

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 VII.

CONDEMNATION AND MARTYRDOM OF HUSS.

Sigismund and Huss face to face—The Bishop of Lodi's Sermon.—Degradation of Huss—His Condemnation—His Prophecy—Procession—His Behaviour at the Stake—Reflections on his Martyrdom.

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.¹ 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.’”²

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. This he accompanied with a brief recapitulation of his proceedings since the

¹ *Op. et Mon. Joan. Huss.*, tom. ii., p. 344; Noribergæ, 1558. Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 412.

² Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., p. 413. *Op. et Mon. Joan. Huss.*, tom. ii., p. 346.

commencement of this matter, ending by saying that he had come to this Council of his own free will, “confiding in the safe-conduct of the emperor here present.” As he uttered these last words, he looked full at Sigismund, on whose brow the crimson of a deep blush was seen by the whole assembly, whose gaze was at the instant turned towards his majesty.³

Sentence of condemnation as a heretic was now passed on Huss. There followed the ceremony of degradation—an ordeal that brought no blush upon the brow of the martyr. One after another the priestly vestments, brought thither for that end, were produced and put upon him, and now the prisoner stood full in the gaze of the Council, sacerdotally apparelled. They next put into his hand the chalice, as if he were about to celebrate mass. They asked him if now he were willing to abjure. “With what face, then,” replied he, “should I behold the heavens? How should I look on those multitudes of men to whom I have preached the pure Gospel? No; I esteem their salvation more than this poor body, now appointed unto death.”⁴

Then they took from him the chalice, saying, “O accursed Judas, who, having abandoned the counsels of peace, have taken part in that of the Jews, we take from you this cup filled with the blood of Jesus Christ.”⁵

“I hope, by the mercy of God,” replied John Huss, “that this very day I shall drink of His cup in His own kingdom; and in one hundred years you shall answer before God and before me.”⁶

The seven bishops selected for the purpose now came round him, and proceeded to remove the sacerdotal garments—the alb, the stole, and other pieces of attire—in which in mockery they had arrayed him. And as each bishop performed his office, he bestowed his curse upon the martyr. Nothing now remained but to erase the marks of the tonsure.

On this there arose a great dispute among the prelates whether they should use a razor or scissors. “See,” said Huss, turning to the emperor, “they cannot

³ *Dissert. Hist. de Huss*, p. 90; Jensæ 1711. Von der Hardt, tom. iv., p. 393. Lenfant, vol. i., p. 422. The circumstance was long after remembered in Germany. A century after, at the Diet of Worms, when the enemies of Luther were importuning Charles V. to have the Reformer seized, notwithstanding the safe-conduct he had given him—“No,” replied the emperor, “I should not like to blush like Sigismund.” (Lenfant.)

⁴ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 820.

⁵ *Op. et Mon. Joann. Huss.*, tom. ii., p. 347. Concil. Const., —Hardouin, tom. viii., p. 423

⁶ These words were noted down; and soon after the death of Huss a medal was struck in Bohemia, on which they were inscribed: *Centum revolutis annis Deo respondebitis et mihi*. Lenfant (lib. c., p. 429, and lib. iv., p. 564) says that this medal was to be seen in the royal archives of the King of Borussia, and that in the opinion of the very learned Schotti, who was then antiquary to the king, it was struck in the fifteenth century, before the times of Luther and Zwingle. The same thing has been asserted by Catholic historians—among others, Peter Matthias, in his *History of Henry IF.*, tom. ii., lib. v., p. 46. (*Vide* Sculteti, *Annates*, p. 7. Gerdesius, *Hist. Evang. Eenov.*, pp. 51, 52; Groningæ, 1744.) Its date is guaranteed also by M. Bizot, author of *Hist. Met. de Hollande*

agree among themselves how to insult me.” They resolved to use the scissors, which were instantly brought, and his hair was cut cross-wise to obliterate the mark of the crown.⁷ According to the canon law, the priest so dealt with becomes again a layman, and although the operation does not remove the *character*, which is indelible, it yet renders him for ever incapable of exercising the functions of the priesthood.

There remained one other mark of ignominy. They put on his head a cap or pyramidal-shaped mitre of paper, on which were painted frightful figures of demons, with the word Arch-Heretic conspicuous in front. “Most joyfully,” said Huss, “will I wear this crown of shame for Thy sake, O Jesus, who for me didst wear a crown of thorns.”⁸

When thus attired, the prelates said, “Now we devote thy soul to the devil.” “And I,” said John Huss, lifting up his eyes toward heaven, “do commit my spirit into Thy hands, O Lord Jesus, for Thou hast redeemed me.”

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.”⁹ Then the emperor, addressing Louis, Duke of Bavaria—who, as Vicar of the Empire, was standing before him in his robes, holding in his hand the golden apple, and the cross—commanded him to deliver over Huss to those whose duty it was to see the sentence executed. The duke in his turn abandoned him to the chief magistrate of Constance, and the magistrate finally gave him into the hands of his officers or city sergeants.

The procession was now formed. The martyr walked between four town sergeants. The princes and deputies, escorted by eight hundred men-at-arms, followed. In the cavalcade, mounted on horseback, were many bishops and priests delicately clad in robes of silk and velvet. The population of Constance followed in mass to see the end.

As Huss passed the episcopal palace, his attention was attracted by a great fire which blazed and crackled before the gates. He was informed that on that pile his books were being consumed. He smiled at this futile attempt to extinguish the light which he foresaw would one day, and that not very distant, fill all Christendom.

The procession crossed the bridge and halted in a meadow, between the gardens of the city and the gate of Gottlieben. Here the execution was to take place. Being come to the spot where he was to die, the martyr kneeled down, and began reciting the penitential psalms. He offered up short and fervent supplications, and oftentimes repeated, as the by-standers bore witness, the words,

⁷ *Op. et Mon. Joan Huss*, tom. ii., fol. 347.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Von der Hardt, tom. iv., p- 440. Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., pp. 425, 426.

“Lord Jesus, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” “We know not,” said those who were near him, “what his life has been, but verily he prays after a devout and godly fashion.” Turning his gaze upward in prayer, the paper crown fell off. One of the soldiers rushed forward and replaced it, saying that “he must be burned with the devils whom he had served.”¹⁰ Again the martyr smiled.

The stake was driven deep into the ground. Huss was tied to it with ropes. He stood facing the east. “This,” cried some, “is not the right attitude for a heretic.” He was again unbound, turned to the west, and made fast to the beam by a chain that passed round his neck. “It is thus,” said he, “that you silence the goose, but a hundred years hence there will arise a swan whose singing you shall not be able to silence.”¹¹

He stood with his feet on the faggots, which were mixed with straw that they might the more readily ignite. Wood was piled all round him up to the chin. Before applying the torch, Louis of Bavaria and the Marshal of the Empire approached, and for the last time implored him to have a care for his life, and renounce his errors. “What errors,” asked Huss, “shall I renounce? I know myself guilty of none. I call God to witness that all that I have written and preached has been with the view of rescuing souls from sin and perdition; and, therefore, most joyfully will I confirm with my blood that truth which I have written and preached.” At the hearing of these words they departed from him, and John Huss had now done talking with men.

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.” Poggius, who was secretary to the Council, and Æneas Sylvius, who afterwards became Pope, and whose narratives are not liable to the suspicion of being coloured, bear even higher testimony to the heroic demeanour of both Huss and Jerome at their execution. “Both,” says the latter historian, “bore themselves with constant mind when their last hour approached. They prepared for the fire as if they were going to a marriage feast. They uttered no cry of pain. When the flames rose, they began to sing hymns; and scarce could the vehemency of the fire stop their singing.”¹²

¹⁰ *Op. et Mon. Joan. Huss.*, tom. ii., fol. 348. Lenfant, *Hist. Counc. Const.*, vol. i., pp. 428–430.

¹¹ In many principalities money was coined with a reference to this prediction. On one side was the effigy of John Huss, with the inscription, *Credo unam esse Ecclesiam Sanctam Catholicam* (“I believe in one Holy Catholic Church”). On the obverse was seen Huss tied to the stake and placed on the fire, with the inscription in the centre, *Johannes Huss, anno a Christo nato 1415 condemnatur* (“John Huss, condemned A.D. 1415”); and on the circumference the inscription already mentioned, *Centum revolutis annis Deo respondebitis et mihi* (“A hundred years hence ye shall answer to God and to me”).—Gerdesius, *Hist. Evang. Renov.*, vol. i., pp. 51, 52.

¹² Æneas Sylvius, *Hist. Bohem.*, cap. 36, p. 54; *apud* Gerdesius, *Hist. Evang. Renov.*, vol. i,

Huss had given up the ghost. When the flames had subsided, it was found that only the lower parts of his body were consumed, and that the upper parts, held fast by the chain, hung suspended on the stake. The executioners kindled the fire anew, in order to consume what remained of the martyr. When the flames had a second time subsided, the heart was found still entire amid the ashes. A third time had the fire to be kindled. At last all was burned. The ashes were carefully collected, the very soil was dug up, and all was carted away and thrown into the Rhine; so anxious were his persecutors that not the slightest vestige of John Huss—not even a thread of his raiment, for that too was burned along with his body—should be left upon the earth.¹³

When the martyr bowed his head at the stake it was the *infallible* Council that was vanquished. It was with Huss that the victory remained; and what a victory! Heap together all the trophies of Alexander and of Caesar, what are they all when weighed in the balance against this one glorious achievement? From the stake of Huss, what blessings have flowed, and are still flowing, to the world! From the moment he expired amid the flames, his name became a power, which will continue to speed on the great cause of truth and light, till the last shackle shall be rent from the intellect, and the conscience emancipated from every usurpation, shall be free to obey the authority of its rightful Lord. What a surprise to his and the Gospel's enemies! "Huss is dead," say they, as they retire from the meadow where they have just seen him expire. Huss is dead. The "Rhine has received his ashes, and is bearing them on its rushing floods to the ocean, there to bury them for ever. No: Huss is alive. 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.¹⁴ The nations are being stirred; Bohemia, is awakening; a hundred years,

p. 42.

¹³ "Finally, all being consumed to cinders in the fire, the ashes, and the soil, dug up to a great depth, were placed in wagons, and thrown into the stream of the Rhine, that his very name might utterly perish from among the faithful. "(*Op. et Mon. Joan. Huss.* tom. ii., fol. 348; Noribergæ.) The details of Huss's martyrdom are very fully given by Fox, by Lenfant, by Bonnechose, and others. These have been faithfully compiled from the Brunswick, Leipsic, and Gotha manuscripts, collected by Von der Hardt, and from the *History of Huss's Life*, published by an eyewitness, and inserted at the beginning of his works. These were never contradicted by any of his contemporaries. Substantially the same account is given by Catholic writers.

¹⁴ "The pious remembrance of John Huss," says Lechler, "was held sacred by the nation. The day of his death, 6th July, was incontestably considered from that time onward as the festival of a saint and martyr. It was called 'the day of remembrance'⁹ of the master John Huss, and even at the end of the sixteenth century the inhabitants of Prague laid such stress on the observances of the day, that the abbot of the monastery Emmaus, Paul Horsky, was threatened and persecuted in the worst, manner because he had once allowed one to work in his vineyard on Huss's day, as if it were an ordinary workday." It was not uncommon to place pictures of

and Germany and all Christendom will shake off their slumber and then will come the great reckoning which the martyr's prophetic spirit foretold: "In the course of a hundred years you will answer to God and to me."

Huss and Jerome on the altars of the parish churches of Bohemia and Moravia. (Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., p. 285.) Even at this day, as the author can testify from personal observation, there is no portrait more common in the windows of the print shops of Prague than that of John Huss.