

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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## CHAPTER V.

### DEPOSITION OF THE RIVAL POPES.

Canonisation of St. Bridget—A Council Superior to the Pope—Wicliffe's Writings Condemned—Trial of Pope John—Indictment against him—He Escapes from Constance—His Deposition—Deposition of the Two Anti-Popes— Vindication of Huss beforehand.

THE first act of the Council, after settling how the votes were to be taken—namely, by nations and not by persons—was to enrol the name of St. Bridget among the saints. This good lady, whose piety had been abundantly proved by her pilgrimages and the many miracles ascribed to her, was of the blood-royal of Sweden, and the foundress of the order of St. Saviour, so called because Christ Himself, she affirmed, had dictated the rules to her. She was canonised first of all by Boniface IX. (1391); but this was during the schism, and the validity of the act might be held doubtful. To place St. Bridget's title beyond question, she was, at the request of the Swedes, canonised a second time by John XXIII. But unhappily, John himself being afterwards deposed, Bridget's saintship became again dubious; and so she was canonised a third time by Martin V. (1419), to prevent her being overtaken by a similar calamity with that of her patron, and expelled from the ranks of the heavenly deities as John was from the list of the Pontifical ones.<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

In the eighth session (May 4th, 1415), John Wicliffe 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 con-

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<sup>1</sup> Lenfant, *Hist. Council. Const.*, vol. i., pp. 106, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Concilium Constant., Sess. v.—Hardouin, tom. viii., col. 258; Parisiis.

<sup>3</sup> Natalis Alexander, *Eccles. Hist.*, sec. 15, dis. 4. Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2, pp. 14, 15. Pox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782. Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, pt. ii., chap. 2, sec. 4.

signing their author to the flames. Wicliffe himself being beyond their reach, his bones, pursuant to this sentence, were afterwards dug up and burned.<sup>4</sup> The next labour 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.<sup>5</sup>

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?"<sup>6</sup> 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 laboured 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 Wicliffe 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.<sup>7</sup>

We have seen the pomp with which John XXIII. entered Constance. 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 tour-

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<sup>4</sup> See decree of Pope John against Wicliffe, ordering the exhumation and burning of his bones, in Hardouin, *Acta Concil.*, tom. viii., pp. 263–303; Parisiis. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782. Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, pt. ii., chap. 2, sec. 8. Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 7, pp. 121, 122.

<sup>5</sup> Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 783. Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, pt. ii., chap. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782. See tenor of citation of Pope John—Hardouin, *Acta Concil.*, tom. viii., p. 291; Parisiis.

<sup>7</sup> Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2. Bonnechose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., pp. 180—182.

nement. The spectacle was to come off late in the afternoon; and while the whole city should be engrossed with the fête, 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.<sup>8</sup>

It was the 20th of March, the eve of St. Benedict, the day fixed upon for the duke's entertainment, and now the tournament was proceeding. The city was empty, for the inhabitants had poured out to see the tilting and reward the victors with their acclamations. The dusk of evening was already beginning to veil the lake, the plain, and the mountains of the Tyrol in the distance, when John XXIII., disguising himself as a groom or postillion, and mounted on a sorry nag, rode through the crowd and passed on to the south. A coarse grey loose coat was flung over his shoulders, and at his saddlebow hung a cross-bow; no one suspected that this homely figure, so poorly mounted, was other than some peasant of the mountains, who had been to market with his produce, and was now on his way back. The duke of Austria was at the moment fighting in the lists, when a domestic approached him, and whispered into his ear what had occurred. The duke went on with the tournament as if nothing had happened, and the fugitive held on his way till he had reached Schaffhausen, where, as the town belonged to the duke, the Pope deemed himself in safety. Thither he was soon followed by the duke himself.<sup>9</sup>

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 labours 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 Schaff-

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<sup>8</sup> Von der Hardt, tom. i., p. 77. Niem, *apud* Von der Hardt, tom. ii., pp. 313—398, and tom. iv., p. 60; *apud* Lenfant, vol. i., p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 130.

hausen 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 manoeuvred; 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 Galilean 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."<sup>11</sup>

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 honour 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.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2, pp. 12,13. Bonne-chose, *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i., pp. 182—181.

<sup>11</sup> Lenfant, *Hist. Council. Const.*, vol. i., p. 463.

<sup>12</sup> Concil. Const., Sess. xii.—Hardouin, tom; viii., col. 376, 377; Parisiis. Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, chap. 2, p. 17. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782. Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 15, pt. ii., chap. 2, sec. 4. The crimes proven against Pope John in the Council of Constance

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<sup>13</sup>—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.

Before turning to the more tragic page of the history of the Council, we have to remark that it seems almost as if the Fathers at Constance were intent on erecting beforehand a monument to the innocence of John Huss, and to their own guilt in the terrible fate to which they were about to consign him. The crimes for which they condemned Balthazar Cossa, John XXIII., were the same, only more atrocious and fouler, as those of which Huss accused the priesthood, and for which he demanded a reformation. The condemnation of Pope John was, therefore, whether the Council confessed it or not, the vindication of Huss. “When all the members of the Council shall be scattered in the world like storks,” said Huss, in a letter which he wrote to a friend at this time, “they will know when winter cometh what they did in summer. Consider, I pray you, that they have judged their head, the Pope, worthy of death by reason of his horrible crimes. Answer to this, you teachers who preach that the Pope is a god upon earth; that he may sell and waste in what manner he pleaseth the holy things, as the lawyers say; that he is the head of the entire holy Church, and governeth it well: that he is the heart of the Church, and quickeneth it spiritually; that he is the well-spring from whence floweth all virtue and goodness; that he is the sun of the Church, and a very safe refuge to which every Christian ought to fly. Yet, behold now that head, as it were, severed by the sword; this terrestrial god enchained; his sins laid bare; this never-failing source dried up; this divine sun dimmed; this heart plucked out, and branded with reprobation, that no one should seek an asylum in it.”<sup>14</sup>

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may be seen in its records. The list fills fourteen long, closely-printed columns in Hardouin. History contains no more terrible assemblage of vices, and it exhibits no blacker character than that of the inculpated Pontiff. It was not an enemy, but his own friends, the Council over which he presided, that drew this appalling portrait, in the Barberini Collection, the crime of poisoning his predecessor, and other foul deeds not fit here to be mentioned, are charged against him. (Hardouin, tom. viii., pp. 343-360.)

<sup>13</sup> Hardouin, *Acta Concil.*, tom. viii., pp. 361, 362.

<sup>14</sup> Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 398; and Huss's Letters, No. 47; Edin. ed. Some

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one posted up in the hall of the Council, one day, the following intimation, as from the Holy Ghost: "Aliis rebus occupati nunc non adesse vobis non possumus;" that is, "Being otherwise occupied at this time, we are not able to be present with you." (Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 782.)