

reigns; what fear, then, can we have?"³¹²

God did listen to the cries of His servants. He gave to princes and ministers grace and courage to maintain the truth against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Saith the Lord, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded."³¹³ The Protestant Reformers had built on Christ, and the gates of hell could not prevail against them.

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12. The French Reformation.



The Protest of Spires and the Confession at Augsburg, which marked the triumph of the Reformation in Germany, were followed by years of conflict and darkness. Weakened by divisions

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ 1 Peter 2:6.

among its supporters, and assailed by powerful foes, Protestantism seemed destined to be utterly destroyed. Thousands sealed their testimony with their blood. Civil war broke out; the Protestant cause was betrayed by one of its leading adherents; the noblest of the reformed princes fell into the hands of the emperor, and were dragged as captives from town to town. But in the moment of his apparent triumph, the emperor was smitten with defeat. He saw the prey wrested from his grasp, and he was forced at last to grant toleration to the doctrines which it had been the ambition of his life to destroy. He had staked his kingdom, his treasures, and life itself, upon the crushing out of the heresy. Now he saw his armies wasted by battle, his treasuries drained, his many kingdoms threatened by revolt, while everywhere the faith which he had vainly endeavored to suppress, was extending. Charles V. had been battling against omnipotent power. God had said, "Let there be light," but the emperor had sought to keep the darkness unbroken. His purposes had failed; and in premature old age, worn out with the long struggle, he abdicated the throne, and buried himself in a cloister.

In Switzerland, as in Germany, there came dark days for the Reformation. While many cantons accepted the reformed faith, others clung with blind persistence to the creed of Rome. Their persecution of those who desired to receive the truth, finally gave rise to civil war. Zwingli and many who had united with him in reform, fell on the bloody field of Cappel. *Æcolampadius*, overcome by these terrible disasters, soon after died. Rome was triumphant, and in many places seemed about to recover all that she had lost. But He whose counsels are from everlasting had not forsaken His cause or His people. His hand would bring deliverance for them. In other lands He had raised up laborers to carry forward the reform. [212]

In France, before the name of Luther had been heard as a Reformer, the day had already begun to break. One of the first to catch the light was the aged Lefevre, a man of extensive learning,

a professor in the University of Paris, and a sincere and zealous papist. In his researches into ancient literature his attention was directed to the Bible, and he introduced its study among his students.

Lefevre was an enthusiastic adorer of the saints, and he had undertaken to prepare a history of the saints and martyrs, as given in the legends of the church. This was a work which involved great labor; but he had already made considerable progress in it, when, thinking that he might obtain useful assistance from the Bible, he began its study with this object. Here indeed he found saints brought to view, but not such as figured in the Roman calendar. A flood of divine light broke in upon his mind. In amazement and disgust he turned away from his self-appointed task, and devoted himself to the word of God. The precious truths which he there discovered, he soon began to teach.

In 1512, before either Luther or Zwingle had begun the work of reform, Lefevre wrote: "It is God who gives us, by faith, that righteousness which by grace alone justifies to eternal life."³¹⁴ Dwelling upon the mysteries of redemption, he exclaimed, "Oh, the unspeakable greatness of that exchange,—the Sinless One is condemned, and he who is guilty goes free; the Blessing bears the curse, and the cursed is brought into blessing; the Life dies, and the dead live; the Glory is whelmed in darkness, and he who knew nothing but confusion of face is clothed with glory."³¹⁵

And while teaching that the glory of salvation belongs solely to God, he also declared that the duty of obedience belongs to man. "If thou art a member of Christ's church," he said, "thou art a member of His body; if thou art of His body, then thou art full of the divine nature.... Oh, if men could but enter into the understanding of this privilege, how purely, chastely, and holily would they live, and how contemptible, when compared with

³¹⁴ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 1.

³¹⁵ D'Aubigné, b. 12, ch. 2 (London ed.).

the glory within them,—that glory which the eye of flesh cannot see,—would they deem all the glory of this world.”³¹⁶

There were some among Lefevre's students who listened eagerly to his words, and who, long after the teacher's voice should be silenced, were to continue to declare the truth. Such was William Farel. The son of pious parents, and educated to accept with implicit faith the teachings of the church, he might, with the apostle Paul, have declared concerning himself, “After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.”³¹⁷ A devoted Romanist, he burned with zeal to destroy all who should dare to oppose the church. “I would gnash my teeth like a furious wolf,” he afterward said, referring to this period of his life, “when I heard any one speaking against the pope.”³¹⁸ He had been untiring in his adoration of the saints, in company with Lefevre making the round of the churches of Paris, worshipping at the altars, and adorning with gifts the holy shrines. But these observances could not bring peace of soul. Conviction of sin fastened upon him, which all the acts of penance that he practised, failed to banish. As to a voice from heaven, he listened to the Reformer's words: “Salvation is of grace.” “The Innocent One is condemned, and the criminal is acquitted.” “It is the cross of Christ alone that openeth the gates of heaven, and shutteth the gates of hell.”³¹⁹ [214]

Farel joyfully accepted the truth. By a conversion like that of Paul, he turned from the bondage of tradition to the liberty of the sons of God. “Instead of the murderous heart of a ravening wolf, he came back,” he says, “quietly, like a meek and harmless lamb, having his heart entirely withdrawn from the pope, and given to Jesus Christ.”³²⁰

While Lefevre continued to spread the light among his stu-

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Acts 26:5.

³¹⁸ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 2.

³¹⁹ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 2.

³²⁰ D'Aubigné, b. 12, ch. 3.

dents, Farel, as zealous in the cause of Christ as he had been in that of the pope, went forth to declare the truth in public. A dignitary of the church, the bishop of Meaux, soon after united with them. Other teachers who ranked high for their ability and learning, joined in proclaiming the gospel, and it won adherents among all classes, from the homes of artisans and peasants to the palace of the king. The sister of Francis I., then the reigning monarch, accepted the reformed faith. The king himself, and the queen mother, appeared for a time to regard it with favor, and with high hopes the Reformers looked forward to the time when France should be won to the gospel.

But their hopes were not to be realized. Trial and persecution awaited the disciples of Christ. This, however, was mercifully veiled from their eyes. A time of peace intervened, that they might gain strength to meet the tempest; and the Reformation made rapid progress. The bishop of Meaux labored zealously in his own diocese to instruct both the clergy and the people. Ignorant and immoral priests were removed, and, so far as possible, replaced by men of learning and piety. The bishop greatly desired that his people might have access to the word of God for themselves, and this was soon accomplished. Lefevre undertook the translation of the New Testament; and at the very time when Luther's German Bible was issuing from the press in Wittenberg, the French New Testament was published at Meaux. The bishop spared no labor or expense to circulate it in his parishes, and soon the peasants of Meaux were in possession of the Holy Scriptures.

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As travelers perishing from thirst welcome with joy a living water-spring, so did these souls receive the message of heaven. The laborers in the field, the artisans in the workshop, cheered their daily toil by talking of the precious truths of the Bible. At evening, instead of resorting to the wine shops, they assembled in one another's homes to read God's word and join in prayer and praise. A great change was soon manifest in these communities. Though belonging to the humblest class, an unlearned and

hard-working peasantry, the reforming, uplifting power of divine grace was seen in their lives. Humble, loving, and holy, they stood as witnesses to what the gospel will accomplish for those who receive it in sincerity.

The light kindled at Meaux shed its beams afar. Every day the number of converts was increasing. The rage of the hierarchy was for a time held in check by the king, who despised the narrow bigotry of the monks; but the papal leaders finally prevailed. Now the stake was set up. The bishop of Meaux, forced to choose between the fire and recantation, accepted the easier path; but notwithstanding the leader's fall, his flock remained steadfast. Many witnessed for the truth amid the flames. By their courage and fidelity at the stake, these humble Christians spoke to thousands who in days of peace had never heard their testimony.

It was not alone the humble and the poor, that amid suffering and scorn dared to bear witness for Christ. In the lordly halls of the castle and the palace, there were kingly souls by whom truth was valued above wealth or rank or even life. Kingly armor concealed a loftier and more steadfast spirit than did the bishop's robe and mitre. Louis de Berquin was of noble birth. A brave and courtly knight, he was devoted to study, polished in manners, and of blameless morals. "He was," says a writer, "a great follower of the papistical constitutions, and a great hearer of masses and sermons; ... and he crowned all his other virtues by holding Lutheranism in special abhorrence." But, like so many others, providentially guided to the Bible, he was amazed to find there, "not the doctrines of Rome, but the doctrines of Luther."³²¹ Henceforth he gave himself with entire devotion to the cause of the gospel. [216]

"The most learned of the nobles of France," his genius and eloquence, his indomitable courage and heroic zeal, and his in-

³²¹ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 9.

fluence at court,—for he was a favorite with the king,—caused him to be regarded by many as one destined to be the Reformer of his country. Said Beza, “Berquin would have been a second Luther, had he found in Francis I. a second elector.” “He is worse than Luther,”³²² cried the papists. More dreaded he was indeed by the Romanists of France. They thrust him into prison as a heretic, but he was set at liberty by the king. For years the struggle continued. Francis, wavering between Rome and the Reformation, alternately tolerated and restrained the fierce zeal of the monks. Berquin was three times imprisoned by the papal authorities, only to be released by the monarch, who, in admiration of his genius and his nobility of character, refused to sacrifice him to the malice of the hierarchy.

Berquin was repeatedly warned of the danger that threatened him in France, and urged to follow the steps of those who had found safety in voluntary exile. The timid and time-serving Erasmus, who with all the splendor of his scholarship failed of that moral greatness which holds life and honor subservient to truth, wrote to Berquin: “Ask to be sent as ambassador to some foreign country; go and travel in Germany. You know Beda and such as he—he is a thousand-headed monster, darting venom on every side. Your enemies are named legion. Were your cause better than that of Jesus Christ, they will not let you go till they have miserably destroyed you. Do not trust too much to the king's protection. At all events, *do not compromise me* with the faculty of theology.”³²³

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But as dangers thickened, Berquin's zeal only waxed the stronger. So far from adopting the politic and self-serving counsel of Erasmus, he determined upon still bolder measures. He would not only stand in defense of the truth, but he would attack error. The charge of heresy which the Romanists were seeking to fasten upon him, he would rivet upon them. The most

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

active and bitter of his opponents were the learned doctors and monks of the theological department in the great University of Paris, one of the highest ecclesiastical authorities both in the city and the nation. From the writings of these doctors, Berquin drew twelve propositions which he publicly declared to be “opposed to the Bible, and heretical;” and he appealed to the king to act as judge in the controversy.

The monarch, not loath to bring into contrast the power and acuteness of the opposing champions, and glad of an opportunity of humbling the pride of these haughty monks, bade the Romanists defend their cause by the Bible. This weapon, they well knew, would avail them little; imprisonment, torture, and the stake were arms which they better understood how to wield. Now the tables were turned, and they saw themselves about to fall into the pit into which they had hoped to plunge Berquin. In amazement they looked about them for some way of escape.

“Just at that time an image of the Virgin at the corner of one of the streets, was mutilated.” There was great excitement in the city. Crowds of people flocked to the place, with expressions of mourning and indignation. The king also was deeply moved. Here was an advantage which the monks could turn to good account, and they were quick to improve it. “These are the fruits of the doctrines of Berquin,” they cried. “All is about to be overthrown—religion, the laws, the throne itself—by this Lutheran conspiracy.”³²⁴

Again Berquin was apprehended. The king withdrew from Paris, and the monks were thus left free to work their will. The Reformer was tried, and condemned to die, and lest Francis should even yet interpose to save him, the sentence was executed on the very day it was pronounced. At noon Berquin was conducted to the place of death. An immense throng gathered to witness the event, and there were many who saw with aston-

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³²⁴ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 9.

ishment and misgiving that the victim had been chosen from the best and bravest of the noble families of France. Amazement, indignation, scorn, and bitter hatred darkened the faces of that surging crowd; but upon one face no shadow rested. The martyr's thoughts were far from that scene of tumult; he was conscious only of the presence of his Lord.

The wretched tumbrel upon which he rode, the frowning faces of his persecutors, the dreadful death to which he was going,—these he heeded not; He who liveth and was dead, and is alive forevermore, and hath the keys of death and of hell, was beside him. Berquin's countenance was radiant with the light and peace of heaven. He had attired himself in goodly raiment, wearing “a cloak of velvet, a doublet of satin and damask, and golden hose.”³²⁵ He was about to testify to his faith in presence of the King of kings and the witnessing universe, and no token of mourning should belie his joy.

As the procession moved slowly through the crowded streets, the people marked with wonder the unclouded peace, the joyous triumph, of his look and bearing. “He is,” they said, “like one who sits in a temple, and meditates on holy things.”³²⁶

At the stake, Berquin endeavored to address a few words to the people; but the monks, fearing the result, began to shout, and the soldiers to clash their arms, and their clamor drowned the martyr's voice. Thus in 1529, the highest literary and ecclesiastical authority of cultured Paris “set the populace of 1793 the base example of stifling on the scaffold the sacred words of the dying.”³²⁷

Berquin was strangled, and his body was consumed in the flames. The tidings of his death caused sorrow to the friends of the Reformation throughout France. But his example was not

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³²⁵ D'Aubigné, “History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin,” b. 2, ch. 16.

³²⁶ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 9.

³²⁷ Ibid.

lost. "We too are ready," said the witnesses for the truth, "to meet death cheerfully, setting our eyes on the life that is to come."³²⁸

During the persecution at Meaux, the teachers of the reformed faith were deprived of their license to preach, and they departed to other fields. Lefevre after a time made his way to Germany. Farel returned to his native town in eastern France, to spread the light in the home of his childhood. Already tidings had been received of what was going on at Meaux, and the truth, which he taught with fearless zeal, found listeners. Soon the authorities were roused to silence him, and he was banished from the city. Though he could no longer labor publicly, he traversed the plains and villages, teaching in private dwellings and in secluded meadows, and finding shelter in the forests and among the rocky caverns which had been his haunts in boyhood. God was preparing him for greater trials. "The crosses, persecutions, and machinations of Satan, of which I was forewarned, have not been wanting," he said; "they are even much severer than I could have borne of myself; but God is my Father; He has provided and always will provide me the strength which I require."³²⁹

As in apostolic days, persecution had "fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."³³⁰ Driven from Paris and Meaux, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."³³¹ And thus the light found its way into many of the remote provinces of France.

God was still preparing workers to extend His cause. In one of the schools of Paris was a thoughtful, quiet youth, already giving evidence of a powerful and penetrating mind, and no less marked for the blamelessness of his life than for intellectual ardor and religious devotion. His genius and application soon made him

³²⁸ D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 2, ch. 16.

³²⁹ D'Aubigné, b. 12, ch. 9.

³³⁰ Phil. 1:12.

³³¹ Acts 8:4.

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the pride of the college, and it was confidently anticipated that John Calvin would become one of the ablest and most honored defenders of the church. But a ray of divine light penetrated even within the walls of scholasticism and superstition by which Calvin was inclosed. He heard of the new doctrines with a shudder, nothing doubting that the heretics deserved the fire to which they were given. Yet all unwittingly he was brought face to face with the heresy, and forced to test the power of Romish theology to combat the Protestant teaching.

A cousin of Calvin's, who had joined the Reformers, was in Paris. The two kinsmen often met, and discussed together the matters that were disturbing Christendom. "There are but two religions in the world," said Olivetan, the Protestant. "The one class of religions are those which men have invented, in all of which man saves himself by ceremonies and good works; the other is that one religion which is revealed in the Bible, and which teaches man to look for salvation solely from the free grace of God."

"I will have none of your new doctrines," exclaimed Calvin; "think you that I have lived in error all my days?"³³²

But thoughts had been awakened in his mind which he could not banish at will. Alone in his chamber he pondered upon his cousin's words. Conviction of sin fastened upon him; he saw himself, without an intercessor, in the presence of a holy and just Judge. The mediation of saints, good works, the ceremonies of the church, all were powerless to atone for sin. He could see before him nothing but the blackness of eternal despair. In vain the doctors of the church endeavored to relieve his woe. Confession, penance, were resorted to in vain; they could not reconcile the soul with God.

While still engaged in these fruitless struggles, Calvin, chancing one day to visit one of the public squares, witnessed there

³³² Wylie. b. 13. ch. 7.

the burning of a heretic. He was filled with wonder at the expression of peace which rested upon the martyr's countenance. Amid the tortures of that dreadful death, and under the more terrible condemnation of the church, he manifested a faith and courage which the young student painfully contrasted with his own despair and darkness, while living in strictest obedience to the church. Upon the Bible, he knew, the heretics rested their faith. He determined to study it, and discover, if he could, the secret of their joy. [221]

In the Bible he found Christ. "O Father," he cried, "His sacrifice has appeased Thy wrath; His blood has washed away my impurities; His cross has borne my curse; His death has atoned for me. We had devised for ourselves many useless follies, but Thou hast placed Thy word before me like a torch, and Thou hast touched my heart, in order that I may hold in abomination all other merits save those of Jesus."³³³

Calvin had been educated for the priesthood. When only twelve years of age he had been appointed to the chaplaincy of a small church, and his head had been shorn by the bishop in accordance with the canon of the church. He did not receive consecration, nor did he fulfil the duties of a priest, but he became a member of the clergy, holding the title of his office, and receiving an allowance in consideration thereof.

Now, feeling that he could never become a priest, he turned for a time to the study of law, but finally abandoned this purpose, and determined to devote his life to the gospel. But he hesitated to become a public teacher. He was naturally timid, and was burdened with a sense of the weighty responsibility of the position, and he desired still to devote himself to study. The earnest entreaties of his friends, however, at last won his consent. "Wonderful it is," he said, "that one of so lowly an origin should be exalted to so great a dignity."³³⁴

³³³ Martyn, Vol. III, ch. 13.

³³⁴ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 9.

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Quietly did Calvin enter upon his work, and his words were as the dew falling to refresh the earth. He had left Paris, and was now in a provincial town under the protection of the princess Margaret, who, loving the gospel, extended her protection to its disciples. Calvin was still a youth, of gentle, unpretentious bearing. His work began with the people at their homes. Surrounded by the members of the household, he read the Bible, and opened the truths of salvation. Those who heard the message, carried the good news to others, and soon the teacher passed beyond the city to the outlying towns and hamlets. To both the castle and the cabin he found entrance, and he went forward, laying the foundation of churches that were to yield fearless witnesses for the truth.

A few months, and he was again in Paris. There was unwonted agitation in the circle of learned men and scholars. The study of the ancient languages had led men to the Bible, and many whose hearts were untouched by its truths were eagerly discussing them, and even giving battle to the champions of Romanism. Calvin, though an able combatant in the fields of theological controversy, had a higher mission to accomplish than that of these noisy schoolmen. The minds of men were stirred, and now was the time to open to them the truth. While the halls of the universities were filled with the clamor of theological disputation, Calvin was making his way from house to house, opening the Bible to the people, and speaking to them of Christ and Him crucified.

In God's providence, Paris was to receive another invitation to accept the gospel. The call of Lefevre and Farel had been rejected, but again the message was to be heard by all classes in that great capital. The king, influenced by political considerations, had not yet fully sided with Rome against the Reformation. Margaret still clung to the hope that Protestantism was to triumph in France. She resolved that the reformed faith should be preached in Paris. During the absence of the king, she ordered a Protestant minister to preach in the churches of the city. This being forbidden by

the papal dignitaries, the princess threw open the palace. An apartment was fitted up as a chapel, and it was announced that every day, at a specified hour, a sermon would be preached, and the people of every rank and station were invited to attend. Crowds flocked to the service. Not only the chapel, but the ante-chambers and halls were thronged. Thousands every day assembled,—nobles, statesmen, lawyers, merchants, and artisans. The king, instead of forbidding the assemblies, ordered that two of the churches of Paris should be opened. Never before had the city been so moved by the word of God. The spirit of life from heaven seemed to be breathed upon the people. Temperance, purity, order, and industry were taking the place of drunkenness, licentiousness, strife, and idleness. [223]

But the hierarchy were not idle. The king still refused to interfere to stop the preaching, and they turned to the populace. No means were spared to excite the fears, the prejudices, and the fanaticism of the ignorant and superstitious multitudes. Yielding blindly to her false teachers, Paris, like Jerusalem of old, knew not the time of her visitation, nor the things which belonged unto her peace. For two years the word of God was preached in the capital; but while there were many who accepted the gospel, the majority of the people rejected it. Francis had made a show of toleration, merely to serve his own purposes, and the papists succeeded in regaining the ascendancy. Again the churches were closed, and the stake was set up.

Calvin was still in Paris, preparing himself by study, meditation, and prayer, for his future labors, and continuing to spread the light. At last, however, suspicion fastened upon him. The authorities determined to bring him to the flames. Regarding himself as secure in his seclusion, he had no thought of danger, when friends came hurrying to his room with the news that officers were on their way to arrest him. At the instant a loud knocking was heard at the outer entrance. There was not a moment to be lost. Some of his friends detained the officers at the door,

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while others assisted the Reformer to let himself down from a window, and he rapidly made his way to the outskirts of the city. Finding shelter in the cottage of a laborer who was a friend to the reform, he disguised himself in the garments of his host, and shouldering a hoe, started on his journey. Traveling southward, he again found refuge in the dominions of Margaret.³³⁵

Here for a few months he remained, safe under the protection of powerful friends, and engaged as before in study. But his heart was set upon the evangelization of France, and he could not long remain inactive. As soon as the storm had somewhat abated, he sought a new field of labor in Poitiers, where was a university, and where already the new opinions had found favor. Persons of all classes gladly listened to the gospel. There was no public preaching, but in the home of the chief magistrate, in his own lodgings, and sometimes in a public garden, Calvin opened the words of eternal life to those who desired to listen. After a time, as the number of hearers increased, it was thought safer to assemble outside the city. A cave in the side of a deep and narrow gorge, where trees and overhanging rocks made the seclusion still more complete, was chosen as the place of meeting. Little companies, leaving the city by different routes, found their way hither. In this retired spot the Bible was read and explained. Here the Lord's supper was celebrated for the first time by the Protestants of France. From this little church several faithful evangelists were sent out.

Once more Calvin returned to Paris. He could not even yet relinquish the hope that France as a nation would accept the Reformation. But he found almost every door of labor closed. To teach the gospel was to take the direct road to the stake, and he at last determined to depart to Germany. Scarcely had he left France when a storm burst over the Protestants, that, had he remained, must surely have involved him in the general ruin.

³³⁵ See D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 2, ch. 30.

The French Reformers, eager to see their country keeping pace with Germany and Switzerland, determined to strike a bold blow against the superstitions of Rome, that should arouse the whole nation. Accordingly placards attacking the mass were in one night posted all over France. Instead of advancing the reform, this zealous but ill-judged movement brought ruin, not only upon its propagators, but upon the friends of the reformed faith throughout France. It gave the Romanists what they had long desired,—a pretext for demanding the utter destruction of the heretics as agitators dangerous to the stability of the throne and the peace of the nation. [225]

By some secret hand—whether of indiscreet friend or wily foe was never known—one of the placards was attached to the door of the king's private chamber. The monarch was filled with horror. In this paper, superstitions that had received the veneration of ages were attacked with an unsparing hand. And the unexampled boldness of obtruding these plain and startling utterances into the royal presence, aroused the wrath of the king. In his amazement he stood for a little time trembling and speechless. Then his rage found utterance in the terrible words: "Let all be seized without distinction who are suspected of Lutheresy. I will exterminate them all."³³⁶ The die was cast. The king had determined to throw himself fully on the side of Rome.

Measures were at once taken for the arrest of every Lutheran in Paris. A poor artisan, an adherent of the reformed faith, who had been accustomed to summon the believers to their secret assemblies, was seized, and with the threat of instant death at the stake, was commanded to conduct the papal emissary to the home of every Protestant in the city. He shrunk in horror from the base proposal, but at last fear of the flames prevailed, and he consented to become the betrayer of his brethren. Preceded by the host, and surrounded by a train of priests, incense-bear-

³³⁶ D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 4, ch. 10.

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ers, monks, and soldiers, Morin, the royal detective, with the traitor, slowly and silently passed through the streets of the city. The demonstration was ostensibly in honor of the "holy sacrament," an act of expiation for the insult put upon the mass by the protesters. But beneath this pageant a deadly purpose was concealed. On arriving opposite the house of a Lutheran, the betrayer made a sign, but no word was uttered. The procession halted, the house was entered, the family were dragged forth and chained, and the terrible company went forward in search of fresh victims. They "spared no house, great or small, not even the colleges of the University of Paris.... Morin made all the city quake.... It was a reign of terror."³³⁷

The victims were put to death with cruel torture, it being specially ordered that the fire should be lowered, in order to prolong their agony. But they died as conquerors. Their constancy was unshaken, their peace unclouded. Their persecutors, powerless to move their inflexible firmness, felt themselves defeated. "The scaffolds were distributed over all the quarters of Paris, and the burnings followed on successive days, the design being to spread the terror of heresy by spreading the executions. The advantage, however, in the end, remained with the gospel. All Paris was enabled to see what kind of men the new opinions could produce. There was no pulpit like the martyr's pile. The serene joy that lighted up the faces of these men as they passed along ... to the place of execution, their heroism as they stood amid the bitter flames, their meek forgiveness of injuries, transformed, in instances not a few, anger into pity, and hate into love, and pleaded with resistless eloquence in behalf of the gospel."³³⁸

The priests, bent upon keeping the popular fury at its height, circulated the most terrible accusations against the Protestants. They were charged with plotting to massacre the Catholics, to

³³⁷ D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 4, ch. 10.

³³⁸ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 20.

overthrow the government, and to murder the king. Not a shadow of evidence could be produced in support of the allegations. Yet these prophecies of evil were to have a fulfilment; under far different circumstances, however, and from causes of an opposite character. The cruelties that were inflicted upon the innocent Protestants by the Catholics, accumulated in a weight of retribution, and in after-centuries wrought the very doom they had predicted to be impending, upon the king, his government, and his subjects; but it was brought about by infidels, and by the papists themselves. It was not the establishment, but the suppression, of Protestantism, that, three hundred years later, was to bring upon France these dire calamities. [227]

Suspicion, distrust, and terror now pervaded all classes of society. Amid the general alarm it was seen how deep a hold the Lutheran teaching had gained upon the minds of men who stood highest for education, influence, and excellence of character. Positions of trust and honor were suddenly found vacant. Artisans, printers, scholars, professors in the universities, authors, and even courtiers, disappeared. Hundreds fled from Paris, self-constituted exiles from their native land, in many cases thus giving the first intimation that they favored the reformed faith. The papists looked about them in amazement at thought of the unsuspected heretics that had been tolerated among them. Their rage spent itself upon the multitudes of humbler victims who were within their power. The prisons were crowded, and the very air seemed darkened with the smoke of burning piles, kindled for the confessors of the gospel.

Francis I. had gloried in being a leader in the great movement for the revival of learning which marked the opening of the sixteenth century. He had delighted to gather at his court men of letters from every country. To his love of learning and his contempt for the ignorance and superstition of the monks was due, in part at least, the degree of toleration that had been granted to the reform. But, inspired with zeal to stamp out heresy, this

patron of learning issued an edict declaring printing abolished all over France! Francis I. presents one among the many examples on record showing that intellectual culture is not a safeguard against religious intolerance and persecution.

France by a solemn and public ceremony was to commit herself fully to the destruction of Protestantism. The priests demanded that the affront offered to high Heaven in the condemnation of the mass, be expiated in blood, and that the king, in behalf of his people, publicly give his sanction to the dreadful work.

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The 21st of January, 1535, was fixed upon for the awful ceremonial. The superstitious fears and bigoted hatred of the whole nation had been roused. Paris was thronged with the multitudes that from all the surrounding country crowded her streets. The day was to be ushered in by a vast and imposing procession. "The houses along the line of march were hung with mourning drapery, and altars rose at intervals." Before every door was a lighted torch in honor of the "holy sacrament." Before daybreak the procession formed, at the palace of the king. "First came the banners and crosses of the several parishes; next appeared the citizens, walking two and two, and bearing torches." The four orders of friars followed, each in its own peculiar dress. Then came a vast collection of famous relics. Following these rode lordly ecclesiastics in their purple and scarlet robes and jeweled adornings, a gorgeous and glittering array.

"The host was carried by the bishop of Paris under a magnificent canopy, ... supported by four princes of the blood.... After the host walked the king.... Francis I. on that day wore no crown, nor robe of state." With "head uncovered, his eyes cast on the ground, and in his hand a lighted taper," the king of France appeared "in the character of a penitent."³³⁹ At every altar he bowed down in humiliation, not for the vices that defiled

³³⁹ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 21.

his soul, nor the innocent blood that stained his hands, but for the deadly sin of his subjects who had dared to condemn the mass. Following him came the queen and the dignitaries of state, also walking two and two, each with a lighted torch.

As a part of the services of the day, the monarch himself addressed the high officials of the kingdom in the great hall of the bishop's palace. With a sorrowful countenance he appeared before them, and in words of moving eloquence bewailed "the crime, the blasphemy, the day of sorrow and disgrace," that had come upon the nation. And he called upon every loyal subject to aid in the extirpation of the pestilent heresy that threatened France with ruin. "As true, Messieurs, as I am your king," he said, "if I knew one of my own limbs spotted or infected with this detestable rottenness, I would give it you to cut off.... And further, if I saw one of my children defiled by it, I would not spare him.... I would deliver him up myself, and would sacrifice him to God." Tears choked his utterance, and the whole assembly wept, with one accord exclaiming, "We will live and die for the Catholic religion!"³⁴⁰ [229]

Terrible had become the darkness of the nation that had rejected the light of truth. "The grace that bringeth salvation" had appeared; but France, after beholding its power and holiness, after thousands had been drawn by its divine beauty, after cities and hamlets had been illuminated by its radiance, had turned away, choosing darkness rather than light. They had put from them the heavenly gift, when it was offered them. They had called evil good, and good evil, till they had fallen victims to their wilful self-deception. Now, though they might actually believe that they were doing God service in persecuting His people, yet their sincerity did not render them guiltless. The light that would have saved them from deception, from staining their souls with blood-guiltiness, they had wilfully rejected.

³⁴⁰ D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 4. ch. 12.

A solemn oath to extirpate heresy was taken in the great cathedral where, nearly three centuries later, the "Goddess of Reason" was to be enthroned by a nation that had forgotten the living God. Again the procession formed, and the representatives of France set out to begin the work which they had sworn to do. "At short distances scaffolds had been erected, on which certain Protestant Christians were to be burned alive, and it was arranged that the fagots should be lighted at the moment the king approached, and that the procession should halt to witness the execution."³⁴¹ The details of the tortures endured by these witnesses for Christ are too harrowing for recital; but there was no wavering on the part of the victims. On being urged to recant, one answered: "I only believe in what the prophets and the apostles formerly preached, and what all the company of saints believed. My faith has a confidence in God which will resist all the powers of hell."³⁴²

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Again and again the procession halted at the places of torture. Upon reaching their starting-point at the royal palace, the crowd dispersed, and the king and the prelates withdrew, well satisfied with the day's proceedings, and congratulating themselves that the work now begun would be continued to the complete destruction of heresy.

The gospel of peace which France had rejected was to be only too surely rooted out, and terrible would be the results. On the 21st of January, 1793, two hundred and fifty-eight years from the very day that fully committed France to the persecution of the Reformers, another procession, with a far different purpose, passed through the streets of Paris. "Again the king was the chief figure; again there were tumult and shouting; again there was heard the cry for more victims; again there were black scaffolds; and again the scenes of the day were closed by horrid executions; Louis XVI., struggling hand to hand with his jailers and execu-

³⁴¹ Wylie, b. 13. ch. 21.

³⁴² D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin." b. 4. ch.

tioners, was dragged forward to the block, and there held down by main force till the axe had fallen, and his dissevered head rolled on the scaffold."³⁴³ Nor was the king the only victim; near the same spot two thousand and eight hundred human beings perished by the guillotine during the bloody days of the Reign of Terror.

The Reformation had presented to the world an open Bible, unsealing the precepts of the law of God, and urging its claims upon the consciences of the people. Infinite Love had unfolded to men the statutes and principles of heaven. God had said, "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."³⁴⁴ When France rejected the gift of heaven, she sowed the seeds of anarchy and ruin; and the inevitable outworking of cause and effect resulted in the Revolution and the Reign of Terror.

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Long before the persecution excited by the placards, the bold and ardent Farel had been forced to flee from the land of his birth. He repaired to Switzerland, and by his labors, seconding the work of Zwingle, he helped to turn the scale in favor of the Reformation. His later years were to be spent here, yet he continued to exert a decided influence upon the reform in France. During the first years of his exile, his efforts were especially directed to spreading the gospel in his native country. He spent considerable time in preaching among his countrymen near the frontier, where with tireless vigilance he watched the conflict, and aided by his words of encouragement and counsel. With the assistance of other exiles, the writings of the German Reformers were translated into the French language, and together with the French Bible, were printed in large quantities. By colporteurs, these works were sold extensively in France. They were fur-

³⁴³ Wylie, b. 13, ch. 21.

³⁴⁴ Deut. 4:6.

nished to the colporteurs at a low price, and thus the profits of the work enabled them to continue it.

Farel entered upon his work in Switzerland in the humble guise of a schoolmaster. Repairing to a secluded parish, he devoted himself to the instruction of children. Besides the usual branches of learning, he cautiously introduced the truths of the Bible, hoping through the children to reach their parents. There were some who believed, but the priests came forward to stop the work, and the superstitious country people were roused to oppose it. "That cannot be the gospel of Christ," urged the priests, "seeing the preaching of it does not bring peace, but war."³⁴⁵ Like the first disciples, when persecuted in one city he fled to another. From village to village, from city to city, he went, traveling on foot, enduring hunger, cold, and weariness, and everywhere in peril of his life. He preached in the market-places, in the churches, sometimes in the pulpits of the cathedrals. Sometimes he found the church empty of hearers; at times his preaching was interrupted by shouts and jeers; again he was pulled violently out of the pulpit. More than once he was set upon by the rabble, and beaten almost to death. Yet he pressed forward. Though often repulsed, with unwearying persistence he returned to the attack; and one after another, he saw towns and cities which had been strongholds of popery, opening their gates to the gospel. The little parish where he had first labored, soon accepted the reformed faith. The cities of Morat and Neuchâtel also renounced the Romish rites, and removed the idolatrous images from their churches.

Farel had long desired to plant the Protestant standard in Geneva. If this city could be won, it would be a center for the Reformation in France, in Switzerland, and in Italy. With this object before him, he had continued his labors until many of the surrounding towns and hamlets had been gained. Then with a

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³⁴⁵ Wylie. b. 14. ch. 3.

single companion he entered Geneva. But only two sermons was he permitted to preach. The priests, having vainly endeavored to secure his condemnation by the civil authorities, summoned him before an ecclesiastical council, to which they came with arms concealed under their robes, determined to take his life. Outside the hall, a furious mob, with clubs and swords, was gathered to make sure of his death if he should succeed in escaping the council. The presence of magistrates and an armed force, however, saved him. Early next morning he was conducted, with his companion, across the lake to a place of safety. Thus ended his first effort to evangelize Geneva.

For the next trial a lowlier instrument was chosen,—a young man, so humble in appearance that he was coldly treated even by the professed friends of reform. But what could such a one do where Farel had been rejected? How could one of little courage and experience withstand the tempest before which the strongest and bravest had been forced to flee? “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.”³⁴⁶ “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”³⁴⁷

Froment began his work as a schoolmaster. The truths which he taught the children at school, they repeated at their homes. Soon the parents came to hear the Bible explained, until the schoolroom was filled with attentive listeners. New Testaments and tracts were freely distributed, and they reached many who dared not come openly to listen to the new doctrines. After a time this laborer also was forced to flee; but the truths he taught had taken hold upon the minds of the people. The Reformation had been planted, and it continued to strengthen and extend. The preachers returned, and through their labors the Protestant worship was finally established in Geneva. [233]

³⁴⁶ Zech. 4:6.

³⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 1:27, 25.

The city had already declared for the Reformation, when Calvin, after various wanderings and vicissitudes, entered its gates. Returning from a last visit to his birthplace, he was on his way to Basel, when, finding the direct road occupied by the armies of Charles V., he was forced to take the circuitous route by Geneva.

In this visit, Farel recognized the hand of God. Though Geneva had accepted the reformed faith, yet a great work remained to be accomplished here. It is not as communities but as individuals that men are converted to God; the work of regeneration must be wrought in the heart and conscience by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the decrees of councils. While the people of Geneva had cast off the authority of Rome, they were not so ready to renounce the vices that had flourished under her rule. To establish here the pure principles of the gospel, and to prepare this people to fill worthily the position to which Providence seemed calling them, was no light task.

Farel was confident that he had found in Calvin one whom he could unite with himself in this work. In the name of God he solemnly adjured the young evangelist to remain and labor here. Calvin drew back in alarm. Timid and peace-loving, he shrank from contact with the bold, independent, and even violent spirit of the Genevese. The feebleness of his health, together with his studious habits, led him to seek retirement. Believing that by his pen he could best serve the cause of reform, he desired to find a quiet retreat for study, and there, through the press, instruct and build up the churches. But Farel's solemn admonition came to him as a call from heaven, and he dared not refuse. It seemed to him, he said, "that the hand of God was stretched down from heaven, that it lay hold of him, and fixed him irrevocably to the place he was so impatient to leave."³⁴⁸

At this time great perils surrounded the Protestant cause. The

³⁴⁸ D'Aubigné, "History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin," b. 9, ch. 17.

anathemas of the pope thundered against Geneva, and mighty nations threatened it with destruction. How was this little city to resist the powerful hierarchy that had so often forced kings and emperors to submission? How could it stand against the armies of the world's great conquerors?

Throughout Christendom, Protestantism was menaced by formidable foes. The first triumphs of the Reformation past, Rome summoned new forces, hoping to accomplish its destruction. At this time, the order of the Jesuits was created, the most cruel, unscrupulous, and powerful of all the champions of popery. Cut off from earthly ties and human interests, dead to the claims of natural affection, reason and conscience wholly silenced, they knew no rule, no tie, but that of their order, and no duty but to extend its power.³⁴⁹ The gospel of Christ had enabled its adherents to meet danger and endure suffering, undismayed by cold, hunger, toil, and poverty, to uphold the banner of truth in face of the rack, the dungeon, and the stake. To combat these forces, Jesuitism inspired its followers with a fanaticism that enabled them to endure like dangers, and to oppose to the power of truth all the weapons of deception. There was no crime too great for them to commit, no deception too base for them to practise, no disguise too difficult for them to assume. Vowed to perpetual poverty and humility, it was their studied aim to secure wealth and power, to be devoted to the overthrow of Protestantism, and the reestablishment of the papal supremacy.

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When appearing as members of their order, they wore a garb of sanctity, visiting prisons and hospitals, ministering to the sick and the poor, professing to have renounced the world, and bearing the sacred name of Jesus, who went about doing good. But under this blameless exterior the most criminal and deadly purposes were often concealed. It was a fundamental principle of the order that the end justifies the means. By this code,

³⁴⁹ See Appendix.

lying, theft, perjury, assassination, were not only pardonable but commendable, when they served the interests of the church. Under various disguises the Jesuits worked their way into offices of state, climbing up to be the counselors of kings, and shaping the policy of nations. They became servants, to act as spies upon their masters. They established colleges for the sons of princes and nobles, and schools for the common people; and the children of Protestant parents were drawn into an observance of popish rites. All the outward pomp and display of the Romish worship was brought to bear to confuse the mind, and dazzle and captivate the imagination; and thus the liberty for which the fathers had toiled and bled was betrayed by the sons. The Jesuits rapidly spread themselves over Europe, and wherever they went, there followed a revival of popery.

To give them greater power, a bull was issued re-establishing the Inquisition.³⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the general abhorrence with which it was regarded, even in Catholic countries, this terrible tribunal was again set up by popish rulers, and atrocities too terrible to bear the light of day were repeated in its secret dungeons. In many countries, thousands upon thousands of the very flower of the nation, the purest and noblest, the most intellectual and highly educated, pious and devoted pastors, industrious and patriotic citizens, brilliant scholars, talented artists, skilful artisans, were slain, or forced to flee to other lands.

Such were the means which Rome had invoked to quench the light of the Reformation, to withdraw from men the Bible, and to restore the ignorance and superstition of the Dark Ages. But under God's blessing and the labors of those noble men whom He had raised up to succeed Luther, Protestantism was not overthrown. Not to the favor or arms of princes was it to owe its strength. The smallest countries, the humblest and least powerful nations, became its strongholds. It was little Geneva in the midst

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³⁵⁰ See Appendix.