

THE LIFE
OF
JOHN KNOX,
THE SCOTTISH REFORMER.

WRITTEN FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION, AND
REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The ASSU, now called American Missionary Fellowship (AMF), has been associated with some of America's most prominent citizens and religious leaders. Included among ASSU officers or influenced by its mission were Bishop William White of Philadelphia's Christ Church; Bushrod Washington (President George Washington's nephew); Francis Scott Key, who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner"; D.L. Moody; Laura Ingalls Wilder; and John Adams (related to both early American presidents), who personally organized over 320 Sunday schools.

ASSU missionaries carried books published by the mission in saddlebags to leave with the fledgling Sunday schools they had started, promoting literacy, education, and the very best in Christian moral values. Though it stopped publishing books in 1968, American Missionary Fellowship continues its missionary work in the United States, extending beyond Sunday school work to include church planting, church camps, and numerous other programs.

<http://www.americanmissionary.org/>

INTRODUCTION.

Preliminary remarks on the religious condition of Scotland, from the third century, the date of the introduction of the gospel into Scotland, down to the time of John Knox, the great Scotch Reformer.

As early as the third century of the Christian era, Scotland appears to have been blessed with the light of the gospel ; and the persecution under the Roman emperor Dioclesian, in the beginning of the fourth century, compelled many Christians, among whom were several preachers, to repair to that country, where they diligently laboured to extirpate idolatry, and establish Christianity. From the retired life of these emigrants, and their devotedness to the service of God, they were called Culdees.

In the fifth century, however, the pope of Rome, who had already enslaved the greater part of Europe, cast his eye on

Scotland, and began to employ means for bringing it also under the papal yoke. He accordingly sent a person of considerable learning, named Palladius, from Rome, for the purpose of confuting the heresies of Pelagius, which had begun to spread over the country. By degrees, popery came to be universally acknowledged ; and in a few centuries afterwards, it was firmly established throughout the kingdom.

During this period, several eminent servants of Christ fearlessly opposed the superstitions and idolatries of the Romish religion. Among others, two Culdees, in the seventh century, named Clemens and Samson, rejected the usurped power of the papal see, and maintained that Christ alone was the head of the Christian church. But such lights as these proved quite insufficient to dispel that moral darkness which had enveloped the church ; and although it was about the fourteenth century before the Culdees were extinct, it was not till the beginning of the fifteenth,

that the light of the reformation began to dawn.

About 1407, John Resby, a scholar of John Wickliffe of England (one of the pope's great opponents), came to Scotland. Imitating his master, he declaimed against the errors of the Romish church, and boldly preached the gospel wherever an opportunity was afforded. But in a short time the emissaries of Rome condemned him to the flames. About ten years afterwards, Paul Craw, a follower of John Huss, the Bohemian reformer, suffered the same fate. In 1528, Patrick Hamilton, an eminent martyr, was likewise condemned in the twenty-fourth year of his age, and sealed his testimony with his blood in the city of St. Andrews; and from this period, till the burning of Walter Mill, the church of Rome was upheld in Scotland solely by means of fire and sword. Multitudes then fell victims to the tyranny of that church, which has in all ages "shed the blood of the saints."

Among this number was the famous George Wishart, who also perished in the flames at St. Andrews, in 1546.* The martyrdom of Walter Mill, however, in 1568, gave the death-blow to popery in Scotland ; but as these transactions occurred during the life of Knox, reference will again be made to them in the course of the ensuing biography.

The enemies of the truth triumphed long in Scotland ; and liberty, either civil or religious, was so little understood before the reformation, that whatever was the will of the Catholic priests, was received by the people with the most superstitious reverence. The corruption of the clergy was extreme ; ignorance, idleness, dissipation, and pride, armed with power, were the characteristics of these spiritual guides. They made no attempts to secure the affections of the people ; but ruled both over the souls and bodies of men, with a tyran-

* The Life of Wishart is published by the American Sunday-school Union.

ny which appears at this day to be hardly credible.

“The form of popery which prevailed in Scotland,” says Dr. Robertson, “was of the most bigoted and illiberal kind. Those doctrines which are most apt to shock the human understanding, and those legends which farthest exceed belief, were proposed to the people without any attempt to palliate or disguise them; nor did they ever call in question the reasonableness of the one, or the truth of the other. The nature of the functions of the popish clergy gave them access to all persons, and at all seasons. They haunted the weak and credulous; they besieged the beds of the sick and of the dying; they suffered few to go out of the world, without leaving marks of their liberality to the church, and taught them *to compound with the Almighty for their sins, by bestowing riches on those who called themselves his servants.*”*

* History of Scotland, Book II.

But the seeds of divine truth had been scattered among the hitherto superstitious and ignorant multitude by a few sincere and faithful servants of Christ ; and in spite of all opposition, in a few years spread over the nation at large. Every effort, indeed, which either force or fraud could invent, was made by the supporters of the church of Rome, to prevent the downfall of their idolatrous establishment. But He who works, and none can hinder it, raised up instruments fitted for accomplishing all his purposes of mercy ; and among these none was so conspicuous for his burning zeal, and unbending faithfulness, as John Knox, who has been emphatically called the reformer of Scotland.

THE
LIFE OF JOHN KNOX

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Knox—Is educated at the same time with the celebrated historian, George Buchanan—Buchanan becomes a literary man—Knox turns all his attention to theology—Imbibes the doctrines of the Reformation—Repairs to East Lothian, where he is appointed tutor in the Douglas family—Attends the sermons of Thomas Guillian, and becomes fully convinced of the errors of Popery.

JOHN KNOX was born in the year 1505, at Gifford, near Haddington, in East Lothian, Scotland, and was descended from an ancient and honourable family. Although his parents were not in affluent circumstances, they were able at least to give him a liberal education. Accordingly he was first sent to the grammar school at Haddington, where he studied the Latin language. He was afterwards removed to the university of Glasgow, where, with George Buchanan, the celebrated historian, he was placed under the tuition of Mr. John Mair or Major, who at that time was professor of theology

and philosophy. Mair appears to have entertained juster sentiments regarding the power of the church than was common in that age. He denied the power of the pope to consecrate or dethrone kings; and maintained that his excommunications could have no force if unjustly pronounced. He censured the avarice and pride of the court of Rome, and wished the abolition of holydays, and the suppression of monasteries. Such sentiments as these both Knox and Buchanan afterwards boldly defended. The instructions of Mair, however, which were in general of a trifling and superstitious description, soon disgusted these two scholars, and they began to employ themselves in quite different studies. While Buchanan turned his attention to literature and poetry, Knox employed his time in searching after divine truth. He continued, however, to attend the instructions of Mair, and soon became so remarkable for his knowledge of the theology of that age, that he obtained the degree of Master of Arts while very young. Having directed his attention to divinity, he was also ordained before the usual time allotted by the rules of the church.

While engaged in these studies, the

doctrines of the reformation, which were spreading over the country, led him diligently to inquire into the tenets and practice of the church of Rome. In searching into the writings of the ancient fathers, especially the works of Jerome and Augustin, he plainly perceived how different their doctrines were from those to which he had been accustomed. The continual references to Scripture also in which they abounded, led him to the perusal of the sacred volume, where alone can be learned "the truth as it is in Jesus." Accordingly, about 1635, he quitted the study of scholastic theology, and applied himself to a plainer, and more simple system of divinity; and although it was about seven years after this before he openly professed the protestant religion, God, in mercy, not to him only, but to the nation at large, gradually enlightened his mind to perceive the difference between the pure doctrines of his holy word, and the vain and absurd traditions of men.

A favourable opinion of the reformed religion being discovered in his lectures, Knox was obliged to repair, in 1542, to East Lothian, where he was appointed tutor to the distinguished families of

Douglas and Cockburn, who favoured the reformation. While residing there, he enjoyed the opportunity of attending the sermons of a friar, named Thomas Guillian, who was one of the chaplains of the earl of Arran, at that time regent of Scotland, and a bold defender of the protestant doctrines. It was under the ministry of this man that Knox was led to a better acquaintance with evangelical truth, and became fully convinced of the errors of popery.

CHAPTER II.

The Earl of Arran appointed Regent of Scotland—Promotes the reading of the Bible in English, which had been deemed heresy—The Regent obliged by Cardinal Beaton, Archbishop of St. Andrew's, to renounce the doctrine of the Reformers—Character, persecution, and murder of George Wishart—Cardinal Beaton assassinated for his tyranny—The conspirators take refuge in the castle of St. Andrew's, which they defend—Knox, persecuted for the doctrines he taught, is obliged to take refuge in the castle—Continues to lecture in the castle—The solemn and remarkable manner in which Knox was called to the office of Reformer—Great change takes place in him—His first sermon directed against the antichristian nature of the church of Rome—Efforts made to cause Knox and other leaders to abjure what the papists denominated *heresy*—The preaching of the Reformer eminently successful.

THE earl of Arran was appointed regent in 1542, on the death of James the Fifth. At first he professed the greatest