

87. JOHN KNOX. THE UNYIELDING SCOT

John Knox was free from being a galley slave!
Where can he go?
Remain in Scotland, his beloved native country?
No, that's not a good idea. That's where intense persecution was raging. Then John would not be sure of his life for a moment.



King
Edward
VI.
Wikipedia

In those days, Edward VI reigned in England. We know from a previous chapter that he was a king who supported the Reformation as much as possible. So, John Knox decided to take refuge in England. He was safe there and not very far from his native country. In England, they received him with open arms.

He even became the king's court chaplain! Yet he was not content in England. To him, the Anglican Church was like the Roman Catholic Church. However, he remained there until Bloody Mary came to the throne. Then his life was also threatened in England because Bloody Mary wanted to kill that 'dangerous heretic'.

KNOX FOLLOWS HIS HEART

So he fled to Geneva in 1554 and became a student of Calvin. Knox felt at home in Geneva because Calvin taught the same as he believed and confessed.

Due to the bloody persecutions in England, many fled to Germany.

Because of that, an English refugee congregation was established in the German city of Frankfort-

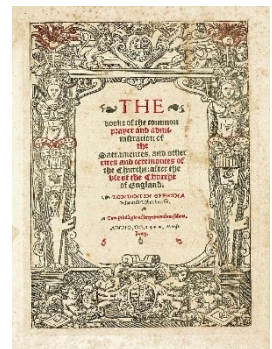


Christians fleeing Catholic England because of the persecution.
Wikipedia

on-Main. Those refugees called John Knox to serve as their minister. Knox could not refuse that call and agreed.

In 1555 he departed to Frankfort-on-Main and ministered to that refugee congregation. However, the refugees used the English prayer book Thomas Cranmer had compiled. John Knox opposed that because that prayer book was still much too Roman Catholic. He refused to use it.

This refusal caused disputes and divisions in the congregation. Some chose their pastor's side, but the majority demanded it should be used. That grieved John Knox, and so he returned to Geneva. He became a zealous co-worker of Calvin. Calvin could use the Scottish preacher well and was pleased with his help.



Thomas Cranmer's
prayerbook which
caused much
division. Wikipedia

However, John Knox longed for his native country Scotland. Sure, he was in no danger in Geneva. No persecution raged there. And yet, that same year, John Knox returned to that dangerous Scotland. Love for his people urged him to return, and Calvin did not have the heart to prevent him from going, although he let him go reluctantly.

Back in Scotland, the brave John Knox fearlessly preached the gospel. He fiercely combatted the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. The regent, Mary de Guise, was furious when she learned that John Knox was back in Scotland. She must arrest and kill that heretic!

She did her utmost to arrest him and get rid of him. Death lurked behind every corner for him. It became far too dangerous for John Knox to stay in Scotland. They even burned an effigy of him. So, John fled to Geneva again! There he was safe, for God watched over His servant. Calvin rejoiced when he had his friend and co-worker back again.

And yet, in 1557, John Knox travelled back to Scotland again!

That took courage as he went to meet many dangers. Perhaps a martyr's death awaited him. And yet - he went! His heart drew him to the Scottish people despite all the perils he knew he would face. Again, he set foot on shore in Scotland and would now remain there.

He preached against all the false Roman Catholic doctrines with the same intensity as before.

He loathed the papal mass and called it a cursed idolatry.

He furiously denounced the worship of images and relics.

His preaching hit home. The people heard him gladly, and from all sides, they flocked together to listen to him. Earnestly and emphatically, he aroused the people to stop practising those Roman Catholic abominations.

THE COVENANT

This preaching resulted in hundreds of Scottish noblemen meeting to make an alliance. They solemnly promised to support God's Word in Scotland and protect the oppressed and persecuted churches as much as possible. The name of that alliance of the Scottish noblemen was called "*The Covenant*". Some signed it with their blood when they became martyrs. But the Scottish government, with Mary de Guise at its head, supported Rome with all they had. This antagonism resulted in a civil war in Scotland. They fought hard and furiously. The people marched in large groups to the church buildings. Images, altars, crosses and many other items used by Roman Catholics were smashed and destroyed.



*John Knox preaching from a pulpit.
Museum at St Andrews.*

Monasteries were broken down. This destruction was Scotland's iconoclasm.

During those turbulent days, the regent, Mary de Guise, died. Her daughter, Mary Stuart, succeeded her as the queen, but she lived in France at the royal court and had married Francis II. So Scotland had no queen, and the Scottish government, the Parliament, used that



*Mary de Guise.
Wikipedia*

opportunity to side openly with the Reformation. That happened in 1560. From then, both the people and the Scottish government supported the Reformation. John Knox became the principal leader of Scotland's Church. His influence was enormous. Everybody listened to him. The Reformation triumphed in Scotland!

The Scottish Protestants were called *Presbyterians*. In England, they were called Puritans.

Undisturbed, the Reformation could now spread throughout Scotland!
Undisturbed?

MARY STUART

In 1561 a young, nineteen-year-old girl stepped ashore in Scotland. A young girl? No, a young nineteen years old *woman*, who was already a widow, stepped ashore. Her name was Mary Stuart! That young widow was the queen, returning to her country. None of her beautiful dreams for the future had eventuated. Her husband, Francis II, died suddenly in 1560. He had been the king of France for only one year. Then he died. God watched over His Church, also the Church of Scotland, and took him away. Francis II could no longer do any harm.

Nothing came of the alliance between Scotland and France, which aimed to destroy the Reformation in Scotland by force. God drew a line through Satan's attacks.

A year after the death of her husband in 1560, Mary Stuart returned to Scotland alone. Why should she stay in France? Mary left France as



Mary Stuart. 1542-1587. Also known as Mary I of Scotland.
Wikipedia

soon as possible and stepped ashore in Scotland. She was a zealous Roman Catholic. That was not surprising. A daughter of Mary de Guise, brought up for years at the court of the wicked French kings, under the evil influence of her mother-in-law, Catherine De' Medici, about whom we told you in chapter 82, the Roman Catholic religion was drummed into her from childhood.

The Scots were not at all happy with the return of their queen. They feared trouble because they realised all too well that Mary Stuart would do anything to make Scotland Roman Catholic again and break the power of the Reformation. They were not mistaken!

The firm plan of the nineteen-year-old queen was to destroy the Reformation in Scotland. But she came too late! The Scottish Parliament had supported the Reformation since 1560. The government forbade the celebration of the papal mass.

But the Scottish queen paid no attention to that. *She* was queen, wasn't she? So *she* would determine what was allowed and what wasn't! The first Sunday she spent on Scottish soil, she celebrated the papal mass in the royal chapel of her palace. The Scottish people were indignant when they heard about it. They forced their way into the small building, destroyed the altar, and broke the long candles burning before the image of Mary, the mother of the Lord. This act showed that the Scottish people did not scared of her.

John Knox was shocked when he heard of the mass the queen had held. He warned against it from the pulpit. He said: "A single mass is more dangerous than an army of ten thousand soldiers invading the country to oppress the true worship of God."

John Knox was Mary Stuart's great opponent. What incredible differences existed between those two! John Knox was a man who lived a

serious life and hated sin. Mary Stuart was a young woman who lived in sin and was only fond of feasting and having fun. It was to be expected that things would come to a head between those two.

JOHN KNOX AND QUEEN MARY

As soon as the queen heard that John Knox had preached so vehemently against the celebration of the papal mass, she sent him a message that he had to come to her.

John Knox immediately went because he was not afraid of her. "Don't you tell the people they must obey their queen?" she sourly asked him. "Don't you know that subjects must honour their ruler? Do you not profess that?"

"Yes, certainly, madam," Knox answered frankly. "I do know that. But when it concerns the worship of God, the people are not subject to the will of their rulers."

"Is that so," the queen answered angrily, "then you believe that the people may oppose their rulers?"

"Yes, certainly, madam," he replies, "if the rulers compel their subjects to do something which they



John Knox Admonishing Mary Queen of Scots. Painted by William Allan in 1829.

are not allowed to do, then the people may refuse to obey their rulers."

When she hears these words, Mary Stuart becomes deathly pale. For a moment, she glares at the brave reformer with glittering eyes, then with a voice vibrating with anger, she says tauntingly:

"Oh, I *get* it! My subjects must not obey *me*, but *you*!"

Undaunted, he answers:

"No, madam, not at all. But the *rulers* must *protect* the church!"

Heatedly, the queen retorts:

"But that's what I'm doing! To the best of my knowledge and conscience, the Roman Catholic Church is the *true* church, which I protect, as is my duty."

Without hesitation, John Knox answers:

"I regret very much, madam, but I disagree with you. Not your conscience, but God's Word is the guideline. God's Word clearly teaches what the true Church is and isn't; we must hold ourselves to that."

Fuming, the queen sends John Knox away, her eyes shooting daggers at him. If looks could kill...! If she could, she would gladly kill him.

How she hates that man!

Calmly the courageous reformer withdraws. He is not at all afraid of her rage. Instead of leaving the palace as quickly as possible, he enters one of the side rooms where a few ladies of the court are

standing together. He seriously warns them to leave their sinful life. He reminds them of their approaching death. Then their bodies, which they now flaunt with worldly attire in the service of sin, will decay in the grave. He tells them that they should repent!

That is John Knox!

He feared no one but God alone!

The queen did not listen to John Knox's earnest warning.

On the contrary, she continued in her wicked, sinful lifestyle.

One day John Knox compares her with Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab. What Jezebel had been for Israel, Mary Stuart was for Scotland. When the queen hears about it, she seethes with rage and immediately sends a message to John Knox that he must come to the palace *now*! The brave reformer obeys again and is soon standing before the angry queen. Mary Stuart hurls the most vehement reproaches at him. She trembles with rage. Then she bursts into tears and pleads with him to support and honour her before the people.

"Then you must see to it that I *can* honour you, madam," he answers frankly. Neither her rage nor her tears can soften John Knox. He stands immovable and does not budge an inch when it concerns God's honour. The queen hated that unyielding, inflexible man with a deadly hatred. Once, she accused John Knox of high treason and had him arrested. But the Scottish Parliament



Holyrood Palace where Mary Stuart received John Knox in 1565. <https://www.visiteuropeancastles.com/europe/castles-mary-queen-of-scots/>

acquitted him, and she had to release him because she did not dare to have him murdered.

MURDER AT THE OLD PROVOST'S HOUSE

It's evening. All is dark and quiet. The towers of the royal palace stand stark and black against the night sky. Everything is peaceful and quiet. Suddenly there's a heavy threatening rumble, a bright blinding flash of light, and a thunderous blast is heard a short distance away.

Pale and trembling with fear, people come running from all directions. Bits of stone from the provost's¹ house lay scattered throughout its garden. The piles of rubble are still smoking.

Soon the garden area is full of fearful, nervous people who ask each other what has happened and how the house could explode so suddenly!

In that garden, they find the dead body of a Scottish nobleman named Darnley. While removing the corpse, they discover a gaping wound in his chest from which some blood still



1567 drawing of the murder scene, drawn shortly after the murder. Wikipedia



A view of the ruins of the provost's house where lord Darnley was murdered. Groups of men stand in the foreground with the church behind them. Two people stand before a gate or port which has severed heads on spikes across the top. Painting by James Skene, 1827.

trickles. A stab from a dagger has put an end to his life. Alarmed, they look at each other. Indignant mutterings arise. Someone has murdered him! What is going on here? Who is Darnley? Who plunged that dagger into his chest and why?

Well, Francis II, the husband of Mary Stuart, had died. The young queen returned to Scotland as a widow. But soon after, she married a Scottish nobleman, Darnley. But that marriage was not a happy one. We won't go into details, but it was terrible. When Darnley became sick, she nursed and looked after him. Mary Stuart did not do that because she had started to love her husband, but she wished to deceive the people. All that so-called loving care was only a pretence! That evil queen was making plans to have him murdered! That show of love was hypocrisy!

And now, this evening, the two-storey provost house suddenly blew up. The idea was that the



Lord Darnley in his late teens, by an unknown artist. National Galleries of Scotland.

¹ A provost is a senior official of the church. The two-story house was next to the church building. The house was destroyed by gunpowder on the 10th of February 1567.

rubble and debris would bury Darnley's body. Then no one would ever have learned the truth. She had planned the whole thing with much cunning.

However, this outrageous plan failed. Whether someone had warned Darnley at the last moment or whether he didn't trust it for some reason, we don't know.

Despite being ill, he fled out of the house into the garden, where the murderer found him and stabbed him to death. He had been on watch there to ensure everything went according to plan. However, this revealed that it was not an accident but pre-meditated murder! The murderer was also discovered. His name was Bothwell. However, the Scottish people didn't trust it. They discussed it with each other. Everything was so strange, so suspicious! They whispered that not Bothwell but Queen Mary was the chief offender.

A few weeks later, Mary Stuart married for the third time. She married Bothwell, the murderer of Darnley!

"There you are!" said the Scottish people: "don't you see?! Our queen had Darnley murdered so she could marry Bothwell!"

They would no longer acknowledge such a wicked queen as their ruler. A terrible insurrection broke out. Mary Stuart still managed to assemble a small army of her friends, who, despite all, continued to support her. However, that little army was totally defeated. Mary was captured and imprisoned and had to abdicate from the throne. Her son James succeeded her.

Then, with the help of some friends, Mary Stuart managed to escape from prison, and she fled to England to her cousin Elizabeth. However, the English queen arrested Mary because she wanted to thrust Elizabeth from the throne so that *she* could become queen of England!

In 1587 Elizabeth ordered her cousin be put to death because she took part in a conspiracy against Elizabeth even while in prison. The English

queen *had* to do this because Mary Stuart constantly threatened her.

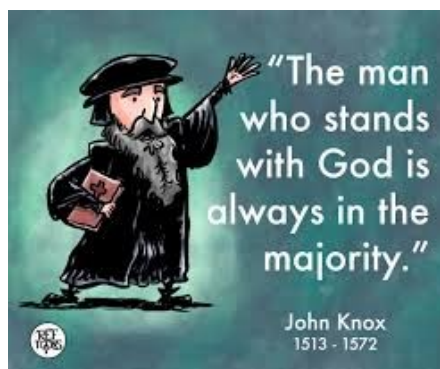
That was the terrible end of that wicked woman.

John Knox had not said too much when he compared her with Jezebel! But her sinful life was over, and she had to render an account before God of all her evil deeds.

Her son ruled in Scotland, but when in 1603 Elizabeth died without children, James, the king of Scotland, also became king of England. Since then, one king has ruled over both Scotland and England.

KNOX'S LAST DAYS

After Mary Stuart fled to England in 1567, there was no longer any danger of the Reformation perishing in Scotland.



John Knox continued to be a great leader. With all his strength, he warned against all things Roman Catholic. He watched over the Church of the Lord. That man experienced much during his life. So much that it weakened his body. His strength diminished quickly. At times they had to carry him onto the pulpit, but once he was there,

his eyes glittered, and his strong voice boomed through the church building like always.

In 1572 he heard the horrific news of the Bartholomew night in France, where tens of thousands of Huguenots were cruelly murdered. He trembled with indignation. He died that same year, 1572.

On the ninth of November, he stood in the pulpit for the last time. The congregation must have sensed it. At the end of the service, they all stood along the side of the road. They wanted to see their beloved preacher once more. Many made use of this opportunity to quickly shake his hand. Others waved a final farewell to him.

He died on the twenty-fourth of November, only fourteen days later. Many visited him on his deathbed. If there were no visitors, he asked

someone to read to him from the Bible. He often asked them to read John 17 - that well-known chapter that records the Lord Jesus' High Priestly prayer.

At times he asked someone to read John 14 to him.

When he heard:

"Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you,"

his eyes filled with tears. Then he desired with heart and soul that he might die because he knew Christ had purchased a mansion for him too!

He passed away peacefully and entered eternal glory. He had been a man who was deaf to all flattery and not afraid of threats. He feared no one but God. We can say of him:

"The memory of the just is blessed."

QUESTIONS

1. Why couldn't Knox be content in England?
2. Where did he go?
3. Why did Knox leave Frankfurt-on-the-Main?
4. Why did he return to Scotland and then leave it for Geneva again?
5. State the content of his preaching on his final return to Scotland.
6. What was 'The Covenant'?
7. Explain the action of Parliament regarding the Reformation.
8. What was the Protestant church of Scotland called?
9. Explain the return of Mary Stuart after one year of living in France.
10. Why does the author say Mary's return was 'too late'?
11. Why did Knox say, "A single mass is more dangerous than an army of ten thousand soldiers invading the country to oppress the true worship of God"?
12. Explain Knox's position on obedience to authority.
13. Why did Mary Stuart beg Knox to "honour her before the people"?

John Knox (1510–1572), leader of the Reformation in Scotland had a famous interview with Mary, Queen of Scots on August 26, 1561 (the first of several). The Queen had accused Knox of raising her subjects against her and that he spoke out against her authority. She said that he was the cause of sedition and slaughter in England.

Queen Mary asked, "Think ye that subjects, having the power, may resist their princes?" Knox answered that much like the Apostle Paul tolerated Nero so could he and his followers tolerate her rule so long as it was convenient, he then said:

If their princes exceed their bounds, Madam, no doubt they may be resisted, even by power. For there is neither greater honour, nor greater obedience, to be given to kings or princes, than God hath commanded to be given unto father and mother. But the father may be stricken with a frenzy, in which he would slay his children. If the children arise, join themselves together, apprehend the father, take the sword from him, bind his hands, and keep him in prison till his frenzy be overpast: think ye, Madam, that the children do any wrong? It is even so, Madam, with princes that would murder the children of God that are subjects unto them. Their blind zeal is nothing but a very mad frenzy, and therefore, to take the sword from them, to bind their hands, and to cast them into prison, till they be brought to a more sober mind, is no disobedience against princes, but just obedience, because it agreeth with the will of God.

14. Explain why Mary Stuart abdicated from the government.
15. Why was Knox a competent leader for Scotland?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Why did violence and destruction of images, relics, etc., play a more dominant role in Scotland than in any other country?
2. Describe the relationship between the Church and the State in Scotland.
3. Would you term Knox a man skilled in compromise? Why or why not?