

Heinrich Bullinger—Swiss Reformer

by

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October 12, 1892

(Taken from his "History of the Swiss Reformation," vol. 1)

After the productive period of the Zwinglian Reformation, which embraced fifteen years, from 1516 to 1531, followed the period of preservation and consolidation under difficult circumstances. It required a man of firm faith, courage, moderation, patience, and endurance. Such a man was providentially equipped in the person of Heinrich Bullinger, the pupil, friend, and successor of Zwingli, and second Antistes of Zurich. He proved that the Reformation was a work of God, and, therefore, survived the apparent defeat at Cappel. He was born July 18, 1504, at Bremgarten in Aargau, the youngest of five sons of Dean Bullinger, who lived, like many priests of those days, in illegitimate, yet tolerated, wedlock.¹ The father resisted the sale of indulgences by Samson in 1518, and confessed, in his advanced age, from the pulpit, the doctrines of the Reformation (1529). In consequence of this act he lost his place. Young Henry was educated in the school of the Brethren of the Common Life at Emmerich, and in the University of Cologne. He studied scholastic and patristic theology. Luther's writings and Melancthon's *Loci* led him to the study of the Bible and prepared him for a change.

He returned to Switzerland as Master of Arts, taught a school in the Cistercian Convent at Cappel from 1523 to 1529, and reformed the convent in agreement with the abbot, Wolfgang Joner. During that time he became acquainted with Zwingli, attended the Conference with the Anabaptists at Zurich, 1525, and the disputation at Bern, 1528. He married Anna Adlischweiler, a former nun, in 1529, who proved to be an excellent wife and helpmate. He accepted a call to Bremgarten as successor of his father.

After the disaster at Cappel, he removed to Zurich, and was unanimously elected by the Council, and the citizens, preacher of the Great Minster, Dec. 9, 1531. It was rumored that Zwingli himself, in the presentiment of his death, had designated him as his successor. No better man could have been selected. It was of vital importance for the Swiss churches that the place of the Reformer should be filled by a man of the same spirit, but of greater moderation and self-restraint.²

Bullinger now assumed the task of saving, purifying, and consolidating the life-work of Zwingli; and faithfully and successfully did he carry out this task. When he ascended the pulpit of the Great Minster in Dec. 23, 1531, many hearers thought that Zwingli had risen from the grave.³ He took a firm stand for the Reformation, which was in danger of being abandoned by timid men in the Council. He kept free from interference with politics, which had proved ruinous to Zwingli. He established a more independent, though friendly relation between Church and State. He confined himself to his proper vocation as preacher and teacher.

In the first years he preached six or seven times a week; after 1542 only twice, on Sundays and Fridays. He followed the plan of Zwingli in explaining whole books of the Scriptures from the pulpit. His sermons were simple, clear, and practical, and served as models for young preachers.

He was a most devoted pastor, dispensing counsel and comfort in every direction, and exposing even his life during the pestilence which several times visited Zurich. His house was open from morning till night to all who desired his help. He freely dispensed food, clothing, and money from his scanty income and contributions of friends, to widows and orphans, to strangers and exiles, not excluding persons of other creeds. He secured a decent pension for the widow of Zwingli, and educated two of his children with his own. He entertained persecuted brethren for weeks and months in his own house, or procured them places and means of travel.⁴

He paid great attention to education, as superintendent of the schools in Zurich. He filled the professorships in the Carolinum with able theologians, as Pellican, Bibliander, Peter Martyr. He secured a well-educated ministry. He prepared, in connection with Leo Judae, a book of church order, which was adopted by the Synod, Oct. 22, 1532, issued by authority of the burgomaster, the Small and the Great Council, and continued in force for nearly three hundred years. It provides the necessary rules for the examination, election, and duties of ministers (*Predicanten*) and deans (*Decani*), for semi-annual meetings of synods with clerical and lay representatives, and the power of discipline. The charges were divided into eight districts or chapters.⁵

Bullinger's activity extended far beyond the limits of Zurich. He had a truly Catholic spirit, and stood in correspondence with all the Reformed Churches. Beza calls him "the common shepherd of all Christian Churches"; Pellican, "a man of God, endowed with the richest gifts of heaven for God's honor and the salvation of souls." He received fugitive Protestants from Italy, France, England, and Germany with open arms, and made Zurich an asylum of religious liberty. He thus protected Celio Secondo Curione, Bernardino Ochino, and Peter Martyr, and the immigrants from Locarno, and aided in the organization of an Italian congregation in Zurich.⁶ Following the example of Zwingli and Calvin, he appealed twice to the king of France for toleration in behalf of the Huguenots. He dedicated to Henry II. his book on Christian Perfection (1551), and to Francis II. his Instruction in the Christian Religion (1559). He sent deputations to the French court for the protection of the Waldenses, and the Reformed congregation in Paris.

The extent of Bullinger's correspondence is astonishing. It embraces letters to and from all the distinguished Protestant divines of his age, as Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, Beza, Laski, Cranmer, Hooper, Jewel, and crowned heads who consulted him, as Henry VIII., Edward VI., of England, Queen Elizabeth, Henry II. of France, King Christian of Denmark, Philip of Hesse, and the Elector Frederick of the Palatinate.

Bullinger came into contact with the English Reformation from the time of Henry VIII. to the reign of Elizabeth, especially during the bloody reign of Mary, when many prominent exiles fled to Zurich, and found a fraternal reception under his hospitable roof. The correspondence of Hooper, Jewel, Sandys, Grindal, Parkhurst, Foxe, Cox, and other church dignitaries with Bullinger, Gwalter, Gessner, Simler, and Peter Martyr, is a noble monument of the spiritual harmony between the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and England in

the Edwardian and Elizabethan era. Archbishop Cranmer invited Bullinger, together with Melanchthon, Calvin, and Bucer, to a conference in London, for the purpose of framing an evangelical union creed; and Calvin answered that for such a cause he would be willing to cross ten seas. Lady Jane Grey, who was beheaded in 1554, read Bullinger's works, translated his book on marriage into Greek, consulted him about Hebrew, and addressed him with filial affection and gratitude. Her three letters to him are still preserved in Zurich. Bishop Hooper of Gloucester, who had enjoyed his hospitality in 1547, addressed him shortly before his martyrdom in 1554, as his "revered father and guide," and the best friend he ever had, and recommended his wife and two children to his care. Bishop Jewel, in a letter of May 22, 1559, calls him his "father and much esteemed master in Christ," thanks him for his "courtesy and kindness," which he and his friends experienced during the whole period of their exile, and informs him that the restoration of the Reformed religion under Elizabeth was largely due to his own "letters and recommendations"; adding that the queen refused to be addressed as the head of the Church of England, feeling that such honor belongs to Christ alone, and not to any human being. Bullinger's death was lamented in England as a public calamity.⁷

Bullinger faithfully maintained the doctrine and discipline of the Reformed Church against the Roman Catholics and Lutherans with moderation and dignity. He never returned the abuse of fanatics, and when, in 1548, the Interim drove the Lutheran preachers from the Swabian cities, he received them hospitably, even those who had denounced the Reformed doctrines from the pulpit. He represents the German Swiss type of the Reformed faith in substantial agreement with a moderate Calvinism. He gave a full exposition of his theological views in the Second Helvetic Confession.

His theory of the sacrament was higher than that of Zwingli. He laid more stress on the objective value of the institution. We recognize, he wrote to Faber, a mystery in the Lord's Supper; the bread is not common bread, but venerable, sacred, sacramental bread, the pledge of the spiritual real presence of Christ to those who believe. As the sun is in heaven, and yet virtually present on earth with his light and heat, so Christ sits in heaven, and yet efficaciously works in the hearts of all believers. When Luther, after Zwingli's death, warned Duke Albert of Prussia and the people of Frankfort not to tolerate the Zwinglians, Bullinger replied by sending to the duke a translation of Ratramnus' tract, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, with a preface. He rejected the Wittenberg Concordia of 1536, because it concealed the Lutheran doctrine. He answered Luther's atrocious attack on the Zwinglians (1545) by a clear, strong, and temperate statement; but Luther died soon afterwards (1546) without retracting his charges. When Westphal renewed the unfortunate controversy (1552), Bullinger supported Calvin in defending the Reformed doctrine, but counselled moderation.⁸ He and Calvin brought about a complete agreement on the sacramental question in the *Consensus Tigurinus*, which was adopted in 1549 at Zurich, in the presence of some members of the Council, and afterwards received the approval of the other Swiss Reformed churches.⁹

On the doctrine of Predestination, Bullinger did not go quite as far as Zwingli and Calvin, and kept within the infralapsarian scheme. He avoided to speak of the predestination of Adam's fall, because it seemed irreconcilable with the justice of the punishment of sin.¹⁰ The *Consensus Genevensis* (1552), which contains Calvin's rigorous view, was not signed by the pastors of Zur-

ich. Theodor Bibliander, the father of biblical exegesis in Switzerland, and a forerunner of Arminianism, opposed it. He adhered to the semi-Pelagian theory of Erasmus, and was involved in a controversy with Peter Martyr, who was a strict Calvinist, and taught in Zurich since 1556. Bibliander was finally removed from his theological professorship (Feb. 8, 1560), but his salary was continued till his death (Nov. 26, 1564)¹¹

On the subject of toleration and the punishment of heretics, Bullinger agreed with the prevailing theory, but favorably differed from the prevailing practice. He opposed the Anabaptists in his writings, as much as Zwingli, and, like Melancthon, he approved of the unfortunate execution of Servetus, but he himself did not persecute. He tolerated Laelio Sozini, who quietly died at Zurich (1562), and Bernardino Occhino, who preached for some time to the Italian congregation in that city, but was deposed, without further punishment, for teaching Unitarian opinions and defending polygamy. In a book against the Roman Catholic Faber, Bullinger expresses the Christian and humane sentiment that no violence should be done to dissenters, and that faith is a free gift of God, which cannot be commanded or forbidden. He agreed with Zwingli's extension of salvation to all infants dying in infancy and to elect heathen; at all events, he nowhere dissents from these advanced views, and published with approbation Zwingli's last work, where they are most strongly expressed.¹²

Bullinger's house was a happy Christian home. He liked to play with his numerous children and grandchildren, and to write little verses for them at Christmas, like Luther.¹³

When his son Henry, in 1553, went to Strassburg, Wittenberg, and Vienna to prosecute his theological studies, he wrote down for him wise rules of conduct, of which the following are the most important: 1) Fear God at all times, and remember that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. 2) Humble yourself before God, and pray to him alone through Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate. 3) Believe firmly that God has done all for our salvation through his Son. 4) Pray above all things for strong faith active in love. 5) Pray that God may protect your good name and keep thee from sin, sickness, and bad company. 6) Pray for the fatherland, for your dear parents, benefactors, friends, and all men, for the spread of the Word of God; conclude always with the Lord's Prayer, and use also the beautiful hymn, *Te Deum laudamus* [which he ascribes to Ambrose and Augustin]. 7) Be reticent, be always more willing to hear than to speak, and do not meddle with things which you do not understand. 8) Study diligently Hebrew and Greek as well as Latin, history, philosophy, and the sciences, but especially the New Testament, and read daily three chapters in the Bible, beginning with Genesis. 9) Keep your body clean and unspotted, be neat in your dress, and avoid above all things intemperance in eating and drinking. 10) Let your conversation be decent, cheerful, moderate, and free from all uncharitableness.¹⁴ He recommended him to Melancthon, and followed his studies with letters full of fatherly care and affection.¹⁵ He kept his parents with him till their death, the widow of Zwingli (d. 1538), and two of her children, whom he educated with his own. Notwithstanding his scanty income, he declined all presents, or sent them to the hospitals. The whole people revered the venerable minister of noble features and white patriarchal beard.

His last days were clouded, like those of many faithful servants of God. The excess of work and care undermined his health. In 1562 he wrote to Fabricius

at Coire: "I almost sink under the load of business and care, and feel so tired that I would ask the Lord to give me rest if it were not against his will." The pestilence of 1564 and 1565 brought him to the brink of the grave, and deprived him of his wife, three daughters, and his brother-in-law. He bore these heavy strokes with Christian resignation. In the same two fatal years he lost his dearest friends, Calvin, Blaurer, Gessner, Froschauer, Bibliander, Fabricius, Farel. He recovered, and was allowed to spend several more years in the service of Christ. His youngest daughter, Dorothea, took faithful and tender care of his health. He felt lonely and homesick, but continued to preach and to write with the aid of pastor Lavater, his colleague and son-in-law. He preached his last sermon on Pentecost, 1575. He assembled, Aug. 26, all the pastors of the city and professors of theology around his sick-bed, assured them of his perseverance in the true apostolic and orthodox doctrine, recited the Apostles' Creed, and exhorted them to purity of life, harmony among themselves, and obedience to the magistrates. He warned them against intemperance, envy, and hatred, thanked them for their kindness, assured them of his love, and closed with a prayer of thanksgiving and some verses of the hymns of Prudentius. Then he took each by the hand and took leave of them with tears, as Paul did from the elders at Ephesus. A few weeks afterwards he died, after reciting several Psalms (51, 16, and 42), the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers, peacefully, in the presence of his family, Sept. 17, 1575. He was buried in the Great Minster, at the side of his beloved wife and his dear friend, Peter Martyr. According to his wish, Rudolph Gwalter, Zwingli's son-in-law and his adopted son, was unanimously elected his successor. Four of his successors were trained under his care and labored in his spirit.

The writings of Bullinger are very numerous, mostly doctrinal and practical, adapted to the times, but of little permanent value. Scheuchzer numbers one hundred and fifty printed books of his. The Zurich City Library contains about one hundred, exclusive of translations and new editions. Many are extant only in manuscript. He wrote Latin commentaries on the New Testament (except the Apocalypse), numerous sermons on Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, the Apocalypse. His *Decades* (five series of ten sermons each on the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed, and the Sacraments) were much esteemed and used in Holland and England. His work on the justifying grace of God was highly prized by Melancthon. His History of the Swiss Reformation, written by his own hand, in two folio volumes, has been published in 1838-'40, in three volumes. His most important doctrinal work is the Second Helvetic Confession, which acquired symbolical authority.¹⁶

FOOTNOTES

1 The bishop of Constance allowed priests to keep concubines for an annual tribute of four Rhenish guilders, called the *Hurensold*. See Christoffel, *Zwingli*, II. 337, and Pestalozzi, p. 5.

2 Pestalozzi, p.25: "*Zwingli and Bullinger-welche verschiedenheit! Zwingli's rasches, feuriges Temperament, Bullinger's Ruhe and Gelassenheit; Zwingli's schneidender, stechender Witz, Bullinger's einlässliche Grundlichkeit; daher auch Zwingli's Kürze, Bullinger's Ausführlichkeit in den meisten seiner Arbeiten. Wie geeignet zur gegenseitigen Ergänzung!*"

3 "*Talem concionem detonavit,*" wrote Myconius to Schenck, "*ut multi putarent Zwinglium non defunctum, sed ad Phoenicis modum renatum esse.*" Hottinger, *Helv. K. Gesch.* III. 28.

4 See the beautiful description of Pestalozzi, pp. 153 sqq.

5 There are copies of several editions of this book in the City Library at Zurich, of 1532, 1535, 1563, etc. It is also printed in Simler's *Sammlung alter and neuer Urkunden*, I. 25-73.

6 See above, p. 155, and the works of Meyer and Morikofer quoted there.

7 See the letters of Barlow to Simler (Bullinger's son-in-law), and Bishop Cox to Gwalter, in *Zurich Letters*, pp. 494 and 496.

8 *Apologetica Defensio*, etc., February, 1556.

9 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, I. 471 sqq., and the literature there quoted.

10 In the Second Helvetic Confession, ch. VIII., he dismisses the curious questions, "whether God would have Adam fall, or whether he forced him to fall, or why he did not hinder his fall, and such like," and says that it is sufficient to know that God did forbid our first parents to eat of the fruit, and punished them for disobedience.

11 A fuller statement in Schaff, *Creeds*, I. 474 sqq., and especially Schweizer, *Central-dogmen*, I. 139, 258-292.

12 See above, p. 177 sq.

13 Some of these verses are still remembered in Switzerland. Specimens in Pestalozzi, 315 sqq.

14 Pestalozzi, 588 sqq.

15 The letters, pp. 595-617, are quite interesting. Henry became pastor at Zollikon, and afterwards of St. Peter at Zurich. He married a daughter of Gwalter, who was a granddaughter of Zwingli.

16 Extracts from Bullinger's Works are given by Pestalozzi, 505-622.