



John Knox going to school.

John Knox.

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JOHN KNOX.

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JOHN KNOX.

JOHN KNOX was another of the great Reformers.

He was a Scotchman, born in the town of East Lothian, three hundred and sixty-five years ago. His parents were good people, and had enough money to send their son to school and to college, which

was a great thing in those days, when many men and women could not even read. The chief study was Latin, and John Knox could read it very well when he was a small boy.

John was fond of study, but there was one great Book that was scarcely ever studied—that book was the BIBLE. We are not told much of John Knox when he was a boy:

the great deeds of his life when he was a man fill up all his histories. We do not know so much as we would wish of the bold, healthy, honest little boy who played about Lothian, and went to school with his leather bag of old Latin books slung over his shoulder. A funny little figure he must have been in winter, in his black fustian cloak, his big hat, his long woolen hose,

his wooden shoes, and his short leather breeches coming only to the knee. And then you should have seen him on Christmas and Easter days, and on saints' days—for they kept saints' days then—going grandly to church with lace ruffles at his neck and wrists, ribbons at his knees tied in bow-knots, and silver buckles shining in his shoes. Ah, you say, this boy had a chance to

learn something good if he went to church. But his church was not like ours. It had a plenty of pictures and images, and the prayers and sermons were in Latin, hurried off as fast as could be, and no matter whether any one understood them or not. And when this sort of service was over, the people rushed off to amuse themselves. Very poor amusement it was. They went to

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ale-houses to drink beer and play cards; to the green, or public square, to dance and wrestle. They sang and feasted and got drunk, and were neither sorry nor ashamed.

The parents of John Knox taught him to prefer study to these rude sports, and to be brave and speak the truth. John had a kind, loving heart, but a gruff manner and a stern face. His lot had fallen in

hard and bitter days, when strength and courage were needful, and to John Knox God gave them both.

John's parents meant him to be a priest, but when he grew up he said that he did not think priests had done him much good, but that he had received great benefit from wise teachers; and this benefit he wished to return to the world by becoming a

teacher himself. He then became a teacher at the College of St. Andrews, and was much liked. Here he met George Wishart.

At St. Andrews, in reading old Latin books, Knox found much mention of the "Bible," and determined to read the Bible for himself. As he read, he found there was something more and better than teachers had taught him or priests had

preached. God's good Spirit came into his heart, and made him know and love the truth. Knox saw himself a poor sinner, and Jesus the sinner's Saviour.

After this, no more closed and forbidden Bible for John Knox ; no more Virgin to be prayed to ; no more saints to come between his soul and God. Knox was REFORMED himself, and his brave, earn-

est nature rose up to try and reform the Church.

Of all the Reformers, we will admit Knox to be the least winning and amiable in his manners. His was a rugged nature, its better and tenderer feelings hidden under ways as bluff and sharp as the winds that whirled from the chilly Highlands and ruffled the waters of his own Scotch lakes.

George Wishart was like the lovely Apostle John, but Knox was more like John the Baptist, who cried out to those who came to him, "O generation of vipers!"

But you know, dear children, God makes men to differ. In his Church he has places for the stern and the bold, as well as for the sweet and entreating.

We do not want you to

think John Knox had no love in him. He loved the Bible; he loved God; he loved his family and friends; he loved the Church, and Scotland, his dear native land. Indeed, for the Church and for Scotland John Knox was ready to die.

When Knox had found what a blessed book the Bible is, he at once began to praise it and to teach it. When his pupils came to their classes, Knox

snap their fingers, and say he should be burned too.

But you know if the Lord is on our side we need not fear what man can do unto us, and it was not the Lord's will that Knox should be burned. By and by the bishop was killed, and the people who had the castle and kept its great guns said that everybody might do as they liked and say what they thought about religion.

Knox was not sorry that the wicked bishop was out of the way, and he said so—said so too freely, perhaps, for his enemies began to say that Knox was glad the bishop had been killed, and even that he had told people to kill him.

This storm blew over before long, and the friends of Knox took courage and crowded to hear him teach; and found

themselves so much profited that they urged him to preach on Sundays to them. This Knox did not wish to do. "I am not fit," he said; "I have not the meek and holy heart—I am not wise enough for so great an office. Find somebody else."

But the people would not get anybody in the place they wanted Knox to fill; they already had one good Chris-

tian preacher, and they wanted Knox for another.

One Sunday they were all at church; Knox was in one of the pews. The preacher had a very good sermon about how the Lord calls some men to spend their lives in telling the good news of a Saviour. He spoke of the four fishermen Jesus called from their nets to preach, and of Amos called from tending the herds,

and of Moses called from the care of the flocks in Midian. Then he turned and looked down at Knox.

“John Knox, my dear brother,” said the preacher, “God, through the mouths of these people, is calling you to preach the gospel; and do not you let Satan hinder you of bringing men into glory. You know the truth: open your lips and tell it to those who

are perishing in their ignorance."

Over John's rough face the tears were streaming. He dared not refuse; he felt that he had a great duty to do, but he was so shy and modest, in view of the greatness of a minister's work, that he dreaded to enter upon it. However, that very afternoon he went into the pulpit, and in much self-distrust and humility

preached a sermon that God blessed. The people cried as they heard it, and when John Knox saw all through the great crowd solemn faces and tearful eyes, he felt that God had called him to preach the gospel to the poor.

Satan is the enemy of all good; he was a great enemy of John Knox, and never let him have any peace of his life. I suppose it aggravated Satan

dreadfully to have John keep telling the truth so earnestly and never being afraid. And if any of you do not know what that long word *aggravated* means, just ask your mother. Satan stirred up many priests to dispute with Knox and to preach against him; and by their means, when St. Andrew's was taken in war by the French, Knox and some other good men were taken

captive and carried to France. They were not treated like ordinary prisoners, but were sent to horrible punishment in "the galleys," where none but very wicked folks, as robbers and murderers, were usually sent. This was done because they would not worship the Virgin Mary.

None of these good men would go back from serving Jesus, but endured all their

hardships, trusting in him. Knox was in the *galleys* for nineteen months. He was very weak and ill from the hard usage he had received. As soon as he was set free he went to England, where there was much need of honest preaching. The people had heard of his preaching at St. Andrew's, and they came in crowds to hear him.

For six years Knox remain-

ed in England, going from place to place, teaching, preaching and praying. He also wrote many little books, showing the people their faults and the way in which they ought to walk. The people heard him gladly. Priests and bad men who hated him dared not lay hands on him. God was keeping his servant for a good work, and no harm came to him.

The king of England was a good young man; he liked Knox, and offered him money and honors, but Knox had a work to do, and would not be hindered. His work was to go like the apostles from place to place, rooting up errors and showing the people what was right. During this time Knox married a pious young lady of Berwick. He hoped to have at least the comfort of a hap-



The Priest and Protestant.

John Knox.

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py home, but just then the good king died, and the enemies of Knox took away all he had, and would not allow any money to be paid him for his work. So he had no money for his wife, and she had to stay at home with her parents.

The enemies of Knox were now so strong that his wife feared he would be killed, and she persuaded him to cross

the sea and go to Switzerland. At Geneva he found the good and wise John Calvin, about whom I will write you another little book. Calvin was a great help to Knox, just as George Wishart had been. And another man who had done much for the Reformation was William Tyndale, about whom you will hear in one of these little books. One after another come the Re-

formers of the Church in different countries — God never leaving himself without a witness.

In the foreign country where he had gone Knox was not idle. He wrote, studied and preached.

After some time spent in Germany and France, Knox wished much to see his wife and to visit the pious people in Scotland and England, who

were trying to serve God even when they had no preachers, could meet in no churches and were not allowed Bibles. The only way they kept Bibles from the priests was by reading them in secret and having them hidden.

In those days a good man about whom I have read kept his Bible fastened by straps to the under side of a stool, and when he wanted to read

it he placed the stool upside down on his knees and turned the pages over under the straps. His children stood about to listen as he read, and one sharp-eyed little boy was put at the door to watch if any strangers came. If one came near, the boy would give the alarm by saying, softly, "Father!" and the father would put the stool on the floor and put his feet on it,

and so hide the book from sight.

One of these good men was a prisoner on the galleys with Knox. One day a priest came up to him, holding an image of the Virgin Mary in one hand and a club in the other. He said the man must kiss the Virgin or he would knock him on the head with the club. The man took the image in his hands, and, instead of kissing

it, flung it over into the water, saying, "Let our lady swim and save herself—she is light enough!"

The priest was in such a hurry to save his image that he forgot to hit the man's head.

To such resolute and God-fearing people went Knox, and from house to house he passed, preaching. When his enemies heard that he was back, they

sent orders for him to appear at court on a certain day, to be tried for his doctrines.

Knox went—one humble preacher all alone—but none of the wicked judges were in their places. They were afraid of the poor Scotchman who always spoke the truth. They did not dare to go where he could reproach them for their evil deeds. This proved true what the Bible says, that

“One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one,” and “Five of you shall chase a hundred.”

Also, “The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

A few weeks after this Knox took his wife and her mother and went back to Geneva. When his enemies found that he was out of the country, they ordered him to come before them. Knox

knew nothing of this order, for he was at sea in a ship. Then the cowardly judges came together, and said, as John Knox had not obeyed their order, he should be burned alive, and said some dreadful things besides. And as Knox was not on hand to be burned, they made an image of him and burned that on the public square. How foolish and wicked they were!

For two years Knox stayed in Geneva, but he did not forget his Scotch churches. He wrote to them, guided their conduct and prayed for them. And when trouble came to them, and a good old man named Walter Milne was burned for reading the Bible, Knox said he must go home to his people, so he left his quiet life in Geneva and went to his native land.

Oftener and plainer now than ever Knox preached against idolatry, images, Sabbath-breaking and neglect of the Bible. Up and down the country he went, forming bands of Christians into churches and teaching the ignorant. High and low, rich and poor went to hear him; and so much good did he do, and so many churches did he form, that the wicked queen and judges of-

ferred a reward to any one who would kill him.

God has promised to keep them in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on him, and John Knox was in perfect peace as he went about his duty—even while several hundred dollars had been promised to any one who would shoot him.

When every one else was frightened and distressed,

Knox was calm and happy. "God," he said, "often lets the wicked triumph for a little while to try us, to make us humble and full of faith; but be not afraid — God is ever true to his people; his arm is strong, and he will rise up and help us."

Knox was now settled as pastor in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland; and here, as his enemies could not frighten

him, they meant to coax him ; and as they could not get him killed, they would hire him to be silent.

Queen Mary came to live in the palace of Edinburgh. She was one of the most beautiful women in the world. She was also a queen, and of a lovely, graceful manner ; and it was thought that if she invited Knox to see her and spoke pleasantly to him, and prom-

ised him rewards, he would agree to keep silent and not oppose sin in public. But when Knox went to see his queen, he felt he had a duty to her, and that was to speak the truth. He told her a queen should be an example of all that was noble and good; that she should fear and serve God, protect the good and punish the bad. He told her that her court was full of wicked

men and women, whom she should send away, and that the land was full of vice, which she should make to cease. He gave her a Bible, and begged her to read it. He went so far as to find fault with some of her acts, and tell her they were unworthy of a child of God, and that God's anger would be on her if she did not do better.

You see, Knox was not like

Samson, who let a pretty woman coax him out of his strength and lead him to forget the work God had given him.

Queen Mary had never been spoken to so plainly. She began to cry, and said Knox was the greatest bear she had ever seen; that he was rough and rude and frightened her, and she hoped she would never see him again.

Many people have said Knox was very cruel to talk so to Queen Mary, but Mary was more cruel to herself than Knox was. If she had taken his advice she would have been a wise and prosperous queen and have died a happy death.

The queen never forgave Knox for his plain speech. She sent for him several times, and he always held the same

firm language. She became still more angry when he preached against the evil doings at her court. She had him tried for treason, hoping that the judges would find him guilty and order his head to be cut off. Instead of this the judges said he was not guilty of treason, but was a good subject and an honest man. So, you see, God made even his enemies to be at peace

with him. But Mary, "Queen of Scots," as she was called, would not listen to his rebukes. She loved her own way too well. So when Knox bade her send away the bad men who were in her court, she was angry and displeased. After some years her enemies drove her out of Scotland. She went to England, and there Queen Elizabeth shut her up in a castle, and at last

sent an order to have the head of Mary cut off, which was done.

The preaching of Knox was so plain and to the point that once when the king went to hear him he thought Knox meant him, and was so angry that he went home scolding and would not eat his dinner.

After Mary ceased to be queen, Scotland was governed by a good nobleman who was

so wise and kind that he was called "the good regent," or ruler. Knox loved him very much, but this good man was cruelly killed by an enemy, and this grieved Knox so much that he became ill.

Knox was growing old; his life had been one of trouble and hard work; he was not strong, and his sorrow at the regent's sudden death wore upon him so much that he

had a fit, and every one thought he would die. His foes were glad over this, and rejoiced and shook hands and sent merry letters to each other; but they were soon disappointed, for Knox began to get well.

He was again able to preach on the Sabbath day, and though he preached in weakness and in pain he would keep on, for he said God had

called him to his work and he would not stop so long as he lived.

Some bad people threw letters in at his windows, saying if he did not hold his tongue they would kill him; but these letters he took into the pulpit, saying, as he read them aloud, that he did not fear man nor death—all he feared was sin.

James Melville writes of

Knox at this time: "I see him every day going out to take a walk. He is very weak; he goes slowly and wearily, and has a fur on his neck. He leans with one hand on a staff, and good Richard Balanden holds him up by the other arm. He went to church on Sunday, and was so feeble that Richard had to lift him to the pulpit; and there he leaned on the desk and spoke

feebly and slowly for half an hour : then he warmed up and grew strong, and spoke so loud and so earnestly that he made me thrill and tremble so I could not hold my pen to take notes.”

The last sermon John Knox preached he signed at the end,

“ John Knox, with my dead hand and warm, glad heart—praising God who leaves such

light and mercy to bless us in his Church.”

The illness of Knox had made his hand weak and feeble, as if it were dead, but his heart was warm and glad in love to his God.

Soon after this Knox was taken worse, and knew that he must die. The Bible bids us “owe no man anything, but to love one another;” so he told his wife to call the

servants and pay them their wages. To one whom he loved the best he gave about five dollars more than was due him.

He then spoke to them all, and told them to meet him in heaven. He then had his friend Richard order his coffin to be made.

As he lay on his bed he said so many things about his peace, his joy, his hope in

God that half of them could not be remembered. He had his wife read to him from the Bible, and told his friends to be kind to her and to his children.

After prayers in the evening he fell asleep. When he woke up, he said, softly, "Now it is come!"

"Do you trust in Jesus? Are you happy?" asked his friend Richard.

Knox could not speak, but he pressed his hand, smiled, looked up, and was gone home to God.

A great many people followed his body to the grave, and among them was the ruler or regent of the country, and this man, as he looked into the open grave, said, "There lies he who never feared the face of man."

Knox was sixty-seven years

old. To his firmness, honesty and holy life the Church of God in Scotland—and indeed in all the world—owes very much.

I hope my little friends will not forget what I have told them of the lion-hearted Reformers, but try to live by the faith which upheld them in all the trials and pain they had to suffer—a suffering which is richly rewarded by

the one only Mediator that stands between our sins and God's wrath—his well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ.