Heroes of the Reformation

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INTRODUCTION

THE twentieth century should be impressed by the legacy of human freedom bequeathed by the Protestant Reformation. Without question Western man was directly and indirectly emancipated by the spirit of the mighty leaders of reform. The Bible, so long closed from the laymen by the clergy, was opened for all men to read. The feudal remnants, which clung like chains to civilization, were shattered by the blows of freedom-loving men. The freedom of the believer to be his own "priest," the freedom from burdensome and hollow sacramentalism, and the freedom of conscience and worship—all of these stem from the Reformation's influence on the human mind.

The authors of this volume have brought together a comprehensive picture of the leaders of the Reformation who arose in every part of Europe. Here were heroes of the cross, who were willing to suffer persecution and death in order that the faith they held dear might be kindled in a thousand other lives. Their basic faith has come down to modern Protestantism from the church of the apostles. It is well for us to remember, too, that "when Protestantism is true to Him who was crucified and risen, it is strong; when it diverts from His word and spirit, it becomes decadent and disintegrates."

The faith and freedom bequeathed to us must be preserved in our day. We must know of the sacrifices and aims, the beliefs and hopes of the Reformation leaders who blazed the way out of the darkness of the Middle Ages. The authors of this volume are to be congratulated on their sincere endeavor to make the men of Protestantism live anew in the hearts of this generation.

MERLIN L. NEFF.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION

What Was It?

WHAT is meant by the term, Protestant Reformation? To some people it denotes a religious fascination bordering on the miraculous. To others it is synonymous with the name of Martin Luther. Some think of it as a series of changes in religious ideas which developed out of the controversies engendered by the Ninety-Five Theses. And to still others the name conjures up a sudden and phenomenal emergence of most of Western Europe from the despotic control of the church, a burst of freedom created by the intellectual and religious impact of a new set of values never known or thought of before.

Actually the Reformation came not as the result of any one idea or any single overt act; many factors aided the rise of this mighty movement, but it took many years to arrive. It came not as a miracle or as the work of one or more brave souls, but as the result of different factors, working many times apparently at cross-purposes. Neither did reform activities spring exclusively from religious leaders: The princes of Germany, the nobles of France, the citizens of Switzerland, and the kings of England and Sweden—all interested in prevailing conditions—played stellar parts in this moving sixteenth-century drama.

The various developments in the dual status of the church as an ecclesiastic and temporal power, as well as the varied views supported by the reigning monarchs and princes of the period, at times hindered as well as advanced the arrival of the Reformation. The work of the Humanists, too, contributed to the unrest of the time and added impetus to the movement as it increased its objections to the religious status quo.

But through all, the hand of God guided the development of conditions which ushered in the turbulent period of the Reformation.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

To understand how freedom came to the individual from the universal dominance of papal authority, as well as surcease to temporal powers from the taxing prowess of the church and its interference in the legal processes of government, one needs to trace the development of various lines of human aspirations preceding the decades of the Reformation. By the term "freedom," as here used, is meant the right to formulate one's own religious conclusions, unhampered by dogma.

Such a procedure constituted a first approach during the eras of both the Renaissance and the Reformation. It implied the acceptance of sound reasoning as applied to Scriptural interpretations as a whole, the relegating of tradition to nothing more than subtle presentations of circumstantial evidence.

CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION

Historians, both ecclesiastical and secular, agree substantially on the causes which combined to give the setting for this period. As has already been stated, there was no one reason, nor should it be supposed that the causes can be rigidly listed in sequence of importance. Yet from the time shortly following the Crusades to the time of the Reformation there developed an increased popular feeling that changes in religious matters were greatly needed. Commonly listed causes for the appearance of the Reformation include the following:

1. The growth of national states.
2. Printing and its impetus to learning.
3. The activity of the Humanists.
4. Changes in the economic outlook.
5. Troubles in the Holy Roman Empire.
6. Decentralized government in Germany.
7. A growing spirit of religious enthusiasm.
8. The abuses in the church.

Only a brief view may be taken of each of these topics; yet sufficient material will be presented to enable the reader to catch a glimpse of the meshing conditions and factors which show that the Reformation resulted from many situations rather than from any one specific cause.

1. Prior to the marked development of centralized monarchies in Western Europe the church held undisputed sway. Taxation and appeals to the higher courts were the prerogatives of the church. The feudal system left in the control of the papacy large areas of land from which the state received no revenue. In Sweden the church held two thirds of the land and in England between a third and two fifths, and the proportion in favor of the papacy in Hungary and Germany showed a still more deplorable ratio. Such vast holdings enriched the church, but resulted in a depletion of national revenues.

As monarchies developed, clashes of other interests were bound to arise, for both the government and the church needed money. Who was to be supreme? When a matter of taxation failed to be satisfactorily settled in a governmental court, appeal was possible to a papal court.

Yet the church was under the control of a foreign power which had its seat in Rome.

As the states grew stronger, more and more power disappeared from the church to find lodgment in the state. Repeated frictions of this type often led to open warfare, with the power of the state growing ever stronger at the expense of the church. The result was a growing antagonism by the people toward a church which sought for temporal power without giving much in return.

2. The development of printing brought with it possibilities of enlightening the rank and file of the middle and upper classes. It razed the walls of medieval ignorance, and the people suddenly learned more than the church had taught; many fields of knowledge became common property. Printing as an art and a profession expanded apace. Before 1500 more than 30,000 separate publications had been issued, and fifteen editions of the Bible appeared in Germany before the open revolt against the papal power occurred.

As general information became available, many persons refused to stay in blind submission to the papacy, with its claims of divine origin. Printing fostered an upsurge of intellectual pursuits; men chose to follow reason in preference to the supposed authority of the clergy.

3. Playing very effectively into this awakened intellectual growth came a group of individuals knows as Humanists. They called attention to the Bible as the source of faith for a Christian. These men also maintained that the veneration of saints was useless, pilgrimages they derided, and religious consideration of relics they called stupid. The idea of temporal power for the church they pointed out as being foreign to apostolic Christianity.

Only a few of the early Humanists felt the deep desire for the spiritual satisfaction they awoke in the hearts of the people, but they did show that the church withheld truth from the masses. Basically they wanted reform within the church; but once their idea that the hierarchy was not infallible struck root, an irresistible force was unleashed against the church.

4. As the feudal period began to recede and omens of modern history began to appear, new ideas of economics arose. Formerly, to be poor was accepted as a religious virtue; but as wealth began to accumulate, poverty began to be looked upon as a social evil. These changing conditions soon resulted in cash payments for peasants' services. Guilds, with exclusive control over business and prices, lost their pre-eminence to the growing system of bargaining. The period of exploration, with its consequent change

from barter to sale, made people realize that land did not compose the basic source of wealth.

The expansion of Europe during the age of discoveries transferred people's minds from things religious to things secular. A class of people since known as capitalists came into existence, and they, too, provided a rift in the armor of the formerly all-powerful church. As the middle class rose in importance in the social strata, the church lost still more of its support.

5. For years the Holy Roman Empire posed as the protector of the church, and more than once the emperor's forces supported the papacy against those Italian rulers who aimed at a consolidation of the various areas.

Many high governmental officials also held offices in the church. But the time came when the empire became so absorbed in attempting to keep its sprawling territories from disintegrating and in working to maintain sufficient men under arms to assure a measure of safety from the threatening Turks, that it had no time nor power to safeguard the church from the dangers of ambitious and incensed lay rulers. This was the condition before the monk of Wittenberg had his open break with the church, and it continued until sometime after the Reformation had become so well established that its progress could not be retarded.

6. In Western Europe strong centralized governments worked to curtail the power of the church and help make a religious revolt possible. The decentralized governmental status in Germany added fuel to the fire which destroyed the former universal structure of the church. At first the church gained ground because no strong central government existed, but in so doing she aroused the ire of the secular feudal lords who stood to lose whenever the church took funds out of their domain. Soon these rulers began to apply the rule of "Might makes right," and thus they hindered the papal representatives from making further financial and jurisdictional gains. The lack of any effective central government also made it impossible to prevent any groups from uniting to thwart the financial exactions of Rome. The princes developed a system whereby they enriched themselves by confiscating lands held by the church.

7. As a result of wars, famines, plagues, fears of Turkish invasion, general social unrest, the activity of the Humanists and their call to literal Bible study, a growing objection to the secular activity of the papacy, wrongs suffered at the hands of the clergy, and a desire to find a spiritual experience and satisfaction which the church never seemed to supply, there arose a religious fervor and a longing for a return to apostolic simplicity.

The teachings of the Brethren of the Common Life, and of the forerunners to the Reformers, stressed a need for Bible study and personal religion without recourse to the clergy. Soon people began to look for spiritual uplift outside the church, a situation which belittled the older accepted ideas of strict conformity to the authority of the church.

8. Perhaps the foremost reason for the coming of the Reformation is that there were abuses in the church itself, abuses that had existed for nearly two centuries, with only occasional efforts at their elimination.

As the church became more and more enmeshed in secular affairs, more money was needed to carry on all phases of governmental and other activities. Furthermore, the ecclesiastics, not satisfied with the exalted dignity afforded them by their doctrine of transubstantiation, or their vantage point which gave them access to the secret thoughts and acts of others by means of auricular confession, they coveted political eminence and preferred governmental status, and they possessed an insatiable greed for material gains.

This need for more finances led to increased taxation, already odious, and to the collection of various fees, including the sale of indulgences. This was carried to such unbelievable lengths that it finally crushed blind fealty. When the church, despite her claim as the sole way of salvation, deteriorated to the status of a temporal power, controlled by worldlings for secular gains, the moral sense of the people suffered a fatal blow.

Even more noxious than the taxing system was the inveterate immorality of the clergy. Their sharp appetite for luxury caused their moral standards to decline. Even the popes contributed to their own hurt when they claimed exemption from obedience to the laws of man and heaven. In general their conduct did not engender personal respect, and several of their number during the Renaissance led dissolute lives.

Furthermore, the creeds of the church had evolved into such subtleties that few tried to grasp their meaning. The supreme power of the papacy, verging on totalitarianism, gradually became so unbearable that many people, though remaining nominally in the church, refused to be awed by it or to be kept in subjection to it.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation possessed definite characteristics, many of which set it apart from any other revolution in history.

One of the distinguishing features was its territorial scope. It began simultaneously and independently in various European countries. About the time that Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, John Colet, dean of St. Paul's in England, was denouncing the abuses of the Catholic Church and upholding the supremacy of the Bible as the rule of faith. Lefevre in France and Zwingli in Switzerland were at the same time preaching against the evils of the church and pointing to Christ as the door of salvation. Although Luther is called the originator of the Reformation, the other Reformers discovered and preached the same message that he did, without having received knowledge of it from him.

There was a power, however, that brought the Reformation into existence and made its progress possible—and that was the Holy Scriptures. The Greek New Testament prepared by Erasmus was a help to scholars all over Europe in learning the way of truth and life.

After the Reformation once got under way, there existed a great friendship and fraternization among the Reformers. There was frequent interchange of ideas, and hospitality was freely extended. One of the surprising features of the Reformation was this extent of contact and co-operation among the Reformers as they encouraged each other in their efforts.

The Reformation spread with great rapidity. Of course, consolidations, refinements, and extensions needed to be made; but that so tremendous a revolution, on such a vast scale, could be executed in so short a time, bringing with it a complete change in thought and habit, still remains one of the amazing events of history.

The Protestant Reformation actually began in Europe's citadels of learning, her universities. There were scholars, such as Luther and Melanchthon at Wittenberg; Erasmus, Colet, and More at Oxford; Bilney, Latimer, and Cartwright at Cambridge; and Lefevre and Farel at Paris. Almost without exception the leaders of the Reformation were highly trained men of that generation. In some instances, as Beza and Tyndale, they ranked high as men of letters. Others, like Cranmer and Valdes, carried responsibilities at court.

Wycliffe, Huss, and Savonarola each ranked high in his country; all three were eminent in literary circles.

Why was this so necessary at that time, when in other ages men of lesser abilities and education have been used effectively to preach the gospel with power? At least two answers can be given: Only the educated knew the Hebrew, Latin, and Greek necessary to read the Bible as it then existed. Then, too, it was essential that the Bible be translated into the vernacular of each country so that the common people could have the privilege of reading the Scriptures in their own tongue. This task demanded scholarship.

All the preaching of many Luthers, Latimers, Zwinglis, Knoxes, and Wisharts would have failed to accomplish the Reformation if, at the same time, the Bible in the vernacular had not been provided for the common people. If at the moment Latimer was preaching at Cambridge it had not happened that Tyndale, who had fled to the Continent, was smuggling back thousands of copies of the English New Testament so that every Englishman could read the way of salvation for himself, there would have been no Reformation in England. A similar situation obtained in Germany, France, and other countries.

With these two phases must be combined the indispensable third—the invention of printing, which had made possible the publication of the translations of the Bible and had brought the price within range of the common man's purse.

Within a ten-year period many of the nations of Europe had received translations of the Bible in their own tongue. Luther had translated it for Germany in 1522, Lefevre for France in 1523, Tyndale for England in 1525, Bruccioli for Italy in 1532. Within the next ten years Francisco Enzinas had translated the Bible into Spanish, and Petri had translated it into Swedish. Shortly after, Karoli, one of the most energetic of Magyar preachers, had done the same in the Magyar tongue.

Another noteworthy characteristic of the Reformers was the basic agreement on important doctrines. The tenet upon which all Reformers agreed was justification by faith. They believed that salvation is not obtained by works, fasting, money, or penance, but that it is God's free gift. This doctrine formed the cornerstone of the Reformation. Agreement also existed on the supreme and sufficient authority of the Scriptures, Communion in both kinds, and the disavowal of saint worship, images, relics, purgatory, mass, celibacy, and the pope as head of the church.

The major Reformers gave little attention to the form of baptism, religious liberty, the state of the dead, the Decalogue, the Trinity, and other doctrines, except as they agreed or disagreed with what they termed the heretical sects, like the Anabaptists and the Libertines. Once or twice arguments on baptism flared briefly. Disagreement also existed on predestination and the definition of original sin.

But the topic that brought the cleavage between the Lutherans and the Calvinists, or the Reformed Church, was the eucharist. Was or was not the bread the body of Christ? Numerous conferences and colloquies restored neither unity nor good will between the two factions. In England the vestment and ritual controversy brought a rift between the developing Church of England and the Puritans.

Bigotry and intolerance, shortcomings for which the Reformers bitterly upbraided the Catholic Church, raised their hydra heads repeatedly in Protestant circles. Many Reformers sought to curb opposition and to stop the infiltration of contrary beliefs by the use of force. Freedom of conscience was not one of their principles.

The executions by strangling, burning, and drowning, and the wars to eradicate those of different faiths, are a sorry chapter in the annals of the Reformation. It may be observed that such destruction failed to bring expressions of disapprobation. On the contrary, these executions were frequently applauded as indicative of the advancement of God's cause upon earth.

Critics who point to these defects as a reason for disbelief in the authenticity of the Reformation are shooting beside the mark. In not all things did the Reformation immediately release men from the prejudices and false thinking of their times, and this was one instance. The Reformation proper, the break with Roman Catholic authority, was accomplished in a relatively short time; but not all the papal teachings were abruptly terminated.

Furthermore, the Reformers were human. They had faults. Perhaps it was part of God's plan to allow their weaknesses to be revealed to the public, lest the people's affection be transferred from the truth to the leaders. God intended that the people focus their attention upon the truth in the Bible.

Of Protestant Reformers there were many, some clearing the highway so that others could march further along toward the goal; some began where others ended. Some laid the foundation, others built the walls, and still others put on the coping stone. Who shall say which were the greatest among them? Historians extol some as eminent—

those Reformers, perhaps, who by the times and the influences at work were brought into greater prominence.

The Reformation was a continuous, all-enveloping movement of action and reaction, accruing more glory by the addition of more light. It was a glorious spiritual awakening, a state of mind that gave the world the mighty heritage of Protestantism.

JOHN HUSS

Preacher and Patriot

"THREE mighty currents were running through the life of Prague. The first, a moral movement, involved the moral improvement and efficiency of the clergy; the second, a movement of doctrinal reform, centering in the views of Wycliffe; the third, a patriotic movement, in which the Czech population were seeking supremacy over the German element and the management of all Bohemian affairs.

"In all three, as a preacher of righteousness, as a religious reformer and as a patriot, Huss was the acknowledged leader. He had the elements of popularity and leadership. His sincerity of purpose was evident, his devotion constant, his energy unflagging, his courage fearless, his daily life lifted above reproach."—David S. Schaff, D.D., *John Huss, His Life, Teachings and Death*, page 58.

This brief sketch outlines the trend of the times and gives a glimpse of the man who by the age of thirty stood as the most famous preacher of his era and the most important churchman in Bohemia. John Huss was born about 1373 of peasant parents at Husinec, near the Bavarian frontier. His father died while John was still in his boyhood.

Early in her sons life, John's mother recognized an exceptional devotion to study. She had no funds to support him in school, but nonetheless she encouraged him to obtain an education. Although a charity student, he determinedly entered the University of Prague, earning part of his way by singing. His main interest centered in the study of theology. Early in his college career he became an able debater. It was said of him that during all his growth as a scholar he remained humble and moderate in his relationships with others.

In 1393 he received the bachelor of arts degree, the next year he became a bachelor of theology, and two years later the University of Prague conferred the master of arts degree upon him. He did not take any studies toward the doctor of theology degree, but turned to active participation in national and university affairs. His ordination to the priesthood came in 1400, after which he became attached to the court in the capacity of chaplain to Queen Sophia.

By 1401 he accepted the deanship of the philosophical faculty, and the following year he rose to be rector of the university. With this recognition of ability also came the appointment as preacher of

Bethlehem Chapel. This house of worship had been built and dedicated to the specific purpose of preaching to the citizens of Prague in their native tongue.

During all his life, Huss distinguished himself by constant application to duty and tireless devotion to preaching according to the Scriptures. His conduct has been termed exemplary, his life blameless, and his personality winning. Apparently this estimation of the man agrees with his life, for even his enemies did not attack his character during his life nor after his death.

What was it that led Huss into religious paths which diverged at first but slightly, then gradually further and still further from the then universally accepted authority of the church? The answer cannot be found in one word, nor even in one statement. W. T. Selley and A. C. Krey present the following reason. "He criticized the church in Bohemia as Wycliffe had criticized it in England. His views found all the more favor among his fellow Bohemians because the higher ecclesiastical offices in Bohemia were held by Germans. The books of Huss show clear evidence of the influence of Wycliffe, whom Huss respected highly, though it is quite possible that he arrived at his opinions independently."—*Medieval Foundations of Western Civilization*, page 316.

While still a student at the University of Prague, Huss knew of Wycliffe's writings and opinions. He did not agree with all the religious ideas promoted by Wycliffe, but the two men's unity of thought regarding the authority of the church as it related itself to the teachings of the Scriptures made them enemies of papal authority.

Up to 1405 Huss seemed unconscious of any violent opposition by the church, but by 1408 this "pale, thin man in mean attire" was being accused by the clergy to the archbishop for using stinging remarks in describing prevalent moral and other abuses among the priests.

What were the objections that Huss had to the church and its teachings? Possibly one of the greatest reasons for his dissatisfaction was the moral corruption of the clergy. This situation kept the spiritual indignation of Huss at a fever pitch. His eloquent preaching and his whiplash remarks concerning the failure of the clergy to live godly lives, combined with his ability to show fallacies in the church, led to more than one excommunication and finally to death at the stake.

Among the opinions he espoused and preached were the following: Christ, not Peter, is the Rock upon which the church was built; the Scriptures comprise the all-sufficient rule in matters of religion; priestly

intervention for salvation is unnecessary; and masses for the dead and the use of most religious relics are useless. He also attacked the worldly attitude of papal monarchy, particularly as it affected secular matters. The rights of the individual's conscience were to him higher than all church and papal authority.

It seems, however, that he placed much more stress on the need for organizational reform than he did on particular theological points. Had he lived longer, it is possible that his views might have been summarized into a creed. But, above all, he preached with the purpose of calling the people to stop sinning and to seek after God. He constantly challenged his fellow clergymen to bring their lives into harmony with the life of Christ.

Twice during 1411 the papacy issued bulls proclaiming indulgences to all who would supply funds for a campaign against the king of Naples. Hardly had these bulls of indulgences reached Bohemia before Huss attacked the whole corrupt system.

His opposition raised such a tumult in Prague that upon the advice of friends he withdrew from the city and went to his native village, where he remained two years to study and write. But it could not be gainsaid that he had stepped out openly and defiantly against the papal hierarchy, for as A. H. Wratislaw states, "Hus's uprising against the papal indulgences was such an assault upon the simoniacal system of the day that it could not but raise a storm against him in the highest ecclesiastical quarter, the court of Rome."—*John Hus*, page 181.

From this time on all events pointed to an ultimate trial of Huss in which the control of the entire proceedings centered in the hands of the church. News of the Hussite opposition to the indulgences, with a consequent loss of money to the papal treasury, and other anticlerical disturbances, reached Rome and resulted in a summons for Huss to appear there. The pope's first efforts to subdue and silence Huss fell fruitless because Huss had too many influential friends, among whom he counted the queen and many nobles. Consequently, upon the refusal of Huss to respect the papal summons and go to Rome, the city of Prague soon felt the weight of an interdict. This act caused a great deal of disturbance, for to have a city placed under an interdict meant that all religious services were suspended, sacraments were not administered, and burials were halted. In short, an interdict deprived all people of the comforts of religion. It was because of this disturbance, and not because of cowardice, that Huss left the city temporarily upon the advice of his friends.

Huss did not entirely ignore the summons to Rome, but because of ill health he sent three personal representatives. When their efforts proved unsuccessful, Huss was again excommunicated. But upon the receipt of a safe conduct granted by Sigismund, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and by the king of Bohemia, Huss, in the company of three nobles and others, started for the Council of Constance in October, 1414, and arrived there November 3.

The Council of Constance convened to the call of Pope John XXIII, one of the three rival popes, upon the urging of Sigismund, the emperor. Based on the number of church and other dignitaries present and the areas represented, this council has the distinction of being one of the most colorful gatherings known in European history. The purposes of this council have always been listed as three; namely, (1) to suppress heresy, (2) to heal the papal schism, and (3) to reform the church.

It has been said that the emperor attempted to keep the safe-conduct assurance to Huss in effect, but that powerful enemies of Huss maliciously determined to appeal to the emperors prejudices. As a consequence the emperor finally let them have their way against Huss. It is, however, true that upon Huss's arrival at Constance the Reformer received full liberty, and Pope John added his personal word that Huss was not to be harmed. But in spite of all these promises of security, by December 6 Huss was placed under arrest by the joint order of Pope John and the cardinals.

Huss soon found himself in a filthy dungeon in a Dominican convent, where he remained chained day and night with insufficient food. Upon his complaints concerning the condition in the dungeon, he was first transferred for safekeeping to the castle of Gottlieben, and by June, 1415, he was under guard in a local Franciscan convent.

As was to be expected, his arrest and imprisonment created a great deal of fruitless indignation among the Bohemians. Furthermore, his confinement under poor sanitary conditions and improper care brought on an illness which nearly resulted in death. When he finally appeared in the council before the emperor he stood in chains as a common criminal.

It is a widely accepted opinion among scholars that what has been called the trial of Huss was nothing but a mockery and a violation of all principles of justice and honor. At the public hearings of June 5, 7, 8, 1415, he was repeatedly shouted down when he tried to speak. He maintained that he was not conscious of any errors, but that if shown

to be in error according to the Scriptures he would gladly lay his offenses aside.

During the long, tiring days of the hearing, misnamed a trial, Huss consistently upheld the Scriptures as the sole guide for the salvation of sinners, and protested against the corruption of the hierarchy. When the news of his conviction reached Bohemia, not less than two hundred fifty lords affixed their seals to a letter addressed to the council requesting leniency for Huss. The letter caused some delay in his execution, but it could not save him.

Briefly the charges preferred against Huss may be summarized by stating that he had disregarded the discipline of the church and that he had rejected some of its doctrines. It seems that the council did not propose to give instruction and correction to Huss, which he repeatedly requested, as much as it endeavored to make a final condemnation of him and his teachings.

If Huss would have been willing to make a full retraction without any question of all charges laid to his account, he might have been set free. But he unwaveringly maintained the position that he could not abjure errors he had never held. He repeatedly expressed his willingness to be instructed and to submit to the decision of the Council, but he stated that he could not make a denial of principles he had never taught. Throughout the hearings many witnesses appeared against him, but not one person was permitted to speak in favor of Huss.

On July 6, 1415, the farce came to an end, and Huss was condemned as a heretic. Then in a prepared ritual Huss was deposed, degraded, commended by the priests to Satan, and delivered to the secular government, which was to carry out the death sentence imposed by the church upon one who believed that a person had a right to have a conscience.

A week before his death he wrote a letter to the university authorities at Prague assuring them in the following words of his steadfastness, "Be confident I have not revoked nor abjured a single article. I refuse to renounce unless what the council charged against me shall be proved false from the Scriptures."—Schaff, *John Huss*, page 264. It was reported that he walked to his death with a steady, firm tread, singing or praying as he went. He showed neither fear nor regret for his actions.

When his executioners led him to the stake in a meadow outside the city, huge crowds followed. At the stake he was divested of all

clothing except his boots. Chains held him securely to the stake. A mixture of wood and straw was piled around him until it reached his face. While the fire licked around his body he sang and prayed until the flames stilled his voice. After his body had been consumed, his ashes and the soil upon which they lay were gathered and thrown into the Rhine River.

His death came as a result of the system of the Roman Catholic Church and the sentiment of the time. Fire was only a medium. John Huss was dead, but the ideals for which he stood and the principles he advocated will never die. By his death he gave the church more trouble than he could have given had he lived.

An almost immediate result of his martyrdom was the growth of international conditions which culminated in a series of wars in Bohemia. These wars, called the Hussite Wars, lasted about fourteen years and were aimed at the papacy, the Council of Constance, the emperor, and all efforts to invade Bohemia and suppress the teachings of Huss. Finally the rebelling Bohemians were brought under control; the Hussite teachings and their influence, however, spread all over Europe.

In evaluating the life of Huss, one needs to remember that he was a patriot as well as a preacher. He loved his people and did all he could to set their language and culture on a high level. His writings, in the Bohemian language, are considered the richest and most stimulating in all Bohemian literature. As an outstanding preacher and intellectual leader he holds an eminence never reached by anyone else in the life of the University of Prague.

He was also honored at the court and was deeply loved by the common people. He has been characterized as a true scholar, the bravest of martyrs, and an eloquent preacher of a democratic religion. Yet his chief glory consists not in his patriotism, nor in his deep learning, but in the beauty and simplicity of his spiritual teaching. So long as the work of the Council of Constance will be studied, the name of Huss and his work will be discussed. The Council of Constance, under the control of the church, intended to silence Huss and eradicate his teachings; but it made of Huss an international hero and spread his spirit and teaching over all the civilized world.

"It is doubtful," says Schaff, "if we except the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, whether the forward movement of religious enlightenment and human freedom have been advanced as much by

the sufferings and death of any single man as by the death of Huss."—*John Huss*, page 2.