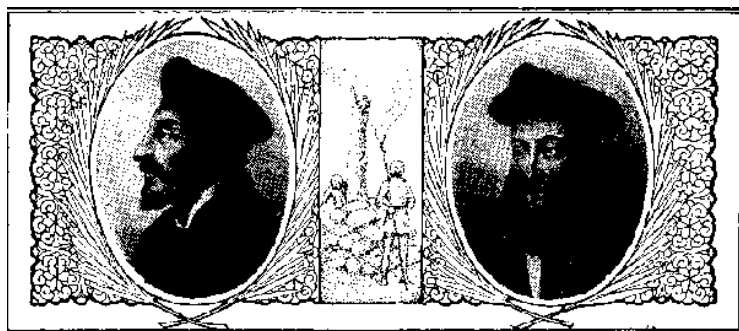


[097]

## 6. Huss and Jerome.



The gospel had been planted in Bohemia as early as the ninth century. The Bible was translated, and public worship was conducted, in the language of the people. But as the power of the pope increased, so the word of God was obscured. Gregory VII., who had taken it upon him to humble the pride of kings, was no less intent upon enslaving the people, and accordingly a bull was issued forbidding public worship to be conducted in the Bohemian tongue. The pope declared that “it was pleasing to the Omnipotent that His worship should be celebrated in an unknown language, and that many evils and heresies had arisen from not observing this rule.”<sup>125</sup> Thus Rome decreed that the light of God’s word should be extinguished, and the people should be shut up in darkness. But Heaven had provided other agencies

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<sup>125</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 1.

for the preservation of the church. Many of the Waldenses and Albigenses, driven by persecution from their homes in France and Italy, came to Bohemia. Though they dared not teach openly, they labored zealously in secret. Thus the true faith was preserved from century to century.

Before the days of Huss, there were men in Bohemia who rose up to condemn openly the corruption in the church and the profligacy of the people. Their labors excited widespread interest. The fears of the hierarchy were roused, and persecution was opened against the disciples of the gospel. Driven to worship in the forests and the mountains, they were hunted by soldiers, and many were put to death. After a time it was decreed that all who departed from the Romish worship should be burned. But while the Christians yielded up their lives, they looked forward to the triumph of their cause. One of those who “taught that salvation was only to be found by faith in the crucified Saviour,” declared when dying, “The rage of the enemies of the truth now prevails against us, but it will not be forever; there shall arise one from among the common people, without sword or authority, and against him they shall not be able to prevail.”<sup>126</sup> Luther's time was yet far distant; but already one was rising, whose testimony against Rome would stir the nations. [098]

John Huss was of humble birth, and was early left an orphan by the death of his father. His pious mother, regarding education and the fear of God as the most valuable of possessions, sought to secure this heritage for her son. Huss studied at the provincial school, and then repaired to the university at Prague, receiving admission as a charity scholar. He was accompanied on the journey to Prague by his mother; widowed and poor, she had no gift of worldly wealth to bestow upon her son, but as they drew near to the great city, she kneeled down beside the fatherless youth, and invoked for him the blessing of their Father in heaven.

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<sup>126</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 1.

Little did that mother realize how her prayer was to be answered.

At the university, Huss soon distinguished himself by his untiring application and rapid progress, while his blameless life and gentle, winning deportment gained him universal esteem. He was a sincere adherent of the Roman Church, and an earnest seeker for the spiritual blessings which it professes to bestow. On the occasion of a jubilee, he went to confession, paid the last few coins in his scanty store, and joined in the processions, that he might share in the absolution promised. After completing his college course, he entered the priesthood, and rapidly attaining to eminence, he soon became attached to the court of the king. He was also made professor and afterward rector of the university where he had received his education. In a few years the humble charity scholar had become the pride of his country, and his name was renowned throughout Europe.

[099]

But it was in another field that Huss began the work of reform. Several years after taking priest's orders he was appointed preacher of the chapel of Bethlehem. The founder of this chapel had advocated, as a matter of great importance, the preaching of the Scriptures in the language of the people. Notwithstanding Rome's opposition to this practice, it had not been wholly discontinued in Bohemia. But there was great ignorance of the Bible, and the worst vices prevailed among the people of all ranks. These evils Huss unsparingly denounced, appealing to the word of God to enforce the principles of truth and purity which he inculcated.

A citizen of Prague, Jerome, who afterward became so closely associated with Huss, had, on returning from England, brought with him the writings of Wycliffe. The queen of England, who had been a convert to Wycliffe's teachings, was a Bohemian princess, and through her influence also the Reformer's works were widely circulated in her native country. These works Huss read with interest; he believed their author to be a sincere Christian, and was inclined to regard with favor the reforms which he

advocated. Already, though he knew it not, Huss had entered upon a path which was to lead him far away from Rome.

About this time there arrived in Prague two strangers from England, men of learning, who had received the light, and had come to spread it in this distant land. Beginning with an open attack on the pope's supremacy, they were soon silenced by the authorities; but being unwilling to relinquish their purpose, they had recourse to other measures. Being artists as well as preachers, they proceeded to exercise their skill. In a place open to the public they drew two pictures. One represented the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, "meek, and sitting upon an ass,"<sup>127</sup> and followed [100] by His disciples in travel-worn garments and with naked feet. The other picture portrayed a pontifical procession,—the pope arrayed in his rich robes and triple crown, mounted upon a horse magnificently adorned, preceded by trumpeters, and followed by cardinals and prelates in dazzling array.

Here was a sermon which arrested the attention of all classes. Crowds came to gaze upon the drawings. None could fail to read the moral, and many were deeply impressed by the contrast between the meekness and humility of Christ the Master, and the pride and arrogance of the pope, His professed servant. There was great commotion in Prague, and the strangers after a time found it necessary, for their own safety, to depart. But the lesson they had taught was not forgotten. The pictures made a deep impression on the mind of Huss, and led him to a closer study of the Bible and of Wycliffe's writings. Though he was not prepared, even yet, to accept all the reforms advocated by Wycliffe, he saw more clearly the true character of the papacy, and with greater zeal denounced the pride, the ambition, and the corruption of the hierarchy.

From Bohemia the light extended to Germany; for disturbances in the University of Prague caused the withdrawal of

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<sup>127</sup> Matt. 21:5.

hundreds of German students. Many of them had received from Huss their first knowledge of the Bible, and on their return they spread the gospel in their fatherland.

Tidings of the work at Prague were carried to Rome, and Huss was soon summoned to appear before the pope. To obey would be to expose himself to certain death. The king and queen of Bohemia, the university, members of the nobility, and officers of the government, united in an appeal to the pontiff that Huss be permitted to remain at Prague, and to answer at Rome by deputy. Instead of granting this request, the pope proceeded to the trial and condemnation of Huss, and then declared the city of Prague to be under interdict.

[101]

In that age this sentence, whenever pronounced, created widespread alarm. The ceremonies by which it was accompanied were well adapted to strike terror to a people who looked upon the pope as the representative of God Himself, holding the keys of heaven and hell, and possessing power to invoke temporal as well as spiritual judgments. It was believed that the gates of heaven were closed against the region smitten with interdict; that until it should please the pope to remove the ban, the dead were shut out from the abodes of bliss. In token of this terrible calamity, all the services of religion were suspended. The churches were closed. Marriages were solemnized in the churchyard. The dead, denied burial in consecrated ground, were interred, without the rites of sepulture, in the ditches or the fields. Thus by measures which appealed to the imagination, Rome essayed to control the consciences of men.

The city of Prague was filled with tumult. A large class denounced Huss as the cause of all their calamities, and demanded that he be given up to the vengeance of Rome. To quiet the storm, the Reformer withdrew for a time to his native village. Writing to the friends whom he had left at Prague, he said: "If I have withdrawn from the midst of you, it is to follow the precept and example of Jesus Christ, in order not to give room to the

ill-minded to draw on themselves eternal condemnation, and in order not to be to the pious a cause of affliction and persecution, I have retired also through an apprehension that impious priests might continue for a longer time to prohibit the preaching of the word of God amongst you; but I have not quitted you to deny the divine truth, for which, with God's assistance, I am willing to die.”<sup>128</sup> Huss did not cease his labors, but traveled through the surrounding country, preaching to eager crowds. Thus the measures to which the pope resorted to suppress the gospel, were causing it to be the more widely extended. “We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.”<sup>129</sup>

[102]

“The mind of Huss, at this stage of his career, would seem to have been the scene of a painful conflict. Although the church was seeking to overwhelm him by her thunderbolts, he had not renounced her authority. The Roman Church was still to him the spouse of Christ, and the pope was the representative and vicar of God. What Huss was warring against was the abuse of authority, not the principle itself. This brought on a terrible conflict between the convictions of his understanding and the claims of his conscience. If the authority was just and infallible, as he believed it to be, how came it that he felt compelled to disobey it? To obey, he saw, was to sin; but why should obedience to an infallible church lead to such an issue? This was the problem he could not solve; this was the doubt that tortured him hour by hour. The nearest approximation to a solution which he was able to make, was that it had happened again, as once before in the days of the Saviour, that the priests of the church had become wicked persons, and were using their lawful authority for unlawful ends. This led him to adopt for his own guidance, and to preach to others for theirs, the maxim that the precepts of Scripture, conveyed through the understanding, are to rule

<sup>128</sup> Bonnechose, “The Reformers before the Reformation.” Vol. I, p. 87 (ed. 1844).

<sup>129</sup> 2 Cor. 13:8.

the conscience; in other words, that God speaking in the Bible, and not the church speaking through the priesthood, is the one infallible guide."<sup>130</sup>

When after a time the excitement in Prague subsided, Huss returned to his chapel of Bethlehem, to continue with greater zeal and courage the preaching of the word of God. His enemies were active and powerful, but the queen and many of the nobles were his friends, and the people in great numbers sided with him. Comparing his pure and elevating teachings and holy life with the degrading dogmas which the Romanists preached, and the avarice and debauchery which they practised, many regarded it an honor to be on his side.

[103]

Hitherto Huss had stood alone in his labors; but now Jerome, who while in England had accepted the teachings of Wycliffe, joined in the work of reform. The two were hereafter united in their lives, and in death they were not to be divided. Brilliancy of genius, eloquence and learning—gifts that win popular favor—were possessed in a preeminent degree by Jerome; but in those qualities which constitute real strength of character, Huss was the greater. His calm judgment served as a restraint upon the impulsive spirit of Jerome, who, with true humility, perceived his worth, and yielded to his counsels. Under their united labors the reform was more rapidly extended.

God permitted great light to shine upon the minds of these chosen men, revealing to them many of the errors of Rome; but they did not receive all the light that was to be given to the world. Through these, His servants, God was leading the people out of the darkness of Romanism; but there were many and great obstacles for them to meet, and He led them on, step by step, as they could bear it. They were not prepared to receive all the light at once. Like the full glory of the noontide sun to those who have long dwelt in darkness, it would, if presented, have caused

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<sup>130</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 2.

them to turn away. Therefore He revealed it to the leaders little by little, as it could be received by the people. From century to century, other faithful workers were to follow, to lead the people on still farther in the path of reform.

The schism in the church still continued. Three popes were now contending for the supremacy, and their strife filled Christendom with crime and tumult. Not content with hurling anathemas, they resorted to temporal weapons. Each cast about him to purchase arms and to obtain soldiers. Of course money must be had; and to procure this, the gifts, offices, and blessings of the church were offered for sale.<sup>131</sup> The priests also, imitating their superiors, resorted to simony and war to humble their rivals and strengthen their own power. With daily increasing boldness, Huss thundered against the abominations which were tolerated in the name of religion; and the people openly accused the Romish leaders as the cause of the miseries that overwhelmed Christendom.

[104]

Again the city of Prague seemed on the verge of a bloody conflict. As in former ages, God's servant was accused as "he that troubleth Israel."<sup>132</sup> The city was again placed under interdict, and Huss withdrew to his native village. The testimony so faithfully borne from his loved chapel of Bethlehem was ended. He was to speak from a wider stage, to all Christendom, before laying down his life as a witness for the truth.

To cure the evils that were distracting Europe, a general council was summoned to meet at Constance. The council was called at the desire of the emperor Sigismund, by one of the three rival popes, John XXIII. The demand for a council had been far from welcome to Pope John, whose character and policy could ill bear investigation, even by prelates as lax in morals as were the churchmen of those times. He dared not, however, oppose the

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<sup>131</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Kings 18:17.



will of Sigismund.<sup>133</sup>

The chief objects to be accomplished by the council were to heal the schism in the church, and to root out heresy. Hence the two anti-popes were summoned to appear before it, as well as the leading propagator of the new opinions, John Huss. The former, having regard to their own safety, did not attend in person, but were represented by their delegates. Pope John, while ostensibly the convoker of the council, came to it with many misgivings, suspecting the emperor's secret purpose to depose him, and fearing to be brought to account for the vices which had disgraced the tiara, as well as for the crimes which had secured it. Yet he made his entry into the city of Constance with great pomp, attended by ecclesiastics of the highest rank, and followed by a train of courtiers. All the clergy and dignitaries of the city, with an immense crowd of citizens, went out to welcome him. Above his head was a golden canopy, borne by four of the chief magistrates. The host was carried before him, and the rich dresses of the cardinals and nobles made an imposing display.

[105]

Meanwhile another traveler was approaching Constance. Huss was conscious of the dangers which threatened him. He parted from his friends as if he were never to meet them again, and went on his journey feeling that it was leading him to the stake. Notwithstanding he had obtained a safe-conduct from the king of Bohemia, and received one also from the emperor Sigismund while on his journey, he made all his arrangements in view of the probability of his death.

In a letter addressed to his friends at Prague he said: "My brethren, ... I am departing with a safe-conduct from the king, to meet my numerous and mortal enemies.... I confide altogether in the all-powerful God, in my Saviour; I trust that He will listen to your ardent prayers, that He will infuse His prudence and His wisdom into my mouth, in order that I may resist them;

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<sup>133</sup> See Appendix.

and that He will accord me His Holy Spirit to fortify me in His truth, so that I may face with courage, temptations, prison, and if necessary, a cruel death. Jesus Christ suffered for His well-beloved; and therefore ought we to be astonished that He has left us His example, in order that we may ourselves endure with patience all things for our own salvation? He is God, and we are His creatures; He is the Lord, and we are His servants; He is Master of the world, and we are contemptible mortals:—yet He suffered! Why, then, should we not suffer also, particularly when suffering is for us a purification? 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. But if it be better that I return amongst you, let us pray to God that I may return without stain,—that is, that I may not suppress one tittle of the truth of the gospel, in order to leave my brethren an excellent example to follow. Probably, therefore, you will never more behold my face at Prague: but should the will of the all-powerful God deign to restore me to you, let us then advance with a firmer heart in the knowledge and the love of His law.”<sup>134</sup>

In another letter, to a priest who had become a disciple of the gospel, Huss spoke with deep humility of his own errors, accusing himself “of having felt pleasure in wearing rich apparel, and of having wasted hours in frivolous occupations.” He then added these touching admonitions: “May the glory of God and the salvation of souls occupy thy mind, and not the possession of benefices and estates. Beware of adorning thy house more than thy soul; and above all, give thy care to the spiritual edifice. Be pious and humble with the poor, and consume not thy substance in feasting. Shouldst thou not amend thy life and refrain from superfluities, I fear that thou wilt be severely chastened, as I am myself.... Thou knowest my doctrine, for thou hast received my [106]

<sup>134</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. I, pp. 147, 148.

instructions from thy childhood; it is therefore useless for me to write to thee any further. But I conjure thee, by the mercy of our Lord, not to imitate me in any of the vanities into which thou hast seen me fall." On the cover of the letter he added, "I conjure thee, my friend, not to break this seal until thou shalt have acquired the certitude that I am dead."<sup>135</sup>

On his journey, Huss everywhere beheld indications of the spread of his doctrines, and the favor with which his cause was regarded. The people thronged to meet him, and in some towns the magistrates attended him through their streets.

Upon arriving at Constance, Huss was granted full liberty. To the emperor's safe-conduct was added a personal assurance of protection by the pope. But in violation of these solemn and repeated declarations, the Reformer was in a short time arrested, by order of the pope and cardinals, and thrust into a loathsome dungeon. Later he was transferred to a strong castle across the Rhine, and there kept a prisoner. The pope, profiting little by his perfidy, was soon after committed to the same prison.<sup>136</sup> He had been proved before the council to be guilty of the basest crimes, besides murder, simony, and adultery, "sins not fit to be named." So the council itself declared; and he was finally deprived of the tiara, and thrown into prison. The anti-popes also were deposed, and a new pontiff was chosen.

[107]

Though the pope himself had been guilty of greater crimes than Huss had ever charged upon the priests, and for which he had demanded a reformation, yet the same council which degraded the pontiff proceeded to crush the Reformer. The imprisonment of Huss excited great indignation in Bohemia. Powerful noblemen addressed to the council earnest protests against this outrage. The emperor, who was loath to permit the violation of a safe-conduct, opposed the proceedings against him. But the enemies of the Reformer were malignant and determined. They appealed to

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<sup>135</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. I, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>136</sup> See Idem, p. 247.

the emperor's prejudices, to his fears, to his zeal for the church. They brought forward arguments of great length to prove that "faith ought not to be kept with heretics, nor persons suspected of heresy, though they are furnished with safe-conducts from the emperor and kings."<sup>137</sup> Thus they prevailed.

Enfeebled by illness and imprisonment,—for the damp, foul air of his dungeon had brought on a fever which nearly ended his life,—Huss was at last brought before the council. Loaded with chains, he stood in the presence of the emperor, whose honor and good faith had been pledged to protect him. During his long trial he firmly maintained the truth, and in the presence of the assembled dignitaries of church and state, he uttered a solemn and faithful protest against the corruptions of the hierarchy. When required to choose whether he would recant his doctrines or suffer death, he accepted the martyr's fate.

The grace of God sustained him. During the weeks of suffering that passed before his final sentence, heaven's peace filled his soul. "I write this letter," he said to a friend, "in my prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death to-morrow.... When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we shall again meet in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself toward me, how effectually He has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials."<sup>138</sup> [108]

In the gloom of his dungeon he foresaw the triumph of the true faith. Returning in his dreams to the chapel at Prague where he had preached the gospel, he saw the pope and his bishops effacing the pictures of Christ which he had painted on its walls. "This vision distressed him: but on the next day he saw many painters occupied in restoring these figures in greater number and in brighter colors. As soon as their task was ended, the painters, who were surrounded by an immense crowd, exclaimed, 'Now let the popes and bishops come; they shall never efface them

<sup>137</sup> Lenfant, "History of the Council of Constance," Vol. I, p. 516.

<sup>138</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 67.

more!” Said the Reformer, as he related his dream, “I maintain this for certain, that the image of Christ will never be effaced. They have wished to destroy it, but it shall be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself.”<sup>139</sup>

For the last time, Huss was brought before the council. It was a vast and brilliant assembly,—the emperor, the princes of the empire, the royal deputies, the cardinals, bishops, and priests, and an immense crowd who had come as spectators of the events of the day. From all parts of Christendom had been gathered the witnesses of this first great sacrifice in the long struggle by which liberty of conscience was to be secured.

Being called upon for his final decision, Huss declared his refusal to abjure, and fixing his penetrating glance upon the monarch whose plighted word had been so shamelessly violated, he declared, “I determined, of my own free will, to appear before this council, under the public protection and faith of the emperor here present.”<sup>140</sup> A deep flush crimsoned the face of Sigismund as the eyes of all in the assembly turned upon him.

Sentence having been pronounced, the ceremony of degradation began. The bishops clothed their prisoner in the sacerdotal habit, and as he took the priestly robe, he said, “Our Lord Jesus Christ was covered with a white robe, by way of insult, when Herod had Him conducted before Pilate.”<sup>141</sup> Being again exhorted to retract, he replied, turning toward the people: “With what face, then, should I behold the heavens? How should I look on those multitudes of men to whom I have preached the pure gospel? No; I esteem their salvation more than this poor body, now appointed unto death.” The vestments were removed one by one, each bishop pronouncing a curse as he performed his part of the ceremony. Finally “they put on his head a cap or pyramidal-shaped mitre of paper, on which were painted frightful

[109]

<sup>139</sup> D'Aubigné, b. 1, ch. 6.

<sup>140</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 84.

<sup>141</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 86.

figures of demons, with the word ‘Arch-Heretic’ conspicuous in front. ‘Most joyfully,’ said Huss, ‘will I wear this crown of shame for Thy sake, O Jesus, who for me didst wear a crown of thorns.’”

When he was thus arrayed, “the prelates said, ‘Now we devote thy soul to the devil.’ ‘And I,’ said John Huss, lifting up his eyes toward heaven, ‘do commit my spirit into Thy hands, O Lord Jesus, for Thou hast redeemed me.’”<sup>142</sup>

He was now delivered up to the secular authorities, and led away to the place of execution. An immense procession followed, hundreds of men at arms, priests and bishops in their costly robes, and the inhabitants of Constance. When he had been fastened to the stake, and all was ready for the fire to be lighted, the martyr was once more exhorted to save himself by renouncing his errors. “What errors,” said Huss, “shall I renounce? I know myself guilty of none. I call God to witness that all that I have written and preached has been with the view of rescuing souls from sin and perdition; and, therefore, most joyfully will I confirm with my blood that truth which I have written and preached.”<sup>143</sup> When the flames kindled about him, he began to sing, “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me,” and so continued till his voice was silenced forever.

Even his enemies were struck with his heroic bearing. A zealous papist, describing the martyrdom of Huss, and of Jerome, who died soon after, said: “Both bore themselves with constant mind when their last hour approached. They prepared for the fire as if they were going to a marriage feast. They uttered no cry of pain. When the flames rose, they began to sing hymns; and scarce could the vehemency of the fire stop their singing.”<sup>144</sup> [110]

When the body of Huss had been wholly consumed, his ashes, with the soil upon which they rested, were gathered up and

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<sup>142</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 7.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 7.

cast into the Rhine, and thus borne onward to the ocean. His persecutors vainly imagined that they had rooted out the truths he preached. Little did they dream that the ashes that day borne away to the sea were to be as seed scattered in all the countries of the earth; that in lands yet unknown it would yield abundant fruit in witnesses for the truth. The voice which had spoken in the council hall of Constance had wakened echoes that would be heard through all coming ages. Huss was no more, but the truths for which he died could never perish. His example of faith and constancy would encourage multitudes to stand firm for the truth, in the face of torture and death. His execution had exhibited to the whole world the perfidious cruelty of Rome. The enemies of truth, though they knew it not, had been furthering the cause which they vainly sought to destroy.

Yet another stake was to be set up at Constance. The blood of another witness must testify for the truth. Jerome, upon bidding farewell to Huss on his departure for the council, had exhorted him to courage and firmness, declaring that if he should fall into any peril, he himself would fly to his assistance. Upon hearing of the Reformer's imprisonment, the faithful disciple immediately prepared to fulfil his promise. Without a safe-conduct he set out, with a single companion, for Constance. On arriving there he was convinced that he had only exposed himself to peril, without the possibility of doing anything for the deliverance of Huss. He fled from the city, but was arrested on the homeward journey, and brought back loaded with fetters, and under the custody of a band of soldiers. At his first appearance before the council, his attempts to reply to the accusations brought against him were met with shouts, "To the flames with him! to the flames!"<sup>145</sup> He was thrown into a dungeon, chained in a position which caused him great suffering, and fed on bread and water. After some months the cruelties of his imprisonment brought upon Jerome

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<sup>145</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. I, p. 234.

an illness that threatened his life, and his enemies, fearing that he might escape them, treated him with less severity, though he remained in prison for one year.

The death of Huss had not resulted as the papists had hoped. The violation of his safe-conduct had roused a storm of indignation, and as the safer course, the council determined, instead of burning Jerome, to force him, if possible, to retract. He was brought before the assembly, and offered the alternative to recant, or to die at the stake. Death at the beginning of his imprisonment would have been a mercy, in comparison with the terrible sufferings which he had undergone; but now, weakened by illness, by the rigors of his prison-house, and the torture of anxiety and suspense, separated from his friends, and disheartened by the death of Huss, Jerome's fortitude gave way, and he consented to submit to the council. He pledged himself to adhere to the Catholic faith, and accepted the action of the council in condemning the doctrines of Wycliffe and Huss, excepting, however, the "holy truths" which they had taught.<sup>146</sup>

By this expedient Jerome endeavored to silence the voice of conscience and escape his doom. But in the solitude of his dungeon he saw more clearly what he had done. He thought of the courage and fidelity of Huss, and in contrast pondered upon his own denial of the truth. He thought of the divine Master whom he had pledged himself to serve, and who for his sake endured the death of the cross. Before his retraction he had found comfort, amid all his sufferings, in the assurance of God's favor; but now remorse and doubt tortured his soul. He knew that still other retractions must be made before he could be at peace with Rome. The path upon which he was entering could end only in complete apostasy. His resolution was taken: to escape a brief period of suffering he would not deny his Lord. [112]

Soon he was again brought before the council. His submission

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<sup>146</sup> See Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 141.



had not satisfied his judges. Their thirst for blood, whetted by the death of Huss, clamored for fresh victims. Only by an unreserved surrender of the truth could Jerome preserve his life. But he had determined to avow his faith, and follow his brother-martyr to the flames.

He renounced his former recantation, and as a dying man, solemnly required an opportunity to make his defense. Fearing the effect of his words, the prelates insisted that he should merely affirm or deny the truth of the charges brought against him. Jerome protested against such cruelty and injustice. "You have held me shut up three hundred and forty days in a frightful prison," he said, "in the midst of filth, noisomeness, stench, and the utmost want of everything; you then bring me out before you, and lending an ear to my mortal enemies, you refuse to hear me.... If you be really wise men, and the lights of the world, take care not to sin against justice. As to me, I am only a feeble mortal; my life is but of little importance; and when I exhort you not to deliver an unjust sentence, I speak less for myself than for you."<sup>147</sup>

His request was finally granted. In the presence of his judges, Jerome knelt down and prayed that the divine Spirit might control his thoughts and words, that he might speak nothing contrary to the truth or unworthy of his Master. To him that day was fulfilled the promise of God to the first disciples: "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake.... But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."<sup>148</sup>

The words of Jerome excited astonishment and admiration, even in his enemies. For a whole year he had been immured in a dungeon, unable to read or even to see, in great physical

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<sup>147</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, pp. 146, 147.

<sup>148</sup> Matt. 10:18-20.

suffering and mental anxiety. Yet his arguments were presented with as much clearness and power as if he had had undisturbed opportunity for study. He pointed his hearers to the long line of holy men who had been condemned by unjust judges. In almost every generation have been those who, while seeking to elevate the people of their time, have been reproached and cast out, but who in later times have been shown to be deserving of honor. Christ Himself was condemned as a malefactor at an unrighteous tribunal.

At his retraction, Jerome had assented to the justice of the sentence condemning Huss; he now declared his repentance, and bore witness to the innocence and holiness of the martyr. "I knew him from his childhood," he said. "He was a most excellent man, just and holy; he was condemned, notwithstanding his innocence.... I also—I am ready to die: I will not recoil before the torments that are prepared for me by my enemies and false witnesses, who will one day have to render an account of their impostures before the great God, whom nothing can deceive."<sup>149</sup>

In self-reproach for his own denial of the truth, Jerome continued: "Of all the sins that I have committed since my youth, none weigh so heavily on my mind, and cause me such poignant remorse, as that which I committed in this fatal place, when I approved of the iniquitous sentence rendered against Wycliffe, and against the holy martyr, John Huss, my master and my friend. Yes! I confess it from my heart, and declare with horror that I disgracefully quailed when, through a dread of death, I condemned their doctrines. I therefore supplicate ... Almighty God to deign to pardon me my sins, and this one in particular, the most heinous of all." Pointing to his judges, he said firmly: "You condemned Wycliffe and John Huss, not for having shaken the doctrine of the church, but simply because they branded with reprobation the scandals proceeding from the clergy,—their

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<sup>149</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 151.

[114]

pomp, their pride, and all the vices of the prelates and priests. The things which they have affirmed, and which are irrefutable, I also think and declare, like them.”

His words were interrupted. The prelates, trembling with rage, cried out, “What need is there of further proof? We behold with our own eyes the most obstinate of heretics!”

Unmoved by the tempest, Jerome exclaimed: “What! do you suppose that I fear to die? You have held me for a whole year in a frightful dungeon, more horrible than death itself. You have treated me more cruelly than a Turk, Jew, or pagan, and my flesh has literally rotted off my bones alive; and yet I make no complaint, for lamentation ill becomes a man of heart and spirit; but I cannot but express my astonishment at such great barbarity toward a Christian.”<sup>150</sup>

Again the storm of rage burst out, and Jerome was hurried away to prison. Yet there were some in the assembly upon whom his words had made a deep impression, and who desired to save his life. He was visited by dignitaries of the church, and urged to submit himself to the council. The most brilliant prospects were presented before him as the reward of renouncing his opposition to Rome. But like his Master, when offered the glory of the world, Jerome remained steadfast.

“Prove to me from the Holy Writings that I am in error,” he said, “and I will abjure it.”

“The Holy Writings!” exclaimed one of his tempters, “is everything then to be judged by them? Who can understand them till the church has interpreted them?”

“Are the traditions of men more worthy of faith than the gospel of our Saviour?” replied Jerome. “Paul did not exhort those to whom he wrote to listen to the traditions of men, but said, ‘Search the Scriptures.’”

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<sup>150</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, pp. 151-153.

“Heretic!” was the response, “I repent having pleaded so long with you. I see that you are urged on by the devil.”<sup>151</sup>

Erelong sentence of condemnation was passed upon him. He was led out to the same spot upon which Huss had yielded up his life. He went singing on his way, his countenance lighted up with joy and peace. His gaze was fixed upon Christ, and to him death had lost its terrors. When the executioner, about to kindle the pile, stepped behind him, the martyr exclaimed, “Come forward boldly; apply the fire before my face. Had I been afraid, I should not be here.” [115]

His last words, uttered as the flames rose about him, were a prayer. “Lord, Almighty Father,” he cried, “have pity on me, and pardon me my sins; for Thou knowest that I have always loved Thy truth.”<sup>152</sup> His voice ceased, but his lips continued to move in prayer. When the fire had done its work, the ashes of the martyr, with the earth upon which they rested, were gathered up, and like those of Huss, were thrown into the Rhine.

So perished God's faithful light-bearers. But the light of the truths which they proclaimed,—the light of their heroic example,—could not be extinguished. As well might men attempt to turn back the sun in its course as to prevent the dawning of that day which was even then breaking upon the world.

The execution of Huss had kindled a flame of indignation and horror in Bohemia. It was felt by the whole nation that he had fallen a prey to the malice of the priests and the treachery of the emperor. He was declared to have been a faithful teacher of the truth, and the council that decreed his death was charged with the guilt of murder. His doctrines now attracted greater attention than ever before. By the papal edicts the writings of Wycliffe had been condemned to the flames. But those that had escaped destruction were now brought out from their hiding-places, and studied in

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<sup>151</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 10.

<sup>152</sup> Bonnechose, Vol. II, p. 168.

connection with the Bible, or such parts of it as the people could obtain, and many were thus led to accept the reformed faith.

The murderers of Huss did not stand quietly by and witness the triumph of his cause. The pope and the emperor united to crush out the movement, and the armies of Sigismund were hurled upon Bohemia.

[116]

But a deliverer was raised up. Ziska, who soon after the opening of the war became totally blind, yet who was one of the ablest generals of his age, was the leader of the Bohemians. Trusting in the help of God and the righteousness of their cause, that people withstood the mightiest armies that could be brought against them. Again and again the emperor, raising fresh armies, invaded Bohemia, only to be ignominiously repulsed. The Hussites were raised above the fear of death, and nothing could stand against them. A few years after the opening of the war, the brave Ziska died; but his place was filled by Procopius, who was an equally brave and skilful general, and in some respects a more able leader.

The enemies of the Bohemians, knowing that the blind warrior was dead, deemed the opportunity favorable for recovering all that they had lost. The pope now proclaimed a crusade against the Hussites, and again an immense force was precipitated upon Bohemia, but only to suffer terrible defeat. Another crusade was proclaimed. In all the papal countries of Europe, men, money, and munitions of war were raised. Multitudes flocked to the papal standard, assured that at last an end would be made of the Hussite heretics. Confident of victory, the vast force entered Bohemia. The people rallied to repel them. The two armies approached each other, until only a river lay between them. "The crusaders were in greatly superior force, but instead of dashing across the stream, and closing in battle with the Hussites whom they had come so far to meet, they stood gazing in silence at

those warriors.”<sup>153</sup> Then suddenly a mysterious terror fell upon the host. Without striking a blow, that mighty force broke and scattered, as if dispelled by an unseen power. Great numbers were slaughtered by the Hussite army, which pursued the fugitives, and an immense booty fell into the hands of the victors, so that the war, instead of impoverishing, enriched the Bohemians.

A few years later, under a new pope, still another crusade was set on foot. As before, men and means were drawn from all the papal countries of Europe. Great were the inducements held out to those who should engage in this perilous enterprise. Full forgiveness of the most heinous crimes was insured to every crusader. All who died in the war were promised a rich reward in heaven, and those who survived were to reap honor and riches on the field of battle. Again a vast army was collected, and crossing the frontier they entered Bohemia. The Hussite forces fell back before them, thus drawing the invaders farther and farther into the country, and leading them to count the victory already won. At last the army of Procopius made a stand, and turning upon the foe, advanced to give them battle. The crusaders, now discovering their mistake, lay in their encampment awaiting the onset. As the sound of the approaching force was heard, even before the Hussites were in sight, a panic again fell upon the crusaders. Princes, generals, and common soldiers, casting away their armor, fled in all directions. In vain the papal legate, who was the leader of the invasion, endeavored to rally his terrified and disorganized forces. Despite his utmost endeavors, he himself was swept along in the tide of fugitives. The rout was complete, and again an immense booty fell into the hands of the victors. [117]

Thus the second time a vast army, sent forth by the most powerful nations of Europe, a host of brave, warlike men, trained and equipped for battle, fled without a blow, before the defenders of a small and hitherto feeble nation. Here was a manifestation

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<sup>153</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 17.

of divine power. The invaders were smitten with a supernatural terror. He who overthrew the hosts of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, who put to flight the armies of Midian before Gideon and his three hundred, who in one night laid low the forces of the proud Assyrian, had again stretched out His hand to wither the power of the oppressor. "There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them."<sup>154</sup>

[118]

The papal leaders, despairing of conquering by force, at last resorted to diplomacy. A compromise was entered into, that while professing to grant to the Bohemians freedom of conscience, really betrayed them into the power of Rome. The Bohemians had specified four points as the condition of peace with Rome: The free preaching of the Bible; the right of the whole church to both the bread and the wine in the communion, and the use of the mother tongue in divine worship; the exclusion of the clergy from all secular offices and authority; and in cases of crime, the jurisdiction of the civil courts over clergy and laity alike. The papal authorities at last "agreed that the four articles of the Hussites should be accepted, but that the right of explaining them, that is, of determining their precise import, should belong to the council—in other words, to the pope and the emperor."<sup>155</sup> On this basis a treaty was entered into, and Rome gained by dissimulation and fraud what she had failed to gain by conflict; for, placing her own interpretation upon the Hussite articles, as upon the Bible, she could pervert their meaning to suit her own purposes.

A large class in Bohemia, seeing that it betrayed their liberties, could not consent to the compact. Dissensions and divisions arose, leading to strife and bloodshed among themselves. In this strife the noble Procopius fell, and the liberties of Bohemia

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<sup>154</sup> Ps. 53:5.

<sup>155</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 18.

perished.

Sigismund, the betrayer of Huss and Jerome, now became king of Bohemia, and regardless of his oath to support the rights of the Bohemians, he proceeded to establish popery. But he had gained little by his subservience to Rome. For twenty years his life had been filled with labors and perils. His armies had been wasted and his treasuries drained by a long and fruitless struggle; and now, after reigning one year, he died, leaving his kingdom on the brink of civil war, and bequeathing to posterity a name branded with infamy.

Tumults, strife, and bloodshed were protracted. Again foreign armies invaded Bohemia, and internal dissension continued to distract the nation. Those who remained faithful to the gospel were subjected to a bloody persecution. [119]

As their former brethren, entering into compact with Rome, imbibed her errors, those who adhered to the ancient faith had formed themselves into a distinct church, taking the name of "United Brethren." This act drew upon them maledictions from all classes. Yet their firmness was unshaken. Forced to find refuge in the woods and caves, they still assembled to read God's word and unite in His worship.

Through messengers secretly sent out into different countries, they learned that here and there were "isolated confessors of the truth, a few in this city and a few in that, the object, like themselves, of persecution; and that amid the mountains of the Alps was an ancient church, resting on the foundations of Scripture, and protesting against the idolatrous corruptions of Rome."<sup>156</sup> This intelligence was received with great joy, and a correspondence was opened with the Waldensian Christians.

Steadfast to the gospel, the Bohemians waited through the night of their persecution; in the darkest hour still turning their eyes toward the horizon like men who watch for the morning.

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<sup>156</sup> Wylie, b. 3, ch. 19.