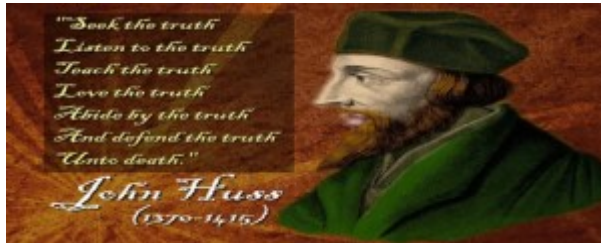


# The Papacy And The Civil Power –

## Chapter XVII. Coercive Power of the Church



Continued from [The Papacy And The Civil Power – Chapter XVI. Henry VIII. Part 2.](#)

Coercive Power of the Church.—Parties and Factions.—Quarrel between Rome and Avignon.—Philip of France and Boniface VIII.—Power claimed by his Bull *Unam Sanctam*.—Promise of Clement V. to Condemn Boniface VIII.—John XXII. and Nicholas V.—Benedict XII. Corruption of the Fourteenth Century.—The Beginning of the Fifteenth Century.—Three Councils called by Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., and the Cardinals.—Council of Pisa.—It condemns both Popes, and deposes Them.—Alexander V. elected.—He confirms all the Decrees of the Council.— Three Popes.—Balthasar Costa becomes Pope, as John XXIII.—Council of Constance.—Tries and Condemns Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., and John XXIII.—The Latter found Guilty of Enormous and Scandalous Crimes.— He is deposed, and the Doctrine of the Pope's Infallibility condemned.—Difficulty in maintaining the Succession of the Popes.—May be two Infallible Popes at same Time.—Corruption in the Council.—John Huss and Jerome.—Their Trial and Death.—Effect in Bohemia.—Martin V.—His Policy.—Violation of his Promise to Alphonso.—His Bull against the King of Arragon.—His Letter to his Legate. Becomes sole Pope.—His Letter to the King of Poland for exterminating the Hussites.—His Death.—Effects of his Reign.

THE interference of the popes with the domestic civil affairs of the nations was, undoubtedly, superinduced by their possession of temporal power in Rome. The fact of having acquired this power by means so totally different from any employed by the apostles, or by the Christians of the first centuries, naturally tended to destroy their Christian humility, and to implant in their minds ideas of personal and official grandeur. Under such influences many of the popes became mere politicians, and were mixed up for several centuries in controversies with kings and princes. They neglected the spiritual affairs of the Church, and seemed to think that God was sufficiently served by an enlargement of their own temporal authority.

The number of bulls, briefs, and encyclicals issued by them concerning temporal matters greatly exceeded those which involved the interest of religion. Having in this way separated themselves from the influence of the apostolic example, and finding the world, on account of its ignorance, in a condition to acquiesce in the imposture, they did not hesitate to set up the claim of divine power, sufficiently broad and comprehensive to embrace within it the right to govern the kings and princes, and, through them, the people. When they succeeded in obtaining a practical recognition of this power, as pertaining to the organization of the Church, they found it necessary to go one step farther in order to preserve it. This was the introduction of the doctrine, as a part of their religious system, that this immense power must

be maintained, it necessary, by force. Hence, the persecution and extirpation of heretics; and also the doctrines now avowed by Pius IX. in his Syllabus.

Although, by these means, they were enabled to secure several centuries of success, during which the world was held in complete subjugation and darkness; yet, in the course of time, the light began to break in upon the minds of men, and to disclose the fact, in spite of the reigning ecclesiasticism, that this entire system of oppression was the offspring of usurpation and fraud. Then, like the possessors of all other ill-gotten power, the leading and most ambitious popes became adepts in all the arts and practices of political intrigue and diplomacy, and in the pursuit of whatsoever means were necessary to maintain their authority, without any regard whatever to the morality or immorality of their acts. And thus it is that they themselves created the combination of influences out of which the Reformation arose. Had they been content to employ their spiritual power for the legitimate uses of the Church, the Church would have possessed within itself sufficient power to have applied the necessary corrective to all abuses in its government. But when they went beyond this, and claimed the right to universal dominion, as derived directly from God and as a part of "the patrimony of Peter," it became necessary to the world that this claim should not only be resisted, but, if possible, absolutely destroyed. It could not undergo any abatement merely; for, according to the papal theory, the power of the papacy is plenary (unlimited), and can be nothing less; and therefore the contest, in so far as the papacy was concerned, became a death-struggle.

And thus we have seen that, in point of fact, the Reformation in England—as the reigns of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth sufficiently demonstrate—was not so much a protestation against the faith and just authority of the Roman Church as against the abuses of the hierarchy, and the gross corruptions practiced by them under papal sanction and toleration. There were many intelligent and devout Roman Catholics who, before that time, had been sagacious enough to understand, and honest enough to declare, that the papacy had departed from the apostolic teachings and the practices of the first centuries of Christianity. Their efforts—preceding, the great Protestant Reformation—to save their ancient and time-honored Church were heroic, but unavailing. They are brilliant lights in these former centuries, and attract no less our admiration than our wonder. They convince us—if anything were necessary to do so—that there was yet enough in the true faith of the Roman Catholic Church, even in the worst days of Rome, to give consolation to the Christian mind, and to excite its liveliest Christian hopes; and that much that is essentially true and consistent with the teachings of the Saviour and his apostles has been preserved in its shifting creeds during all the years of its existence. The genuine love and veneration they felt for the Church to which their affections clung so tenaciously, stimulated them to desire and to labor for its reform, for the lopping-off the decayed branches, that the trunk of the old tree which had withstood so many storms might continue to bear good and wholesome fruit.

We cannot withhold from Anselm and Abelard, and Arnold of Brescia—all devout Roman Catholics—the concession of sincerity for their bold appeals to reason

against the unjust assumptions and usurpation of authority by the popes. They were not of the number of those commonly classed with the Reformers; but when they asserted the right of free inquiry and free thought, they brought themselves under the ban of the papacy, which feared an open exposure of its enormous offenses against religion and society; and the controversy thus inaugurated necessarily incited such inquiries as could never thereafter be suppressed or silenced.

Nor can we fail to appreciate the integrity and manliness of Savonarola when he stirred up the people of Florence to intense excitement by his denunciations of papal infallibility—declaring that the constitutions issued by some popes had been annulled by others; that the opinions of some are contrary to those of others; and that the prevalent doctrines of the papacy led to “evil doings—to waste in eating and drinking, to avarice, to concubinage, to the sale of benefices, and to many lies, and to all wickedness.” (\*)

\* “Predica,” by Savonarola; *apud* Dean Milman, in his “Essays,” Essay 1., pp. 37, 57; “Life of Lorenzo de’ Medici,” by Roscoe, Bohn’s ed., p. 347.

It should increase our admiration of this intrepid priest to know that for the avowal of his honest convictions he lost his life. Arrested by violence, tried by authority of Pope Alexander VI. with “true Inquisitorial mercilessness,” and put to death by his persecutors, his courage, exhibited in the midst of the flames, imparted itself to his defenders, and gave fresh impulse to the work of reform. (Milman’s “Essays,” p. 66, etc.)

If the reforms sought for by these and other faithful Christians had been obtained within the Church, the Christian world would have been disinclined to rebel against the *spiritual* authority of the popes, being content to regard it as indicating the unity of the faith. But the authorities of the Church—including popes, prelates, and the inferior clergy—had become so corrupt that practical reform became impossible. The long residence of the popes at Avignon, in France—brought about by the political intrigues carried on between popes and princes—so demoralized those who conducted the affairs of the Church, both there and at Rome, that with them religion became a matter of secondary importance, if not of utter indifference. The Church was divided into parties and factions, each accusing and anathematizing the others as heretics and schismatics, and visiting upon them the curse of excommunication.

We have heretofore seen that Boniface IX. was pope at Rome, while Clement VII. and Benedict XIII. respectively claimed the pontificate at Avignon. This state of things manifestly grew out of the quarrel between Philip of France and Boniface VIII., which was conducted with great asperity on both sides, and reduced the election of a pope to a mere matter of temporal expediency, the real interests of the Church or of religion having little or nothing to do with it. The celebrated bull of Boniface—*Unam Sactam*—where in he asserted that the pope holds in his hands both the spiritual and the temporal sword, led him into such direct conflict with the temporal power, that, without

resistance on the part of the nations, he would have reduced them all to the condition of entire dependency upon the papacy. Hence we find Clement V. securing the pontificate, as the successor of Boniface VIII., by taking an oath to Philip, "by the body of Jesus Christ," that he would "*blot out the memory of Pope Boniface!*" and proceeding soon after his election to revoke several of the bulls of Boniface, and, especially, to declare "that the bull *Unam Sanctam* should do no prejudice to the king or kingdom of France, and that all things should remain in the same posture they were in before that bull;" (Du Pin, vol. xii., p. 11.) notwithstanding which, the faithful are now instructed that this same bull continues to be, even at the present day, a part of the canon law!

Hence, also, we find that, after the death of Clement V. the discord prevailing among the cardinals occasioned so much delay in the election of his successor, that the people became so disgusted as to "set fire on the conclave," (*Ibid.*, p. 21.) and disperse the cardinals. The terrified prelates could not be assembled again until after the death of Philip, and "the chair of Peter" remained without an occupant for two years!

John XXII. was then elected at Lyons and took up his residence at Avignon, and Nicholas V. was elected at Rome. But the Italians, though backed by the King of Bavaria, were unable to protect their pope, and he ultimately fell into the hands of John XXII., who imprisoned him till he died. (*Ibid.*, p. 24) So prostituted had the papacy become under such influences, that heresy consisted in disobedience to the pope in the merest trifles, and punishments were inflicted on account of them, without the slightest remorse.

John XXII. caused four Gray Friars to be arrested because they would not wear their gowns in the shape prescribed by his pontifical bull *Quorundam*! They were condemned to be burned as heretics, and were executed! A fifth one was degraded and imprisoned for life for the same offense! (Du Pin, vol. xii., p. 25. )

Benedict XII., successor of John XXII., was himself a heretic, in this; that he maintained that "the souls of those who die in mortal sin descend actually right into hell, where they suffer the pains of the damned;" (*Ibid.*, p. 29.) in express violation of the doctrine of purgatory, which the General Council of Florence, at its twenty-fifth session, in 1438, declared to have always been the doctrine of the Church.

Such a condition of affairs as thus existed at Avignon, aided by what occurred during the subsequent pontificates of Clement VI., Innocent VI., Urban V., Gregory XI., and Urban VI., surrounded the papacy, in the fourteenth century, with an amount of corruption which had no parallel in all the previous history of the world. The good men of the Church, of whom there were many, were made heart-sick at the spectacle. They desired reform, but were overpowered by the prevailing corruption.

The fifteenth century opened with demands for three councils: one summoned by Gregory XII.; another by the rival pope, Benedict XIII.; and the third by the cardinals. The latter, which assembled at Pisa, was the most numerous-attended, having, besides a number of cardinals, ambassadors from

France and England. That this council did not believe in the doctrine of papal infallibility is perfectly certain; for, soon after it convened, it caused both popes, Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII., to be called at the gate of the Church; and neither of them appearing, proctors were appointed, in the name of the Universal Church, to consider what steps were necessary to be taken against both of them, in order to put an end to the schism and restore the peace of the Church. After they had been several times called, and had failed to appear by themselves or legates, the council unanimously adopted a sentence against them to the effect that they were both "contumacious (obstinately disobedient) of faith and of schism." Here was an issue directly and explicitly made between the cardinals and these two contumacious popes, as to where the controlling authority of the Church was lodged; whether in a general council representing the whole Church, or, as Pius IX. and his Jesuit defenders now say, in the pope alone, as the infallible vicegerent of God.

The settlement of this great question by the Council of Pisa assures us that if Pius IX. had then been pope, he would not have been considered infallible; or if the cardinals of Pisa had been at the late Lateran Council at Rome, the decree of infallibility would not have been enacted. It was decided that the cardinals had power to call the council, that it was lawfully assembled, and that it had power to proceed to a definitive sentence against both popes. The trial was, therefore, entered upon with all necessary solemnity. The popes remaining contumacious, although duly summoned to appear, commissioners were appointed to appear for and defend them.

After all the evidence had been heard and duly considered, the council decided, by a solemn and deliberate vote, that both Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII. had violated their oaths by continuing the schism, and that all Christians were released from the obligation of obedience to them! Benedict XIII. was accused of heresy upon the authority of the universities of Paris, Angiers, Orleans, and Toulouse, and three hundred doctors of that of Bononia. And all the accusations against him and Gregory XII. being fully sustained, a decree was unanimously passed declaring that they were both "manifest schismatics, favorers of schism, heretics, guilty of perjury and of the violation of their oaths; that they give a scandal to the whole Church by their manifest obstinateness and contumacy; that they are unworthy of all honor and dignity, and particularly of the pontifical; and that they are fallen from it, deprived of it, and separate from the Church, *ipso facto*." The See of Rome was declared vacant; all Christians were forbidden to obey either of the popes; and all their judgments and sentences were declared null and void! (Du Pin, vol. xiii., D. 5.)

Now, when it is considered that this council was composed of one hundred and forty cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and mitred abbots, of twenty-six doctors of divinity, of three hundred doctors of civil and canon law, and of ambassadors from France, England, Jerusalem, Sicily, Cyprus, Poland, Brabant (a province of Belgium), Austria, Bavaria, and from a number of lesser powers, including some of the princes of Italy, it must require more than a common amount of assurance to pretend, as all the Jesuit and ultramontane writers now do, that infallibility was always and everywhere the universal doctrine of the Church! For although it has suited the purposes of the papacy

to deny that the Council of Pisa was an ecumenical council, and to disguise its proceedings as much as possible, yet that it did represent the real sentiments of the Church is abundantly attested by the history of those times. There could not then have been assembled in Europe any considerable concourse of Christians who would not have denounced the infallibility of the pope as impious and unchristian. And of this we shall soon see more satisfactory proof than that furnished by the Council of Pisa.

After Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII. had both been deposed, the Council of Pisa proceeded to the election of a new pope; when Alexander V. was chosen, and, being present, presided over the council and approved all its sentences and decrees. After a few more sessions the council adjourned, and another general council was ordered to meet in 1412, to provide for reform in the Church. Pope Alexander V. afterward published a bull in 1410, confirming all that the Council of Pisa had done, against which bull many ultramontane maledictions have since been hurled.

In the mean time, Gregory XII. assembled his council in Aquileia, but it was attended by very few prelates. He, however, caused it to decree that his election was canonical, as had been also that of Urban VI., Boniface IX., and Innocent X.; and that the elections of Clement VII., Benedict XIII., and Alexander V. "were temerarious (reckless), unlawful, and sacrilegious, and that they were schismatics and usurpers." He, moreover, caused it to be announced that he would resign the pontifical dignity, in order to restore harmony, if Benedict XIII. and Alexander V. would do so; for it must be remembered that there were now *three* popes, each claiming to be the successor of Peter!

But Alexander V. was disposed neither to surrender his dignity nor to carry on the work of reform which was expected of him by the Council of Pisa. He was under the control of Balthasar Costa, who directed the measures of his pontificate with the sole view of making himself his successor, in which he succeeded. Yet he was, says Du Pin, "acknowledged for pope by all Christendom, except Apulia and some part of Italy which had not yet abandoned Gregory, and the kingdoms of Arragon, Castile, and Scotland, and the states of Count Armagnac, who acknowledged Benedict."

At his death, which occurred in 1410, Balthasar Costa was elected his successor, and took the name of John XXIII. He made war upon the King of Naples with a view of wresting his dominions from him, and placing the Duke of Anjou upon his throne. The king, however, finally drove him from Rome, where he was hated by the people in consequence of his having "drawn great sums of money from the richest men in the city." He took refuge at the Court of the King of Hungary, where he went to consult about the meeting of a council. He sent his legate to France with a bull, whereby he assured the French clergy that he desired that a council should be held at the time agreed on at Pisa, to endeavor to bring about a union between the Greek and Latin churches, to make peace between France and England, and "to reform the Church both in its head and members." He finally succeeded, by obtaining the protection of Sigismund of Hungary, in getting his views so generally acquiesced in that he at last called the Council of Constance to meet in 1414—the time fixed at Pisa. This council, although thus convened by a pope

who had participated in the proceedings of the Council of Pisa, and had, by acquiescing in them, committed himself to the doctrine that a council can try, condemn, and depose a pope, and, therefore, that popes are not infallible, is regarded by all the Church as the Sixteenth Ecumenical Council. Whatever it did, therefore, carries with it the highest sanction of the Church, and has all the authority of law.

At this council the means of restoring peace to the Church by terminating the schism were much discussed by the fathers. Deputies attended from Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII., the former of whom proposed his resignation. The fathers, however, although they declared that the Council of Pisa was lawfully celebrated, were mostly of opinion that the best way to put an end to the schism was to require that all three of the popes—Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., and John XXIII.—should resign! They held that, notwithstanding John XXIII. was a lawful pope, yet the Universal Church might constrain him to resign, and that the council was the representative of the Universal Church. John endeavored to defeat this measure by sowing divisions among the members of the council; but all his exertions in that direction were without avail, the vote being unanimous.

In the mean time an Italian bishop accused John XXIII. of having committed "all sorts of crimes," which were not immediately made public. The prelates from Germany, England, and Poland thought they ought not to be published, because it "could only serve to disgrace the Holy See, to scandalize the Church, and throw it in confusion." John at first thought he would defy the council, and deny their power to depose him, except for heresy; but he was persuaded by his friends not to make this attempt. Before the investigation of the charges was begun, the council proposed to him his resignation, according to the plan they had previously adopted. Embarrassed as he was, he had no other method left which seemed to open the door of escape; and he accepted the plan with apparent pleasure, proposing that he would voluntarily resign if Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII. would also agree to do so. This contingent proposition was not acceptable to the council, and he made another, equally unsatisfactory for the same reasons. A third one was drawn up which, through fear of the Emperor Sigismund, he agreed to accept. He then pronounced the declaration, and the next day repeated it in the presence of the council. He vowed, and swore to God, to the Church, and the Holy Council, that he would resign so soon as Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII. should do so, or should be deprived of their claims to the pontificate by death or otherwise. He offered to visit Benedict XIII. himself and procure his abdication; but the council would not consent to this, suspecting that his only object was to get away from Constance, and thus break up its sessions. This suspicion was not without foundation; for soon after, notwithstanding he had promised the emperor that he would not leave, he escaped in disguise, and took shelter in a castle several leagues distant, followed by only five or six cardinals, four of whom returned in a few days.

This absence of the pope led immediately to the consideration in the council of the question whether the pope was above the council, and, therefore, infallible, or was inferior to it, and consequently not infallible. There were only six cardinals who maintained the first of these propositions, and

who insisted that the council was dissolved in consequence of the absence of the pope. But the council answered them "that the pope was not above the council, but inferior to it," thus directly and emphatically condemning the doctrine of papal infallibility! The ill-fated John XXIII., finding his efforts to break up the council ineffectual, fled to another castle, where he summoned a notary, and made solemn protestation against all that he had promised to the council, and sworn to because, as he said, he was "forced to it by violence and fear," so little did the popes in those days regard even their most solemn oaths, though taken in the presence of an ecumenical council.

The council, in order to counteract the influences which John XXIII. was trying to invoke in his own behalf, then proceeded to pass several important decrees. In one of these it is declared that the Council of Constance was "lawfully assembled in the name of the Holy Ghost;" that it "represented the whole Catholic Church militant; had its power immediately from Jesus Christ; and that every person, of whatsoever state or dignity, even the pope himself, is obliged to obey it in what concerns the faith, the extirpation of schism, and the general reformation of the Church in its members and its head:" (\*) Other decrees were passed, declaring that those who refused to obey the council, "even the popes themselves not excepted," should be punished; that if the pope, when required by the council to renounce the pontificate, failed or delayed to do so, he had thereby forfeited his dignity, and no obedience was due him; and that if John XXIII. did not return to Constance, "they would proceed against him as a favorer of schism, and suspected of heresy."

\* The ultramontane writers pretend that the words, "in what concerns the faith," in the above decree, were afterward added by the Council of Basil. They do this in order to break the force of this decision of a general council against papal infallibility. But Du Pin, from whom the above facts are taken, shows the falsity of this pretense, and also that, even without these words, the decree sufficiently affirms the supremacy of a council over the pope.—Du PIN, vol. xiii., pp. 14, 15.

John XXIII. resorted to many subterfuges to escape his impending doom. He endeavored to apologize for his secret departure from Constance by pretending that it was necessary on account of the condition of his health; and even went so far as to propose the second time to resign. But the council had no confidence in him or his promises. Having already committed perjury by the violation of a most solemn oath, the fathers could put no other estimate upon him than that he was capable of any kind of treachery—was both base and false-hearted. They therefore proceeded with his trial, and, after the most careful examination of the evidence and full deliberation, found him guilty of crimes before which the iniquities of the basest of modern criminals dwarf into insignificance. Du Pin thus enumerates them:

"Lewdness and disorders in his youth, the purchasing of benefices by simony; his advancement to the dignity of a cardinal by the same means; his tyranny while he was legate at Bononia; his incests and adulteries while he was in that city; his poisoning of Alexander V. and his own physician; (\*) his contempt of the divine offices after he was pope; his neglecting to recite the canonical prayers, and to practice the fasts, abstinences, and ceremonies



of the Church; his denying justice, and oppressing the poor; his selling benefices and ecclesiastical dignities—to those that bid most; his authorizing an infinite number of dreadful abuses in distributing of preferments, and committing a thousand and a thousand cheats; his selling bulls, indulgences, dispensations, and other spiritual graces; his wasting the patrimony of the Church of Rome, and mortgaging that of other Churches; his maladministration of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Church; and lastly his breaking the oath and promise he had made to renounce the pontificate, by re tiring shamefully from Constance, to maintain and continue the schism.” (\*\*)

\* The accusation against him was that he had caused his physician to poison Pope Alexander V., in order that he might obtain the papal chair, and then poisoned his physician to prevent detection.

\*\* Du Pin, vol. xiii., p. 17.

Cormenin gives the decision of the council somewhat more in detail, thus:

“The General Council of Constance, after having invoked the name of Christ and examined the accusations brought against John XXIII., and established on irrefragable proof, pronounces, decrees, and declares, that Balthasar Costa [the pope] is the oppressor of the poor, the persecutor of the just, the support of knaves, the idol of simoniacs, the slave of the flesh, a sink of vices, a man destitute of every virtue, a mirror of infamy, and devil incarnate; as such it deposes him from the pontificate, prohibiting all Christians from obeying him and calling him pope. The council further reserves to itself the punishment of his crimes in accordance with the laws of secular justice; and his pursuit as an obstinate and hardened, noxious, and incorrigible sinner, whose conduct is abominable and morals infamous; as a simoniac, ravisher, incendiary, disturber of the peace and unity of the Church; as a traitor, murderer, Sodomite, poisoner, committer of incest, and corrupter of young nuns and monks!” (\*)

\* Cormenin, vol. ii., p. 108. This author also says that only a portion of the articles were publicly read; and that there were, besides these, secret ones too frightful to be announced. In a recent work it is said that these latter were “dropped for the sake of public decency.”—*The See of Rome in the Middle Ages*, by Reichel, part iii., p. 484. This last-named author publishes some of the charges, and the sentence of the council, taken from Labbe’s collection, in the original Latin.—*Ibid.*, note 5, and p. 485, note 1; see also *Life and Times of John Huss*, by Gillett, vol. i., pp. 515–517.

Few men have reached so low a point of infamy and degradation as that reached by John XXIII., who is recognized by all the Church historians as having been lawfully elected pope. On account of the enormity of his crimes, he was deposed and disgraced by the council, and all persons were forbidden to recognize him thereafter as pope, or to obey him. Thus reduced, and abandoned by the few friends who had previously adhered to him, he humiliatingly

announced to the council that he had no defense to offer, declared the council to be most holy and infallible, and approved of all its decrees up to his deposition at the twelfth session, thus entitling that decree which declared that a general council was superior to the pope, and, therefore, that the pope was not infallible, to take its place in the canons and to become a part of the law of the Church!

The Jesuit defenders of infallibility, with all their cunning and ingenuity, have been sorely puzzled over this part of the history of the Church. They have found it exceedingly difficult to make the links in the chain of regular apostolic succession interlock each other. In whatsoever way they attempt it, they run afoul of numerous palpable facts which, when fully understood, upset all their theories.

In the "Catholic Family Almanac for the United States," for 1870, there appears a chronological table of the Roman pontiffs, beginning with St. Peter and ending with Pius IX. ("Catholic Almanac," 1870, pp. 47, 48.) This is intended for the instruction of the faithful. Referring to the forty years of disputed succession which followed the close of the pontificate of Urban VI., in 1389, it carries down the Roman line of succession as follows: Boniface IX., from 1389 to 1404; Innocent VII., from 1404 to 1406; Gregory XII., from 1406 to 1417; and then follows it with Martin V., from 1417 to 1431—thus making the line unbroken. Within these same years it puts down as "rival popes," Clement VII., Benedict XIII., Alexander V., and John XXIII.

A recent "History of the Catholic Church," published also in the United States in 1870, and highly commended for its accuracy, contains also a chronological table of the same kind. Covering the period given above, it makes the line as follows: Boniface IX., from 1389 to 1404; Innocent VII., from 1404 to 1406; Gregory XII., from 1406 to 1409; Alexander V., 1409; John XXIII., from 1409 to 1413; and then follows Martin V., from 1413 to 1431—with the additional statement, indicated by the letters "*abd*" opposite their names, that Gregory XII. abdicated in 1409, and John XXIII. in 1413. ("History of the Catholic Church," by Rev. Theodore Noethen, p. 577.)

Now, without stopping to comment upon other facts connected with the great schism of forty years, during which the right to the chair of Peter was continually and obstinately contested, to the disgrace of all the parties and the injury of the cause of Christianity, it may be well asked, how are the faithful to decide between contradictory statements like these? One places Alexander V. and John XXIII. among the "rival popes," and the other places them in the regular line of succession! One continues the pontificate of Gregory XII. in the regular line down to 1417, and makes no mention of Alexander V. and John XXIII. in that line; while the other represents Gregory XII. as having abdicated in 1409, and continues the regular line down to Martin V., with both Alexander V. and John XXIII. One represents Martin V. as having been made pope in 1417, and the other in 1413—four years before.

But the puzzle will become more difficult of solution to an intelligent investigator when he finds out, as he would do, that neither of these tables represents the precise truth. Gregory XII. was not pope from 1406 to 1417. He was elected at Rome in 1406, while Benedict XIII. was yet pope at Avignon,

where he had held his pontifical court since 1394 as the successor of Clement VII. At the time of his election he promised the cardinals at Rome to resign if Benedict would do so, but afterward equivocated to such an extent that all his cardinals except four withdrew from him, and appealed from his authority to that of the Council of Pisa. This council deposed him in 1409, as they also did Benedict XIII., and elected Alexander V., who was regarded as the legal pope. Alexander V. was not, therefore, a "rival pope;" nor was John XXIII. Gregory XII. did not abdicate in 1409; but after he was then deposed by the Council of Pisa, claimed still to be pope as against Benedict XIII., Alexander V., and John XXIII. up till the fourteenth session of the Council of Constance, in 1415, when he resigned his right to the pontificate and recognized the validity of the council. The council then approved of what he had *canonically* done; (Du Pin, vol. xiii., p. 18.) that is, what he had done before he was deposed by the Council of Pisa. This broke his fall somewhat by recognizing him as legal pope at Rome against Benedict XIII. at Avignon, from 1406 to 1409—only three years out of the twelve which he claimed. And this was perhaps more a matter of policy and necessity than principle; for if Gregory XII. was not the lawful pope from 1406 to 1409, then Benedict XIII. was; and he is properly put down as a "rival pope" in one of the above tables, and does not appear in the other at all. And if Gregory XII. was a lawful pope after he was deposed by the Council of Pisa, then Alexander V., who was elected by that council, was not. As the Council of Constance decided that at Pisa to have been regularly and legally held, and recognized Alexander V. and John XXIII. both to be legal popes, they could not stultify themselves by approving of what Gregory XII. had done after he was deposed; for that would have been equivalent to deciding that Peter had two successors at the same time!

But, apart from this confusion in tracing out the line of regular apostolic succession, this complicated condition of affairs suggests this most pertinent inquiry: where, during all this time, was infallibility deposited? Was Gregory XII. infallible? He was deposed by the Council of Pisa, and the Council of Constance recognized the act as valid. Was Benedict XIII. infallible? He also was deposed by the same authority. Was John XXIII. infallible? He was deposed by the Council of Constance, after having been found guilty of the most outrageous offenses. Was the Council of Constance infallible? That it claimed infallibility is certainly true; that the whole Church assented to this claim is also true, and yet to affirm now that it was would be heresy, under the decree of the late Lateran Council. By it the faithful are taught that the pope is alone the possessor of infallibility, and is the source from which all others receive it. Therefore they are driven to the necessity of deciding that Gregory XII., or Benedict XIII., or John XXIII. was infallible. If they select Gregory XII., the Council of Pisa stands in the way to condemn them. If they select Benedict XIII., they meet the same difficulty. If John XXIII., the Council of Constance, and his tremendous catalog of crimes, stare them in the face. If they pass by all three of them, and lodge infallibility in the General Council of Constance, they are pronounced heretics by Pius IX. and his Jesuit and ultramontane prelates, and cut off from the Church by excommunication.

What, then, are the faithful to do in the midst of all these complications?

To a common-sense mind this question would be hard to answer; but the defenders of the papacy are equal to the occasion. See how admirably this difficulty is disposed of by St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, who wrote shortly after the schism. He says:

"It is possible for one to have belonged to either party in good faith and with a safe conscience, for, although it is necessary to believe that there is but one visible head of the Church, if it should nevertheless happen that two sovereign pontiffs are elected at the same time, it is not obligatory to accept either as the legitimate pope; but only to acknowledge as the true pope the one who has been canonically elected; and the people are not expected to determine which is the pope, but can follow the opinion and guidance of their pastors." (\*)

\* History of the Catholic Church," by Noethen, p. 404. This author gives an account of the great schism in three pages, and without even mentioning the name of Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., or John XXIII. He quotes the above with approbation.

That is to say, "it is necessary to believe that there is but one" pope at a time, but "not obligatory." Peter can have but one legitimate successor occupying the pontifical chair; but if there should be two, it is no matter, as it is "not obligatory" upon the faithful to select between them. All that is necessary is to believe that one or the other is the pope, no matter which. "The people" are too ignorant and simple-minded to "determine" anything about matters of so much intricacy. All they are required to do is to "follow the opinion and guidance of their pastors!" to avoid all thoughts of their own, all investigation of the facts, and passively submit to whatsoever commands shall be given them. Even though, as was the case in the instances referred to, one set of the faithful should be taught by their pastors to support one pope, and another class another pope, still no matter! for notwithstanding each should denounce the other as a heretic and guilty of all sorts of crimes, still, as infallibility must be somewhere, one or the other must have it!

Until the Council of Pisa deposed Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII., the faithful were permitted to believe that either was infallible as taught by their pastors. And the only effect of the election of Alexander V. by the council was to add to the list another representative of infallibility. The necessary effect was, each was infallible to those who followed him, so that infallibility became triplicated, existing, in three places at the same time.

The Church had not so many heads as Briareus, yet it had so many that nobody then and nobody now can tell which was the true head! And yet this book, designed for the edification of American readers, after admitting that "the obstinacy of the popes" divided the Christian world, "increased the schism, and caused all the subsequent evils" to the Church; and that as "God has promised his Church that he will not forsake her in time of extreme peril," his providence selected the cardinals as the agents for convening a council in defiance of these schismatic popes, and thus saving the Church from overthrow—after admitting all this with every appearance of candor, does not

hesitate to tell us that each of these popes was infallible to his followers; that each was in the line of regular apostolic succession; that each wore the crown and held the sword of St. Peter, provided only that the pastors who paid obedience to each so commanded their several flocks to believe, as they undoubtedly did! And this is put forth with apparent sincerity in this intelligent and investigating age, as if mens' minds were still encased in an impenetrable coat of ignorance and stupidity, and bold and unblushing dogmatism were alone possessed of impunity.

But it will not do to pass by the Council of Constance without further comment. When it is remembered that it is regarded by all the Church as ecumenical; that the pope found guilty by it of the most infamous crimes belongs to the regular line of succession from Peter; and that he was the pope at Rome; some of the impending difficulties in the way of reform in the Church may be seen and appreciated, even at this distance of time. It was claimed that the "chair of St. Peter" was at Rome, and that the Church there was, consequently, "the mother and mistress of all the Churches."

As pagan Rome was the chief imperial city of the world, so the popes, in imitation of the emperors, had endeavored to make Christian Rome the sole representative of ecclesiastical imperialism. It was so in the person of John XXIII., an Italian, who was in possession of the Vatican, of all the holy churches of Rome, of the triple papal crown, of the fisherman's ring, of all the relics of the saints, part of the true cross, of the thorns in the cross of Christ, and of the garments worn by the Virgin Mary, and the thousands of other things which the ignorant and superstitious are still taught to worship. And, more than all that, was he not infallible, so that he could not err in matters of faith or morals?—though steeped in crime and villainy sufficient to contaminate the whole atmosphere of Rome. The festering and consuming sore of corruption was, therefore, more violent at the heart of the Church than at the extremities; it was viler and more filthy there than the world ever saw anywhere else, in any of the departments of society, since Sodom and Gomorrah were overwhelmed by the wrath of God. And such was the solemn and deliberate decision of an ecumenical council, pronounced without a single dissenting voice!

There were some good men in the council who desired to make it a reform council—the ostensible object for which it was convened. But the ideas which prevailed with the majority limited the work of reform to the pope alone: they desired to reform him, but not themselves. If the cardinals and higher prelates of the Church had been willing to practice such virtues as they demanded of the pope, and of the inferior clergy, results very different from those which did ensue might have been brought about. But, so far from this having been the case, a large number of them were as corrupt as the pope, and habitually practiced the very vices they condemned in him, thus influencing the lower clergy to a still greater degree of degradation. And such is the undeniable voice of all impartial history. John Huss, after the conviction and disgrace of John XXIII., thus spoke from his dreary prison at Gottlieben:

"The council has condemned its chief—its proper head—for having sold indulgences, bishoprics, in fact, everything; and yet among those who have condemned him are many bishops who are themselves guilty of the shameful

traffic!... O profligate men! why did you not first pull out the beam from your own eye?... They have declared the seller to be accursed, and have condemned him, and yet themselves are the purchasers. They are the other party in the compact, and yet they remain unpunished." (Life and Times of John Huss," by Gillett, vol. i., p. 524.)

The learned Clemingis, who lived in those days, whose Christian fidelity was unquestioned, and who, together with Gerson and D'Ailly, shed luster upon the University of Paris, spoke of the members of the council as "carnal, for the most part bent on their pleasures, not to say their lusts;" and said:

"These carnal sons of the Church do not only have no care or apprehension of spiritual things, but they even persecute those who walk after the Spirit, as has been the case from the days of just Abel, and will be to the end of time. These are the men who fly together to the Church merely to seize upon temporalities; who lead in the Church a secular life, conspire, covet, plunder, rejoice in pre-eminence, not in profiting others; oppress and rob their subjects; glory in the honor of promotion; riot in pomp, pride, and luxury; who count gain godliness, sneer at such as wish to live holily, chastely, innocently, spiritually, calling them hypocrites.... Of such men the Church is full this day, and scarcely, in whole chapters or universities, can you find any others.... Are men like these the ones to exert themselves for a reformation of the Church—men who would account such a reformation the greatest calamity to themselves? (*Apud Gillett, ibid.*)

The Council of Constance, controlled by men of this sort, and subject to such influences as would naturally emanate from them, while its action, like that of the Council of Pisa, was a blow at the ambition of the papacy and the infallibility of the pope, did as much as lay in its power to advance the cause of ecclesiastical absolutism, and to crush out the rising and growing spirit of inquiry which had been excited by Anselm, Arnold, Savonarola, and Wycliffe, of former times, and by John Huss and Jerome of Prague, who then lived. The trial, condemnation, and execution of Huss and of Jerome will remain a reproach to it as long as history is read—will forever convict it of injustice, cruelty, intolerance, and persecution. Whatever amount of ingenuity may be expended, and however the facts may be perverted and distorted by Jesuit art and cunning, it cannot be disguised that the cruelty practiced toward them was designed as a condemnation of free thought, and an attempt on the part of the highest authority of the Roman Catholic Church to perpetuate the corruption and vices which then prevailed at the expense of all that was sanctified in the former history of the Church, and that purity of faith and practice which it had derived from the teaching and example of the apostolic Christians. No language is fertile enough in words of denunciation to express what all intelligent and thinking minds must feel in relation to it.

Both Huss and Jerome had always led pure and Christian lives. No charge of vice or immorality was ever made against either of them. The Bohemian Christians venerated and followed them, not merely on account of their eloquence as preachers, but because no breath of suspicion ever rested upon their integrity as men or upon their fidelity as Christians. But they were accused of favoring the doctrines of Wycliffe, which pointed to reform; and

that was an unpardonable sin, because they struck at the multifarious forms of vice and corruption which were then sanctioned by the example of such popes as John XXIII., and such prelates as constituted the majority of the Council of Constance. This pope and these prelates were their accusers, triers, and executioners, and it should surprise no one to know with what alacrity they hastened to their conviction, and how their hearts leaped with gladness when the torches that consumed their bodies were lighted by their emissaries.

John Huss had a "safe-conduct" from the Emperor Sigismund, under whose influence John XXIII. consented that the council should be held. He was promised full protection both in going and returning to the council, where he was summoned to answer the charge of heresy. Yet this promise of protection was violated, to the damning disgrace of all the parties concerned in the treacherous and dastardly act. Whether it was justified by the perpetrators of the wrong upon the declared ground that "faith should not be kept with heretics," is no matter, since it is undoubtedly true that such was the doctrine which then prevailed among the popes and the leading members of the hierarchy, and *which yet prevails*, as there are volumes of evidence to show. Both upon this and less satisfactory grounds, innumerable contracts, agreements, and promises have been violated and disregarded without the slightest compunctions of conscience; and in all these matters the popes themselves were far ahead of all others.

Whether John XXIII. or Sigismund was most to blame for the betrayal of Huss is of no consequence now, since the pope is shown to have been capable of that or any other enormity, and the emperor was ready to do whatsoever was necessary to the protection of his imperial authority. The council was equally guilty with either or both of them, for, knowing that the "safe-conduct" had been given by the very authority under which it convened, if it had not been insensible to shame it would have scorned to maintain a jurisdiction acquired over a defenseless adversary by such base and cowardly means. Du Pin says, "The pope and the emperor invited John Huss to come thither," and "the emperor granted him a safe-conduct." (Du Pin, vol. xiii., p. 120. ) This invitation, if it did not expressly engage the pope to good faith, implied it so strongly that any man less infamous than John XXIII. would have protested against its violation. And if the council had entertained any respect for the pope, and had not been influenced by the loose principles of morality which then prevailed, the blood of John Huss would not yet be clinging to its skirts.

The next morning after Huss arrived at Constance, two noblemen, who had accompanied him, visited the pope to notify him of his arrival. They inquired of him whether he could safely remain without any risk of violence. The pope replied: "Had he killed my own brother, not a hair of his head should be touched while he remained in the city." ( "History of the Council of Constance," by L'Enfant; apud Gillett, vol. i., p. 329 (note 1).) So that, if the pope was not a party to the "safe-conduct," he gave his solemn promise that it should be observed. Either would have bound an honest man, but neither would have bound John XXIII.! Even his oath, taken before the council with a solemn appeal to God, could not bind him, *infallible* as he was!

Infamous as John XXIII. was, he was not destitute of ability or cunning. Having reached Constance some time before the emperor, he endeavored to shape the policy of the council so as to divert attention from his own crimes. He had already distinguished his pontificate by emptying the vials of his wrath upon the head of King Ladislaus of Naples for no other offense than his having been an ally of Gregory XII., which, as we have just been taught by Noethen, quoting from St. Antoninus, was no offense against the law of the Church. Harmless as this preference of Ladislaus is now pretended to have been, yet for it alone he was declared by this infallible pope to be "a heretic, a schismatic, a man guilty of high treason against the majesty of God;" a crusade was proclaimed against him, and those who should take part in it were promised that all their sins should be forgiven, upon repentance and confession. (Gillett, vol i., p. 181.)

His success in bringing the hierarchy to adopt his views in reference to Ladislaus, and his promptness in dealing with heresy, led him to believe that if he could turn the attention of the council to inquiries of that kind, he might himself escape. Accordingly, "the foil he used was the heresy of Huss," which he hoped would give him the opportunity of showing how faithfully he guarded the faith of the Church! To effect his purpose the more certainly, he caused his bull of convocation to be read, wherein, in order to establish the legitimacy of his own pontificate, he claimed that the Council of Constance was but a continuation of that of Pisa, and then announced, through one of his cardinals, that the council would be expected to direct its attention especially to some prevalent errors of doctrine, and "pre-eminently to those which were originated by Wycliffe," knowing that Huss had been accused of maintaining them. He succeeded in part of his plan, that is, in inciting the persecution of Huss, but not in escaping the doom which he himself so richly merited. (Gillett, vol. i., p. 342.)

Huss, when summoned before the council, was told that he had been charged with disseminating "errors of the gravest kind" in Bohemia, but they were not specifically stated. He was only notified that they were "manifestly opposed to the Catholic Church." To this indefinite accusation he replied, like an honest man, "If any one can convince me of any error, I will unhesitatingly abjure it." (*Ibid.*, p. 345.) Specific articles of accusation were, however, afterward drawn up against him, by which it was charged, 1st, that he rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation; 2d, with maintaining that a priest in mortal sin cannot administer the sacraments; 3d, that by the Church is not to be understood the pope, clergy, or members of the hierarchy; 4th, that the endowment of the Church by secular princes is unwise; 5th, that all priests are equal, and it is false that bishops alone have the right to consecrate and ordain; 6th, that the entire Church has no power of the keys, when the whole clergy is in gross sin; and, 7th, that he had contemned his excommunication by saying mass everyday on his journey to Constance. (*Ibid.*, p. 347.)

He was immediately arrested and held in custody as a prisoner, to answer this indictment. His place of imprisonment was a nauseous and unhealthy apartment, "through which every sort of impurity was discharged into the lake"—of Constance. When the emperor, who had not yet arrived, heard of this, he sent



forward ambassadors to demand the release of Huss, but he was not discharged. On account of his sickness, occasioned by the foul air he was compelled to breathe in his filthy and poisonous dungeon, he was at last removed to more healthy apartments. This is said to have been done by the pope, "lest Huss should die in prison, and the cause of orthodoxy lose the incense of a burning heretic." (*Ibid.*, p. 357.) His failing health admonished him of the necessity of having an advocate to defend him, and he asked that one might be appointed. But this was refused; and he was told "that, according to the canon law, no one could be allowed to take the part or plead the cause of a man suspected of heresy;" an act of tyranny worthy only of the most heartless despotism.

Weak and feeble as he was, however, his defense of himself was a masterly exhibition of his great powers of mind, and of his unflinching courage. But it was of no avail. All sorts of evidence were admitted against him; everything he said was tortured into heresy; and, after a mock trial of a few days, he was pronounced by this great ecumenical council to be guilty not of any crime, but of *daring to think*! He had ventured to say that immoral priests could not administer the sacraments, and this was considered by a majority of the council as an impeachment of themselves. He had endeavored to lower the pride and diminish the authority of the pope and hierarchy, and had thus brought himself under the ban of these corrupt officials. Of course he was convicted—that had been predetermined—for no victim could be furnished so likely as Huss to satisfy the world of the orthodoxy of the council and the pope!

There was but a single mode of escape for this intrepid champion of free thought; that was, to admit the errors charged against him, and to retract them. Unconscious of error, he could not in his conscience admit it; and therefore he had nothing to retract. He appealed to reason and the enlightened judgment of the council; but that body refused him the right to address himself to any motive higher than that which grew out of its own selfish and partisan passions, and demanded unconditional submission. It would allow no debate, no inquiry; every one of its assumptions had to be accepted as infallibly true. Huss, then, when he demanded to be heard in defense of his own opinions, was the representative of the free spirit of the present age—the champion of that intellectual and moral freedom upon which the central column of Protestantism is now resting. How much fairer and nobler a place does he occupy in history than the infamous pope whose victim he became, or any of those members of the council who aided in producing his conviction! Their names are scarcely known except to the readers of history, while his is lisped by almost every schoolboy throughout Christendom.

Jerome met the same fate. He and Huss were burned at the stake—martyrs in the cause of truth and freedom. Neither of them exhibited the slightest fear of death. No quivering muscle displayed the cowardice of conscious guilt. They were heroes in the highest sense, and left behind them influences which were not long in producing fruits, not expected by their persecutors, but which laid the foundation for some of the grandest results in history.

To pretend that the Roman Catholic Church is not guilty of the death of Huss and Jerome, as the papists do, is worse than idle. The Council of Constance

was its highest authority. It represented the entire Church, and in this capacity tried, convicted, and turned them over to the secular authorities for execution. After their conviction, and before they were removed from the council chamber, paper crowns were placed upon their heads. These were covered with "pictured fiends" with flames around them, to signify that they were devoted to death by burning. (Gillett, vol. ii., pp. 65, 255.)

When this was placed upon the head of Huss, his persecutors exclaimed, "We devote thy soul to the devils in hell," which was more the language of a fiend than of a Christian. The council knew what the result of the conviction would be. The Church at that time shaped the domestic policy of the nations, in so far as it concerned the Church or dealt with heresy. Wherever there was an emperor or king who refused to enact laws against heretics consistently with the decree of persecution enacted by the Fourth Lateran Council, he was cursed and excommunicated, and his subjects were released from their allegiance. Hence the law under which Huss and Jerome were executed was the result of that obedience which the nations then paid to the Church, which the Church required of them, and for the failure or refusal to pay which it visited its severest punishments upon them. The blood, therefore, of these murdered Christians is still crying out against the hierarchy of the Church, and will not be washed away until they learn to exchange their persecuting intolerance for the mild and forbearing teachings of the Gospel.

Soon after the vengeance of the Council of Constance had spent itself in the flames which consumed the bodies of Huss and Jerome, avengers begun to spring up on every side to proclaim anew the truths uttered by them, and more especially to assert the right to challenge the oppressions and usurpations of imperialism. The contest became one between reason and authority—between the papacy, wielding all the power of the Church in maintaining its demand for absolute and uninquiring submission, and in denying to its followers free access to the Scriptures, and the right of free inquiry into the truths of religion, philosophy, and science.

In order ignobly to maintain its authority, and thus to perpetuate the existing corruptions, every artifice was employed. Bulls of excommunication and ecclesiastical interdicts—employed far more frequently in reference to secular than spiritual affairs—were the common resort of the popes, who, forgetting that God still reigned over the world, impiously claimed that they could open or close the gates of heaven and hell at their pleasure, and could withdraw the thunder and the lightning from the sky to scathe and blast the opponents of their ignominious and debasing vices. What wonder is there, then, that these avengers arose *within* the Church, when they remembered how much it had done to Christianize and civilize the world, and how much of apostolic purity there was yet retained in its cherished faith? They saw clearly that the struggle involved the life of Christianity and the dearest hopes of the Christian world; and the inspiriting thought that they were the champions of such a cause gave them a courage and heroism which the world will never cease to admire. The oceans of blood which papal imperialism caused to be shed throughout the beautiful plains and valleys of Europe have not been sufficient to wash from the pages of history the bright record of their virtues and their courage. The flames could consume their bodies, but

other flames were enkindled which could not be extinguished; and from out of these flashed forth the light of truth.

The Bohemians were very much attached to Huss and Jerome, and their cruel murder produced intense excitement among them. The King of Bohemia observing, one day, a nobleman, named John Zisca, deeply wrapped in thought, inquired of him what he was thinking about; when he replied: "I was thinking on the affront offered to our kingdom by the death of John Huss." The king replied: "It is out of your power or mine to revenge it, but if you know which way to do it, exert yourself." ("Church History," by Fry, London, 1824, p. 261.)

And he did exert himself in such a way as to bring down terrible revenge upon the heads of the persecutors. With the assistance of Nicholas de Hussinetz, he raised an army of forty thousand men, and a war immediately ensued between the emperor, as the representative of papal imperialism, and the Bohemians, which lasted for thirteen years. Inhuman cruelties were practiced on both sides, and the termination of the struggle was marked by a concession to the Bohemians which they considered of the utmost importance in maintaining their faith and mode of religious worship. This was the allowance to their laity of the use of the cup in the sacrament, which the Romanists had denied to them, *because it gave too much importance to the common people*. The introduction of this concession in the treaty of peace was, to some extent, the recognition of the fact that the laity were not a mere *canaille* (riffraff); and it resulted, ultimately, in bringing about a union between the Waldenses and the Hussites, and in giving new impetus to the cause of the Moravian Christians. And although the Hussites were banished from Moravia some time afterward, they had two hundred congregations in Bohemia and Moravia at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Martin V. was elected pope by the Council of Constance, and having finally succeeded, after much difficulty, in getting rid of his rivals, was also anxious to get rid of the council—for, like other popes, he desired to govern alone. He was afraid to break it up, and endeavored to keep in its favor by continuing to execute the Hussites, making for that purpose "a magnificent *auto-da-fe* (public execution)!" Unable to accomplish his wish in this way, he announced his intention of leaving Constance, but was opposed in this by the emperor, who desired to have the relations between them satisfactorily arranged. Martin, dreading the possibility of being cited to a new council, in case of disagreement with the emperor, thought to put an end to the proceedings by resort to a pontifical bull, wherein he maintained that "a pope was the absolute judge of his own actions, in all circumstances, and that he could *annul the promises he had previously made!*" (Cormenin, vol. ii., p. 111.) And he adopted this principle in practice.

He endeavored to establish the papal rule over the cities of Genoa, Venice, Florence, and Naples, which had freed themselves from the tyranny of the popes. He found the husband of Joanna, Queen of Naples, driven out in consequence of his cruelties; and, taking advantage of the existing disorders, he offered the crown to Louis of Anjou, on condition of his assisting him to re-acquire the papal possessions, thus claiming the divine right to dispose of crowns and kingdoms. Joanna, to defeat this, obtained assistance from Alphonso, King of Arragon; and as the pope's army was upon

the eve of being defeated, the wily pope had recourse to the cunning expedient of making another agreement with Alphonso, to the effect that if he would dethrone Joanna, he would obtain the renunciation of Louis of Anjou, and give the crown to him. Alphonso consented, and seized the government of Naples, requiring an oath of allegiance from the inhabitants. Joanna fled, and Alphonso became master of Naples. He called on the pope for the fulfillment of his promise, by deposing Joanna and conferring the title of king upon him. But as the pope, when he made the promise, had not the slightest idea of complying with it, he replied, very deliberately, that "*he had never intended to fulfill the promises he had made him!*" (*Ibid.*, p. 113.) that the crown of right belonged to Louis, who had bought the investiture of it from Popes Alexander V. and John XXIII.; and that, besides, he would not aid a prince who had given shelter to a rival pope, as Alphonso had done to Benedict XIII. His solemn promise did not weigh with him the weight of a feather.

Alphonso determined to avenge the insult, and Martin V., seeing that he was likely to do it effectually, sent to him a legate to sue for peace. But Alphonso, having learned his perfidy and hypocrisy sufficiently, declined any intercourse with the legate, and published an edict forbidding the reception of any of the pope's bulls in Spain. This was purely a temporal matter, yet the pope issued a bull against the King of Arragon declaring him an enemy of religion, a supporter of schism, and as such deprived him of his dignity and kingdom; not, it will be observed, for any sin against God and the Church, but for daring to rebuke him, an infallible pope, for his perfidy and want of truth.

The pope now gathered an army of Italian, French, German, and English soldiers, and sent them into Bohemia, under the command of one of his cardinals, to exterminate all who embraced the doctrines of Huss. The Bohemians were not easily overcome, and drove the papal troops out of their country. But the pope, although thus defeated, was gratified that he had succeeded in stirring up a civil war in Germany, from which he hoped great gains to the papal cause. Therefore he wrote to his defeated legate:

"You will immediately recruit new troops to recommence hostilities, and to wash out, in the blood of the Hussites, the opprobrium with which your name is covered. Let no consideration arrest you; spare neither money nor men. Believe that we are acting for religion, and that God has no more agreeable holocaust than the blood of his enemies! Strike with the sword, and when your arm cannot reach the guilty, employ poison, burn all the towns of Bohemia, that fire may purify this accursed land; transform the country into arid steppes, and let the dead bodies of the heretics hang from the trees in greater number than the leaves of the forest." (*Cormenin*, vol. ii., pp. 115, 116.)

Benedict XIII. having died, and Clement VIII. having resigned his claims to the pontificate, Martin V. became the sole possessor of the tiara, in 1429, thus ending the great Western schism, which had for more than fifty years enabled the chief actors to exhibit themselves as "ambitious, avaricious, vindictive, debauched, and cruel; solely occupied with duping men, and changing the holy water into a stream of gold." This gave to Martin V. more

leisure to prosecute his war of extermination of the Hussites; and we have still further insight into the character of this war, and the policy of this infallible pope, by the following letter, addressed by him to the King of Poland, endeavoring to procure his aid in bringing back the Bohemians to the true faith:

"Know that the interests of the Holy See, and those of your crown, make it a duty *to exterminate the Hussites*. Remember that these impious persons dare proclaim principles of equality; they maintain that all Christians are brethren, and that God has not given to privileged men the right of ruling the nations; they hold that Christ came on earth to abolish slavery; they call the people to liberty, that is, to the annihilation of kings and priests. While there is still time, then, turn your forces against Bohemia; *burn, massacre, make deserts everywhere, for nothing could be more agreeable to God, or more useful to the cause of kings, than the extermination of the Hussites.*" (Cormenin, vol. ii., pp. 116,117.)

Martin V. did not live long enough, after issuing this bloody edict, to witness its desolating effect upon the Bohemians. The gallant Hussites, invigorated by the consciousness that they were defending an inalienable right which God had given them, rallied, like true soldiers, to the defense of their principles and their homes, and cut the papal army to pieces, driving it back in dismay and disgrace. At their hands liberty won another triumph over imperialism, and the cause of free conscience was, under the protecting providence of God, still preserved. The shock which the pope sustained when this sad news reached the Vatican was too great for him. Finding himself thus defied, and with an army routed and dispirited, he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, and died, disappointed in his hopes, and despised by all except those who were united with him in the effort to keep the people in degradation and perpetuate the reign of papal and imperial absolutism. But he lived long enough to show the world that the canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, which commanded the extermination of heresy by force, was still the law of the Church, and that from it the papacy derived the leading and governing principle of its action. With a view to the enforcement of this law, he proclaimed his infallibility, that he might the more readily grasp sufficient temporal power to unsheath the swords of princes, and send forth their armies, with torch and fagot, to murder, to destroy, and to desolate some of the fairest portions of Europe. What impious blasphemy it is to say that God was on the side of the fiendish and infernal work prescribed by this pope for the defenders of papal sovereignty!

But the healing of the schism to which the pontificate of Martin V. led did not put an end to the corruptions of popes, prelates, or priests. God seems to have permitted these to continue during the remainder of the fifteenth century, and into the sixteenth, in order that the Christian world might realize how far the papacy had departed from the teachings and practices of the apostolic age, and be prepared for the ushering-in of the Protestant Reformation. Notwithstanding that torrents of blood were shed, and the fires of the terrible Inquisition were kindled, and gibbets and scaffolds were erected wherever the papacy had power, God did not design that the world should be longer ruled by depraved popes and priests; and, therefore, by the

consummation of that great event, he marked out for it new roads to happiness and prosperity, and to Christianity fresh triumphs in more peaceful fields. And thousands who had before felt the crushing weight of papal oppression, and groaned under the burden, enlisted under the banner of religious freedom, which has been borne onward and upward, through terrible trials, until at last it floats in front of the Vatican at Rome, despite the curses and anathemas of Pope Pius IX., who, that it might again be trailed in the dust before him, invites another crusade, revives the canon of the Lateran Council, and gnashes his teeth in desperate rage, because there is no king upon any throne to do his bidding, and because mankind will not tamely submit to the pressure of his heel upon their necks.

By the proclamation of his sovereignty, his infallibility, and his omnipotence, he leaves no room to doubt that he desires to turn the Christian world back from its progressive advancement into the terrible condition from which the Reformation raised it, and by the substitution of terror, hatred, and intolerance, for love, charity, and toleration, to will again universal supremacy for the papacy. To do this, he would enslave all peoples who will not obey him, destroy all governments wherein the people have power, abrogate every law in conflict with papal enactments, restore the universal reign of kings, and establish a Holy Empire, with ecclesiastical supremacy, upon the ruins of all popular government.

Continued in [The Papacy And The Civil Power – Chapter XVIII. Resistance to Civil Power](#).