested with the most hallowed memories of the city of Constance.

The Bohemian Reformation was the direct offspring of English Lollardism. John Huss was the disciple of John Wycliffe. The relations of the two countries were intimate. Anne of Bohemia, the consort of Richard II., favored the new doctrine. Jerome of Prague sat at Wycliffe's feet at Oxford, and brought his writings in great numbers to Bohemia, and translated them into the common speech.

In the little town of Hussinetz, from which he takes his name, was born, in the year 1373, the child whose heroic after-career and tragic death were to be, in the eyes of millions, the chief glory of his native land. Huss was instructed in all the learning of his age, and took honorable degrees at the University of Prague -- “the decorations,” says his biographer, “of a victim for the sacrifice.” He was characterized by youthful piety and fervent zeal. While reading the “Life of St. Lawrence,” it is said, he was aroused to enthusiasm, and thrust his hand into the flames to try what part of the martyr's suffering he could endure – an unconscious forecast of his own tragic fate and undying fame.

On account of his learning and piety, Huss became preacher in the university and chaplain to the Queen. He rapidly rose to distinction at the university, which was attended by twenty thousand, or, as Milman says, thirty thousand students of Bohemia and Germany, [8] and at length became rector. He studied carefully the works of Wycliffe and preached boldly his doctrines. The Archbishop of Prague denounced those teachings, and threatened with the heretic's death – the death of the stake – all who should preach them.

Huss was not the man to speak with bated breath at the command of authority. The strife between Churchmen and Wycliffites became a burning question at the university. The Bohemians took sides with their countrymen against the Germans, and in street, on bridge, and in square the hot-headed gownsmen substituted clubs and stones for syllogisms and arguments. The German faction were deprived of certain rights of voting for academic officers, and in revenge they abandoned the city and established the rival University of Leipsic.

John Huss continued fearlessly to preach against the corruptions of religion and the vices of the clergy. Pope Alexander V. issued a bull against the doctrines of Wycliffe, and the Archbishop of Prague committed two hundred of his books, many of them the property of the university, to the flames. Huss protested against this wanton destruction, and procured payment for the costly manuscripts. His own

safety was menaced, but he continued to preach. He appealed from the judgment of a venal Pope to the unerring tribunal of the skies.

“I, John Huss,” he wrote, “offer this appeal to Jesus Christ, my Master and my just Judge, who knows, defends, and judges the just cause.” He was summoned to Rome, charged with every conceivable crime. The Bohemian king and people, fearing the machinations of his enemies, refused to let him cross the Alps, and he retired for a time into seclusion. From his retreat he sent forth a book demonstrating what Rome has never yet admitted, that the writings of the so-called heretics should be studied, not burned.

There now came to Bohemia vendors of indulgences, seeking to gain thereby recruits for the Pope’s war against Ladislaus, King of Naples. The blasphemous sale of remission of sins past and permission for sins in the future, which a century later awoke the indignation of Luther, aroused the abhorrence of Huss. He boldly denounced the impiety of the “sin-mongers,” and his disciple, Jerome, burned the Pope’s bull beneath the gallows.

“Dear master,” said the Town Council to the rector, “we are astonished at your lighting up a fire, in which you run the risk of being burned yourself.” But the heroic soul heeded not the prophetic words. He went everywhere preaching with tongue and pen against the doctrine of indulgences, the worship of images, the corruptions of the clergy. “They who cease to preach,” he said, “will be reputed traitors in the day of judgment.”

The last bolt of Papal vengeance was hurled. The city of Prague, and wherever Huss sojourned, were laid under an interdict. A silence and gloom as of death fell upon the land. No longer the matin bell or Angelus rang from the minster spire, or the twin-towered Theinkirche, or from the many belfries of church or monastery. Even the dying were denied the last unction and sacred viaticum for the journey to the spirit world, and their bodies were consigned to earth without the hallowed rites of religion – the wrath of man casting deeper darkness over the shadows of the grave.

But the nation was aroused. “Huss,” says Milman, “was now no isolated teacher, no mere follower of a condemned English heretic; he was even more than the head of a sect; he almost represented a kingdom – no doubt much more than the half of Bohemia.” Like Luther’s, his words were half battles. His books on the abominations of monks and the members of Antichrist, directed against the hierarchy, were sledge-hammer blows that were felt throughout Europe.

It was at this juncture that the Council of Constance was convoked. Huss, strong in the consciousness of his integrity, proffered to go thither and to vindicate his orthodoxy before the great tribunal of Christendom. In a paper affixed to the gates of the palace at Prague, he challenged his enemies to meet and confute him at the great council. Yet he was not without his forebodings of evil. In a sealed paper which he left, containing his will and confession, to be opened only on his death, he wrote: “I expect to meet as many enemies at Constance as our Lord at Jerusalem – the wicked clergy, even some secular princes, and those Pharisees the monks.”

“I confide,” he wrote to a friend, “altogether in the all-powerful God – in my Saviour. I trust that he will accord me his Holy Spirit, to fortify me in his truth, so that I may face with courage temptations, prisons, and, if necessary, a cruel death. Therefore, beloved, if my death ought to contribute to his glory, pray that it may come quickly, and that he may enable me to support all my calamities with constancy. Probably, therefore, you will never more behold my face at Prague.” Before setting out on his journey, he asked and received from Sigismund, Emperor of Germany, a safe-conduct, commanding all ecclesiastical and secular princes to allow him “to pass, sojourn, stop, and return freely and surely.” He traveled unattended, on horseback, and took lodgings in the house of a poor widow, whom he compares to her of Sarepta, at Constance.

Pope John XXIII., who was trembling for fear of his own safety, received him graciously. He solemnly declared: "Though John Huss had killed my own brother I would not permit any harm to be done to him in Constance." Yet he eagerly sacrificed him in the hope of averting his own fate. John had two rival Popes to contend with – Gregory XII. And Benedict XIII. (They were all three subsequently deposed by the council, and Martin V. elected in their place). To prevent or postpone his own deposition, Pope John entered upon the persecution and suppression of heresy, an object which he felt would unite, for the time at least, all the rival factions of the council.

Two bitter enemies of Huss, whom he had worsted in controversy – an offense not to be forgiven – had preceded him to Constance, and now preferred charges of heresy. He was summoned to the presence of the Pope and cardinals. He demanded to be arraigned before the whole council, but yielded to the summons, saying, "I shall put my trust in our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and shall be more happy to die for his glory than to live denying the truth."

Notwithstanding his appeal to the safe-conduct of the Emperor, he was separated from his Bohemian friend and protector, the noble John de Chlum, and confined in prison, first in the bishop's palace, and then in a dungeon of the Dominican convent, on an island near the city. In this loathsome vault – its walls reeking with damp, and so dark that only for a short time each day was he able to read by the feeble light struggling through an aperture in the roof – for well nigh eight weary months, with irons on his legs, and fastened by a chain to the wall, [9] the valiant confessor languished, and only escaped from its durance vile through the door of martyrdom. The old monastery is now – such changes brings the whirligig of time – a hotel, and modern tourists loiter in the quaint Romanesque cloisters, and dine in the vaulted refectory of the monks, above the dungeon of John Huss.

The Emperor Sigismund broke into a rage at the violation of his safe-conduct, and gave orders "immediately to set John Huss at liberty, and, if necessary, to break open the doors of the prison." But the persistence of the Pope prevented his release. On Christmas Day the Emperor himself arrived, and in the grand old cathedral, dating from 1048, he read, in the dalmatic of a deacon, the lesson for the day: "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus" -- an ill omen to the Pope of the influence of this modern Caesar. On a throne of state sat Sigismund and the Empress. To the former the Pope presented a sword, exhorting him to use it for the defense of the council. It was upon himself that its weight first fell.

No open breach, however, as yet took place. The Pope presented the Emperor that distinguished reward of the most eminent of the faithful – a golden rose – and offered him the more substantial argument of a subsidy of 200,000 florins. But dark accusations were made against the scandalous life of the sinful old man, misnamed "his Holiness." Of such lurid iniquity were these that an honest English bishop cried out in righteous indignation that "the Pope deserved to be burned at the stake."

John XXIII. Yielded to the inevitable, resigned the papacy, and fled by stealth in the mean disguise of a groom, riding on an ill-accounted horse, with a cross-bow on the pommel of his saddle, from Constance to Schaffhausen, and afterwards to the depths of the Black Forest -- "A wandering vagabond," says a contemporary chronicler, "seeking rest and finding none" -- "Vagabundus mobilis, quaerens requiem et non inveniens."

The accusations against the furtive Pope were formulated in seventy-two distinct charges: Sixteen of these, as too unutterably vile for discussion, were dropped. Of the remaining fifty-six he was convicted, and was solemnly deposed by the council from St. Peter's chair. His armorial bearings were defaced, his "fisherman's ring" was broken, and he was brought back a captive and consigned to the very prison in which, for six months, the victim of his tyranny had languished.

But what a contrast between these men! The wretched, deposed pontiff – hurled for his crimes from his high place, and crushed by his infamy – exclaimed, in the bitterness of his soul, “Would to God that I had never mounted to such a height! Since then I have never known a happy day.” In a cell separated by the space of but a few steps, sat and wrote by the dim light struggling into his dungeon, the heroic confessor and destined martyr of the faith. Unmoved by the rage of his enemies, his soul was strong in God. In his serene majesty of spirit he refused life and liberty at the cost of doing violence to his conscience.

Amid such stirring events as the deposition of a sovereign pontiff, the case of John Huss, the Bohemian priest, was for the time postponed. Though Sigismund writhed under the accusation of having violated his Imperial guarantee of safety, he shrank from becoming the defender of heresy and schism against the persecuting zeal of such an august assembly as the great council.

The fall of the Pope gave opportunity for the congenial employment of the persecution of heresy. The doctrines of the English reformer, John Wycliffe, were the first object of denunciation. Three hundred and five distinct propositions from his writings were condemned. In impotent malice this assembly of all that was most august in Church and State in Christendom wreaked its rage upon the dead body which had lain for thirty years in its quiet grave at Lutterworth. Wycliffe’s remains were ordered to be rifled from their tomb, and with his books to be given to the flames. But near at hand, and in their power, was a living exponent of those hated doctrines, who would be more sentient to their torture. John Huss was therefore brought before the council, not so much for examination, as for prejudged condemnation.

The council was to be favored with two victims instead of one. An illustrious disciple was to share the martyrdom of his illustrious master. Jerome of Prague was only two years younger than John Huss; but while his rival in learning and religious zeal, he was his inferior in moral energy, and probably also in physical nerve. After visiting the universities of Cologne, Heidelberg, Paris, and Oxford, he preached boldly the doctrines of Wycliffe, and became also the ardent disciple and colleague in the reform movement of John Huss. When his revered and honored friend left Prague for Constance Jerome had said, “Dear master, be firm; maintain intrepidly what thou hast written and preached. Should I hear that thou hast fallen into peril I will come to thy succor.”

In fulfillment of this pledge he now hastened to Constance – himself determined to plead his friend’s cause before the council. He entered the city unknown, and mingling with the gossiping crowd learned the common rumor that his friend was already pre-condemned. His own faith and courage failed, and feeling that all was lost he sought safety in flight.

While traversing the Black Forest, which stretches for many gloomy leagues over mountain and valley, he lodged for the night with the village cure. Bursting with indignation at the outrages inflicted on his friend, he denounced the council as “a synagogue of Satan, a school of iniquity.” The bold words were repeated to the village authorities, and Jerome was arrested, and by order of the council was sent to Constance, riding in a cart, bound with chains and guarded by soldiers.

He was arraigned before the assembly, loaded with fetters. He was accused of the odious crime of heresy. It was intolerable that the greatest council ever held, with an Emperor at its head, which had just deposed the Pope himself, should be bearded by two contumacious priests from a half-barbarous land. “Prove that what I have advanced were errors,” Jerome calmly replied, “and I will abjure them with all humility.” Hereupon a tumult arose, and a multitude of voices cried out, “To the flames with him; to the flames.” “If it is your pleasure that I must die,” answered Jerome, “The will of God be done.”

But his hour was not yet come. He was sent back to his dungeon and heavily ironed. For two days he was chained in a torturing posture, with outstretched hands, to a lofty beam; and for a year he lingered,

the prey of bodily weakness and mental anguish in this loathsome prison cell. Even the consolation of sharing the imprisonment of his friend Huss was denied him.

After six months' weary confinement, Huss was at length arraigned before the council. "Fear not," he said to his friends, "I have good hope that the words which I have spoken in the shade shall hereafter be preached on the house top" -- "Spero quod quae dixi sub recto praedicabuntur super tectis." These words of cheer were to his disciples in many an hour of persecution and gloom an encouragement and inspiration. In the great hall of the Kaufhaus, where the tourist today gazes with curious eye on the fading frescoes on the wall, the great council sat -- prelates, priests, and deacons in mitres, alb, stole, chasuble and dalmatic; and secular princes in robes of state and wearing the insignia of office -- all to crush one manacled but unconquerable man.

The writings of Huss were presented -- there were twenty-seven in all -- the authorship of which he frankly admitted. From these, thirty-nine articles were extracted alleged to be heretical. He was accused of denying transubstantiation, of teaching the doctrines of Wycliffe, of appealing from the Pope to Christ, and other such heinous crimes, Huss attempted to reply, but was met by an outburst of mockery and abuse. "One would have said," writes Maldoneiwitz, who was present, "that these men were ferocious wild beasts rather than grave and learned doctors." Huss appealed to the Scriptures, but was howled clown with rage. "They all," says Luther, in his vigorous phrase, "worked themselves into a frenzy like wild boars -- they bent their brows and gnashed their teeth against John Huss."

Two days later he was again arraigned. For nearly two hours an almost total eclipse darkened the sun, as if in sympathy with the dire eclipse of truth and justice on the earth. The Emperor sat on his throne of state. Men in armor guarded the prisoner in chains. His bitter adversaries, including the Cardinal of Cambray, who had won renown as "the hammer of the heretics," were his accusers.

"If I die," said Huss to a friend, "God will answer for me at the day of judgment." Accused of urging the people to take arms, he replied, "I certainly did; but only the arms of the Gospel -- the helmet and sword of salvation." The Emperor urged unconditional submission. "If not," he added, "the council will know how to deal with you. For myself, so far from defending you in your errors, I will be the first to light the fires with my own hands." "Magnanimous Emperor," replied Huss, with keen but seemingly unconscious sarcasm, "I give thanks to your Majesty for the safe-conduct which you gave me --" He was here interrupted and sent back to prison.

Again he was arraigned, and again he was condemned by the council. Even the Emperor -- superstition and anger stifling the voice of conscience -- declared "that his crimes were worthy of death; that if he did not forswear his errors he must be burned." Still, his saintly life, his great learning, his heroic courage commanded the admiration even of his enemies; and they exhorted him even with tears to abjure, and a form of recantation was presented to him.

"How can I?" he asked. "If Eliezer, under the Old Law, refused to eat the forbidden fruit lest he should sin against God, how can I, a priest of the New Law, however unworthy, from fear of punishment so brief and transitory, sin so heinously against the law of God. It is better for me to die, than by avoiding momentary pain to fall into the hands of God, and perhaps into eternal fire. I have appealed to Jesus Christ, the one All-powerful and All-just Judge; to him I commit my cause, who will judge every man, not according to false witness and erring councils, but according to truth and man's desert."

He was accused of arrogance in opposing his opinion to that of so many learned doctors. "Let but the lowest in the council," he replied, "convince me, and I will humbly own my error. Till I am convinced," he added, with grand loyalty to conscience, "not the whole universe shall force me to recant."

Huss spent his last hours in prison in writing to his friends in Prague. "Love ye one another" -- so runs his valediction -- "never turn any one aside from the divine truth. I conjure you to have the Gospel

preached in my chapel of Bethlehem so long as God will permit. Fear not them that kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul.”

His faithful friends loved him too well to counsel moral cowardice. They urged him to be faithful to the end. “Dear master,” said the brave knight, John de Chlum, “I am an unlettered man, unfit to counsel one so learned. But if in your conscience you feel yourself to be innocent, do not commit perjury in the sight of God, nor leave the path of truth for fear of death.”

“O noble and most faithful friend,” exclaimed Huss, with an unwonted gush of tears, “I conjure thee depart not till thou hast seen the end of all. Would to God I were now lead to the stake rather than to be worn away in prison.”

After all, Huss was but human. In his lonely cell he had his hours of depression, and, like his blessed Master, his soul was at times exceeding sorrowful. “It is hard,” he wrote, “to rejoice in tribulation. The flesh, O Lord! Is weak. Let thy Spirit assist and accompany me; for without thee I cannot brave this cruel death... Written in chains,” is the pathetic superscription of the letter, “on the eve of the day of St. John the Baptist, who died in prison for having condemned the iniquity of the wicked.”

But for the most part his courage was strong, and, like Paul and Silas, he sang his “Sursum Corda” in the prison: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” “Shall I,” he wrote, “who for so many years have preached patience and constancy under trials – shall I fall into perjury, and so shamefully scandalize the people of God? Far from me be the thought! The Lord Jesus will be my succor and my recompense.”

He freely forgave all his enemies – even his chief accuser, who came to gloat upon his sufferings in his cell, and whom he heard say to the gaoler, “By the grace of God we will soon burn this heretic.” After thirty days longer of weary confinement, he was brought forth to receive his sentence. The august ceremony took place in the venerable cathedral. Sigismund and the princes of the empire sat on thrones of state. The cardinals in scarlet robes, the bishops in golden miters, filled the chancel. High mass was sung; the solemn music pealing through the vaulted aisles, and the fragrant incense rising like a cloud. But Huss stood guarded by soldiers in the porch, “lest the holy mysteries should be defiled by the presence of so great a heretic.” He then advanced, and after long and silent prayer, stood at the tribunal.

The Bishop of Lodi preached from the text, “That the body of sin might be destroyed.” It was a violent outburst of denunciation. Turning to the Emperor at its close he said, “It is a holy work, glorious prince, which is reserved for you to accomplish. Destroy heresies, errors and, above all, this obstinate heretic,” pointing to Huss, who knelt in fervent prayer. “Smite, then, such great enemies of the faith, that your praises may proceed from the mouths of children and that your glory may be eternal. May Jesus Christ, forever blessed, deign to accord you this favor!”

After this unapostolic benediction, the council, which claimed to be under the especial inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, proceeded to its work of cursing and bitterness and death. The writings of Huss were first condemned to be destroyed, then himself to be degraded from his office of priest, and his body to be burned. “Freely came I hither,” said Huss in that supreme hour, “under the safe-conduct of the Emperor,” and he looked steadfastly at Sigismund, over whose face there spread a deep blush. [10] “Oh! Blessed Jesus,” he went on, “this thy council condemns me because in my afflictions I sought refuge with thee, the one just Judge.”

Yet with a sublime magnanimity he fervently prayed for his persecutors: “Lord Jesus, pardon my enemies; pardon them for thine infinite mercy.” To this day men point to a stone Slab in the pavement of the church – a white spot on which always remains dry, when the rest is damp – as the place where Huss stood when sentenced to be burned at the stake.

The last indignities were now to be inflicted. Priestly vestments were first put upon the destined victim,

and then, in formal degradation, removed. As they took the chalice of the sacrament from his hands, the apparitor said, "Accursed Judas, we take away from thee this cup filled with the blood of Jesus Christ." "Nay," he replied, "I trust that this very day I shall drink of his cup in the Kingdom of Heaven."

They placed on his head a paper miter daubed over with devils, with the words of cursing: "We devote thy soul to the devils in hell." "And I commend my soul," he meekly replied, "to the most merciful Lord Christ Jesus. I wear with joy this crown of shame, for the love of him who wore for me a crown of thorns."

Then the Church – too holy, too tender to imbrue her hands in the blood of her victim – having declared him no longer a priest but a layman, delivered him to the secular power to be destroyed. He was conducted between four town sergeants and followed by a guard of eight hundred horsemen and a great multitude of people, from the grey old minster to the place of execution, in a green meadow without the walls. Before the bishop's palace the guard halted, that Huss might see the fire on which his books were burning. Knowing that truth is mighty – next to God himself – he only smiled at the ineffective act of malice. So great was the crowd of people that, in crossing the moat, it almost broke down the bridge.

Arrived at his funeral pyre, Huss knelt down and recited several of the penitential psalms, and prayed, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me. Into thy hands I commit my spirit. I beseech thee to pardon all my enemies." "We know not what this man's crime may be," said the people;" we only know that his prayers to God are excellent." As he prayed his paper miter fell from his head. A soldier rudely thrust it on, with the jeer, "He shall be burned with all his devils." "Friend," said the patient martyr, "I trust that I shall reign with Christ since I die for his cause."

He was then bound to the stake with a rusty chain, and wood and straw were heaped about him. As the fire was applied and the smoke wreaths rose, the voice of the dying martyr was heard singing the *Christe Eleison*; "Jesus, son of the living God, have mercy upon me." Then his head fell upon his breast, and the awful silence was broken only by the crackling of faggots and the roar of the flames. In impotent rage his executioners gathered his ashes and cast them into the swift-flowing Rhine. But the zeal of his followers scraped up the very earth of the spot, and bore it as a precious relic to Bohemia.

But one victim could not appease the wrath of this zealous council. Another still languished in prison for whose blood it thirsted. Every vestige of heresy must be destroyed. For six long months Jerome had lain in his noisome dungeon. He was commanded to abjure his faith or to perish in the flames. He was a man of less heroic mold than Huss. He was now deprived of the support of that strong spirit on which he had leaned. His body was enfeebled and his spirit broken by his long confinement in chains, in darkness, and on meager fare. He was only forty years of age, and the love of life was strong within him. He shrank from torture, and in an hour of weakness he affixed his name to a sentence of retraction.

The council, as if eager for his death, rejected the retraction as ambiguous and imperfect, and demanded a fuller abjuration. But the hour of weakness was past. The love of truth prevailed over the love of life. With a moral heroism that almost atones for his single act of yielding, he withdrew his recantation. "I confess," he wrote, "that, moved by cowardly fear of the stake, against my conscience, I consented to the condemnation of the doctrines of Wycliffe and Huss. This sinful retraction I now fully retract; and am resolved to maintain their tenets unto death, believing them to be the true and pure doctrine of the Gospel, even as their lives were blameless and holy."

By these words he signed his own death-warrant. He was speedily condemned as a relapsed heretic. He demanded an opportunity of making a defense. "What injustice!" he exclaimed. "You have held me shut up for three hundred and forty days in a frightful prison, in the midst of filth, noisomeness, stench, and the utmost want of everything. You then bring me out, and lending an ear to my mortal enemies, you refuse to hear me." He was at length granted an opportunity to reply to the hundred and seven charges preferred against him. He defended himself with extraordinary eloquence and learning -- "now

deeply pathetic, now with playful wit or taunting sarcasm, confounding, bewildering, overpowering his adversaries. He stood fearless, intrepid, like another Cato, not only despising, but courting death.” Of all the sins of his life, he said, none weighed so heavy on his conscience as his unworthy denial of the doctrines of Wycliffe and Huss. “From my heart I confess and declare with horror,” he exclaimed, “that I disgracefully quailed when through fear of death I condemned their doctrines. I declare anew, I lied like a wretch in adjuring their faith.” “Do you suppose I fear to die?” he demanded. “You have held me for a whole year in a frightful dungeon, more horrible than death itself. You have treated me more cruelly than Turk, Jew or pagan, and my flesh has literally rotted off my bones alive, and I make no complaint.” Yet he exhorted, for the truth’s sake, that they would listen to that voice which was soon to be hushed forever.

He was again haled from the prison to the church to receive his sentence. The troops again were under arms. The council sat in state. Again high mass and chanted hymns consecrated judicial murder. On his way to the place of burning Jerome repeated, with firm voice, the Apostle’s creed and chanted the litanies of the Church. As they piled the faggots and straw about him, he sang the hymn, “Salve, festa dies” -- “Hail, joyful day,” as though it were his birthday – as it was – into immortal life. As the executioner was lighting the fire behind his back, he said, “Light it before my face. Had I been afraid, I would not have been here.” He then committed his soul to God, and prayed in the Bohemian tongue as long as life lasted.

On the occasion of the present writer’s visit to Constance, I made a pilgrimage to the places made sacred by these imperishable memories. Early in the morning I went to the old cathedral, founded 1052, with its sixteen lofty monolithic columns. In the stone floor is shown a large slab which always remains white when the rest of the pavement is damp. On this spot Huss stood – so runs the legend – on July 6th, 1415, when the council condemned him to be burnt at the stake. In the choir are wonderfully quaint satirical wood carvings, dating from 1470-Adam and Eve rocking Cain in a cradle; Absalom wearing huge spurs; St. George and the Dragon; St. Jerome and the Lion; the Apostles, with grave German faces and mediaeval costumes, recognized by their attributes carved above their heads; a vision of heaven, with harpers, crowned saints, the strange apocalyptic “beasts” -- griffins, unicorns, dog-headed figures, etc. -- all carved with realistic power.

I went next to the Kaufhaus, in whose great hall the council that condemned Huss sat, 1414-1418. Now this Catholic city glorifies his memory by a series of exquisite frescoes on the walls of this very chamber. In one scene the noble figure of Huss is shown, surrounded by a crowd of bishops, cardinals and soldiers, while a gross old monk is taking down the evidence against him. In another, Huss is being taken in a boat at night to prison. A monk holds a flaring torch which illumines the calm face of the martyr and the steel morions and crossbows of the carousing soldiers, one of whom holds a huge flagon to his lips. Another shows the building of the pyre and the burning of the martyr. The soldiers are grim and indifferent, the faces of the monks are contorted with rage, a timid girl is shrieking with terror, a Hussite disciple is beseeching for his honored teacher. Another shows the “Auswanderung der Protestanten,” in 1548; old age and childhood alike exiled from their homes, carrying their Bibles and baggage; one girl With a pet bird in a cage. The whole history of Constance is written on these walls. As we gaze, the past seems more real than the present.

On the walls of the vaulted chapel of the ancient monastery – now the dining-room of our hotel – were faded frescoes of scenes of martyrdom, from which the hearts of the pious monks gathered courage, in the far-off years forever flown. In a dark and dismal dungeon in the basement of an ivy-covered round tower, where for a short time each day a beam of light found entrance, with irons on his legs and fastened by a chain to the walls, the heroic Huss was confined for nearly eight months before he glorified God amid the flames. The cloisters surround a beautiful quadrangle, covered with noble frescoed scenes from the history of Constance.

Then I walked out beneath the limes and poplars to the sacred spot where the martyrs suffered, without the gate. No chiseled monument commemorates their death – nothing but a huge granite boulder – emblem of the unflinching endurance of their fortitude and of the endless endurance of the faith for which they suffered. Deeply engraved upon its rugged surface are the words:

“HIERONUMUS VON PRAG* -- 30 MAR 17 JUIN 1 1416.

JOHANNES HUS – 6/14/JULI, 1415.”

Then I walked back through the Hussenstrasse, through the Schnetzthor, a wonderfully quaint structure, built, as an inscription affirms, in the thirteenth century. Near here is shown the house where Huss was arrested, with a quaint relief of 1415, with the following mocking verses, in old German script, which may be freely rendered somewhat as follows:

“O woe to me, poor simpleton,
Here one took hold of me by the hair (of the head).

“To this place I had run away,
Am still for all in jeopardy.”

Passing through Jerome Street – for so is the name of the hero commemorated after nearly five hundred years – we reach St. Paul’s tower, now a brewery, where the martyr was imprisoned for a year before his death. We moderns seem intruders amid these shadows of the distant past. But the most real and reverent of them all are the potent memories of the heroic Huss and Jerome.

Measured by years, their lives were short – Huss was forty-two and Jerome forty-one. But measured by sublime achievement, by heroic daring, by high-souled courage, their lives were long, and grand, and glorious. They conquered a wider liberty, a richer heritage for man. They defied oppression in its direst form – the oppression of the souls of men. They counted not their lives dear unto them for the testimony of Jesus. They have joined the immortal band whose names the world will not willingly let die. Their ashes were sown upon the wandering wind and rushing wave, but their spirits are alive for evermore. Their name and fame, in every age and every land, have been an inspiration and a watchword in the conflict of eternal right against ancient wrong.

In the age immediately succeeding his own, the name of Huss became a battle-cry on many a gory field; and the Hussite wars are a tragic page in the history of the world. All Bohemia rose to avenge the death of its apostles and martyrs. Knight and baron, with hand on sword, swore defiance to the power which had doomed to death Jerome and Huss. Among these emerged into prominence the terrible name of Ziska, “The one-eyed,” as it signifies, who soon became a portent of wrath to the foes of his country. The communion of the cup as well as of the bread was cherished as a national right of Bohemia, which had received the Gospel from the Greek rather than from the Latin Church. Ziska made a sacramental chalice the standard of his army and he signed his name, “Ziska of the Cup.” A bloody war was waged to maintain this badge of national independence.

His sacrifice of Huss cost Sigismund a long and, cruel war, and well-nigh cost him his kingdom of Bohemia. A fierce fanaticism raged on either side. Cities were stormed, lordly palace and costly shrine were given to the flames. From the Danube to the Rhine, from the Alps to the Netherlands, was a wild whirl of battle. Two hundred thousand men were in arms. Ziska, with his fierce war chariots, mowed down armies as with the scythe of death. When, by the loss of his sole remaining eye, he became blind, he became only the more terrible – his victories as sweeping, his vengeance more deadly. He was conqueror in a hundred fights, and was conquered in only one. The track of his armies was like that of a desolating typhoon. It was traced by scathe of fire and sword, by plundered towns and burning villages and devastated plains. His death, like his life, was a portent of wrath. According to tradition, he ordered his body to be left to the crows and kites, and his skin to be converted into a drum, on which should

resound the dreadful march of death.

For thirteen years the wild war waged; and then, after a short respite, again broke out, and for half a century longer desolated Central Europe – a terrible penalty for a terrible crime. But not yet was the cup of misery full. Again and again has Bohemia been made the battle-ground of the nations – in the Thirty Years' war, the Seven Years' war, and in our own day was fought on its soil the great battle of Sadowa.

More pleasing memories of the land of Huss are the Moravian Brethren, who share his doctrine and exemplify his spirit. As the foster-mother of Methodism, as the mother of modern missions, and as their most energetic promoter, the Church of the Moravian Brethren, which is more than any other the Church of Huss, commands the admiration of mankind. Not by wrath and bloodshed, not by strife and bitterness, but by the spirit of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, are the victories of the Cross achieved. While we deprecate the wild fanatic wars of the Hussites, let us revere as among the noblest heroes of the race Jerome of Prague and John Huss.

04 – GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA, THE MARTYR OF FLORENCE

“Cross of my Lord, give room! Give room!
To thee my flesh be given!
Cleansed in thy fires of love and praise,
My soul rise pure to heaven!
Ah! vanish each unworthy trace
Of earthly care or pride;
Leave only graven on my heart
The Cross, the Crucified.”

-- Savonarola

On a brilliant July day I stood in the vast and shadowy Duomo of Florence, where four hundred years ago Savonarola proclaimed, like a new Elijah, to awestruck thousands, the judgments of Heaven upon their guilty city. I went thence to the famous Monastery of San Marco, of which he was prior. I paced the frescoed cloisters where he was wont to con his breviary, and the long corridors lined on either side with the prison-like cells of the cowed brotherhood. I stood in the bare bleak chamber of the martyr-monk, in which he used to weep and watch and write and pray. I sat in his chair. I saw his eagle-visaged portrait, his robes, his rosary, his crucifix, his Bible – richly annotated in his own fine clear hand – and his MS. Sermons which so shook the Papacy.

The same day I stood in the dungeon vaults of the fortress-like Palazzo del Podesta, lurid with crimson memories, where the great reformer was imprisoned; and in the paved square whence his brave soul ascended in a chariot of flame from the martyr's funeral pyre; and I seemed brought nearer to that heroic spirit who, amid these memory-haunted scenes, four centuries ago spoke brave words for God and truth and liberty, that thrill our souls today.

The age in which Savonarola lived was one of the most splendid in the history of European art and literature. Even during the darkness of the middle ages, the lamp of learning was fanned into a flickering flame in many a lonely monkish cell, and the love of liberty was cherished in the free cities of the Italian peninsula. But with the dawn Of the Renaissance came a sunburst of light that banished the night of ages. The fall of Constantinople scattered throughout Western Europe the scholars who still spoke the language of Homer and of Chrysostom, and taught the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. The agents of Lorenzo il Magnifico swept the monasteries of the Levant for the precious MSS., the flotsam and jetsam of the ancient world, which had drifted into these quiet retreats. The invention of a German mechanic gave new wings to this rescued learning, and from the presses of Florence, Venice, and

Rome, and later of Amsterdam, Paris, and London, it flew abroad on all the winds.

In Italy the Arethusan fount of long-buried art and science sprang to life, sparkling and flashing in the new-found light. From the rich soil of the Campagna were daily rescued fresh relics of the past -lovely marble torsos, whose very fragments were at once the rapture and despair of the new-born instinct of art. Rome woke to the consciousness of the priceless wealth long buried in her bosom. The earth seemed to renew her youth. There were giants in those days. Michael Angelo, great as poet, painter, and sculptor; Da Vinci, Ghiberti, Celini, Fra Lippi, Macchiavelli, Petrarch, Politian – a brotherhood of art and letters never equaled in the world. [11]

But no good or evil is unmixed. This revived learning brought with it a revived paganism. This quickened art contained the seeds of its own moral taint. Social corruption and political tyranny and treachery flourished amid this too stimulating atmosphere. The moral antiseptic of a vital Christianity was lacking. The salt had lost its savor, and moral corruption ensued. The state of the Church was at its very worst. The Papacy was never more Heaven-defying in its wickedness. A succession of human monsters occupied St. Peter's chair. Paul II., Sixtus IV., Innocent VIII., and the infamous Borgia – Alexander VI. -- had converted the Vatican into a theater of the most odious vices. While wearing the title of Christ's Vicars on earth, they were utterly pagan in sentiment and worse than pagan in life.

"They regarded," says Macaulay, "the Christian mysteries of which they were the stewards, just as the Augur Cicero and the Pontifex Maximus Caesar regarded the Sibylline books and the pecking of the sacred chickens. Among themselves they spoke of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Trinity in the same tone in which Cotta and Velleius talked of the oracle of Delphi, or of the voice of Faunus in the mountains."

Said Leo X. -- himself a priest at eight and a cardinal at fourteen years of age – to his secretary, Bembo, "All ages know well enough of what advantage this fable about Christ has been to us and ours." The same Bembo cautions a friend against reading the Epistles of St. Paul, "lest his taste should be corrupted." Of the works of Macchiavelli, the foremost writer of the times, says Macaulay, "Such a display of wickedness – naked yet not ashamed – such cool, judicious, scientific atrocity, seem rather to belong to a fiend than to the most depraved of men." Yet the highest honors of his age were heaped upon him, and at the first courts of Italy his atrocious sentiments evoked no condemnation, but rather the warmest approval.

The city of Florence was, not even excepting Rome, the chief seat of the Renaissance revival in Italy. It was the very focus of art, of literature, of commerce. Its revenue, says Macaulay, was greater than that which both England and Ireland yielded to Elizabeth. Its cloth manufactures employed thirty thousand workmen. Eighty banks transacted its business and that of Europe, on a scale that might surprise "even the contemporaries of the Barings and the Rothschilds."

"Every place," continues the brilliant essayist, "to which the merchant princes of Florence extended their gigantic traffic, from the bazaars of the Tigris to the monasteries of the Clyde, was ransacked for medals and manuscripts. Architecture, painting and sculpture were munificently encouraged. We can hardly persuade ourselves that we are reading of times in which the annals of England and France present us only with a frightful spectacle of poverty, barbarity and ignorance. From the oppressions of illiterate masters and the sufferings of a brutalized peasantry, it is delightful to turn to the opulent and enlightened States of Italy – to the vast and magnificent cities, the ports, the arsenals, the villas, the museums, the libraries, the marts filled with every article of comfort and luxury, the manufactories swarming with artisans, the Apennines covered with rich cultivation to their very summits, the Po wafting the harvests of Lombardy to the granaries of Venice, and carrying back the silks of Bengal and the furs of Siberia to the palaces of Milan. With peculiar pleasure every cultivated mind must repose on the fair, the happy, the glorious Florence.

But, alas! For the beautiful city. A time was at hand when all the seven vials of the Apocalypse were to be poured forth and shaken out over those pleasant countries – a time for slaughter, famine, beggary, infamy, slavery, despair.”

A characteristic of Florence has ever been her passionate love of liberty. On her arms for six hundred years has been inscribed the glorious word “Libertas.” When other cities crouched beneath the heel of tyrants she flourished as a free Republic. At length the princely house of the Medici obtained a sway which was really that of a monarch. The ostentatious prodigality of Lorenzo the Magnificent, at once beguiled Florence of her liberty, corrupted her virtue, and hastened the calamities by which she was overwhelmed.

At this time, and on such a stage, God called Savonarola to play his brief but heroic part. The grandest soul of the fifteenth century animated his frail body. He beheld with dismay the corruptions of the times. He foretold the outpouring of the vials of wrath upon the land. He sought to set up Christ’s throne in the earth. Like John the Baptist, he was a voice crying, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Like John the Baptist, he fell martyr to the truth which he proclaimed.

Savonarola was the scion of a noble family of Padua, but he was born at the ancient city of Ferrara, whose moldering palaces and deserted streets still speak of its former opulence and splendor. He derived much of his heroic character from his brave-souled mother, who recalls the noble women of the early days of Rome. To her unfaltering faith his heart turned ever for support and inspiration even in his sternest trials and his darkest hour. He had been educated for the profession of medicine, but the deeper misery of the world’s moral maladies were to demand his sympathy and succor, rather than its physical ills.

He felt in his soul a call of God to devote himself to a religious life, and he fled from a world lying in wickedness to the cloistered seclusion of the Dominican Monastery of Bologna. Here he performed the humblest duties of the convent, toiling in the garden, or repairing the garments of the monks. “Make me as one of thy hired servants,” was the cry of his world-weary heart as he sought refuge in the quiet of God’s house. At the same time, he devoted every hour of leisure to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelical Doctor, to those of St. Augustine, and above all, to the study of the Word of God. He was much given to prayer and fasting, to perplexed and often tearful thought. Like all great souls he nourished his spiritual strength by solitary communings with God, and wrestling with the great problems of duty and destiny. In two poems of this period, “De Ruina Mundi” and “De Ruina Ecclesim,” he mourns over the moral ruin of the world and of the Church.

In his soul there rankled, too, the deep and tender wound of disappointed affection. In his youth he had loved, with all the passionate ardor of his nature, a daughter of the princely House of Strozzi. But the impaired fortunes of his family caused the rejection of his suit – it is said with scorn – by the proud patrician.

The zealous neophyte was greatly grieved at the ignorance and worldliness of the monks. But he found congenial employment in teaching them the principles of philosophy, and in expounding the Scriptures. His first attempt at public teaching, by which he was afterwards to sway so wonderfully the hearts of men, were very disheartening. In his native town of Ferrara he could not get a hearing, and he somewhat bitterly remarked, “A prophet has no honor in his own country.” Even in Florence his first audience never exceeded twenty-five persons, collected in the corner of a vast church. “I could not,” he said, “so much as move a chicken.”

But “the Word of God was as a fire in his bones,” and could not be restrained. On his removal to the convent of San Marco he besought the prayers of the brethren and essayed to preach. He began a course of sermons on the Book of Revelation “and applied,” says his biographer, “with tremendous force the imagery of John’s vision to the condition and prospects of Italy. With a voice that rolled like

thunder or pierced with the wild and mournful anguish of the loosened winds, he denounced the iniquities of the time, and foretold the tribulations that were at hand." Soon, so rapidly his audience grew, he had to leave the chapel and preach in the open cloisters, "standing beneath a damask rose tree," to the multitudes who thronged to hear. To this day the place is pointed out, and a damask rose still marks the spot. He had found at length his work, and for the remaining eight years of his life his voice was the most potent in Italy.

The burden of his preaching, he tells us, were these three propositions: "That the Church of God would be renovated in the then present time; that fearful judgments would precede that renovation; and that these things would come soon." With the anointed vision of the seer, discerning wisely the signs of the times, he exhorted men to repentance from sin and reformation of life.

Soon the convent of San Marco became too small to hold the crowd of eager listeners, and the great Duomo became thenceforth the theater of the eloquence of the preaching friar. The pale face and deep dark eyes gazed around on the assembly, and the awe-inspiring voice filled the mighty dome. Before him were gathered the types of the many-colored life of Florence, "Politicians who only thought of how they could best promote the advantage Of their country or themselves; courtiers who spent their life in frivolity and gilded sin, and like resplendent moths fluttered about the light that consumed them; philosophers who made Aristotle or Plato their study and guide; artists who, having caught the Renaissance spirit, were more heathen than Christian in their conceptions and aims; merchants, too, and tradesmen, and artisans, and laborers, and country peasants – all flocked to hear the eloquent and mysterious friar, and all heard something which, in spite of themselves, cut deep into their heart and conscience.

"At times a simultaneous and universal sob would rise audibly from the breasts of his multitudinous hearers. At other times tears would appear in all eyes, moistening the driest and flowing freely from the sensitive and tender. Yet, again, there were moments when a manifestation of horror ran through the whole assembly. And not seldom, when men and women, of all conditions, left the cathedral after some overwhelming display of holy passion, whether of indignation or of sorrow and pity, there was a silence amongst them all, utter and solemn, which told, more than words could do, of the profound impression the faithful preacher had made."

The preaching of the bold monk proved very distasteful to the princely Lorenzo de Medici, by whom he had been promoted to the dignity of prior of San Marco. He, therefore, after attempting in vain to bribe him with gifts, sent a message threatening banishment from the city unless he learned more courtly ways. "Tell Lorenzo, from me," was the intrepid answer, "that though he is the first in the State, and I a foreigner and a poor brother, it will, nevertheless, happen that I shall remain after he is gone."

These words were afterwards called to mind as the greatest of the Medici lay upon his deathbed. In that solemn hour the dying prince sent for the only man in Florence who had dared to cross his will. The faithful preacher urged, as the condition of Divine pardon, reparation for deeds of oppression and the restoration of the usurped liberties of Florence. But the ruling passion was strong in death, and the prince passed to the tribunal of the skies without the priestly absolution that he craved.

The succeeding prince, Pietro de Medici, was no less a tyrant than his sire. But the pulpit of Savonarola continued to be the ruling power in Florence. The bold monk was therefore banished to Bologna, where he ceased not to proclaim the judgments of God. At length he returned, on foot, with nothing but his staff and wallet, to the destined scene of his brief triumph and glorious martyrdom.

Foreseeing the evils that threatened the State, he saw, or thought he saw, in the smiling heavens, the vision of a sword bearing the words "Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter" -- "The sword of the Lord on the earth, swiftly and soon." That sword proved to be the French king, Charles VIII., who, with a powerful army, subdued the peninsula as far as Naples. As the tread of armies drew near, again

the prophetic voice of Savonarola was heard in the great Duomo, proclaiming the judgments of God in tones which come across the ages and move our souls today. His text was, "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth."

"Behold," he said, "the cup of your iniquity is full. Behold the thunder of the Lord is gathering, and it shall fall and break the cup, and your iniquity, which seems to you as pleasant wine, shall be poured out upon you, and shall be as molten lead. And you, O priests, who say, 'Ha! Ha! There is no Presence in the sanctuary – the Shekinah is naught – the Mercy-seat is bare; we may sin behind the veil and who will punish us?' To you I say, The presence of God shall be revealed in his temple as a consuming fire, and your sacred garments shall become a winding sheet of flame, and for sweet music there shall be shrieks and hissing, and for soft couches there shall be thorns, and for the breath of wantons shall come the pestilence; for God will no longer endure the pollution of his sanctuary; he will thoroughly purge his Church.

"Ye say in your hearts, 'God lives afar off, and his word is a parchment written by dead men, and he deals not as in the days of old.' But I cry again in your ears, God is near, and not afar off; his judgments change not; he is the God of armies. The strong men who go up to battle are his ministers, even as the storm and fire and pestilence. He drives them by the breath of his angels, and they come upon the chosen land which has forsaken the covenant. And thou, O Italy, art the chosen land: has not God placed his sanctuary in thee, and thou hast polluted it? Behold the ministers of his wrath are upon thee – they are at thy very doors.

"Yet there is a pause. There is a stillness before the storm. Lo! There is blackness above, but not a leaf quakes. The winds are stayed that the voice of God's warning may be heard. Hear it now, O Florence, chosen city in the chosen land! Repent and forsake evil; do justice; love mercy; put away all uncleanness from among you, and then the pestilence shall not enter, and the sword shall pass over you and leave you unhurt.

"For the sword is hanging from the sky; it is quivering; it is about to fall! The sword of God upon the earth, swift and sudden! Is there not a king with his army at the gates? Does not the earth shake with the tread of the horses and the wheels of the swift cannon? Is there not a fierce multitude that can lay bare the land as with a sharp razor? God shall guide them as the hand guides a sharp sickle, and the joints of the wicked shall melt before him; and they shall be mown down as stubble.

"But thou, O Florence, take the offered mercy. See! The cross is held out to you; come and be healed. Wash yourselves from the black pitch of your vices, which have made you even as the heathen; put away the envy and hatred which have made your city even as a lair of wolves. And then shall no harm happen to you; and the passage of armies shall be to you as the flight of birds; and famine and pestilence shall be far from your gates, and you shall be as a beacon among the nations.

"Listen, O people! Over whom my heart yearns as the heart of a mother over the children she has travailed for! God is my witness that, but for your sakes, I would willingly live as a turtle in the depths of the forest, singing low to my Beloved, who is mine and I am his. For you I toil, for you I languish, for you my nights are spent in watching, and my soul melteth away for very heaviness. O Lord, thou knowest I am willing, I am ready. Take me, stretch me on thy cross; let the wicked who delight in blood, and rob the poor, and defile the temple of their bodies, and harden themselves against thy mercy-let them wag their heads and shoot out the lip at me; let the thorns press upon my brow, and let my sweat be anguish -- I desire to be like thee in thy great love. But let me see the fruit of my travail; let this people be saved! Let me see them clothed in purity; let me hear their voices rise in concord as the voices of angels; let them see no wisdom but thy eternal law, no beauty but in holiness. Then shall they lead the way before the nations, and the people from the four winds shall follow them, and be gathered into the fold of the saved. Come, O blessed promise! And behold I am willing – lay me on the

altar; let my blood flow and the fire consume me; but let my witness be remembered among men, that iniquity may not prosper forever.”

Nor were the labors of Savonarola for the welfare of Florence confined to the pulpit of the Duomo. He went forth alone and on foot as embassy to the invader, Charles VIII. In the spirit of Elijah rebuking Ahab, he boldly admonished him. “Most Christian King,” he began, “thou art an instrument in the Lord’s hand, who sends thee to assuage the miseries of Italy (as I have foretold for many years past), and lays on thee the duty of reforming the Church which lies prostrate in the dust. But if thou fullest to be just and merciful; if thou dost not show respect to the city of Florence, to its women, its citizens, its liberty; if thou forgettest the work for which the Lord sends thee; he will then choose another to perform it, and will in anger let his hand fall heavily upon thee, and will punish thee with dreadful scourges. These things I say to thee in the name of the Lord.”

Once again “a poor wise man by his wisdom delivered a city” besieged by its enemies. The humble monk was a stronger defense of Florence than its walls and moats and armaments. Its ruler, Pietro de Medici, fled in the hour of peril, and, in the disguise of a lackey, sought an asylum in Venice. His palace was sacked and his treasures of art scattered by the fickle mob, whom only the influence of Savonarola could call back to order.

The French armies entered the city as allies instead of as enemies. Their long stay, however, wore out their welcome. Charles submitted an ultimatum which Capponi, the tribune of the people, refused to accept. “Then we will sound our trumpets,” exclaimed the irritated king, threatening force. “And we,” cried the patriot tribune, rending the parchment in pieces, “we will ring our bells.” And the old cow, as the Florentines called the great bell in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, began to low, [12] its deep reverberations sounding like a tocsin over the city, where every house would become a fortress, and every citizen a soldier for the defense of its ancient rights.

Again Savonarola became the champion of liberty. Again he bearded the lion in his lair, and in the name of God commanded the invader to depart. And again the king of France obeyed the words of the preaching friar.

Pietro had fled, Charles had retired, and Florence was free to adopt a new constitution. Again all eyes were turned toward Savonarola, as the noblest mind and most potent will in Italy. And he shrank not from the task. He longed to see Christ’s kingdom established in the earth – a kingdom of truth and righteousness, with God as its supreme ruler and law-giver.

“Your reform,” he said, “must begin with things spiritual, which are superior to all that are material, which constitute the rule of life, and are life itself; and all that is temporal ought to be subservient to morals and to religion on which it depends. If you wish to have a good government it must be derived from God. I certainly would not concern myself with the affairs of state were it not for that end.”

A Great Council – a council of eighty and a court of eight magistrates – was therefore appointed to administer the affairs of the city, on the model of the ancient Republic of Venice. Taxation was equalized, and a right of appeal secured to the Great Council of the people. Yet the prior of San Marco sought no personal power. “He was never to be seen in the meetings in the Piazza,” writes his contemporary, Vellari, “nor at the sittings of the Signoria; but he became the very soul of the whole people, and the chief author of all the laws by which the new government was constituted.” From his bare and solitary cell his spirit ruled the souls of men by the right divine of truth and righteousness.

“The authority of Savonarola,” writes an unfriendly critic, [13] “was now at its highest. Instead of a republic, Florence assumed the appearance of a theocracy, of which Savonarola was the prophet, the legislator and the judge.” A coin of this period is still extant, bearing a cross and the legend, “JESUS CHRISTUM REX NOSTER” -- “Jesus Christ, our King;” and over the portal of the civic palace was

placed the inscription, "JESUS CHRISTUS REX FLORENTINI POPULI."

The great object of Savonarola's life was the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth, and the bringing into conformity thereto of all the institutions of this world. He began with his own convent of San Marco, putting away all luxuries of food, clothing, costly ecclesiastical furniture and vestments. He enforced secular diligence among the monks, and assigned to the more gifted regular preaching duties. Hebrew, Greek and the Oriental languages were sedulously taught, and San Marco became a famous school of the prophets and propaganda of the Christian faith in foreign parts.

Yet the prior's rule was not stern, but kindly and gentle. He carefully cultivated the hearts and intellect of the youthful novices, and sought the inspiration and refreshment of their company. With a true philosophy he used to say, "If you wish me to preach well, allow me time to talk to my young people, for God often speaks by these innocent youths, as by pure vessels full of the Holy Ghost."

Numbers of young enthusiasts sought to become the disciples of this ruler of men. But the wise prior strongly discouraged the rash assumption of irrevocable vows.

A certain gilded youth of the aristocracy of Florence was induced to hear the great preacher. At first he listened with scarce concealed contempt. But the spell of that mighty spirit seized his heart, and he was soon at the convent gate begging admission to its cloistered solitude. Savonarola bade him prove the strength of his convictions by a Christian life amid the temptations of the world. He endured the trial, and again sought the privilege of becoming a monk. The prior sent him back to nurse the sick and bury the dead. A month later he was permitted to assume the cowl and enter what was, in fact, the Christian ministry of the day. Fra Benedetto – such was his conventual name – in his memorials of his master, has recorded the loving care with which Savonarola, after sending him back to the conflicts of life, never lost sight of him; but often invited him to his cell for solemn conversation on the duties and rewards of a religious life.

The moral reformation of the people was the great object of Savonarola's preaching and prayer. And seldom, if ever, has such a general reformation ensued. His biographer thus records the result: "The whole city was stirred to its depths. What may be called revival of religious interest swept through all classes, and an almost universal desire was manifested for a reformation of life. The churches were filled with devout worshippers. The spirit of prayer entered families. Women exchanged a richly adorned and often meretricious mode of dress for one of modest simplicity. The young men, instead of flaunting their folly before the eyes of the citizens, now gave themselves up to religious and benevolent works. Artisans and others of their rank, might be seen reading the Bible or some religious work during the interval allowed for the midday meal. Men in business were found making restitution, even to large amounts, for gains which they had unjustly gotten. Gaming houses and drinking saloons were deserted. Theaters and masquerades were closed. Impure books and pictures in vast numbers were publicly burned. Evil practices and sports were discontinued. Crime was diminished. Luxury was at an end. Obscenity was banished. 'Wonderful thing,' exclaims an Italian writer, 'that in a moment such a change of customs should take place.'"

A pernicious carnival custom of long standing was an obstacle to the completeness of this reform. The youths of the city had been wont, in masquerade costumes, to levy contributions on the citizens to be spent in convivial excesses around great bonfires in the public squares. Savonarola sought to turn this enthusiasm into a pious channel. He organized the youths into companies, and dressed in symbolic white and crowned with laurel, they sang soft Tuscan hymns and begged alms, not for themselves but for the poor.

A new sort of bonfire, too, was substituted for those of previous carnivals – a "bonfire of vanities." In this theocratic community there was no longer need for the masks and masquerades of folly, for the implements of gaming and wickedness. Troops of white-robed and impulsive young inquisitors,

therefore, went from house to house asking for “vanities,” whose proper place was the fire; and stopping the gaily bedizened holiday-makers in the street and exhorting them, for their soul’s health, to make a burnt sacrifice of the “Anathema” -- the unseemly fineries upon their persons.

The annals of the time record many a serio-comic scenes as these mischief-loving young Florentines sought out the abode of some forlorn spinster or ancient dandy, and brought to light the dyes and perfumes and rouge pots, the wigs, and masks and frippery with which they in vain attempted to conceal the ravages of age. The artist’s studio gave up every picture that could raise a blush upon the cheek of innocence, and the vice-suggesting writings of Ovid, Boccaccio and Pulci were heaped upon the growing pile. The heart of the city seemed moved by a common impulse to this moral purgation, as when at Ephesus, under the preaching of Paul fourteen centuries before, “many of them which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men. And they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

In the Piazza della Signoria, a pyramid of “vanities” was collected, sixty feet high and eighty yards in circuit. After morning communion, a long procession wound from the Duomo to the Piazza. The white-robed children lined the square, and their pure clear voices chanted the “lauds” and carols written for the day. Then the torch was applied; the flames leaped and writhed and reveled amid the things of folly and shame; the trumpets blared, and the clangorous bells filled the air with peals of triumph and joy.

“Florence,” says a historian of the event, “was like a city burning its idols, and with solemn ceremony vowing fidelity in all the future to the worship of the one true God. One more offering up of ‘vanities’ by fire took place in the following year. Then followed a burning of a different sort on the same spot, in which the person of Savonarola furnished food for the flame and excitement for the populace; which burning ended the grand Florentine drama of the fifteenth century.”

Already the clouds were gathering which were to shroud in an eclipse of woe the glories of that auspicious day. There were many in the once gay and luxurious Florence who were not in harmony with the high moral tone to which society was keyed. There were also secret agents and friends of the fugitive Medici. These combined against the Frateschi, or followers of Savonarola, and chief supporters of the republic. A conspiracy for the restoration of Pierre was detected. Five of its leaders were tried and found guilty, and suffered the inevitable penalty in that age of high treason. Savonarola was averse to their execution, would have preferred their exile, but was overruled by what were deemed necessities of state.

Under the civil disturbances, trade languished and idleness and poverty prevailed. Then famine and pestilence followed – the mysterious Black Death of the middle ages – and the sick, the dying and the dead were in every street and square. Savonarola remained at his post – although the plague entered the monastery – and became the chief succor of the terror-stricken community.

But the chief enemy of the intrepid friar was that “Nero of the Papacy,” the infamous Borgia, Alexander VI. The Pope sent first a flattering invitation to “his much-beloved son, the most zealous of all the laborers in the Lord’s vineyard,” inviting him to Rome – in order to deprive Florence of his wise councils. Savonarola respectfully declined the invitation, urging his broken health and the need of his services to the new government. Then the tiger claws which stroked so smoothly in their silken sheath were shown; and “Girolamo Savonarola, a teacher of heretical doctrine,” was summoned under heavy penalties to the presence of the sovereign pontiff. The prior of San Marco refused to leave his post; when the enraged Pope, dreading the power of his eloquence, prohibited his preaching.

For a time Savonarola yielded obedience, but the sweet constraint of the Gospel compelled him to proclaim its truths. “Without preaching,” he exclaimed, “I cannot live.” His Lenten sermons, as his voice rang once more through the Duomo, fell with strange power on the hearts of men. Their fame rang through Europe, and even the Sultan of Turkey had them translated, that he might understand the

controversy that was shaking Christendom. But through them all there ran an undertone of sadness, and prescience of his impending doom. He felt that he was engaged in a conflict, the only end of which for him was death. "Do you ask me," he said, "what the end of the war will be? I answer that in general it will be victory, but that, individually, I shall die and be cut to pieces. But that will only give a wider circulation to my doctrine, which is not from me, but from God. I am only an instrument in his hand, and am resolved, therefore, to fight to the last."

The Pope, thinking every nature as venal as his own, now tried the effects of bribery, and offered the preaching friar a principedom in the Church and a cardinal's hat if he would only cease from "prophesying." "Come to my sermon tomorrow," said the monk to the ambassador, "and you shall have my answer." In the presence of a vast assembly in the Duomo, Savonarola, with burning words, refused the glittering bribe. "I will have no other crimson hat," he exclaimed, with a foreboding of his coming doom, "than that of martyrdom, crimsoned with my own blood."

When the bold defiance was reported to the Pope, for a moment conscience-stricken at the spectacle of such heroic virtue, he exclaimed, "This must be a true servant of God." But the strong vindictive passions soon awoke again. The terrors of the major excommunication were launched against his victim, and all men were commanded to hold him as one accursed. The Cardinal of Siena, afterwards Pope Julius II., sent a secret message to the persecuted friar, offering to have the ban removed for the sum of five thousand crowns. "To buy off the Pope's curse," was the defiant answer, "were a greater disgrace than to bear it."

The commission of an awful crime in his family again stung the guilty conscience of the Borgia to a brief remorse. The dead body of his son, the Duke of Gandia, was found floating in the Tiber, pierced with many stabs, and the crime was traced to his brother Caesar, a cardinal of the Church. The fratricide smote the world with horror; and Savonarola wrote the wretched pontiff a letter of pious counsel and condolence. But the tide of worldliness soon swept again over that sordid nature. The resources of the Church were lavished on the murderer, and the man of God was persecuted with still more bitter malignity.

Savonarola's last Lenten sermons seemed burdened with a foreknowledge of his near-approaching fate. They were more intensely earnest than ever, like the words of a dying man, to whom the verities of the unseen were already laid bare. The light of his eye was undimmed, and the eloquent voice still thrilled as of yore the hearts of the multitude who thronged the Duomo. But the frail body was wasted almost to emaciation. An inward fire seemed to consume his frame. So intense were the emotions excited, that the shorthand reporter of his sermons narrates, "such was the anguish and weeping that came over him, that he was obliged to stop recording his notes."

The anathema of the Pope, at which conquering monarchs have turned pale, lay upon the lone monk, but his courage quailed not. "A wicked, unbelieving Pope," he said, "who has gained his seat by bribery, is not Christ's Vicar. His curses are broken swords; he grasps a hilt without a blade. His commands are contrary to Christian life; it is lawful to disobey them – nay, it is not lawful to obey them." And turning away from the wrath of man to the righteous tribunal of God, he only said, like one of old, "Let them curse, but bless thou."

One of his last public acts was a solemn appeal to Heaven in vindication of his integrity of soul. Taking in his hand the vessel containing the consecrated Host, he thus addressed the listening multitude: "You remember, my children, I besought you, when I should hold this sacrament in my hand in the face of you all, to pray fervently to the Most High, that if this work of mine does not come from him, he shall send a fire and consume me, that I may vanish into the eternal darkness away from his light, which I have hidden with my falsity. Again I beseech you to make that prayer, and to make it now."

Then, with wrapt and uplifted countenance, he prayed, in a voice not loud, but distinctly audible in the

wide stillness:

“Lord, if I have not wrought sincerity in my soul, if my word cometh not from thee, smite me in this moment with thy thunder, and let the fires of thy wrath consume me.”

In the solemn silence of that moment he stood motionless, when suddenly a beam of golden light, striking on the pale and furrowed face, lit it up as with a celestial halo. “Behold the answer,” said each man in his heart and many with their lips. Then, with the yearning solicitude of a father for his children about to be orphaned, the brave-souled monk stretched out his wasted hand, and, in a voice in which tears trembled, pronounced the benediction on the people -- “Benedictione perpetua, benedicat vos, Pater Eternus.”

But the curse of Rome was a terror to all weaker souls than that of the intrepid martyr. The Pope threatened, unless Savonarola were silenced or imprisoned, to lay the whole city of Florence under an interdict, which should cut it off from all intercourse with the world, and render its merchants and citizens liable to the confiscation of their goods. That argument conquered. The voice through which God spoke to Europe was soon to be silenced for ever.

A strange event, however, first took place, one possible only under the high-wrought feelings of the times. This conflict between the great prior and Pope of Rome was felt to be one on which the judgment of Heaven might be invoked. A Franciscan monk, therefore, challenged Savonarola to walk with him through the flames, as an ordeal of the rightness or wrongness of his teachings. Of this challenge the prior took no notice. An enthusiastic disciple, however, Fra Dominico by name, eagerly took up the gauntlet. Indeed many persons of all ranks, including his own sisters and other noble ladies, offered to undergo the ordeal in vindication of their honored master. Savonarola at first opposed the strange project; but all Florence clamored for the ordeal, and he at last consented. Perhaps his high-wrought faith believed that God would answer by fire as he did at the prayer of Elijah.

The day appointed for the fiery trial came. All Florence poured into the great square. After early communion, the monks of San Marco walked in procession to the scene of the ordeal, chanting the canticle -- “Exurgat Dens et dissipentur inimici ejus” -- “Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered.” But the Franciscan champion remained within the civic palace. He evidently had no intention of undergoing the ordeal himself, but wished to throw the blame of its non-fulfillment on the party of Savonarola. He objected first to the crucifix, then to the cope, then to the gown which Fra Dominico wore. These were in succession laid aside, when still further excuses were made. Then a heavy rain drenched the impatient multitude and rendered the trial impossible. A confused tumult arose. The enemies of Savonarola made a rush to seize his person. His friends rallied around him, and under their protection he returned to San Marco. The object of his foes was, in part at least, secured. His credit with the people seemed to be shaken and his honor and integrity compromised.

Despairing of the reform of the Church by the Pope, Savonarola had written a letter to Charles VIII., urging the convocation of a General Council for that purpose. This letter was intercepted by fraud and sent to the vindictive Borgia, who thereupon launched new fulminations against his victim. These new terrors influenced the magistrates of Florence to abandon the prior to his impending fate, and at last to become the instruments of his ruin.

The day after the frustrated ordeal was Palm Sunday. For the last time Savonarola addressed in words of cheer and counsel the brethren of San Marco. As they were assembled for evening prayers, sounds of tumult were heard without, and soon a mob of armed men assailed the gates. Some thirty monks barricaded the doors and fought in their long white robes as bravely for their beloved prior as ever Knight Templar fought for the tomb of Christ. “Let me go and give myself up,” he said, seeking to quell the strife. “I am the sole cause of this myself.” “Do not abandon us,” they cried. “You will be torn to pieces, and then what shall become of us?” Yielding to their entreaties, he summoned them to the

choir that they might seek God in prayer.

Meanwhile the mob set fire to the doors, scaled the walls and burst into the choir. The civic guards soon entered and led away, as prisoners, Savonarola and his brave friend, Fra Dominico. A brutal mob, made up of the very dregs of the city, clamored for his blood and wreaked their rage upon their unresisting victim. He was kicked, smitten, spat upon, and bitterly reviled. "This is the true light," cried a low ruffian, as he thrust a flaring torch in his face. Other vile wretches buffeted him with their fists, and leered, like another mob in the presence of another Victim, "Prophesy who it is that smote thee." But, like the Master whom he served, who, when he was buffeted answered not, the patient confessor endured with meekness the very bitterness of human rage and hate. He was thrust into prison, and was soon brought to trial.

On the very day of the ordeal, Charles VIII. died, and all hope of a general council or of succor for Savonarola was at an end. The Pope and his craven creatures had their victim in their power. "During many days," says the historian of the event, "the prior was subjected to alternate examination and torture. He was drawn up from the ground by ropes knotted round his arms, and then suddenly let down with a jerk, which wrenched all the muscles of his sensitive frame. Fire, too, was at times put under his feet. How often torture was applied to him we have no means of learning. One witness, Violi, declares that he had seen him, in one day, hoisted by the rope no fewer than fourteen times!"

A venal notary, who afterwards suffered for his crime the remorse of Judas, was bribed to falsify the confessions wrung from the tortured man by the thumb-screw and the rack, so as to find ground for condemnation. But even his enemies have left it on record that, "after much and careful questioning, extending through many days and aided by the torture, they could extort scarcely anything from him." In his lonely cell, in the intervals of his torture, the brave soul turned from the strife of tongues to commune with God. With his mutilated hand he wrote his meditations, which are still extant, on the 31st and 51st Psalms. "I shall place my hope on the Lord," he said, "and before long I shall be set free from all tribulation."

His doom had long been decreed. Alexander Borgia had declared that Savonarola should be put to death even though he were John the Baptist. Sentence of death was therefore pronounced upon him and on his two devoted friends, Fra Dominico and Fra Silvestro.

On the morning of May 23rd, 1498, after early communion in the prison, the destined victims walked together to the place of doom in the great square of the ordeal and of the "Bonfire of Vanities." The Pope's commissioner stripped off their gowns and pronounced the last anathema: "I separate you from the Church militant and triumphant." "Militant, not triumphant," replied, with a calm, clear voice, the hero soul of Savonarola -- "not triumphant; that is beyond your power." A vast mob surged around the scaffold and the martyr pyre, but he seemed to see them not. With unfaltering step and with a rapt smile upon his pale, worn face he went to his death. His last words were, like those of his Lord and Master and of the proto-martyr, "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit."

His comrades in life and in death with equal dignity met their fate. They were first hanged till dead and then burned to ashes. As the torch was applied, writes the biographer, "from the storied Piazza, the saddest and most suicidal 'burning' that Florence had ever witnessed sent up its flame and smoke into the bright heaven of that May morning. On this 23rd day of May, 1498, aged forty-five years, the greatest man of his day -- great on every side of him, great as a philosopher, a theologian, a statesman, a reformer of morals and religion, and, greatest of all, as a true man of God -- died in a way which was worthy of him, a martyr to the truth for which he had lived."

"Lest the city should be polluted by his remains," says a contemporary, "his ashes were carefully gathered and thrown into the Arno."

In the narrow cell at San Marco, in which Savonarola wept and watched and prayed, hangs a contemporary painting of this tragic scene, and by its side a portrait of the martyr monk with his keen dark eyes, his eagle visage, his pale cheek, and his patient thought-worn brow. In a case beneath are his vestments, his crucifix, rosary, Bible and MS. Sermons. As we gaze on these relicts, thought and emotion overleap the intervening centuries, and we seem brought into living contact with the hero soul, who counted not his life dear unto him for the testimony of Jesus.

The ungrateful city which exiled or slew her greatest sons, Dante and Savonarola, was overtaken by a swift Nemesis. Soon the Medici returned in power, and long ruled with an iron hand. When Rome, the proud City of the Seven Hills, "that was eternal named," was besieged, taken and sacked by a foreign army, the prophetic words of the great prior were remembered. Florence for a time again drove the Medician tyrants from power. Again "the Council elected and proclaimed Christ the King of Florence, and the famous cry, 'Viva Gesu Christo, Nostro Re,' was once more the watchword of the city." But despotism was again installed on the ruins of freedom, "and for long centuries the light of Florence was extinguished."

In fitting words a late biographer of the reformer thus concludes the memorial of his life:

"It seemed like the acting of a piece of historical justice when, nearly four hundred years after the martyrdom of the prior, the late King Victor Immanuel opened the first parliament of a united Italy in the city of Florence, and in the venerable hall of the Consiglio Maggiore. The representative assembly which gathered in the room of Savonarola's Great Council, bridged over centuries of darkness and misrule, connecting the aspirations of a hardly-won freedom in the present with those of a distant and glorious past, and secured permanently, let us hope, for the whole of Italy the precious liberties for which the Monk of San Marco died

"The day which Savonarola saw afar off from amidst the darkness and trouble of the fifteenth century, and through times of scourging, has now dawned. The seed which was then and afterwards sown, and moistened by so much blood, is now ready for harvest. National unity, constitutional freedom, and religious equality, are things secured. *The Pope has been deprived of his temporal power.* (whew!!) Rome is the capital of a free and united people, and Italy is fast asserting for itself a prominent place among the nations of Europe."

05 – MARTIN LUTHER

"In Martin Luther," says the Chevalier Bunsen, "we have the greatest hero of Christendom since the days of the apostles." He was the foremost actor in the greatest event of modern times. "For him," says Carlyle, "the whole world and its history was waiting, and he was the mighty man whose light was to flame as a beacon over long centuries and epochs of the world."

Luther was a child of the people. "I am a peasant's son," he says, "my father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather were thorough peasants -Recte Bauern." "He was born poor and brought up poor; one of the poorest of men," says Carlyle, "yet, what were all emperors, popes and potentates in comparison!" He was one of God's anointed kings and priests – the kingliest soul of modern times.

In the little village of Eisleben, in Saxony, in the year 1483, this child of destiny was born. "My parents," writes the reformer, "were very poor. My father was a poor wood-cutter, and my mother has often carried wood upon her back that she might procure the means of bringing up her children." But, though poor, his parents sought to make their son a scholar, and he was sent successively to the schools of Magdeburg and Eisenach, and to the University of Erfurt. A stern discipline ruled in the village school. Luther complains of having been punished fifteen times in a single morning. So poor was he that, when pinched with hunger, he used to sing from door to door the sweet German carols of the time

for food. One day the kind-hearted Ursula Cotta, the wife of the burgomaster of Ilfeld, took pity on the lad, and adopted him into her household during his school days at Eisenach.

At the University of Erfurt Luther was a very diligent and successful student, becoming familiar with both classic lore and scholastic philosophy. The most important event of his college life was his discovery in the library of the university of an old Latin Bible – a book which he had never seen in its entirety before. “In that Bible,” says D’Aubigne, “the Reformation lay hid.”

Two other events also occurred which affected the whole of his after life. A serious illness brought him almost to death’s door, and his friend and fellow-student, Alexis, was smitten dead by his side by a stroke of lightning. *The solemn warning spoke to the heart of Luther* like the voice that spoke to Saul on the way to Damascus. He resolved to give up his hopes of worldly advancement, and to devote himself to the service of God alone. He had been trained for the practice of law, but he entered forthwith an Augustinian monastery. His scholastic habit gave place to a monk’s coarse serge dress. The accomplished scholar and young doctor of philosophy performed the menial tasks of porter of the monastery, swept the church, cleaned out the cells, and with his “wallet by his side begged bread for the mendicant brotherhood from door to door. He also studied with zeal the scholastic theology, *and especially the Word of God*. He sought to mortify his body for the health of his soul. A little bread and a small herring were often his daily food, and sometimes he fasted for four days at a time. The youthful monk was, at least, terribly in earnest in his self-imposed penance. Never had Rome a more sincere devotee.

“I tortured myself almost to death,” he wrote, “in order to procure peace with God for my troubled heart and agitated conscience; but, *surrounded with thick darkness, I found peace nowhere*.” The words of the creed, which he had learned in his childhood, now brought comfort to his heart: “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” and that other emancipating word, “*the just shall live by faith*.” At the end of two years he was ordained priest. As he received authority “to offer sacrifice for the living and the dead,” his intense conviction of the real presence of Christ upon the altar almost overwhelmed his soul.

Luther was now summoned, in the twenty-fifth year of his age, to the chair of philosophy and theology in the University at Wittenberg. He devoted himself with zeal to the study and exposition Of the Word of God. He was also appointed preacher to the university and town council, and the impassioned energy of his sermons charmed every heart.

Two or three years later he was sent as the agent of his order to negotiate certain business with the Vicar-General at Rome. As he drew near the seven-hilled city – the mother city of the Catholic faith, the seat of God’s Viceregents upon earth – he fell upon his knees, exclaiming, “Holy Rome, I salute thee.” He went the round of the churches. He visited the sacred places. He said mass at the holiest altars. He did everything that could be done to procure the religious benefits which the hallowed sites of Rome were supposed to impart.

The warlike Julius now sat upon the Papal chair. The infamous Borgia had but recently been summoned to his account. The scarcely disguised paganism of the Papal court filled the soul of the Saxon monk with horror. He tells of wicked priests who, when celebrating the solemnities of the mass, were wont to use, instead of the sacred formula, the mocking words, “Panis es, et panis manebis” -- “Bread thou art, and bread thou shalt remain.” “No one,” he says again, “can imagine what sins and infamies are committed in Rome. If there is a hell, Rome is built over it.”

It was a dreadful disenchantment to his soul. He came to the Eternal City as to the holy of holies on earth. He found it the place where Satan’s seat was. One day, while toiling on his knees up the steps of Pilate’s stairs – the very steps, according to tradition, trodden by our Lord on the last night of his mortal life, “than which,” says an inscription at the top, “there is no holier spot on earth” there flashed once more through his soul the emancipating words, “The just shall live by faith.” He rose from his knees.

His soul revolted from the mummeries (play-acting) of Rome. The Reformation was begun.

Luther returned to his university, his heart full of grief and indignation at the corruptions of religion which he had witnessed. But it needed yet another revelation of Romish fraud to rouse his mighty soul to arms against the mystery of iniquity which had so long beguiled the minds of men. That revelation was soon made. The measure of Papal iniquity was filled up by her shameless traffic in pardons for sins past, present and to come. Were not the historic evidences of this wickedness irrefutable, it would be deemed incredible.

To gain money for the erection of the colossal church of St. Peter's – one which should eclipse in splendor and magnificence all the churches of Christendom – Pope Leo X. [14] sent forth indulgence-mongers across the Alps to extort alike from prince and peasant, by the sale of licenses to sin, the gold required for his vain glorious purpose.

One of the most shameless of these indulgence-sellers, the Dominican monk, John Tetzel, found his way to the quiet towns and cities of central Germany. In the pomp and state of an archbishop he traversed the country. Setting up his great red cross and pulpit in the market-places, he offered his wares with the effrontery of a mountebank and quack medicine-show, to which he added the most frightful blasphemies. “This cross,” he would say, pointing to his standard, “has as much efficacy as the very cross of Christ. There is no sin so great that an indulgence cannot remit; only let the sinner pay well, and all will be forgiven him.” Even the release of souls in purgatory could be purchased by money. And he sought to wring the souls (and wallets) of his hearers by appeals to their human affections.

“Priest! Noble! Merchant! Wife! Youth! Maiden! Do you not hear your parents and friends who are dead cry from the bottomless abyss, ‘We are suffering horrible torments; a trifling alms will save us; you can give it, and you will not?’

As the (uninformed) people shuddered at these words, the brazen impostor went on: “At the very instant that the money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory and flees to heaven.”

Increasing in blasphemy, he added, “The Lord our God no longer reigns. He has resigned all power to the Pope.” Yet, with strange inconsistency, he would appeal to the people to come to the aid of “poor Leo X., who had not means to shelter the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul from the rain and hail, by which they were dishonored and polluted.”

There was a graded price for the pardon of every sin, past or future, from the most venial to the most heinous – even those of nameless shame.

The honest soul of Luther was roused to indignation by these impieties. “If God permit,” he said, “I will make a hole in Tetzel’s drum.” He denied the efficacy of the Pope’s indulgences, declaring, “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” But still the delusion spread. The traffic in licenses to sin thrived mightily. The brave reformer took his resolve. He would protest in the name of God against the flagrant iniquity

At noon on the day before the feast of All Saints, when whoso visited the Wittenberg church was promised a plenary pardon, he walked boldly up and nailed upon the door a paper containing the famous ninety-five theses against the doctrine of indulgences. The first of these, which gives the keynote of the whole, read thus: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says, ‘Repent,’ he means that the whole life of believers upon earth should be a constant and perpetual repentance.”

This 31st of October, 1517, was the epoch of the Reformation. The sounds of the hammer that nailed this bold protest to the church door echoed throughout Europe, and shook the Papal throne. Thus was

flung down the gauntlet of defiance to the spiritual tyranny of Rome.

The theses created a prodigious sensation. "As nobody was willing to bell the cat," wrote the reformer, "poor Luther became a famous Doctor because he ventured to do it. But I did not like this glory, and the tune was nearly too high for my voice." "Oh!" he writes again, "with what anxiety and labor, with what searching of the Scriptures, have I justified myself in conscience in standing up alone against the Pope." Tetzel, of course, attacked the theses with virulence, caused them to be publicly burned, and declared their author worthy of the same fate. Luther cogently defended them.

Soon more able opponents than Tetzel appeared against the reformer – Prierias, the Papal censor; Dr. Eck, a learned theologian; and Cajetan, the Papal legate. But Luther defied them all. "I will not," he wrote, "become a heretic by denying the truth; sooner will I die, be burnt, be banished, be anathematized. If I am put to death, Christ lives; Christ my Lord, blessed for evermore. Amen!" He was summoned to Rome to meet the charges of heresy alleged against his teaching, but the venue of the conference with the Papal legate was changed to Augsburg, in Germany.

"When all men forsake you," asked the legate, "where will you take refuge?"

"Under Heaven – sub coelo" -- said Luther, looking upward with the eye of faith. "If I had four hundred heads," he said again, in his striking manner, I would rather lose them all than retract the testimony I have borne to the holy Christian faith. They may have my body if it be God's will, but my soul they shall not have."

After ten days spent in profitless disputation, Luther appeared "from the Pope ill-informed to the Pope better informed," and then to a general council. *By the advice of his friends, who feared lest he should be betrayed into the power of his enemies, he left Augsburg by night.* By the connivance of the town authorities he escaped through a postern gate in the wall, and rode over forty miles the next day. His horse, we read, was a hard trotter; and Luther, unaccustomed to riding, and worn out with the journey, was glad to throw himself down on a truss of straw.

The champion of the Reformed doctrine accepted a challenge of the famous Dr. Eck, the Chancellor of Ingolstadt, to discuss at Leipsic the primacy of the Pope, the doctrine of purgatory, and other matters in dispute between the adherents of the Church of Rome and those of the Reformed faith. The disputation took place in a public hall of the ducal palace, in the presence of Duke George. Each disputant had a rostrum to himself. The hall was crowded with spectators, who warmly applauded their favorite champions. The war of words lasted twenty days, and resulted, as such debate generally does, in a drawn battle, neither party admitting defeat.

Luther startled his opponents by avowing his belief in certain doctrines of both Huss and Wycliffe, which had been denounced by the Council of Constance. "It matters not by whom they were taught or condemned," he said, "they are truth."

The breach was widening between the Saxon monk and the Church of Rome. It was asserted that such an impious apostate must be in league with the Devil. Nay, *it was affirmed that he carried a devil about with him, confined in a small box!*

Yet it was a violent wrench that tore Luther from the companionship of his old friends. To one of these, Staupitz, he wrote: "You have abandoned me. I have been very sad on your account, as a wearied child cries after its mother." Yet loyalty to the convictions of his conscience demanded the sacrifice of any earthly tie.

A storm of fanaticism was kindled against the bold reformer. His doctrines were condemned by the universities of Cologne and Louvain. The priests of Meissen even taught publicly that *he who should kill Luther would be without sin.* [15] Such teaching produced its natural result. One day a stranger,

who held a pistol concealed beneath his cloak, demanded of him, "Why do you walk thus alone?" "I am in God's hands," said the heroic soul, "what can man do unto me?" and the would-be assassin, brought into conscious conflict with the Almighty, turned pale and fled trembling away.

Before his final breach with Rome, Luther wrote a letter of respectful remonstrance to the Pope, invoking him to set about the work of reformation in his corrupt court and in the Church. With this letter he sent a copy of his discourse on "Christian Liberty," in which he set forth, in a noble and elevated strain, "the inwardness of true religion, the marriage of the soul to Christ through faith in the Word, and the vital connection of faith and works."

But this remonstrance only hastened his condemnation. What the Pope wanted was not arguments, but submission. The last weapon of Papal tyranny was now employed. A bull of excommunication was launched against the reformer. With symbolical ceremonial and solemn cursings – with bell, book and candle – the Saxon monk was cut off from Christendom, and incurred the dreadful anathema of the mitered tyrant of Rome. He was soon to be arraigned before the mightiest monarch since the days of Charlemagne.

But his intrepid spirit quailed not. "What will happen," he wrote, "I know not, and I care not to know. Wherever the blow shall reach me, I fear not. The leaf of a tree falls not to the ground without the will of our Father. How much less we ourselves. It is a little matter to die for the Word, since the Word, which was made flesh, first died for us."

With grave deliberation – for he felt that the act was irretrievable – Luther solemnly appealed from the Pope of Rome to a General Council of the Church. "I appeal," he wrote "from the said Pope as an unjust, rash, and tyrannical judge; as an heretic and apostate, misled, hardened, and condemned by the Holy Scriptures; as an enemy, an Antichrist, an adversary, an oppressor of Holy Scripture; and as a despiser, a calumniator (liar), and blasphemer of the holy Christian Church."

"The son of the Medici," writes D'Aubigne, "and the son of the miner of Mansfeldt, have gone down into the lists; (a field where horseback jousts to the death take place) and in this desperate struggle, which shakes the world, one does not strike a blow which the other does not return. The monk of Wittenberg will do all that the sovereign pontiff dares do. He gives judgment for judgment. He raises pile for pile. The Pope had burned his books. He would burn the Pope's bull."

On the 10th of December, therefore, 1520, amid a great concourse of doctors and students of Wittenberg, Luther cast upon the blazing pyre the papal bull, saying, as he did so, "As thou hast vexed the Holy One of Israel, so may everlasting fire vex and consume thee."

The breach with Rome was complete. He had declared war unto death. He had broken down the bridge behind him. Retreat was henceforth impossible. "Hitherto I have been only playing with the Pope," he said. "I began this work in God's name; it will be ended without me and by his might the Papacy is no longer what it was yesterday. Let it excommunicate me. Let it slay me. It shall not check that which is advancing. I burned the bull at first with trembling, but now I rejoice more at it than at any other action of my life."

The Pope waged a crusade against Luther and his doctrines. His books were ordered everywhere to be burned. The young Emperor, Charles V., gave his consent to their destruction in his hereditary States. "Do you imagine," said the friends of the reformer, "that Luther's doctrines are found only in those books which you are throwing into the fire? They are written where you cannot reach them, in the hearts of the people. If you will employ force, it must be that of countless swords unsheathed to massacre a whole nation."

The German fatherland, with its ancient instincts of truth and liberty, responded almost as one man to the invocation of the miner's son. New students flocked to Wittenberg every day, and six hundred

youths, the flower of the nation, sat at the reformer's feet. The churches were not large enough for the crowds who hung upon his words.

The Papal party appealed to Charles V. to crush the heresy which was springing up in his dominion. But the young emperor was shrewd enough to perceive that even he dare not so outrage public sentiment as to condemn Luther unheard. The bold monk was therefore summoned to appear before a diet of the empire at Worms, and answer for his contumacy. He was ill at the time, but rejoiced in the opportunity to bear witness to the truth.

"If I cannot go to Worms in health," he said, "I will be carried there, sick as I am. I cannot doubt that it is the call of God. He still lives who preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. If he will not save me, my life is of little consequence."

The young emperor granted a safe-conduct to "the honorable our well-beloved and pious Doctor Martin Luther," which was signed in the name of "Charles the Fifth, by the grace of God, Emperor, always august, King of Spain, of the Two Sicilies, of Jerusalem, of Hungary, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, Count of Hapsburg," etc., etc. Luther, in feeble health, made his journey to Worms in a farmer's wagon. At Erfurt, the university professors and students came out in a procession to greet him as the Champion of the faith. His progress was like that of a victorious general. The people thronged to see the man who was going to lay his head at the feet of the Emperor.

"There are too many bishops and cardinals at Worms," said some. "They will burn you as they did John Huss."

"Huss has been burned," replied the intrepid monk, "but not the truth with him. Though they should kindle a fire all the way from Worms to Wittenberg, the flames of which should reach to heaven, I would walk through it in the name of the Lord -- I would appear before them -- I would enter the jaws of this Behemoth, and break his teeth, confessing the Lord Jesus Christ."

Even his enemies could not but admire his high courage and holy zeal. One day, as he entered an inn, a military officer demanded, "Are you the man that has undertaken to reform the Papacy? How can you hope to succeed?" "I trust in God Almighty, replied Luther, "whose word and commandment I have before me." The officer was touched by his piety, and responded, "My friend, I am a servant of Charles, but your Master is greater than mine. He will aid and preserve you."

The Papal party, true to their doctrine that no faith is to be kept with heretics, endeavored to invalidate his safe-conduct, and argued that it was monstrous that a man excommunicated by the Pope should plead before the emperor. Even Luther's friends feared lest the fate of Huss should be his. As he approached the city one of them sent him word, "Do not enter Worms." With a dauntless confidence in God, the heroic monk replied in the memorable words, "Though there were as many devils in Worms as tiles on the housetops, yet will I enter in." [16]

Luther's entry into Worms was more like a triumphal procession than like the citation of a heretic before an Imperial tribunal. He was preceded by a herald with trumpet and tabard, and accompanied by an escort of a hundred knights and gentlemen on horseback, and two thousand people on foot, who had come outside of the walls to conduct him into the town. The roofs and windows along the route were crowded with spectators, who gazed with profoundest interest upon this champion of the rights of humanity, of the supremacy above Pope or Kaiser, of the Word of God and the individual conscience. As Luther, clad in his monk's frock, stepped from the open wagon in which he rode, he said, in accents of unfaltering faith, "Deus stabit pro me" -- "God will be my defense."

Till late at night a multitude of counts, barons and citizens thronged to call upon him. His enemies meantime were active, and urged the emperor, now that he had the arch-heretic in his power, to disregard his safe-conduct and to crush him at once. "Nay," said the youthful and ingenuous

(unsophisticated and trusting) Charles V., remembering the shameful treachery of his Imperial predecessor at Constance, a hundred years before, "I do not wish to blush like Sigismund."

The next day Luther was summoned before the diet; and having commended his soul to God in prayer, he went undismayed to meet the august conclave. So great was the throng in the streets that he had to be conducted through gardens and private premises into the great hall of audience. In the antechambers and deep recesses of the windows five thousand eager spectators were crowded. The noblest hearts of Germany stood by him. The brave old soldier, George of Freundsberg, grizzled with many years and scarred with many battles, tapped Luther on the shoulder as he passed, and said, "Poor monk! Poor monk! Thou art going to make a nobler stand than I or any other captain have ever made in the bloodiest of our fights! But if thy cause is just, and thou art sure of it, go forward in God's name and fear nothing. God will not forsake thee." The gallant knight Hutten also on this very day wrote him: "Dearly beloved Luther, my venerable father! Fear not and stand firm. The counsel of the wicked has beset you; but fight valiantly for Christ's cause. May God preserve you!"

The Saxon monk stood now before the Imperial diet. Never had man stood before a more august assembly. On his throne sat Charles V., sovereign of a great part of the old world and the new. Around him sat six royal electors, twenty-four grand dukes, eight margraves, thirty bishops and abbots, and a crowd of princes and counts of the empire, Papal nuncios, and foreign ambassadors. There, in his monk's frock, stood the man on whom had fallen the curse and interdict of Rome, summoned to defend himself against the Papacy, before all that was most exalted and august in Christendom.

"Some of the princes," writes D'Aubigne, "when they saw the emotion of this son of the lowly miner of Mansfeldt in the presence of this assembly of kings, approached him kindly, and one of them said to him, 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.'" Another added: "When ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, the Spirit of your Father shall speak in you." Thus was the reformer comforted with his Master's Word by the princes of this world."

The arraignment and defense were repeated in both Latin and German. "Martin Luther," said the Chancellor in a loud, clear voice, "his sacred and invincible Imperial Majesty has cited you before his throne in accordance with the advice and counsel of the Holy Roman Empire, to require you to answer two questions: First, Do you acknowledge these books to have been written by you?" and he pointed to a pile of twenty volumes on a table: "and secondly, Are you prepared to retract these books and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions you have advanced in them?"

"Let the titles of the books be read," said Luther's counsel. This having been done, Luther replied: "Most Gracious Emperor, gracious princes and lords! I acknowledge as mine the books that have just been named; I cannot deny them. As to the second question, seeing that it concerns faith and the salvation of souls, and in which the Word of God, the greatest and most precious treasure either in heaven or earth, is interested, I should act imprudently were I to reply without reflection. I might affirm less than the circumstance demands, or more than truth requires, and so sin against this saying of Christ: 'Whosoever will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.' For this reason I entreat your Imperial Majesty, with all humility, to allow me time, that I may answer without offending against the Word of God."

A respite of four-and-twenty hours was granted, and the diet adjourned. Luther had restrained his natural impetuosity, but no fear of consequences shook his soul. That night he wrote to a friend: "With Christ's help, I shall never retract a tittle of my works." Still he felt that the crisis of his life was at hand. In the agony of his soul on that night of prayer, as if groping in the darkness for the sustaining hand of God, were wrung forth the following pleading cries, which, overheard by a friend of the reformer, were left on record as one of the most precious documents of history:

"My last hour is come; my condemnation is pronounced. O God, do thou help me against all the

wisdom of this world. O God, hearest thou me not? O God, art thou dead? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou hidest thyself only. Act then, O God. Stand by my side. Lord, where stayest thou? I am ready to lay down my life for thy truth. Though the world should be filled with devils, though my body should be slain, be cut to pieces, be burned to ashes, my soul is thine. I shall abide with thee forever. Amen! O God, help me. Amen." These wrestlings of his soul in the hour of his Gethsemane are the key of the Reformation. Luther laid hold upon the very throne of God, and was enbraved with more than mortal might.

The next day Luther was again arraigned before the crowded diet. He modestly requested that if, through ignorance, he should violate the proprieties of the august presence, he might be pardoned, for he had not been brought up in the palaces of kings, but in an obscure convent. "If I have spoken evil," he said, quoting the words of our Lord, "bear witness of the evil. As soon as I am convinced I will retract every error, and be the first to lay hold upon my books and throw them into the fire." "But," he went on, in his grand loyalty to truth, "unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, I cannot and will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience." Then looking round upon that great assembly of the might and majesty of Christendom, he uttered the immortal words: "Hier stehe Ich. Ich kann nicht anders, Gott helfe mir" -- "Here I take my stand; I can do no other; God help me. Amen." "It is," says Carlyle, "the greatest moment in the modern history of men." The heroic scene is commemorated in the grand Luther Monument erected near the place where these words were uttered.

"This monk speaks with an intrepid heart and unshaken courage," said the Emperor. Some of Luther's friends began to tremble for his fate, but with unfaltering faith he repeated, "May God be my helper, for I can retract nothing."

The Papal party, fearing the effect of Luther's dauntless daring, redoubled their efforts with the emperor to procure his condemnation. In this they were successful. The next day Charles V. caused sentence to be pronounced against the reformer. "A single monk," he said, "misled by his own folly, has risen against the faith of Christendom. To stay such impiety I will sacrifice my kingdoms, my treasures, my friends, my body, my blood, my soul and my life. I am about to dismiss the Augustine Luther, forbidding him to cause the least disorder among the people; I shall then proceed against him and his adherents as contumacious (scornful or insulting) heretics, by excommunication, by interdict, and by every means calculated to destroy them." Luther is further described as not a man, but Satan himself dressed in a monk's frock, and all men are admonished, after the expiration of his safe conduct, not to conceal him, nor to give him food or drink, but to seize him and deliver him into custody.

But the heart of the nation was on the side of Luther. There were, it is said, four hundred knights who would have maintained his safe conduct, and under their protection he was permitted to depart from Worms. He visited first the village of his sires and preached in the little church of Eisenach. As he was traveling next day, accompanied by two friends, through the Thuringian Forest, five horsemen, masked and armed, sprang upon them, and before he was aware, Luther found himself a prisoner in the hands of those unknown men. Through devious forest-ways, adopted to avoid detection or pursuit, he was conveyed up a mountain slope, and by midnight reached the lofty and isolated fortress of the Wartburg -- a place of refuge provided for him by his friend, the "wise" Elector of Saxony. He was furnished with a knight's dress and a sword, and directed to let his hair and beard grow, so that even the inmates of the castle might not discover who he was. Indeed, he tells us, he hardly recognized himself. Here in his mountain eyrie, like John at Patmos, he remained in hiding till the outburst of the storm of persecution was overpast.

At first his friends thought that Luther was slain. But soon, as evidence of his vigorous life and active labors, a multitude of writings, tracts, pamphlets and books were sent forth from his mysterious hiding-place, and were everywhere hailed with enthusiasm. The bold blows of the imprisoned monk shook the

very throne of the Papacy. Within a year he published one hundred and eighty-three distinct treatises. He worked hard, too, at his translation of the Scriptures into the German tongue, and secure in his mountain fortress he sang his song of triumph -- "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott."--

"A safe stronghold our God is still
A trusty shield and weapon."

But he was not without his hours of darkness and visitations of Satan. His long confinement proved irksome, and wore upon his spirits and his health. One day, as in bodily depression he was working at his desk, at his translation of the Bible, to his disordered vision appeared an apparition of Satan in a hideous form, forbidding him to go on with his sacred task. Seizing his inkhorn, the intrepid monk hurled it at the head of the arch-enemy of man, who instantly disappeared. On the walls of the old castle of the Wartburg may be seen the ink stains to the present day.

The progress of the Reformation in Germany needed the control of a firm hand and wise head to restrain it from tending toward enthusiasm or violence. Luther could no longer endure the restraint of the Wartburg, and after ten months' concealment he left its sheltering walls. He went boldly to Wittenberg, though warned of the hostility of Duke George. "I would go," he wrote, in his vigorous way, "though it for nine whole days rained Duke Georges, and each one nine times more furious than he." Your true reformer must be no coward. Like John the Baptist, like Luther, Knox or Wesley were, he must boldly face death or danger, counting not his life dear unto him for the testimony of Jesus.

At Wittenberg, Luther was received, by town and gown with enthusiasm, and preached with boldness and success alike against the corruptions of Rome and the doctrinal errors which threatened the nascent Reformation. Among the many opponents of Luther, none was more virulent and violent than the royal polemic, Henry VIII., King of England. He ordered the reformer's writings to be burned at St. Paul's Cross; and in his own "Defence of the Sacraments," written, says a historian, "as it were with his scepter," he sought to crush beneath the weight of his invective the German monk, whom he denounced as "a wolf of hell, a poisonous viper, a limb of the devil."

"Behold," cried the Papal sycophants, "the most learned work the sun ever saw." "He (Henry) is a Constantine, a Charlemagne," said others; "nay, he is more, he is a second Solomon." Pope Leo averred that his book could only have been written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and bestowed on the king the title of "Defender of the Faith," which the sovereigns of England have ever since borne.

Luther handled his royal antagonist without gloves. He was an equal master of invective, and he used it without stint. He refuted the book in detail, and concluded with bold defiance: "It is a small matter," he said. "that I should revile a king of earth, since he fears not to blaspheme the King of heaven. Before the Gospel which I preach must come down popes, priests, monks, princes, devils. Let these swine advance and burn me if they dare. Though my ashes were thrown into a thousand seas, they will arise, pursue and swallow this abominable herd. Living, I will be the enemy of the Papacy; burnt, I shall be its destruction."

We defend not Luther's railing tongue, but it must be said in apology that it was an age of hard words and strong blows. The venerable Bishop Fisher inveighs against Luther as "an old fox, a mad dog, a ravening wolf, a cruel bear;" and Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, uses yet more violent language. But the coarseness of this railing was partly veiled beneath the stately Latin language in which it was clothed.

By tongue and pen the new doctrines were everywhere proclaimed. Despite the burning of Protestant books, they rapidly multiplied. In 1522-23, in Wittenberg alone, were published eight hundred and fifty pamphlets and books, of which three hundred and seventeen were by Luther himself, and many of them were translated into English, French, Italian and Spanish. The churches could not contain the multitude who thronged to hear the gospel. At Zwickau, from the balcony of the rathhaus, or town-hall, Luther

preached to twenty-five thousand persons in the market-place

The Reformed doctrines Spread rapidly, especially in Germany and the Low Countries, and soon, at Antwerp, a whole convent of monks were followers of Luther. They were imprisoned and condemned to death. Some escaped, but two – Esch and Voes, the proto-martyrs of the Reformation – were burned at the stake at Brussels, July 1, 1523. As the flames arose around them, Esch said, “I seem to lie upon a bed of roses.” Then both repeated the Creed and sang the Te Deum, and joined the noble army of martyrs in the skies. Luther commemorated their death in a beautiful hymn, and soon in almost every hamlet in the Netherlands and Germany were sung the triumphs of the martyrs’ faith:

“No! No! Their ashes shall not die;
But, borne to every land,
Where’er their sainted dust shall fall
Upsprings a holy band.”

Luther used his utmost influence to repress and mitigate the unhappy Peasants’ War, waged by the fanatical Anabaptists. For this, not the Reformation, but the cruel land laws and feudal oppression of the toiling multitudes are to blame. Nevertheless, upon the unhappy people fell the brunt of the war, and many thousands were slain.

We now approach an event of great influence on the social character of the Reformation, and on the future of the Protestant clergy. Luther had long asserted the right of a priest to marry; but for himself, he averred, he had no thought of it, for he every day expected the punishment and death of a heretic. At length he considered it his duty to bear his testimony in the most emphatic manner against the Romish “doctrine of devils,” forbidding to marry. He therefore espoused the fair Katharine von Bora, a lady of noble family, who had for conscience’ sake abandoned the vocation of a nun. It was eight years after his first breach with Rome. He was then forty-two years old; so his reforming zeal cannot be ascribed, as it has been, to his impatient haste for wedlock.

All Catholic Europe hurled its accusations and calumnies upon the reformer. But in the solace of his happy home, and in the society of his “dear and gracious Ketha” -- his “Lord Ketha” or “Doctoress Luther,” as, on account of her native dignity, he often called her – his spirit, amid his incessant toils and trials, found a sweet repose. In after years, in his songs and mirth and frolics with his children, he forgot the persecution of his enemies. By this bold act he made once more possible to the ministers of Christ that sweet idyl of domestic happiness which the Church of Rome, to the great detriment of manners and morals, had banished from the earth.

The remaining twenty years of Luther’s life were less fertile in dramatic incident. They were, however, fruitful in labors of lasting benefit to mankind. The greatest of these was his translation into the common German tongue of the Holy Scriptures. This has fixed the language and faith of almost the whole of the German Fatherland. His commentaries, sermons and chorals, and his work for popular education are the undying evidences of his wise head, his large heart, his fervent piety, and his unflagging energy. The care of the churches, his labors as professor and preacher at Wittenberg, his theological disputations, by which he sought to mold the doctrines of the Reformed faith, engrossed his busy days and trenched far upon his nights. He took also an active part in all the public events of his country.

Some of the dogmas of Rome Luther retained to the very last. His strangely literal mind accepted without question the doctrine of transubstantiation, or, perhaps more properly, consubstantiation. This doctrine he defended in a disputation with Zwingle, at Marburg, for several successive days. At the

beginning of the controversy he wrote in chalk upon the table cover the words: “Hoc est corpus meum” -- “This is my body;” and at the close of the wordy war, in testimony of his unalterable faith, he raised. The cloth and shook it in the face of his antagonist, crying, “Hoc est corpus meum.”

Luther’s disposition was sunny, cheerful and magnanimous; but his temper was often irascible and his anger violent. Yet beneath the surface he had a warm, genial and generous heart. To use his own graphic words, he was “rough, boisterous, stormy and warlike, born to fight innumerable devils and monsters.”

But the home side of Luther’s character is its most delightful aspect. Playing on his German flute, from which he said the devils fled away; singing his glorious German carols; paying mirthful homage to his gentle spouse, the grave “Lady Ketha;” romping with his little Hans and Katharina around a Christmas tree; or tearfully wrestling with God for the life of his babe Magdalen, and then, awe-struck, following the flight of her departing spirit through the unknown realms of space – these things knit to our souls the great-hearted Dr. Martin Luther.

His latter years were frequently darkened by sickness, sorrow, the death of friends, doctrinal differences among the Reformed churches, and the gloomy shadows of war hanging over his beloved country. His work was done, and he longed to depart and be at rest. “I am worn out,” he wrote in his sixtieth year, “and no more any use. I have finished my course. There remains only that God gather me to my fathers, and give my body to the worms.” Three years later, January, 1546, with his three sons, he traveled to Eisleben to settle a dispute between the Counts of Mansfeldt and some of the miner folk. He preached four times, enjoyed the recollections of his birthplace, and wrote loving letters to his “profoundly learned Lady Ketha.”

His conversation in those last days was unusually earnest, rich and impressive. It related to death, eternity, and the recognition of friends in heaven. On February 17th he was seized with a painful oppression at the chest, and after fervent prayer, with folded hands, and thrice repeating to his friends the words, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, thou faithful God,” he quietly passed away. His remains were removed in solemn procession to Wittenberg, and deposited in the castle chapel, near the pulpit from which he had so often and so eloquently preached.

Luther was emphatically a man of prayer. He lived in its very atmosphere. “Bene orasse,” he used to say, “est bene studuisse.” He habitually fed his soul on the Word of God. “The basis of his life,” says Carlyle, “was sadness, earnestness. Laughter was in this Luther, but tears, too, were there. Tears also were appointed him, tears and hard toil. I will call this Luther a true, great man – great in intellect, in courage, affection and integrity, Great, not as a hewn obelisk, but as an Alpine mountain – so simple, honest, spontaneous. Ah, yes, unsubduable granite, piercing far and wide into the heavens, yet in the clefts of it fountains, green beautiful valleys with flowers! A right spiritual hero and prophet; once more a true son of nature and fact, for whom these centuries, and many that are yet to come, will be thankful to Heaven.

06 – ULRICH ZWINGLE

The Reformation in Europe was a simultaneous movement in many lands, for which the age was fully ripe. The stirring of thought produced by the spread of learning, through the invention of printing and the revived study of the sacred Scriptures, led to religious inquiry, and loosened from the minds of earnest thinkers the bonds of superstition. Among the mountains of Switzerland, where freedom ever had her home, were many lovers of religious liberty and many leaders of reform. But towering above them all, like the snowy Jungfrau above all the Bernese Alps, shines the majestic character of Ulrich Zwingli.

On New Year's Day, 1484, seven weeks after the birth of Luther, in a lonely chalet overlooking Lake Zurich, which lay far below, the future Swiss reformer saw the light of day. His boyhood was spent as a goat-herd amid the mountain solitudes. "I have often thought," writes "his friend, Myconius, "that being brought near to heaven on these sublime heights, he then contracted something heavenly and divine."

In the long nights of winter, while the storm howled aloof, the boy listened with thrilling pulse to the stirring tale of Tell and Furst and Winkelried, and to the Scripture stories and quaint legends of his pious grandmother. As his father was the well-to-do amman, or bailiff, of the parish, young Zwingle was sent to school successively to Basle and Berne, and to the University of Vienna. He studied literature, philosophy and theology, and developed an extraordinary talent for music. He said his first mass in his native village in his twenty-second year.

The Swiss cantons then, as often since, hired their sturdy peasantry as mercenary soldiers to the great powers of Europe. Twice Zwingle accompanied, as chaplain, the troops of his native canton to the Italian war. He came back, like Luther, disgusted with the idleness and profligacy of the Italian monks, and with the corruptions of the Italian Church. By tongue and pen he remonstrated with his countrymen against the mercenary shedding of their blood for a foreign power, and sought to revive the ancient spirit of liberty. He devoted himself with intense zeal to the study of the Scriptures in their original tongues, which quickly loosened from his mind the fetters of Rome.

In 1516 Zwingle was transferred to the vicarship of Einsiedeln, near Lake Zurich, long the richest and most frequented pilgrimage church of Europe. As many as one hundred and fifty thousand pilgrims were wont to visit it annually. The object of adoration was an ugly black doll, dressed in gold brocade and glittering with jewels – Our Lady of Einsiedeln. An inscription at the sacred shrine offered the full forgiveness of all sins – *plena remissio peccatorum a culpa et a poena*.

Zwingle's whole soul revolted against the flagrant idolatry. He boldly preached Christ as the only sacrifice and ransom for sin. "Can unprofitable works," he asked from the pulpit, "can long pilgrimages, offerings, images, the invocation of the Virgin or of the Saints, secure for you the grace of God? What efficacy has a glossy cowl, a smooth-shorn head, a long and flowing robe? God is all around you and hears you, wherever you are, as well as at our Lady of Einsiedeln's. Christ alone saves, and he saves everywhere."

This new and strange doctrine smote the hearts of the people like a revelation from the sky. The pilgrims went everywhere telling the strange news. "Whole bands," says D'Aubigne, "turned back without completing the pilgrimage. Mary's worshippers diminished in numbers daily. It was their offerings that largely made up the stipend of Zwingle, but he felt happy in becoming poor if he could make others rich in the truth that maketh free."

To the Pope's nuncio, who called him to account, he said: "With the help of God, I will go on preaching the Gospel, and this preaching shall make Rome totter." And so it did. The civil governor caused the inscription to be removed from the lintel of the church, the relics which the pilgrims revered were burned, and the new doctrine prevailed.

In 1518 the Cathedral church of Zurich became vacant, and Zwingle was elected preacher. On New Year's Day he entered the pulpit, from which as from a throne he thenceforth ruled the souls of men. "To Christ," he cried, "to Christ will I lead you – the true source of salvation. His Word is the only food I wish to set before your souls." He began forthwith to expound the Gospels and Epistles – long a sealed book to the people. Like another Baptist, he boldly preached repentance and remission of sins – denouncing the luxury, intemperance and vice of the times. "He spared no one," says Myconius; "neither Pope, emperor, kings, dukes, princes, lords. All his trust was in God. And he exhorted the whole city to trust solely in him." On market days he had a special service for the benefit of the

neighboring peasants, who on that day thronged to the city. "The life of Christ," he said, "has too long been hidden from the people," and he sought by every means to make it known.

With his zeal for the Gospel was blended a fervid love of fatherland. Piety and patriotism were the twin passions of his soul. He sternly rebuked those who for the love of money lent themselves as the hireling soldiers of foreign powers – thus, as he called it, "selling their very flesh and blood." "The cardinal of Zion," he said, "who recruits for the Pope, rightly wears a red hat and cloak; you need only to wring them and you behold the blood of your kinsmen."

At Zurich Zwingle was brought into direct antagonism with the Papal power. Over the wild St. Gothard Pass had come from Rome an indulgence-monger of even more flagrant impudence than Tetzl. "Here," cried Abbot Samson, "are pardons on parchment for a crown – on paper for threepence." He bargained with the Knight Jacques de Stien to exempt from hell forever himself and his five hundred men-at-arms for a dapple-grey horse to which he took a fancy. Walking in procession with his acolytes around the churchyard, he pretended to see the souls of the departed escaping from the graves to heaven, and exclaimed, "Ecce volant," -- "See how they fly!" A wag climbed the belfry tower and shook a bag of feathers on the procession, crying, in derision, "See how they fly!" Zwingle sternly denounced such impious mockery, and forbade the Pope's indulgence-monger to enter Zurich.

The zealous labors of the Swiss reformer wore upon his health, and he was ordered to repair to the baths of Pfeiffers. Here, in a frightful gorge between impending rocks, in a house shaken by the concussion of the raging torrent and drenched by its spray, and so dark that lamps had to be burned at midday, for some weeks he dwelt.

The fearful plague, known as the Great Death-tier Grosse Tod – now broke out in Zurich, more than decimating the population. Zwingle hastened from his refuge to the place of danger among the dying and the dead. He was soon smitten down, and never expected to rise again. In that solemn hour he wrote, in rugged verse, a hymn of faith and trust:

"Lo, at the door, I hear Death's knock;
Shield me, O Lord, my strength and rock;
The hand once nailed upon the tree,
Jesus uplift and shelter me."

He was at length restored to the pulpit of Zurich, and preached with greater power than ever. "There was a report," wrote his friend, Myconius, "that you could not be heard three paces off. But all Switzerland rings with your voice." The Reformed doctrines spread from town to town. At Basle, on the festival of Corpus Christi, instead of the relics which it was customary to bear through the streets, was borne a Bible, with the inscription, "This is the true relic; all others are but dead men's bones."

Attempts were made by the agents of the Papacy to take away the reformer's life by poison, or by the assassin's dagger. When warned of his peril, the intrepid soul replied: "Through the help of God, I fear them no more than a lofty rock fears the roaring waves." The town council placed a guard around his house every night.

Zwingle asked for a conference at which his enemies might publicly bring their charges against his life or doctrine. He appeared in the council hall with his Bible in his hand. "I have preached that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone," he said, "and for this I am denounced as a heretic, a seducer of the people, a rebel. Now, then, in the name of God, here I stand." But his enemies, while secretly plotting against his life, dared not openly confront him. "This famous sword will not leave its sheath to day," said the burgomaster, as he broke up the assembly.

Like Luther, the Swiss reformer perceived that the enforced celibacy of the clergy was a yoke which the Scriptures had not imposed, and one which caused unspiritual natures to fall into sin. He therefore wrote against the Romish rule, and showed his consistency by marrying a worthy widow, Anna

Reinhardt, who made him a noble and loving wife.

A fashion of the time was the holding of public disputations on the topics of controversy between the Reformed and Romish Churches. A celebrated one, which lasted eighteen days, took place between Eck and Faber, champions of the Papacy, and the Reformers (Ecolampadius and Zwingli). A contemporary rhymist thus describes the scene:

“Eck stamps with his feet and thumps with his hands;
He blusters, he swears, and he scolds;
Whatever the Pope and the cardinals teach,
Is the faith, he declares, that he holds.”

But the simple truth of the Gospel shone all the more conspicuously by contrast with the sophistries and superstitions of Rome.

Even in the ranks of the Reformed arose differences of doctrinal opinion. We have referred in a previous chapter to the disputation between Zwingli and Luther, at Marburg, on the subject of the Lord's Supper. Luther, in accordance with his impetuous character, had spoken violently and warmly; Zwingli replied calmly and coolly. The public disputation, as is the general result of such debates, left them both unconvinced, unreconciled. At the close, Zwingli, dissolved in tears, exclaimed, “Let us confess our union in all things in which we agree; and as for the rest, let us remember that we are brothers.” But the sturdy and headstrong Saxon monk would bate no jot of his convictions of right, and the breach between the two reformers was never fully healed. So great anger can dwell even in celestial minds.

“I came not,” says Christ, “to send peace on the earth, but a sword.” The doctrines of the Cross in the early centuries arrayed mankind into hostile camps – the friends of Christianity and its foes. So was it during the Reformation era. All Europe was marshaled into two great armies – the adherents of the Romish Church and those who embraced the soul-emancipating doctrines of the Reformed faith.

In Switzerland the hostile lines were sharply defined: canton was opposed to canton; city to city. The Protestant free cities demanded religious toleration and the right of return for those who had been banished for conscience's sake. The Catholic cantons refused this demand, and a Reformed minister was apprehended and burned. At Berne and Basle tumults broke out, and the images of the saints were hurled from their niches, and trampled under foot. Men-at-arms buckled on their hauberks and helmets, seized lance and arquebuse, and through mountain passes and forest defiles marched for the attack or defense of the Reformed faith.

“Luther and the German Reformation,” writes D'Aubigne, “declining the aid of the temporal power, rejecting the force of arms, and looking for victory only in the confession of the truth, were destined to see their faith crowned with the most brilliant success. Zwingli and the Swiss Reformation, stretching out their hands to the mighty ones of the earth, and grasping the sword, were fated to witness a horrible, cruel and bloody catastrophe fall upon the Word of God.”

The army of the Catholic cantons advanced against Zurich. The Zurich lansquenets marched out for the defense of their native city. “Stay with the council,” said the Burgomaster to Zwingli; “we have need of you.” “No,” he replied, “when my brethren expose their lives I will not remain quietly by my fireside.” Then taking his glittering halberd, which he had carried at the battle of Marignan, he rode off with the troops. Every day divine service was held in the camp. No dice, no cards were seen, no oaths were heard; but psalms, and hymns, and prayers consecrated each hour. The war was for a time postponed and an armed truce prevailed.

The Catholic cantons, without warning, renewed the war. Their attack upon Zurich was like the deadly and resistless sweep of one of their own mountain avalanches. Not till the Papal army held the heights near the city was its approach known. It was a night of terror in Zurich, The scene is thus described in

the vivid pages of D'Aubigne: "The thick darkness – a violent storm – the alarum bell ringing from every steeple – the people rushing to arms – the noise of swords and guns – the sound of trumpets and drums, combined with the roaring of the tempest -the sobs of women and children – the cries which accompanied many a heart-rending adieu – an earthquake which violently shook the mountains as though nature shuddered at the impending ocean of blood: all increased the terrors of this fatal night – a night to be followed by a still more fatal day."

At break of dawn, October 11th, 1531, the banner of the city was flung forth, but – sinister omen- instead of floating proudly on the breeze, it hung listless on the pulseless air. Forth from his happy home stepped Zwingli clad in arms. After a fond embrace from his wife and children, he rode forth with the citizen soldiery of the town. The brave-souled woman kept back her tears, although her husband, brother, son, and many kinsmen were in the ranks – destined to return no more.

Zwingli set out with a presentiment of disaster; yet not for a moment did he falter in what he considered the path of duty. "Our cause," he said to his friends, "is a righteous one, but badly defended. It will cost me my life, and the life of many an upright man who wishes to restore to religion its native purity, and to his country its ancient morals. But God will not forsake his servants; he will help even when you believe all is lost. My confidence is in him alone. I submit myself to his will."

As the forlorn hope climbed the Albis Mountain to its crest, they beheld the hostile army, eight thousand veteran men-at-arms, strongly encamped, and heard the fierce challenge of their mountain horns. Against this host the little Protestant republic could oppose in all scarce one thousand eight hundred men. It was with the utmost difficulty that the rude artillery of the period was dragged up the rough mountain road, and the arduous climb exhausted the strength of the mail-clad men-at-arms.

When the Protestant troops at length gained the upland meadows, every head was uncovered, every knee was bowed in prayer. The Catholic army also fell upon their knees, and amid solemn silence each man crossed himself and repeated five Paters, as many Aves, and the Credo. Then their leader, desecrating the words of religion to a cruel war-cry, exclaimed: "In the name of the Holy Trinity, of the Holy Mother of God, and of all the heavenly host – fire!" And volley upon volley flashed from the leveled arquebuses and echoed back from the surrounding mountains. "How can we stay calmly upon these heights," exclaimed Zwingli, "while our brethren are shot down? In the name of God, I will die with them or aid in their deliverance." "Soldiers," cried the leader, "uphold the honor of God and of our lords; be brave, like brave men." "Warriors," said Zwingli, who stood helmet on head and halberd in hand, "fear nothing. If we are this day to be defeated, still our cause is good. Commend yourselves to God."

The action had scarcely begun when Zwingli stooping to console a dying man, was smitten by a missile which wounded his head and closed his lips.

He struggled to his feet, but was twice struck down and received a thrust from a lance. Falling upon his knees he was heard to say, "What matters this misfortune! They may indeed kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul." These were his last words. As he uttered them he fell backwards and lay upon the ground, his hands clasped, his eyes upturned to heaven. Crushed beneath the weight of numbers, the little band of Protestants, after performing deeds of heroic valor, and leaving five hundred men dead upon the field, was utterly defeated. Twenty seven members of the council and twenty-five Protestant pastors who accompanied their flocks to the field of battle were among the slain.

The darkness of night was now gathering on the field of battle. In the deepening gloom, stragglers of the Catholic army prowled with torches and lanterns over the field of carnage, to slay the wounded and to rob the dead. "What has your heretical faith done for you?" they jeeringly demanded of the conquered Protestants. "We have dragged your Gospel through the mire. The Virgin and the saints have punished you. Call upon the saints and confess to our priests – the mass or death."

The dying reformer lay upon the gory field, hearing shouts of the victors, and the groans of the wounded, and surrounded by the mangled bodies of the dead. Beyond the moonlight and the starlight he looked up into that heaven whither, all life's battles and fightings over, he was soon to pass. "Do you wish a priest to confess you?" asked a soldier prowling near. Zwingli could not speak, but shook his head. "Think at least of the Mother of God and call upon the saints," said the man. Protesting against the errors of Rome even in his latest hour, the dying reformer again expressed his emphatic dissent. Hereupon the rough trooper began to curse him as a miscreant heretic. Curious to know who it was who thus despised the saints, though in the very art of death, he turned the gory head to the light of a neighboring camp-fire "I think it is Zwingli," he exclaimed, letting it fall. "Zwingli," cried a Papal captain, "that vile heretic! Die, obstinate wretch!" and with his impious sword he smote him on the throat. Thus died the leader of the Swiss Reformation, in darkness and defeat, by the hand of a hireling soldier.

But still further indignities were heaped upon his mangled frame. The ruthless soldiery demanded that his body should be dismembered and distributed throughout the Papal cantons. "Nay," cried a generous captain, "peace be to the dead. God alone be their judge. Zwingli was a brave and loyal man." But the cruel will of the mob prevailed. The drums beat to muster, a court martial was formed, the dead body was tried and condemned to be quartered for treason, and burned for heresy. "The executioner of Lucerne," writes D'Aubigne, "carried out the sentence. Flames consumed Zwingli's disjointed members; the ashes of swine were mingled with his; and a lawless multitude rushing upon his remains, flung them to the four winds of heaven."

The kindled fire of the Swiss Reformation seemed extinguished in blood. Zurich on that night of horrors became a Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they were not. As the wounded fugitives, escaping through the darkness, brought the tidings of disaster, the tocsin of alarm knelled forth, and tears and lamentations resounded through the streets. Almost every household mourned a husband, brother, son, among the slain. Anna Zwingli had lost all three, and her son-in-law, her brother-in-law, and other kinsmen besides. As the fatal news, "Zwingli is dead! Is dead!" rang through the streets and pierced like a sword her heart, she knelt amid her fatherless babes in her chamber of prayer and poured out her agonizing soul to God.

The city in the hour of its deepest despair was roused to heroic effort. It rallied every available man and gun. The imminent danger of its capture was averted and another battle with the army of the Papal cantons was fought. The latter made a night attack, the soldiers wearing white shirts over their armor and shouting their watchword -- "the Mother of God" -- that they might recognize each other in the dark. The men of Zurich were again defeated, and eight hundred of their number left upon the field; but they proved too stubborn a foe to be completely conquered. Zurich maintained the Protestant faith; and from the pulpit in which it was first preached by Zwingli it has ever since been manfully declared. On the neighboring battle-field a grey stone slab commemorates the spot where the Swiss reformer fell; but his truest monument is the Protestant Church of his native land, of which he was, under God, the father and founder.

Zwingli died at what may seem the untimely age of forty-eight; but measured by results his life was long. He was not a disciple of Luther, but an independent discoverer of the truth. "It was not from Luther," he said, "that I received the doctrine of Christ, but from God's Word. I understood Greek before I ever heard of Luther." The great mistake of his life was his consent to the use of carnal weapons for the defense of the Bride of Heaven, the Church of Christ. But in extenuation of this grievous fault -- and grievously he answered for it -- it has been pleaded that he believed that the fatherland belonged to Christ and his Church, and must be defended for their sake; and that Switzerland could only give herself to Christ so far and so long as she was free.

Wiser in this regard than Zwingli, Luther over and over declared: "Christians fight not with the sword

and arquebuse, but with suffering and with the Cross. Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.” “My kingdom is not of this world,” said the Master, “else would my servants fight.” Not with weapons forged by mortal might, but by weapons of immortal temper – the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God – shall earth’s grandest victories be gained.

07 – JOHN CALVIN

The present writer made a pilgrimage to the scenes of the principal events of concerning the life and death of John Calvin, the French Reformer. Few places in Europe possess greater historical interest than the fair city of Geneva, mirrored in the placid Leman, where the deep blue waters of the arrowy Rhone issue from the lovely lake. For centuries it has been the sanctuary of civil and religious liberty, and its history is that of the Reformation and of free thought. The names of Calvin, Knox, Beza, Farel, the Puritan exiles; and many other refugees from tyranny, are forever associated with this little republic of Switzerland.

But the chief interest attaches to the name of Calvin. “His system of doctrine and policy,” writes a recent biographer, “has shaped more minds and entered into more nations than that of any other Reformer. In every land it made men strong against the interference of the secular power with the rights of Christians. It gave courage to the Huguenots; it shaped the theology of the Palatinate; it prepared the Dutch for the heroic defense of their national rights; it has controlled Scotland to the present hour; it formed the Puritanism of England; it has been at the basis of the New England character; and everywhere it has led the way in practical reforms.”

It was therefore with intense interest that I visited the house in which Calvin lived and the church in which he held his famous disputations, and from whose pulpit, like a czar upon his throne, he wielded an almost despotic influence over the minds of men in many lands. The church was closed, and while I was looking for the sexton a Roman Catholic priest, whom I accosted, went for the key, and with the greatest courtesy conducted me through the building and explained its features of historic interest. It seemed to me very strange to have that adherent of the ancient faith exhibit the relics of him who was its greatest and most deadly foe. With something of the old feeling of proprietorship, he looked around the memory-haunted pile and said proudly, yet regretfully, “This was all ours once,” and he pointed in confirmation to the beautiful chapel of the Virgin and to the keys of St. Peter sculptured on the walls. Then he led me to Calvin’s pulpit, once the most potent intellectual throne in Europe, and to Calvin’s chair – in which I sat, without feeling my Arminian orthodoxy affected thereby – and pointed out other memorials of the great reformer.

Calvin’s house, in a narrow street, is now occupied for purposes of trade, and presents little of interest. His grave I could not visit, for no man knows where his body is laid. By his own express desire no monument was erected over his remains, and now the place of their rest has passed from the memory of men. Nor needs he such memorial. His truest monument is the grand work he was enabled to do for God and for humanity – a monument more lasting than brass – more glorious than any sculptured pile.

In the evening twilight I walked down the Rhone to its junction with the Arve. The former flows clear as crystal from the very clear lake; the latter rushes turbid with mud from the grinding glaciers. For a long distance the sharp contrast between the two may be traced -- “the tresses,” says the poetic Cheever, “of a fair-haired girl beside the cues of an Ethiopian; the Rhone, the daughter of day and sunshine; the Arve, the child of night and frost.”

“Fair Leman woos me with its crystal face,
The mirror where the stars and mountains view
The stillness of their aspect in each trace,

Its clear depths yield of their fair light and hue.
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood... here the Rhone hath spread himself a couch, the Alps have reared
a throne."

The far-shining "Sovran Blanc" loomed distinctly through the air, like a visible throne of God in the heavens. While the stately architecture of the city is chiefly modern, the aspects of nature are still the same as met the gaze of the exiles from many lands who found here a refuge.

John Calvin – or Chauvin, as the name was sometimes written – was born at Noyon, in Picardy, on the 10th of July, 1509, twenty-six years after the birth of Luther. He belongs, therefore, to the second generation of reformers. His father, Gerard Calvin, was a man of distinguished ability, whose talents had raised him to the position of notary in the ecclesiastical court of Noyon, and secretary of the diocese. His mother, we read, was a woman of "remarkable beauty and unassuming piety." From her he probably inherited his delicate features, and to her pious training he doubtless owes the religious disposition of his early youth.

At school he was a student of remarkable promise – singularly free from the prevailing follies and frivolities of the time. Indeed, the austerity of this young censor of the morals of his fellow-students procured for him the nickname of "the Accusative Case." Calvin was educated in the strictest tenets of the Romish faith. As a child he took part in the religious processions of the Church, and, through paternal influence, at the age of twelve he received the office and income of chaplain of La Gesine, though, of course, without performing its duties. On the eve of Corpus Christi, the boy solemnly received the tonsure – as the shaving of the crown, by which he became admitted to the first rank of the clergy, was designated. This abuse of ecclesiastical privilege was quite the fashion of the times. The Cardinal of Lorraine received far higher preferment at the age of four years, and Alphonso of Portugal became a cardinal at eight.

At the age of fourteen, Calvin was sent to college at Paris, where he made remarkable progress in his studies. Four years later his father concluded to qualify his son for the profession of jurist, and sent him to study law under celebrated teachers at Bourges and Orleans. So great was his proficiency, that he sometimes took the place of the professors during their temporary absence. He continued also his study of scholastic theology, and began the critical reading of the New Testament in the original Greek. The day, we are told, he spent in the study of the law and a great part of the night in the study of the Bible. Through the teaching of this higher law his confidence in his hereditary faith was shaken, and the light of truth shone upon his soul. The death of his father interrupted his university course, and we next hear of him as the editor of an annotated edition of Seneca, exhibiting a wide acquaintance with the classics and an almost Ciceronian skill in the grand old Latin tongue.

Shortly after this took place what he himself calls his "sudden conversion," whose process he thus describes. "After my heart had long been prepared for the most earnest self-examination," he writes, "on a sudden the full knowledge of the truth, like a bright light, disclosed to me the abyss of errors in which I was weltering, the sin and shame with which I was defiled. A horror seized my soul, when I became conscious of my wretchedness and of the more terrible misery that was before me. And what was left, O Lord, for me, miserable and abject, but with tears and cries of supplication turn from the old life which thou didst condemn, and to flee into thy path."

He describes his vain attempts to obtain peace of mind through the services and penances of the Church. "Only one haven of salvation is there for our souls," he writes, "and that is the compassion of God which is offered us in Christ. We are saved by grace; not by our merits, not by our works."

Zeal for the truth of God now became the passion of his life. The hour for indecision was past. He threw up his ecclesiastical benefits, the income of which he could not retain with a clear conscience,

and cast in his lot with the persecuted reformers at Paris, and, notwithstanding his youth, was soon accounted a leader among them. The bitterness of the persecution of the Protestants compelled him to fly, first from Paris, and then, not without tears and a dislocating wrench, from his native land. He fled to the court of the beautiful and accomplished Margaret, Queen of Navarre, where he was confirmed in his new opinions by the society and counsel of the venerable Lefevre, the father of the Reformation in France. He next found refuge at Strasburg and Basle, where he pursued the study of Hebrew.

[Read cautiously and wisely the following paragraph, which explains some of Calvin's Doctrine of Election – a doctrine which apparently even he, himself, could not reconcile in his own mind and heart. -- DVM]

At Basle the young theologian issued the first edition of his "Institutes of the Christian Religion." The striking characteristic of this book is the prominence given to the doctrine of predestination. The dominating thought is the absolute supremacy of the Divine will. "That will," writes a recent commentator, "though hidden from man, is not arbitrary, but is most wise and holy. The human race, corrupted radically in the fall with Adam, has upon it the guilt and impotence of original sin; its redemption can be achieved only through an incarnation and propitiation; of this redemption only electing grace can make the soul a participant, and such grace once given is never lost; this election can come only from God, and it includes only a part of the race, the rest being left to perdition; election and perdition are both predestined in the divine plan; that plan is a decree eternal and unchangeable; all that is external and apparent is but the unfolding of this eternal plan."

[Nevertheless] Calvin seems himself to have shrunk from the logical consequence of this "decretum horrible" -- "this horrible decree," as he calls it. He sought to evade those consequences by denying that God is the author of sin, and by asserting that men act freely and not of necessity in spite of this decree... [Obviously, Calvin's own heart and mind revolted against the logical conclusions that resulted from his doctrine of Election. Indeed, Calvinism's Doctrine of Election is a "decretum horrible" -- an "horrible decree"! -- because it is contrary to the true interpretation of the Scriptures on this subject -as was later proven! -- DVM]

At the invitation of the Duchess Renee, Calvin took refuge at the Court of Ferrara, where he won certain high-born ladies to the persecuted opinions of the reformers. But the vigilance of the Inquisition compelled him to retrace his steps across the Alps. On his way to Basle he stopped at Geneva, intending to remain but a single night. But here occurred an event which shaped the whole future of his life.

Through the labors of William Farel, the scion of a noble family of Dauphine, the Reformed doctrines had obtained a foothold in Geneva. But they still met with powerful opposition, and the morals of the city were exceedingly corrupt. Farel waited on Calvin at his inn, and besought him to remain and take part in the work of reformation. Calvin declined, pleading his need of repose and desire for study. "Since you refuse to engage in the work of God," exclaimed Farel, with the solemn menace of a Hebrew prophet, "His curse will alight upon your studies and on you." Calvin was struck with terror, and felt as if the hand of the Almighty had been stretched out from heaven and laid upon him. "I yielded," he writes, "as if to the voice of the Eternal."

He immediately began his work by preaching in the cathedral, and by preparing a catechism for the instruction of the young, "since," he wisely remarks, "to build an edifice which is to last long, the children must be instructed according to their littleness." No mercenary motive urged him to his duty, for we read that after six months the council voted him six crowns, "seeing he had not received anything."

He set to work at once to reform the morals of the gay and pleasure-loving city. Stringent ordinances were prescribed, restraining sumptuousness of apparel and personal adornment. A hairdresser, for instance, narrates a historian of the times, for arranging a bride's hair in what was then deemed an

unseemly fashion, was imprisoned for two days. Games of chance and dancing were also prohibited. The fashionable fribbles of the day revolted from this strictness, and procured the banishment of the faithful preacher. "It is better to obey God than man," said Calvin; and though "he loved Geneva as his own soul," he departed from its ungrateful walls.

He was welcomed to Strasburg, and put in charge of a church of one thousand five hundred French refugees. Here he married Idelette de Bures, the widow of an Anabaptist preacher whom he had converted. In her he found a faithful and devoted wife, "who never opposed me," he says, "and always aided me." For nine happy years she cheered and consoled his stormy life; and when she died, his grief and the strength and tenderness of his attachment were shown in letters, still extant, whose pathos touches our hearts across the silent centuries.

Three years after his expulsion he was urged by both the town council and the people to return to Geneva. He yielded, "offering to God his slain heart as a sacrifice, and forcing himself to obedience." Not only was a "plain house" set apart for him, but also, we read, "a piece of cloth for a coat." He returned to spend the remaining twenty-three years of his life in the city to which he was to give its chief fame. It was with the full and fair understanding that his discipline should be carried out. To build up a Christian Church, pure and spotless in morals and in doctrine, was the ideal of his life.

A presbyterial council assumed control of both secular and sacred affairs. Even regulations for watching the gates and for suppressing fires were found in the writing of Calvin. The lofty and the lowly were alike subjected to one inflexible rule. All profaneness, drunkenness, and profligacy, and even innocent recreations, were rigorously suppressed. Severe penalties were often inflicted for slight offenses. Persons were punished for laughing during divine service. Dancing, the use of cards or of nine-pins, and the singing of secular songs were offenses against the law; so was giving to children the names of Catholic saints. For attempting to strike his mother, a youth of sixteen was scourged and banished, and for a graver offense of the same nature another was beheaded. The use of torture in criminal trials was allowed, and the penalty for heresy was death by fire, a law which has left its blackest stigma on Calvin's name.

The effect on society of this austere rule was marvelous. From being one of the most dissolute, Geneva became one of the most moral cities of Europe. It became the home of letters and the refuge of the persecuted Protestants of every land. "The wisest at that time living," writes the judicious Hooker, "could not have bettered the system." "It was the most perfect school of Christ," says Knox, who was here three times, 1554-56, "since the days of the Apostles." "This is a reformation," writes Luther, "that has hands and feet."

Nevertheless, these rigid restraints provoked strong opposition. "Lewd fellows of the baser sort" writhed under their enforced morality. Calvin was the object of their intensest hate. Upon him they heaped the utmost indignity. The very dogs in the streets were, in scorn, named after him, and were incited to attack his person with cries of "seize him!" "seize him!" and his clothes and flesh were torn by their fangs. As he sat at his study table, in a single night fifty gunshots were fired before the house. Once he walked into the midst of an infuriated mob and offered his breast to their daggers. His iron will subdued them all. He prevented, he said upon his death-bed, over three hundred riots which would have desolated Geneva.

The darkest shadow upon the name and fame of Calvin is his complicity in the death of Servetus. *[I beg to differ with Withrow here: -- The darkest shadow upon the name and fame of Calvin is "Calvinism," a doctrine which is erroneous, false, and contrary to the Word of God. As good and well-intentioned as Calvin was, it is the dark shadow of "Calvinism" which most beclouds his name and his influence as a professed Christian. -- DVM]* This remarkable man [Servetus] was a Spanish physician of great ability. He almost anticipated Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood. He published

a book against the doctrine of the Trinity, and wrote a number of letters to Calvin in the same strain, and inveighing against the reformer himself. Yet for thirty years, under an assumed name, he conformed outwardly to the Roman Church. He subsequently published, anonymously, another work on the "Restoration of Christianity," in which the doctrine of the Trinity and infant baptism were described as the two great hindrances to this result.

Servetus was arrested and tried for heresy by the Roman Archbishop of Lyons. He denied his authorship of the obnoxious book. Calvin, at the request of a friend, furnished, in the letters written thirty years before, the evidence which procured the condemnation of the accused. Servetus, however, escaped, and after a few months came to Geneva, lodging in an obscure inn near the city wall. After a month Calvin was informed of his presence, and procured his arrest. He was arraigned before the council, and defended his opinions with acuteness, but with much insolent invective, and demanded the condemnation of Calvin. To his surprise, he was himself condemned and sentenced to be burned.

The conclusion of this tragic story is thus told by the judicious Fisher: "He called Calvin to his prison and asked pardon for his personal treatment of him; but all attempts to extort from him a retraction of his doctrines were ineffectual. He adhered to his opinions with heroic constancy, and was burned at the stake on the morning of the 27th of October, 1553." Calvin made an attempt to have the mode of his death changed to one less painful – to beheading, instead of burning – and there is reason to believe that he expected that Servetus would recant. Still, it is indisputable that he consented to his death, which, however, was the act of the whole council, and not of one individual.

At the very time that Calvin was involved in these stormy conflicts he was wielding probably the most potent intellectual influence in Europe. He was in communication with the leaders of the Reformation. In every land. "In England, and France, and Scotland, and Poland, and Italy," writes Fisher, "on the roll of his correspondents were princes and nobles, as well as theologians. His counsels were called for and prized in matters of critical importance. He writes to Edward VI. And Elizabeth, to Somerset and Cranmer. The principal men in the Huguenot party looked up to Calvin as to an oracle."

To his lectures thronged students from Scotland, Holland and Germany. From six o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon the classes were together, except at the dinner-hour, from ten to eleven. On alternate weeks he preached every day, and often on Sundays, besides his regular theological lectures. Hundreds of Protestant exiles, the most cultivated men of the age, sat at his feet. After a day of toil it was his rest to give half the night to his pen and his books. His commentaries cover nearly the whole of both the Old Testament and the New.

"For a long time," writes a biographer, "in the closing period of his life, he took but one meal in a day, and this was often omitted. He studied for hours in the morning, preached, and then lectured before taking a morsel of food. Too weak to sit up, he dictated to an amanuensis from his bed, or transacted business with those who came to consult him.

His intrepid spirit triumphed over all physical infirmity. From his sick bed he regulated the affairs of the French Reformation. He called the members of the senate and the clergy of the city around his dying couch, and, taking each by the hand, bade them an affectionate farewell. "We parted from him," writes his friend, Beza, "with our eyes bathed in tears and our hearts full of unspeakable grief."

Thus John Calvin passed away, on the 27th of May, 1564. He was in the fifty-fifth year of his age. His whole earthly wealth was about two hundred dollars. This he bequeathed to his relations and to poor foreigners. He chose to be poor, and persistently refused any addition to his very modest salary. "If I am not able to avoid the imputation of being rich in life," he said, "death shall free me from this stain." The labors of his pen and brain were prodigious. His published works fill fifty-two octavo volumes. Besides these, in the library of Geneva, are twenty thousand manuscript sermons. *[Ah, but it is not the Volume of a man's writings, but the Verity of them that matters most! -- and, the writings of John Calvin have*

had a pernicious effect on the minds, hearts, and souls of millions who have believed Calvinism relative to Election and a so-called, Eternal Security. -- DVM]

Their Arminian aversion to the logical consequences of Calvin's theology has, with many, extended also to his person and character.* But let us, while rejecting what we may deem the errors of his intellect, admire the greatness of his soul. He feared God, and loved righteousness, and loathed iniquity, and scorned a lie. His brave spirit dominated over a weak and timorous body, and he consecrated with an entire devotion his vast powers to the glory of God and the welfare of his fellow men.

(Calvin's highly trained mind was gifted for the work of theology. It was his avocation as well as vocation. One of the first things he did in Geneva was: "He immediately began his work by preaching in the cathedral, and by preparing a catechism for the instruction of the young, "since," he wisely remarks, "to build an edifice which is to last long, the children must be instructed according to their littleness." No mercenary motive urged him to his duty, for we read that after six months the council voted him six crowns, "seeing he had not received anything." It was just the way his mind worked. Some people just love puzzles. The gospel was Calvin's great puzzle.

And there was a great vacuum for this at the time since Catholic teachings had been proven to be often little more than a confidence game designed to prey upon the innocent. So what were the people to believe? It was often very puzzling. Luther still relied heavily upon Catholic teaching and did not begin to answer many pressing questions. So the people flocked hear this teacher that seemed to have the important answers they were craving. This encouraged Calvin to even greater theological effort. Regrettably, to make proper sense out of the whole faith -especially in its the dismayingly garbled state of the time was too much for any one mere mortal. Even one so signally gifted as Calvin. Other gifted theologians were raised up over time to continue building this growing understanding of the gospel.

This process continues today, some teachers help advance the faith, while other more pragmatic souls turn it aside it for their own advantage. At that time the issue was Papal indulgences; today it is the prosperity gospel. Both urge the free believer to give to the church even their subsistence -for their own direct benefit *from an always-generous God*. These extorted funds built the Vatican and its many splendours. Today the gilded lives of popular preachers grow fat on similar extortion. T'was ever thus. -Earnest Seeker)

08 – WILLIAM TYNDALE

In the history of the English Bible there is no name that occupies a more honored place than that of William Tyndale. No man has so imperishably left his impress on that book as he. The authorized version of the present day, with its majestic rhythm, its subtle harmony, its well of English undefiled, is substantially that which Tyndale gave the English-speaking race. No revision of the text can ever change its grand basic character.

"Those words which we repeat as the holiest of all words," says a recent biographer of the great translator; "those words which are the first that the opening intellect of the child receives with wondering faith from the lips of its mother, which are the last that tremble on the lips of the dying as he commends his soul to God, are the words in which Tyndale gave to his countrymen the Book of Life." The service which Tyndale thus rendered that wondrous instrument of thought, the English tongue, is akin in its far-reaching influence to that of even Shakespeare himself.

This being the case, it is strange that so little is known of the facts of Tyndale's life, or of the factors which contributed to mold his character. Even the place and date of his birth are not known with certainty. According to tradition, he was born in the county of Gloucester, in the flat and fertile region through which winds the sluggish Severn. The family, however, are said to have come from the North during the Wars of the Roses, and to have taken their name from the lovely Tyne valley in which, from time immemorial, their ancestors dwelt. The only kinsmen of whom any record is known are a brother

John, who became a London merchant of some repute, and another named Edward, a country gentleman, who basked in the light of court favor at the very time that his martyr brother was done to death by court hatred and intrigue.

The family must have been of good social standing and of considerable means, for at an early age the future scholar and translator was sent to Oxford to receive the best training that the kingdom could afford. He was enrolled as a student at Magdalen Hall, one of the oldest and one of the most picturesquely beautiful in that city of colleges. Often must he have paced those quaintly-carved cloisters, or wandered, deep in thought, through the leafy arcades which skirt the classic Isis. In the oaken dining-hall, among portraits of the distinguished scholars and divines of Magdalen College, still looks down the grave countenance of William Tyndale, the most illustrious of them all.

Among the great spirits at this time at that focus of intellectual life were Erasmus, the acute and learned Dutchman; More, the future Lord Chancellor of England; and Collet, afterwards Dean of St. Paul's, whose lectures on the New Testament were so full of religious fire and force that he incurred the suspicion and narrowly escaped the penalty of heresy. Tyndale seems to have shared the zeal in the study of the Scriptures of Collet, for he soon became distinguished for special progress in that sacred lore. He probably shared also his religious convictions, for we read that he "privily read some parcel of divinity to certain students and fellows of Magdalen College."

He incurred thereby the suspicion of the authorities, and guarded his safety by retiring to the sister university of Cambridge. Here he enjoyed, there is reason to believe, the instruction of Erasmus, the most brilliant Greek scholar in Europe. At all events, he acquired a familiar and accurate acquaintance with the language of the New Testament, which enabled him afterwards to render its nervous force into the vernacular speech of his fellow-countrymen. Here also he made the acquaintance of that Thomas Bilney, who was destined, like himself, to glorify God amid the flames. The fellow-students little thought, as they paced together the quadrangle of their college, that through the same fiery door of martyrdom they should pass to the skies.

At Cambridge Tyndale received his academic degrees and entered on the sacred calling which had long been the object of his life. On leaving the university he assumed the duties of a tutor in the family of Sir John Walsh, a Gloucestershire baronet. The position of a tutor or chaplain in the country house of the period was often very humiliating. "The coarse and ignorant squire," says Macaulay, "who thought it belonged to his dignity to have grace said every day at his table by an ecclesiastic in full canonicals, found means to reconcile dignity and economy. A young levite – such was the phrase then in use – might be had for his board, a small garret, and ten pounds a year, and might not only perform his own professional functions, might not only be the most patient of listeners, but might also save the expense of a gardener, or of a groom. He was permitted to dine with the family, but he was expected to content himself with the plainest fare. He might fill himself with the corned beef and carrots, but as soon as the tarts and cheesecakes made their appearance he quitted his seat, and stood aloof till he was summoned to return thanks for the repast, from the greater part of which he had been excluded."

It seems certain, however, that the position of Tyndale was much more honorable than that here described, for we read that so greatly were his abilities respected that he went on preaching excursions throughout the surrounding villages, and even to the great city of Bristol. At the table of his patron, who dispensed an open-handed hospitality, he met the neighboring squires and clergy. The religious questions which were agitating the nation of course were warmly discussed, and the Cambridge scholar, fresh from the university, was more than a match in argument for the country clergy, whose learning had become rusty by disuse. The advanced opinions of the young tutor soon provoked the suspicion and dislike of the dry-as-dust divines of the old school, and even called forth the remonstrance of Lady Walsh, his patron's wife. "Why," she expostulated, "one of these Doctors may dis-spend one hundred pounds, another two hundred, another three hundred; and, what! Were it reason,

think you, that we should believe you, a tutor with ten pounds a year, before them?"

Tyndale, however, would not submit to this commercial rating of his opinions, and translated the "Enchiridion Militis Christiani," or "Manual of a Christian Soldier" of Erasmus, in support of his conflict with the "Hundred Pound Doctors" of Little Sodbury. These gentlemen resenting their refutation, accused, after the manner of the age, the obnoxious tutor of heresy. He was summoned before the Chancellor of the Diocese, who, "after rating him like a dog, dismissed him uncondemned."

These discussions confirmed the future reformer in his growing convictions of the errors of Rome. The entire Papal system seemed to him honeycombed with fraud. He broached his doubts to an aged priest, whose sincerity and piety invited his confidence. "Do you not know," replied his friend, "that the Pope is the very Antichrist of whom the Scriptures speak?" "The thought," says Tyndale's biographer, "shot through his mind like a flash of lightning across the midnight sky. From that day the great object of his life was to prove to his countrymen that the Pope was indeed Antichrist.

That they might learn the true character of primitive Christianity, and thus realize how great were the corruptions of Rome, he felt that they must first have access to the Word of God in their own mother tongue. And to give them that access became thenceforth his ruling purpose. "If God spare my life," he exclaimed to a learned antagonist, "ere many years I will cause the boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do.

For the furtherance of his great design he proceeded to London, to seek the patronage of Tonstall, the learned and reputed liberal bishop of that city. As a credential of his scholarship and a passport, as he hoped, to episcopal favor, he translated into nervous English one of the orations of Isocrates. But the learned prelate had little liking or leisure for the succor of poor scholars: and Tyndale's reception at "Lambeth Palace was marked by chilling reserve. "There was no room in my lord's house," he somewhat bitterly remarks, "for translating the Bible, but much room for good cheer" -- for the bishop's dinners were famous for their profusion and elegance.

In his chagrin and disappointment he sought solace, like a wise man, in active Christian work. While preaching in one of the city churches, he attracted the attention of Humphrey Monmouth, a wealthy merchant, who invited him to his own house, became his patron and friend, and provided the "sodden meat, single small beer and humble apparel, which were all," as he himself tells us, "that a good priest required." The London Maecenas had a mind enlarged by travel and enriched by observation and thought. He had seen at Jerusalem and Rome the corruptions and superstitions that spring up at the very centers and sacred places of the Christian faith, and was prepared to sympathize with the general movement toward reform of the Church throughout Europe.

Monmouth advised his friend to seek in the free cities of Holland and Germany those facilities for the prosecution of his life purpose which he could not find in his native land. He therefore embraced a self-imposed exile from that England which he loved so well. As the Dutch vessel in which he took passage to Hamburg dropped down the Thames, and he took his last look of the grim old Tower, the fort at Tilbury, and the green familiar hills, did a prescience that he should never see them more cross his mind? Yet so it was. There remained for him but twelve years more of life -- in exile, in toil and travel, in bonds and imprisonment -- and then, through the sharp swift pangs of martyrdom, he entered on his endless and exceeding great reward.

From Hamburg Tyndale proceeded to Wittenberg, to seek the counsel and assistance of the illustrious Father of the Reformation, who was himself engaged in translating the Word of God into the Teutonic tongue. Under this inspiration he toiled diligently, and "without being helped with English of any that had interpreted the Scriptures beforetime," he assures us, "he endeavored singly and faithfully, so far forth as God gave him the gift of knowledge, to give his countrymen a true and honest translation of the Word of Life in their native tongue."

With money furnished by Monmouth he proceeded to Cologne, to pass his translation through the press. The greatest secrecy was observed; but, unfortunately, the suspicions of a Romish priest were aroused. Having plied the printers with wine, he elicited the important secret that an English New Testament was then in the press. The meddling priest informed the ecclesiastical authorities, who promptly procured an interdict of the work. Deeply chagrined at this interruption of his project, Tyndale sailed up the castled Rhine to Worms, doubtless more anxious about the safety of his precious manuscript than observant of the beauties of the storied stream.

In the old Rhenish city, in which the excitement of the famous diet which forms the epoch of the Reformation had scarce subsided, he completed, by the aid of Peter Schoeffer, the son of Schoffer who is claimed as the inventor of the art of printing, an octavo edition of the New Testament. It was a notable fact that in this now decayed old city, where Luther confronted all the powers of the Papacy, was printed the first English New Testament, the great instrument in the conversion of a kingdom, and the grand charter of English liberties. [17]

In spite of the utmost endeavor of the English customs authorities to exclude the “pernicious poison,” the obnoxious book found entrance to the kingdom. Through lonely outposts, or by bold adventurers on harborless and unguarded coasts, or concealed in consignments of merchandise, copies of the precious book reached the hands of Lollard merchants, and were distributed by friends of the reformer, disguised as chapmen or peddlers, throughout the kingdom. By royal proclamation the book was denounced and ordered to be burned. The bishops eagerly searched out and bought or confiscated every copy they could find, and great bonfires of the Word of God blazed at St. Paul’s cross, where Tostall publicly denounced its alleged errors. Still the people were hungry for the Bread of Life, and the bishop’s money, contributed for its extirpation, served but to print new editions of the condemned book.

Tyndale was compelled to retire from Worms to the secluded city of Marburg, where he improved his translation and wrote those works on practical religion and those scathing exposures of the frauds and errors of Rome which so greatly aided the Reformation in England. His treatise on “Obedience” set forth with vigorous eloquence the mutual duties of sovereign and subject, clergy and people. Sir Thomas More, the college companion of Tyndale, dipped his pen in gall to denounce “this malicious book, wherein,” he asserts, “the writer sheweth himself so puffed up with the poison of pride, malice and envy, that it is more than a marvel that the skin can hold together.” The king himself, however, was of a different opinion; for finding a copy of the book which the hapless Anne Boleyn had carefully read and marked “with her nail” on the margin, he said, “this is a book for me and all kings to read.”

Tyndale now proceeded to Antwerp, whose busy wharves and warehouses and marts were the great center of trade with England, to buy type and procure money for a new and improved edition of the Scriptures. By a strange coincidence – or was it not rather a providence? -- that Bishop Tostall who had refused his aid to the translator in London, was now in Antwerp trying to buy up the stock of Bibles for his bonfires before they should be scattered through the country. An old chronicle records that through his agent, Packington, Tyndale sold a quantity of books to this episcopal merchant, whose money enabled the almost penniless exile to flood the country with his new edition. [18] The merchant Packington is said to have consoled the bishop, in his chagrin and anger, by advising him to buy up the printing presses if he would make sure of stopping the work. Thus does God make even the wrath of man to praise him.

In 1581 Tyndale removed to Antwerp, as that great commercial center offered better facilities for the printing and introduction into England of the Word of God. We like to think of the zealous reformer as threading the narrow and winding streets of the quaint old Flemish city, visiting its guild-houses and exchange, pausing in the cathedral square to gaze at the exquisite tracery of the fretted stone spire, or to listen to the wondrous music of its sweet, wild chimes; or, as he paced through its solemn aisles, to feel his soul grow sad within him as he beheld the rank superstition and almost idolatry of the people.

After the fall of Wolsey, Henry VIII. Invited Tyndale to return to England. But unwilling to exchange the liberties secured to him by the privileges of the free city of Antwerp, for the uncertain protection of a king's favor, he declined. He felt keenly the trials which he enumerates -- "His poverty, his exile out of his natural country, his bitter absence from his friends, his hunger, his thirst and cold; the great danger wherewith he was everywhere compassed, the innumerable hard and sharp fightings which he endured."

Yet he was willing to endure any suffering, any bonds of imprisonment, nay, even death itself, so that the Word of God were not bound. "I assure you," he solemnly declared, "if it would stand with the king's most gracious pleasure to grant only a bare text of the Scripture to be put forth among his people, be it the translation of what person soever shall please his Majesty, I shall immediately make promise never to write more, nor abide two days in these parts after the same, but immediately to repair unto his realm, and there most humbly submit myself at the feet of his Royal Majesty, offering my body to suffer what pains or tortures, yea, what death his Grace will, so that this be obtained."

The following year his faithful friend and colaborer, John Fryth, who was his own son in the Gospel, ventured over to England. He was speedily entangled in a disputation on the sacraments, and was condemned to be burned. He refused to escape when an opportunity was given him by sympathizing friends, lest he should "run from his God and from the testimony of his Holy Word -- worthy then of a thousand hells." While in Newgate prison, in a dismal dungeon, laden with bolts and fetters, and his neck made fast to a post with a collar of iron, he spent his last days writing, by the light of a candle, which was necessary even at midday, his dying testimony to the truth. So, "with a cheerful and merry countenance, he went to his death, spending his time with godly and pleasant communications."

As he was bound to the stake in that Smithfield market, which is one of the most sacred places on English soil, Dr. Cook, a London priest, "admonished the people that they should in nowise pray for him -no more than they would do for a dog." At these words, Fryth, smiling amid the pangs of martyrdom, desired the Lord to forgive them, and passed from the curse and condemnation of men to the joy and benediction of Christ.

Tyndale wrote to his friend in prison words of comfort and exhortation: "Be of good courage, and comfort your soul with the hope of your high reward, and follow the example of all your other dear brethren which chose to suffer in hope of a better resurrection." He was soon himself to follow the same glorious path to immortality. His last work was the complete revision of his former translation of the whole Scriptures, leaving it as the most precious legacy ever given to the English-speaking race. [19]

At length the machinations of his enemies triumphed. He lodged at the house of Thomas Poyntz, a relative of his former friend, Lady Walsh. Here he was safe; but through the wiles of an English priest he was induced to leave his only shelter. He was immediately seized by Flemish officers and hurried to the neighboring castle of Vilvorde, the "Bastile of the Low Countries." He experienced in all its bitterness "the law's delay." For eighteen weary months the process of his trial lingered. His controversial works had to be translated into Latin, that the learned Doctors of Louvain might find therein ground for his condemnation.

Meanwhile the destined martyr languished in his noisome dungeon. In a letter still extant he complains of "its cold and damp, of the tedious winter nights which he had to spend alone in the dark, and he entreats his keeper to send him warmer clothing, to allow him the use of a candle, and, above all, to grant him the use of his Hebrew Bible and dictionary, that he might prosecute the work for which he felt that but few days remained." He translated a great part of the Old Testament, which was afterwards incorporated in his edition of the Bible. So exemplary was his prison life, that it is recorded that he converted his keeper, his keeper's daughter, and others of his household.

On the 6th of October, 1536, being then in the fifty-second year of his age, Tyndale was led forth from his dungeon to his death. Having been bound to the stake, he cried aloud, as the last utterance of his steadfast and loyal patriotism and zeal for the Word of God, "O Lord, open the King of England's eyes!" He was then strangled, and his body burned to ashes. No monument marks the spot; but his perpetual memorial – the grandest that man ever had – is the first printed Bible in the English tongue.

Tyndale's dying prayer was soon answered in the sense of the king's sanctioning the circulation of the Word of God. The very year of his martyrdom, the first Bible ever printed on English ground, the translation of Miles Coverdale, was published by the king's special license. The year following, Tyndale's own translation, the basis of every subsequent version, was published by royal authority and placed in the parish churches throughout the realm, so that all who would might read. Never again could the Word of God be bound or sealed from the reading of the English people.

Tyndale's portrait, as preserved for us at Magdalen College, reveals a grave-faced man with broad high brow, seamed with thought, clear calm eyes, as of one who walked in the vision of spiritual realities, and a grey and pointed beard. He wears a scholastic robe, an SS. Collar, and a black skull cap. He describes himself as "ill-favored in this world, and without grace in the sight of men, speechless and rude, dull and slow-witted, weary in body, but not faint in soul." Yet to him was vouchsafed to do a grander work for England and the English-speaking race than any man who ever lived. On the bank of the river of the ten thousand masts, a grateful people have placed an effigy of this benefactor of mankind.

Of his marvelous translation Mr. Froude thus speaks: "The peculiar genius which breathes through it, the mingled tenderness and majesty, the Saxon simplicity, the preternatural grandeur – unequaled, unapproached in the attempted improvements of modern scholars – all bear the impress of the mind of one man – William Tyndale. Lying, while engaged in that great office, under the shadow of death, the sword above his head and ready at any moment to fall, he worked under circumstances alone perhaps truly worthy of the task which was laid upon him -his spirit, as it were divorced from the world, moved in a purer element than common air."

09 – JOHN KNOX

Like John the Baptist from the wilderness,
He comes in rugged strength to courts of kings,
Approaches in the name of God and flings
The gage of battle down with hardiesse
Of loftiest courage, and doth truth confess
Amid a base and sordid age that rings.
With conflict 'gainst the saints of God, and brings
The wrath of Heaven down in stern redress.
Not clothed in raiment soft is he; a stern
Iconoclast, he smites the idols down
In Rimmon's lofty temple, and doth turn
To scorn of Baal's power the pride and crown;
Therefore his country garlands now his urn
With wreath immortal of unstained renown.

-- Withrow

On the 24th of November, 1572, John Knox died. That period of intellectual and religious quickening which gave birth to Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, Farel, Beza, and Jansen, produced

no nobler soul than that of the Father of the Scottish Reformation. Froude, indeed, declares that he Was the greatest man of his age. His countrymen, especially, should reverence his memory. He stood between Scotland and utter anarchy. He was the bulwark of national liberty against civil and religious despotism.

We will attempt to trace in a few pages the chief incidents of his busy life, and to note his influence on his age and on the destiny of Scotland. He was born in 1505, of a good family, at Haddington, in East Lothian. With the afterward distinguished George Buchanan, he was trained in Latin, Greek, and scholastic philosophy, at the University of St. Andrew's. *Disgusted with the barren trifling of the schoolmen*, he turned with enthusiasm to the study of the primitive Fathers, especially to the writings of St. Jerome and St. Augustine. Here he found a system of religious truths very different from that taught in the cloisters of St. Andrew's. The result was a gradual alienation from the doctrines of Rome leading to a divorce from her communion and a repudiation of her authority.

The ferment of the Reformation was already leavening Scottish society. The vigorous verse of Sir David Lyndsay was lashing the vices of the clergy, and the bright wit of Buchanan was satirizing that cowed legion of dullness, the monks. Patrick Hamilton had the honor of being, in 1528, the proto-martyr of the Scottish Reformation. He was soon followed by the intrepid George Wishart. The mantle of the latter, as he ascended in his chariot of flame, seems to have fallen upon Knox. He had already renounced his clerical orders – for he had been ordained priest-and boldly espoused the persecuted doctrines. He soon encountered the rage of the infamous Archbishop Beaton, who employed assassins to destroy him.

No tittle of evidence connects the name of Knox with the subsequent murder of the Archbishop; but he has been censured for taking refuge for his life with the Protestant insurgents in the castle of St. Andrew's – a censure which he must share with the apostolic John Rough, and with the high-minded Sir David Lyndsay. Invited to become preacher to the forces in the castle, he, after some hesitation, consented. He opened his commission in the presence of the members of the university, the sub-prior of the abbey, and many canons and friars, by challenging the entire Papal system as false and anti-Christian. The Romanist party unwisely took up the challenge of battle, only to be disastrously defeated in public discussion. This was Knox's initiation into his life-long conflict with the Church of Rome.

The garrison of St. Andrew's, disappointed of English support, and attacked by French land and sea forces, surrendered on terms of honorable capitulation. But the treaty of capitulation was violated. The leading lay insurgents were thrust into French dungeons, and Knox and his fellow-confessors were chained like common felons to the benches of the galleys on the Loire. Upon Knox, as the arch-heretic, were heaped the greatest indignities. The coarse felon's fare, exposure to the wintry elements, the unwonted toil of tugging at a heavy oar, undermined his health, but could not break his intrepid spirit. Although a single act of conformity to Roman ritual would have broken their chains, yet neither he nor any of his companions in captivity would bow in the temple of Rimmon. When mass was celebrated on the galleys, they resolutely covered their heads in protest against what they considered the idolatrous homage of a "broaden god."

One day (it is Knox who tells the story) an image of the Virgin was presented to a Scotch prisoner-probably himself – to kiss. He refused; when the officer thrust it into his hands, and pressed it to his lips. Watching his opportunity, the prisoner threw it far into the river, saying:

"Lat our Ladie now save herself; sche is lycht enoughe, lat hir leirne to swime."

It was useless attempting to convert such obstinate heretics; so they were let alone thereafter.

The following year, 1548, the galleys hovered on the coast of Scotland to intercept English cruisers; and upon the Scottish prisoners was enforced the odious task of serving against their country and the

cause of the Reformation. From long and rigorous confinement and excessive labor, Knox fell ill; but as he beheld from the sea the familiar spires of St. Andrew's, where he had first preached the Gospel, he exclaimed, in the full assurance of faith, that he should not die, but live to declare again God's glory in the same place – a prediction which was strikingly fulfilled.

Although lying in irons, sore troubled by bodily infirmities, in a galley named Nostre Dame, Knox found opportunity to send to his "best beloved brethren of the congregation of St. Andrew's, and to all professors of Christ's true evangel," godly counsels and encouragements concerning their religious duties in the perils of the times. After well-nigh two years' captivity in the noisome galleys, during which time the seeds of many of his subsequent infirmities were planted, Knox was set at liberty.

The Reformation was rapidly spreading in England under the patronage of Edward VI. And the zeal of Bishop Cranmer; and Knox accepted from the Privy Council the appointment of chaplain in ordinary to his Majesty. As court preacher, the boldness and freedom of his sermons produced an unusual sensation among the sycophants and parasites whose vices he denounced. His zeal and political, as well as religious, influence, drew upon him the animosity of the Roman Catholic lords, and he was cited before the council to answer charges preferred against him, but was honorably acquitted.

He was offered a benefice in the city of London, that of Allhallows, and even the miter of Rochester, but declined both dignities with their emoluments on account of his anti-prelatical principles. He rejoiced in the progress of the Reformation in England, and in the suppression of the idolatries and superstitions of the Mass; but he regretted the temporizing policy that retained in the ritual and hierarchical institutions the shreds and vestiges of Popery.

After the accession of Mary, Knox continued to preach, though with daily increasing peril, the doctrines of the Reformation. At length, his papers being seized, his servant arrested, and himself pursued by the persecuting zeal of the court party, he withdrew, by the persuasion of his friends, beyond the sea. An exile from his native land and from his family – for in the meantime he had married – he longed to return to the religious warfare from which he seemed to have fled. "I am ready to suffer more than either poverty or exile," he writes, "for the profession of that religion of which God has made me a simple soldier and witness-bearer among men; but my prayer is that I may be restored to the battle again."

At Geneva, whither he repaired, he made the acquaintance of Calvin, and other great lights of the Reformation, and enjoyed the society of many distinguished refugees from the Marian persecution. Here he devoted himself to study, especially in Oriental learning, then almost unknown among his countrymen. His enemies say that he also embraced the anti-monarchical principles of the Swiss Republic.

Invited by the Protestant refugees of Frankfort to become their pastor, he consented to do so; but soon became involved in a controversy with the prelatical faction of the English exiles, who anticipated on the continent the prolonged conflict between conformists and non-conformists, which subsequently convulsed the mother country.

The Reformation seemed to have been crushed out in Scotland with the capture of the castle of St. Andrew's, the last stronghold of the Protestant party, and with the banishment of the Protestant clergy which followed. But Knox, yearning for the conversion of his country to the "true evangel," resolved, though at the peril of his life, to visit the persecuted remnant lurking in obscure wynds of the city or in remote country houses, and to try to fan to a flame the smoldering embers of the Reformation, apparently well-nigh extinct.

He was received with joy by brethren found faithful even in tribulation. "I praisit God," he writes, "perceaving that in the midst of Sodome, God had mo Lottis than one, and mo faithful dochteris than

two. Depart I cannot Unto sic tyme as God quenche the thirst a litill of our brethrene, night and day sobbing, gronyng for the breid of lyre.”

He journeyed through the hill country – the refuge of the Lollards of Scotland – preaching and teaching day and night, kindling the zeal of the disheartened, and binding the scattered faithful in a bond of mutual helpfulness and common fidelity to Christ and his Gospel – the first of those solemn Leagues and Covenants by which Scottish Protestantism was confederated against both popery and prelacy. Like the sound of a clarion, his voice stirred the hearts of the people. “The trumpet blew the auld sound,” he exclaims, “till the houssis culd not conteane the voce of it.

Smoothing his rugged style to not uncourtly phrase, he wrote a letter of self-justification to the Queen Regent: “I am traduceit as an heretick, accusit as a false teacher and seducer of the pepill, besydis uther opprobries, whilk may easilie kindill the wrath of majestratis, whair innocencie is not knawin.” He appeals to the justice of Heaven, and refutes the false accusations against him.

The remonstrance produced little effect. The first principles of religious toleration were unknown in high places. Non-conformity to the religion of the sovereign was accounted rebellion against her person. “Please you, my Lord, to read a pasquil?” the Regent contemptuously remarked, handing the document to the Archbishop of Glasgow, the bitter enemy of the Reformer.

Cited before an ecclesiastical court at Edinburgh, Knox repaired thither; but, daunted by his boldness, his accusers abandoned their charge. He returned to Geneva to become, at the request of the congregation, pastor of the church in that place. But no sooner had he left the kingdom than the Roman Catholic clergy regained their courage. In solemn consistory they adjudged his body to the flames and his soul to damnation, and in impotent rage caused his effigy to be burned at the market-cross, amid the jeers of a ribald mob.

While at Geneva, Knox’s busy pen was engaged in fighting the battles of the reformed faith. He lent also important assistance in translating that version of the Scriptures known as the Geneva Bible, one of the most powerful agents of the Scottish Reformation. The cruel burning of the venerable Walter Milne by the Archbishop of St. Andrew’s, for the alleged crime of heresy, was the spark which exploded the mine of popular indignation against the priest party in Scotland.

Knox felt that his place was in the thick of the impending conflict. Denied passage through England by the antipathy of Elizabeth, after leaving Geneva forever, he sailed directly from Dieppe to Leith. The day after his arrival he writes from Edinburgh: “I am come, I praise my God, even into the brunt of the battle.” The Queen Regent resolved to crush the Reformation, and declared that the Protestant clergy “should all be banished from Scotland, though they preached as truly as ever St. Paul did.”

On the outbreak at Perth, the Regent attempted to dragoon the Protestants into conformity by French cuirassiers. The Lords of the Congregation took arms in defense of Christ’s Kirk and Gospel. The summons sped like the fiery cross over the hills of Scotland. Knox preached everywhere, like John the Baptist in the wilderness, the evangel of grace.

The iconoclastic zeal of the new converts led, in many places, to the destruction of images and the sacking of monasteries and churches – events which have been a grievance with sentimental antiquarians to this day. But the evils with which the Reformers were contending were too imminent and too deadly to admit of very great sympathy for the carved and painted symbols of idolatry. Better, thought they, that the stone saints should be hurled from their pedestals than that living men should be burned at the stake; and Knox is actually accused of the worldly wisdom implied in the remark, “Pull down their nests, and the rooks will fly away.” We are not sure but that those stern iconoclasts would have regarded the sparing of these strongholds of superstition as analogous to the sin of Israel in sparing the fenced cities of the Philistines, “We do nothing,” says Knox, “but go about Jericho, blowing

with trumpets, as God giveth strength, hoping victory by his power alone.”

The Protestant Lords, in solemn assembly at Edinburgh, deposed the Regent and appointed a Council of Government, This decision Knox approved and defended. Thus was struck the first heavy blow at the feudal tenure of the crown in Europe, and Knox became one of the earliest expounders of the great principles of constitutional government and limited monarchy, a hundred years before these principles triumphed in the sister kingdom.

Disaster assailed the Congregation. Their armies were defeated; their councils were frustrated. But in the darkest hour the fiery eloquence of Knox rekindled their flagging courage. An English army entered Scotland. The French troops were driven from the country. The religious fabric, supported by foreign bayonets, fell in ruins to the ground, and the Reformation was established by law.

The Protestant Council, with the aid of Knox, proceeded to the organization of society. Liberal provision was made for public instruction. In every parish was planted a school; and to Knox is it largely owing that for three centuries Scotland has been the best educated country in Europe.

At this juncture arrived Mary Stuart, to assume the reins of government. Of all who came within the reach of her influence, John Knox alone remained proof against the spell of her fascinations. The Mass to which she adhered was more dreaded by him, he said, than ten thousand armed men. And soon the Protestant party had cause to distrust the fair false queen, who, with light words on her lip and bright smiles in her eye, had seen head after head of the Huguenot nobles fall in the Place de la Greve, and who subsequently put her perjured hand to the bloody covenant of the Catholic League.

Knox was now installed in the old historic church of St. Giles, Edinburgh, where, to listening thousands, he thundered with an eloquence like his who “shook the Parthenon and fulminated over Greece.” “His single voice puts more life in us,” exclaims a hearer, “than six hundred trumpets pealing in our ears.” He spared not the vices of the court, and, with a spirit as dauntless as that of Ambrose, rebuking the Emperor Theodosius, condemned the conduct of the queen. She sent for him in anger.

“Is he not afraid?” whispered the courtiers. “Why should the plesing face of a gentilwoman affray me?” retorted Knox; “I have luiked in the faces of mony angry men, and yet have not been affrayed above measure.”

“My subjects, then,” said the queen, after a protracted interview, “are to obey you and not me?”

“Nay,” he replied, “let prince and subject both obey God.”

“I will defend the Kirk of Rome,” she continued; “for that, I think, is the Kirk of God.”

“Your will, madam,” answered Knox, “is no reason; neither does your thought make the Roman harlot the spouse of Jesus Christ.”

The subtle queen next tried the effect of flattery on the stern reformer. She addressed him with an air of condescension and confidence as “enchanting as if she had put a ring on his finger.” But the keen-eyed man could not be thus hooded like a hawk on a lady’s wrist.

The Protestant Lords were beguiled, by the cunning wiles of the crowned siren, of the rights won by their good swords. Knox, with seeming prescience of the future, protested against their weakness, and solemnly renounced the friendship of the Earl of Murray as a traitor to the true evangel. But the submission of the haughty barons of Scotland availed nothing with the queen while one frail old man bowed not to her proud will. He was summoned before her.

Never prince was so handled,” she exclaimed; “but I vow to God I will be revenged;” and she burst into passionate weeping.

Waiting till she became calm, Knox defended his public utterances. “He must obey God rather than

man,” he said. “He was not his own master, but his who commanded him to speak plainly, and to flatter no flesh on the face of the earth.”

The queen burst again into tears. The stern old man seemed to relent. “He took no delight in the distress of any creature,” he said, “and scarce could bear his own boys’ weeping when he chastened them for their faults; but,” he added, “rather than hurt his conscience, or betray his country, he must abye even the tears of a queen.”

Sentimental readers wax indignant at the iron-hearted bigot who could endure unmoved the weeping of a woman, young and lovely, and a queen. But possibly the vision of the headless trunks of the martyrs of Amboise steeled his nature against the wiles of the beautiful siren, who beheld unmoved that sight of horror; and a thought of their weeping wives and babes may have nerved his soul to stand between his country and such bloody scenes.

Knox at length was cited before Queen Mary on the accusation of treason. As she took her seat, she burst into laughter. “That man,” she exclaimed, “had made her weep, and shed never a tear himself. She would now see if she could make him weep.” But Knox was not made of such “penetrable stuff” as to be moved by fear.

The impracticable man was a thorn in the side of both queen and courtiers. He could neither be overawed by authority, nor bribed by personal interest, nor cajoled by flattery. The ill-starred Darnley marriage was consummated. Knox publicly protested against it, although he kept clear of Murray’s insurrection against the queen. The Protestant Lords being driven into exile in consequence of the disastrous failure of their revolt, the Catholic faction rapidly gained the ascendant. But the bloody scene of Rizzio’s murder, and the consequent political convulsions, frustrated their hopes of supremacy.

Knox, though innocent of all complicity with that foul deed, by which some of Scotland’s noblest names were stained, was yet compelled to retire from Edinburgh to Kyle, and subsequently visited the English court. He was absent from the realm when the dark tragedy of Kirk-a-Field was enacted, rendered still more horrible by the infamous marriage of the queen with her husband’s murderer. Craig, the colleague of Knox at St. Giles, commanded to publish the banns of these fatal nuptials – vile as those of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus – publicly took Heaven and earth to witness that he abhorred and detested the marriage as scandalous and hateful in the eyes of God and men.

The heart of the nation was stirred to its depths. The Protestants, almost to a man, believed Mary guilty of the death of Darnley. Broad sides of verse invoked a bloody vengeance on the perfidious wife and queen, as in the following example:

“Her dolesome death be worse than Jezebel,
Whom through a window surely men did throw;
Whose blood did lap the cruel hounds’ fell,
And doggis could her wicked bairns gnaw.”

“Bothwell was no his lane in his sin,” said the people, “and he suldna be his lane in the punishment.” With this Rhadamanthine judgment the stern spirit of Knox and of most of the ministers concurred. The nation rose in its majesty, and deposed the queen who had brought a stain upon the Scottish name

Romance and poetry, and even the pages of sober history, have cast a glamour around the fair and fascinating woman, who, by her witcheries, beguiled all who came within her influence – all save our stern Reformer. Her beauty and her misfortunes, her long imprisonment and the tragic pathos of her death, have softened the rigor of historical judgment concerning her life. But the relentless literary iconoclasm of Froude has broken the idol of romance, and exposed her faults and vices, which were neither few nor light.

Knox’s profound conviction of Mary Stuart’s guilt must be his justification for what has been regarded

as his harsh and almost vindictive treatment of his fallen sovereign. He felt that her crimes might not be condoned without becoming a partaker in her iniquity. They were not merely political offenses, but sins against high Heaven, which called aloud for retribution. *"The queen had no more right," he said, "to commit murder and adultery than the poorest peasant."* And to the criminal lenience of the nation he attributed the civil war, which reddened mountain gorse and moorland, heather, and made many a rippling burn run ruddy to the sea with stains of Scotland's noblest blood.

In the confusion and anarchy which followed Murray's murder, was fulfilled the saying, "Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is a child!" The malice of Knox's enemies – and no man ever had more virulent ones – took advantage of the death of his powerful protector to hound down the aged and enfeebled minister of God. His life even was threatened by the Marian forces in possession of the city, and an arquebuse was fired into his room. The ball failed to take effect only in consequence of a change of his accustomed seat.

The spiteful tribe of slander-mongers also distilled their venom, and strove to poison the public mind against him. His friends counseled his withdrawal from the reach of the turbulent Edinburgh mob. But the sturdy veteran refused, till they told him that they would defend him with their lives, but that if blood was shed the blame would be his. Upon this, "sore against his will," he retreated to St. Andrew's, the scene of his earliest labors and of some of his greatest triumphs.

Yet he was once more to be restored to his beloved flock at St. Giles. The queen's party being driven from the city, Knox returned thither to die. Yet once more, like a lamp which a blast of wind: fans into intenser flame only to flicker sooner to extinction, so the fiery soul was again to blaze forth in righteous indignation, and the clarion voice was again to fill the hollow arches of St. Giles before it became silent forever.

The blood-curdling story of St. Bartholomew's dread massacre might well wake the dead or cause the stones to cry out. As post after post brought tidings of fresh atrocities to the tingling ears of the Scottish Protestants, a thrill of horror convulsed the heart of the nation. It seemed as if the mystical angel of the Apocalypse poured his vial of wrath upon the earth, and it became as blood. The direst crime since the crucifixion, at which the sun was darkened and the earth trembled, cried to Heaven for vengeance.

In the gay French capital, as the midnight tocsin rang its knell of doom, human hyenas raged from house to house, from street to street, howling, "Kill! Kill!" Maids and matrons, aged men and little children, were offered in bloody holocaust to the Papal Moloch. Infants were snatched: from their mother's arms and tossed on spear points through the streets; and high-born ladies were dragged in death by hooks through the gutters reeking with gore. The noblest head in France, the brave Coligny's, was borne by a ruffian on a pike, its hoary hair bedabbled with blood. The craven king, from his palace windows, glutted his cruel eyes with the murder of his people. For a week the carnival of slaughter continued. In the capital and the provinces seventy thousand persons perished.

But throughout Protestant Christendom a thrill of horror curdled the blood about men's hearts. They looked at their wives and babes, then clasped them closer to their hearts and swore eternal enmity to Rome. For once the cold language of diplomacy caught fire and glowed with the white heat of indignation. At London, Elizabeth, robed in deepest mourning, and in a chamber draped with black, received the French ambassador, and sternly rebuked this outrage on humanity. Her minister at Paris, in the very focus of guilt and danger, fearlessly denounced the crime.

In Edinburgh, John Knox was borne to the great kirk and lifted up into the pulpit, "with a face wan and weary as of one risen from the dead." Over the upturned sea of faces – the women's pale with tearful passion, the men's knit as in a Gorgon frown-gleamed his kindling eyes. The weak voice quavered with emotion, now melting their souls with sympathy, now firing their indignation at the deed of blood. Gathering up his expiring energies, like a prophet of the Lord he hurled forth words of doom, and

pronounced God's wrath against the traitor king. He declared that his name should be a curse and a hissing to the end of time, and that none of his seed should ever sit upon his throne.

But Huguenoterie was not buried in the gory grave dug on St. Bartholomew. From the martyrs' blood, more prolific than the fabled dragon's teeth, new hosts of Christian heroes sprang, contending for the martyr's starry and unwithering crown. Like the rosemary and thyme, which the more they are bruised give out the richer perfume, Protestantism in France breathed forth those odors of sanctity which shall never lose their fragrance till the end of time.

Knox's work was well-nigh done. A few days after the scene above described, he tottered home from the pulpit which he should occupy no more, followed by a sympathetic multitude of his "bairns," as he affectionately called his children in the Gospel, till he entered his house, which he never left again alive. With a prescience of his near approaching end, he calmly set his house in order, paying his servants and settling his worldly affairs. He gave also his dying charge and last farewell to the elders and deacons of his church, and to his fellow-ministers in the Gospel.

The Earl of Morton he solemnly charged to maintain the true evangel, the cause of Christ and his kirk, the welfare of his sovereign and of the realm. "If you shall do so," he said, "God will bless and honor you; but if you do it not," he continued in solemn menace, "God shall spoil you of these benefits, and your end shall be ignominy and shame."

Though his right hand had forgot its cunning, and his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, yet did he not forget Jerusalem, but remembered her above his chief joy. His continual prayer was, "Be merciful, O Lord, to thy Church, which thou hast redeemed. Give peace to this afflicted commonwealth. Raise up faithful pastors, who will take the charge of thy Church."

The reading of the Scriptures and of "Calvin's Sermons" cheered almost every hour of his sickness. The day before his death, Sunday, November 23rd, he was in holy ecstasy. "If any be present, let them come and see the work of the Lord," he exclaimed; and as the by-standers approached his bed, the veteran confessor, having fought the fight and kept the faith, exulted, like another Paul, in his approaching deliverance, and beheld in holy vision the triumph of the true Church, "the spouse of Christ, despised of the world, but precious in the sight of God." "I have been in heaven," he continued, "and have possession. I have tasted of the heavenly joys, where presently I am."

The last day of his life, being in physical anguish, a friend expressed sympathy for his suffering. "It is no painful pain," he said, "but such as shall, I trust, put an end to the battle." He was willing to be thus for years, he said, if God so pleased, and if he continued to shine upon his soul through Jesus Christ.

Exulting in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, he requested his wife to read the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians. "O, what sweet and salutary consolation," he exclaimed, "the Lord hath afforded me from that chapter!"

"Read where I first cast my anchor," he added, a little later; when she repeated Christ's pleading, pathetic intercession for his disciples in John 17. -- a passage which, with Isaiah 53., and a chapter from the Ephesians, he had read to him every day.

"Now, for the last time," said the dying saint, "I commend my body, spirit, soul, into thy hands, O Lord... Within a short time I shall exchange this mortal and miserable life for a blessed immortality through Jesus Christ... Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

After evening worship, said a friend, "Sir, heard ye the prayers?" "Would to God," he replied, "that you and all men had heard them as I have heard them! I praise God for that heavenly sound."

After an interval of quiet, he exclaimed, "Now it is come"! And ere midnight tolled from the Tollbooth tower, the weary wheels of life stood still, and, without a struggle, he expired. The eloquent tongue was

now silent forever. The noble heart throbbed no more. The face that never blanched before man, became pale at the icy touch of Death. His long toil and travail were ended. The Christian athlete laid his arms forever down, and entered into his eternal rest.

“After life’s fitful fever, he sleeps well.
... He hates him,
That would upon the rack of this rough world
Stretch him out longer.

In two days his body was laid beside the walls of St. Giles, the scene of his apostolic ministrations. The Regent, the principal nobility, the neighboring ministers, and a great concourse of people paid their last homage, not without sighs and tears, to one of Scotland’s noblest sons. As he was laid in the grave, the Earl of Morton pronounced his eulogy in the memorable words, “Here lies he who never feared the face of man.”

Rarely did so strong a soul tabernacle in so frail a body. Knox was of low stature, slight frame, and, as age, care and sickness did their work, of worn and rugged features, which were, however, kindled by piercing dark eyes. His grey hair and long grey beard gave him a venerable and dignified mien.

Knox’s chief power was in the pulpit. There he reigned without a rival. Indeed, we must go back to the golden-mouthed preacher of Antioch and Constantinople before we can find his equal in eloquence and in influence on contemporary political events.

The afterward celebrated James Melville thus describes Knox’s preaching at St. Andrew’s: “In the opening up of his text, he was moderate the space of an half-houre; but ere he had done with his sermone, he was sa active and vigorous that he was lyk to ding the pulpit in blads, and flie out of it.”

His words rang like anvil-strokes where swords are forged for battle. He was not a man clothed with soft raiment, and speaking smooth things, but a stern prophet of the truth, rebuking sin when flaunting in velvet as well as when cowering in rags. He was ungraced with that fine complacency which speaks only in flowery phrase and courtly compliment in the presence of the great. He felt that he stood ever in his presence before whom all earthly distinctions vanish, and the meanest and the mightiest are alike the objects of his love and the subjects of his law. He walked “as ever in his great taskmaster’s eye.”

Yet his nature was not naturally stern. “I know,” he said, as he lay upon his death-bed, “that many have frequently and loudly complained, and do yet complain of my too great severity. But God knows that my mind was always void of hatred to the persons of those against whom I thundered the severest judgments.”

In refutation of the charge of seditious railing against his sovereign, he said that he had not railed against her, unless Isaiah, Jeremiah and other inspired writers were also railers. He had learned plainly and boldly to call wickedness by its own terms. “I let them understand,” he proudly said, “that I am not a man of the law that has my tongue to sell for silver or favors of the world.”

To the last, Knox was a devoted student of Holy Scripture. Every month the Book of Psalms was read in course; and the sayings of our Lord and teachings of St. Paul were ever on his lips and in his heart.

Knox was twice married, first to Miss Bowes, of Berwick, a lady of good family, who for seven years made him a faithful help-meet during his frequent exiles and journeyings. After her death he remained a widower for upwards of three years, when he married Margaret Stewart, a daughter of Lord Ochiltree.

Knox was a voluminous writer, as well as an eloquent preacher, and a man active in public affairs. His literary style is marked by the characteristics of the age. It is somewhat involved, sometimes harsh, always strong, and often picturesque and animated, although devoid of ornament, for he utterly despised the graces of rhetoric.

No man was ever more bitterly maligned and traduced during his life, or persecuted in the grave with posthumous malice. Even his very bones have been flung out of their resting-place, and no man knoweth where they are laid. Political partisanship and religious rancor have combined in aspersing his character, his motives and his conduct. "A romantic sympathy with the Stuarts," says Froude, "and a shallow liberalism, which calls itself historical philosophy, has painted over the true Knox with the figure of a maniac."

Nor even after a controversy of three centuries above his slumbering dust, has he been relieved of the odium which was heaped upon his memory. Like his distinguished contemporary, Lord Bacon, who, overwhelmed with obloquy and reproach, committed his reputation to after ages and to foreign lands, so the maligned and persecuted Father of the Scottish Reformation, conscious of the approval of his Maker, appealed from the passions and prejudices of his enemies to the judgment of posterity. "What I have been to my country," he declares, "albeit this unthankful age will not know, yet the ages to come will be compelled to bear witness to the truth. For, to me," he plaintively continues, "it seems a thing most unreasonable that in my decrepit age I shall be compelled to fight against shadows and houlets, that dare not abide the light."

"The full measure of Knox's greatness," says the philosophic Froude, "no man could then estimate. It is, as we look back over that stormy time, and weigh the actors in it one against the other, that he stands out in his full proportions. No grander figure can be found in the entire history of the Reformation in this island than that of Knox. He was no narrow fanatic, who could see truth and goodness nowhere but in his own formula. He was a large, noble, generous man, with a shrewd perception of actual fact, who found himself face to face with *a system of hideous iniquity*... His was the voice which taught the peasant of the Lothians that he was a free man, the equal in the sight of God with the proudest peer or prelate that had trampled on his forefathers. He was the one antagonist whom Mary Stuart could not soften nor Maitland deceive. He it was that raised the poor commons of his country into a stern and rugged people, who might be hard, narrow, superstitious and fanatical, but who, nevertheless, were men whom neither king, noble, nor priest could force again to submit to tyranny. The spirit which Knox created saved Scotland."

Today he belongs not to Scotland, but to the world. While men love virtue and revere piety and admire heroism, so long will the memory of Knox be a legacy of richest blessing and an inspiration to highest courage and to noblest effort for the glory of God and for the welfare of man

In the High Street, Edinburgh, still stands Knox's house, a quaint old place, with a steep outer stair. It is carefully maintained as a museum of relics of the great reformer – as nearly as possible in its original condition. It was with feelings of profound reverence that I stood in the room in which Knox died, and in the little study – very small and narrow, only about four feet by seven in which he wrote the "History of the Scottish Reformation." I sat in his chair at his desk, and I stood at the window from which he used to preach to the multitude in the High Street – now a squalid and disreputable spot. The motto on the house front reads:

"Love God above all and ye neighbor as ye self."

A garrulous Scotch wife, with a charming accent, showed a number of interesting relics, including his portrait and that of the fair, false queen, whose guilty conscience he probed to the quick, and those of the beautiful Four Maries of her court.

The old St. Giles Church, which so often echoed with the eloquence of Scotland's greatest son, is one of the most interesting of historic structures. Within its walls are buried the Regent Murray and the great Earl of Montrose; and without, beneath the stone pavement of the highway, once part of the churchyard, lies the body of John Knox. A metal plate, with the letters "I. K., 1572," conjecturally marks his grave – the exact position is unknown – and all day long the carts and carriages rattle over

the bones of the great Scottish Reformer.

The churchyard of old Greyfriars, not far distant, is an epitome of Scottish history. On the broad flat stone, now removed, the Solemn League and Covenant was signed, 1638, and on Martyrs' Monument one reads, "From May 27th, 1661, that the most noble Marquis of Argyll were beheaded, until February 18th, 1668, there were executed in Edinburgh about one hundred noblemen, gentlemen, ministers and others, the most of whom lie here." Nourished by such costly libations, the tree of liberty took root and flourished strong and fair.

Around the blue banner of the Scottish Covenant gather memories as heroic as ever thrilled the heart of man. As we read to day its story, two hundred years after the last covenanting martyr went to God, our souls are touched to tenderness and tears. Like a waft of mountain air, fragrant with the bloom of the gorse and heather, comes the inspiration of the noble lives and nobler deaths of those brave confessors of the faith and witnesses for God. No single name looms up so conspicuously as that of Knox at an early period; but the heroes of the Covenant were a grand army of brave men, battling and dying for the truth.

The "old leaven" of Popery was still working in the land when James VI., paltering with the popish lords, was reminded by the bold Andrew Melville that "there were two kings in the realm, one King James and the other King Jesus, whose subject King James was."

On the 1st of March, 1638, after a sermon in the old Greyfriars' church, a great parchment was spread upon a broad, flat tombstone in the churchyard, and was subscribed by such numbers that space failed, so that many could affix only their initials; and many of the signatures were written in blood. Never did nation before make more solemn and awful engagement to God than this. It was received as a sacred oath, and was defended with the heart's blood of Scotland's bravest sons. The covenanting host rallied round the blue and crimson flag, then first flung to the winds, emblazoned with the words, "For Christ's Crown and Covenant."

The Earl of Montrose, originally a Covenanter, changed sides and raised the white flag for the king. He blazed like a meteor through the Highlands, winning brilliant victories, carrying terror and bloodshed into many a peaceful vale. He was at length defeated and exiled; but returning in arms, was apprehended, beheaded and quartered, with the utmost indignities of that stern age, at Edinburgh.

After the Restoration the covenants were torn by the hands of the common hangman, and burned with drunken mockery. Rather than submit to the "black prelacy," four hundred ministers resigned their livings and were driven out in the depth of winter upon the snowy wolds. Their places were filled by a mob of illiterate hirelings, so that it was said, "the cows were in jeopardy because the herd boys were all made parsons." Men and women were driven at the point of the sabre and under the penalty of a fine to a service which they abhorred; and to give "meat, drink, house, harbor or succor" to an ejected minister was a crime.

The Covenanting Church, driven from its altars; betook itself to the wilderness – to lonely straths and distant vales, where the scream of the eagle and the thunder of the cataract blended with the singing of the psalm and the utterance of the prayer, while armed sentinels kept watch on the neighboring hills. At the rippling burn infants were baptized, and at those mountain altars youthful hearts plighted their marriage vows. "It is something," says Gilfillan, "to think of the best of a nation worshipping God for years together in the open air, the Druids of the Christian faith."

Claverhouse swept through the country like a destroying angel. Twelve hundred prisoners were dragged to Edinburgh and huddled together for four long months in Greyfriar's churchyard, where the Covenant had been signed, with no covering but the sky, no couch but the cold earth. The Covenanters, banned like wild beasts, withdrew with their Bibles and their swords to dark glens, wild heaths, rugged

mountains, and rocky caves. The preachers, stern eremites, gaunt and haggard, proclaimed, like a new Elijah, the threatenings of God's wrath against his foes. As such live in history and tradition the names of Cargill, Cameron and Renwick, and such as Sir Walter Scott portrayed in his marvelous creations, Ephraim Macbriar and Habakuk Mucklewrath.

Wild superstitions were mingled with lofty faith. Some claimed the gift of second sight, and uttered dark prophesies of the future. They believed in magic and Satanic agency. "Claverhouse was in league with the arch-fiend, and lead could not harm him, nor water drown. Only to the cold steel of the Highland skian or the keen edge of the claymore was his body vulnerable." And in the violent and bloody deaths of many of their persecutors they beheld the avenging hand of God.

The moral heroism of these brave men has never been surpassed. Take, as examples, the fate of Richard Cameron and David Hackstoun. When Cameron was ordained the minister who laid his hand upon his head predicted "that that head should be lost for Christ's sake, and be set up before sun and moon in the sight of the world." But the prophecy daunted not his daring. He was the most powerful of the covenanting preachers, and his voice stirred the souls of the people like the peal of a clarion. His home was the wild muir, his bed the heather, his pillow a stone, his canopy the sky

At Airmoss he, with Hackstoun and about sixty companions, were attacked by the Royal troops. "This is the day I have prayed for," he exclaimed with prophetic soul; "today I gain the crown." He fell pierced with wounds. His head and his hands were hacked off and borne on a halberd through the High Street of Edinburgh, the fingers uplifted as in prayer. "These," said Murray, as he delivered them to the officials of the Privy Council, "are the head and hands of a man who lived praying and preaching, and died praying and fighting."

With shocking barbarity they were presented to Cameron's father, in the Tollbooth in Edinburgh, with the unfeeling and mocking inquiry if he knew to whom they belonged? "Oh, yes," said the poor old man, taking them and kissing them, "they are my son's, my own dear son's. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days."

As the saintly Peden sat on Cameron's grave he lifted his streaming eyes to heaven and pronounced his noblest eulogy in the prayer: "Oh! To be with Ritchie." "Bury me beside Ritchie," he asked on his death-bed, "that I may have rest in my grave, for I have had little in my life." But his prayer was not to be answered, for forty days after his own burial the ruffian soldiery disinterred his body and hanged it on a gibbet.

The Cameronian rank and file, humble peddlers and weavers and weak women, were no less heroic than their leaders. A martyr spirit seemed to animate every frame. The story of John Brown, the Ayrshire carrier, has been often told, but will never lose its power to touch the heart. His only crime was the worship of God according to the dictates of his conscience. Surprised by troopers, he walked at their head, "rather like a leader than a captive," to his own door. "To your knees," cried Claverhouse, "for you must die."

John prayed with such feeling that the dragoons were moved to tears. He tenderly kissed his wife and babes, and prayed, "May all purchased and promised blessings be multiplied unto you." "No more of this," roared the unrelenting Claverhouse, and he ordered the dragoons to fire. Seeing them waver, he snatched a pistol, and, with his own hand, shot the good man through the brain. As he fell the brave wife caught her husband's shattered head in her lap.

"What think you of your husband now?" demanded the titled ruffian. "I aye thocht muckle o' him, sir," was the brave response, "but never sae muckle as I do this day." "I would think little to lay thee beside him," he answered. "If you were permitted, I doubt na ye would," said the God-fearing woman; "but how are you to answer for this morning's work?" "To men I can be answerable, and as to God," was the

blasphemous answer, “I will take him into my own hands,” and the brutal soldier struck spurs to his horse and galloped away.

“Meekly and calmly,” continues the record of this martyrdom, “did this heroic woman tie up her husband’s head in a napkin, compose his body, and cover it with her plaid – and not till these duties were performed did she permit the pent-up current of her mighty grief to burst forth, as she sat down beside the corpse and wept bitterly.”

“Will you pray for the king?” queried Major Balfour of three Glasgow laborers. “We will pray for all within the election of grace,” was their reply. “Do you question the king’s election?” he asked. “Sometimes we question our own,” they answered. Such contumacy was unpardonable, and within an hour the dogs lapped their blood.

“Though every hair on my head were a man,” said another dying martyr, “I would die all these deaths for Christ and his cause.” “Will you renounce the Covenant?” demanded the soldiers of a peasant whom they found sleeping on the muir with a Bible by his side. “I would as soon renounce nay baptism,” he replied, and in an instant dyed the heather with his blood.

In moss hags, in hollow trees, in secret caves, in badgers’ holes, in churchyards, and other haunted spots – even in burial lots; in haystacks, in meal chests, in chimneys, in cellars, in garrets, in all manner of strange and loathsome places, the fugitives for conscience, from the sword or the gallows, sought shelter, and marvelous were their hairbreadth escapes from the fury of the persecutors. In hunger, and perils, and penury, and nakedness, these “true-hearted Covenanters wrestled, or prayed, or suffered, or wandered or died,” Many of Scotland’s grandest or loveliest scenes are ennobled by the martyr memories of those stormy times; by the brave deaths of those heroes of the Covenant, and by their blood that stained the sod,

“On the muirland of mist where the martyrs lay; Where Cameron’s sword and Bible were seen Engraved on the stone where the heather grows green.”

For eight-and-twenty years the flail of persecution had scourged the land. Nearly twenty thousand, it is estimated, had perished by fire, or sword, or water, or the scaffold, or had been banished from the realm, and many, many more had perished of cold and hunger in the moss hags and morasses. They went rejoicing from the sorrows and trials of earth to the everlasting rewards of heaven.

“The struggle and grief are all passed,
The glory and worth live on.”

10 – THOMAS CRANMER

The character of Cranmer exhibits, strangely blended, great strength and great weakness, the noblest fidelity and painful apostasy, the grandest heroism and pitiful cowardice. But, thank God, the heroic triumphs over the ignoble. Like a day that has been beclouded by storms, but whose sun at last sets in splendor, so his life-sun went down sublimely, and left a long trail of glory in the sky, and “nothing in his life became him like his leaving it.”

A complete story of Cranmer would be almost a history of the English Reformation. We can here give only a rapid outline sketch. He was born in 1489, and died in 1555. In the sixty-six years of his life he bore a prominent part in the history of England during three reigns, and reached the highest ecclesiastical dignity in the realm. At school he was trained by a harsh preceptor, from whom, he says, he “learned little and suffered much.

On his father’s death he was sent, at the early age of fourteen, to Jesus College, Cambridge. Here, for eight years, he was a diligent student of the scholastic learning of the day. Twelve years longer he spent

in the study of philosophy and the Holy Scriptures before he received his degree of Doctor of Divinity. He continued five years longer at this college, recognized as one of the most learned men of his time, and not till the ripe age of thirty-nine did he enter upon the public life in which he subsequently played so prominent a part.

In 1529 Henry VIII., twenty-five years after his marriage with Katharine of Arragon, affected to be troubled by religious scruples, because she had been his brother's widow, and wished a divorce, that he might wed the younger and fairer Anne Boleyn. The Pope, Clement VII., under various pretexts, evaded and postponed giving a decision on the subject. The impatient monarch asked the opinion of Cranmer and other learned men expert in ecclesiastical law. Cranmer answered that the question should be decided by the Bible; that the divines of the English universities were as well fitted to give judgment as those of Rome or any foreign country; and that both the king and Pope would be bound to abide by their decision.

The bluff monarch declared that Cranmer "had got the right sow by the ear," and he was summoned to court, made a royal chaplain, and was ordered to prepare an argument on the question. The conclusion of the argument was that marriage with a brother's widow was condemned by the Scriptures, the Councils, and the Fathers. This opinion is not surprising, since it is held by many Protestant clergy of the present day.

Cranmer having declared his readiness to defend his decision even at Rome, was sent thither on an embassy. His more familiar acquaintance with the "Holy City" and the Papal court opened his eyes to the manifold corruptions of both the one and the other. He then visited the leading Lutheran clergy of Germany, and seems to have become completely converted to the Reformed doctrines. He showed his dissent from the Roman decree enforcing the celibacy of the clergy by marrying the niece of Osiander, one of the leading reformers.

Returning to England, he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533. His consecration was delayed for six months because he declared his intention not to receive the archbishopric from the Pope, whom he considered to have no authority within the realm. The Pope, deeply chagrined, did not feel at liberty, however, to quarrel with his powerful suffragan.

Cranmer proceeded with the divorce, and declared Henry's marriage null and void. In this he has been accused of subserviency to his royal master; but although we believe him to have sanctioned a grievous moral wrong, we believe, also, his own strong convictions of right, and not the will of the king, to have been his supreme motive. The Pope, enraged at this contempt of his authority, excommunicated the king, and Cranmer became the active instrument of the Reformation. A violent breach between England and Rome took place. The payment of Peter's Pence was discontinued, and the Papal power was entirely set aside. Sir Thomas More, Bishop Fisher, and three others, refused to accept the change of succession, and, in spite of Cranmer's remonstrance, were put to death as traitors to the crown.

Cranmer now urged forward the translation of the Scriptures, and the placing of a copy in every parish church in the realm. Gardiner, a Romanist bishop, strongly opposed the circulation of the Bible in the vulgar tongue. "Does it contain any heresies?" demanded the king. The bishop could not affirm that it did. "Then, in God's name, let it be issued among our people," exclaimed the impetuous monarch. As soon as Cranmer received some copies of the new edition, he exclaimed, "Glory to God," and declared that it afforded him more pleasure than the gift of 10,000 Pounds.

The people thronged to the churches to read the sacred volume, which, for safety, was chained to the desks. So great were the crowds, that the best scholars among them used to read to the others who stood or sat around. A prisoner in the Lollards' tower, at a period soon after this, being accused of having said that he "trusted to see the day when maids will sing the Scriptures at their wheels, and yeomen at the plough," replied, "I thank God that I have seen that day, and I know husbandmen better

read in the Scriptures than many priests.”

Notwithstanding the many cares of his high office, Cranmer rose daily at five o’clock, and gave many hours to study, especially to the study of God’s Word. He preached with great diligence, confirming his teaching by quotations from Scripture. “And such heat and conviction,” writes Foxe, “accompanied the archbishop’s sermons, that the people departed from them with minds possessed with a great hatred of vice, and burning with a desire for virtue.”

The whole country, in consequence of the breach with the Pope, was laid under an interdict, and all the curses in the Papal armory were hurled against the hapless people. No marriages nor baptisms might take place with the sanction of the Pope, and the dead must be consigned to unhallowed graves, without the consoling rites of religion. The king retorted by the dissolution of the monasteries and the confiscation of their revenues – a measure warranted by the corruption and profligacy which they harbored. The monks had always been “the soldiery of the Pope” and the enemies of the Reformation; and Henry proceeded on the principle subsequently avowed by Knox, “Pull down the nests and the rooks will fly away.”

Cranmer sought to have their revenues devoted to religious purposes, but in spite of his efforts the greater part of their lands were diverted to secular objects. From the condition of Spain and Italy today, we may conceive the probable condition of England, had those bastiles of ignorance, wantonness, and superstition been allowed to remain.

The order of public service, under the influence of Cranmer, was greatly changed, a liturgy and prayers, in the English tongue, superseding the Latin mumblings of a mass-priest. The fickle king, now grown weary of the hapless Anne Boleyn, soon found occasion of accusation against her. Cranmer, because he was the queen’s friend, was ordered to confine himself to his palace of Lambeth. But he wrote a spirited letter in her defense to the king. On evidence which conveyed conviction to his mind, he subsequently declared the marriage void.

Four days after, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on that gloomy Tower Hill, whose soil was soaked with so much of England’s noblest blood. She faced the stern ordeal with constancy and courage. “The headsman, I hear,” she said to the lieutenant, “is very expert, and my neck is very slender;” and she clasped it with her little hands and smiled. Her last words were “To Christ I commend my soul.” The best defense of her character is the fact that three days after her death, Henry married her rival, Jane Seymour.

Under a Roman Catholic reaction, the Act of Six Articles, or “whip with six strings,” as it was called, was passed, re-establishing several of the errors of Rome, and enjoining the celibacy of the clergy. This act Cranmer strongly opposed, but ineffectually; and, indeed, was compelled to send his wife out of the country to avoid the penalty of death. In London alone, in fourteen days, five hundred persons were haled to prison for the violation of this act, some of whom were executed. Cromwell, a staunch friend of the Reformation, now fell under the king’s displeasure, and, under the convenient plea of high treason, was put to death. Cranmer bravely stood by him to the last, not fearing the wrath of the king.

The Roman party, gaining courage, procured the prohibition of the Bible to all except nobles and gentlemen. Plots were laid by his enemies against the archbishop; but the king, who was expected to favor the plots, honored the fidelity of his servant by warning him of the menaced attack. Cranmer invited the two arch-plotters to his palace, and asked their counsel as to the treatment of such designs. They both loudly censured such villainy, and declared that the traitors who plotted it deserved death, one of them vowing that if an executioner were wanting he would perform the office himself. “Know ye these letters, my masters?” demanded the archbishop, confronting them with the evidence of their guilt. He then, after solemn rebuke, freely pardoned them. Indeed, his clemency passed into a proverb. “Do my Lord Canterbury an ill turn,” it was said, “and you make him your friend forever.”

Renewed attempts were made against the primate. "If they do so now," said the king, who was not without his generous qualities, "what will they do with him when I am gone?" and he gave him, after the manner of an Oriental monarch, his signet ring, as a pledge of his protection. Henry had much keen discernment. Referring to Cranmer's crest, -- three pelicans -- he admonished him to be ready, like the pelicans, to shed his blood for his spiritual children. "You are likely," he said, in unconscious prophecy, "to be tested at length, if you stand to your tackling."

In his own last hours, the king sent for his faithful and honored servant. Cranmer faithfully admonished the monarch, who was about to appear before the great tribunal of the skies, to look for salvation to Christ alone, and asked if he trusted in him. Then the king, unable to speak, "did wring the archbishop's hand in his," says Foxe, "as hard as he could, and shortly after departed." Like David's, his hands were too deeply imbrued with blood for him to build for the Lord the temple of a Reformed Church. That was reserved for the innocent hands of his son Edward and his daughter Elizabeth.

Cranmer was appointed by the king's will one of the Council of Regency during the minority of Edward VI., who was only nine years old. During the "boy-king's" life his influence was great, and was directed to the establishment of the Reformed religion, which, with the brief interval of Mary's reign, has ever since obtained in England. The worship of images was prohibited, and the Scriptures, no longer bound, were open to the study of every rank and condition.

Many editions of the Bible were printed and freely disseminated. The English Book of Common Prayer, in almost its present form, the Book of Homilies, and the Articles of Religion, were all set forth in the vulgar tongue for the instruction of the common people. The new service book was founded on the liturgies of the primitive Church, divested of most of the Roman additions, and retaining the phraseology of Scripture. The pure and noble English and simple dignity of that service have made it a priceless heritage to the Anglo-Saxon race, and the grandest monument to the memory of the martyr-primate of England.

Cranmer has been accused of austerity to the adherents of the ancient faith. Numerous facts, however, go to prove his leniency and clemency. "If it ever come to their turn," remonstrated a friend, "they will show you no such favor." "Well," said Cranmer, "if God so will, we must abide it." And abide it he did, even unto death.

Nevertheless, the principles of religious toleration were not then, nor for long afterwards, understood; and persecution for religious opinions marked Catholic and Protestant alike. Cranmer's complicity, although only as a member of the council by which she was condemned, in the death by fire of the Anabaptist, Joan Bocher, is a dark stain on his character, like the burning of Servetus on that of Calvin. The Protestant party, however, have ever more freely permitted the use of the press to their opponents than the Romanists, whose inflexible rule it has been to suppress all discussion of controversial subjects. "Turn or burn" is the conclusive argument they have sought to employ.

When Edward VI. resolved to leave the crown to Lady Jane Grey, Cranmer reluctantly consented to the change of succession. But having taken his stand, he adhered faithfully to the hapless queen of a day, and shared her fall. His last official act was to serve at the funeral of Edward VI. The next day he was ordered to confine himself to his palace of Lambeth.

On the accession of Mary, of bloody memory, the Mass was again set up, and the kingdom was once more distracted by a religious revolution. Cranmer boldly wrote and published a declaration against the Mass. "My Lord, we doubt not that you are sorry that it hath gone forth," said the complaisant Roman bishop, Heath. "I intended," replied the intrepid reformer, "to have made it on a more large and ample manner and to have set it on St. Paul's Church door, and on the doors of all the churches of London, with mine own seal joined thereto." He was soon sent to the Tower on charge of treason. He was attainted by a pliant parliament, but it was resolved to proceed against him for heresy alone.

He was sent down to Oxford with Latimer and Ridley, to go through the form of disputing with the doctors and divines on the contested points of religion. All three were condemned, although they were not so much as heard, and were confined in the Bocardo, or common jail, like common felons. Cranmer was reduced to “stark beggary,” for all his effects had been confiscated; he had not a penny in his purse, and his jailers refused to allow his friends to bestow alms upon him – a privilege granted to the vilest criminals.

After a year’s imprisonment, he was cited before the commissioners of Philip of Spain and of Mary, “with,” says Foxe, “the Pope’s collector and a rabblement of such other like.” He was charged with heresy, treason, and adultery, for so his lawful marriage was called. He made a firm reply, concluding thus: “I cast fear apart; for Christ said to his apostles that in the latter days they should suffer much sorrow, and be put to death for his name’s sake. ‘Moreover,’ he said, ‘confess me before men, and be not afraid. If you do so, I will stand with you; if you shrink from me, I will shrink from you.’ This is a comfortable and terrible saying; this maketh me to set all fear apart. I say, therefore, the Bishop of Rome treadeth under foot God’s laws and the king’s.”

He was then remanded to the Bocardo, and the mockery of citing him to appear within eighty days, before the Pope at Rome, while he was confined a close prisoner in England, was proceeded with. He wrote to the queen that he was content to go, but his bonds were not relaxed, and for his failure to perform the impossible, he was condemned as contumacious, and sentenced to death. He was led from his dungeon to see his fellow-prisoners, Ridley and Latimer, burned at the stake.

He was also, with every symbol of contumely and shame, degraded from his high office. He was invested with alb, surplice, and stole as a priest, and with the robes of a bishop and archbishop, “as he is at his installing,” says Foxe, in simple, homely phrase, that carries conviction of its truthfulness, “saving this, that as everything there is most rich and costly, so everything in this was of canvas and old clouts, with a miter and a pall of the same put upon him in mockery, and the crosier staff was put in his hand. Then a barber clipped his hair round about, and the bishops scraped the tops of his fingers where he had been anointed; wherein Bishop Bonner bore himself so rough and unmannerly as the other bishop was to him soft and gentle.

“‘All this,’ quoth the archbishop, ‘needed not; I had myself done with this gear long ago.’ Last of all they stripped him out of his gown into his jacket, and put upon him a poor yeoman beadle’s gown, full bare and nearly worn, and as evil made as one might see, and a townsman’s cap on his head, and so delivered him to the secular power. Then spake Lord Bonner, saying to him, ‘Now are you no lord any more.’ And thus, with great compassion and pity of every man, in this ill-favored gown, was he carried to prison. ‘Now that it is past,’ said the destined victim, ‘my heart is well quieted.’”

Every art was used – threatening, flattering, entreating, and promising – to induce him to make some assent to the doctrines of the Papacy. For awhile he stood firm, but at last the fear of the flames shook his fortitude, the high courage and serene faith which had sustained him in his bold confession of Christ deserted him, and, in an hour of weakness, Cranmer fell. He consented to affix his signature to a formulary of recantation.

“The queen,” says Foxe, “having now gotten a time to revenge her old grief, received his recantation very gladly; but of her purpose to put him to death she would nothing relent. Now was Cranmer’s cause.” he quaintly adds, “in a miserable taking, who neither inwardly had any quietness in his own conscience, nor yet outwardly any help in his adversaries. Neither could he die honestly, nor yet live dishonestly. And whereas he sought profit, he fell into double disprofit, that neither with good men could he avoid secret shame, nor yet with evil men the note of dissimulation.”

The following year – so slowly did the grim process linger – Cranmer was brought from the prison to the beautiful church of St. Mary’s, to hear his final sentence. The mayor and aldermen, priests and

friars, and a great concourse of people, assembled to witness the scene. “It was a lamentable sight,” says Foxe: “He that late was Archbishop and Primate of all England, and King’s Privy Councilor, being now in a bare and ragged gown, and ill-favoredly clothed, with an old square cap, exposed to the contempt of all men.”

Dr. Cole preached a sermon, in which he declared that while Cranmer’s sin against God was forgiven, yet his crime against the queen demanded his death. All the while the venerable archbishop stood, “now lifting up his hands and eyes in prayer to God, and now for very shame letting them fall. More than twenty several times,” goes on the contemporary chronicler, “the tears gushed out abundantly and dropped down marvelously from his fatherly face.” But he wept not for his present or prospective suffering, but for his dire apostasy, which he was now resolved, as far as possible, to retrieve.

When asked to make his confession of faith, “I will do it,” he said, “and with a good will.” Then he asked the people to pray to God for him to forgive his sins, which above all men, both in number and greatness, he had committed. “But there is one offense,” he went on, “which, above all, at this time doth vex and trouble me,” and he drew from his cloak his last confession of “his very faith,” in which, to the astonishment of all, he boldly retracted his previous recantation as follows:

“And now I come to the great thing that so much troubleth my conscience, more than anything that ever I did or said in my whole life; and that is, the setting abroad of a writing contrary to the truth, which now here I denounce and refuse, as things written with my hand, contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and which were written for fear of death, and to save my life, if it might be. And forasmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished therefor; for when I come to the fire, it shall first be burned. And as for the Pope, I refuse him, as Christ’s enemy and Antichrist, with all his false doctrine.”

“Stop the heretic’s mouth and take him away,” cried Cole. Then Cranmer being dragged down from the stage – we follow the vivid narrative of Foxe – was led away to the fire, the monks meanwhile “vexing, troubling, and threatening him most cruelly.” When he came to the place, in front of Balliol College, where he had seen Latimer and Ridley glorify God amid the flames, he knelt down, put off his garments, and prepared himself for death. Then was he bound by an iron chain to the stake, and the faggots piled about his body.

As the flames arose, he stretched forth his right hand, which he held in the fiercest blaze, steadfast and immovable. His eyes were lifted up to heaven, and oftentimes he repeated, “This hand has offended! Oh, this unworthy right hand!” so long as his voice would suffer him; and using often the words of St. Stephen, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” in the greatness of the flame he gave up the ghost.

He had overcome at last. The day of his death was the grandest of his life. The hour of weakness was past. The hour of triumph had come. The strong will, and lofty faith, and steadfast courage defied even the agonies of the fire. Beyond the jeering mob and the cruel priests, he beheld the beatific vision of the Lord he loved; and above the roar of the flames and the crackling of faggots, fell sweetly on his inner ear the words of benediction and pardon, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

His brief apostasy deepens our sympathy, like the gaping wound the warrior receives in deadly conflict with his foe. His human weakness proves his kinship to our souls. A man of like passions with ourselves, he fell – fell grievously – but, laying hold upon the strength of God, he rose again. Like repentant Peter, the glory of his final confession makes us forgive, and almost forget, the shame of his denial of his Lord.

11 – LATIMER AND RIDLEY

Of the effigies on the Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford, two of the most impressive are those of Bishops Latimer and Ridley, the former bending beneath the weight of well nigh fourscore years. Side by side on that very spot those noble souls glorified God amid the flames, and passed through the gate of martyrdom to their reward on high. It is fitting, therefore, that side by side we trace their life history and record their sublime confession of the faith.

Hugh Latimer sprang from that sturdy Saxon stock which constitutes the bone and sinew of the English race. "By yeoman's sons," he declared in his first sermon before King Edward VI., "the faith of Christ is, and hath been, chiefly maintained," and by his own brave life and heroic death, he illustrated the saying. The following is his own account of his parentage, given in his famous "Sermon of the plough:"

"My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pounds by the year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled as much as kept half-a-dozen men. He had a walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness with himself and his horse, and so he came to the place where he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath Field."

He goes on to say, "My father kept me to school, or else I had not been able to preach before the King's Majesty now. He married my sisters with five pounds, or twenty nobles, apiece, and he brought them up in godliness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbors, and some alms he gave to the poor. And all this he did on the same farm."

The subject of our sketch was born in 1480, at Turcaston, and went in his fourteenth year to Cambridge University, where he pursued a full scholastic course, and became a Fellow of Clare Hall. In his zeal for the new learning then springing into life, he crossed the sea and sat at the feet of the great Italian scholars of the university of Padua. He diligently studied the Roman theology, and was so zealous in the observance of the rites of the Church that he was made the cross-bearer in the religious processions. He had, indeed, the intention of becoming a friar, thinking thereby more effectually to serve God.

"I was as obstinate a papist," he writes, "as any was in England, insomuch that, when I should be bachelor of divinity, my whole oration went against Philip Melancthon and against his opinions. Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney, that suffered death for God's Word's sake, heard me at that time, and perceived that I was zealous without knowledge. He came to me afterward in my study and desired me to hear his confession. I did so, and learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the Word of God, and forsook the school doctors and such fooleries."

He became forthwith a zealous preacher of the faith he once opposed. He was therefore cited before Wolsey, and charged with holding heretical opinions. But the astute cardinal, finding him no ignorant fanatic, to the chagrin of his enemies, gave him a general license to preach. He preached, therefore, more zealously than ever, defending the doctrines of the Reformation, and inveighing against indulgences and other Roman usages.

When Henry VIII. began to throw off the shackles of the Papacy, Latimer was appointed one of the royal chaplains. But he abated not a jot of his sturdy boldness of speech. He strongly remonstrated against the king's inhibition of the Holy Scriptures and religious books in the English tongue. The bluff king never shrank from plain honest dealing, and the inhibition was shortly removed. Latimer was now appointed to a living in Wiltshire, where his zealous itinerating aroused the ire of his enemies. He was cited before the Archbishop of Canterbury for heresy. But through the interference of the king he was acquitted.

Yet he courted not the favor of the monarch who protected him. "Have pity on your soul," he cried,

remonstrating with the king in the spirit of Elijah rebuking Ahab, “and think that the day is even at hand when you shall give an account of your office and of the blood that has been shed by your sword.” He reproved boldly the unpreaching prelates of his day. “I would ask you a strange question,” he once said, with biting irony, to a ring of bishops at St. Paul’s Cross, “Who is the most diligent prelate in all England? I will tell you. It is the Devil. He passeth all the rest in doing of his office. Therefore, if you will not learn of God, for very shame learn of the Devil.”

Latimer’s moral earnestness, his homely humor, his shrewd wit, his broad charity, his transparent sympathy, made his sermons come home to every man’s conscience. No such preaching had ever been heard in England, and as the peasants of Galilee listened to the Great Teacher, so the common people heard him gladly.

In 1535, Latimer was appointed Bishop of Winchester, and opened the convocation with two of his boldest sermons. He devoted himself with great zeal to his official duties, and especially labored to remove the superstitious ceremonies of Romanism, which still clung like strangling ivy around the goodly trunk of the Protestant faith. He steadfastly pointed to Christ as the true object of adoration. For the celebration of the Lord’s Supper he prepared a hymn, setting forth, as follows, its spiritual character:

“Of Christ’s body this is a token,
Which on the cross for our sins was broken;
Wherefore of your sins you must be forsakers,
If of Christ’s death ye will be partakers.”

He preached with great diligence – twice on Sundays and often during the week – and was bold in denouncing sin, even in his sermons before the court. His plainness of speech gave much offense to the courtiers, whose vices he rebuked, and complaint was made to the king, whereupon the bishop made the following defense: “I never thought myself worthy, nor did I ever sue to be a preacher before your Grace, but I was called to it, and am willing, if you mislike me, to give place to my betters; and if it be your Grace’s pleasure so to allow them for preachers, I could be content to bear their books after them; but if your Grace allow me for a preacher, I would desire your Grace to give me leave to discharge my conscience, and to frame my doctrine according to my audience.”

In 1539, through the influence of Gardiner and other Romanizing bishops, the Act of Six Articles was passed, making it penal to impugn transubstantiation, communion in one kind, the celibacy of the clergy, monastic vows, private masses, and auricular confession. Latimer at once resigned the honors of an office whose duties he could not discharge with the approval of his conscience, and retired into privacy. Being compelled by ill-health to seek medical aid in London, he was discovered by Gardiner’s spies, and was thrust into the gloomy Tower – that grim prison of so many of England’s best and noblest sons. Here he languished for six slow-rolling years, till he had well-nigh attained the allotted limit of threescore and ten.

The accession of Edward VI., released from his bondage the venerable prisoner. He was pressed by the House of Commons to resume his bishopric, but declined the charge on account of his age and infirmities. These, however, did not prevent his diligently pursuing his studies, for which purpose, we read, he used sometimes to rise at two o’clock in the morning. He frequently preached at court and throughout the country. His chief residence was at Lambeth, where he enjoyed the hospitality of his friend Cranmer, the Primate of all England. Hither many resorted to him for temporal and spiritual advice. “I cannot go to my book,” he said, “for poor folk who come to me desiring that their matters may be heard.” The “law’s delay,” especially in the case of poor suitors, was then even more proverbial than now.

He took little part in the public direction of the Reformation; but as the popular favorite, and through

his powerful preaching, he did more than any other man to prepare the way for it in the hearts of the people.

But his life-day, so strangely flecked with sunshine and shadow, was destined to have a lurid close. On the accession of Mary, of sanguinary memory, the old persecuting edicts were re-enforced. The fulminations of Rome were again hurled against the adherents of the Reformation – at lofty and lowly alike. So distinguished a mark as Latimer could not long escape the menaced blow. But he sought not to evade it, and calmly awaited its fall. It came swift, and sure, and fatal.

He was at Coventry when the summons was issued citing him before the Privy Council. He had ample warning, but refused to escape. John Carless, a Protestant weaver, who afterwards died in prison for the truth, informed him of the approach of the officers -not of justice, but of cruel and flagrant wrong. But in the spirit of a martyr, he felt that the best use he could make of his life would be to lay it down for the testimony of Jesus.

As he was led through Smithfield market – a spot consecrated by the fires of martyrdom – he said, “that place had long groaned for him,” expecting soon to be consigned to the flames. He was again remanded to the gloomy prison of the Tower. As the frosts of winter smote through the stone walls of his chamber and chilled the thin blood of age, he wrote to the Lieutenant that, “unless they allowed him fire he should deceive them; for they purposed to burn him, but he should be starved with cold.”

His imprisonment, however, was not without its joys. As the number of prisoners increased, his friends Cranmer, Ridley and Bradford shared his chamber. In the study of the New Testament they solaced their souls and confirmed their convictions of the errors of Rome. In such employment the long months of winter passed away, and when the trees bourgeoned forth, and the lambs skipped in the meadows, and the “larks soared in the ether, they rode on ambling palfreys, guarded by wardens, from the Tower down to Oxford, cited thither to dispute with the learned doctors of the university. How bright and beautiful must this fair world have seemed as they passed beneath the hawthorn and apple blossoms of the Thames valley in the year of grace, 1554 – their last ride through the rural loveliness of “Merrie England.”

The learned doctors and logic-mongers of Oxford, assailed the already prejudged bishops with arguments from the Fathers, the decisions of Councils, and the trivial distinctions of the schoolmen. But Latimer stoutly replied that these things had no weight with him only as they were confirmed by Holy Scripture. With such an obstinate heretic what could the purblind (wilfully blind) doctors do but hale him away again to prison? This was accordingly done, and in the grim Bocardo, or felon’s jail of Oxford, the destined martyr, with his companions in tribulation, were confined.

The long months of the summer, so bright and beautiful without, so dark and dreary in his gloomy cell, dragged on. But even the dungeon gloom was irradiated with the light of God’s smile, and many fervent prayers for his beloved England, so rent by faction, and for the persecuted Church of Christ therein, went up from the grey-haired patriot bishop kneeling on the stone floor of his narrow cell. Seven times over during this last imprisonment he diligently read and studied the New Testament.

At length, on the 30th of September, Latimer and Ridley were brought forth for their final arraignment. The scene in the stately Church of St. Mary’s was one of pomp and splendor, so far as thrones of state and embroideries of golden tissue can give splendor to a high crime against justice and righteousness. Latimer’s appearance is thus described: “He held his hat in his hand, having a kerchief on his head, and upon it a great cap, such as townsmen use, with two broad flaps to button under the chin wearing an old threadbare Bristol frieze gown, girded to his body with a penny leather girdle, at which his Testament hung by a string of leather, and his spectacles, without case, depending about his neck upon his breast.”

The Papal ecclesiastics accused him of want of learning, on which he emphatically replied, “Lo, you

look for learning at my hands, who have gone so long to the school of oblivion, making the bare walls my library, keeping me so long in prison without book, or pen and ink, and now you let me loose to come and answer to articles.”

But remonstrance was futile. He had only to hear sentence pronounced, to be degraded from office with puerile and insulting ceremonies, and be led away to be burned. In the public square in front of Balliol College the stakes were planted and the faggots piled. From a wooden pulpit a sermon was preached to the assembled multitude, aspersing the name and fame of the reformers, but they were not suffered to reply. “Well,” said Latimer, appealing to the great tribunal and the last assize, “there is nothing hid but shall be opened.”

The jailer then took off his prison clothes to prepare him for the stake, when it was seen that he had put on a shroud as an undergarment. Although an infirm old man, yet, divinely strengthened for this ordeal by fire, he now “stood upright, as comely a father as one might anywhere behold.” As he stood at the stake the grand old hero, turning to Ridley, who was “coupled with him for a common flight,” uttered these words, which still stir our souls across the centuries:

“Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.” Then lifting up his voice, he cried, “O, Father in heaven, receive my soul!” The fire burned fiercely; and, bending towards the flames he seemed to bathe his hands therein, when the explosion of a bag of gunpowder fastened to his body swiftly ended his life.

His companion in martyrdom was yet a child when Latimer had reached man’s estate. Nicholas Ridley was born early in the sixteenth century, of old Northumbrian stock. He was educated as a zealous Romanist at the universities of Cambridge, Paris and Louvain. But his study of the Scriptures enlightened his mind, and he embraced the doctrines of the Reformation. He forthwith preached strongly against the errors of Popery. On the accession of Edward VI. He became, successively, court preacher, Bishop of Rochester, and Bishop of London.

“He so labored and occupied himself in preaching and teaching the true and wholesome doctrines of Christ,” says Foxe, “that a good child never was more loved by his dear parents than he was by his flock and diocese. To these sermons the people resorted, swarming about him like bees, and coveting the sweet flowers and wholesome juice of the fruitful doctrine, which he not only preached, but showed the same by his life.”

During the prevalence of the fatal pestilence known as the “sweating sickness,” when many fled from the city to save their lives, he braved the danger and steadfastly ministered to his flock. On the accession of Mary, Ridley was deposed from office, and, with Cranmer and Latimer, was, as we have already narrated, thrown into the Tower. During the famous Oxford disputation his critical knowledge of Greek enabled him to correct many attempts to pervert the meaning of ancient writers. But it availed not to avert a fate already foredoomed. When the death sentence was pronounced, Ridley calmly replied to his judges, “Although I be not of your company, yet I doubt not that my name is written in another place, whither this sentence will send us sooner than we should have come by the course of nature.”

During his last imprisonment he was deprived of most of his books, and denied the use of pen, ink, or paper; but in his zeal for study he cut the lead from the lattice of his windows, and wrote on the margin of the few books left him. From his prison cell Ridley sent a letter of apostolic greeting and encouragement to his friend Bradford, who was shortly afterwards burned at Smithfield, saying, “O England! England! Repent thee of thy sins!” -- and then to his companion in the flames, “Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall sup this night with the Lord.”

As he was himself led to the stake, Ridley embraced his fellow-sufferer, Latimer, saying, "Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame or else strengthen us to abide it. So long as the breath is in my body," he went on, "I will never deny my Lord Christ and his known truth." Then lifting up his hands he uttered the patriotic prayer for his country, which, although it so persecuted him, he loved to the end: "I beseech thee, Lord God, have mercy upon the realm of England, and deliver her from all her enemies."

Latimer soon died, but on Ridley's side the fire burned slowly, so that his torture was prolonged and dreadful. Yet was he "strengthened to abide it." His own brother-in-law, desiring to relieve his pain heaped on more faggots, which, however, kept the fire down still longer. Frequently he groaned in the bitterness of his anguish, "O Lord, have mercy upon me!" and urged the bystanders to let the fire reach his body. At length one understood him and pulled the faggots apart. The flames leaped up and caught the gunpowder hung around his neck. A sharp explosion followed, and he moved no more.

By such constancy and courage and fiery pangs of martyrdom was the faith of Jesus confessed in those days of tribulation; and by such a costly sacrifice were the triumphs of the Gospel secured. And this testimony was not availing. Julius Palmer, a Fellow of Magdalen College, a bigoted Romanist, was present, and, convinced of the truth of the doctrines for which men die thus, became himself a convert to the Protestant faith, and soon sealed his testimony with his blood.

The terrors of the stake and faggot were powerless against men like these. John Rogers died bathing his hands in the flames "as if they had been cold water." John Lambert cried, exultingly amid the flames, "None but Christ." "The Holy Spirit," said Thomas Bilney, "shall cool the flames to my refreshing," and praying, like Stephen, for his murderers, he "fell on sleep." In three years three hundred martyrs thus glorified God amid the flames. But every death at the stake won hundreds to the persecuted cause. "You have lost the hearts of twenty-thousand that were rank papists," ran a letter to Bonner, "within the last twelvemonth."

The Church of Christ in an age of luxury and self-indulgence may well revert to those days of fiery trial, and catch inspiration from the faith and zeal and lofty courage, unfaltering even in the agonies of death, of those noble confessors and witnesses for God. Amid the darkness of the times they held aloft the torch of truth, and handed down from age to age the torn yet triumphant banner of the faith, dyed with their hearts' best blood.

They recall the sublime words of Tertullian, which, sounding across the centuries, still thrill the soul like the sound of a clarion: "We say, and before all men we say, and torn and bleeding under your tortures we cry out, 'We worship God through Christ.' We conquer in dying, and are victorious when we are subdued. The flames are our victory robe and our triumphal car. Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to powder. The oftener you mow us down, the more we grow, The martyr's blood is the seed of the Church." [20] In kindred spirit exclaims Justin Martyr: "You can kill us, but you cannot harm us." [21]

"The rosemary and thyme," says Bacon, "the more they are incensed (or bruised) give out the richer perfume." So under the cruel flail of persecution the confessors of Jesus breathed forth the odors of holiness, which are fragrant throughout the world today. From the martyr's blood, more prolific than the fabled dragon's teeth, new hosts of Christian heroes rose, contending for the martyr's starry and unwithering crown.

Age after age the soldiers of Christ have rallied to the conflict whose highest reward was the guerdon of death. They bound persecution like a wreath about their brow, and rejoiced in the "glorious infamy" of suffering for their Lord. Beside the joys of heaven, they won imperishable fame on earth, and were ennobled by the accolade of martyrdom to the lofty peerage of the skies. Wrapped in their fiery vest and shroud of flame, they yet exulted in their glorious victory. While their eyes filmed with the

shadows of death, their spirits were entranced by the vision of the opening heaven; and above the jeers of the ribald mob swept, sweetly o'er their souls the song of the redeemed before the throne. Beyond the shadows of time, and above the sordid things of earth, they soared to the grandeur of the infinite and the eternal.

Like a solemn voice falling on the dull ear of mankind, these holy examples urged the inquiry, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And that voice awakened an echo in full many a heart. The martyrs made more converts by their deaths than by their lives. Of the group of "great reformers" commemorated in this series of papers, all save four suffered as martyrs to the truth, and all save one of these by the agonizing death of fire. Yet they live forever in the memory of mankind, and they still rule our spirits from their sceptered urns with a potent and abiding spell.

ENDNOTES

1 *The name is written in sixteen different ways, but we adopt that which is most common. In those days every man spelled as was right in his own eyes.*

2 Milman's "Latin Christianity." Vol. 8, p. 158.

3 *With similar perverted ingenuity the Communists of the first French revolution claimed Jesus Christ as "le bon sansculotte."*

4 *A mark was 13s. 4d. Sterling; but the purchasing power of money was much greater then than now.*

5 *The following is a specimen of this first translation of Luke x. 88-42: "Forsooth it was don. While thei wenten, and he entride in to sum castel: and sum womman, Martha bi name, receyuede him into hir hous. And to this Martha was a sister, Marie bi name, which also sittinge by sydis the feet of the Lord, herde the word of Him. Forsothe Martha bisyede about moche seruyee. Which stood and seide, Lord, is it not of charge to thee that my sister lefte me aloone, for to mynystre? Therefore seye to hit, that she helpe me. And the Lord, answeringe, seide to hir, Martha, Martha, thou err bysi and ert troublid anentis ful manye thingis; forsoth o thing is necessarie. Marie hath chose the beste parts which schal not be take away fro hir."*

6 *"His industry," says Dean Milman, "even in those laborious days, was astonishing. The number of his books baffles calculation. Two hundred are said to have been burned in Bohemia alone."*

7 *"Latin Ohristismity," Murray's ed., Vol. Viii., pp. 228, 229.*

8 *It has now 154 Professors and 1,871 students.*

9 *Years after his death, it was said that this indignity was inflicted because Huss attempted to escape. But all the evidence available is against that accusation, which, even if true, would have been no justification of his treatment.*

10 *At the Diet of Worms, a hundred years later, when Charles V. was urged to violate the safe-conduct which he had given Luther, he replied, remembering this scene, "No; I should not like to blush like Sigismund."*

11 *Not among the "giants" of the time, but as one of its tenderest and most loving spirits, is to be mentioned Fra Angelico, whose lovely frescoes of saints and angels and Madonnas still adorn the cells of San Marco. He could not preach, but he could paint such beatific visions as fill our eyes with tears. He never touched his brush till he had steeped his inmost soul in prayer. Overcome with emotion, the tears often streamed down his face as he painted the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the raptures of the saved. He would take no money for his work, it was its own exceeding great reward. When offered the Archbishopric of Florence he humbly declined, and recommended for that dignity a brother monk. He died at Rome while sitting at his easel – caught away to behold with open face the beatific vision on which his inner sight so long had dwelt. The holy faces of his angels still haunt our memory with a spell of power. Well did the saintly painter wear the name of Fra Angelico – the Angelic Brother.*

12 *"La vacea muglia" was the phrase for the ringing of this great bell, whose deep-toned notes still boom from its lofty tower.*

13 Roscoe, "Life of Leo X.," p. 346.

14 *"Of prodigal expenditure and magnificent tastes, he would have been," said a Roman prelate, "a perfect man if he had had some knowledge of religion."*

15 *Ut sine peccato esse eum censebant qui me interfecerit. Lutheri Epistola I., 383, Quoted by D'Aubigne, Bk. V., c. 2.*

16 *Wenn so viel Teufel zu Worms waren, als Ziegel auf den Dachern noch wollt Ich hinein. -- Lutheri Opera, quoted by D'Aubigne. "The Diet of Worms, Luther's appearance there on the 17th of April, 1521," says Carlyle, "may be considered as the greatest scene in modern European history."*

17 *The only copy of this Bible extant is in the Baptist College at Bristol. "I have translated, brethern and susters moost dare, and tenderly beloved in Christ," says the prologue, "The Newe Testament for your spiritual edyfyinge, consolasion end solace."*

18 *In this edition were given several wood cuts and a short comment on the text generally, calling attention to the errors of*

Rome; as when on the words, "None shall appear before me empty," Tyndale satirically remarks, "This is a good text for the Pope."

19 The title of this edition reads thus: "The newe Testament dilygently corrected and compared with the Greke by William Tyndale and fynisshed in the yere of our Lorde God A.M.D. & xxxiiii, in the moneth of November."

20 "Sanguis Martyrum Semen Eeelesiae." Tertul. Apol., C. 50.

21 Jus. Mar. Apol., 1.

THE END