THE CONVERSION OF SIMON FISH.

By John Knipe.

2. SHROVE TUESDAY AT PAUL'S (February 11, 1526, O.S.).

DURING Simon's exile the Widow Necton was kept busy burning his love-letters which she contrived to intercept unknown to her daughter, as they were brought over by Endhoven's trading vessel and delivered at her door by a Dutch seaman who pocketed his silver piece for handing them to her or her elderly maidservant. Madam Necton destroyed Simon's tender beseeching billets ruthlessly unread, but on Shrovetide Eve as she sat alone by her kitchen fire she remembered one that she had forgotten which lay at the bottom of a locked coffer in her bedchamber. She took a candle and went to fetch it, but to do so she must go through Margery's tiny room, scarce more than a recess in the wall. She went softly and secured the letter which she thrust into her gown-pocket. Shading the light the mother glanced at the girl's bed. Her eyes grew fond, for Margery lay fast asleep, all lines of secret trouble smoothed into innocent peace, her soft brown curls framing her face, her round cheek flushed and a smile on her slightly parted lips. Jane Necton could not resist bending over to kiss her daughter. Then Margery stirred and sighed in her sleep. "Simon!" she murmured. "My dear Simon!"

The widow's face hardened and she turned and carried his letter straight to the dying fire, pulled it from her pocket and thrust it against the red embers. Christmas to Lent and the young man had not forgotten her daughter nor would she lightly forget him. The paper curled up and in Simon's neat clerkly hand words were plain. "So, dear heart, I am become a Gospeller even as thou, converted in this my bitter exile by reading of the New Testament done into English by Sir William Tyndale, a most holy and learned priest, known to thy friends." Here the paper was charred, but the widow's horrified eyes saw further—"our love hallowed by like Faith into yet closer bonds—such marriage of souls e'en Death can never dissolve . . ." "The runagate has turned heretic!" muttered the widow, as she pushed the last shreds of Simon's letter to catch the flame—and she swore to herself that she would find some way to end that youthful folly of her girl's troth-plighting. She would write to her cousin the Sheriff-elect of Norwich and ask his counsel.

Who was this learned priest named Tyndale? She wondered how Margery should know of him through her friends? Could he be the same as the preacher at Saint Dunstan's-in-the-West whom Humphrey Monmouth received for a time in his house as an honoured guest?

Musing thus the widow reflected how grave her little wench was become, how she disliked certain rites and customs, in particular votive offerings and Requiem Masses, and how she did shrink from

her religious duty of confession save at such great days as all must attend when a young girl's innocent shrift was passed quickly over in the common press.

"Well, I've not done my duty by my child," thought Madam Necton finally. "She shall go up early to-morrow and if there be not time then to make a clean shrift I'll speak to the priest to bid her come again for proper Lent penance. Aye! She must needs confess I've forbid her troth to yon railing rogue who dared mock my Lord Cardinal!"

But the bell ringing from Paul's reminded the widow of the great Shrovetide Sermon which the citizens were bidden to hear. And soon after seven o'clock she and Margery were hurrying along Candlewick Street, past London Stone, Budge Row and Watling Street to enter by the Saint Augustine Gate of the churchyard. Here were crowds streaming towards the West Front and a fat jolly greyfriar advised them "to go round by Paul's Cross for they'd never get sight of my Lord Cardinal and the brave show now at the West doors." He rattled a wooden box asking "Alms for the Poor Souls in Purgatory!" He blessed them when the widow put in a groat. "Your fair wench looks a dove bred for the cloister," he said. He smiled meaningly at her pure still face and serious brown eyes. But she shrank back and Widow Necton retorted—"Not she! 'Tis a wilful lovesick maid, good brother! Thank the Saints! I've an arm stout enough to keep her from her folly!"

"*Parce flagellum!*" laughed the surprised friar. "She looks so soft and meek! Heed thy loving mother, my child. She knows best," he said sagely. "*Pax vobiscum!*"

Margery's cheeks were flaming at such public rebuke without due cause, but she dared not question her mother, whose lips were pressed into a thin line in a face grown hard and shrewish. She would have slapped her daughter like a naughty child in her irritated mood, and Margery followed meekly until the press made Madam Necton turn to grip her by the arm, even as the girl recoiled white-faced, staring at what she saw in a gap where the folk parted before wooden rails in front of the Northern Rood.

"Dear Lord!" gasped Margery. "'Tis for a burning!"

A slow fire was kindled in the midst of the railed-off space and round it was ranged reed baskets and hampers heaped high with books, pamphlets and papers.

Madam Necton nipped her arm and whispered sharply: "Peace, ye ninny! Leave high matters be! Come within!"

Then a rough voice muttered good-humouredly: "Tush! There be no stake! They burn books, not men! Look not so scared, little mistress!"

She heard in great comfort and recognised Roger, Master Monmouth's staid oldish man, escorting Madam through the crowd, who smiled and beckoned them and the widow followed gladly through the *Si Quis* door until Roger found them a clear space in the nave, and seats for the two dames against a pillar at the end of a narrow bench.

Roger stood by Margery and put his lips to her ear: "Mark yon high platform hung with red? 'Tis for my Lord Cardinal and the bishops—yon's his Throne. T'other low scaffold be for his Grace's prisoners. They must abjure openly but he spares their lives. His Eminence hates burning folk for heresy. Nay! Ye'll see naught frightful."

She nodded whispering: "Who must abjure, good Roger?"

"A parcel o' Steelyard men—foreigners—'Lutherans,' they say."

The great church was crowded from end to end and most of all in the nave before the pulpit, the citizens sat, if they could, or stood leaning on each his neighbour, or clung to wall and pillar like flies. Gaily clad for the Shrovetide Feast when they moved the dim interior of Old Saint Paul's seemed covered with a vast close-woven tapestry of human figures blown in the wind from the open doors north and south, and streaked like gold thread from the rays of the pale sun.

As eight o'clock struck on the great bell Roger muttered: "They're opening the West doors! Hark to the shouting! From Paul's Wharf! My Lord Cardinal comes from his barge!"

The girl stared eagerly in curiosity and dislike, to catch a glimpse of the Great Cardinal who had robbed her of Simon, and thought in wonder how strange it was that such a lowly soul as herself should suffer under my Lord Grace of York's displeasure against her own dear lover.

Chanting that swelled louder and nearer, a glimpse of the white-robed choristers, a tall gold cross borne solemnly ahead of the procession, the religious in their habits, monks, nuns and friars, priests in glittering copes, mitred bishops and abbots and priors, all vested in the sombre penitential purple hue of that Solemn Act of Reparation to be offered God in His Church of the Holy Apostle Paul, then a passing of six men clad in sackcloth, the foremost holding a great wax candle, and the Cardinal's own escort, his golden mace, his high silver crosses borne by the tallest priests he could find, his pillars, his pole-axes, his red hat on gold-fringed red velvet cushion, his superb crozier, and last his Eminence, walking slow under his red-and-gold canopy, clad all in scarlet, his long gloved hand raised solemnly, great ruby ring glittering on uplifted finger—hand blood-red as he blessed the kneeling citizens. Margery counted eighteen mitred bishops, and as many abbots, while his Grace's doctors in damask robes sat below where they could.

Margery stared. Was that short, waddling, fleshy, sallow-faced man seating himself on the Bishop's Throne in the midst, he of the hard dark eyes, the right had a hideous cast, that cold proud face and arrogant demeanour, was he verily Thomas Wolsey of Ipswich, the Cardinal Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor of England? He Simon's enemy! She sickened and turned her eyes to that other scaffold, mean and black, and bit her lips as she recognised the tall spare form of the man who held a great wax candle, the Austin Friar, the preacher whom all London flocked to hear as he expounded Wyclif's Bible in English; aye, surely the great Divine

of Cambridge, Doctor Barnes. And in horror she observed the like faggot was bound to his shoulder as the rest bore!

He had recanted! Barnes had denied his Lord! Hot tears ran down the girl's cheek as she hung her head in shame, shame for him and loathing of the fat proud Cardinal sitting in bloated pomp, like a monstrous red spider eyeing poor flies in his web.

The Choir finished singing a Penitential Psalm. A black and white robed Dominican Father Prior rose from his seat on the platform, bowed to the Cardinal, and turning to the Church's prisoners, he uttered a Latin form.

The six men fell on their knees and repeated the *Mea Culpa* and made confession after in English. She heard little, for the people shifted and coughed—something of "their having erred . . . fallen into the deadly Sin of Heresy . . . they begged humble pardon of the Catholic Church for their high crimes and offences."

They ended. A stillness like death held the crowd.

"Dear Lord Christ!" prayed Margery. "They do not truly mean what they say for fear of the terrible fiery death."

She looked up. A rustle of robes, the Lord Cardinal's hand uplifted as he signed the Cross over all present—and again gave a second silent blessing to those who had abjured—he turned to depart with his train of attendant bishops—all save one who went now to mount the pulpit-steps.

John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, a tall, spare, ascetic man, whose thoughtful face was severe, and his deep-set eyes burned with more zeal than Christian charity as his clear hard tones harangued the citizens of London. He bade them "take warning by this example the Church made of one to whose words in that same pulpit they had listened." "Not," cried the bishop, "as a savour of Life unto Life, as saith the Holy Apostle Paul, but as he saith further, of Death unto Destruction!"

Margery looked at the miserable Doctor Barnes and thought of his last sermon there—how he called aloud to those same Londoners "Come unto Me!", how lovingly he had spoken of the Lord Christ's care. Yet here was the great Lord Bishop of Rochester who denounced that sermon as heresy!

"Then am I a heretic?" puzzled Margery, and she lost much of the bishop's grave discourse in her bewilderment.

A sudden stir like the ripple of a long wave. Heads turning and folk craning their necks—at the bishop's bidding poor miserable Doctor Barnes turned to face those Londoners and Margery saw his face, livid save for a burning patch on each cheek-bone, his eyes swollen and restless, his hand shaking so that the candle dripped grease in a rain of drops.

"Good people!" he began—in a dry husky voice, which was harsh as he forced himself to utter phrases which were plainly dictated—"I confess that I have grievously erred—and I pray that no poor souls may be lost through my great fault—and if any here be led astray let them return as I do—and seek mercy, for I am more charitably and gently entreated than I do deserve—my heresies,

being so heinous and detestable . . ." He tried to continue, but his voice broke, his words were inaudible, though he stood there a moment, leaning one hand on the low rail, his throat working painfully, his eyes regarding them in a beseeching look of such utter misery that sobs of pity rose from many present.

The bishop stood immovable, waiting for some further word. Suddenly Barnes dropped on his knees and hid his face, weeping bitterly, while a groan burst from him, like one on the rack.

"Better be burned than so shamed!" cried a woman's shrill voice. "Thou hast denied like Peter! Aye! Thou may'st well weep!"

John Fisher leaned over the high pulpit and his eyes swept the congregation, while he signed to the Knight-Marshal below the penitents' platform. He looked sternly towards the bold unknown voice. He gestured for silence. His thin thoughtful face grew gentle.

"A broken and a contrite heart," said the bishop softly, "shalt Thou not despise!"

His words were the signal for the Choir to chant the *Miserere*, and the six men in sackcloth were led down and escorted to the north door, Barnes pausing to offer his candle while the faggots were unbound from their shoulders—and the people watched them led within the rails to walk around the fire and each cast in his faggot—and stood aside while the hampers of heretic books were thrown into the flames.

Then the doctor and the poor Steelyard men were brought to the chancel screen to kneel on the lowest step before Bishop Fisher, whose clear voice pronounced the "*Absolvo Te!*" over each bowed head, and he declared them re-admitted to full Communion with the Catholic Church. And the bishop raised his fingers and blessed all there, and so ended the Shrovetide Sermon and the Public Penance done at Paul's.

The Return of Simon Fish.

"Well!" said the Widow Necton comfortably to Madam Monmouth, as she finished a second pancake brought off the fire—they were at dinner at the clothier's house. "'Twas a sorry sight, my neighbours, but to my mind a burning o' live folk at Smithfield be a deal sorrier, though yon silly woman cried out contrarywise! Fire be hot and pain great." She shrugged her plump shoulders and glanced at Margery's tense face. . . . "Come, my wench, needs not look so down," she added.

Margery said nothing. She had scarce spoken since they left the great church.

"Mass! Ye may well call it so! Sad as sorry!" burst out Master Monmouth. The worthy merchant was impetuous when hot. "A parcel o' godfearing men and a grand Gospel preacher to be put to open shame in Paul's! They did no crime! The Steelyard men sold Gospel books and tracts . . ."

"One was straitly forbidden," interrupted the widow, "*The*

Wicket, a book of that dead heretic, John Wyclif! I saw it thrown on to burn."

"Look ye, dame! Why be the bishops so set against the Scriptures being sold here in the vulgar tongue? 'Tis not so in all lands. They keep to their Latin mumble-jumble. Why?"

Madam Necton shrugged. "How should a plain simple woman know?"

"Because the Word is pure," returned Monmouth, "and all men do know the King's Court has a foul name. 'Tis a sink of wicked pleasures. The bishops wink at the same. Aye! Even John Fisher must. Poor man! He knows the great Lord Cardinal himself to be no better than any libertine lordling of a courtier. How can my Lord of Rochester alone stand against Cardinal Wolsey, the Pope's Legate!"

The widow stared and let her pancake grow cold. Margery slid her hand under the board into her godfather's grasp.

"Come thy ways, Humphrey, dear heart!" laughed his wife. "Jane, take a fresh pancake. 'Tis good the 'prentices hear ye not, my master!"

A second great dish heaped in gold-brown pancakes was pushed through the buttery hatch. Monmouth served his friends.

"Margie, thou ought to be merrier," he said. "Master Serjeant and Tom Moyle be released. Great folk at the Court spoke for 'em behind the Cardinal's back."

The girl gave him a demure smile.

"E'en at that monstrous wicked place."

Monmouth roared. "Aye! But the Cardinal was crafty! When he heard who had the King's ear he hastened to free 'em, and told the King's Grace he did it to please Canterbury, who had sent Master Golde his chaplain to him with this word, 'My Lord Archbishop is sorry such a matter as a Misrule Frolic should be taken in earnest.'" The clothier smiled and patted her curls. "Thou wilt soon be seeing thy Simon back."

The widow smoothed her best black damask and coughed.

"What mean ye by saying how when his Eminence heard who had the King's ear?" she asked quickly.

Monmouth glanced at the girl and replied curtly:

"Mistress Nan Boleyn. 'Tis said she hates the Lord Cardinal," he added. "He calls her the 'Night Crow.'"

The elder ladies looked deeply interested, but the merchant turned to Margery, whose radiant face showed where her thoughts had flown, far from King, Cardinal or Court lady.

"Sweetheart, hast Simon not told ye how of late he met our good preacher Sir William Tyndale at Mynheer van Endhoven's house?"

The girl flushed deeper, but she answered at once in a low troubled voice, without looking at anyone, her downcast eyes on her platter:

"No, godfather. I have had no word from Simon at all."

"Marry come up!" exclaimed the clothier vehemently. "The ship-master sent ye all the young man's . . ."

"Humphrey!" intervened his wife quickly.

Monmouth bit his tongue. He stared at the furious eyes of the widow, whose face was crimson, and from her the clothier looked again at Margery, whose bowed face was now hidden in her hands. Humphrey Monmouth laid his broad hand on her shoulder.

"There, little love," he said tenderly. "Come in the garden with thy old gossip and pluck Lent lilies for thy pretty grass green gown."

But Madam Necton detained him.

"Master Monmouth, the girl is a dutiful wench. I forbade her to have his letters for her own good. And my child knows it well. 'Twas a silly trothplight, for she was over-young. But I let it pass for the year until the youth's own folly broke it on his side. 'Tis no contract, no binding pledge. I asked my cousin John Necton, who is Sheriff-elect of Norwich. He says that in law no man who forswears the Realm can claim a pact of betrothal to a chit of seventeen."

"Law can't make me break faith!" cried Margery, her eyes shining through tears, her cheeks flushed and her soft voice quivering. "I love Simon! Oh, Mother, I have obeyed ye in this! But I can't break my word to him! I'd sooner die!"

"So! That's how it stands," muttered Monmouth shrewdly.

His wife, rising from the table, suggested that Margery should come into the garden with her, and her husband might like a word apart with their friend. She threw him a warning look as she went out, her arm round the girl's waist.

"So, ye stopped his letters—have ye kept them?" asked Monmouth.

"Nay. They were burned. I didn't read a line save by chance." The widow pursed her mouth. "I've a better match for my girl." She nodded. "Robert Necton, my cousin's youngest brother. Not too nigh akin and a sober quiet man of thirty. He spoke for her."

"Thirty! Thirty-six if he's a day!" fumed Monmouth. "More'n twice her age and a widower! Simon's twenty-six!"

"A staid, kind, pious man," the widow returned. "In a good repute and has his lands, his business, a fine house and wants no dowry. She will be dowered but slenderly, Master Monmouth."

"For that, as my godchild, I'd make up her portion," he replied so warmly that Madam Necton must needs thank him, though she disliked it.

That night Master Monmouth wrote a long letter to Simon in Antwerp. It was delayed, for young Fish was now a trusty messenger and go-between of the exiles of his new faith. He had confessed himself to Tyndale as many there did, and the Reformer was warmly interested in the bold, impetuous, devoted former Student of Gray's Inn. Though Simon had not been formally expelled from the Inns of Court, Tyndale warned him that his beliefs would make the law no career for a Gospeller. He approved Simon's resolve to help forward the sale and spread of the New Testament in

London, where the citizens were eager to read it. Endhoven had offered him a place in the export trade, and Simon hoped to visit London for his work, if he could not live there the whole of the year.

So he accompanied Tyndale to Worms on Endhoven's business, and learned more of his new bookcraft, and after he had spent some months at the work, Simon, having received Monmouth's letter, sought out William Tyndale and humbly offered to undertake the dangerous task of receiving in bulk copies of Tyndale's Translation in London, where the citizens and Essex men were longing impatiently to read the Gospels in English.

It was clear summer twilight. In the cool of the day Tyndale, as he loved to do, was walking by the banks of the Rhine. He looked earnestly at the young man's keen face.

"Hast heard the Master's call, friend Simon?"

"I trust so, sir," answered young Fish. He paused and the Reformer's calm reflecting eyes watched his disciple's hesitation.

"But not—to be a priest," Simon said. "There is a young maid—my betrothed—who is of the Christian Brethren. I have written to her of my changed purpose in life, and received no answer. To-day I learn that her mother is unwilling. Sir! Sir! Must I give her up—she, my dear love?" His voice broke, and he looked away at the distant fields of green corn in the flat open spaces beyond the town.

"I think if ye be already betrothed, 'tis for ye to ask that of her own mouth," Tyndale said slowly, a kindly smile in his eyes. "A marriage contract is a sacred bond if her mother allowed it openly."

"'Twas at the Christmas Feast in her mother's house," Simon said eagerly. "Madam Necton seemed willing, and Master Humphrey Monmouth signed the contract as my witness."

"I know him. A good man and a true. One who loves the Word," Tyndale said.

"He writes that my offence is forgotten. The Cardinal bears no more grudge. Neither is he so sure of his own footing at the Court."

Simon paused. "Mynheer van Endhoven will pay for my lodging while I sell his books. And I have money at home now naught will be seized."

"Go in peace, friend. See thy betrothed and work if 'tis in thy heart," Tyndale answered. "But remember to count the cost. 'Tis death by fire to circulate the Holy Scriptures in the mother tongue in England if once being denounced ye refuse to abjure. All are not required to risk in such peril liberty and life. Ye are a young man. Therefore I say take heed and be sure that a great danger is the Lord's will. For bread eaten in exile has but a sour taste." And the Reformer looked earnestly at him.

Simon bent his head. "I am ready," he said, with humility. "Only pray for me, sir, that I may be steadfast to the end."

"The Lord keep thee!" Tyndale answered. He was much moved, and he laid his hand affectionately on his convert's smooth dark hair.

Simon left Worms that night, taking boat up the Rhine to Cologne, and there he found merchants going to Antwerp, who knew Endhoven. The printer's trading vessel, a fast Flemish hoy, took him across to London, and after a good passage, Simon leaned next day on the bulwark in the prow to gaze eagerly as they passed Greenwich, watching for the first glimpse of The Pool and London Bridge, seen in the warm haze of twilight after heavy rain. He sprang to the quay of Billingsgate, and ran up Pudding Lane, leading to Great Fish Hill, and down the familiar ways of Candlewick Street, turning confidently into the little court where was the widow's house. Here, to his amazed eyes, he found the low-browed door fast closed, the tiny windows shuttered, no smoke rising from the kitchen chimney, and no voice responded to his knocking and his loud calls. At last a neighbour's gate opened in the street above, and a man dressed as a porter came into the lane and demanded his business.

"Necton? The Chandler's widow, sir? She has left. That house is for sale. A daughter was sick—she died there and the woman, thinking the place unwholesome in the heat, why, she sold up the home and is gone for good."

"Died!" gasped Simon. "Was the daughter grown? A fair maid, soft-eyed and quiet in her ways?"

The man said he did not know. He was new to that place. Nor where they had gone, but he thought to her folk in the country. He nodded, said a civil word, and walked back whistling.

Simon stood still and hid his face, leaning on the closed door weeping by the empty house. Then he moved away, thinking, a terrible ache at his heart, until suddenly he remembered Humphrey Monmouth! He ran to Little East Cheap, and never stayed until he reached the clothier's house in Tower Ward, hard by the Church of All Hallows, Barking. Simon Fish had a bitter home-coming from his exile, but at least he knew that he was sure of a kindly welcome from the generous man who was her godfather.

Monmouth was at supper when Simon, his eyes wild, his hair rough, and his manner disordered by grief, staggered into the hall.

"Simon Fish!" exclaimed Monmouth. "Welcome, thrice welcome, man!"

But Simon stood stock-still, his eyes so frantic that the clothier wondered if the young man were mad or drunk. He went to him and put a friendly arm round his shoulder.

"See! Madam Monmouth waits to greet ye," he said gently.

Simon gazed at him, the apple in his throat working like one in a convulsion.

"Margery?" he gasped in despair.

"Well, very well! Staying in the country," Monmouth assured him.

"Where?" demanded Simon suspiciously. "Art lying? She's dead! The house is shut up."

"Neither dying nor dead," returned Monmouth. "So cheer

ye, friend. Margery is staying at Norwich with her mother and their folk."

"God be praised!" muttered Simon, and he staggered back and would have fallen but for Monmouth's arm.

"So! 'Tis a faithful-hearted gallant!" said the merchant. "Give me a cordial, good wife. He is swooning."

Simon drank. He sighed and smiled, then bowed to Madam and let himself be led to the table.

"I have come straight after your letter, which reached me at Worms," he said. "Will ye lend me a saddle-horse for Norwich?"

"Aye, to-morrow," Monmouth laughed.

(*To be continued.*)

THE MINISTER THE METHOD AND THE MESSAGE: SUGGESTIONS ON PREACHING. By Harold Adye Prichard. [x + 303 pp.] *Charles Scribner's Sons.* 7*s.* 6*d.* net.

Some hold a deep conviction that a certain lack of pulpit power is the root cause of the decline in public attendance at places of worship. Whether that be so or not preaching occupies the primary place in the duties and privileges of ordained ministers of the gospel. There is still an immense sphere of influence open to the spoken word. This volume is intended to lead ministers of the gospel to take more seriously the responsibility of the opportunity afforded in the pulpit. Canon Prichard is a student of the art and offers material that is valuable. Rightly he places for prime consideration the life of the preacher himself, his life with men and with God, his life in the world of books and his discipline of mind and body. For the method of the minister Canon Prichard has considered the methods used both in preparation and delivery by nine of the most prominent and effective preachers of America. Each has his own method which he has found to be most suited to his own temperament and personality. They are given as suggestions for less-gifted men, and valuable suggestions they are.

The third section of the book deals with the message which the preacher has to deliver. Primarily his business is to preach Jesus Christ. There we join issue with the writer. His Christ is not our Christ. "The preacher cannot stop with Christ because He is not and can never be entirely sufficient." "Christ is not the journey's end, but is the way." "I do not find in him the ultimate consummation of hopes and longings and ambitions." That certainly is not the message of St. Paul. "We preach Christ crucified." "That Christ may be all in all." F. B.

To the Editor of THE CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—

I see that in my review of *Frederick II* (Kantorowicz) in the April number of THE CHURCHMAN, I have stated that Innocent IV was driven into exile at Avignon. This is wrong. I should have said Lyons. I regret the blunder. A. J. M.