

## THE WOOL-CARDER OF MEAUX.

Soon after the Reformation broke out in Germany, the doctrines by which it was sustained entered sunny France to find many adherents. The Lutheran opinions—which meant in the main a revival of the evangelical faith which had been the life of the Primitive Church—were mightily stimulated by the publication of the French translation of the New Testament in the year 1528. Jacobus Lefevre is with some justice regarded as the Tyndale of France; and he gave to the people that bread of life which had sustained his own soul. In the preface he openly accepted the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith in Christ as the sinner's only hope. Though he was at that time a very aged man, Lefevre was able to complete the translation of the entire Bible in 1530; and a high authority tells us, that the work "at once took a high place, has often been reprinted, and has, indeed, been the basis of all subsequent French versions." The effect of the circulation of the book was immediate. Stealthily, as it were, the copies found their way through the land, carried in this direction and in that by faithful men who understood the power of the Word. People read with the wonder of those who make a new discovery; the Scriptures went to their hearts with all the force and freshness of a new revelation.

One of the centres in which the doctrines were most gladly received was Meaux, a small manufacturing town, and the district became the seat of an evangelical church. For a time Briconnet, the bishop and the friend of the pious Queen Margaret, sister of King Francis I., was himself an earnest preacher of the Word. So great was the revival in all directions, that one might have supposed that the winter of superstition and formality was over, and that the springtide of a new era was opening. The people of Meaux were for the most part of the artisan class, the majority being employed in the wooltrade. A chronicler of the sixteenth century says that, "In many was engendered so ardent a desire to know the way of salvation, that artisans, carders, spinners, and combers, employed themselves, while engaged in manual labor, in conversing on the Word of God, and deriving comfort from it. In particular, Sundays and festivals were employed in reading the Scriptures, and enquiring after the goodwill of the Lord."

Before the revival broke out in Meaux the wool-carder John Leclerc had been one of the most servile followers of the priests; but the evangelical light entered his household, his wife and two sons were converted, and John began to ask himself whether there was not something more in what might look like new doctrines than he had at first suspected. He was soon numbered among the band of believers. The Reformers grew more bold and sanguine day by day. What did they care for priests and monks when their hearts were fixed on the true rock of salvation?

The grace of God which he had received into his heart filled Leclerc with that zeal and courage which fitted him to become a leader of his humble associates; and thus he was soon recognized as the leader of the evangelical church in Meaux. The wool-carder's zeal in the new service carried him quite away; he knew nothing of the prudence which many friends of the evangelical faith would have seen him exercise. It was not enough to teach and exhort the disciples of Christ in the assembly; Leclerc visited the members of the church in their households, to confirm them in the faith and to urge them to remain steadfast. He knew nothing of nervous shrinking; he wrote out what he had to say and posted the paper on the gate of Meaux Cathedral. No such scene as that which followed had been witnessed in the city since it had become the seat of a bishop. The crowd which assembled at the gate was overcome with astonishment; the monks and priests were correspondingly enraged. It was bad enough when the arch-heretic of Wittenberg had attacked the pope in a similar way; but for a mere working man to assail the Church was past all bearing. The clamor of the Franciscans for Leclerc to be made a fitting example of was too great to be resisted. The offender was arrested and cast into prison.

A trial followed. The sentence on the wool-carder was that he should be beaten through the streets of Meaux for three

days successively—beaten with rods. "Leclerc, with his hands tied and his back bare, was led through the streets, and the executioners let fall upon his body those blows which he had brought upon himself by attacking the bishop of Rome," says the historian. "An immense crowd followed the procession, the course of which might have been traced by the blood of the martyr." In the main, those who looked on and followed were probably in sympathy with the monks and priests, who seemed capable of any cruelty in support of their cause. Some cried out in rage against him; others, more compassionate, looked on in silence, or gave expression to their abhorrence of the scene. But there was one, however, who with unfaltering "eye and tongue" encouraged the confessor to bear and brave all for Christ's sake. The woman who showed this heroism and dependence upon God was the mother of Leclerc. Her gentle voice mingled with the savage cries of the bloodthirsty throng—"Blessed be Christ! and welcome be His prints and marks!" This she said when her son was branded as a heretic in the

short distance away in the suburbs there was a noted chapel, furnished with an image of the Virgin and certain "saints," and to which the priests with a great following periodically resorted. One of these festivals was about to take place, and the soul of the pious wool-carder was stirred within him when he thought of the poor people being thus led astray when they should be instructed in the things of Christ. What had the Lord himself spoken? "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works; but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images." Again the words seemed to be spoken to himself.

In the stillness of evening Leclerc went to the chapel, or to what was to him the house of idols, in and around which the already expectant people would crowd on the morrow. He was there alone, and for some time he remained looking upon the images, his heart becoming filled with indignation when he thought of the revival of paganism in the name of Christianity which these images represented. Then he arose, and seizing one of the "saints," hurled it down

Leclerc had no desire to conceal anything; he confessed all, at the same time taking the opportunity to confess Christ before his enemies as the one Saviour to be preferred before all saints and images. The outspoken boldness of the Christian mechanic only increased the rage of his enemies; and being taken before the judges he was at once condemned to be burned alive, all such frightful tortures being added as the inventive genius of inquisitors could think of. His arms were broken in several places; he was mutilated with red-hot pincers, and otherwise treated in a manner such as the deadly hatred of the powers of darkness alone could have inspired. What was the Divine support given to a martyr in such an hour of fiery trial? One thing appears to be certain, that it was greater than we are able to realize: for otherwise, how are we to account for a man's apparent peace of mind, and settled determination still to confess his Lord even in the fire? In a loud, clear voice, Leclerc said in the words of the Psalmist: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them: so is everyone that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord; he is their help and their shield."

The martyr was burned at a slow fire in order to increase his torments, but all that the cruelty of his murderers could devise seemed only to have the effect of increasing his triumph in his Lord and the everlasting gospel.

Thus lived and died the first martyr of the Reformation in France. The memory of Leclerc, the humble wool-carder, is still green in Metz and Lorraine.—*Sunday at Home.*

## ASK AND RECEIVE.

I have a word of counsel to give those who have just entered Christian life, and that is, be faithful in prayer. You might as well, business man, start out in the morning without food and expect to be strong all day—you might as well abstain from food all the week and expect to be strong physically, as to be strong without prayer. The only way to get any strength into the soul is by prayer, and the only difference between that Christian who is worth everything and that who is worth nothing is the fact that the last does not pray and the other does. And the only difference between this Christian who is getting along very fast in the holy life, and this who is getting along only tolerably is that the first prays more than the last. You can graduate a man's progress in religion by the amount of prayer, not by the number of hours, perhaps, but by the earnest supplication that he puts up to God.

A minister comes into the pulpit. He has a magnificent sermon, all the sentences rounded according to the laws of rhetoric and fine sermonizing, and the truth makes no impression on the hearts of men. People go away and say: "Very beautiful, wasn't it?" A plain man comes into the pulpit. He has been on his knees before God, asking for an especial message that day, and the hearts of men open to the plain truth, the broken sentences strike into their consciences, and, though the people may disperse at the close of the services seemingly without having received any impression, that night voices will be lifted in some household: "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" Oh, this power of prayer! Pray! Pray! —*Dr. Talmage.*

## LICENSED.

- Licensed—to make the strong man weak;
- Licensed—to lay the wise man low;
- Licensed—a wife's fond heart to break,  
And cause the children's tears to flow.
- Licensed—to do thy neighbor harm;
- Licensed—to kindle hate and strife;
- Licensed—to nerve the robber's arm;
- Licensed—to whet the murderer's knife.
- Licensed—where peace and quiet dwell  
To bring disease, and want, and woe;
- Licensed—to make the home a hell,  
And fit men for a hell below.



"BLESSED BE CHRIST!" CRIED HIS MOTHER, "AND WELCOME BE HIS PRINTS AND MARKS!"

face with hot irons. Thus did this Frenchwoman of the sixteenth century, as Merle d'Aubigne remarks, fulfil the commandment of the Son of God: "He that loveth his son more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Such boldness, and at such a moment, merited signal punishment; but this Christian mother had appalled the hearts both of priests and soldiers. All their fury was controlled by a stronger arm than theirs. The crowd, respectfully making way, allowed the martyr's mother slowly to regain her dwelling. The monks, and even the town-sergeants, gazed on her without moving. "Not one of her enemies dared lay hands upon her," said Theodore Beza.

In Metz and about Lorraine, Leclerc still continued to instruct the ignorant, and to build up those who had accepted the faith. As he read the terrific denunciations of idolatry in Scripture, the burning words seemed to be spoken directly from heaven to himself, and he would not have been true to himself if he had failed to act according to his light.

In a Romish sense, Metz was a superstitious city, and the common people were almost wholly given up to idolatry. A

with all his force to the floor, and the fragments were scattered in front of the altar. Then he took hold of another and did likewise, until every one of the images resembled Dagon when the Philistines found him broken in pieces. The wool-carder returned to Metz; but there were those who saw the image-breaker enter the town.

On the following morning the old Lorraine city was all astir betimes; the bells rang merrily, and the people in their holiday clothes turned out into the streets to keep the festival of the "saints." A great crowd, preceded by the principal churchmen of the place, was seen moving towards the chapel in the suburbs. The old sixteenth century chronicler quaintly tells us what next happened. When the throng came "to the place of idolatry, to worship as was their wont, they found all their blocks and stocks almighty lie broken upon the ground; at the sight whereof they, being mightily offended in their minds, set all the city agog, to search out the author thereof, who was not hard to be found." Everybody knew that the wool-carder was no friend of images and the superstitious celebrations to which they gave rise, so that he was at once suspected and arrested.