



ELGIN CATHEDRAL NAVE, LOOKING EAST.

Here is the picture that presents itself to my mind. A semi-barbarous country with a most corrupt Church; but corrupt largely because the State had seized its honours and offices, as provision for royal scions and favourites. A turbulent people, not taking kindly to the exactions of lords spiritual even in the palmy days when the church was supreme—as witness, for example, the tragic ends of the Bishops of Caithness and Orkney. Aspirations—such as the air of the world was thick with at that time—after larger breathing space: for the mind an “ampler ether,” for the soul a “diviner air.” And a rebellious movement—the vibration of that which was shaking other lands—against the ecclesiastical despotism that had replaced primitive truth with empty dogmatic formulæ and debasing superstition.

Let us give the Papacy its due. To it, as to a strong centralizing power, all Western Europe looked, when the barbarians of the North flocked into Italy and put an end to the Empire; and it was equal to the emergency. Never in the history of the world met such incongruous, contradictory elements as in the Rome of that day; yet the Church with marvellous power and skill assimilated them, and out of them created modern Europe. The history of the religion, the polity, the thought, even, of the Middle Ages, is all comprised in the history of the Roman Church.

But by the middle of the fifteenth century the glory of this ecclesiastical empire was past. Thought had ceased to be creative; polity had become Machiavellian intrigue; religion was not even a cloak for the sins of such men as Innocent VIII. and Alexander VI., and the conclave that elected and the court that surrounded them. Here and there great saints did splendid service; and, in the world and in the cloister, many a holy life was lived. But the head and the heart of the system were diseased, and the world rebelled against it.

I think it is Heine that plays with the fancy that Leo X. was just as much a Protestant as Luther, but that his protestantism did not express itself in theses but in beautiful objects of art. Fancy aside, the ruling passion of Leo expresses the limitations of the movement in Italy. It began and ended in the realm of thought, and the result was the Renaissance. As it travelled northward, and reached graver, more earnest people, it passed from the domain of thought into that of religion—taking shape in the Reformation. And still later, among the practical Anglo-Saxons, it passed from religion to politics—its outcome being the Revolution.

Amid the chaos of contending elements that marked the religious phase of the movement in

Scotland, a few figures stand out with startling distinctness, and above all others those of Queen Mary and John Knox. Surely never went prejudice further than in painting the character of Mary as her enemies have painted it. Brought up at the most corrupt court in Europe, and by those to whom, literally, language was “a means for concealing thought,” she brought to Scotland, with the dignity of a queen, the open heart and unaffected manners of girlhood. Her life, as she ordered it on assuming the government of her own country, seems worthy of all praise. We hear of her reading Livy daily with Buchanan, sitting in Council with her nobles, and entertaining the envoys of foreign princes. With the easy manners of her race, she was always accessible to her people; accepting the hospitalities of the wealthier citizens, and having “for the poorest a ready smile and a pleasant word.” Free outdoor life with hawk and hound was dearer to her than the ceremonial state of palaces. The interest taken by her in her people is shown by the fact that during the four years prior to her marriage she visited every part of her kingdom south of the Firth of Cromarty. Her generosity was unbounded; and her moderation in religious matters so great, that she refused to re-establish the Roman Catholic ritual by force, and begged only for liberty of conscience.

Of all the enemies of the youthful queen, Knox seems to me the most worthy of respect, because the ends at which he was aiming were not selfish ends. Every one of them except the Reformer had some personal ambition to serve; and some wrought by open ruffianly violence, and others by smooth-faced duplicity. Knox himself was coarse, arrogant, violent; but he was absolutely sincere.

He was a man, we cannot doubt, on whom the debased condition of the Church had made a profound impression; and who felt himself commissioned to preach not only of sin and of righteousness, but, above all, of judgment. He had entered, he believed, into the counsels of the Most High, and been divinely ordained to execute His will. A reform *within* the Church—such as was carried out in England, and such as Martland of Lettington and others would gladly have seen carried out in Scotland—was to him no reform at all. Apostolic succession, historical continuity, were nothing to him. The old was to be destroyed, root and branch, and he himself was to found the Church of Christ anew.

And the foundations of this Church, like those of the Druids, were to be laid in blood. How Knox revelled in biblical scenes of carnage wrought in the service of God! The Old Testament—as interpreted by himself—was his *vade mecum*. The slaying of Agag by Samuel, and of the prophets of Baal by Elijah, were texts for the sermon he was never weary of preaching—that “the idolater must die the death”; while without hesitation he identified as that idolater the priest of Rome. For woman's weakness he had no chivalrous tenderness, but rather a rude contempt; and it was unbearable to him that Mary should be permitted to practice, or even to profess, the “idolatry” he was bent upon extirpating. The Queen, on the other hand, “brought up in joyousitie,” as she pathetically reminded her persecutors, must have found little to attract her in a religion that seemed to make her chief business in life the listening to long sermons, wherein her authority was set at defiance, and resistance to a “wicked ruler” taught as the plainest duty of the subject. In Scotland, as well as in England, “new presbyter was but old priest writ large.”

We shudder at the apparent blood-thirstiness of Knox's teachings. We revolt against his assumption: “We are the only part of your people that truly fear God.” We see all the inconsistency of his arguments. The people of God, if in a minority, must have their right to liberty of conscience respected by the idolatrous majority; but, if in a majority, must arise and execute God's vengeance on the idolatrous minority. And we marvel at, as much as we lament, the narrow-mindedness that doomed, and the ruthlessness that destroyed, the sanctuaries which piety had reared and consecrated.



ELGIN CATHEDRAL, TRANSEPT AND WEST TOWERS.