

THE HISTORY
OF
PROTESTANTISM

BY THE
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WITH FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE BEST ARTISTS

“PROTESTANTISM, THE SACRED CAUSE OF GOD’S LIGHT AND TRUTH AGAINST THE
DEVIL’S FALSITY AND DARKNESS.”—*Carlyle*

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Book Third.

JOHN HUSS AND THE HUSSITE WARS.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH, EDUCATION, AND FIRST LABOURS OF HUSS.

Bohemia—Introduction of the Gospel—Wicliffe's Writings—Pioneers—Militz, Stiekna, Janovius—Charles IV.—Huss—Birth and Education—Prague—Bethlehem Chapel.

IN spring-time does the husbandman begin to prepare for the harvest. He turns field after field with the plough, and when all have been got ready for the processes that are to follow, he returns on his steps, scattering as he goes the precious seed on the open furrows. His next care is to see to the needful operations of weeding and cleaning. All the while the sun this hour, and the shower the next, are promoting the germination and growth of the plant. The husbandman returns a third time, and lo! over all his fields there now waves the yellow ripened grain. It is harvest.

So was it with the Heavenly Husbandman when He began His preparations for the harvest of Christendom. For while to the ages that came after it the Reformation was the spring-time, it yet, to the ages that went before it, stood related as the harvest.

We have witnessed the great Husbandman ploughing one of His fields, England namely, as early as the fourteenth century. The war that broke out in that age with France, the political conflicts into which the nation was plunged with the Papacy, the rise of the universities with the mental fermentation that followed, broke up the ground. The soil turned, the Husbandman sent forth a skilful and laborious servant to cast into the furrows of the ploughed land the seed of the translated Bible. So far had the work advanced. At this stage it stopped, or appeared to do so. Alas! we exclaim, that all this labour should be thrown away! But it is not so. The labourer is withdrawn, but the seed is not: it lies in the soil; and while it is silently germinating, and working its way hour by hour towards the harvest, the Husbandman goes elsewhere and proceeds to plough and sow another of His fields. Let us cast our eyes over wide Christendom. What do we see? Lo! yonder in the far-off East is the same preparatory process begun which we have already traced in England. Verily, the Husbandman is wisely busy. In Bohemia the plough is at work, and already the sowers have come forth and have begun to scatter the seed.

In transferring ourselves to Bohemia we do not change our subject, although we change our country. It is the same great drama under another sky.

Surely the winter is past, and the great spring time has come, when, in lands lying so widely apart, we see the flowers beginning to appear, and the fountains to gush forth.

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 Wicliffe.”¹ “A Taborite chronicler of the fifteenth century, Nicholaus von Pelhrimow, testifies that the books of the evangelical doctor, Master John Wicliffe, 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.”²

Such is the link that binds together Bohemia and England. 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 enrol among its disciples. The spiritually dead who are in their graves are beginning to hear the voice of Wicliffe—yea, rather of Christ speaking through Wicliffe—and to come forth.

The first drama of Protestantism was acted and over in Bohemia before it had begun in Germany. So prolific in tragic incident and heroic character was this second drama, that it is deserving of more attention than it has yet received. It did not last long, but during its career it shed a resplendent lustre upon the little Bohemia. It transformed its people into a nation of heroes. It made their wisdom in council the admiration of Europe, and their prowess on the field the terror of all the neighbouring States. It gave, moreover, a presage of the elevation to which human character should attain, and the splendour that would gather round history, what time Protestantism should begin to display its regenerating influence on a wider area than that to which until now it had been restricted.

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 baptised, 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.”³ 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,

¹ Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, cap. 8, 5; Lugduni Batavorum, 1647.

² Hoefler, *Hist. Hussite Movement*, vol. ii., p. 593. Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., p. 140.

³ Nestor, *Annals*, pp. 20–23; St. Petersburg edit., 1767; *apud* Count Valerian Krasinski, *Slavonia*, pp. 36, 37.

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.⁴

Though practising 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.⁵

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. Thaurus 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 evangelisers, 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

⁴ Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, cap. 1, 1. Centuriatores Madgebergenses, *Hist. Eccles.*, tom. iii., p. 8; Basilæ, 1624.

⁵ See the Pontiff’s letter in Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, pp. 16,17. The following is an extract:—“Sæpe enim meditantes Scripturam Sacram, comperimus, omnipotenti Deo placuisse, et placere, cultum sacrum lingua arcana peragi, ne à quibus vis promiscue, præsertim rudioribus, intelligatur.*’ Datæ Romæ, &c. Anno 1079.

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.

All great changes prognosticate themselves. The revolutions that happen in the political sphere never fail to make their advent felt. Is it wonderful that in every country of Christendom there were men who foretold the approach of a great moral and spiritual revolution? In Bohemia were three men who were the pioneers of Huss; and who, in terms more or less plain, foretold the advent of a greater champion than themselves. The first of these was John Milicius, or Militz, Archdeacon and Canon of the Archiepiscopal Cathedral of the Hradschin, Prague. He was a man of rare learning, of holy life, and an eloquent preacher. When he appeared in the pulpit of the cathedral church, where he always used the tongue of the people, the vast edifice was thronged with a most attentive audience. He inveighed against the abuses of the clergy rather than against the false doctrines of the Church, and he exhorted the people to Communion in both kinds. He went to Rome, in the hope of finding there, in a course of fasting and tears, greater rest for his soul. But, alas! the scandals of Prague, against which he had thundered in the pulpit of Hradschin, were forgotten in the greater enormities of the Pontifical city. Shocked at what he saw in Rome, he wrote over the door of one of the cardinals, "Antichrist is now come, and sitteth in the Church,"⁶ and departed. The Pope, Gregory XI., sent after him a bull, addressed to the Archbishop of Prague, commanding him to seize and imprison the bold priest who had affronted the Pope in his own capital, and at the very threshold of the Vatican.

No sooner had Milicius returned home than the archbishop proceeded to execute the Papal mandate. But murmurs began to be heard among the citizens, and fearing a popular outbreak the archbishop opened the prison doors, and Milicius, after a short incarceration, was set at liberty. He survived his eightieth year, and died in peace, A.D. 1374.⁷

His colleague, Conrad Stiekna—a man of similar character and great eloquence, and whose church in Prague was so crowded, he was obliged to go outside and preach in the open square—died before him. He was succeeded by Matthew Janovius, who not only thundered in the pulpit of the cathedral against the abuses of the Church, but travelled through Bohemia, preaching

⁶ "Antichristu jam venit, et in Ecclesia sedet." (Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, p. 21.) Some say that the words were written on the portals of St. Peter's.

⁷ Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, p. 21,

everywhere against the iniquities of the times. This drew the eyes of Rome upon him. At the instigation of the Pope, persecution was commenced against the confessors in Bohemia. They durst not openly celebrate the Communion in both kinds, and those who desired to partake of the “cup,” could enjoy the privilege only in private dwellings, or in the yet greater concealment of woods and caves. It fared hard with them when their places of retreat were discovered by the armed bands which were sent upon their track. Those who could not manage to escape were put to the sword, or thrown into rivers. At length the stake was decreed (1376) against all who dissented from the established rites. These persecutions were continued till the times of Huss.⁸ Janovius, who “taught that salvation was only to be found by faith in the crucified Saviour,” 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.”⁹

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 labours of the sovereign stop here. He extended the municipal liberties 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 patronised 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

⁸ Comenius, *Perse cut. Eccles. Bohem.*, p. 23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Protestantism.¹⁰

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 Huss¹¹ 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. He took his name from the place of his birth. His parents were poor, but respectable. His father died when he was young. His mother, when his education was finished at the provincial school, took him to Prague, to enter him at the university of that city. She carried a present to the rector, but happening to lose it by the way, and grieved by the misfortune, she knelt down beside her son, and implored upon him the blessing of the Almighty.¹² The prayers of the mother were heard, though the answer came in a way that would have pierced her heart like a sword, had she lived to witness the issue.

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 Wicliffe 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 proces-

¹⁰ Krasinski, *Religious History of the Slavonic Nations*, pp. 49, 50; Edin., 1849.

¹¹ More properly Hus, but we use the familiar form.

¹² Bonnechose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., p. 70; Edin., 1844.

sions 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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 clamour arose. But the queen and the archbishop protected Huss, and he continued preaching with indefatigable zeal in his Chapel of Bethlehem,¹⁵ 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 Wicliffe, 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.¹⁶

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

¹³ *Chronicon Universitatis Pragensis; apud Lechler, Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., p. 136.

¹⁴ Comenius, *Persecut. Eccles. Bohem.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Bethlehem Chapel*—the House of Bread, because its founder meant that there the people should be fed upon the Bread of Life.

¹⁶ Hoefler, *Hist. of Hussite Movement; apud Lechler, Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., p. 140, foot-note.

the Church of Borne, 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.

The echoes of a voice which had spoken in England, but was now silent there, had already reached the distant country of Bohemia. We have narrated above the arrival of a young student in Prague, with copies of the works of the great English heresiarch. Other causes favoured the introduction of Wicliffe'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 centre 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.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Huss copied out Wicliffe's *Dialogus* for the Margrave Jost of Moravia, and others of noble rank, and translated it for the benefit of the laity, and even women, into the Czech language. A manuscript in Huss's handwriting, and embracing five philosophical tractates of Wicliffe, is to be found in the Royal Library at Stockholm, having been carried away with many others by the Swedes out of Bohemia at the end of the Thirty Years' War. This MS. was finished, as the concluding remark proves, in 1400, the same year in which Jerome of Prague returned from England." (Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., p. 113.)