

# HOME & SCHOOL.

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## John Huss, the Martyr of Bohemia.

BY THE EDITOR

MORE than five hundred years ago, in 1373, a child was born in a little town in Bohemia, whose heroic life and tragic death were to become in the eyes of millions the chief glory of his native land. He became a great scholar and professor in the University of Prague, and adopted the doctrines of John Wyckliffe, the morning star of the English Reformation. For this he was arraigned before the great Council of Constance, in 1414, the Emperor Sigismund giving him a letter of safe-conduct, which was flagrantly violated.

After six months' weary confinement, Huss was at length brought before the Council. "Fear not," he said to his friends: "I have good hope that the words which I have spoken in the shade shall hereafter be preached on the housetop." In the great hall of the Kauf haus, where the tourist to-day gazes with curious eye on the fading frescoes on the wall, the great Council of Constance sat—prelates, priests, and deacons, in mitres, alb, stole, chasuble and dalmatic, and secular princes in robes of state and wearing the insignia of office—all to crush one manaced but unconquerable man. The writings of Huss were presented—there were twenty-seven in all—the authorship of which he frankly admitted. From these thirty-nine articles were extracted alleged to be heretical. Huss attempted to reply, but was met by an outburst of mockery and abuse. "One would have said," writes one who was present, "that those men were ferocious wild beasts rather than grave and learned doctors." Huss appealed to the Scriptures, but was howled down with rage. "They all," says Luther, in his vigorous phrase, "worked themselves into a frenzy like wild boars—they bent their brows and gnashed their teeth against John Huss."

Two days later he was again arraigned. For nearly two hours an almost total eclipse darkened the sun—and if in sympathy with the dire eclipse of truth and justice on the



MARTYRDOM OF JOHN HUSS.

earth. The Emperor sat on his throne of state. Men in armour guarded the prisoner in chains. "If I die," said Huss to a friend, "God will answer for me at the Day of Judgment."

Again he was arraigned, and again he was condemned by the Council. Still, his saintly life, his great learning, his heroic courage commanded the admiration even of his enemies; and

they exhorted him even with tears to abjure, and a form of recantation was presented to him. "How can I?" he asked. "It is better for me to die, than by avoiding momentary pain to fall into the hands of God, and perhaps into eternal fire. I have appealed to Jesus Christ, the one All-powerful and All-just Judge; to Him I commit my cause, who will judge every man, not

according to false witness and erring councils, but according to truth and man's dessert." He was accused of arrogance in opposing his opinion to that of so many learned doctors. "Let but the lowest in the Council," he replied, "convince me, and I will humbly own my error. Till I am convinced," he added, with grand loyalty to conscience, "not the whole universe shall force me to recant."

Huss spent his last hours in prison in writing to his friends in Prague. "Love ye one another"—so runs his valediction—"never turn any one aside from the divine truth. Fear not them that kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul." His faithful friends loved him too well to counsel moral cowardice. They urged him to be faithful to the end. "Dear master," said the brave knight, John de Chlum, "I am an unlettered man, unfit to counsel one so learned. But if in your conscience you feel yourself to be innocent, do not commit perjury in the sight of God, nor leave the path of truth for fear of death." "O noble and most faithful friend," exclaimed Huss with an unwonted gush of tears, I conjure thee depart not until thou hast seen the end of all. Would to God I were now led to the stake rather than be worn away in prison."

After all, Huss was but human. In his lonely cell he had his hours of depression, and, like his blessed Master, his soul was at times exceedingly sorrowful. "It is hard," he wrote, "to rejoice in tribulation. The flesh, O Lord! is weak. Let Thy Spirit assist and accompany me. For without Thee I cannot brave this cruel death. . . . Written in chains," is the pathetic superscription of the letter,

"on the eve of the day of St. John the Baptist, who died in prison for having condemned the iniquity of the wicked."

But for the most part his courage was strong, and, like Paul and Silas, he sang in the prison: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"