

Why Were Our Reformers Burned?

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There are certain facts in history which the world tries hard to forget and ignore. These facts get in the way of some of the world's favorite theories, and are highly inconvenient. The consequence is that the world shuts its eyes against them. They are either regarded as vulgar intruders, or passed by as tiresome bores. Little by little they sink out of sight of the students of history, like ships in a distant horizon. Of such facts the subject of this paper is a vivid example: "*The Burning of our English Reformers; and the Reason why they were Burned.*"

It is fashionable in some quarters to deny that there is any such thing as *certainty about religious truth*, or any opinions for which it is worth while to be burned. Yet, 300 years ago, there were men who were certain they had found out truth, and were content to die for their opinions. It is fashionable in other quarters to leave out all the unpleasant things in history, and to paint everything with a rose-colored hue. A very popular history of our English Queens hardly mentions the martyrdoms of Queen Mary's days! Yet Mary was not called "Bloody Mary" without reason, and scores of Protestants were burned in her reign. Last — but not least, it is thought very bad taste in many quarters to say anything which throws discredit on the Church of Rome. Yet it is as certain that the Romish Church burned our English Reformers — as it is that William the Conqueror won the battle of Hastings. These difficulties meet me face to face as I walk up to the subject which I wish to unfold in this paper. I know their magnitude, and I cannot evade them. I only ask my readers to give me a patient and indulgent hearing.

After all, I have great confidence in the honesty of Englishmen's minds. Truth is truth, however long it may be neglected. Facts are facts, however long they may lie buried. I only want to dig up some old facts which the *sands of time* have covered over, to bring to the light of day some old English monuments which have been long neglected, to unstop some old wells which the prince of this world has been diligently filling with earth. I ask my readers to give me their attention for a few minutes, and I trust to be able to show them that it is good to examine the question, "Why were our Reformers burned?"

I. The broad facts of the martyrdom of our Reformers are a story well known and soon told. But it may be useful to give a brief outline of these facts, in order to supply a framework to our subject.

Edward VI, "that incomparable young prince," as Bishop Burnet justly calls him, died on the 6th July, 1553. Never, perhaps, did any royal personage in this land die more truly lamented, or leave behind him a fairer reputation. Never, perhaps, to man's poor fallible judgment, did the cause of God's truth in England receive a heavier blow. His last prayer before death ought not to be forgotten, "O Lord God, defend this realm from *papistry*, and maintain Your true religion." It was a prayer, I believe, not offered in vain.

After a foolish and deplorable effort to obtain the crown for Lady Jane Grey, Edward was succeeded by his eldest sister, *Mary*, daughter of Henry VIII, and best known in English history by the ill-omened name of "Bloody Mary." Mary had been brought up from her infancy as a rigid adherent of the Romish Church. She was, in fact, a very Papist of Papists, conscientious, zealous, bigoted, and narrow-minded in the extreme. She began at once to pull down her brother's work in every possible way, and to restore Popery in its worst and most offensive forms. Step by step she and her councillors marched back to Rome, trampling down one by one every obstacle, and as thorough as Lord Stratford in going straight forward to their mark. The Mass was restored; the English service was taken away; the works of Luther, Zwingle, Calvin, Tyndale, Bucer, Latimer, Hooper, and Cranmer were forbidden. Cardinal Pole was invited to England. The foreign Protestants resident in England were banished. The leading divines of the Protestant Church of England were deprived of their offices, and, while some escaped to the Continent, many were

put in prison. The old statutes against *heresy* were once more brought forward, primed and loaded. And thus by the beginning of 1555 the stage was cleared, and that bloody tragedy, in which Bishops Bonner and Gardiner played so prominent a part, was ready to begin.

For, unhappily for the credit of human nature, Mary's advisers were not content with depriving and *imprisoning* the leading English Reformers. It was resolved to make them abjure their principles — or to put them to death. One by one they were called before special Commissions, examined about their religious opinions, and called upon to recant, on pain of death if they refused. No third course, no alternative was left to them. They were either to give up Protestantism and receive Popery — or else they were to be burned alive! Refusing to recant, they were one by one handed over to the secular power, publicly brought out and chained to stakes, publicly surrounded with faggots, and publicly sent out of the world by that most cruel and painful of deaths — the death by fire. All these are broad facts which all the apologists of Rome can never gainsay or deny.

It is a broad fact that during the four last years of Queen Mary's reign, no less than 288 people were burnt at the stake for their adhesion to the Protestant faith.

- In 1555, 71 were burnt
- In 1556, 89 were burnt
- In 1557, 88 were burnt
- In 1558, 40 were burnt

Indeed, the faggots never ceased to blaze while Mary was alive, and five martyrs were burnt in Canterbury only a week before her death. Out of these 288 sufferers, be it remembered, one was an archbishop, four were bishops, twenty-one were clergymen, fifty-five were women, and four were children.

It is a broad fact that these 288 sufferers were not put to death for any offence against property or person. They were not rebels against the Queen's authority. They were not thieves, or murderers, or drunkards, or men and women of immoral lives. On the contrary, they were, with barely an exception, some of the holiest, purest, and best Christians in England, and several of them the most learned men of their day.

I might say much about the gross injustice and unfairness with which they were treated at their various examinations. Their *trials*, if indeed they can be called trials, were a mere mockery of justice. I might say much about the abominable *cruelty* with which most of them were treated, both in prison and at the stake. But you must read *Fox's Book of Martyrs* on these points.

Never did Rome do herself such irreparable damage as she did in Mary's reign. Even unlearned people, who could not argue much, saw clearly that a Church which committed such horrible bloodshed could hardly be the one true Church of Christ! But I have no time for all this. I must conclude this *general sketch* of this part of my subject with two short remarks.

For one thing, I ask my readers never to forget that for the burning of our Reformers, the Church of Rome is wholly and entirely responsible. The attempt to transfer the responsibility from the Church to the secular power, is a miserable and dishonest subterfuge. The men of Judah did not slay Samson; but they delivered him bound into the hands of the Philistines! The Church of Rome did not slay the Reformers; but she condemned them, and the secular power executed the condemnation! The precise measure of responsibility which ought to be meted out to each of Rome's agents in the matter, is a point that I do not care to settle. Miss Strickland, in her "Lives of the Queens of England," has tried in vain to shift the blame from unhappy Mary. With all the zeal of a woman, she has labored hard to whitewash her character. The reader of her biography will find little about martyrdoms. But it will not do. Mr. Froude's volume tells a very different tale. The Queen, and her Council, and the Parliament, and the Popish Bishops, and Cardinal

Pole — must be content to share the responsibility among them. One thing alone is very certain. They will never succeed in *shifting the responsibility* off the shoulders of the Church of Rome. Like the Jews and Pontius Pilate, when our Lord was crucified — all parties must bear the blame. THE BLOOD is upon them all.

For another thing, I wish my readers to remember that the burning of the Marian martyrs is an act that the Church of Rome has never *repudiated, apologized for, or repented of* — down to the present day. There stands the *huge blot* on her escutcheon; and there stands the *huge fact* side by side — that she never made any attempt to wipe it away.

Never has she repented of her cruel treatment of the Vaudois and the Albigenses;
never has she repented of the wholesale murders of the Spanish Inquisition;
never has she repented of the massacre at St. Bartholomew's;
never has she repented of the burning of the English Reformers!

We should make a note of that fact, and let it sink down into our minds. Rome never changes. Rome will never admit that she has made mistakes. She burned our English Reformers 300 years ago. She tried hard to stamp out by violence the Protestantism which she could not prevent spreading by arguments. If Rome had only the power, I am not sure that she would not attempt to play the whole game over again!

II. The question may now arise in our minds: WHO were the leading English Reformers that were burned? What were their names, and what were the circumstances attending their deaths? These are questions which may very properly be asked, and questions to which I proceed at once to give an answer.

In this part of my paper I am very sensible that I shall seem to many to go over old ground. But I am bold to say that it is ground which ought often to be gone over. I, for one, want the names of our martyred Reformers to be "Household Words" in every Protestant family throughout the land. I shall, therefore, make no apology for giving the names of the nine principal English martyrs in the chronological order of their deaths, and for supplying you with a few facts about each of them. Never, I believe, since Christ left the world, did Christian men ever meet a cruel death with such glorious faith, and hope, and patience, as these *Marian martyrs*. Never did dying men leave behind them such a rich store of noble sayings, sayings which deserve to be written in golden letters in our histories, and handed down to our children's children.

(1) The first leading English Reformer who broke the ice and crossed the river, as a martyr in Mary's reign, was **John Rogers**, a London Minister. He was burned in Smithfield on Monday, the 4th of February, 1555. Rogers was a man who, in one respect, had done more for the cause of Protestantism than any of his fellow-sufferers. In saying this I refer to the fact that he had assisted *Tyndale* and *Coverdale* in bringing out a most important version of the English Bible, a version commonly known as Matthews' Bible. Indeed, he was condemned as "Rogers, alias Matthews." This circumstance, in all human probability, made him a marked man, and was one cause why he was the first who was brought to the stake.

Rogers' examination before Gardiner gives us the idea of his being a bold, thorough Protestant, who had fully made up his mind on all points of the Romish controversy, and was able to give a reason for his opinions. At any rate, he seems to have silenced and abashed his examiners even more than most of the martyrs did. But argument, of course, went for nothing. "Woe to the conquered!" If he had the *Scripture* — his enemies had the *sword*.

On the morning of his martyrdom he was roused hastily in his cell in Newgate, and hardly allowed time to dress himself. He was then led forth to Smithfield on foot, within sight of the Church of Sepulcher, where he had preached, and through the streets of the parish where he had done the work of a pastor. By the wayside stood his wife and ten children (one a baby) whom Bishop Bonner, in his diabolical cruelty,

had flatly refused him permission to see in prison. He just saw them — but was hardly allowed to stop, and then walked on calmly to the stake, repeating the 51st Psalm. An immense crowd lined the street, and filled every available spot in Smithfield. Up to that day men could not tell how English Reformers would behave in the face of death, and could hardly believe that some would actually give their bodies to be burned for their religion. But when they saw John Rogers, the first martyr, walking steadily and unflinchingly into a fiery grave, the enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. They rent the air with thunders of applause. Even Noailles, the French Ambassador, wrote home a description of the scene, and said that Rogers went to death "as if he was walking to his wedding!" By God's great mercy he died with comparative ease. And so the first Marian martyr passed away.

(2) The second leading Reformer who died for Christ's truth in Mary's reign was **John Hooper**, Bishop of Gloucester. He was burned at Gloucester on Friday, the 9th of February, 1555.

Hooper was perhaps, the noblest martyr of them all. Of all Edward the Sixth's bishops, none has left behind him a higher reputation for personal holiness, and diligent preaching and working in his diocese. None, judging from his literary remains, had clearer and more Scriptural views on all points in theology. Some might say that he was too Calvinistic; but he was not more so than the Thirty-nine Articles. Hooper was a far-sighted man, and saw the danger of leaving *nest-eggs* for Romanism in the Church of England.

A man like Hooper, firm, stem, not naturally congenial, unbending and unsparing in his denunciation of sin, was sure to have many enemies. He was one of the first marked for destruction as soon as Popery was restored. He was summoned to London at a very early stage of the Marian persecution, and, after lingering eighteen months in prison, and going through the form of examination by Bonner, Gardiner, Tunstall, and Day — was degraded from his office, and sentenced to be burned as a heretic.

At first it was fully expected that he would suffer in Smithfield with Rogers. This plan, for some unknown reason, was given up, and to his great satisfaction, Hooper was sent down to Gloucester, and burnt in his own diocese, and in sight of his own cathedral. On his arrival there, he was received with every sign of sorrow and respect by a vast multitude, who went out on the Cirencester Road to meet him, and was lodged for the night in the house of a Mr. Ingrain, which is still standing, and probably not much altered. There Sir Anthony Kingston, whom the good Bishop had been the means of converting from a sinful life, entreated him, with many tears, to spare himself, and urged him to remember that "*Life was sweet — and death was bitter.*" To this the noble martyr returned this memorable reply, that "*Eternal life was more sweet — and eternal death was more bitter.*"

On the morning of his martyrdom he was led forth, walking, to the place of execution, where an immense crowd awaited him. It was market-day; and it was reckoned that nearly 7000 people were present. The stake was planted 100 yards in front of the Cathedral. The exact spot is marked now by a beautiful memorial at the east end of the churchyard. The window over the gate, where Popish friars watched the Bishop's dying agonies, stands unaltered to this day.

When Hooper arrived at this spot, he was allowed to pray, though strictly forbidden to speak to the people. And there he knelt down, and prayed a prayer which has been preserved and recorded by Fox, and is of exquisitely touching character. Even then a box was put before him containing a *full pardon*, if he would only recant. His only answer was, "Away with it; if you love my soul, away with it!" He was then fastened to the stake by a chain round his waist, and fought his last fight with the *king of terrors*. Of all the martyrs, none perhaps, except Ridley, suffered more than Hooper did. Three times the faggots had to be lighted, because they would not burn properly. Three quarters of an hour the noble sufferer endured the mortal agony, as Fox says, "neither moving backward, forward, nor to any side," but only praying, "Lord Jesus,

have mercy on me; Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and beating his breast with one hand until it was burned to a stump! And so the good Bishop of Gloucester passed away.

(3) The third leading Reformer who suffered in Mary's reign was **Rowland Taylor**, Rector of Hadleigh, in Suffolk. He was burned on Aldham Common, close to his own parish, the same day that Hooper died at Gloucester, on Friday, the 9th February, 1555.

Rowland Taylor is one of whom we know little, except that he was a great friend of Cranmer, and a doctor of divinity and canon law. But that he was a man of high standing among the Reformers is evident, from his being ranked by his enemies with Hooper, Rogers, and Bradford; and that he was an exceedingly able and ready divine is clear from his examination, recorded by Fox. Indeed, there is hardly any of the sufferers about whom the old Martyrologist has gathered together so many touching and striking things. One might think he was a personal friend.

Striking was the reply which he made to his friends at Hadleigh, who urged him to flee, as he might have done, when he was first summoned to appear in London before Gardiner — "What will you have me to do? I am old, and have already lived too long to see these terrible and most wicked days. Hurry, and do as your conscience leads you. I believe before God that I shall never be able to do for my God such good service as I may do now!"

Striking were the replies which he made to Gardiner and his other examiners. None spoke more pithily, weightily, and powerfully than did this Suffolk incumbent.

Striking and deeply affecting was his last testament and legacy of advice to his wife, his family, and parishioners, though far too long to be inserted here, excepting the last sentence — "For God's sake beware of Popery! For though it appears to have in it unity — yet the same is *vanity and Antichristianity*, and not in Christ's faith and truth."

He was sent down from London to Hadleigh, to his great delight, to be burned before the eyes of his parishioners. When he got within two miles of Hadleigh, the Sheriff of Suffolk asked him how he felt. "God be praised, Master Sheriff," was his reply, "never better! For now I am *almost at home*. I lack but just two stiles to go over, and I am even at my Father's house!"

As he rode through the streets of the little town of Hadleigh, he found them lined with crowds of his parishioners, who had heard of his approach, and came out of their houses to greet him with many tears and lamentations. To them he only made one constant address, "I have preached to you God's Word and truth — and have come this day to seal it with my blood."

On coming to Aldham Common, where he was to suffer, they told him where he was. Then he said, "Thank God, I am even at home!"

When he was stripped to his shirt and ready for the stake, he said, with a loud voice, "Good people, I have taught you nothing but God's Holy Word, and those lessons that I have taken out of the Bible; and I am come hither to seal it with my blood!" He would probably have said more, but, like all the other martyrs, he was strictly forbidden to speak, and even now was struck violently on the head for saying these few words. He then knelt down and prayed, a poor woman of the parish insisting, in spite of every effort to prevent her, in kneeling down with him. After this, he was chained to the stake, and repeating the 51st Psalm, and crying to God, "Merciful Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, receive my soul into Your hands!" stood quietly amidst the flames without crying or moving, until one of the guards dashed out his brains with an axe. And so this good old Suffolk incumbent passed away.

(4) The fourth leading Reformer who suffered in Mary's reign was **Robert Ferrar**, Bishop of St. David's, in Wales. He was burned at Carmarthen on Friday, the 30th March, 1555. Little is known of this good man beyond the fact that he was born at Halifax, and was the last Prior of Nostel, in Yorkshire, an office which he surrendered in 1540. He was also Chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer, and to this influence he owed his elevation to the Episcopal bench.

He was first imprisoned for various trivial and ridiculous charges on temporal matters, and afterwards was brought before Gardiner, with Hooper, Rogers, and Bradford — on the far more serious matter of his *doctrine*. The articles exhibited against him clearly show that in all questions of faith, he was of one mind with his fellow-martyrs. Like Hooper and Taylor, he was condemned to be burned in the place where he was best known, and was sent down from London to Carmarthen. What happened there at his execution is related very briefly by Fox, partly, no doubt, because of the great distance of Carmarthen from London in those pre-railways days; partly, perhaps, because most of those who saw Ferrar burned could speak nothing but Welsh. One single fact is recorded which shows the good Bishop's *courage* and *constancy* in a striking light. He had told a friend before the day of execution that if he saw him once stir in the fire from the pain of his burning, he need not believe the doctrines he had taught. When the awful time came, he did not forget his promise, and, by God's grace, he kept it well. He stood in the flames holding out his hands until they were burned to stumps, until a bystander in mercy struck him on the head, and put an end to his sufferings. And so the Welsh Bishop passed away.

(5) The fifth leading Reformer who suffered in Mary's reign was **John Bradford**, Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Chaplain to Bishop Ridley. He was burned in Smithfield on Monday, July the 1st, 1555, at the early age of thirty-five. Few of the English martyrs, perhaps, are better known than Bradford, and none certainly deserve better their reputation. Strype calls Bradford, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer — the "four prime pillars" of the Reformed Church of England. At an early age his high talents commended him to the notice of men in high quarters, and he was appointed one of the six royal chaplains who were sent about England to preach up the doctrines of the Reformation. Bradford's commission was to preach in Lancashire and Cheshire, and he seems to have performed his duty with singular ability and success. He preached constantly in Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton, Bury, Wigan, Ashton, Stockport, Prestwich, Middleton, and Chester — with great benefit to the cause of Protestantism, and with great effect on men's souls. The consequence was what might have been expected. Within a month of Queen Mary's accession, Bradford was in prison, and never left it until he was burned. His youth, his holiness, and his extraordinary reputation as a preacher — made him an object of great interest during his imprisonment, and immense efforts were made to pervert him from the Protestant faith. All of these efforts, however, were in vain. As he lived — so he died.

On the day of his execution, he was led out from Newgate prison to Smithfield about nine o'clock in the morning, amid such a crowd of people as was never seen either before or after. A Mrs. Honeywood, who lived to the age of ninety-six, and died about 1620, remembered going to see him burned, and her shoes being trodden off by the crowd. Indeed, when he came to the *stake*, the Sheriffs of London were so alarmed at the press, that they would not allow him and his fellow-sufferer, Leaf, to pray as long as they wished. "Arise," they said, "and make an end; for the press of the people is great."

"At that word," says Fox, "they both stood up upon their feet, and then Master Bradford took a faggot in his hands and *kissed* it, and so likewise the *stake*." When he came to the stake, he held up his hands, and, looking up to Heaven, said, "*O England, England, repent of your sins! Beware of idolatry; beware of false Antichrists! Take heed they do not deceive you!*" After that he turned to the young man Leaf, who suffered with him, and said, "Be of good comfort, brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!" After that he spoke no more that man could hear, excepting that he embraced the reeds, and said,

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to eternal life, and few there are who find it." "He embraced the flames," says Fuller, "as a fresh gale of wind in a hot summer day." And so, in the prime of life, he passed away.

(6, 7) The sixth and seventh leading Reformers who suffered in Mary's reign were two whose names are familiar to every Englishman, Nicholas **Ridley**, Bishop of London, and Hugh **Latimer**, once Bishop of Worcester. They were both burned at Oxford, back to back, at one stake, on the 16th of October, 1555.

The history of these two great English Protestants is so well known to most people, that I need not say much about it. Next to Cranmer, there can be little doubt that no two men did so much to bring about the establishment of the principles of the Reformation in England. Latimer, as an extraordinary popular preacher, and Ridley, as a learned man and an admirable manager of the Metropolitan diocese of London, have left behind them reputations which never have been passed. As a matter of course, they were among the first that Bonner and Gardiner struck at, when Mary came to the throne, and were persecuted with relentless severity until their deaths.

How they were examined again and again by Commissioners about the great points in controversy between Protestants and Rome — how they were shamefully baited, teased, and tortured by every kind of unfair and unreasonable dealing — how they gallantly fought a good fight to the end, and never gave way for a moment to their adversaries — all these are matters with which I need not trouble my readers. Are they not all fairly chronicled in the pages of good old Fox? I will only mention a few circumstances connected with their deaths.

On the day of their martyrdom, they were brought separately to the place of execution, which was at the end of Broad Street, Oxford, close to Balliol College. *Ridley* arrived on the ground first, and seeing Latimer come afterwards, ran to him and kissed him, saying, "Be of good heart, brother; for God will either assuage the fury of the flames, or else strengthen us to abide it!" They then prayed earnestly, and talked with one another, though no one could hear what they said. After this they had to listen to a sermon by a wretched renegade divine named Smith, and, being forbidden to make any answer, were commanded to make ready for death.

Ridley's last words before the fire was lighted were these, "Heavenly Father, I give You most hearty thanks that You have called me to a profession of You even unto death. I beseech You, Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver the same from all her enemies." *Latimer's* last words were like the blast of a trumpet, which rings even to this day, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God's grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out!"

When the flames began to rise, *Ridley* cried out with a loud voice in Latin, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit! Lord, receive my spirit," and afterwards repeated these last words in English.

Latimer cried as vehemently on the other side of the stake, "Father of Heaven, receive my soul." Latimer soon died. An old man, above eighty years of age, it took but little to set his spirit free from its earthly tenement.

Ridley suffered long and painfully, from the bad management of the fire by those who attended the execution. At length, however, the flames reached a vital part of him, and he fell at Latimer's feet, and was at rest. And so the two great Protestant bishops passed away. "They were lovely and beautiful in their lives, and in death they were not divided."

(8) The eighth leading English Reformer who suffered in Mary's reign was *John Philpot*, Archdeacon of Winchester. He was burned in Smithfield on Wednesday, December the 18th, 1555. Philpot is one of the martyrs of whom we know little comparatively, except that he was born at Compton, in Hampshire, was

of good family, and well connected, and had a very high reputation for learning. The mere fact that at the beginning of Mary's reign he was one of the leading champions of Protestantism in the mock discussions which were held in Convocation, is sufficient to show that he was no common man.

The thirteen examinations of Philpot before the Popish bishops are given by Fox at great length, and fill no less than one hundred and forty pages of one of the Parker Society volumes. The length to which they were protracted, shows plainly how anxious his judges were to turn him from his principles. The skill with which the Archdeacon maintained his ground, alone and unaided, gives a most favorable impression of his learning, no less than of his courage and patience.

The night before his execution he received a message, while at supper in Newgate, to the effect that he was to be burned next day. He answered at once, "I am ready! God grant me strength and a joyful resurrection." He then went into his bed room, and thanked God that he was counted worthy to suffer for His truth.

The next morning, at eight o'clock, the Sheriffs called for him, and conducted him to Smithfield. The road was foul and muddy, as it was the depth of winter, and the officers took him up in their arms to carry him to the stake. Then he said, merrily, alluding to what he had probably seen at Rome, when traveling in his early days, "What, will you make me a Pope? I am content to go to my journey's end on foot."

When he came into Smithfield, he kneeled down and said, "I will pay my vows in you, O Smithfield." He then kissed the stake and said, "Shall I disdain to suffer at this *stake* — seeing my Redeemer did not refuse to suffer a most vile death on the *cross* for me?" After that, he meekly repeated the 106th, 107th, and 108th Psalms; and being chained to the stake, died very quietly. And so the good Archdeacon passed away.

(9) The ninth and last leading Reformer who suffered in Mary's reign was **Thomas Cranmer**, Archbishop of Canterbury. He was burned at Oxford, on the 21st of March, 1556. There is no name among the English martyrs so well known in history as his. There is none certainly in the list of our Reformers to whom the Church of England, on the whole, is so much indebted. He was only a mortal man, and had his weaknesses and infirmities, it must be admitted; but still, he was a great man, and a good man.

Cranmer, we must always remember, was brought prominently forward at a comparatively early period in the English Reformation, and was made Archbishop of Canterbury at a time when his views of religion were confessedly half-formed and imperfect. Whenever quotations from Cranmer's writings are brought forward by the advocates of semi-Romanism in the Church of England, you should always ask carefully to what period of his life those quotations belong. In forming your estimate of Cranmer, do not forget his antecedents. He was a man who had the honesty to grope his way into fuller light, and to cast aside his early opinions and confess that he had changed his mind on many subjects. How few men have the courage to do this!

Cranmer maintained an unblemished reputation throughout the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, although frequently placed in most delicate and difficult positions. Not a single man can be named in those days who passed through so much dirt — and yet came out of it so thoroughly undefiled.

Cranmer, beyond all doubt, laid the foundation of our present Prayer-book and Articles. Though not perhaps a brilliant man, he was a learned one, and a lover of learned men, and one who was always trying to improve everything around him. When I consider the immense difficulties he had to contend with, I often wonder that he accomplished what he did. Nothing, in fact — but his steady perseverance, would have laid the foundation of our Formularies.

I say all these things in order to break the force of the great and undeniable fact that he was the only English Reformer who for a time showed the *white feather*, and for a time shrank from dying for the truth!

I admit that he fell sadly. I do not pretend to extenuate his fall. It stands forth as an everlasting proof, that *the best of men are only men at the best*. I only want my readers to remember that if Cranmer failed as no other Reformer in England *failed* — he also had *done* what certainly no other Reformer had done.

From the moment that Mary came to the English throne, Cranmer was marked for destruction. It is probable that there was no English divine whom the unhappy Queen regarded with such rancour and hatred. She never forgot that her mother's divorce was brought about by Cranmer's advice, and she never rested until he was burned.

Cranmer was imprisoned and examined just like Ridley and Latimer. Like them, he stood his ground firmly before the Commissioners. Like them, he had clearly the best of the argument in all points that were disputed. But, like them, of course, he was pronounced guilty of heresy, condemned, deposed, and sentenced to be burned.

And now comes the painful fact that in the last month of Cranmer's life, his courage failed him, and he was persuaded to sign a *recantation* of his Protestant opinions. Flattered and cajoled by subtle kindness, frightened at the prospect of so dreadful a death as burning, tempted and led away by the devil — Thomas Cranmer fell, and put his hand to a paper, in which he repudiated and renounced the principles of the Reformation, for which he had labored so long.

Great was the sorrow of all true Protestants on hearing these tidings! Great was the triumphing and exultation of all Papists! Had they stopped here and set their noble victim at liberty, the name of Cranmer would probably have sunk and never risen again. But the Romish party, as God would have it, outwitted themselves. With fiendish cruelty they resolved to burn Cranmer, even after he had recanted! This, by God's providence, was just the turning point for Cranmer's reputation. Through the abounding grace of God, he repented of his fall, and found Divine mercy. Through the same abounding grace, he resolved to die in the faith of the Reformation. And at last, through abounding grace, he witnessed such a bold confession in St. Mary's, Oxford, that he confounded his enemies, filled his friends with thankfulness and praise, and left the world a triumphant martyr for Christ's truth!

I need hardly remind you how, on the 21st March, the unhappy Archbishop was brought out, like Samson in the hands of the Philistines, to make sport for his enemies, and to be a gazing-stock to the world in St. Mary's Church, at Oxford. I need hardly remind you how, after Dr. Cole's sermon he was invited to declare his faith, and was fully expected to acknowledge publicly his alteration of religion, and his adhesion to the Church of Rome. I need hardly remind you how, with intense mental suffering, the Archbishop addressed the assembly at great length, and at the close suddenly astounded his enemies by renouncing all his former recantations, declaring the *Pope to be Antichrist*, and rejecting the Popish doctrine of the Real Presence. Such a sight was certainly never seen by mortal eyes since the world began!

But then came the time of Cranmer's triumph. With a light heart, and a clear conscience, he cheerfully allowed himself to be hurried to the stake amidst the frenzied outcries of his disappointed enemies. Boldly and undauntedly he stood up at the stake while the flames curled around him, steadily holding out his *right hand* in the fire, and saying, with reference to his having signed a recantation, "*This unworthy right hand,*" and steadily holding up his left hand towards heaven. Of all the martyrs, strange to say, none at the last moment showed more physical courage than Cranmer did. Nothing, in short, in all his life became him so well as the manner of his leaving it. Greatly he had sinned — but greatly he had repented. Like Peter he fell — but like Peter he rose again. And so passed away the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury.

I will not trust myself to make any comment on these painful and interesting histories. I have not time. I only wish my readers to believe that the *half* of these men's stories have not been told them, and that the

stories of scores of men and women less distinguished by position might easily be added to them — quite as *painful* and quite as *interesting*. But I will say boldly, that the men who were burned in this way were not men whose memories ought to be lightly passed over, or whose opinions ought to be lightly esteemed.

Opinions for which "an army of martyrs" died, ought not to be dismissed with scorn. To their faithfulness, we owe the existence of the Reformed Church of England. Her *foundations* were *cemented with their blood*. To their courage we owe, in a great measure our English liberty. They taught the land that it was worth while to die for free thought. Happy is the land which has had such citizens! Happy is the Church which has had such Reformers! Honor be to those who at Smithfield, Oxford, Gloucester, Carmarthen, and Hadleigh — have raised stones of remembrance and memorial to the martyrs!

III. But I pass on to a point which I hold to be one of cardinal importance in the present day. The point I refer to is **the special reason why our Reformers were burned**. Great indeed would be our mistake, if we supposed that they suffered for the vague charge of refusing submission to the Pope, or desiring to maintain the independence of the Church of England. Nothing of the kind! The principal reason why they were burned, was because they refused one of the peculiar doctrines of the Romish Church. On that doctrine, in almost every case, hinged their life or death. If they admitted it — they might live; if they refused it — they must die!

The doctrine in question was the **real presence** of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not, believe that the body and blood of Christ were really, that is, corporally, literally, locally, and materially, present under the forms of bread and wine after the words of consecration were pronounced? Did they or did they not believe that the *real body of Christ*, which was born of the Virgin Mary, was present on the so-called altar, as soon as the mystical words had passed the lips of the priest? Did they or did they not? That was the simple question. If they did not believe and admit it — they were burned!

There is a wonderful and striking unity in the stories of our martyrs on this subject. Some of them, no doubt, were attacked about the marriage of priests. Some of them were assaulted about the nature of the Catholic Church. Some of them were assailed on other points. But all, without an exception, were called to special account about the *real presence*, and in every case their refusal to admit the doctrine formed one principal cause of their condemnation.

(1) Hear what *John Rogers* said: "I was asked whether I believed in the sacrament to be the very body and blood of our Savior Christ that was born of the Virgin Mary, and hanged on the cross, really and substantially? I answered, 'I think it to be false. I cannot understand really and substantially to signify otherwise than corporally. But corporally Christ is only in Heaven, and so Christ cannot be corporally in your sacrament.'"

And therefore he was condemned and burned.

(2) Hear what *Bishop Hooper* said: "Tunstall asked him to say, 'whether he believed the corporal presence in the sacrament,' and Master Hooper said plainly 'that there was none such, neither did he believe any such thing.' Whereupon they bade the notaries write that he was married and would not go from his wife, and that he believed not the corporal presence in the sacrament — as to why he was worthy to be deprived of his bishopric."

And so he was condemned and burned.

(3) Hear what *Rowland Taylor* said: "The second cause why I was condemned as a heretic was that I denied *transubstantiation*, and *concomitacion*, two juggling words whereby the Papists believe that

Christ's natural body is made of bread, and the Godhead by and by to be joined thereto — so that immediately after the words of consecration, there is no more bread and wine in the sacrament — but the substance only of the body and blood of Christ."

"Because I denied the aforesaid Papistical doctrine (yes, rather plain, wicked idolatry, blasphemy, and heresy) I am judged a heretic."

And therefore he was condemned and burned.

(4) Hear what was done with *Bishop Ferrar*. He was summoned to "grant the natural presence of Christ in the sacrament under the form of bread and wine," and because he refused to subscribe this article as well as others, he was condemned. And in the sentence of condemnation, it is finally charged against him that he maintained that "the sacrament of the altar ought not to be ministered on an altar, or to be elevated, or to be adored in any way."

And so he was burned.

(5) Hear what holy *John Bradford* wrote to the men of Lancashire and Cheshire when he was in prison: "The chief thing which I am condemned for as an heretic is because I deny in the sacrament of the altar (which is not Christ's Supper — but a plain perversion as the Papists now use it) to be a real, natural, and corporal presence of Christ's body and blood under the forms of bread and wine — that is, because I deny transubstantiation, which is the darling of the devil, and daughter and heir to Antichrist's religion."

And so he was condemned and burned.

(6) Hear what were the words of the sentence of condemnation against *Bishop Ridley*: "The said Nicholas Ridley affirms, maintains, and stubbornly defends certain opinions, assertions, and heresies, contrary to the Word of God and the received faith of the Church, as in denying the true and natural body and blood of Christ to be in the sacrament of the altar, and secondarily, in affirming the substance of bread and wine to remain after the words of consecration."

And so he was condemned and burned.

(7) Hear the articles exhibited against *Bishop Latimer*: "That you have openly affirmed, defended, and maintained that the true and natural body of Christ after the consecration of the priest, is not really present in the sacrament of the altar, and that in the sacrament of the altar remains still the substance of bread and wine."

And to this article the good old man replied: "After a corporal being, which the Romish Church furnishes, Christ's body and blood is not in the sacrament under the forms of bread and wine."

And so he was condemned and burned.

(8) Hear the address made by Bishop Bonner to *John Philpot*: "You have offended and trespassed against the sacrament of the altar, denying the real presence of Christ's body and blood to be there, affirming also material bread and material wine to be in the sacrament, and not the substance of the body and blood of Christ."

And because the good man stoutly adhered to this opinion he was condemned and burned.

(9) Hear, lastly, what *Cranmer* said with almost his last breath, in St. Mary's Church, Oxford: "As for the sacrament, I believe, as I have taught in my book against the Bishop of Winchester, the which my book teaches so true a doctrine, that it shall stand at the last day before the judgment of God when the Papist's doctrine contrary thereto shall be ashamed to show her face."

If any one wants to know what Cranmer had said in this book, let him take the following sentence as a specimen — "They (the Papists) say that Christ is corporally under or in the form of bread and wine. We say that Christ is not there, neither corporally nor spiritually; but in those who worthily eat and drink the bread and wine He is *spiritually*, and corporally in Heaven."

And so he was burned.

Now, were the English Reformers right in being so stiff and unbending on this question of *real presence*? Was it a point of such vital importance that they were justified in dying before they would receive it? These are questions, I suspect, which are very puzzling to many unreflecting minds. Such minds, I fear, can see in the whole controversy about the real presence, nothing but a strife of words. But they are questions, I am bold to say, on which no well-instructed Bible reader can hesitate for a moment in giving his answer. Such a one will say at once that the Romish doctrine of the *real presence* strikes at the very root of the Gospel, and is the very citadel and foundation of Popery. Men may not see this at first — but it is a point that ought to be carefully remembered. It throws a clear and broad light on the line which the Reformers took, and the unflinching firmness with which they died.

Whatever men please to think or say, the Romish doctrine of the real presence, if pursued to its legitimate consequences, obscures every leading doctrine of the Gospel, and damages and interferes with the whole system of Christ's truth! Grant for a moment that the Lord's Supper is a *sacrifice*, and not a sacrament — grant that every time the words of consecration are used, the natural body and blood of Christ are present on the Communion Table under the forms of bread and wine — grant that every one who eats that consecrated bread and drinks that consecrated wine, does really eat and drink the natural body and blood of Christ — grant for a moment these things, and then see what momentous consequences result from these premises.

You spoil the blessed doctrine of *Christ's finished work* when He died on the cross. A sacrifice that needs to be repeated, is not a perfect and complete thing.

You spoil the *priestly office of Christ*. If there are priests who can offer an acceptable sacrifice of God besides Him — the great High Priest is robbed of His glory.

You spoil the Scriptural doctrine of the *Christian ministry*. You exalt sinful men into the position of *mediators* between God and man.

You give to the sacramental elements of bread and wine an honor and veneration they were never meant to receive, and produce an *idolatry* to be abhorred of faithful Christians.

Last, but not least, you overthrow the true doctrine of *Christ's human nature*. If the body born of the Virgin Mary can be in more places than one at the same time, it is not a body like our own, and Jesus was not "the second Adam" in the truth of our nature.

I cannot doubt for a moment, that our martyred Reformers saw and felt these things even more clearly than we do, and, seeing and feeling them, chose to die rather than admit the doctrine of the real presence. Feeling them, they would not give way by subjection for a moment, and cheerfully laid down their lives. Let this fact be deeply engraved in our minds. Wherever the English language is spoken on the face of the globe, this fact ought to be clearly understood by every Englishman who reads history. *Rather than admit the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's natural body and blood under the form of bread and wine — the Reformers of the Church of England were content to be burned!*

IV. And now I must ask the special attention of my readers while I try to show the bearing of the whole subject on our own position and on our own times. I must ask you to turn from the dead — to

the living, to look away from England in 1555 — to England in this present enlightened and advanced age, and to consider seriously the light which the burning of our Reformers throws on the Church of England at the present day.

We live in momentous times. The ecclesiastical horizon on every side is dark and lowering. The steady rise and progress of extreme Ritualism and Ritualists are shaking the Church of England to its very center. It is of the very first importance to understand clearly what it all means. A *right diagnosis* of disease — is the very first element of *successful treatment*. The physician who does not see what the *real problem* is — is never likely to work any *cures*.

Now, I say there can be no greater mistake than to suppose that the great controversy of our times is a mere question of vestments and ornaments — of more or less church decorations — of more or less candles and flowers — of more or less *bowings* and *crossings* — of more or less gestures and postures — of more or less show and form. The man who imagines that the whole dispute is a mere *aesthetic* one, a question of *taste*, like one of fashion and clothing style, must allow me to tell him that he is under a complete delusion! He may sit on the shore, like the Epicurean philosopher, smiling at *theological storms*, and flatter himself that we are only squabbling about trifles; but I must tell him that his philosophy is very shallow, and his knowledge of the controversy of the day very superficial indeed.

The things I have spoken of are trifles, I fully concede. But they are pernicious trifles, because they are the *outward expression of an inward doctrine*. They are the *skin disease* which is the symptom of an *unsound constitution*. They are the *plague spot* which tells of *internal poison*. They are the curling smoke which arises from a hidden volcano of mischief. I, for one, would never make any stir about church millinery, or incense, or candles — if I thought they meant nothing beneath the surface. But I believe they mean a great deal of error and false doctrine, and therefore I publicly protest against them, and say that those who support them are to be blamed.

I give it as my deliberate opinion that the root of the whole Ritualistic system is the dangerous doctrine of the *real presence* of Christ's natural body and blood in the Lord's Supper under the form of the consecrated bread and wine. If words mean anything, this real presence is the foundation principle of *Ritualism*. This real presence is what the extreme members of the Ritualistic party want to bring back into the Church of England. And just as our martyred Reformers went to the stake rather than admit the real presence — so I hold that we should make any sacrifice and contend to the bitter end, rather than allow a materialistic doctrine about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper to come back in any shape into our Communion.

I will not weary my readers with quotations in proof of what I affirm. But I ask any reflecting mind to mark, consider, and digest what may be seen in any thorough-going Ritualistic place of worship. I ask him to mark the *superstitious veneration* and *idolatrous honor* with which everything within the sanctuary, and around and upon the Lord's table, is regarded. I boldly ask any jury of twelve honest and unprejudiced men to look at that chancel and communion table, and tell me what they think all this means. I ask them whether the whole thing does not *savor* of the Romish doctrine of the Real Presence, and the sacrifice of the Mass?

I believe that if Bonner and Gardiner had seen the sanctuaries and communion tables of some of the churches of this day, they would have lifted up their hands and rejoiced; while Ridley, Bishop of London, and Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, would have turned away with righteous indignation and said, "This communion table is not meant for the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Supper — but for counterfeiting the idolatrous Popish Mass!"

I do not for a moment deny the zeal, earnestness, and sincerity of the extreme Ritualists — though as much might be said for the *Pharisees* or the *Jesuits*. I do not deny that we live in a singularly free country, and that Englishmen, now-a-days, have liberty to commit any folly short of crime. But I do deny that any clergyman, however zealous and earnest, has a right to reintroduce Popery into the Church of England. And, above all, I deny that he has any right to maintain the very principle of the Real Presence, for opposing which the Reformers of his Church were burned.

The plain truth is, that the doctrine of the extreme Ritualistic school about the Lord's Supper, can never be reconciled with the dying opinions of our martyred Reformers. The members of this school may protest loudly that they are sound churchmen — but they certainly are not churchmen of the same opinions as the *Marian martyrs*. If words mean anything, Hooper, and Rogers, and Ridley, and Bradford, and their companions, held one view of the Real Presence — and the ultra-Ritualists hold quite another. If they were right — then the Ritualists are wrong. There is a gulf that cannot be crossed between the two parties. There is a thorough difference that cannot be reconciled or explained away. If we hold with one side — then we cannot possibly hold with the other. For my part, I say, unhesitatingly, that I have more faith in Ridley, and Hooper, and Bradford — than I have in all the leaders of the ultra-Ritualistic party.

But what are we going to do? The danger is very great, far greater, I fear, than most people suppose. A *conspiracy* has been long at work for unprotestantizing the Church of England, and all the energies of *Rome* are concentrated on this little island. A sapping and mining process has been long going on under our feet, of which we are beginning at last to see a little. We shall see a good deal more by and by. At the rate we are going, it would never surprise me if within fifty years the crown of England were no longer on a Protestant head, and High Mass were once more celebrated in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's! The danger, in plain words, is neither more nor less than that of our Church being *unprotestantized* — and going back to *Babylon* and *Egypt*. We are in imminent peril of reunion with *Rome*.

Men may call me an alarmist, if they like, for using such language. But I reply, there is a cause. The *upper* classes in this land are widely infected with a taste for a sensuous, histrionic, formal religion. The *lower* orders are becoming sadly familiarized with all the ceremonialism which is the stepping-stone to Popery. The *middle* classes are becoming disgusted with the Church of England, and asking what is the use of it. The *intellectual* classes are saying that all religions are either equally good or equally bad. The House of Commons will do nothing unless pressed by public opinion. And all this time, *Ritualism* grows and spreads. The ship is among *breakers* — breakers ahead and breakers astern — breakers on the right hand and breakers on the left. Something needs to be done, if we are to escape shipwreck.

The very life of the Church of England is at stake, and nothing less. Take away the Gospel from a Church — and that Church is not worth preserving. A *well* without water, a *scabbard* without a sword, a *steam-engine* without a fire, a *ship* without compass and rudder, a *watch* without a mainspring, a stuffed *carcass* without life — all these are *useless things*. But there is nothing as useless as a Church without the Gospel. And this is the very question that stares us in the face — *Is the Church of England to retain the Gospel or not?* Without it, in vain shall we turn to our archbishops and bishops, in vain shall we glory in our cathedrals and parish churches. *Ichabod* will soon be written on our walls. The ark of God will not be with us. Surely something ought to be done!

One thing, however, is very clear to my mind. We ought not lightly to forsake the Church of England. No! As long as her Articles and Formularies remain unaltered, unrepealed, and unchanged — so long we ought not to forsake her. Cowardly and base is that seaman who launches the life-boat and forsakes the ship — as long as there is a chance of saving her. Cowardly, I say, is that Protestant Churchman who talks of seceding — because things on board our Church are at present out of order. What though some of the

crew are *traitors*, and some are *asleep*! What though the old ship has some leaks, and her rigging has given way in some places! Still I maintain there is much to be done.

There is life in the old ship yet! The great Pilot has not yet forsaken her. The compass of the Bible is still on deck. There are yet left on board, some faithful and able seamen. So long as the Articles and Formularies are not *Romanized* — let us stick by the ship. So long as she has Christ and the Bible — let us stand by her to the last plank, nail our colors to the mast, and never haul them down. Once more, I say, let us not be wheedled, or bullied, or frightened, or cajoled, or provoked — into forsaking the Church of England.

In the name of the Lord let us set up our banners. If ever we would meet Ridley and Latimer and Hooper in another world without shame — let us "contend earnestly" for the truths which they died to preserve. The Church of England expects every Protestant Churchman to do his duty. Let us not *talk* only — but *act*. Let us not act only — but *pray*. "He who has no sword — let him sell his garment and buy one."

There is a *voice* in the blood of the martyrs. What does that voice say? It cries aloud from Oxford, Smithfield, and Gloucester, "Resist the *Popish doctrine of the Real Presence* to the death!"

Source: http://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/why_were_our_reformers_burned.htm