

## CHAPTER 19 : JOHN HUSS AND REFORMATION ON CONTINENTAL EUROPE

We read in the Book of the Persecutions of the Bohemian Church: "In the year A.D. 1400, Jerome of Prague returned from England, bringing with him the writings of Wyckliffe." "A Taborite chronicler of the fifteenth century, Nicholaus von Pelhrimow, testifies that the books of the evangelical doctor, Master John Wyckliffe, opened the eyes of the blessed Master John Huss, as several reliable men know from his own lips, whilst he read and re-read them together with his followers." And thus was born the great Reformer of continental Europe.

Such is the link that binds together continental Europe and the British Isles. Already Protestantism attests its true catholicity. Oceans do not stop its progress. The boundaries of States do not limit its triumphs. On every soil is it destined to flourish, and men of every tongue will it enroll among its disciples. The spiritually dead who are in their graves are beginning to hear the voice of Wyckliffe – yea, rather of Christ speaking through Wyckliffe – and to come forth.

It is probable that Christianity first entered Bohemia in the wake of the armies of Charlemagne. But the Western missionaries, ignorant of the Slavonic tongue, could effect little beyond a nominal conversion of the Bohemian people. Accordingly we find the King of Moravia, a country whose religious condition was precisely similar to that of Bohemia, sending to the Greek emperor, about the year 863, and saying: "Our land is baptized, but we have no teachers to instruct us, and translate for us the Holy Scriptures. Send us teachers who may explain to us the Bible." Methodius and Cyrillus were sent; the Bible was translated, and Divine worship established in the Slavonic language. The ritual in both Moravia and Bohemia was that of the Eastern Church, from which the missionaries had come. Methodius made the gospel be preached in Bohemia. There followed a great harvest of converts; families of the highest rank crowded to baptism, and churches and schools arose everywhere.

Though practicing the Eastern ritual, the Bohemian Church remained under the jurisdiction of Rome; for the great schism between the Eastern and the Western Churches had not yet been consummated. The Greek liturgy, as we may imagine, was displeasing to the Pope, and he began to plot its overthrow. Gradually the Latin rite was introduced, and the Greek rite in the same proportion displaced. At length, in 1079, Gregory VII (Hildebrand) issued a bull forbidding the Oriental ritual to be longer observed, or public worship celebrated in the tongue of the country. The reasons assigned by the Pontiff for the use of a tongue which the people did not understand, in their addresses to the Almighty, are such as would not, readily occur to ordinary men. He tells his "dear son," the King of Bohemia, that after long study of the Word of God, he had come to see 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.

This missive closed in effect every church, and every Bible, and left the Bohemians, so far as any public instruction was concerned, in total night. The Christianity of the nation

would have sunk under the blow, but for another occurrence of an opposite tendency which happened soon afterwards. It was now that the Waldenses and Albigenses, fleeing from the sword of persecution in Italy and France, arrived in Bohemia. Thaunus informs us that Peter Waldo himself was among the number of these evangelical exiles.

Reynerius, speaking of the middle of the thirteenth century, says: "There is hardly any country in which this sect is not to be found." If the letter of Gregory was like a hot wind to wither the Bohemian Church, the Waldensian refugees were a secret dew to revive it. They spread themselves in small colonies over all the Slavonic countries, Poland included; they made their headquarters at Prague. They were zealous evangelizers, not daring to preach in public, but teaching in private houses, and keeping alive the truth during the two centuries which were yet to run before Huss should appear.

It was not easy enforcing the commands of the Pope in Bohemia, lying as it did remote from Rome. In many places worship continued to be celebrated in the tongue of the people, and the Sacrament to be dispensed in both kinds. The powerful nobles were in many cases the protectors of the Waldenses and native Christians; and for these benefits they received a tenfold recompense in the good order and prosperity which reigned on the lands that were occupied by professors of the evangelical doctrines. All through the fourteenth century, these Waldensian exiles continued to sow the seed of a pure Christianity in the soil of Bohemia.

At length the stake was decreed (1376) against all who dissented from the established rites. These persecutions were continued till the times of Huss. Janovius, who "taught that salvation was only to be found by faith in the crucified Savior," when dying (1394) consoled his friends with the assurance that better times were in store. "The rage of the enemies of the truth," said he, "now prevails against us, but it will not be for ever; there shall arise one from among the common people, without sword or authority, and against him they shall not be able to prevail."

Politically, too, the country of Bohemia was preparing for the great part it was about to act. Charles I, better known in Western Europe as Charles IV, Emperor of Germany, and author of the Golden Bull, had some time before ascended the throne. He was an enlightened and patriotic ruler. The friend of Petrarch and the protector of Janovius, he had caught so much of the spirit of the great poet and of the Bohemian pastor, as to desire a reform of the ecclesiastical estate, especially in the enormous wealth and overgrown power of the clergy. In this, however, he could effect nothing; on the contrary, Rome had the art to gain his concurrence in her persecuting measures. But he had greater success in his efforts for the political and material amelioration of his country. He repressed the turbulence of the nobles; he cleared the highways of the robbers who infested them; and now the husbandman being able to sow and reap in peace, and the merchant to pass from town to town in safety, the country began to enjoy great prosperity. Nor did the labors of the sovereign stop here. He extended the municipal libraries of the towns, and in 1347 he founded a university in Prague, on the model of those of Bologna and Paris; filling its chairs with eminent scholars, and endowing it with ample funds. He specially patronized those authors who wrote in the Bohemian tongue, judging that there was no more

effectual way of invigorating the national intellect, than by cultivating the national language and literature. Thus, while in other countries the Reformation helped to purify and ennoble the national language, by making it the vehicle of the sublimest truths, in Bohemia this process was reversed, and the development of the Bohemian tongue prepared the way for the entrance of Protestantism. Although the reign of Charles IV was an era of peace, and his efforts were mainly directed towards the intellectual and material prosperity of Bohemia, he took care, nevertheless, that the martial spirit of his subjects should not decline; and thus when the tempest burst in the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the anathemas of Rome were seconded by the armies of Germany, the Bohemian people were not unprepared for the tremendous struggle which they were called to wage for their political and religious liberties.

Before detailing that struggle, we must briefly sketch the career of the man who so powerfully contributed to create in the breasts of his countrymen that dauntless spirit which bore them up till victory crowned their arms. John Huss was born on the 6th of July, 1373, in the market town of Hussinetz, on the edge of the Bohemian forest near the source of the Moldau river, and the Bavarian boundary. The university career of the young student, whose excellent talents sharpened and expanded day by day, was one of great brilliance. His face was pale and thin; his consuming passion was a desire for knowledge; blameless in life, sweet and affable in address, he won upon all who came in contact with him. He was made Bachelor of Arts in 1393, Bachelor of Theology in 1394, Master of Arts in 1396; Doctor of Theology he never was, any more than Melancthon. Two years after becoming Master of Arts, he began to hold lectures in the university. Having finished his university course, he entered the Church, where he rose rapidly into distinction. By-and-by his fame reached the court of Wenceslaus, who had succeeded his father, Charles IV, on the throne of Bohemia. His queen, Sophia of Bavaria, selected Huss as her confessor.

He was at this time a firm believer in the Papacy. The philosophical writings of Wyckliffe he already knew, and had ardently studied; but his theological treatises he had not seen. He was filled with unlimited devotion for the grace and benefits of the Roman Church; for he tells us that he went at the time of the Prague Jubilee, 1393, to confession in the Church of St. Peter, gave the last four groschen that he possessed to the confessor, and took part in the processions in order to share also in the absolution – an efflux of superabundant devotion of which he afterwards repented, as he himself acknowledged from the pulpit.

The true career of John Huss dates from about A.D. 1402, when he was appointed preacher to the Chapel of Bethlehem. This temple had been founded in the year 1392 by a certain citizen of Prague, Mulhamio by name, who laid great stress upon the preaching of the Word of God in the mother-tongue of the people. On the death or the resignation of its first pastor, Stephen of Colonia, Huss was elected his successor. His sermons formed an epoch in Prague. The moral condition of that capital was then deplorable. According to Comenius, all classes wallowed in the most abominable vices. The king, the nobles, the prelates, the clergy, the citizens, indulged without restraint in avarice, pride, drunkenness, lewdness, and every profligacy. In the midst of this sunken community

stood up Huss, like an incarnate conscience. Now it was against the prelates, now against the nobles, and now against the ordinary clergy that he launched his bolts. These sermons seem to have benefited the preacher as well as the hearers, for it was in the course of their preparation and delivery that Huss became inwardly awakened. A great clamor arose. But the queen and the archbishop protected Huss, and he continued preaching with indefatigable zeal in his Chapel of Bethlehem, founding all he said on the scriptures, and appealing so often to them, that it may be truly affirmed of him that he restored the Word of God to the knowledge of his countrymen.

The minister of Bethlehem Chapel was then bound to preach on all church days early and after dinner (in Advent and fast times only in the morning), to the common people in their own language. Obligated to study the Word of God, and left free from the performance of liturgical acts and pastoral duties, Huss grew rapidly in the knowledge of scripture, and became deeply imbued with its spirit. While around him was a daily-increasing devout community, he himself grew in the life of faith. By this time he had become acquainted with the theological works of Wyckliffe, which he earnestly studied, and learned to admire the piety of their author, and to be not wholly opposed to the scheme of reform which he had promulgated. Already Huss had commenced a movement, the true character of which he did not perceive, and the issue of which he little foresaw. He placed the Bible above the authority of Pope or Council, and thus he had entered, without knowing it, the road of Protestantism. But as yet he had no wish to break with the Church of Rome, nor did he dissent from a single dogma of her creed, the one point of divergence to which we have just referred excepted; but he had taken a step which, if he did not retrace it, would lead him in due time far enough from her communion.

We have narrated above the arrival of a young student in Prague, with copies of the works of the great English heresiarch. Other causes favored the introduction of Wyckliffe's books. One of these was the marriage of Richard II of England, with Anne, sister of the King of Bohemia, and the consequent intercourse between the two countries. On the death of that princess, the ladies of her court, on their return to their native land, brought with them the writings of the great Reformer, whose disciple their mistress had been. The university had made Prague a center of light, and the resort of men of intelligence. Thus, despite the corruption of the higher classes, the soil was not unprepared for the reception and growth of the opinions of the Rector of Lutterworth, which now found entrance within the walls of the Bohemian capital.

An incident which is said to have occurred at this time (1404) contributed to enlarge the views of Huss, and to give strength to the movement he had originated in Bohemia. There came to Prague two theologians from England, James and Conrad of Canterbury. Graduates of Oxford, and disciples of the gospel, they had crossed the sea to spread on the banks of the Moldau the knowledge they had learned on those of the Isis. Their plan was to hold public disputations, and selecting the Pope's primacy, they threw down the gage of battle to its maintainers. The country was hardly ripe for such a warfare, and the affair coming to the ears of the authorities, they promptly put a stop to the discussions. Arrested in their work, the two visitors did not fail to consider by what other way they

could carry out their mission. They bethought them that they had studied art as well as theology, and might now press the pencil into their service. Having obtained their host's leave, they proceeded to give a specimen of their skill in a drawing in the corridor of the house in which they resided. On the one wall they portrayed the humble entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, "meek, and riding upon an ass." On the other they displayed the more than royal magnificence of a Pontifical cavalcade. There was seen the Pope, adorned with triple crown, attired in robes bespangled with gold, and all lustrous with precious stones. He rode proudly on a richly caparisoned horse, with trumpeters proclaiming his approach, and a brilliant crowd of cardinals and bishops following in his rear. Many came to gaze, and to mark the contrast presented between the lowly estate of the Church's Founder, and the overgrown haughtiness and pride of His pretended vicar. The city of Prague was moved, and the excitement became at last so great, that the English strangers deemed it prudent to withdraw. But the thoughts they had awakened remained to ferment in the minds of the citizens.

Among those who came to gaze at this antithesis of Christ and Antichrist was John Huss; and the effect of it upon him was to lead him to study more carefully than ever the writings of Wyckliffe. He was far from able at first to concur in the conclusions of the English Reformer. Like a strong light thrown suddenly upon a weak eye, the bold views of Wyckliffe, and the sweeping measure of reform which he advocated, alarmed and shocked Huss. The Bohemian preacher had appealed to the Bible, but he had not bowed before it with the absolute and unreserved submission of the English pastor. To overturn the hierarchy, and replace it with the simple ministry of the Word; to sweep away all the teachings of tradition, and put in their room the doctrines of the Bible, was a revolution for which, though marked alike by its simplicity and its sublimity, Huss was not prepared. It may be doubted whether, even when he came to stand at the stake, Huss's views had attained the breadth and clearness of those of Wyckliffe.

Nevertheless, by 1405 this Reformer in continental Europe had embraced many of Wyckliffe's doctrines. Later elevated to the rectorship of the university, Huss was, by his greater popularity and higher position, abler than ever to propagate these doctrines.

But what was going on at Prague could not long remain unknown at Rome. On being informed of the proceedings in the Bohemian capital, the Pope, Alexander V, fulminated a bull, in which he commanded the Archbishop of Prague, Sbinko, with the help of the secular authorities, to proceed against all who preached in private chapels, and who read the writings or taught the opinions of Wyckliffe. There followed a great auto da fe, not of persons but of books. Upwards of 200 volumes, beautifully written, elegantly bound, and ornamented with precious stones – the works of John Wyckliffe – were, by the order of Sbinko, piled upon the street of Prague, and, amid the tolling bells, publicly burned. Their beauty and costliness showed that their owners were men of high position; and their number, collected in one city alone, attests how widely circulated already were the writings of the English Reformer on the continent of Europe.

This act but the more inflamed the zeal of Huss. In his sermons he now attacked indulgences as well as the abuses of the hierarchy. A second mandate arrived from Rome.

The Pope summoned him to answer for his doctrine in person. To obey the summons would have been to walk into his grave. The king, the queen, the university, and many of the magnates of Bohemia sent a joint embassy requesting the Pope to dispense with Huss's appearance in person, and to hear him by his legal counsel. The Pope refused to listen to this supplication. He went on with the case, condemned John Huss in absence, and laid the city of Prague under interdict.

The Bohemian capital was thrown into perplexity and alarm. On every side tokens met the eye to which the imagination imparted a fearful significance. Prague looked like a city stricken with sudden and terrible calamity. The closed church-doors – the extinguished altar-lights – the corpses waiting burial by the way-side – the images which sanctified and guarded the streets, covered with sackcloth, or laid prostrate on the ground, as if in supplication for a land on which the impieties of its children had brought down a terrible curse – gave emphatic and solemn warning that every hour the citizens harbored within their walls the man who had dared to disobey the Pope's summons, they but increased the heinousness of their guilt, and added to the vengeance of their doom. "Let us cast out the rebel," was the cry of many, "before we perish."

Tumult was beginning to disturb the peace, and slaughter to dye the streets of Prague. What was Huss to do? Should he flee before the storm, and leave a city where he had many friends and not a few disciples? What had his Master said? "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." This seemed to forbid his departure. His mind was torn with doubts. But had not the same Master commanded, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another"? His presence could but entail calamity upon his friends; so, quitting Prague, he retired to his native village of Hussinetz.

Here Huss enjoyed the protection of the territorial lord, who was his friend. His first thoughts were of those he had left behind in Prague – the flock to whom he had so lovingly ministered in his Chapel of Bethlehem. "I have retired," he wrote to them, "not to deny the truth, for which I am willing to die, but because impious priests forbid the preaching of it." The sincerity of this avowal was attested by the labors he immediately undertook. Making Christ his pattern, he journeyed all through the surrounding region, preaching in the towns and villages. He was followed by great crowds, who hung upon his words, admiring his meekness not less than his courage and eloquence. "The Church," said his hearers, "has pronounced this man a heretic and a demon, yet his life is holy, and his doctrine is pure and elevating."

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 Savior, 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 sScripture, conveyed through the understanding, are to rule the conscience; in other words, that God speaking in the Bible, and not the Church speaking through the priesthood, is the one infallible guide of men. This was to adopt the fundamental principle of Protestantism, and to preach a revolution which Huss himself would have recoiled from, had he been able at that hour to see the length to which it would lead him. The axe which he had grasped was destined to lay low the principle of human supremacy in matters of conscience, but the fetters yet on his arm did not permit him to deliver such blows as would be dealt by the champions who were to follow him, and to whom was reserved the honor of extirpating that bitter root which had yielded its fruits in the corruption of the Church and the slavery of society.

Gradually things quieted in Prague, although it soon became evident that the calm was only on the surface. Intensely had Huss longed to appear again in his Chapel of Bethlehem – the scene of so many triumphs – and his wish was granted. Once more he stands in the old pulpit; once more his loving flock gather round him. With zeal quickened by his banishment, he thunders more courageously than ever against the tyranny of the priesthood in forbidding the free preaching of the gospel. In proportion as the people grew in knowledge, the more, says Fox, they "complained of the court of Rome and the bishop's consistory, who plucked from the sheep of Christ the wool and milk, and did not feed them either with the Word of God or good examples."

A great revolution was preparing in Bohemia, and it could not be ushered into the world without evoking a tempest. Huss was perhaps the one tranquil man in the nation. A powerful party, consisting of the doctors of the university and the members of the priesthood, was now formed against him. Chief among these were two priests, Paletz and Causis, who had once been his friends, but had now become his bitterest foes. This party would speedily have silenced him and closed the Chapel of Bethlehem, the center of the movement, had they not feared the people. Every day the popular indignation against the priests waxed stronger. Every day the disciples and defenders of the Reformer waxed bolder, and around him were now powerful as well as numerous friends. The queen was on his side; the lofty character and resplendent virtues of Huss had won her esteem. Many of the nobles declared for him – some of them because they had felt the Divine power of the doctrines which he taught, and others in the hope of sharing in the spoils which they foresaw would by-and-by be gleaned in the wake of the movement. The great body of the citizens were friendly. Captivated by his eloquence, and taught by his pure and elevating doctrine, they had learned to detest the pride, the debaucheries, and the avarice of the priests, and to take part with the man whom so many powerful and unrighteous confederacies were seeking to crush.

But Huss was alone; he had no fellow-worker; and had doubtless his hours of loneliness

and melancholy. One single companion of sympathizing spirit, and of like devotion to the same great cause, would have been to Huss a greater stay and a sweeter solace than all the other friends who stood around him. And it pleased God to give him such: a true yoke-fellow, who brought to the cause he espoused an intellect of great subtlety, and an eloquence of great fervor, combined with a fearless courage, and a lofty devotion. This friend was Jerome of Faulfish, a Bohemian knight, who had returned some time before from Oxford, where he had imbibed the opinions of Wyckliffe. As he passed through Paris and Vienna, he challenged the learned men of these universities to dispute with him on matters of faith; but the theses which he maintained with a triumphant logic were held to savor of heresy, and he was thrown into prison. Escaping, however, he came to Bohemia to spread with all the enthusiasm of his character, and all the brilliancy of his eloquence, the doctrines of the English Reformer.

With the name of Huss that of Jerome is henceforward indissolubly associated. Alike in their great qualities and aims, they were yet in minor points sufficiently diverse for one to be the complement of the other. Huss was the more powerful character, Jerome was the more eloquent orator. Greater in genius, and more popular in gifts, Jerome maintained nevertheless towards Huss the relation of a disciple. It was a beautiful instance of Christian humility. The calm reason of the master was a salutary restraint upon the impetuosity of the disciple. The union of these two men gave a sensible impulse to the cause. While Jerome debated in the schools, and thundered in the popular assemblies, Huss expounded the scriptures in his chapel, or toiled with his pen at the refutation of some manifesto of the doctors of the university, or some bull of the Vatican. Their affection for each other ripened day by day, and continued unbroken till death came to set its seal upon it, and unite them in the bonds of an eternal friendship.

The drama was no longer confined to the limits of Bohemia. Events were lifting up Huss and Jerome to a stage where they would have to act their part in the presence of all Christendom. Let us cast our eyes around and survey the state of Europe. There were at that time three Popes reigning in Christendom. The Italians had elected Balthazar Cossa, who, as John XXIII, had set up his chair at Bologna. The French had chosen Angelo Corario, who lived at Rimini, under the title of Gregory XII; and the Spaniards had elected Peter de Lune (Benedict XIII), who resided in Arragon. Each claimed to be the legitimate successor of Peter, and the true vicegerent of God, and each strove to make good his claim by the bitterness and rage with which he hurled his maledictions against his rival. Christendom was divided, each nation naturally supporting the Pope of its choice. The schism suggested some questions which it was not easy to solve. "If we must obey," said Huss and his followers, "to whom is our obedience to be paid? Balthazar Cossa, called John XXIII, is at Bologna; Angelo Corario, named Gregory XII, is at Rimini; Peter de Lune, who calls himself Benedict XIII, is in Arragon. If all three are infallible, why does not their testimony agree? and if only one of them is the Most Holy Father, why is it that we cannot distinguish him from the rest?" Nor was much help to be got towards a solution by putting the question to the men themselves. If they asked John XXIII he told them that Gregory XII was "a heretic, a demon, the Antichrist;" Gregory XII obligingly bore the same testimony respecting John XXIII., and both Gregory and John united in sounding, in similar fashion, the praises of Benedict XIII, whom they

stigmatized as "an impostor and schismatic," while Benedict paid back with prodigal interest the compliments of his two opponents. It came to this, that if these men were to be believed, instead of three Popes there were three Antichrists in Christendom; and if they were not to be believed, where was the infallibility, and what had become of the apostolic succession?

The chroniclers of the time labor to describe the distractions, calamities, and woes that grew out of this schism. Europe was plunged into anarchy; every petty State was a theater of war and rapine. The rival Popes sought to crush one another, not with the spiritual bolts only, but with temporal arms also. They went into the market to purchase swords and hire soldiers, and as this could not be done without money, they opened a scandalous traffic in spiritual things to supply themselves with the needful gold. Pardons, dispensations, and places in Paradise they put up to sale, in order to realize the means of equipping their armies for the field. The bishops and inferior clergy, quick to profit by the example set them by the Popes, enriched themselves by simony. At times they made war on their own account, attacking at the head of armed bands the territory of a rival ecclesiastic, or the castle of a temporal baron.

It is distressing to dwell on this deplorable picture. Of the practice of piety nothing remained save a few superstitious rites. Truth, justice, and order banished from among men, force was the arbiter in all things, and nothing was heard but the clash of arms and the sighings of oppressed nations, while above the strife rose the furious voices of the rival Popes frantically hurling anathemas at one another.

The frightful picture which society now presented had a very powerful effect on John Huss. He studied the Bible, he read the early Fathers, he compared these with the sad spectacles passing before his eyes, and he saw more clearly every day that "the Church" had departed far from her early model, not in practice only, but in doctrine also. A little while ago we saw him leveling his blows at abuses; now we find him beginning to strike at the root on which all these abuses grew, if haply he might extirpate both root and branch together.

It was at this time that he wrote his treatise *On the Church*, a work which enables us to trace the progress of his emancipation from the shackles of authority. He establishes in it the principle that the true Church of Christ has not necessarily an exterior constitution, but that communion with its invisible Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is alone necessary for it: and that the Catholic Church is the assembly of all the elect.

This tractate was followed by another under the title of *The Six Errors*. The first error was that of the priests who boasted of making the body of Jesus Christ in the mass, and of being the creator of their Creator. The second was the confession exacted of the members of the Church – "I believe in the Pope and the saints" – in opposition to which, Huss taught that men are to believe in God only. The third error was the priestly pretension to remit the guilt and punishment of sin. The fourth was the implicit obedience exacted by ecclesiastical superiors to all their commands. The fifth was the making no distinction between a valid excommunication and one that was not so. The sixth error was simony.

This Huss designated a heresy, and scarcely, he believed, could a priest be found who was not guilty of it.

This list of errors was placarded on the door of the Bethlehem Chapel. The tract in which they were set forth was circulated far and near, and produced an immense impression throughout the whole of Bohemia. Another matter which now happened helped to deepen the impression which his tract on The Six Errors had made. John XXIII fulminated a bull against Ladislaus, King of Hungary, excommunicating him, and all his children to the third generation. The offense which had drawn upon Ladislaus this burst of Pontifical wrath was the support he had given to Gregory XII, one of the rivals of John. The Pope commanded all emperors, kings, princes, cardinals, and men of whatever degree, by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, to take up arms against Ladislaus, and utterly to exterminate him and his supporters; and he promised to all who should join the crusade, or who should preach it, or collect funds for its support, the pardon of all their sins, and immediate admission into Paradise should they die in the war – in short, the same indulgences which were accorded to those who bore arms for the conquest of the Holy Land. This fulmination wrapped Bohemia in flames; and Huss seized the opportunity of directing the eyes of his countrymen to the contrast, so perfect and striking, between the vicar of Christ and Christ Himself; between the destroyer and the Savior; between the commands of the bull, which proclaimed war, and the precepts of the gospel, which preached peace.

Having condemned crusades, the carnage of which was doubly iniquitous when done by priestly hands, Huss next attacks indulgences. They are an affront to the grace of the gospel. "God alone possesses the power to forgive sins in an absolute manner."

Waxing bolder as his views enlarged, he proceeded to stigmatize many of the ceremonies of the Roman Church as lacking foundation, and as being foolish and superstitious. He denied the merit of abstinences; he ridiculed the credulity of believing legends, and the groveling superstition of venerating relics, bowing before images, and worshipping the dead. "They are profuse," said he, referring to the latter class of devotees, "towards the saints in glory, who want nothing; they array bones of the latter with silk and gold and silver, and lodge them magnificently; but they refuse clothing and hospitality to the poor members of Jesus Christ who are amongst us, at whose expense they feed to repletion, and drink till they are intoxicated." Friars he no more loved than Wyckliffe did, if we may judge from a treatise which he wrote at this time, entitled The Abomination of Monks, and which he followed by another, wherein he was scarcely more complimentary to the Pope and his court, styling them the members of Antichrist.

Plainer and bolder every day became the speech of Huss; fiercer grew his invectives and denunciations. The scandals which multiplied around him had, doubtless, roused his indignation, and the persecutions which he endured may have heated his temper. He saw John XXIII, than whom a more infamous man never wore the tiara, professing to open and shut the gates of Paradise, and scattering simoniacal pardons over Europe that he might kindle the flames of war, and extinguish a rival in torrents of Christian blood. It was not easy to witness all this and be calm. In fact, the Pope's bull of crusade had

divided Bohemia, and brought matters in that country to extremity. The king and the priesthood were opposed to Ladislaus of Hungary, and consequently supported John XXIII, defending as best they could his indulgences and simonies. On the other hand, many of the magnates of Bohemia, and the great body of the people, sided with Ladislaus, condemned the crusade which the Pope was preaching against him, together with all the infamous means by which he was furthering it, and held the clergy guilty of the blood which seemed about to flow in torrents. The people kept no measure in their talk about the priests. The latter trembled for their lives. The archbishop interfered, but not to throw oil on the waters. He placed Prague under interdict, and threatened to continue the sentence so long as John Huss should remain in the city. The archbishop persuaded himself that if Huss should retire the movement would go down, and the war of factions subside into peace. He but deceived himself. It was not now in the power of any man, even of Huss, to control or to stop that movement. Two ages were struggling together, the old and the new. The Reformer, however, fearing that his presence in Prague might embarrass his friends, again withdrew to his native village of Hussinetz.

Huss had closed one career, and was bidden rest awhile before opening his second and sublimer one. Sweet it was to leave the strife and clamor of Prague for the quiet of his birth-place. As the preacher of Bethlehem Chapel he had largely contributed to emancipate Bohemia, as the martyr of Constance he was to contribute to emancipate Christendom.

We have now before us a wider theater than Bohemia. It is the year 1413. Sigismund – a name destined to go down to posterity along with that of Huss, though not with like fame – had a little before mounted the throne of the Empire. Wherever he cast his eyes the new emperor saw only spectacles that distressed him. Christendom was afflicted with a grievous schism. There were three Popes, whose personal profligacy and official crimes were the scandal of that Christianity of which each claimed to be the chief teacher, and the scourge of that Church of which each claimed to be the supreme pastor. The most sacred things were put up to sale, and were the subject of simoniacal bargaining. The bonds of charity were disrupted, and nation was going to war with nation; everywhere strife raged and blood was flowing. The Poles and the knights of the Teutonic order were waging a war which raged only with the greater fury inasmuch as religion was its pretext. Bohemia seemed on the point of being rent in pieces by intestine commotions; Germany was convulsed; Italy had as many tyrants as princes; France was distracted by its factions, and Spain was embroiled by the machinations of Benedict XIII, whose pretensions that country had espoused. To complete the confusion the Muslim hordes, encouraged by these dissensions, were gathering on the frontier of Europe and threatening to break in and repress all disorders, in a common subjugation of Christendom to the yoke of the Prophet. To the evils of schism, of war, and Turkish invasion, was now added the worse evil – as Sigismund doubtless accounted it – of heresy. A sincere devotee, he was moved even to tears by this spectacle of Christendom disgraced and torn asunder by its Popes, and undermined and corrupted by its heretics. The emperor gave his mind anxiously to the question how these evils were to be cured. The expedient he hit upon was not an original one certainly – it had come to be a stereotyped remedy – but it possessed a certain plausibility that fascinated men, and so Sigismund resolved to make trial of it: it

was a General Council.

This plan had been tried at Pisa, and it had failed. This did not promise much for a second attempt; but the failure had been set down to the fact that then the miter and the Empire were at war with each other, whereas now the Pope and the emperor were prepared to act in concert. In these more advantageous circumstances Sigismund resolved to convene the whole Church, all its patriarchs, cardinals, bishops, and princes, and to summon before this august body the three rival Popes, and the leaders of the new opinions, not doubting that a General Council would have authority enough, more especially when seconded by the imperial power, to compel the Popes to adjust their rival claims, and put the heretics to silence. These were the two objects which the emperor had in eye – to heal the schism and to extirpate heresy.

Sigismund now opened negotiations with John XXIII. To the Pope the idea of a Council was beyond measure alarming. Nor can one wonder at this, if his conscience was loaded with but half the crimes of which Popish historians have accused him. But he dared not refuse the emperor. John's crusade against Ladislaus had not prospered. The King of Hungary was in Rome with his army, and the Pope had been compelled to flee to Bologna; and terrible as a Council was to Pope John, he resolved to face it, rather than offend the emperor, whose assistance he needed against the man whose ire he had wantonly provoked by his bull of crusade, and from whose victorious arms he was now fain to seek a deliverer. Pope John was accused of opening his way to the tiara by the murder of his predecessor, Alexander V, and he lived in continual fear of being hurled from his chair by the same dreadful means by which he had mounted to it. It was finally agreed that a General Council should be convoked for November 1st, 1414, and that it should meet in the city of Constance.

The day came and the Council assembled. From every kingdom and state, and almost from every city in Europe, came delegates to swell that great gathering. All that numbers, and princely rank, and high ecclesiastical dignity, and fame in learning, could do to make an assembly illustrious, contributed to give eclat to the Council of Constance. Thirty cardinals, twenty archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, and as many prelates, a multitude of abbots and doctors, and eighteen hundred priests came together in obedience to the joint summons of the emperor and the Pope. Among the members of sovereign rank were the Electors of Palatine, of Mainz, and of Saxony; the Dukes of Austria, of Bavaria, and of Silesia. There were margraves, counts, and barons without number. But there were three men who took precedence of all others in that brilliant assemblage, though each on a different ground. These three men were the Emperor Sigismund, Pope John XXIII., and – last and greatest of all – John Huss.

In the train of the Council came a vast concourse of pilgrims from all parts of Christendom. Men from beyond the Alps and the Pyrenees mingled here with the natives of the Hungarian and Bohemian plains. Room could not be found in Constance for this great multitude, and booths and wooden erections rose outside the walls. Theatrical representations and religious processions proceeded together. Here was seen a party of revelers and masqueraders busy with their cups and their pastimes, there knots of cowed

and hooded devotees devoutly telling their beads. The orison of the monk and the stave of the bacchanal rose blended in one. So great an increase of the population of the little town – amounting, it is supposed, to 100,000 souls – rendered necessary a corresponding enlargement of its commissariat. All the highways leading to Constance were crowded with vehicles, conveying thither all kinds of provisions and delicacies: the wines of France, the breadstuffs of Lombardy, the honey and butter of Switzerland; the venison of the Alps and the fish of their lakes, the cheese of Holland, and the confections of Paris and London.

While the Pope was approaching Constance on the one side, John Huss was traveling towards it on the other. He did not conceal from himself the danger he ran in appearing before such a tribunal. His judges were parties in the cause. What hope could Huss entertain that they would try him dispassionately by the scriptures to which he had appealed? Where would they be if they allowed such an authority to speak? But he must appear; Sigismund had written to King Wenceslaus to send him thither; and, conscious of his innocence and the justice of his cause, thither he went. In prospect of the dangers before him, he obtained, before setting out, a safe-conduct from his own sovereign; also a certificate of his orthodoxy from Nicholas, Bishop of Nazareth, Inquisitor of the Faith in Bohemia; and a document drawn up by a notary, and duly signed by witnesses, setting forth that he had offered to purge himself of heresy before a provincial Synod of Prague, but had been refused audience. He afterwards caused writings to be affixed to the doors of all the churches and all the palaces of Prague, notifying his departure, and inviting all persons to come to Constance who were prepared to testify either to his innocence or his guilt. To the door of the royal palace even did he affix such notification, addressed "to the King, to the Queen, and to the whole Court." He made papers of this sort be put up at every place on his road to Constance. In the imperial city of Nuremberg he gave public notice that he was going to the Council to give an account of his faith, and invited all who had anything to lay to his charge to meet him there. He started, not from Prague, but from Carlowitz. Before setting out he took farewell of his friends as of those he never again should see. He expected to find more enemies at the Council than Jesus Christ had at Jerusalem; but he was resolved to endure the last degree of punishment rather than betray the Gospel by any cowardice. The presentiments with which he began his journey attended him all the way. He felt it to be a pilgrimage to the stake.

While the Pope was assigning to others their place in heaven, his own place on earth had become suddenly insecure. Proceedings were commenced in the Council which were meant to pave the way for John's dethronement. In the fourth and fifth sessions it was solemnly decreed that a General Council is superior to the Pope. "A Synod congregate in the Holy Ghost," so ran the decree, "making a General Council, representing the whole Catholic Church here militant, hath power of Christ immediately, to the which power every person, of what state or dignity soever he be, yea, being the Pope himself, ought to be obedient in all such things as concern the general reformation of the Church, as well in the Head as in the members." The Council in this decree asserted its absolute and supreme authority, and affirmed the subjection of the Pope in matters of faith as well as manners to its judgment.

In the eighth session (May 4th, 1415), John Wyckliffe was summoned from his rest, cited before the Council, and made answerable to it for his mortal writings. Forty-five propositions, previously culled from his publications, were condemned, and this sentence was fittingly followed by a decree consigning their author to the flames. Wyckliffe himself being beyond their reach, his bones, pursuant to this sentence, were afterwards dug up and burned. The next labor of the Council was to take the cup from the laity, and to decree that Communion should be only in one kind. This prohibition was issued under the penalty of excommunication.

These matters dispatched, or rather while they were in course of being so, the Council entered upon the weightier affair of Pope John XXIII. Universally odious, the Pope's deposition had been resolved on beforehand by the emperor and the great majority of the members. At a secret sitting a terrible indictment was tabled against him. "It contained," says his secretary, Thierry de Niem, "all the mortal sins, and a multitude of others not fit to be named." "More than forty-three most grievous and heinous crimes," says Fox, "were objected and proved against him: as that he had hired Marcillus Permensis, a physician, to poison Alexander V, his predecessor. Further, that he was a heretic, a simoniac, a liar, a hypocrite, a murderer, an enchanter, a dice-player, and an adulterer; and finally, what crime was it that he was not infected with?" When the Pontiff heard of these accusations he was overwhelmed with affright, and talked of resigning; but recovering from his panic, he again grasped firmly the tiara which he had been on the point of letting go, and began a struggle for it with the emperor and the Council. Making himself acquainted with everything by his spies, he held midnight meetings with his friends, bribed the cardinals, and labored to sow division among the nations composing the Council. But all was in vain. His opponents held firmly to their purpose. The indictment against John they dared not make public, lest the Pontificate should be everlastingly disgraced, and occasion given for a triumph to the party of Wyckliffe and Huss; but the conscience of the miserable man seconded the efforts of his prosecutors. The Pope promised to abdicate; but repenting immediately of his promise, he quitted the city by stealth and fled to Schaffhausen.

John XXIII entered Constance in pomp. In striking contrast to the ostentatious display of his arrival, was the mean disguise in which he sought to conceal his departure. The plan of his escape had been arranged beforehand between himself and his good friend and staunch protector, the Duke of Austria. The duke, on a certain day, was to give a tournament. The spectacle was to come off late in the afternoon; and while the whole city should be engrossed with the fete, the lords tilting in the arena and the citizens gazing at the mimic war, and oblivious of all else, the Pope would take leave of Constance and of the Council.

When the Pope's flight became known, all was in commotion at Constance. The Council was at an end, so every one thought; the flight of the Pope would be followed by the departure of the princes and the emperor: the merchants shut their shops and packed up their wares, only too happy if they could escape pillage from the lawless mob into whose hands, as they believed, the town had now been thrown. After the first moments of consternation, however, the excitement calmed down. The emperor mounted his horse

and rode round the city, declaring openly that he would protect the Council, and maintain order and quiet; and thus things in Constance returned to their usual channel.

Still the Pope's flight was an untoward event. It threatened to disconcert all the plans of the emperor for healing the schism and restoring peace to Christendom. Sigismund saw the labors of years on the point of being swept away. He hastily assembled the princes and deputies, and with no little indignation declared it to be his purpose to reduce the Duke of Austria by force of arms, and bring back the fugitive. When the Pope learned that a storm was gathering, and would follow him across the Tyrol, he wrote in conciliatory terms to the emperor, excusing his flight by saying that he had gone to Schaffhausen to enjoy its sweeter air, that of Constance not agreeing with him; moreover, in this quiet retreat, and at liberty, he would be able to show the world how freely he acted in fulfilling his promise of renouncing the Pontificate.

John, however, was in no haste, even in the pure air and full freedom of Schaffhausen, to lay down the tiara. He procrastinated and maneuvered; he went farther away every few days, in quest, as suggested, of still sweeter air, though his enemies hinted that the Pope's ailment was not a vitiated atmosphere, but a bad conscience. His thought was that his flight would be the signal for the Council to break up, and that he would thus checkmate Sigismund, and avoid the humiliation of deposition. But the emperor was not to be balked. He put his troops in motion against the Duke of Austria; and the Council, seconding Sigismund with its spiritual weapons, wrested the infallibility from the Pope, and took that formidable engine into its own hands. "This decision of the Council," said the celebrated Gallican divine, Gerson, in a sermon which he preached before the assembly, "ought to be engraved in the most eminent places and in all the churches of the world, as a fundamental law to crush the monster of ambition, and to stop the mouths of all flatterers who, by virtue of certain glosses, say, bluntly and without any regard to the eternal law of the Gospel, that the Pope is not subject to a General Council, and cannot be judged by such."

The way being thus prepared, the Council now proceeded to the trial of the Pope. Public criers at the door of the church summoned John XXIII to appear and answer to the charges to be brought against him. The criers expended their breath in vain; John was on the other side of the Tyrol; and even had he been within ear-shot, he was not disposed to obey their citation. Three-and-twenty commissioners were then nominated for the examination of the witnesses. The indictment contained seventy accusations, but only fifty were read in public Council; the rest were withheld from a regard to the honor of the Pontificate – a superfluous care, one would think, after what had already been permitted to see the light. Thirty-seven witnesses were examined, and one of the points to which they bore testimony, but which the Council left under a veil, was the poisoning by John of his predecessor, Alexander V. The charges were held to be proven, and in the twelfth session (May 29th, 1415) the Council passed sentence, stripping John XXIII of the Pontificate, and releasing all Christians from their oath of obedience to him.

When the blow fell, Pope John was as abject as he had before been arrogant. He acknowledged the justice of his sentence, bewailed the day he had mounted to the

Popedom, and wrote cringingly to the emperor, if haply his miserable life might be spared – which no one, by the way, thought of taking from him.

The case of the other two Popes was simpler, and more easily disposed of. They had already been condemned by the Council of Pisa, which had put forth an earlier assertion than the Council of Constance of the supremacy of a Council, and its right to deal with heretical and simoniacal Popes. Angelus Corario, Gregory XII, voluntarily sent in his resignation; and Peter de Lune, Benedict XIII, was deposed; and Otta de Colonna, being unanimously elected by the cardinals, ruled the Church under the title of Martin V.

When John Huss set out for the Council, he carried with him, as we have already said, several important documents. But the most important of all Huss's credentials was a safe-conduct from the Emperor Sigismund. Without this, he would hardly have undertaken the journey.

Full liberty was accorded him during the first days of his stay at Constance. He made his arrival be intimated to the Pope the day after by two Bohemian noblemen who accompanied him, adding that he carried a safe-conduct from the emperor. The Pope received them courteously, and expressed his determination to protect Huss. The Pope's own position was too precarious, however, to make his promise of any great value.

Paletz and Causis, who, of all the ecclesiastics of Prague, were the bitterest enemies of Huss, had preceded him to Constance, and were working day and night among the members of the Council to inflame them against him, and secure his condemnation. Their machinations were not without result. On the twenty-sixth day after his arrival Huss was arrested, in flagrant violation of the imperial safe-conduct, and carried before the Pope and the cardinals. After a conversation of some hours, he was told that he must remain a prisoner, and was entrusted to the clerk of the Cathedral of Constance.

When the tidings of his imprisonment reached Huss's native country, they kindled a flame in Bohemia. Burning words bespoke the indignation that the nation felt at the treachery and cruelty with which their great countryman had been treated. The puissant barons united in a remonstrance to the Emperor Sigismund, reminding him of his safe-conduct, and demanding that he should vindicate his own honor, and redress the injustice done to Huss, by ordering his instant liberation. The first impulse of Sigismund was to open Huss's prison, but the casuists of the Council found means to keep it shut. The emperor was told that he had no right to grant a safe-conduct in the circumstances without the consent of the Council; that the greater good of the Church must over-rule his promise; that the Council by its supreme authority could release him from his obligation, and that no formality of this sort could be suffered to obstruct the course of justice against a heretic. The promptings of honor and humanity were stifled in the emperor's breast by these reasonings. In the voice of the assembled Church he heard the voice of God, and delivered up John Huss to the will of his enemies.

The Council afterwards put its reasonings into a decree, to the effect that no faith is to be kept with heretics to the prejudice of the Church. Being now completely in their power,

the enemies of Huss pushed on the process against him. They examined his writings, they founded a series of criminatory articles upon them, and proceeding to his prison, where they found him still suffering severely from fever, they read them to him. He craved of them the favor of an advocate to assist him in framing his defense, enfeebled as he was in body and mind by the foul air of his prison, and the fever with which he had been smitten. This request was refused, although the indulgence asked was one commonly accorded to even the greatest criminals. At this stage the proceedings against him were stopped for a little while by an unexpected event, which turned the thoughts of the Council in another direction. It was now that Pope John escaped, as we have already related. In the interval, the keepers of his monastic prison having fled along with their master, the Pope, Huss was removed to the Castle of Gottlieben, on the other side of the Rhine, where he was shut up, heavily loaded with chains.

While the proceedings against Huss stood still, those against the Pope went forward. The flight of John had brought his affairs to a crisis, and the Council, without more delay, deposed him from the Pontificate, as narrated above.

To the delegates whom the Council sent to intimate to him his sentence, he delivered up the Pontifical seal and the fisherman's ring. Along with these insignia they took possession of his person, brought him back to Constance, and threw him into the prison of Gottlieben, the same stronghold in which Huss was confined. How solemn and instructive! The Reformer and the man who had arrested him are now the inmates of the same prison, yet what a gulf divides the Pontiff from the martyr! The chains of the one are the monuments of his infamy. The bonds of the other are the badges of his virtue. They invest their wearer with a luster which is lacking to the diadem of Sigismund.

The Council was only the more intent on condemning Huss, that it had already condemned Pope John. It instinctively felt that the deposition of the Pontiff was a virtual justification of the Reformer, and that the world would so construe it. It was minded to avenge itself on the man who had compelled it to lay open its sores to the world. It felt, moreover, no little pleasure in the exercise of its newly-acquired prerogative of infallibility: a Pope had fallen beneath its stroke, why should a simple priest defy its authority?

The Council, however, delayed bringing John Huss to his trial. His two great opponents, Paletz and Causis – whose enmity was whetted, doubtless, by the discomfitures they had sustained from Huss in Prague – feared the effect of his eloquence upon the members, and took care that he should not appear till they had prepared the Council for his condemnation. At last, on the 5th of June, 1415, he was put on his trial. His books were produced, and he was asked if he acknowledged being the writer of them. This he readily did. The articles of crimination were next read. Some of these were fair statements of Huss's opinions; others were exaggerations or perversions, and others again were wholly false, imputing to him opinions which he did not hold, and which he had never taught. Huss naturally wished to reply, pointing out what was false, what was perverted, and what was true in the indictment preferred against him, assigning the grounds and adducing the proofs in support of those sentiments which he really held, and which he

had taught. He had not uttered more than a few words when there arose in the hall a clamor so loud as completely to drown his voice. Huss stood motionless; he cast his eyes around on the excited assembly, surprise and pity rather than anger visible on his face. Waiting till the tumult had subsided, he again attempted to proceed with his defense. He had not gone far till he had occasion to appeal to the sScriptures; the storm was that moment renewed, and with greater violence than before. Some of the Fathers shouted out accusations, others broke into peals of derisive laughter. Again Huss was silent. "He is dumb," said his enemies, who forgot that they had come there as his judges. "I am silent," said Huss, "because I am unable to make myself audible midst so great a noise."

The minds of the Fathers were too perturbed to be able to agree on the course to be followed. It was found impossible to restore order, and after a short sitting the assembly broke up.

Some Bohemian noblemen, among whom was Baron de Chlum, the steady and most affectionate friend of the Reformer, had been witnesses of the tumult. They took care to inform Sigismund of what had passed, and prayed him to be present at the next sitting, in the hope that, though the Council did not respect itself, it would yet respect the emperor.

After a day's interval the Council again assembled. The morning of that day, the 7th June, was a memorable one. An all but total eclipse of the sun astonished and terrified the venerable Fathers and the inhabitants of Constance. The darkness was great. The city, the lake, and the surrounding plains were buried in the shadow of portentous night. This phenomenon was remembered and spoken of long after in Europe. Till the inauspicious darkness had passed the Fathers did not dare to meet. Towards noon the light returned, and the Council assembled in the hall of the Franciscans, the emperor taking his seat in it. John Huss was led in by a numerous body of armed men. Sigismund and Huss were now face to face. There sat the emperor, his princes, lords, and suite crowding round him; there, loaded with chains, stood the man for whose safety he had put in pledge his honor as a prince and his power as emperor. The irons that Huss wore were a strange commentary, truly, on the imperial safe-conduct. Is it thus, well might the prisoner have said, is it thus that princes on whom the oil of unction has been poured, and Councils which the Holy Ghost inspires, keep faith? But Sigismund, though he could not be insensible to the silent reproach which the chains of Huss cast upon him, consoled himself with his secret resolve to save the Reformer from the last extremity. He had permitted Huss to be deprived of liberty, but he would not permit him to be deprived of life. But there were two elements he had not taken into account in forming this resolution. The first was the unyielding firmness of the Reformer, and the second was the ghostly awe in which he himself stood of the Council; and so, despite his better intentions, he suffered himself to be dragged along on the road of perfidy and dishonor, which he had meanly entered, till he came to its tragic end, and the imperial safe-conduct and the martyr's stake had taken their place, side by side, ineffaceably, on history's eternal page.

Causis again read the accusation, and a somewhat desultory debate ensued between Huss and several doctors of the Council, especially the celebrated Peter d'Ailly, Cardinal of Cambray. The line of accusation and defense has been sketched with tolerable fullness by

all who have written on the Council. After comparing these statements it appears to us that Huss differed from the Church of Rome not so much on dogmas as on great points of jurisdiction and policy. These, while they directly attacked certain of the principles of the Papacy, tended indirectly to the subversion of the whole system – in short, to a far greater revolution than Huss perceived, or perhaps intended. He appears to have believed in transubstantiation; he declared so before the Council, although in stating his views he betrays ever and anon a revulsion from the grosser form of the dogma. He admitted the Divine institution and office of the Pope and members of the hierarchy, but he made the efficacy of their official acts dependent on their spiritual character. Even to the last he did not abandon the communion of the Roman Church. Still it cannot be doubted that John Huss was essentially a Protestant and a Reformer. He held that the supreme rule of faith and practice was the Holy Scriptures; that Christ was the Rock on which our Lord said he would build his Church; that "the assembly of the Predestinate is the Holy Church, which has neither spot nor wrinkle, but is holy and undefiled; the which Jesus Christ, calleth his own;" that the Church needed no one visible head on earth, that it had none such in the days of the Apostles; that nevertheless it was then well governed, and might be so still although it should lose its earthly head; and that the Church was not confined to the clergy, but included all the faithful. He maintained the principle of liberty of conscience so far as that heresy ought not to be punished by the magistrate till the heretic had been convicted out of Holy Scripture. He appears to have laid no weight on excommunications and indulgences, unless in cases in which manifestly the judgment of God went along with the sentence of the priest. Like Wyckliffe he held that tithes were simply alms, and that of the vast temporal revenues of the clergy that portion only which was needful for their subsistence was rightfully theirs, and that the rest belonged to the poor, or might be otherwise distributed by the civil authorities. His theological creed was only in course of formation. That it would have taken more definite form – that the great doctrines of the Reformation would have come out in full light to his gaze, diligent student as he was of the Bible had his career been prolonged, we cannot doubt. The formula of "justification by faith alone" – the foundation of the teaching of Martin Luther in after days – we do not find in any of the defenses or letters of Huss; but if he did not know the terms he had learned the doctrine, for when he comes to die, turning away from Church, from saint, from all human intervention, he casts himself simply, upon the infinite mercy and love of the Savior. "I submit to the correction of our Divine Master, and I put my trust in his infinite mercy." "I commend you," says he, writing to the people of Prague, "to the merciful Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, and the Son of the immaculate Virgin Mary, who hath redeemed us by his most bitter death, without all our merits, from eternal pains, from the thralldom of the devil, and from sin."

The members of the Council instinctively felt that Huss was not one of them; that although claiming to belong to the Church which they constituted, he had in fact abandoned it, and renounced its authority. The two leading principles which he had embraced were subversive of their whole jurisdiction in both its branches, spiritual and temporal. The first and great authority with him was Holy Scripture; this struck at the foundation of the spiritual power of the hierarchy; and as regards their temporal power he undermined it by his doctrine touching ecclesiastical revenues and possessions.

From these two positions neither sophistry nor threats could make him swerve. In the judgment of the Council he was in rebellion. He had transferred his allegiance from the Church to God speaking in his Word. This was his great crime. It mattered little in the eyes of the assembled Fathers that he still shared in some of their common beliefs; he had broken the great bond of submission; he had become the worst of all heretics; he had rent from his conscience the shackles of the infallibility; and he must needs, in process of time, become a more avowed and dangerous heretic than he was at that moment, and accordingly the mind of the Council was made up – John Huss must undergo the doom of the heretic.

Already enfeebled by illness, and by his long imprisonment – for "he was shut up in a tower, with fetters on his legs, that he could scarce walk in the day-time, and at night he was fastened up to a rack against the wall hard by his bed"– he was exhausted and worn out by the length of the sitting, and the attention demanded to rebut the attacks and reasonings of his accusers.

In the interval between Huss's second appearance before the Council, and the third and last citation, the emperor made an ineffectual attempt to induce the Reformer to retract and abjure. Sigismund was earnestly desirous of saving his life, no doubt out of regard for Huss, but doubtless also from a regard to his own honor, deeply at stake in the issue. The Council drew up a form of abjuration and submission. This was communicated to Huss in prison, and the mediation of mutual friends was employed to prevail with him to sign the paper. The Reformer declared himself ready to abjure those errors which had been falsely imputed to him, but as regarded those conclusions which had been faithfully deduced from his writings, and which he had taught, these, by the grace of God, he never would abandon.

Thirty days elapsed. Huss had languished in prison, contending with fetters, fetid air, and sickness, for about two months. It was now the 6th of July, 1415 – the anniversary of his birth. This day was to see the wishes of his enemies crowned, and his own sorrows terminated. The hall of the Council was filled with a brilliant assemblage. There sat the emperor; there were the princes, the deputies of the sovereigns, the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, and priests; and there too was a vast concourse which the spectacle that day was to witness had brought together. It was meet that a stage should be erected worthy of the act to be done upon it – that when the first champion in the great struggle that was just opening should yield up his life, all Christendom might see and bear witness to the fact.

The Archbishop of Riga came to the prison to bring Huss to the Council. Mass was being celebrated as they arrived at the church door, and Huss was made to stay outside till it was finished, lest the mysteries should be profaned by the presence of a man who was not only a heretic, but a leader of heretics. Being led in, he was bidden take his seat on a raised platform, where he might be conspicuously in the eyes of the whole assembly. On sitting down, he was seen to engage in earnest prayer, but the words were not heard. Near him rose a pile of clerical vestments, in readiness for the ceremonies that were to precede the final tragedy. The sermon, usual on such occasions, was preached by the Bishop of

Lodi. He chose as his text the words, "That the body of sin might be destroyed." He enlarged on the schism as the source of the heresies, murders, sacrileges, robberies, and wars which had for so long a period desolated the Church, and drew, says Lenfant, "such a horrible picture of the schism, that one would think at first he was exhorting the emperor to burn the two anti-Popes, and not John Huss. Yet the bishop concluded in these terms, addressed to Sigismund: 'Destroy heresies and errors, but chiefly' (pointing to John Huss) 'that OBSTINATE HERETIC.'"

The sermon ended, the accusations against Huss were again read, as also the depositions of the witnesses; and then Huss gave his final refusal to abjure. The prelates then pronounced him condemned. They 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."

Turning to the emperor, the bishops said, "This man John Huss, who has no more any office or part in the Church of God, we leave with thee, delivering him up to the civil judgment and power." The emperor turned him over to the magistrates to have him burned at the stake.

Huss was escorted to the place of his execution. The fire was applied, the flames blazed upward. "John Huss," says Fox, "began to sing with a loud voice, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' And when he began to say the same the third time, the wind so blew the flame in his face that it choked him."

It is not death, but life, that he has found in the fire; his stake has given him not an entombment, but a resurrection. The winds as they blow over Constance are wafting the spirit of the confessor and martyr to all the countries of Christendom. The nations are being stirred; Bohemia is awakening.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.