

KNOX AND HIS WRITINGS.

BY THE EDITOR - The Rev. Thomas Thomson.

JOHN KNOX was born in the year 1505, but it is uncertain whether his birth-place was Gifford, in East Lothian, or the town of Haddington. After receiving the elements of a learned education at the Grammar School of Haddington, he entered the University of Glasgow in his sixteenth year. Here, such was his proficiency as a scholar, and subsequently, his reputation as a lecturer and teacher, that he was admitted to priest's orders before he had attained the canonical age of twenty-five. But the fervent spirit of enquiry which had been kindled within him at college, made him narrowly examine the doctrines of that church in which he had become an office-bearer. He read and prayed, he doubted and was dissatisfied; and the principles of the Reformation, already preached in Scotland, arrested his attention and secured his assent. But it was by no sudden burst of conviction that the change in his belief was accomplished. He who was to become the Reformer of his country, behaved, like Luther, to undergo a long and painful process, before he was fitted for his mission; and it was not until he had reached the mature age of thirty-eight, that his doubts were fully resolved, and he became a Protestant.

The change thus wrought upon the mind of Knox, was soon apparent to the world. His zeal in the pursuit of truth, and boldness in proclaiming it, which ever after were his great characteristics, induced him, as a lecturer in the College of St. Andrews, to decry

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the old methods of investigation, and direct his pupils to sounder principles of enquiry. This excited the attention of his superiors, and their suspicions were quickly confirmed. He was denounced as a heretic, and degraded from the priesthood; and on betaking himself to flight, emissaries were sent by Cardinal Beaton, to way-lay and murder him. Two years after we find him attending Wishart¹ in his missionary labours, and carrying a two-handed sword before him, to guard him from assassins. The martyr himself appears to have foreseen the usefulness of this devoted follower: for just before his own apprehension, he took from Knox the two-handed sword; and on the latter entreating to be allowed to remain with him, and share in his danger, Wishart affectionately replied, "Nay, return to your bairns, and God bless you; one is enough for a sacrifice."

After this event, Knox returned to the house of Hugh Douglas of Long Niddrie, to whose children he was tutor; and there he was accustomed to assemble, in a neighbouring chapel, not only the family, but the inhabitants of that district, whom he instructed in the reformed doctrines. The assassination of Cardinal Beaton, and the persecution that followed, made this residence unsafe; and at the urgent entreaty of his employers, he retired with his pupils into the castle of St. Andrews, now the chief refuge of the persecuted. The small garrison was attacked by the forces

¹ George Wishart (c. 1513-1546) – Scottish reformer and Protestant martyr. He translated into English the first Helvetic Confession of Faith in 1536. At his trial he refused to accept that confession was a sacrament, denied free will, recognized the priesthood of all believing Christians. He proclaimed that the true Church was where the Word of God was faithfully preached, and the two dominical sacraments rightly administered.

of “Scotland and France, but made a gallant resistance. It was during this siege, that Knox was summoned to the public work of the ministry by the unanimous voice of the people. He trembled, wept, and shut himself up in his chamber, overwhelmed with thoughts of the responsibility of the office — but he did not dare

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to disobey. The commencement of his ministrations amongst a handful of people, in a beleaguered tower, was the beginning of a mighty era in the history of Scotland — it founded and established that important characteristic by which the history of the Scottish Reformation was ever afterwards distinguished. In England, where the change had been little more than a mere court revolution, guided by the most sordid impulses, the church had been rather plundered than reformed, so that most of the ancient ceremonies, and much of the error, were left undisturbed; and hitherto, even in Scotland, the first reformers had contented themselves with assailing only the more gross corruptions of the Romish establishment. But instead of timidly pruning the branches, Knox boldly laid the axe to the root. It was not a few excesses that were to be removed: the whole trunk was corrupt, and must be hewn down. Such was the first onset of that uncompromising warfare which he waged with antichrist to the end of his career, and the principle of which, he recommended and bequeathed to his country through all succeeding generations.

At last, the garrison of St. Andrews capitulated to overwhelming numbers, after a brave resistance. And yet, overborne as they were, they only yielded upon honourable conditions. These were, that they should be safely conveyed to France, and afterwards be allowed to retire to any country they pleased, except Scotland. But their treacherous captors violated the terms; for on the arrival of the prisoners in France, some were thrown into dungeons, and the rest were sent chained to the galleys. Of the latter number was Knox, who for nineteen months was compelled to labour at the oar, under sorrow, privation, and sickness,

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during which his life was at one time despaired of. But even in this state, and with the towers of St. Andrews looming in sight, as his galley sailed along the coast of Scotland, he declared, that God would yet again open his mouth in that place, where he had first been called to preach. His prayers to the Most High for deliverance were heard and answered, for he was set at liberty in February, 1549, in consequence of the urgent application of Edward VI of England, to the King of France. At the period of his liberation, the state of affairs in Scotland was so unsettled, and the violence of persecution so high, that had Knox repaired thither, he would probably have been apprehended and put to death, even if he had been permitted to land: he therefore passed over to England, where his labours in the meantime were likely to be most effective, and where he could best observe the progress of events in his own country.

The spiritual condition of England at this time was well fitted to excite the sympathy of our Reformer. The public mind had been so unsettled by the imperious changes of Henry VIII, veering between Popery and Protestantism according to the mood of the moment, and had been so often compelled to adapt its faith to the last royal statute, that the majority of the nation had

become indifferent to all belief; the clergy, and especially the bishops, who had conformed to the royal pleasure, only waited the opportunity of returning to their secretly-cherished ancient faith: while the nobles and courtiers, whose avarice had been sharpened by church plunder, were ready to welcome any change that promised a fresh bribe. And to withstand this ignorance, this indifference, this selfishness, there was

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the boy-king Edward VI, and the gentle timid Cranmer! To the few devoted friends of the Reformation in England, the arrival of Knox was a welcome event, for the history of his toils and sufferings in the cause of truth was not unknown to them. As the faithful labourers at this time were few indeed, so that the most eminent of the clergy had to itinerate as missionaries over extensive districts, Knox, on his arrival in London, was sent by Cranmer and the Council, to Berwick. Here, he itinerated and preached for two years with distinguished success, notwithstanding the opposition of Tostal, Bishop of Durham; after which he was removed to Newcastle, where his sphere of usefulness was more extensive; and in 1551, the Council expressed their sense of the value of his services, by appointing him one of the chaplains in ordinary to the young king. But in every change, the persecution that followed him kept pace with the success of his ministrations. While he laboured in Berwick, he was arraigned before the Council of the North, for teaching that the mass was idolatrous; and now, in his capacity of royal chaplain, he was summoned before the Privy Council, to answer for his bold denunciations of the selfish and profligate courtiers. But unsparing though he had been, and sharp as were his enemies, there was nothing in the form of calumny or falsehood that could be substantiated against his sermons, and he was honourably acquitted. Hitherto Knox had laboured as a missionary and upon the borders; but so greatly was his value appreciated, that higher offices in the church were offered, to tempt him to settle in England. The first of these was the living of All-Hallows in London, tendered by Cranmer, in February, 1553. With the

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scanty revenue of forty pounds a-year as a royal chaplain, and with a constitution still suffering from the effects of his confinement in the French galleys, it would have been thought nothing blameable, if Knox had embraced such a prospect of ease and comfort in the metropolis. But to the surprise, and somewhat to the displeasure of his friends, he refused the presentation — and on the cause of his refusal being demanded, he frankly stated before the Privy Council, that he was not free in his conscience to accept a permanent charge in the English church, believing as he did, that it was not yet sufficiently reformed in sacraments and discipline. The more tempting offer of the bishopric of Rochester succeeded, at the special desire of the king himself; but this he also refused upon the same principle. To this refusal he alludes in the course of his writings; and by stating the fact, he also refuted the slander of his enemies, who insinuated, near the close of his life, that his dislike to the appointment of a bishop to St. Andrews, arose from chagrin at not being himself appointed. “I have refused,” he said, “a greater bishopric than ever this was, which I might have had, with the favour of greater men than he has his.”

And now the time was at hand, when neither church preferment, nor yet even personal safety, was to be within the reach of this conscientious recusant.² Edward sickened; and courtiers and prelates anticipating a Popish successor, scowled upon Knox and his fellow-labourers, and were already putting their recantation into rehearsal, as if that had been to form a part of the coronation pageant. The gentle and pious king expired; Mary³ was proclaimed; and such a spirit of drunken loyalty blinded all classes, as

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nothing but the fires of Smithfield⁴ sufficed to dissipate. This ungrateful forgetfulness of the past, and deadness to the future, so grieved the heart of Knox, that although it was a perilous duty, he rebuked the levity of the people, and predicted in no equivocal terms the calamities that were at hand. He also resumed with fresh diligence his missionary duties, for he knew that the opportunity would be brief. What he had sadly foreseen and announced, soon followed. The Romish creed was restored to its former authority, and all who dissented, were exposed to the pains of heresy. Some of the most eminent of the English reformers were thrown into prison, while others became wanderers in distant lands. Although the danger deepened around him, Knox still lingered at his post, until he was compelled by the affectionate violence of his friends to provide for his own safety. He therefore repaired to the coast, and having found a vessel, he embarked for France, and arrived at Dieppe in Normandy, on the 28th of February, 1554.

The foregoing brief account of Knox's labours in England, will in some degree illustrate those portions of his writings which he addressed to his personal friends, or to the people at large in that kingdom. The first in order of these is his *Treatise on Prayer* (see p. 31 of this vol.) which was first published in July 1554 under the following copious title "A Confession, and Declaration of Prayers added thereunto, by John Knox, minister of Christ's most sacred Evangel, upon the death of that most famous king, Edward VI, King of England, France, and Ireland; in which Confession, the said John does accuse no less his own offences, than the offences of others, to be the cause of the away-taking of that most godly prince now

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reigning with Christ, while we abide plagues for our unthankfulness." In the *Treatise* itself, which is rich in Christian consolation and counsel, we have an affecting account of his own supplications while a prisoner in the French galleys, and the comfort he received from communion with God even in his lowest estate, combined with animating encouragements towards faith and hope, from the example of his own deliverance. The confession and prayer was that which he commonly used in the pulpit, after the king's decease; and there it will be seen, that he expressly prayed for Queen Mary, and for the suppression of those who rebelled against her lawful authority. This is a sufficient proof, among others which occur in this volume, that he was the friend of peace and order, instead of tumult and revolution; and that whatever might be his own personal sentiments, he was ready to submit to every constitutional authority, even though it might be impersonated in a "female regimen."

² Someone who refuses to conform to established standards of conduct.

³ Mary I, Roman Catholic Queen of England – also known as "Bloody Mary."

⁴ The place where many Protestant martyrs had been burned at the stake.

When Knox arrived in Dieppe, he found himself a solitary stranger, not knowing what might next await him, or whence he should derive a bare subsistence. But this was not the chief subject of his anxiety. He thought of the flock he had left, and who were now as sheep without a shepherd. Trial and persecution had fallen upon them, under which the timid fainted, and the unconfirmed were guilty of tergiversation.⁵ As is usual in such cases, many thought it lawful to purchase safety by an external compliance with error, if they only held the truth in secret within their own hearts. Reports of such instances of apostacy reached the exile in his retirement, and immediately his pen addressed them with the same earnestness, that had

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formerly animated his living voice in warning and instructing them. A short time therefore after his arrival, he wrote and transmitted his *Letter to the Faithful in London, Newcastle, and Berwick*, (p. 60) in which he announced the deadly consequences of apostacy, and exhorted them by every tender and animating appeal, to hold fast their profession during these days of general defection. And amidst these his public anxieties, his generous heart had large room for the individual sorrows of his own kindred. His mother-in-law, Mrs. Bowes, as may be gathered from the Letters at the end of this volume, was a lady of deep piety, but labouring under severe spiritual depression, in which she often doubted the sincerity of her faith, and despaired of salvation. It was to remove these agonising misgivings, and speak peace to her troubled heart, that Knox commenced in England the *Exposition of the Sixth Psalm*, (p. 106). The First part of this most experimental⁶ treatise was finished on the 6th of January 1554, and was sent without signature or intimation of place; for already, his enemies had been on the alert, and a packet of letters which he had previously sent to his wife and mother-in-law, had been intercepted and examined. The Second part was finished at the end of the following month, and transmitted from Dieppe. A few months afterwards, Knox having travelled into Switzerland, where his depression was alleviated by the kindly intercourse of Christian brethren, was enabled to address his friends in England in the language of encouragement and hope. He therefore wrote to them the letter, entitled a *Comfortable Epistle* (p. 149.) In this short address, after exhorting the faithful to patience, from the consideration that their

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state, thus depressed and persecuted, was that into which the church of God had often been brought in former ages, he animated them with the hope, that a deliverance similar to that of the church of old, would also be theirs. But although their persecutors were to be humbled and destroyed, the faithful were in no case to be the avengers of their own wrongs, nor yet, were they even to hate the persons of those who had unjustly afflicted them. On the contrary, they were to pray for them, and leave them in the hands of God. This letter is dated the last of May, 1554. It was at the close of the same year, that he penned the most copious and elaborate of his addresses to the English, entitled a Faithful Admonition, in which he consoled them with the promise, that although their boat was tossed in the midnight storm, yet in the first watch, they should see Christ coming to them, walking upon the waters. This year indeed in the history of the Reformer,

⁵ Falsification by means of vague or ambiguous language, here to avoid guilt by association.

⁶ Or *experiential*, in the sense of a deeply moving spiritual experience.

was rich in Treatises, Addresses, and Letters, which compose a large portion of his printed works. And when we consider his aversion to authorship while employed in the duty of preaching — a circumstance to which he alludes in his preface to the sermon on Isaiah, chap, xxvi — the Christian reader will adore the wisdom of that providence, by which Knox was led to a strange land, that there, he might not only find safety, but also give utterance to those rich and nervous instructions which have descended to posterity, and which, we trust the world will never willingly let die.

Hitherto, the public labours of Knox had been chiefly confined to England, and when persecution arrived with the accession of Mary, the condition of Scotland, at that time less troubled, occupied a smaller

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portion of his anxiety and regret. But his native land was henceforth to be the beloved object of his cares. In 1555 he returned to England, to visit his friends; and finding the opportunity favourable, he repaired secretly to Edinburgh. There, he preached in private houses with such success, that multitudes thronged to hear him; after which, he visited different parts of the country, where he not only preached, but dispensed the sacrament of the Supper to large congregations. The report of these daring proceedings astounded the Romish priests, who could not imagine who the new comer might be. Some said, he was an Englishman: “No,” replied the Archbishop of Glasgow, “it is no Englishman, but Knox, that knave!” “A Convention was summoned to be held at Edinburgh on the fifteenth of May, before which, the preacher was to be tried as a heretic; but his friends, who dreaded the summary proceedings of these tribunals, accompanied him in such force, that the priests in dismay deserted the diet. He now continued to preach unmolested, and with such success, that in writing to his mother-in-law, he uses these affecting words, “Oh! sweet were the death that should follow such forty days in Edinburgh, as here I have had three!”

Mary of Guise, queen regent of Scotland, instead of suppressing, had hitherto tolerated the Reformers, but from no partiality either to them or their cause. As her tenure of power was insecure, she merely regarded them as a party, with which she could alarm or counterpoise the faction of her enemies, the Hamiltons, while she fondly thought, that she could crush the Reformation at pleasure, when it had reached a certain height, or was no longer subservient to her

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purposes. But this Italian policy was too refined for the Scots to comprehend, and the Earls Marischal and Glencaim believed in the honesty of their hearts, that the same arguments might move the regent, which had proved so influential with themselves. They therefore entreated Knox, to solicit her favourable attention towards the reformed doctrines and preachers: and in consequence of their wish, he wrote the *Letter to the Lady Mary, dowager, Regent of Scotland* (p. 161). This epistle, which is evidently composed with great care, and with an earnest desire to avoid offence, exhibits all the deep regard to royalty which was the characteristic of the age,

without that fulsome⁷ servility by which it was so often degraded; and in cautious, well-measured terms, the writer sets before her the duties of rulers as the guardians of religion, and the danger of neglecting them. But the queen was not to be so moved. She read the letter coldly, and within a day or two after, she handed it to the Archbishop of Glasgow, saying with a scornful smile, "Please you, my lord, to read a pasquil!" Two years after, when Knox was abroad, he published the letter with copious additions; and in allusion to her taunt, he said, "If you no more esteem the admonition of God's servants, than cardinals do the scoffing of pasquils,⁸ then he shall shortly send you messengers, with whom you shall not be able to jest in that manner."

Although the preaching of the Reformer had been so successful, he was again obliged to become an exile. The personal hatred of the Romish party was so keen against him, that his further stay in Scotland would only have perilled the safety of his friends, and therefore he judged it advisable in 1556 to repair to Geneva.

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Before his departure, he was most anxious to impress upon the minds of his friends, the necessity of maintaining the practice of social worship, in the absence of a regular ministry: and on his arrival at Dieppe, he sent to them his advice on the subject, in his *Most Wholesome Counsel* (p. 173). In this letter, he unfolds the plan, and recommends the practice of those meetings among Christians for prayer, reading of the word, and mutual instruction, which were common in every country, at the first introduction of the truth, or during seasons of persecution, and which had their origin in the spirit of Christianity itself, and the practice of the apostolic ages. His counsel was followed, and the numerous social meetings which were formed, expanded afterwards into congregations.

On the retirement of Knox from Scotland, an event occurred, that showed the necessity of his withdrawing, while it called forth one of the most finished of his literary productions. The Scottish clergy, as soon as they heard of his departure, renewed that summons which formerly they had abandoned; and as he could not now appear at their citation, they formally doomed his body to the flames, and his soul to Satan, after which, they burned him in effigy at the cross of Edinburgh. Against this their iniquitous sentence he afterwards wrote his Appellation, and published it in 1558. The first part of this production is addressed to the Nobles, the second, to the Commons of Scotland. The appeal to the nobility, is based upon those feudal privileges, by which the aristocracy of Scotland, in their collective capacity, had been wont to regulate the authority of the sovereign, and enforce the administration of the laws; and he urged them to exert these their recognised rights, in protecting the truth

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against a corrupt and usurping hierarchy, and obtaining for him an open hearing, in behalf of the cause for which he was condemned. The Second part, consisting of the *Address to the Commonalty of Scotland*, as being of more general and practical application, is inserted in this volume (p. 211). Previous, however, to the publication of this important work, by which the

⁷ Excessively ingratiating; fawning or overly flattering in order to obtain favor.

⁸ *Pasquil* – a satirical composition that imitates or misrepresents somebody's style; a parody.

reformation in Scotland was materially advanced, the pen of Knox had been actively employed in warning, animating, and encouraging his countrymen, collectively and individually. Several of these letters were solutions of questions in casuistry,⁹ of which we have given a specimen in his *Answer to Questions on Baptism*, etc. (p. 253) wherein may be seen, not only his sympathy and patience with tender consciences, but the straight-forwardness with which he approached a difficulty, and the acuteness with which he solved it. Perhaps we may refer to this period also, the *Sermon or Dissertation on Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness*, (p. 229) which Knox, who had preached it some time before, now transcribed, and addressed to certain pious females of his acquaintance probably in England. It was first published in London in 1583, from a manuscript belonging to Mrs. Prouze of Exeter, widow of Mr. Edward Deering, a distinguished non-conformist.

But the most important part of Knox's writings at this period, was the correspondence which took place between him and the Scottish lords, upon the subject of his returning to Scotland. They wrote, entreating him to return, with the promise of hazarding their lives and fortunes in defence of the reformation; and, conceiving that the season was ripe, he bade farewell to his flock in Geneva, and addressed himself to the

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journey. But when he arrived at Dieppe, on his way to Scotland, he received letters of a different character. He was advertised,¹⁰ that new consultations had been held, and that the lords had drawn back. These tidings struck him with anguish, under which he sent them a letter, rebuking them for their dereliction. A short time afterwards, when his feelings had subsided, he wrote the *Epistle to his Brethren in Scotland*, (p. 181) warning them against those sinful inconsistencies, from which, their enemies had been emboldened to deny that their communion formed any part of the church of Christ. This was especially the objection of the Anabaptists, who at that time were busy in Scotland, and who inculcated the most extravagant principles upon the impeccability of a true church. Knox successfully refuted their errors, by showing from Scripture, the excesses of which many professors had been guilty in former ages, even when the church of God was most pure and flourishing. About two weeks after, he wrote to the Lords professing the truth in Scotland, (p. 198) in which letter, forgetting his late disappointment, he addressed them in a style of the utmost tenderness and affection. It is interesting to observe on this occasion also, the rooted dislike of Knox, to every species of revolt and disorder. The Protestant nobles had strong temptations at this time to join the faction of the Hamiltons against Mary of Guise, for she was now discountenancing and persecuting them. But the Reformer warns them against all resistance to the established authority in matters merely political and secular. It was only when the most urgent of emergencies had arrived, and when the highest and holiest of their privileges as Christians were subverted, that they were to merge the political

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in a still more paramount duty — they were only to draw the sword for the defence of their persecuted faith, and at the command, and for the cause of God. These earnest appeals were

⁹ *Casuistry* – here it means moral instruction based on the application of general biblical principles.

¹⁰ That is, he was advised or made aware of – they called his attention to this change in circumstance.

effectual. The Protestant lords united as one man, and resolved, in behalf of religion, to dare and endure the utmost. Knox arrived in Scotland in May, 1559, the war commenced,¹¹ and superstition was driven from its strong-holds and entrenchments. The popery of Scotland backed by the troops of France rallied, and had like to have proved an overmatch, when at the suggestion of Knox, the aid of Protestant England, then under Elisabeth, was invoked against the common enemy. The request was complied with, and Europe was startled with the strange spectacle of English and Scottish soldiers fighting side by side upon their native soil. Nothing short of the all-absorbing power of religion could have swallowed up their national hatred, and united them into one people, and it was at the siege of Leith that the union of the two countries was virtually ratified. The French were expelled from Scotland, Mary of Guise died; and during the long minority which followed, the Reformation was established upon so firm a basis, that Mary Stuart, with all the aid of France and Rome, was unable to subvert it.

Closely connected with this fierce war of principles, were the circumstances under which the *Sermon on Isaiah* (p. 264) was preached, and the consequences that ensued. To explain these, it is necessary to advert to the marriage of the queen with Darnley, which was solemnised on the 27th of July, 1565. This rash union was succeeded by the still more imprudent step of proclaiming Darnley king, without the consent of the Estates. On account of these proceedings, the

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nobles in general were jealous of one of their number so highly preferred, and indignant that he should be invested with the royal title without their sanction, while the Protestants feared, that Darnley's previous leanings to popery, would be confirmed by the blandishments of his royal bride. A civil war was the consequence, in which Edinburgh was disturbed by street conflicts; and the artillery of the castle was opened upon those who had taken up arms against the court. To lull the growing suspicions, Darnley had occasionally repaired to the sermons of the Protestant preachers; and on the 19th of August, he went up to St. Giles church in great pomp, where a throne had been prepared for him. The preacher on this occasion was Knox; the subject of his sermon was taken from Isaiah, xxvi, verses 13, 14, etc. Darnley on hearing the following quotation from Scripture, "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them: children are their oppressors, and women rule over them;" and the passing remark of the preacher, that God punished Ahab, because he did not correct his wife, idolatrous Jezebel, imagined that himself and the queen were aimed at, and returned to the palace in a rage. On the afternoon of the same day, Knox was taken from his bed, to answer before the Privy Council for his alleged offence, on which occasion he was accompanied by several respectable citizens, who were anxious for his safety. On appearing before the council, he was accused of having given offence to the king, and ordered to desist from preaching, while their Majesties remained in Edinburgh. He replied, that he "had spoken nothing but what was according to his text, and that if the Church would command him to speak or abstain, he would

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¹¹ The Siege of Leith ended a twelve year encampment of French troops at Leith, the port near Edinburgh. The French troops arrived by invitation in 1548 and left in 1560 after an English force arrived to assist in removing them from Scotland.

obey so far as the word of God allowed. The prohibition of the council was confirmed; but Knox's colleague, who was appointed to preach in his stead, refused to officiate; the towns-folks were in a state of excitement at the sentence; and the members of the town council entered so warmly into the subject, that they declared their determination, in no way to suffer the mouth of their minister to be stopped. All parties were thus involved in a difficulty which was happily removed by the departure of the queen and Darnley from Edinburgh, a few days after; and as the prohibition was in force only during their stay, the public ministrations of the Reformer do not appear to have been suspended even for a single Sabbath. On the return of their Majesties to the capital, not a word was spoken of silencing the intrepid preacher, and he continued to labour with his wonted¹² zeal and energy. So unconscious however was Knox of having given just ground of offence, and so desirous to make his innocence apparent to the world, that he published the sermon at the end of the same month.

The letters which are inserted at the end of this volume, will perhaps more clearly exhibit the temper and character of Knox, than his more elaborate compositions: but to understand the allusions with which they abound, it is necessary to revert to his domestic history while he resided in England. During his stay at Berwick, he contracted an acquaintanceship with Mrs. Bowes, in the course of which, a mutual attachment was formed between him and her daughter Marjory, with the approbation¹³ of the mother, who gave her hearty consent to their union. But the intended match was opposed by her husband's relatives,

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and especially, by Sir Thomas Bowes, an eminent diplomatist of that period, who seems to have thought, that his family would be degraded, by the alliance of one of its members with an obscure Scot. The expressions of Knox at this unworthy treatment, were those of a man who could combine dignity of feeling and proper self-respect, with the humility and forbearance of a Christian. The marriage was postponed till a better season; but he still continued to address Mrs. Bowes, in his letters, by the endearing title of mother. At last, when no prospect appeared that the obstinate relatives would be brought to compliance, the union was solemnised; and soon after, the accession of Mary followed, and his own flight to the continent. His devoted partner, after sharing in his troubles both in Switzerland and Scotland, died in the latter country, at the close of the year 1560.

Although the pen of Knox was so indefatigable both in his political and ministerial capacity, at one time drawing up a manifesto, and at another, penning a treatise, or letter of religious consolation and advice, his published works are comparatively few; and of these, a considerable proportion seem to have been printed without his superintendence and revision. Indeed, during the Marian persecution, when the ports were carefully watched, that no heretical works might be smuggled into England, imperfect copies of the writings of eminent reformers were sometimes hurried, through the press under such circumstances of concealment, that numerous errors of the printer were often added to those of the transcriber. Such has evidently been the fate of several of

¹² *Wonted*: usual.

¹³ *Approbation*: approval.

Knox's writings. Although most of them were published during his life-time, only a few bear the marks of his own superintendence.

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One proof also of the difficulties that attended their being printed, is to be found in their title-pages. Some have neither the printer's name, nor that of the place where they were printed; and some profess to have been printed in Rome, before the castle of St. Angelo, at the sign of St. Peter. In either case, it was an attempt to elude the inquisitors. An anonymous book might be arrested, but the unknown printer was safe; and when the searchers saw in the title-page, that the work had issued from the purlieus¹⁴ of the castle of St. Angelo, they let it pass without further question, thinking, that no heresy could proceed from under the guns of the papal battery. These earliest editions, which are now scarcely to be found, except in the library of the British Museum, or that of the advocates of Edinburgh, have been carefully copied for this volume, and compared, when it was possible, with more recent editions, where any sentence or expression seemed to be doubtful. Still however the work must have been prepared for the press under serious disadvantages, but for the valuable manuscript volume of Knox's works in the possession of the Rev. Thomas M'Crie, from which, the late Dr. M'Crie has quoted so frequently, in his well-known life of the Scottish Reformer. This antiquarian treasure, in which the date of 1603 incidentally occurs, appears, from the character of the penmanship, to have been written by Richard Bannatyne, the affectionate servant and secretary of John Knox; a circumstance that greatly enhances its value, by warranting its fidelity. From this source, the errors to be found in the oldest editions of the *Treatise on Prayer*, and the *Most Wholesome Counsel*, have been corrected, and the *Sermon on Christ's temptation in the wilderness*

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wholly transcribed. But what is of still greater importance to mention is, that the *Epistles to his Brethren in Scotland*, and to the *Lords professing the truth in Scotland*, the *Answer to questions on Baptism*, etc. and the Letters at the end of this volume — all these, which form so large a portion of the whole, have been derived from the same source; and as they have not hitherto been published, this is a circumstance from which it is hoped our publication will derive additional interest. The *Exposition of the Sixth Psalm* in this edition will be found to differ from other printed copies: but these alterations originated, in the editor having found the first part, in a manuscript, in the British Museum, which bears every evidence of having been the original letter sent to Mrs. Bowes, and which afterwards came into the possession of Foxe the Martyrologist, the friend and correspondent of Knox. In the same collection of Foxe also, is a neatly written transcript of the *Address to the Faithful in London, Newcastle, and Berwick*, which on account of its superior correctness, was adopted for our version.

These circumstances are merely stated, to assure our readers of the care that has been taken to secure a superior degree of fidelity and correctness in the present publication. Not only also has there been no change or mutilation of the text, but not a single sentence or sentiment of the original has been omitted, however harsh it might appear to modern readers. With the same care, the style and phraseology of the Reformer have been scrupulously retained, the few obsolete

¹⁴ [An outer adjacent area.](#)

words that occur having been explained in foot-notes, while the antiquated orthography alone has been modernised. More than this would have

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been injudicious and unjust, for a slight examination will show the impropriety of tampering with that rich and impressive style. Much indeed has been said of Knox's ruggedness and lack of taste, and the allegations against him as the enemy of all refinement have been heavy.. But let the choice of his words and the structure of his sentences be considered — his epithets so pregnant with meaning, and the march of his language, so stately and so full of music — and it will be acknowledged, that as a writer of the old rich English tongue, he had few equals, and certainly no superior, during his own day. Nay, more than this, he not only exhibits the highest literary excellencies of his English cotemporaries, but with his characteristic good feeling and sound sense, he avoids that classical and scholastic pedantry by which their writings were so generally infected. From this circumstance, as well as from the vigour of his intellect, and straightforwardness of his habits of thought, Knox is a writer for all time, and will be intelligible in every age — and especially to those who prize the language of the Bible. To modernise such a style, therefore, would have been to deprive it of its richness and its power, in the vain hope of improving its perspicuity; and in consequence of this, the process has not been attempted.¹⁵ With these explanations, we submit our selection of Knox's practical writings to the judgment of the public.

Source: <http://archive.org/details/selectpracticalw00knox>

¹⁵ Even this mid-nineteenth century overview is perhaps difficult for most modern English-speaking people, and certainly those for whom English is a second language. The King James Version of the Bible is no longer the standard for the English-speaking world, and therefore it no longer aids our understanding of the still older language of Knox. Hence this modern adaptation is offered in an effort to make this text accessible to a wider audience today.
– WHG