

CHAPTER V.

KNOX AS LEADER OF OUR REFORMATION.

As stated towards the close of my last lecture, the sword-bearer of Wishart stood forth at once "to wield the spiritual sword which had fallen from the master's grasp, and to wield it with a vigour and trenchant execution superior even to his."

At this time Knox was full forty years of age, having been born at Giffordgate, in Haddington, in 1505. He probably received the rudiments of his education there, and matriculated at the University of Glasgow in 1522. Some suppose that he may have followed Major to St Andrews in 1523, or may have come there later, to study theology or to act as a private tutor to some young men studying at that university. But there is no reference to him in the university books, nor mention of his presence by any one then resident. From 1522 up to 1545-46, when he appears as sword-bearer to Wishart, his life is to us almost a blank. But as Minerva was said to have come full armed from the brain of

Jupiter, so did Knox then start up as leader of our Reformation, fully equipped and singularly matured. Whatever his early training may have been, he had by that time thoroughly mastered the subjects in controversy between the two churches, and possibly, as Bayle supposes, had made himself acquainted in his retirement with the writings of that great doctor of the western church to whom Luther, Calvin, and Alesius were largely indebted. I believe no man in recent times has in brief space sketched his character, both on its brighter and darker sides, with less partisan feeling than Dr Merle D'Aubigné, when he says: "The blood of warriors ran in the veins of the man who was to become one of the most intrepid champions of Christ's army. . . . He was active, bold, thoroughly upright and perfectly honest, diligent in his duties, and full of heartiness for his comrades. But he had in him also a firmness which came near to obstinacy, an independence which was very much like pride, a melancholy which bordered on prostration, a sternness which some took for insensibility, and a passionate force sometimes mistakenly attributed to a vindictive temper."¹ According to Calderwood, he received his first "taste of the truth" from the preaching of his fellow-countryman, Thomas Guilliame or Williams, a black friar, who in 1543 became one of the chaplains of the

¹ D'Aubigné's *Reformation in the Time of Calvin*, vi. 17.

regent, and shortly after, being inhibited to preach, retired into England.¹ The good seed sown by him was watered by Wishart, and grew up apace, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

On 29th May 1546, while the applause of priests and friars was still ringing in his ears, and he was proudly congratulating himself on the progress of his new fortifications, and the success of all his measures to secure the triumph of his party and his own complete personal ascendancy, the cardinal was suddenly surprised by conspirators in his stronghold, and cut off by "a fate as tragical and ignominious" as almost "any that has ever been recorded in the long catalogue of human crimes."² Only the deep feeling of relief thus given from merciless oppression could prompt or excuse the lines of Sir David Lindsay—

"As for the Cardinal, I grant
He was a man we weill culd want,
And we'll forget him sune ;
But yet I think the sooth to say,
Although the loon is weill away,
The deed was foully dune."³

¹ Calderwood's History, i. 155, 156, 160; Laing's Knox, i. 95, 96, 105. [Calderwood says that Williams was born "beside Elstonefurde, in East Lothiane."]

² Lorimer's Scottish Reformation, pp. 155, 156.

³ [Though these lines are continually attributed to Lindsay, I do not remember to have ever seen them in any edition of his works, or quoted as his by any earlier writer than Wodrow.]

When it became known that the conspirators who assassinated Betoun meant to hold the castle of St Andrews, they were joined by a considerable number of their friends from among the reforming gentry of Fife, and gradually by others from a greater distance who were friendly to the Reformation and the English alliance, and in consequence were then being subjected to many annoyances at the hands of the regent and his new following. Among these last, about Pasche 1547—in charge of his pupils, the sons of certain lairds in East Lothian—came John Knox, whose life, ever since he had cast in his lot with Wishart, had been made so miserable to him by the regent's bastard brother¹—the aspirant to the vacant archbishopric—that, but for this refuge unexpectedly opened to him, he would have found it necessary to leave his native land and follow Alesius, Fyfe, and others to Germany or Switzerland. At the time when he arrived in St Andrews there was a truce between the regent and the occupants of the castle, and with the latter the inhabitants of the city had pretty free intercourse. The reforming citizens resorted at times

¹ [According to Knox, though "called bastard brother to the governour," many deemed him to be a son of "the old Bischope of Dunkelden, called Crychtoun" (Laing's Knox, i. 105). Buchanan says he was "first callid *Cunningham*, estemit *Corvane*, and at last Abbot *Hamilton*" (Admonition to the trew Lordis). In a transcript used by Ruddiman, *Givane* occurs instead of *Corvane*.]

to the services in the chapel of the castle; and John Rough, the chaplain of the garrison, under the powerful protection he enjoyed, occasionally forced his way into the parish church and preached there to the assembled citizens.

Knox was no sooner settled in St Andrews than he resumed the system he had followed with good effect in East Lothian, causing his pupils to give account of their catechism in public to all who chose to come, and opening up in a plain and colloquial manner the Gospel of St John. His great ability and success as a teacher, and his wonderful gift of persuasive speech, thus became generally known. After private but unsuccessful efforts had been made by Balnaves and others to induce him to become colleague to John Rough, a formal call to the ministry was, with the counsel of Sir David Lindsay,¹ publicly addressed to him from the pulpit by Rough, in the name of the rest, and he was solemnly adjured not to despise the voice of God speaking to him. Thus honourably called to assume the office of a public preacher in that reformed congregation, he at last entered on the work with all his heart, and made full proof of his ministry before the assembled citizens in their parish church, as well as before the rude

¹ [Laing's Knox, i. 186. Though the Lyon King was then in St Andrews, he was not one of those who were sheltering in the castle (Laing's Lindsay's Poetical Works, 1879, vol. i. pp. xxxix, xli).]

garrison in the castle chapel. He administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the simple form he always used, and continued the public catechising of his pupils, which the people of the town heard repeated till they had the substance of his teaching by heart, and thus was spread a knowledge of Gospel truth even among those who could not read. A very graphic account is given in his History of the sermons, catechisings, and disputations he held with the popish champions, by means of which the new doctrines gained a hold on the minds of the citizens of St Andrews which they never wholly lost. But times of trial were to come ere the cause should finally triumph in that city, or in his native land; and the earnest preacher, whose mouth God had opened in that old parish church, was to be taught by sad experience how hard it is to leave all and simply follow Christ, ere he was to be privileged to see the full fruit of his labours.

Those who had presumed to take into their hands "the sword of God" as they called it, and to mete out to the tyrant cardinal the punishment which human justice was too weak to award, were made to feel that they who take the sword must expect to suffer from the sword. They had been able to withstand the power of the regent and the attacks of his unskilful captains; but help and skill at last came to the aid of these from

their co-religionists abroad—chief among them being a militant ecclesiastic entitled Prior of Capua—and the succour promised to the garrison by England having been again and again delayed, they were obliged to surrender the castle to the representative of the French king.¹ The occupants of the castle—those who had come to it for shelter, as well as those who were really guilty of the murder—were deprived of liberty, and dealt with as criminals of the worst class. For nineteen months² our reformer had to work as a chained slave on board the French galleys, generally at Rouen or Dieppe, though sometimes a cruise was taken to more distant waters. Once, at least, he was brought within sight of the towers of the city where he had begun his ministry; and then he solemnly affirmed that he believed God would once more allow him to proclaim His word there. Even then he maintained unshaken faith in God, and at times indulged in sallies of pleasantry against his popish custodiers; but he would have been more than human if the iron had not entered into his soul, and if traces of the sternness thence arising had not long been visible in his character.

Early in 1549 he was, by English influence, re-

¹ [Knox says that the castle was rendered "upone Setterday, the last of Julij" (Laing's Knox, i. 205); Bishop Lesley says "the xxix of Julij" (Lesley's History, 1830, p. 195). In 1547, the last of July fell not on Saturday but on Sabbath.]

² Laing's Knox, vi. 104.

leased from his captivity in the French galleys, and from his exile.¹ He proceeded first to London, and thereafter to Berwick, with the approval of the English Privy Council. There he was as near to his persecuted fellow-countrymen as it was safe for him to go, and there many of them might resort to him; and in fact so many did so, that the president of the English Northern Council became anxious for his transference farther south. There also, through the appointment of the Privy Council, a wide field of usefulness was opened to him among the English. Into this he entered with his whole soul, preaching the Gospel with great boldness and success not only to the garrison and citizens of Berwick, but also in the surrounding districts; and proving himself a true successor of those early Scottish missionaries who had originally won over to the Christian faith the heathen Saxons of Northumbria. At Newcastle, in 1550, he discussed, before Tonsal, Bishop of Durham, his doctors, and the

¹ [The negotiations for the release of the captives seem to have dragged their weary length along very slowly. So early as the 29th of March 1548, Huntly wrote thus to Somerset: "The governor has agreed to exchange the men in the castle of St Andrews with Scots prisoners conform to your desire, and has sent me commission therein, as I shall show you at my coming to London: or if you send your mind to my Lord Warden, I shall appoint with him. The governor has written to the king of France to send the men taken in St Andrews to Rouen, to be ready for the exchange" (Bain's Calendar, 1543-67, p. 104).]

Northern Council, the idolatry of the mass; and in the spring of 1551 he removed his headquarters to that more central and influential town, extending his labours at times, no doubt, into Yorkshire, as well as into Northumberland and Cumberland.

His fame as an eloquent preacher, and able and ready defender of the doctrines of the Reformation, spread southwards; and at the close of 1551, or early in 1552, he was appointed one of the royal chaplains of Edward VI. In the autumn of 1552 he was summoned to the south, and preached with great power and faithfulness before the king and his court. He persistently advocated, along with the other royal chaplains, those thorough-going Protestant doctrines which, in the north, he had previously held and taught and carried out in practice. In conjunction with the other five royal chaplains, he was called to give his opinion of the Articles then proposed to be adopted as the creed of the English Church, and of the revised Communion Office then prepared to take the place of that of 1549. His objections to the act of kneeling in receiving the elements in the Lord's Supper helped to procure the insertion of that rubric which high-churchmen term "the black rubric." He refused both an English bishopric and a London rectory, and continued to labour on, faithfully and devotedly, as a preacher unat-

tached. He had a presentiment that the time he would have to do so would be brief, and he improved it to the uttermost. The Reformation in England at that date had been forced on by its courtly patrons and their earnest preachers beyond what was warranted by the hold it had as yet gained on the mass of the people. When the good King Edward¹ was succeeded by the bigoted Mary, nothing remained for the Protestant bishops and preachers but either to prove the sincerity of their convictions in prison and at the stake, or to leave the country and reserve themselves in exile for happier times. Knox, as a foreigner, was especially warranted to choose the latter course; and at the urgent request of his friends in the north he did so, when it was only not yet too late to escape.

The five years of the reformer's life which followed were not less eventful for himself nor for those of whom he now became the chosen leader. After an unsuccessful attempt to set up a substantially Puritan church among the English exiles at Frankfort, Whittingham and he obtained at Geneva, through the favour of Calvin, an asylum for themselves and their like-minded fellow-exiles, where they might be allowed peacefully to carry out their own forms of worship and discipline. But he had not been long there till,

¹ [Edward died July 6, 1553.]

at the earnest invitation of the reforming party, he paid a visit to his native land — a visit which was memorable for its immediate, and still more for its ultimate, results. For several years the cause of the Reformation had been making quiet progress. Those who could read the Scriptures had been drinking the waters of life from the fountain-head. Those who could not, drank from the streams opened by the Reformation poets, whose verses were carefully committed to memory. Then came the voice of the living preacher, accompanied, as it had never yet been in Scotland, with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power from on high. The reformer wrote that he would be content to sing his *nunc dimittis* after forty such days as he had had three of in Edinburgh. He prolonged for six months a visit which he had intended to complete in as many weeks; and, when he was at last recalled to Geneva by the urgent letters of the congregation there, he promised to his friends in Scotland that he would return whenever they saw meet to summon him and to assure him of protection from persecution.

The few quiet years which Knox and his fellow-exiles passed at Geneva were to be richly blessed to themselves and to their fatherland. He, at least, had not gone there to have his views of Christian doctrine or church order formed or

materially changed. He went to see the pure reformed faith (which he and Calvin in common believed, and independently had drawn from the Holy Scriptures and from the writings of the great doctor of the ancient church) exhibiting its benign influence in quickening to higher life, and moulding into a united community the volatile citizens of Geneva. He came to have his wearied spirit revived and refreshed by communion with devoted Christian brethren; and, by witnessing the success of their labours, to be nerved for further achievements in the service of their common Lord and for the good of his native land.

It was there that Puritanism was organised as a distinct school, if not also as a distinct party, in the church. If it had done nothing more than what it was honoured to do in the few peaceful years our fathers were permitted to spend in that much loved city by the bright blue waters of the Lemman Lake, it would have done not a little for which the church and the world would have had cause to be grateful to it still. There were first clearly proclaimed in our native language those principles of constitutional government, and the limited authority of the "upper powers," which are now universally accepted by the Anglo-Saxon race. There was first deliberately adopted and resolutely put in practice among British Christians

a form of church constitution which eliminated sacerdotalism, and taught the members of the church their true dignity and responsibility as priests to God and witnesses for Christ in the world. There was first used that Book of Common Order which was long to be the directory for public worship in the fully reformed Church of Scotland, and whose simple rites Bishop Grindal was forced to own, in his controversy with the English Puritans, he could not reprove. There was nearly completed, after the model of the French version, the English Metrical Psalter. There was planned and executed a translation of the Scriptures into our mother tongue, which for nearly half a century continued to hold its place alongside of others executed at greater leisure and more favoured by authority.¹ That was how our

¹ [The first edition of the Genevan version was printed at Geneva by Rouland Hall in 1560. "The changes made in the Geneva Bible were the adoption of Roman type instead of the black letter, in which all English Bibles had previously been printed, and the division of the chapters into verses. These changes were the principal cause of the wonderful popularity of this version, of which about 200 editions are known. From 1560 to 1616 no year passed without one or more editions issuing from the press, in folio, quarto, or octavo. In 1599 no less than ten distinct editions were printed, each of which consisted of a large number of copies. The last quarto printed in England is dated 1615, and the last folio 1616. After this time a great many editions were printed at Amsterdam by Joost Broerss and other Dutch printers; the last folio bears the imprint of Thomas Stafford, and the date 1644. . . . 150,000 copies were imported from Holland after this version had ceased to be printed in England. . . . Owing to the vast number of copies

reformer and his tireless associates occupied themselves when left freely to follow their own bent. That was how he was ultimately prepared for the great work he was to accomplish in his native country when finally invited to return to it.

Immediately after the accession of Elizabeth to the English throne in the autumn of 1558,¹ the English exiles on the Continent began to break up their congregations and return to their native land. Those at Geneva were among the first who commenced to do so; but those of them who had been occupying themselves in that translation of the Bible into English which was to prove such a blessing to their countrymen decided to remain where they were until they had finished that work.² Those who returned were at first favourably received by the queen and her advisers, and taken into service in the reconstituted church; but when it was found that they were generally averse to comply fully with the ceremonies which she fostered, a change took place.

Knox, who does not seem to have been one in circulation during the three-quarters of a century that this version was the household Bible of England, it is now the most common of all early printed Bibles. . . . The singular rendering of the 7th verse of the third chapter of Genesis in every edition of the Genevan version has caused it to be commonly known as the 'Breeches' Bible" (Dore's Old Bibles, 1888, pp. 203, 204).]

¹ [Mary Tudor died on the 17th of November 1558.]

² Troubles at Frankfort, Petheram's reprint, pp. cxci, cxcii.

of the translators, appears to have left Geneva among the earliest. In February 1558-59 we find that he had gone to Dieppe, whence, while assisting in the French Protestant services, he sent a request to Cecil for leave to pass through England on his way to Scotland, and to converse with him on some matters which deeply concerned the welfare of the Protestants in both realms.¹ But his 'First Blast of the Trumpet' was an insult which Elizabeth could not brook, and so, after waiting in vain for the desired permission for a reasonable time, he set sail from Dieppe for Scotland, and arrived in Edinburgh on the 2nd of May 1559, much to the consternation of the popish council then assembled in the city. It dissolved forthwith; but care was taken to get Knox's name, as that of an already condemned heretic, added to the list of Protestant preachers then under summons to appear before the queen regent and her council to answer for their persistence in preaching.² Knox at once

¹ [After making two requests by messengers, Knox wrote to Cecil from Dieppe on the 10th of April 1559, and on the 22nd sent from the same town a duplicate of that letter with a postscript added (Laing's Knox, ii. 15-22, vi. 15-21).]

² [The Provincial Council is said to have closed on the 10th of April (Robertson's *Concilia Scotiæ*, ii. 151, 176; Lesley's *History*, p. 271); but Knox says that it sat until he arrived in Scotland (Laing's Knox, i. 291); and that the date of his arrival was the 2nd of May (*Ibid.*, i. 318, vi. 21); and an anonymous writer alleges that the council broke up when assured that Knox had come (Wodrow *Mis-*

resolved to throw in his lot with his brethren, and went north to Dundee where the zealous Protestants of Fife, Angus, and Mearns were already assembling, determined to make common cause with their preachers, and to go forward in peaceful form to Stirling in order that they might do so, and leave the queen and her council in no doubt as to the position which they were henceforth to occupy towards her and them. They accordingly marched forward from Dundee to Perth, and sent on Erskine of Dun to Stirling to apprise the queen and council of their attitude and intentions. It is said that she promised Erskine that the prosecution of the preachers would be abandoned, but they were condemned in absence and outlawed, and the breach between the two parties thus became irrevocable. Nothing remained for the queen, from her point of view, but to prosecute the matter to the bitter end, if thereby she might succeed in silencing and repressing the Protestants.

After the regent's falsehood to Erskine and persistence in her fatal policy, the reformers proceeded at once to set about such reform as they desired, and commenced rather roughly at Perth, where they had the majority of the population in

cellany, pp. 56, 57). M'Crie suggests that, although the Acts were concluded on the 10th of April, the council may not have then closed (*Life of Knox*, 1855, p. 126, n.).]

their favour. Knox, along with Moray, went to Fife as soon after as it became apparent that forcible measures must be taken to secure toleration for the Protestants. After a few brief visits to other towns he presented himself at the public preaching-place in St Andrews. Modern historians will not allow us to say that it was in that city that he had received his university training, or had first listened to the preaching of the reformed doctrines, or been brought to a personal knowledge of the truth; but they leave untouched, as previously stated, the more important facts that it was there, when in charge of his pupils at the university, that he had first ventured at the hazard of his life openly to make known to others that which had been blessed of God to the quickening of his own soul, and publicly to exert in the cause of the Reformation those rare gifts of telling argument and persuasive speech which were destined so signally to contribute to its ultimate and permanent triumph throughout the land. It was there, probably in the old parish church, that he had been first solemnly called to the ministry of the Word in the reformed church; and there, in the chapel of the old and now ruined castle, that he had first celebrated the Lord's Supper with the same purity and simplicity with which it was afterwards observed in the fully reformed Church of

Scotland.¹ Even in exile and working as a slave in the galleys his heart had turned with special pleasure to the scene of his first labours, and he had cherished the confident expectation that God would again bring him to the place where he had first opened his mouth, and permit him again to preach from its pulpit the precious truths of His Holy Word.²

This expectation he believed that God had then fulfilled, and neither the threats of adversaries could make him quail from his purpose, nor the counsels of timid friends move him to let slip the opportunity which he believed God had then given him of bearing full and faithful testimony to the truth of God in that important city.³ He therefore boldly proclaimed before the dignitaries of the church, the doctors of the university,⁴ and

¹ [While it is apparent from Knox's own narrative that his first public sermon was delivered in the parish church of St Andrews (Laing's Knox, i. 189), it is not quite so clear whether Rough addressed the call to him in that church or in the chapel of the castle, though it rather appears to have been in the former (Ibid., i. 186-188); and the precise building in St Andrews in which he first celebrated the Lord's Supper seems to me to be also uncertain (Ibid., i. 201).]

² Laing's Knox, i. 228.

³ Ibid., i. 348, 349; vi. 25.

⁴ [Many members of the university became Protestants. The twenty-one men in St Andrews, whom the first General Assembly deemed qualified "for ministreing and teaching," were with few exceptions professors, or regents. For the number of the ecclesiastics who joined the congregation at St Andrews in the early months of the Reformation, see *supra*, p. 13. In September,

the magistrates of the burgh, as well as before more humble citizens, that doctrine of the grace of God which had long been his own solace and support, and was then being more generally recognised and embraced by his countrymen. Having thus seized the opportunity and improved it to the utmost, his efforts were so abundantly blessed by God that the cause of truth and right finally triumphed there. The reformed worship was by general consent peaceably set up, and the authority of the archbishop was virtually ended in the very stronghold of his power. That which, with the divine blessing, the reformer's preaching then accomplished in St Andrews, was by the same or similar means effected in the chief cities of the kingdom, and throughout the greater part of the lowlands, almost within the compass of a single year. In fact, four months after his arrival, he could write to his friends: "Nothwithstanding the fevers have vexed me, . . . yitt have I travelled through the most part of this realme where (all praise be to His blessed Majestie) men of all sorts and conditiouns embrace the Truthe. . . . We doe nothing but goe about Jericho, blowing with trumpets as God giveth strenth, hoping [for the] victorie by His power

1566, St Andrews was emphatically declared to be "the most flourishing city as to divine and human learning in all Scotland" (Laing's Knox, vi. 546).]

alone."¹ The reformer's expectation of victory, and of victory by the persuasive means which Bishop Hooper affirmed were alone legitimate and in accord with Christ's will, was neither disappointed nor long deferred. The great body of the nation, with unexampled rapidity and unanimity, embraced the truth, and submitted to the discipline of their teacher, and under its salutary influence, as Stähelin in his 'Johannes Calvin' affirms, from being one of the rudest, most ignorant, indigent, and turbulent peoples, grew to be one of the most civilised, educated, prosperous, and upright which our family of nations can show.

Believing that we have no cause to be ashamed of the great revolution which was thus effected, or of aught which has legitimately followed from it, but that we need to have our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance of the great things the Lord has done for us, I proceed to direct attention to the distinctive characteristics of the Scottish Reformation in respect of doctrine, worship, government, discipline, and church life, and the lessons which such a review should tend to rivet on the hearts of those who still hold fast its principles and long to see them more fully carried out.

¹ Laing's Knox, vi. 78.