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The retiring Moderator of the General Assembly, John A. Marquis, D.D., LL.D., President of Coe College, presided.

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THE REFORMERS AS MEN OF THOUGHT AND ACTION

BY

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THE man who is in the midst of some great labor rarely, if ever, thinks of the dim and distant future, and of his own place in it. He certainly never pictures himself as the hero of a posterity that is placing laurel wreaths upon his brow. How far from the thought of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century the idea that their words or their personalities would ever become the subjects of commemorative services! How much farther the thought that in that new world of mythical dimensions and mysterious conditions, of which they had barely heard, a democracy would be built such as they were dreaming of in their best moments! How much farther still the anticipation that a Church would arise framed after the pattern of their ideals, a Church endeavoring in all respects to realize in its doctrine and organization the principles of the New Testament, and that they themselves would be given the credit of stimulating it into existence! Finally, how far beyond their conception was the thought that this Church expressing itself through its representatives, after the lapse of four full centuries, would devise and execute a service commemorative of their work. Marvelous, indeed, is the

work of the Reformer and unexpected the form and the time of his reward.

But what is a reformer? There is too prevalent an impression in the mind of the average man that a reformer is a malcontent and an agitator, a man dissatisfied with existing conditions and bent on changing them. If it were necessary to correct this notion, one might point to the record of the men of whom we are now thinking. Surely they did not plead for change for the sake of change; they were not restless spirits venting their love of adventure in dashing efforts to overthrow the existing order and establish a new order. They were scholars. Luther was a common professor in the university; Calvin was a philosopher and a writer before he found himself forced, against his will, to take the leadership of a disorganized community, and give it coherency and form. Zwingli, though drawn into the whirl of public life, and finding it more congenial to his nature than either Luther or Calvin, was not essentially anything more than a student and a clergyman. John Knox came farthest away from the line of scholarship, but he, too, loved the pursuit of knowledge and cared more for what was true than for the noise of battle and the smell of powder. Being scholars, the Reformers were not malcontents by nature and temperament. It was stress of circumstances rather than a native love of change that drove them to denounce and attack existing conditions. Luther expressed the thought of them all when he said, years after the open break with the papacy, that had he known what it would

mean when he first launched upon the movement, "a team of ten oxen could not have dragged him into it" from his monastic retirement, his mystic meditations, and his quiet studies.

And yet the Reformers were discontented with the conditions of their day. Every reformer, by the very nature of his aims and aspirations, is one who desires and endeavors to refashion the world about him; therefore he is in a sense a malcontent. But between the agitator who glibly labels himself a reformer and a man of the type of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, or Knox, there is a vast gulf fixed. The former strikes right and left because he likes to see things topple over and fall in pieces; he is essentially a radical. The latter is essentially a conservative. He is more concerned to see the heart of good things saved from the corruption that is threatening it than merely to destroy the apparently useless things. The true reformer is aflame with zeal for the healthy and sound life of the spirit. He is hungry and thirsty, not for adventure but for the works of love. He hates what is eating out the life of men and women, but he loves men and women more than he hates anything. He forgets himself because his whole mental life is taken up and occupied with the highest welfare of others.

Let us see how this character of the true reformer was realized in the lives and careers of those whose work we are commemorating. The group includes a large number, each one of whom is worthy of the admiration and gratitude of the generations that have followed him.

But we must single out four as the leaders; among these, most conspicuous by reason of the initiative providentially allotted to him, stands Martin Luther.

Born in 1483, in what he calls a peasant's home, Luther developed a spiritual sensitiveness which, contrary to his father's wishes, led him in early manhood to the religious life. This was at the time identified with the monastic system. Step by step, Luther came to realize the difference between the ideals put forth in the Bible and the corruption of the Church in his day. When the sale of indulgences by Johann Tetzel was undertaken in Saxony his sense of duty was stirred to the quick, and on that memorable October 31, 1517, he nailed his Ninety-five Theses as a declaration and a challenge. The Theses were ninety-five, but the theme is one. Men cannot be made just before God by works of any kind, but by faith alone. This was called the material principle of the Reformation.

When challenged to prove his contention, Luther first undertook to do so on general grounds. He found, however, that this was a precarious position, and at the disputation held at Leipzig in 1519, he planted himself squarely on the Scriptures alone. If it could be proved from the Bible that he was wrong, he would recant. otherwise he must abide by the decision of the Word of God. The papacy tried excommunication upon him the very next year, but with no effect. Thus came into view the second great principle of the Reformation—the sole authority of the Bible in religion.

The next great step was the appeal to the State. At

the Diet of Worms in 1521 Luther was practically asked to accept the interpretation of the Bible by the Church. This he refused to do. He claimed the right for himself and for every other individual to read the Bible and understand it in the light given by the Spirit of God. Thus the third, though commonly unrecognized and never fully realized, principle of the Reformation became operative. For when Luther faced the diet with his immortal words: "Here I stand, otherwise I cannot, God help me," he gave expression to the most vital of all the principles that were to influence and mold Christian life from that day onward.

Almost simultaneously in another portion of Europe the same conditions had led Ulrich Zwingli, pastor at Glarus, Switzerland, provoked by the same scandal of the sale of indulgences, to challenge the advocates of the system to a discussion. Either because of local conditions or because of the special methods he used, he did not at first attract so much attention as Luther, although his positions were much more radical.

An effort to unite these two independent streams in one strong movement proved futile. But each gathered strength and moved along its own path. While that led by Luther gained steadily and occupied the imperial diets from 1521 to 1530, that led by Zwingli issued in a disruption and civil war in Switzerland, during which Zwingli lost his life in battle and the reforming party seemed to collapse.

On the German side of the line, a stage was reached when in the Diet of Augsburg the Reformers clearly

and definitely placed a constructive statement of their doctrinal views before the assembled princes. This was a great gain, but it did not satisfy the papal side and the years following increased the breadth of the chasm between the old and the new to such an extent that a war was inevitable. Fortunately, Luther died before the actual outbreak of hostilities. The struggle began with the war, commonly called the Smalkaldic, 1546-1547, and continued with some interruptions until 1555, when the Religious Peace of Augsburg gave Lutherans and Romanists equal rights in the empire.

Meanwhile, ten years before the outbreak of the Smalkaldic War, John Calvin made his appearance in Geneva. He was almost forcibly drawn into the struggle of Farel to revive and infuse permanent life into the Zwinglian movement. Born in France, in 1509, Calvin belonged to the constructive rather than to the pioneer stage of the great movement. But from the time of his arrival at Geneva in 1536 to the day of his death, in 1564, his genius and his power were the controlling factors. He organized the government of the city upon the democratic plan, and the Church according to the Presbyterian polity; he reformed the morals and the social life of the community and gave to the world a new interpretation of Christianity.

The human mind has produced three world systems and only three. It was given to Calvin to work out consistently upon Biblical grounds the most wholesome and successful system of the three. These systems may

be named in general the absolutistic, the individualistic, and the collectivistic.

The absolutistic system logically means autocracy in the State, papacy in the Church, dogmatism in religious thought, and authority in philosophy.

The individualistic system means anarchy in the body politic, irresponsible freedom in the Church, subjectivism in religious thought, and agnosticism in philosophy.

The collectivistic system is identified with democracy in the State, representative or presbyterian government in the Church, the authority of the spirit in religious thought, and scientific method in philosophy. The breadth and strength of this system as constructively presented to the world by Calvin have rendered it a universal, international, and ecumenical force, which is destined to control the life of mankind in the future even more completely than it has during the four centuries past.

From Geneva John Knox, born in 1505, and four years the senior of Calvin, carried this new interpretation to Scotland. Here conditions were ripe for a rapid and radical change in the thought and practice of the Church. Domestic, political, and social ferment had aligned the nobility and the people on one side against the clergy and the crown on the other. The struggle was unequal, though not without its episodes and stages. The old order was foredoomed to pass away and John Knox was the man providentially prepared to replace it by the new. In the year 1560, as if in one day, the change was made, and the so-called Reformed Church

was established. Thus the movement begun in Wittenberg forty-three years earlier reached its culmination in Edinburgh. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, are the towering figures in the great army of men whose collective labors rise in the mind when the word, Reformation, is pronounced.

What significance for the man who follows them at a distance of four hundred years is to be attached to the personalities and labors of these men? What does it mean to us that they lived and spoke, toiled and suffered, four centuries ago?

The answer to these questions is rich and manifold. From among the thoughts that throng the mind, let us select a few for special consideration.

First, the success given to the Reformers means the triumph of personality over conditions. These men lived and labored at a time when Nature, hard and exacting, had not as yet submitted to the dominance of man, her lord and master, to the degree that she has yielded since. The conditions were crude and simple. Life was comparatively barren of the physical comforts to which the children of the twentieth century are so accustomed as to take them for granted. Becky Sharp says, "It would be easy—oh, so easy—to be good on five thousand pounds a year." Many men feel that it would be possible for them to work and to produce great world-moving thoughts if only they could be freed from the hard conditions of life, if only they could command the services of an army of stenographers and clerks and assistants, if only they could so arrange

their lives that they would not feel the annoyances of untoward or debasing environment, or the pinch of poverty, if only their minds could be emancipated from the necessity of thinking of what they shall eat and what they shall drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed.

There is no doubt that the physical life lies at the basis of sound intellectual work. A sound body in normally healthy condition is prerequisite to the best activities of the mind and spirit. But it is an error to think that the life of the spirit beats with strength proportionate to the physical elements upon which it is based and through which it must needs labor and express itself. The work of the Reformers is a standing rebuke to the materialistic spirit of an age in which the greed for money, with all the facilities it provides for all sorts of activities, has invaded the very citadel of the spiritual life, organized Christianity. Consider the conditions under which Luther and Zwingli and Knox achieved the triumph of the spirit. One goes to Edinburgh and examines with deepest interest that house on High Street in which the fiery leader of the Scottish Reformation rested himself during the periods of intermission between preaching at St. Gile's Cathedral, or visiting Mary at the Holyrood Palace, or consulting with the members of Parliament, and one is amazed at the simplicity and barrenness of the establishment. Can it be that such a rich life was lived in such unhelpful surroundings? One goes to the Wartburg and is shown the room in which Luther translated the New Testament into the rugged vernacular German

in which it survives to the present day, and one is fascinated by the quaint disposition of details and overawed by the remembrance of the great ideas which once found their local habitation in the little room. But, on second thought, one is amazed that such power should have been associated with such insignificant outward concomitants.

But amazement is not in place. The facts of the lives of these great souls should once and forever burn the conviction into our hearts that circumstances are nothing but plastic clay in the hands of the mighty spirit. When the inner man, whose springs of life are from God arises in his might, he is a Samson whom the cords of unfavorable conditions cannot restrain or hold bound.

Of the four great Reformers who are for the moment occupying our attention, not one lived to the full measure of a well-rounded human life upon earth. If the psalmist's "threescore years and ten" be the typical lifetime, then Luther came short by seven full years, Calvin by fifteen, Knox by three, and Zwingli by twenty-three, when he died in battle at the age of forty-seven. Regardless of rules of hygiene, forgetful of everything but the task that was set before them, they were willing to spend and be spent. Unmindful of its passing, they kept the candle of life burning brightly, bent only on its shedding light as it burned in a benighted world. Their constitutions were undoubtedly injured by the hard strain put upon them through unceasing labors. If they were not called upon like those heroes of old to

"Meet the tyrant's brandished steel,
The lion's gory mane,"

they were just as really conquerors over hardships and difficulties, before which few muster up the courage to stand.

There is a social philosophy preached to-day according to which the ills of mankind are due to economic conditions. If these conditions were made ideal the millennium would come automatically. Poverty is the cause of ignorance, disease, and sin. Remove poverty and men would be lifted to a high intellectual level. Without for a moment minimizing the importance of rendering conditions as nearly ideal as possible, the course of the Reformers shows the need of redeemed personality before conditions can be changed. Luther is sometimes censured because in the peasants' uprising he did not throw his sympathy and influence on the side of the downtrodden peasants. On the face of it, it must be admitted that his conduct fails to measure up to the best Christian ideals of this later day. But considered from the viewpoint of a true Christian philosophy, his instinct was accurate. It was necessary to have a people awakened to spiritual realities before industrial conditions could be adequately treated. "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." It was much more important to strike at the root of the tree than to deal with the trunk outwardly, much more effective to deal with the spiritual forces, unentangled with external conditions, than to lose the essence of things

in the effort to make applications in detail. The salvation of men not only may, but must, precede the change of conditions. The supreme need in reformation is not the creation of conditions favorable to the change, but of characters that will create the conditions.

Secondly, the Reformers mean to us the triumph of personality over social mechanism, of spirit over institutions, of freedom over efficiency. Great is the power of organization, and our day seems to have awakened to a consciousness of this profoundly significant fact in the world. Coöperation accomplishes vastly more than scattered individual effort. Teamwork, whether on the ball field, or as a coördinated movement on the battle front, assures victory over forces that are divided, no matter how far superior in other respects. A perfect machine, whether military or ecclesiastical, seems to be the goal of the ambition of large groups of men, and efficiency has been chosen as the motto—the magic wand to conjure with. To all of this a man of the present day would be purblind to say an unqualified nay.

But one need not turn his eyes away from the origins of the New Testament to find due emphasis laid on thorough organization. The original preacher of cooperative movement in order to efficiency was the Apostle Paul. Read his wonderful parable of the Body and the Members. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ." "They are many members, but one body." Nothing has been said in

behalf of efficiency by organized coöperation more compactly, more practically, and more forcibly, than has been said by the Apostle Paul in that matchless simile.

But the difference between the apostle's plea for organized coöperation and the present-day anvil chorus on the same subject is that Paul was thinking of organization designed to advance the life of the spirit. Modern advocates of coöperation have in mind economy and abundant results. We are in danger of enthroning a new goddess in our pantheon, the goddess of efficiency, and of falling down and worshiping her, irrespective of the cause or causes to be observed.

The Reformers with keen instinct had seized upon the supremacy of the spirit. They fought a battle against the most powerful organization that, up to their time, the world had ever allowed to be completed. The papal system, patterned after the model of Imperial Rome, had grown through centuries, fitting part into part, member into member, in complete and perfect subordination. Emperors from the days of Henry IV, who ignominiously bent his knees at Canossa, and through the days of Barbarossa and the greater Frederick II, had striven with all their might to break this papal power and had found it invincible. When a man grew overly ambitious, when the lust for power entered his heart, as it did into the Medici of Florence, all he had to do was to insinuate himself into this system, and to rise step by step to a seat of command. Thence he could control the world. When Rodrigo Borgia, the infamous Alexander VI, was elected to the papacy, he

exclaimed, "Now I am pope, now I can rule the world." This wonderful mechanism bade fair to be the rock against which whosoever struck was destined to be dashed to pieces, and on whomsoever it fell, it seemed as if he must be ground to powder. John Huss, Jerome, and Savonarola were crushed by it. It was the ideal of efficiency as an organized institution. What should man do to it or with it?

But no! Luther and Calvin, Zwingli and Knox, proved that there is a greater power than that of the most compact machine the world has ever known—the power of the spirit, of the spirit of man possessed and controlled and directed by the Spirit of God. The incredible came to pass. The gigantic image was struck at the feet by the stone not hewn with hands, and the image crumbled and fell. A few men, and they working independently, accomplished the miracle.

Let no one point doubtfully to the more recent Modernist movement in the Roman fold and claim that freedom is impotent against the efficient machine. The difficulty with Modernism was that it lacked the power of personality. It was not a movement for the freedom of the spirit as a product of evolution. Let Modernism revive as a movement of the spirit, let personality be placed at its center, and its warfare against ecclesiastical machinery is bound to succeed. Are we asked how this is to be accomplished, when the machine by its inexorable operation automatically eliminates every disturbing factor? Our answer is, we do not know. The inevitable element in such conflicts and their issues

is the element of surprise. No one could have foreseen that Luther and Calvin, Zwingli and Knox, would triumph where Wyclif and Huss and Savonarola had failed; yet that is precisely what happened. The ways of the Spirit are mysterious, but his achievements are sure; and his victory is all the more certain because the path he follows is unpredictable. Let us be men of the Spirit, dauntless and strong, assured that the victory is ours if we faint not nor falter.

Thirdly, the course of the Reformers demonstrates the triumph of the fear of God over the fear of man, of the Spirit over tradition and statute. Luther and Zwingli, Calvin and Knox, are reputed men of courage to have dared what they did. But courage in their case was only another name for that holy fear of God which swallows all other fears. It is doubtful whether Luther's personal courage would have carried him as far as it did had it not been suffused and tempered by the regard he had for the will of God. Iron in its purity is hard, but it is brittle. Add to it certain other ingredients under high temperature and it becomes steel. Luther faced the Diet of Worms on the afternoon of April 17, 1521. On the journey he had prepared himself as well as a man could, but as he gazed upon the assemblage of magnates his heart sank within him. When the question was put to him whether he would recant his views as contained in the books he had published, of which copies had been provided, he answered in a low, almost inaudible voice. He seemed to be on the point of collapse. He said it was a serious question, and he ought

to have time to consider it. He was given until the next day. He went to his lodgings and engaged in prayer. The next day he faced the same assemblage. The same question was asked him. His natural timidity had disappeared. He had seen God—what terror could the fear of man have for him?

John Knox's unflinching stand before Mary, Queen of Scots is very well known. It amazed his contemporaries. To him it was nothing more than the ordinary duty of a man who had learned to regard the will of God as the supreme rule of his conduct.

This feature of the Reformers' minds explains their attitude to the Bible on the one hand and to tradition on the other. The motto, "The Bible, the only religion of Protestants," has become so familiar in the present age that the difficulty of setting it forth and vindicating it is not easily realized. Yet it was inexpressibly hard to break the power of tradition and revert to the fountainhead of authority for light on faith and conduct. Tradition is a tremendous power. It accumulates force as it moves. It thickens and hardens every moment. It is like some evil habit which a man contracts and which he finds impossible to give up. Tradition is a pressure that prescribes the course of the individual and compels him to move within certain fixed bounds. It is an atmosphere that must be breathed, a stream that carries all upon its bosom. It requires strength to cut loose from any tradition. The tradition of the Medieval Church was stronger than ordinary traditions, because it came under the name and with the sanction of the

Word of God. To cut loose from tradition was first of all to realize that the will of God was something other than the body of precepts and maxims handed down by tradition in the Church. To realize this in one's own mind first, then to proclaim it in such a way that others should believe it—this required strength of character possible only to the man of the Spirit.

Sabatier has given us a book in which he contrasts the religions of authority with the religion of the Spirit. So far as the Reformers were concerned, the authority they recognized was the sole authority of the Spirit. Being men of the Spirit, they committed themselves to it absolutely and unconditionally. In the Bible they recognized the supreme expression of the will of the Spirit. The antithesis between Spirit and authority does not exist for those who commit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit.

The triumph of the fear of God means the vindication of the venture of faith. In the realm of the Spirit true safety lies in taking risks. Faith is the key word of the Reformation, in more than one sense. It is first the key word of its doctrinal system as given in the phrase, justification by faith. It is also the key word of the life of its leading spirits. Faith to them was more than a theological term. It was more even than the act of appropriating the offer of salvation from the hands of God. It was an act of commitment to the guidance of God. Like Abraham, the Reformers launched upon their bold course as travelers not know-

ing whither they went. Each of them might rightly have made his own the words of Paracelsus:

> "I go to prove my soul,
> I see my way as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive—what time, what circuit first,
> I ask not; but unless God send his hail
> Or blinding fire-balls, sleet or stifling snow,
> In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
> He guides me and the bird. In his good time."

When Luther launched out upon this venture of faith there was no lack of indication that he would incur the apparently omnipotent hatred of the papacy. The grim examples of Huss and Savonarola lay before him like forbidding danger signals on the path. When Calvin committed himself to the new interpretation of Christianity, Francis I was holding the reins of government in France with a stern determination to maintain the unity of his realm by suppressing the reformed views, even though he might to that end shed the blood of thousands of his best subjects. John Knox threw himself into the movement in the face of the recent martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart. Luther, Calvin, Knox, saw their way in those days of hail and sleet and stifling snow and blinding fireballs as birds see their trackless way. But they believed in the guidance of Him who directs the bird, and they arrived. So shall it be with the man of faith always and everywhere. He will arrive. Whether soon, in his own earthly lifetime, or later, when he himself has won

his victor's crown of gold, in God's good time he will arrive.

Finally, the holy fear of God as a principle of action for the individual led the Reformers to a conception of the State in which theocracy and democracy blend into harmony and dethrone autocracy. Just as in the Church, under the full functioning of this fundamental reformation, the priest disappears, because every man becomes his own priest, so in the State, under the same conditions, the king is antiquated and ready to become an ornamental relic of bygone ideal, or to vanish utterly from life. True democracy, in which each citizen has realized his ideal relation to the Source of all authority, the voice of God in his conscience, is the real theocracy, the rule of God. And when this has been said, we come to the point where the labors of the Reformers affiliate with the preaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God.

Four hundred years lie between the Reformers and ourselves. But their problems and ours are not essentially different. The chief fact of importance is that they found the key to the solution of the problems. That key resolves itself into two principles: First, that reformation is progress by reversion to and fulfillment of preëxisting ideals; second, that the ideals underlying all sound progress have been given by God himself in his self-revelation in the Bible and Jesus Christ, his Son. The first shows the Reformers to be true progressives. Progress is not to be found in reconstruction by demolition. That is a purely mechanical process. True prog-

ress is a vital growth. It follows the law of life which always goes back to an already existing element full of potentialities and develops these out of it. It is the remnant that is saved in order to grow and fulfill the ideal.

The second principle is even more important. All reformation must insist on conformity to the known will of God; and God has not left himself without testimony. Only as men realize that the supreme good is to be found in God's will as revealed in his Word will they be worthy successors of the Reformers, who were themselves the successors of the apostles and prophets and of Jesus Christ.