

no longer Jesus and his apostles, as we know them in Scripture, but the priest of their parish. The court of appeal for the conscience was no longer the Bible, but the priest, or above him, the priest of priests—the Pope of Rome.

At the very outset this change of masters must have seemed rather a benefit than a disadvantage. A person is always more real, more inspiring, than the dead written page, and to have the law of God represented, not by a book that might be laid on a shelf, but by a person, who was the living, manifest, insuperable embodiment of that law, must have seemed a great advantage in those rough, barbarous times, especially as the priest of those days was largely a man of great self-mastery, with a passionate sense of his mission to a lost world and an enlightenment and life before which the people bowed in reverence.

"Evil thoughts are stayed
At his approach; and low-bowed necks entreat
A benediction from his voice or hand."

But the glory of this priesthood passed away, and that largely because, even for it, the keeper of the conscience was not Christ in Scripture, but the bishop of Rome. In the interests of the Church of Rome and her revenues an endless code of duties was put on the Christian, most of which were counted as binding as the moral law. Then followed the practice of remitting these duties for a sum of money, and the system of "indulgences," by which men must have been led to believe that the pardon of sin could be purchased at a price. Over and above this, so many of the lawgivers of the church were living in gross and immoral violation of the laws they made and even the fundamental laws of charity and purity, that men's hearts were growing sick of the church as their guide in life, and there was a deep yearning for a voice that would be the voice of God to them, and great was the joy when that voice was heard in the appeal of Martin Luther from the church to the Scriptures.

III. The Scriptures Found Again.

Three things brought the people back from the authority of the priest to the authority of the Scriptures:

- (a) The revival of learning.
- (b) The discovery of printing.
- (c) The translations.

(a) "The Revival of Learning" was a large movement of the mind of Europe back to the study of ancient languages. A result was the study of Holy Writ in the ancient Hebrew and Greek, and the consequence of this was that men once more knew the beautiful simplicity and moral grandeur of the

Gospel and its infinite superiority to church rites and traditions. Erasmus gave his life to putting into the hands of cultured men the New Testament in the Greek, and he boldly contrasted the simplicity of the past with the worldly pomp and pride of life of the present.

Here is an example. Commenting on the words: "The Kingdom of God comes without observation," he says: "I saw with my own eyes (Pope) Julius II. at Bologna, and afterwards at Rome, marching at the head of a triumphal procession as if he were Pompey or Caesar. St. Peter subdued the world by faith and not with arms or soldiers or military engines. St. Peter's successors would win as many victories as St. Peter won if they had Peter's spirit."

That Erasmus felt that he had found Christ in the New Testament may be seen in his words:

"These books give us a living image of Christ's holy mind. Were we to have seen him with our own eyes we should not have had so intimate a knowledge as they give of Christ speaking, healing, dying, rising again, as it were, in our actual presence."

No wonder that Erasmus, having found Christ in the Gospels, wished all men to know him. "I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospels, should read the epistles of Paul, and I wish that they were translated into all languages so that they might be read and understood not only by Scots and Irishmen but also by Turks and Saracens. I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, and that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey."

(b) The second matter that brought back the Scriptures to their place of authority over the conscience of the people was the "Discovery of Printing." Its immediate result was that books became many and cheap, even to the poor. Had Erasmus' New Testament been circulated by copies in handwriting, how slow would have been the growth of its influence. Printed, it seized on men's minds in every country and every station. The Pope on his throne and the poor monk Martin Luther in his cell, each had his copy. A handwritten copy of Wycliffe's New Testament sold at \$220 of our money; a printed copy of Tyndale's New Testament, at about \$10. Printing, by making it possible for every man to have his Bible, restored the Scriptures to their place of authority over men's minds.

(c) "Translations." Only one step was now wanting. It was to give the Scriptures to the people in the language they could understand and which they loved. Martin Luther gave the Germans their Bible.

In England two generations of scholars set themselves to the task, and the result of their work is that we hold in our hands