

THE HISTORY
OF
PROTESTANTISM

BY THE
REV. J. A. WYLIE, LL.D.

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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CHAPTER IV.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE.

Picture of Europe—The Emperor Sigismund—Pope John XXIII.—Shall a Council be Con-
voked?—Assembling of the Council at Constance—Entry of the Pope—Coming of John
Huss—Arrival of the Emperor.

WE have now before us a wider theatre 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 profligacies 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 Mussulman 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.¹ 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,² 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 mitre 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 advanta-

¹ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., chap. 1.

² Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, Counc. of Pisa, cent. 15, chap. 1.

geous 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.³ 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.,⁴ 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.⁵

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 *éclat* 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.⁶ 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,

³ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., chap. 1, p. 6. Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 1, p. 9; Lond., 1699.

⁴ Alexander V. was a Greek of the island of Candia; he was taken up by an Italian monk, educated at Oxford, made Bishop of Vicenza, and chosen Pope by the Council of Pisa. (Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15.)

⁵ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 7. Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2, p. 10. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 781. Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, pt. ii., chap. 2, sec. 4.

⁶ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 83. Bonnechose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., p. 155. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782.

Pope John XXIII., and— last and greatest of all—John Huss.

The two anti-Popes had been summoned to the Council. They appeared, not in person, but by delegates, some of whom were of the cardinalate. This raised a weighty question in the Council, whether these cardinal delegates should be received in their red hats. To permit the ambassadors to appear in the insignia of their rank might, it was argued, be construed into a tacit admission by the Council of the claims of their masters, both of whom had been deposed by the Council of Pisa; but, for the sake of peace, it was agreed to receive the deputies in the usual costume of the cardinalate.⁷ In that assembly were the illustrious scholar, Poggio; the celebrated Thierry de Niem, secretary to several Popes, “and whom,” it has been remarked, “Providence placed near the source of so many iniquities for the purpose of unveiling and stigmatising them; “Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, greater as the elegant historian than as the wearer of the triple crown; Manuel Chrysoloras, the restorer to the world of some of the writings of Demosthenes and of Cicero; the almost heretic, John Charlier Gerson;⁸ the brilliant disputant, Peter D’Ailly, Cardinal of Cambray, surnamed “the Eagle of France,” and a host of others.

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 revellers and masqueraders busy with their cups and their pastimes, there knots of cowed and hooded devotees solemnly 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.⁹ All the highways leading to Constance were crowded with vehicles, conveying thither all kinds of provisions and delicacies:¹⁰ the wines of France, the breadstuff’s of Lombardy, the

⁷ Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2, p. 11.

⁸ There was no more famous Gallican divine than Gerson. His treatise on the Ecclesiastical Power which was read before the Council, and which has been preserved in an abridged form by Lenfant (vol. ii., bk. v., chap. 10), shows him to have been one of the subtlest intellects of his age. He draws the line between the temporal and the spiritual powers with a nicety which approaches that of modern times, and he drops a hint of a power of *direction* in the Pope, that may have suggested to Le Maistre his famous theory, which resolved the Pope’s temporal supremacy into a power of direction, and which continued to be the common opinion till superseded by the dogma of infallibility in 1870.

⁹ The Pope alone had 600 persons in his retinue; the cardinals had fully 1,200; the bishops, archbishops, and abbots, between 4,000 and 5,000. There were 1,200 scribes, besides their servants, &c. John Huss alone had eight, without reckoning his vicar who also accompanied him. The retinue of the princes, barons, and ambassadors was numerous in proportion. (Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., pp. 83, 84.)

¹⁰ Bonnechose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., p. 158. See also note by transla-

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.

The emperor and the Pope, in the matter of the Council, thought only of circumventing one another. Sigismund professed to regard John XXIII. as the valid possessor of the tiara; nevertheless he had formed the secret purpose of compelling him to renounce it. And the Pope on his part pretended to be quite cordial in the calling of the Council, but his firm intention was to dissolve it as soon as it had assembled if, after feeling its pulse, he should find it to be unfriendly to himself. He set out from Bologna, on the 1st of October, with store of jewels and money. Some he would corrupt by presents, others he hoped to dazzle by the splendour of his court.¹¹ All agree in saying that he took this journey very much against the grain, and that his heart misgave him a thousand times on the road. He took care, however, as he went onward to leave the way open behind for his safe retreat. As he passed through the Tyrol he made a secret treaty with Frederick, Duke of Austria, to the effect that one of his strong castles should be at his disposal if he found it necessary to leave Constance. He made friends, likewise, with John, Count of Nassau, Elector of Mainz. When he had arrived within a league of Constance he prudently conciliated the Abbot of St. Ulric, by bestowing the mitre upon him. This was a special prerogative of the Popes of which the bishops thought they had cause to complain. Not a stage did John advance without taking precautions for his safety—all the more that several incidents befell him by the way which his fears interpreted into auguries of evil. When he had passed through the town of Trent his jester said to him, “The Pope who passes through Trent is undone.”¹² In descending the mountains of the Tyrol, at that point of the road where the city of Constance, with the lake and plain, comes into view, his carriage was overturned. The Pontiff was thrown out and rolled on the highway; he was not hurt the least, but the fall, brought the colour into his face. His attendants crowded round him, anxiously inquiring if he had come by harm: “By the devil,” said he, “I am down; I had better have stayed at Bologna;” and casting a suspicious glance at the city beneath him, “I see how it is,” he said, “that is the pit where the foxes are snared.”¹³

John XXIII. entered Constance on horseback, the 28th of October, attended by nine cardinals, several archbishops, bishops, and other prelates, and a numerous retinue of courtiers. He was received at the gates with all possible magnificence. “The body of the clergy,” says Lenfant, “went to meet him in solemn procession, bearing the relics of saints. All the orders of the city assembled also to do him honour, and he was conducted to the episcopal palace

tor.

¹¹ Lenfant, *Hist. Council. Const.*, vol. i., p. 17.

¹² “Pater sante qui passo Trenta perdo.” (Lenfant, *Hist. Council. Const.*, vol. i., p. 18.)

¹³ *Ibid.*

by an incredible multitude of people. Four of the chief magistrates rode by his side, supporting a canopy of cloth of gold, and the Count Radolpl de Montfort and the Count Berthold des Ursins held the bridle of his horse. The Sacrament was carried before him upon a white pad, with a little bell about its neck; after the Sacrament a great yellow and red hat was carried, with an angel of gold at the button of the ribbon. All the cardinals followed in cloaks and red hats. Reichenthal, who has described this ceremony, says there was a great dispute among the Pope's officers as to who should have his horse, but Henry of Ulm put an end to it by saying that the horse belonged to him, as he was burgomaster of the town, and so he caused him to be put into his stables. The city made the presents to the Pope that are usual on these occasions; it gave a silver-gilt cup weighing five marks, four small casks of Italian wine, four great vessels of wine of Alsace, eight great vessels of the country wine, and forty measures of oats, all which presents were given with great ceremony. Henry of Ulm carried the cup on horseback, accompanied by six councillors, who were also on horseback. When the Pope saw them before his palace, he sent an auditor to know what was coming. Being informed that it was presents from the city to the Pope, the auditor introduced them, and presented the cup to the Pope in the name of the city. The Pope, on his part, ordered a robe of black silk to be presented to the consul."¹⁴

While the Pope was approaching Constance on the one side, John Huss was travelling 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

¹⁴ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., chap. 1, p. 19.

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.¹⁵

At every village and town on his route he was met with fresh tokens of the power that attached to his name, and the interest his cause had awakened. The inhabitants turned out to welcome him. Several of the country cures were especially friendly; it was their battle which he was fighting, as well as his own, and heartily did they wish him success. At Nuremberg, and other towns through which he passed, the magistrates formed a guard of honour, and escorted him through streets thronged with spectators eager to catch a glimpse of the man who had begun a movement which was stirring Christendom.¹⁶ His journey was a triumphal procession in a sort. He was enlisting, at every step, new adherents, and gaining accessions of moral force to his cause. He arrived in Constance on the 3rd of November, and took up his abode at the house of a poor widow, whom he likened to her of Sarepta.¹⁷

The emperor did not reach Constance until Christmas Eve. His arrival added a new attraction to the melodramatic performance proceeding at the little town. The Pope signalled the event by singing a Pontifical mass, the emperor assisting, attired in dalmatic in his character as deacon, and reading the Gospel—"There came an edict from Cæsar Augustus that all the world," &c. The ceremony was ended by John XXIII. presenting a sword to Sigismund, with an exhortation to the man into whose hand he put it to make vigorous use of it against the enemies of the Church. The Pope, doubtless, had John Huss mainly in his eye. Little did he dream that it was upon himself that its first stroke was destined to descend.¹⁸

The Emperor Sigismund, whose presence gave a new splendour to the fêtes and a new dignity to the Council, was forty-seven years of age. He was noble in person, tall in stature, graceful in manners, and insinuating in address. He had a long beard, and flaxen hair, which fell in a profusion of curls upon his shoulders. His narrow understanding had been improved by study, and he was accomplished beyond his age. He spoke with facility several languages, and was a patron of men of letters. Having one day conferred nobility upon a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i., pp. 38–41.

¹⁶ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 789. Bonnechose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., pp. 150–152.

¹⁷ Palacky informs us that the house in which Huss lodged is still standing at Constance, with a bust of the Reformer in its front wall.

¹⁸ Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 77.

scholar, who was desirous of being ranked among nobles rather than among doctors, Sigismund laughed at him, and said that “he could make a thousand gentlemen in a day, but that he could not make a scholar in a thousand years.”¹⁹ The reverses of his maturer years had sobered the impetuous and fiery spirit of his youth. He committed the error common to almost all the princes of his age, in believing that in order to reign it was necessary to dissemble, and that craft was an indispensable part of policy. He was a sincere devotee; but just in proportion as he believed in the Church, was he scandalised and grieved at the vices of the clergy. It cost him infinite pains to get this Council convoked, but all had been willingly undertaken in the hope that assembled Christendom would be able to heal the schism, and put an end to the scandals growing out of it.

The name of Sigismund has come down to posterity with an eternal blot upon it. How such darkness came to encompass a name which, but for one fatal act, might have been fair, if not illustrious, we shall presently show. Meanwhile let us rapidly sketch the opening proceedings of the Council, which were but preparatory to the great tragedy in which it was destined to culminate.

¹⁹ Maimbourg, *Hist. of Western Schism.*, tom. ii., pp. 123, 124; Dutch ed. Theobald., *Bell. Huss*, p. 38. Æneas Sylvius. *Hist. Bohem.*, p. 45. Lenfant, *Hist. Council. Const.*, vol. i., pp. 78, 79.