

# LIGHT FROM OLD TIMES;

OR,

Protestant Facts and Men.

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION FOR OUR OWN DAYS.*

BY THE LATE BISHOP

JOHN CHARLES RYLE, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF

“EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS,” “KNOTS UNTIED,” ETC., ETC.

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?”—1 Cor. xiv. 8.

**Illustrated Coronation Edition,**

LONDON:

CHAS. J. THYNNE,

**Wycliffe House,**

6, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN, W.C.

JUNE, 1902.

## JOHN ROGERS: MARTYR.

JOHN ROGERS, who was burned at Smithfield in 1555, is a man who deserves to be held in peculiar honour by all English Protestants, for one simple reason. He was the first of that noble band of Christian heroes who suffered martyrdom for God's truth in Queen Mary's reign. By his courage and constancy at the stake he supplied a glorious example to all who followed him, and mightily helped forward the English Reformation. Some account of this good man can hardly fail to be interesting to all loyal Churchmen. In the noble army of English martyrs he was eminently a standard-bearer.

Rogers was born about the year 1500 A.D., at Deritend, a hamlet in the parish of Aston, and now within the present borough of Birmingham.<sup>1</sup> Little or nothing is known about his father's family, rank, or position; and just as little about his own early history, and the first thirty years of his life. It is only certain that he was educated at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and took his degree as B.A. in 1525. Pembroke Hall, we should remember, was the College at which both Ridley and Bradford were members, and in all human probability Rogers was a contemporary and acquaintance of these good men. This circumstance, and the preaching of Latimer, which began to make a stir in Cambridge about the same time, could hardly fail to exercise considerable influence on the mind of Rogers at a later period.

At Pembroke Hall, Rogers seems to have read hard and done well. Fox merely says, in one edition of his history, that he "profitably travailed in good learning;" and in another, that he resided long at Cambridge, "attentively and diligently engaged in the honourable pursuit of learning." It is evident, however, that he established a reputation as a good scholar and a learned man, according to the standard of the age. This is abundantly shown by the work that he subsequently did in translating the Scriptures, and by the preferments conferred on him by Bishop Ridley, who was no mean judge of men. The best proof of his character, however, as a scholar,

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<sup>1</sup> By far the fullest account of Rogers will be found in a biography of him published by Mr. Chester, an American, in the year 1861. Two defects unhappily impair the value of this book very much. For one thing, the author goes out of his way to depreciate such men as Ridley and Cranmer, and praises Rogers so extravagantly, that he overshoots his mark and wearies the reader. For another thing, the author speaks far too harshly of John Fox, the historian, and accuses him most unfairly of underrating Rogers. This charge, I must plainly say, I think he fails to prove. My own estimate of Rogers has always been extremely high, and it has been based on the testimony of Fox! Barring these two defects, however, Mr. Chester's book is very useful and interesting.

was his selection to be a Junior Canon of Cardinal's College, better known as Christ's Church, Oxford, when that noble foundation was commenced by Cardinal Wolsey. Wolsey was naturally anxious to fill his new College with the best men that he could persuade to join it in either University, and held out every inducement to men of promise to become members. The mere fact that he selected Rogers among the first men whom he made Canons is a clear proof that the young B.A. of Pembroke Hall had the reputation of being a ripe scholar.

The next twenty-two years of John Rogers' life are a period of his history which is involved in much obscurity, chiefly because the greater part of the time was spent on the Continent. The doings and sayings of a man who lives among foreigners are never likely to be so accurately described as those of one who lives under the eyes of his countrymen and friends. Out of a rather tangled skein, the following facts are probably a correct account of his proceedings.

Rogers was ordained soon after his appointment to the Canonry which he held in Cardinal's College, Oxford, but does not appear to have held any cure of souls until the year 1532. He was then presented to the living of Trinity the Less, in the city of London, a parish united to St. Michael's, Queenhithe, after the Great Fire, and held it for two years, resigning in 1534. After this he became for a short time Chaplain to the company of English residents at Antwerp, and was absent from England for about thirteen years. It was at this period of his life that he became intimately acquainted with the famous William Tyndale, embraced the doctrines of Protestantism, and became a fellow-labourer with him in the great work of translating the Holy Scriptures. In 1537, not long after Tyndale's martyrdom, Rogers married a lady of Antwerp, named Adriana de Weyden, and shortly afterwards removed to Wittenberg, in Saxony, where he ministered to a German congregation for, at least, ten years. It is highly probable that this move was absolutely necessary to escape persecution, and that Rogers' life would not have been safe if he had remained in Belgium. The mere fact that he was a friend of such a man as Tyndale, and that, although a priest, he had contracted marriage, would make him a marked man. It is only fair, however, to say that these are only conjectures. In all human probability these quiet ten years at Wittenberg were a period of immense benefit to Rogers' soul. He became established in the principles of the Reformation, learned to know his own heart, grew in faith and knowledge and holiness, and became fitted for the heavy work he had afterwards to do, and the fiery death he had to die.

The exact amount of Rogers' connection with the English translation of the Bible, commonly known as "Matthews' Bible," is a point that will, per-

haps, never be thoroughly cleared up. There is considerable reason to believe that he had far more to do with the translation than most people are aware, and that he deserves to take rank with Tyndale and Coverdale as one of its authors. Certain it is that he is responsible for the marginal notes and tables of "common places" which accompanied the version. Equally certain is it, that when Rogers was condemned to be burned, he was called "Rogers, *alias* Matthews;" while the title page of the famous Bible put forth by authority in the time of Henry VIII. contains the words, "The Old and New Testaments, truly and freely translated into English, by Thomas Matthews." Whether the judge who condemned Rogers exaggerated his share in the work of translation, in order to justify his condemnation, it is of course impossible to say. But, on the whole, it seems most probable that Rogers may fairly be regarded as one among the earliest labourers in the great work of translating our English Bible. The sum of the whole matter, in my own judgment, is this: Tyndale has received the credit that he justly deserves,—Coverdale rather more than he deserves, and Rogers much less.

In 1547 Edward VI. succeeded to the throne of England, and Rogers, not long after, returned to his own land. As might be reasonably expected, he was soon brought forward and placed in a prominent position. A man of his gifts and graces was just the man whom the leaders of the English Reformation were only too glad to employ. In 1550 he became Vicar of St. Margaret Moyses and also of St. Sepulchre, both parishes in the city of London. In 1551 he was appointed to the Prebendal stall of St. Pancras, in the Cathedral of St. Paul, and also to the Rectory of Chigwell, in Essex. In 1553 he was made Divinity Lecturer of St. Paul's. It is only fair to Bishop Ridley to state that Rogers owes to have been much indebted to him for these preferments, and that the good Bishop of London does not appear to have forgotten his old fellow-collegian. In fact he speaks of Grindall, Bradford, and Rogers in a letter addressed to Sir W. Cecil, as "men so necessary to be abroad in the Commonwealth, that I can keep none of them in my house." This language shows pretty clearly that Rogers was one of his chaplains.

The death of Edward VI. in 1553, and the accession of Queen Mary to the throne, cut short the active usefulness of Rogers; and before the end of the year 1553 he was a prisoner, first in his own house, and afterwards in Newgate, where he was finally placed in January, 1554. Of his condition in prison we know but little, except that his wife was not allowed to see him, and that his treatment seems to have been very severe. He was brought before a Commission, presided over by Bishop Gardiner, in January, 1555, together with Hooper and Cardmaker, as an obstinate heretic, partly because he denied the doctrine of the Real Presence, and partly because, being a priest, he had contracted marriage.

Of his conduct during his imprisonment, and on the day when he was burnt, no better account can be given than that which John Fox supplies. I shall, therefore, give it in the Martyrologist's own words:—

“Amongst other words and sayings which may seem prophetically to be spoken of him, this also may be added, and is notoriously to be marked, that he spake, being then in prison, to the printer of this present book, John Day, who then also was laid up for like cause of religion: ‘Thou,’ said he, ‘shalt live to see the alteration of this religion, and the Gospel to be freely preached again; and, therefore, have me commended to my brethren, as well in exile as others, and bid them be circumspect in displacing the Papists, and putting good ministers into churches, or else their end will be worse than ours.’ And for lack of good ministers to furnish churches, his device was (Master Hooper also agreeing to the same) that for every ten churches someone good and learned superintendent should be appointed, which should have under him faithful readers such as might well be got; so that Popish priests should clean be put out, and the bishop once a year to oversee the profiting of the parishes. And if the minister did not his duty, as well in profiting himself in his book, and his parishioners in good instructions, so that they may be trained by little and little to give a reckoning how they do profit, then he to be expelled, and another put in his place, and the bishop to do the like with the superintendent. This was his counsel and request: showing, moreover, and protesting in his commendations to his brethren by the printer aforesaid, that if they would not so do, their end, he said, would be worse than theirs.

“Over and besides divers things touching Master Rogers, this is not to be forgotten, how in the days of King Edward VI. there was a controversy among the bishops and clergy, for wearing of priests' caps and other attire belonging to that order. Master Rogers, being one of that number which never went otherwise than in a round cap, during all the time of King Edward, affirmed that he would not agree to that decreement of uniformity, but upon this condition: that if they would needs have such a uniformity of wearing the cap, tippet, etc., then it should also be decreed withal, that the Papist, for a difference betwixt them and others, should be constrained to wear upon their sleeves a chalice with a host upon it. Whereupon if they would consent, he would agree to the other: otherwise he would not, he said, consent to the setting forth of the same, nor even wear the cap; as indeed he never did.

“The Sunday before he suffered, he drank to Master Hooper, being then underneath him, and bade them commend him unto him, and tell him, ‘There was never little fellow better would stick to a man than he would stick to him;’ presupposing they should both be burned together, although it

happened otherwise, for Master Rogers was burnt alone.

“Now when the time came that he, being delivered to the Sheriffs, should be brought out of Newgate to Smithfield, the place of his execution, first came to him Master Woodroffe, one of the aforesaid Sheriffs, and calling Master Rogers unto him, asked him if he would revoke his abominable doctrine, and his evil opinion of the sacrament of the altar. Master Rogers answered and said, ‘That which I have preached I will seal with my blood.’ ‘Then,’ quoth Master Woodroffe, ‘thou art a heretic.’ ‘That shall be known,’ quoth Rogers, ‘at the day of judgment.’ ‘Well,’ quoth Master Woodroffe, ‘I will never pray for thee.’ ‘But I will pray for you,’ quoth Master Rogers; and so was brought the same day, which was Monday, the 4th of February, by the Sheriffs toward Smithfield, saying the psalm ‘Miserere’ by the way, all the people wonderfully rejoicing at his constancy, with great praises and thanks to God for the same. And there, in the presence of Master Rochester, Comptroller of the Queen’s Household, Sir Richard Southwell, both the Sheriffs, and a wonderful number of people, the fire was put unto him; and when it had taken hold both upon his legs and shoulders, he, as one feeling no smart, washed his hands in the flame, as though it had been in cold water. And, after lifting up his hands unto heaven, not removing the same until such time as the devouring fire had consumed them, most mildly this happy martyr yielded up his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father. A little before his burning at the stake, his pardon was brought, if he would have recanted, but he utterly refused. He was the first martyr of all the blessed company that suffered in Queen Mary’s time, that gave the first adventure upon the fire. His wife and children being eleven in number, and ten able to go, and one sucking on her breast, met him by the way as he went towards Smithfield. This sorrowful sight of his own flesh and blood could nothing move him; but that he constantly and cheerfully took his death, with wonderful patience, in the defence and quarrel of Christ’s Gospel.”

It must always be remembered that John Rogers was the first who was burned in Queen Mary’s reign, and that before he died at the stake there was no example of a Protestant of the Reformed Church of England enduring death rather than recant his opinions. It is to the eternal credit of Rogers that he was the first to break the ice, and to supply proof that the grace of God was sufficient to sustain a believer even in the fire. The very day that he was burned, Noailles, the French Ambassador, wrote to Montmorency the following words: “This day was performed the confirmation of the alliance between the Pope and this kingdom, by a public and solemn sacrifice of a preaching Doctor, named Rogers, who has been burned alive for being a Lutheran; but he died persisting in his opinion. At this conduct, the great-

est part of the people took such pleasure, that they were not afraid to make him many exclamations to strengthen his courage. Even his children assisted at it, comforting him in such a manner that it seemed as if he had been led to a wedding.”

Like Rowland Taylor, Rogers left behind him no literary remains, unless we accept his contribution to the famous “Matthews’ Bible.” But he left behind him a name which ought to be held in honour by all Protestant Churchmen as long as the world stands.