

**SKETCHES OF THE
PROGRESS
OF FREEDOM**

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Sketches of the Progress of Freedom by Frederic May Holland

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... AUTHOR OF ...

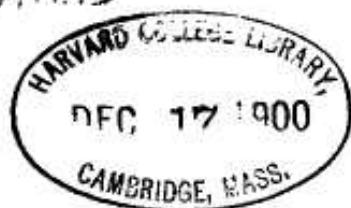
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SKETCHES OF THE PROGRESS OF FREEDOM.

A great step in the progress of freedom was taken during the fifteenth century, in consequence of a sudden and rapid growth of interest in classic literature. A region of thought, wholly outside of Christian influence, and illuminated by authors whose originality had not yet been equalled and whose love of liberty can never be surpassed, was thrown open to men and women who had hitherto read scarcely any books not written in support of popes and kings.

Study of the Latin classics had been much encouraged during the latter half of the fourteenth century by Petrarch and Boccaccio. Italy soon abounded in scholars who were busy in expounding and translating the ancient masterpieces. Many books by Cicero, Tacitus, Lucretius and other great thinkers, were unearthed in monastic libraries, where the amount of ancient literature which was preserved was small in proportion to what had perished needlessly, or been wantonly destroyed. Little was known about Greek in western Europe except by isolated students like Heloise and Bacon before the closing years of the fourteenth century, when the language of Plato and Aristotle was taught in Florence. Many manuscripts of the great

philosophers and dramatists, as well as of Plutarch, Lucian, Thucydides, and other authors whose tone of thought was more advanced than that of any mediæval writer, were brought back from Greece early in the fifteenth century; and the capture of Constantinople by the Moslems obliged many learned Greeks to flee to Italy, where they were cordially welcomed by the princes as well as by the popes.

This literary movement owed much to the establishment during the fourteenth century of nine universities south, and as many north, of the Alps, besides four colleges in Oxford and five in Cambridge, institutions originally intended to promote scholasticism, but destined ere long to become centres of the new culture. The latter influence was still stronger in the twenty universities which were founded during the fifteenth century, in company with three of the Oxford and seven of the Cambridge colleges.

The tendency of loving learning for its own sake was soon apparent. The University of Paris took the lead in calling on kings and nations to end the contest between rival popes, and reform other ecclesiastical abuses. Professors sat beside bishops and princes in the Council of Constance, which deposed three pontiffs and restored unity, though not purity, to the Church. The next council, that at Basel, recognized the right of heretics in arms to obtain peace, by insisting on toleration.

Among the mistakes at Constance was that of burning a follower of Wycliffe from Bohemia named Huss for refusing to recant opinions, some of which he had never held, while others were taken from Scripture. He had come to Constance under a safe-conduct; but

the highest authority in the Church decided that heretics had no right to be treated honestly. He was allowed a month to deliberate, before he went bravely to the flames. He was no rationalist; but his paper mitre, painted with figures of devils, was the cap of liberty. Soon after the execution a proclamation was posted up in Constance, saying, "The Holy Ghost to the Fathers in council, greeting! Do your work as best you can. I have business elsewhere."

It had been already discovered in Bohemia that the Bible gives all Christians a right to the communion cup, and a convenient emblem was thus ready for the banners of the insurgent Hussites. Their leader, Zizka, was the first general to use gunpowder with much effect; and decisive victories were gained, in 1420, over vastly superior forces by the aid of his invention of movable forts, made by chaining together wagons fitted with very high sides and filled with musketeers. The emperor brought a horde of nearly a hundred thousand crusaders into Bohemia that summer, but even the Red Cross Knights were driven back by the heretics' cannon. Zizka had already founded the city of Tabor for his adherents, who held public worship in their own language, suffered women to preach, called each other brother and sister, and formed a pure democracy in which everybody was taught to read and write. The more aristocratic of the Hussites were called Calixtines, because they would have been satisfied with permission to use the cup. The bloody battles between Calixtines and Taborites did not prevent co-operation against invaders; four successive armies of crusaders were found too cowardly to meet the Hussites, and the latter came to an agreement among themselves, which enabled

them to overrun Austria, Bavaria and Saxony. A new council, which was vainly attempting to make the papacy a constitutional monarchy and otherwise reform the Church, invited the Hussite leaders to Basel, where they were allowed to hold public worship in German and argue openly for freedom in the pulpit. The council finally promised that the communion cup might be used by all Christians in Bohemia and Moravia; and the right was retained for nearly two hundred years. In that blood-stained chalice lay precious seeds. Progress was suspended by a new war, levied by the Calixtine nobles against the Taborites. The fierce sect was destroyed, except the remnant whose descendants are meek Moravians; but it was not until after the middle of the century that Tabor ceased to be what one of the popes indignantly called "a place where every man may believe what he likes."

Christian women had been slaves to the Church and ciphers in the State, but they were now greatly encouraged to think and act for themselves by the example of an illiterate young peasant, who was no heretic, though she fell a victim to pious fraud. The claim of Joan of Arc, that she was sent by virgin-martyrs and warrior-angels to drive the English out of France, was so well supported by the enthusiasm of the troops, and by her own courage and military skill, that she won some brilliant victories. She had not done all she promised when she was taken prisoner and brought to trial for having given too much reverence to what she called her voices, and violated the text in Deuteronomy (xx. 5), which calls the wearing of male attire by a woman an abomination unto God. Her conduct in both respects had been fully sanctioned by an archbishop, and her appeal

to the pope ought to have saved her life, though the friendless girl, not yet twenty, suffering from illness, loaded with chains, and in constant danger of death and dishonor, dared to say to the bishop and abbots who threatened to doom her to the flames: "Take heed not to judge badly, for the Lord would punish you." "Nothing in the world can make me say that I did not do those deeds in obedience to God." "What he bids me, I will not fail to do." Instruments of torture were brought before her, but she showed no fear, and they were decided to be useless. She was told that if she submitted she would be set free, but otherwise she must be burned.

It was not until she was about to be led to the stake that she said, "I will give up my visious, and dress as other women do." The illiterate girl was tricked into making her mark under what was supposed by her to be only a brief pledge to this effect, but was really a long indictment, charging her with the worst crimes. She was then told that she was to be imprisoned for life on bread and water. She asked that she might be confined in a nunnery; but she was sent back among soldiers who had already made her fear the worst of wrongs. The woman's dress was taken away while she slept, and she asked in vain for other garments than the male attire, which had been placed beside her bed, and which seemed necessary to protect her against violence. Noon came before she put it on; but this was pronounced a capital crime. She told her judges that she would dress as other women did if she could be imprisoned with them. She was questioned again about her voices, and replied that in disowning them she had damned her soul to save her life. "The truth