

THE QUEEN'S CONFESSION.

OR, THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. JOHN NEPOMUCENE. FROM THE FRENCH OF HENRI DE NAVERY.

CHAPTER XI. THE MARTYR'S DEATH.

The kingly power was fast losing all its authority and respect under Wenceslaus. The king's worst qualities were rapidly developed. He was once more a puppet in the hands of Hatto. He was jealous, cruel, selfish. Hatto was virtually the sovereign. The good, disgusted with the brutish helplessness of the young king, fled far from his presence. The wicked gathered around him; they were his advisers, his agents; he was their tool, and under his name and authority their lawlessness filled the land with corruption and misery.

These evils prepared the way for worse. The teachings of Wickliffe were whispered in Bohemia. The flourishing university of Prague had fallen into the hands of John Huss. He had not yet begun to teach his errors openly, but enough could be gleaned from his opinions privately expressed, to influence the future of the kingdom. From among Wenceslaus' learned ecclesiastical advisers a tyranny was invented by the priests, and that the Papal dignity depended on the good-will of the emperor. Wenceslaus was flattered. In his most delirious humor, he never dreamed that his kingly power could reach so far, that if the Pope did not bow to his sovereign will, he might chastise him as a rebel.

The hour was come in which the holy martyr, John Nepomucene, was to preach for the last time to the people whom he loved, and by whom he was so much revered. A thrill of sorrow passed through every heart as they saw his pale face, and his worn, worn hands still bearing the scars of the torture he had undergone. He had been their father and their friend; the moment he began to speak, the chests of strong men heaved, and tears began to course down the cheeks of women and children. "My dear children," said he, "I have not much time to speak to you. I am going from you, I am leaving you! Would that in leaving you, I left with you the peace of the Savior, that peace in which the prince of this world has no part. But no! no! my voice which shall deceive. My last words shall not lead you astray.

"The Church in Germany has had her years, her ages of glory. Her years of trial are begun. The time is gone when kings were obedient to Peter, when monasteries rose on the hills tops, when the banners of the cross and the palms of the saints were succeeding ages of shame. Men shall try to deface the beauty of the spouse of Christ. The maid face of the Savior shall be again outraged in the insults which shall be heaped upon His Church. The blaspheming Jews said to Christ, 'Come down from the cross and we will believe Thee'; and men who trust only in the strength of their arms and the edge of their swords, shall say to the spouse of Christ, 'If thou shalt outlive these things which come upon thee, we will believe that art upheld by the might of God.'

"Aias, that my eyes should foresee the desolation of the Church. I would fain turn my mind from such a distressful vision, for my soul is filled with a nameless dread that such evils are coming upon you, and I am unable to avert them.

"Oh, great and noble Germany! Thou art given sovereigns to Papal Rome! Land of powerful kings, how low art thou fallen! The bones of thy mighty tremble in the tomb! Passion-unchecked bring forth crimes hitherto unknown. The blood of thy priests stains thy altars. The voice of false prophets is heard in thy cities. The tyrant bell hangs 'out in mellow tones. The starless, moonless night was dark and dark below. The soldiers raised up the body of the saint; one moment they poised it in the air, then let it fall. The martyr fell with a loud splash into the waters below. The whole river rolled over him, dashed against the arches of the bridge, and all was still. The soldiers tried to pierce to darkness below, but desecrating nothing, they hurried from the place.

The soul of the saint was hardly in the presence of his Maker, when his body, floating on the water, was surrounded with a great brilliant light, drew many persons to the banks of the river. The news of the strange event spread rapidly. A crowd hastened to the bridge and ran down to the waters edge. They saw the body of the martyr, they saw the water, they saw the light and the glory. The whole river was lighted up with bright rays which came from the martyr's body. From her window in the palace the queen saw the light on the river; she saw many forms moving rapidly to and fro, and she heard the hum of many voices breaking the silence of the night. She hastened to the king to ask what it meant. The tyrant, struck with awe at the news, and forbidding anyone to follow him, fled like a madman from the palace into the country.

The whole city flocked to the river. The canons of the cathedral went in procession, took up the body, and carried it to the church of the Holy Spirit and the Penitents. Everyone hastened to kiss the hands and feet of the martyr, and if possible, to procure a shred of his clothes as a relic. The king's wickedness was betrayed by the soldiers. The anger of the people, pent up so long, burst forth. The martyr's death gave them a courage they had not known for a long time. They no longer feared the king's frown, or Hatto's baleful shadow. Their words, their gestures were full of wrath. The king, hearing of the people's excitement, and fearing a sudden uprising against his tottering throne, sent an order to the religious to have the martyr's body secretly removed.

which shall draw upon you the hatred of men. Summon up all your strength; let fervor increase in your soul. You shall expiate the crimes of the wicked, you shall suffer for the guilty."

Ofried begged that he might be allowed to accompany him to Prague. "I allow you to come with you, but at the gates of the city we part." They walked on together towards the city, discoursing as they went of heavenly things. John Nepomucene exhorted his young companion to fulfill the rule of the Cistercians with the most exactness, and Ofried begged the martyr to remember him before God.

Near the gates of the city John Nepomucene clasped the young monk in his arms. It was a long and affectionate embrace. At last he tore himself from the arms of his young friend, and passed alone through the streets of the city. Ofried never saw him more. Wenceslaus was standing on a balcony outside one of the windows. It was yet early in the day, but the flush of drunkenness was on his face, and the stupor of drunkenness was in his eyes. He was talking to the queen, whom he had cruelly wronged. She had pardoned him; but as he was too revengeful to forgive, so he knew not what it was to be forgiven. In Ofried he believed he saw an enemy of his honor, in John Nepomucene an enemy of his happiness. "One word," thought he, "from that stubborn priest could restore my happiness. Then the red flush of drunkenness was made redder still by the heat of his anger. At that moment the priest passed below. Wenceslaus saw him, and gave orders that he should be immediately brought before him.

A query delivered the message. The priest smiled gravely; he knew what the king required of him. He entered the palace and awaited the king's pleasure. In a few moments he was standing in the presence of Wenceslaus. "You shall speak this evening, or..."

The priest looked at the king with a calm look, which said more plainly than words, "Do you not know that I do not fear death?" but not one word came from the king's lips. "Call six soldiers," said the king to the same person who had delivered his message to the priest. "Take this man," said Wenceslaus to them, when they entered the apartment, "take this wretched priest from my sight, and when night is come cast him into the river. I do not wish his death to cause needless noise; a fanatic people would give him the title of martyr."

"Sire," said one of the soldiers, "they have already given him that title."

"Away with him!" roared the king. The night had fallen; all the bells of the city announced to the faithful the grand festival of the coming morrow. The priest rejoiced; he would soon be keeping the Ascension of our Divine Master with the angels and the saints of God. He no longer thought of himself. He spent the few hours that remained to him in prayer. He prayed to the Almighty to spare and to save the country so soon to be made desolate by the heresies of John Huss and Jerome of Prague. He offered up his coming martyrdom for his unhappy country, and he earnestly besought the Lord to console the queen, whom he would no longer be able to console.

When the soldiers went into the room where the priest had been left to await their coming, they found him on his knees, wholly wrapt in communion with God. They rudely wrenched him and dragged him to the bridge. The distant bell rang 'out in mellow tones. The starless, moonless night was dark and dark below. The soldiers raised up the body of the saint; one moment they poised it in the air, then let it fall. The martyr fell with a loud splash into the waters below. The whole river rolled over him, dashed against the arches of the bridge, and all was still. The soldiers tried to pierce to darkness below, but desecrating nothing, they hurried from the place.

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the seal of confession, he was cruelly tormented, and afterwards thrown from the bridge of Prague into the river Muldaw, by the orders of Wenceslaus IV, King of Bohemia, and son of Charles IV.—1383.

The Ball of St. John Nepomucene's benediction was solemnly published by Benedict XIII, in 1729.

Year after year, and night after night, pious mothers gather their little ones round the firesides of Prague to tell them the story of the martyr-saint, who died rather than betray the queen's confession. And never does citizen of Prague cross the bridge from whose battlement the saint was cast into the waters of the Muldaw, without proudly uncovering his head as a mark of respect to St. John Nepomucene.

CHAPTER XII. LAST DAYS OF WENCESLAUS.

"The wicked man doeth when no one pursueth." As a demoniac carries his tormentor with him wherever he goes, Wenceslaus carried with him the torment of giving reasons for his conduct. There was no peace in his soul. Change of scene brought him no relief. There was no pleasure in his food, no rest in his sleep. His crime had "murdered sleep;" horrible dreams harassed him in the night; he feared dawn; every morning began a long day of torture.

His vices grew more and more. He showed his ugly head. The heresy of John Huss had taken deep root. This bold heretic was an able man, one to lead others blindly by the energy of his strong will. He had won over a great number of the students to his side. They took his adopted heresy for originally of character, and with him they were ready to profess and maintain the errors of Wickliffe. To the sophistry of John Huss, they added the zeal and enthusiasm which young men bring with them to every cause they take up warmly. Young people are fond of hero-worship; John Huss was the hero of the university of Prague, and the students, who followed his lead, blindly worshipped him. They carried his name to the furthest bounds of the city; they discussed his theories, and wrangled over what they did not understand. Owing to their numbers, their activity, and earnestness, they were a powerful body for good or evil. They were to be met in groups in every quarter of the city, denying, distinguishing, and granting arguments heard for the first time in the streets of Prague.

The good people of Prague were astonished at what they overheard from the mouths of the students. They soon gave place to curiosity. The people wished to know what the students argued so learnedly and so noisily about. The students were right glad to satisfy them. The vulgar stared at them in open-mouthed wonder. They would not say a single word, and thus the way was prepared for the arch-heretic in the city of Prague.

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John Huss was born in the village of Huss, from which he took his name. His advancement in learning, and in social life, proves him to have been a clever, energetic man. His parents were too poor to afford him the means of a good education. He carried a young gentleman's books every day to the university. The lad found it hard to be trudging in ignorance beside his more fortunate companion, and with a manly pride and bold resolve, he determined to know more about the books than their mere weight.

Mixing with the students and professors, he began to read, and to discuss the books which he found in the university. He was a Bohemian by birth, he had an inborn dislike to the German professors. He went to the king, and obtained from him the privilege that, in all the deliberations of the university, the vote of one Bohemian professor would count as much as the votes of three Germans, or as the votes of any three professors coming from any other country than Bohemia. The other professors were offended. They left Prague, and to them is mainly due the credit of establishing the famous University of Leipzig. John Huss was now master of the University of Prague. The Bohemian, Saxon, Bavarian, and Polish professors who were with him in the university, were offended by his boldness, bowed down before his sovereign will.

learning of the lowly born were frequently forgotten. Be that as it may, John Huss had soon a large following. Simek, Archbishop of Prague, called a Synod, at which were gathered men remarkable alike for virtue and learning. This Synod condemned the doctrines taught by Huss. Huss strove to stir up the people to oppose the Synod. The Archbishop excommunicated him. He appealed to the Pope; in the meantime the Archbishop died, and Bohemia became a prey to the growing heresy. The heresy preached by John Huss aimed chiefly at sapping the authority of the Pope, and of the superiors in the Church. He said that priests, though excommunicated, ought to preach; but civil and ecclesiastical lords, as Prelates and Bishops, lost all right to rule when they were guilty of mortal sin.

John Huss was fast approaching his unhappy end. He was cited to Rome by the Pope; he refused to obey the summons. In 1414 a General Council was held in the city of Constance. Huss was summoned to defend his doctrines before the council to defend his doctrines, by the Emperor Sigismund. "This Council," said Schlegel, "Sigismund, true to the ancient idea of emperor as protector of the Church, and of the whole Christian republic of Europe, supported with the utmost zeal the standard of the Council. A social cause more nearly touching his own interest, for he needed these general assemblies of the Church, and the expression of public opinion they formed, in order to subdue the more readily the Hussites, either by forcible or by peaceful means."

And now, in the early Hussite war, for the first time, perceive what fruitful effects must ensue when the affairs of the Church and of Christianity, neglected by their spiritual and temporal heads, whose first duty it had been to watch over them, at last devolve upon a passionately excited people, to be decided by a desolating civil war."

Huss refused to leave Prague unless the emperor furnished him with a safe conduct. Sigismund gave him the safe conduct demanded. Instead of peacefully awaiting the issue of the council, or preparing to defend his doctrines, Huss raised the standard of revolt, and freed himself from the control of Albert of Austria. Wenceslaus sold the duchy of Milan for one hundred thousand florins; one by one he sold out to the highest bidder many of his richest and fairest provinces. He had lost every feeling of manly dignity and self-respect; but the stubbornness of the tyrant and the stottishness of the drunkard accompanied him to the last.

In 1383, the princes and states begged the tyrant to leave Bohemia, to reside in the empire, and put a stop to the growing evils. He laughed at their fears, spurred their entreaties, and continued to allow as he pleased, which shocked the good and enabled the bad to plunge the whole land into deepest misery. He had no pity for the wretched. The cry of the widow and the orphan was heard in every street and corner of the kingdom. Still Wenceslaus ate like a glutton, drank like a drunkard, and laughed like a madman. By the advice of his brother Sigismund, the twelfth of Bohemia looked him up twice as a dangerous lunatic; he escaped from his keepers, but a fit of apoplexy swept him from the lane he had so long cursed with his presence; the German empire and the kingdom of Bohemia began to breathe the pure air of freedom, and to grow strong under the rule of the wise and able Emperor Sigismund.

There is deep solemn silence in the hospital of the Cistercian monastery. He is lying motionless on his bed. A group of monks are kneeling on the floor, their heads bowed in prayer; they are praying for the eternal rest of a departed soul; they are begging the Almighty to have mercy on the soul of the generous Ofried.

The END.

IN AN OLD CASTLE.

A MYSTERIOUS GHOST. A PICTURE AND A HAPPY DISCOVERY.

Every evening since I had come, old Shawms had been sitting in the old house or something within it yet drew me back.

madly to the front, and though he quickly disabled more than one of them, they dragged him from his horse and trampled him to death. The troop of soldiers fought bravely, but were at length overpowered and disbanded.

At the beginning of the conflict Mauper turned and fled; but the moment Hatto was dragged to the ground his horse was mounted by one of the Hussites, who followed Mauper, overtook him, and slew him.

Thus perished two men joined through life in forming plots of the deepest villainy. Their names were not linked with a single virtue. They fell under the hands of men whom they had wickedly incited to rebel; they were made the victims of passions which they inflamed for the purpose of achieving their own heartless aims.

The fate of Wenceslaus is soon told. Four years after the martyrdom of St. John Nepomucene Wenceslaus lost his gentle and virtuous queen. The death of his wife gave her a terrible shock. Weak and languishing, she lingered from 1383 to 1387, when she closed a life of great self-sacrifice and keen sorrow, to begin a life of peace and changeless rest with the blessed.

Wenceslaus remained some months in the castle of Zboraz, whether he had fled on the night of St. John's martyrdom. His heart grew harder; his ear was deaf to the voice of Heaven; his only joy was the brutal pleasure arising from a slothful voluptuous life. But his punishment came swiftly. The whole empire was a scene of bloodshed and wild ungovernable disorder. The Switzers raised the standard of revolt, and freed themselves from the control of Albert of Austria. Wenceslaus sold the duchy of Milan for one hundred thousand florins; one by one he sold out to the highest bidder many of his richest and fairest provinces. He had lost every feeling of manly dignity and self-respect; but the stubbornness of the tyrant and the stottishness of the drunkard accompanied him to the last.

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loer which I thought carried some apprehension. "So close that I might have easily overtaken her," said I. "But 'tis no business of mine, though the fortune of war has made me the unwelcome guest of the house to spy on a lady, living or dead."

"Madam could hear your Honor," said Shawms. "She would not grudge you the shelter of her house, then."

"Not to your Honor any more than the people in the valley grudge the shelter of their rooftrees to your Honor's Highlanders. There were terrible tales before you came. The women were for hiding themselves in the vaults in the old abbey."

"Alas," said I. "If others had come in our place they would have had too much cause."

"Would your Honor know the ghost again if you were to see it?" asked Shawms, with the sly look which evoked the fear of a timid and meek old man.

"The garments," I returned. "I caught no glimpse of her face."

"Would your Honor come with me?" he asked, his smile all deference, his old hand inclining toward one of the silver candlesticks.

I rose and followed him. At the end of the first flight of stone steps he unlocked a door. The place struck odd, and the candle was but a glow-worm lamp amid all that darkness.

I followed him down the long stately room. The moon came from behind a cloud and mildly illuminated it. Pictures were ranged along the walls. There were cabinets between the long window full of china and silver. It was well the Highlander had come here and not the Hessians. The house had great treasures, although it was falling to ruin.

of death I should cease to be haunted by the face of the living woman. Up she came, with the swish, with the silks all rustling softly and a light came with her. A second more she came showed above the upper step. She carried a silver branch of three wax candles; and their light was full on her face. It was pale, paler than the face of the portrait, yet the minute I saw it, I knew it was the face of no ghost but of a warm, living woman.

Hardly had my blood begun to run tumultuously through my veins at the knowledge that it was frozen again. Had I made an unconscious movement? "Hush!" said the lady, in the softest whisper, and then drew back little by little.

When I saw she was not alone, A extremely handsome youth was with her, following close behind.

"Did you hear anything, Harry?" she asked in a whisper.

"Nothing, sweet," he replied. "The room was always a place of strange noises at night."

His face came into the light of the candle. He wore his hair unpowdered and it fell over the collar of a soldier's cloak. Under the cloak I saw the glitter of uniform. He had fine blue eyes and features of a classical delicacy and dignity, finely set off by his magnificent black hair. He looked pale and harassed, and I thought he held a hand to his side.

So much I recalled afterward, and wondered how I had carried so clear an impression from the black passion of rage and jealousy which swept over me at the sight of her lover.

As they stood there, she hitching me slipped an arm about her neck. "I had went to my sword. I would have killed him without a scruple. The her words saved him."

"Your wound—she began."

So he was wounded and unharmed. I turned away, setting my teeth in the darkness. When I looked again, the had passed up the stairs.

Now, even then, in the extremity of my jealousy, I did the lady no wrong. So it was a lie old Shawms had told me, and the family yet hid in the wilderness of the great house, which had never thought to explore. Much consideration had I shown them though I believed it empty. Doubtless they had thought me coming; the soldierly menaced them with all its speechless things, as it had done elsewhere, and so they barrowed away from me poor Highland gentlemen who would not have been a hair's breadth from the door of their heads. And the lady's lover—rebel, doubtless—came to see her nightly.

I tossed on my bed sleepless till morning. I, who had not known sleepless night till I came to Kilmanus Abbey, I had not thought to explore. Much consideration had I shown them though I believed it empty. Doubtless they had thought me coming; the soldierly menaced them with all its speechless things, as it had done elsewhere, and so they barrowed away from me poor Highland gentlemen who would not have been a hair's breadth from the door of their heads. And the lady's lover—rebel, doubtless—came to see her nightly.

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