

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 32

THE CAPTURE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

In the year 1453, after a close siege of fifty-three days, the capital of Eastern Christendom fell into the hands of the victorious Turks. The Emperor, who bore the name of the founder of Constantinople, displayed great valour in the siege; he threw off his purple and fought in the breach, till he, with the nobles that surrounded him, fell among the slain. This was the **last of the Constantines**, and the last christian Emperor of Constantinople. Most of the inhabitants that remained were either sold as slaves or massacred, and five thousand Turkish families were brought into the city as settlers. Destruction, violence, and profanity, far exceeding the power of description, followed. The ancient church of St. Sophia was stripped of all the valuable offerings of ages, the images were broken to pieces, and, after having been the scene of gross profanations, was turned into a mosque. The treasures of Greek learning — to the extent some say, of one hundred and twenty thousand manuscript books — were destroyed or dispersed. The conquest was complete, and **Mahomet II** at once transferred the seat of government to Constantinople.

But the unbounded ambition of the fierce Ottoman was far from being satisfied, he contemplated nothing less than a conquest of all Christendom. And from his rapid and easy victories over many of the lesser christian principalities in the East, it would appear that, if death had not relieved the world of such a tyrant, he might have pursued his path of conquest through the heart of Europe. What city, what kingdom, what power, would arrest the fierce invader? All Europe trembled, especially Italy. The death of Nicholas V was hastened, it is said, by the news of the capture of Constantinople. Grief and fear broke the old man's heart. But after overturning empires, kingdoms, and cities without number, Mahomet II died, at the age of fifty, from internal pains, supposed to be the effects of poison.

Tidings of these heavy calamities in the East spread a deep gloom over all the West. But that which threatened to arrest the progress of civilization and the spread of Christianity was overruled by an all-wise and good Providence for the furtherance of both in a marvellous way. The falling of Constantinople into the hands of the infidels drove many learned Greeks into Italy, and from Italy into many other countries in Europe. It so happened, just at this time, that the reigning pope, **Nicholas V**, was distinguished by his love of literature, which he greatly promoted by his position and his wealth. The refugees had brought such books with them as they had been able to rescue from the ruins of their fallen empire. The study of Greek was revived by such

means and became exceedingly popular. Among these students it pleased God to raise up men of highly cultivated minds and devout hearts, who did much in preparing the way for the great Reformation.

INVENTION OF PRINTING — IMPROVEMENT OF PAPER

Just at this period the Lord was making “all things work together for good” in a most remarkable way. Two silent agents of immense influence and power were ordained to precede the living voices of His gospel-preachers — the invention of **printing** and the manufacture of **paper**. These harmonious inventions were brought to great perfection during the latter half of the fifteenth century for which we can lift up our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to God.

We have now reached a turning point in our history; and not only in the history of the church, but of civilization, of the social condition of the European states, and of the human family. It is well to pause on such an eminence and look around us for a moment. We see a divine hand for the good of all gathering things together, though apparently unconnected. The falling of an empire, the flight of a few Greeks with their literary treasures, the awakening of the long dormant mind of the western world, the invention of printing from moveable types, and the discovery of making fine white paper from linen rags. Incongruous as “linen rags” may sound with the literature of the Greeks, and the skill of Guttenberg, both would have proved of little avail without the improved paper. Means, the most insignificant in man’s account, when used of God, are all sufficient. By miraculous power, a dry rod in the hand of Moses shakes Egypt from centre to circumference, divides the Red Sea, and gives living water from the flinty rock: a smooth pebble from the brook, or an empty ram’s horn, accomplishes great deliverances in Israel. The power is of God, and faith looks only to Him.

It is a deeply interesting fact to the Christian, that the first complete book which Guttenberg printed with his cut metal types was a folio edition of the Bible in the **Latin vulgate**, consisting of six hundred and forty-one leaves. Hallam, in his *Literary History* beautifully observes: “It is a very striking circumstance, that the high minded inventors of the great art tried at the very outset so bold a flight as the printing an entire Bible, and executed it with great success... We may see in imagination this venerable and splendid volume leading up the crowded myriads of its followers, and imploring, as it were, a blessing on the new art, by dedicating its firstfruits to the service of heaven.”²²⁴

Although it scarcely falls within the line of our “Short Papers” even briefly to sketch the history of the great discovery, yet for the sake of some of our readers who may not have such histories at hand we must mention a few particulars, as it was one of the most powerful agents of the Reformation.

²²⁴ *Literature of Europe*, vol. 1, p. 153.

From an early period the mode of printing from blocks of wood had been practised. Sometimes the engravings, or impressions, were accompanied by a few lines of letters cut in the block. Gradually these were extended to a few leaves and called block-books. An ingenious blacksmith, it is said, invented in the eleventh century separate letters made of wood. The celebrated **John Guttenberg**, who was born at a village near Mentz, in the year 1397, substituted *metal* for the wooden letters, his associate Schaeffer cut the characters in a matrix, after which the types were cast, and thus completed the art of printing as it now remains.

Parchment, preparations of straw, the bark of trees, papyrus, and cotton had sufficed for the printer and transcriber, till the fourteenth century. But these preparations would have been utterly inadequate to supply the demand of the new process. Happily, however, the discovery of making paper from rags coincided with the discovery of letter-press printing. The **first paper-mill** in England was erected at Dartmouth by a German named Spielmann, in 1588, who was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

THE FIRST PRINTED BIBLE

All historians seem to agree, that Guttenberg, having spent nearly ten years in bringing his experiments to perfection, had so impoverished himself that he found it necessary to invite some capitalist to join him. **John Faust**, the wealthy goldsmith of Mentz, to whom he made known his secret, agreed to go into partnership with him, and to supply the means for carrying out the design. But it does not appear that Guttenberg and his associates, Schoeffer and Faust, were actuated by any loftier motive in executing this glorious work, than that of realizing a large sum of money by the enterprise. The letters were such an exact imitation of the best copyists, that they intended to pass them off as fine manuscript copies, and thus to obtain the usual high prices. Those employed in the work were bound to the strictest secrecy. The first edition appears to have been sold at manuscript prices without the secret having transpired. A second edition was brought out about 1462, when John Faust went to Paris with a number of copies. He sold one to the king for seven hundred crowns, and another to the archbishop for four hundred crowns. The prelate, delighted with such a beautiful copy at so low a price, showed it to the king. His majesty produced his, for which he had paid nearly double the money; but what was their astonishment on finding they were identical even in the most minute strokes and dots? They became alarmed, and concluded they must be produced by magic, and the capital letters being in red ink, they supposed that it was blood, and no longer doubted that he was in league with the devil and assisted by him in his magical art.

Information was forthwith given to the police against John Faust; his lodgings were searched, and his Bibles seized other copies which he had sold were collected and compared. and finding they were all precisely alike, he was pronounced a **magician**. The king ordered him to be thrown into prison and

he would soon have been thrown into the flames, but he saved himself by confessing to the deceit, and by making a full revelation of the secret of his art. The mystery was now revealed, the workmen were no longer bound to secrecy printers were dispersed abroad, carrying the secret of their art wherever they found a welcome, and the sound of printing presses were soon heard in many lands. About 1474 the art was introduced into England by **William Caxton**; and in 1508 it was introduced into Scotland by Walter Chepman.

Before the days of printing, many valuable books existed in manuscript, and seminaries of learning flourished in all civilized countries, but knowledge was necessarily confined to a comparatively small number of people. The manuscripts were so scarce and dear that they could only be purchased by kings and nobles, by collegiate and ecclesiastical establishments. "A copy of the Bible cost from forty to fifty pounds for the writing only, for it took an expert copyist about ten months' labour to make one." Although several other books issued from the new presses, the Latin Bible was the favorite book with all the printers. They usually commenced operations, wherever they went, by issuing an edition of the Latin Bible. It was most in demand and brought high prices. In this way Latin Bibles multiplied rapidly. Translators now began their work; and by individual reformers in different countries, the word of God was translated into various languages in the course of a few years. "Thus an Italian version appeared in 1474, a Bohemian in 1475, a Dutch in 1477, a French in 1477, and a Spanish in 1478; as if heralding the approach of the coming Reformation."

ROME'S OPPOSITION TO THE BIBLE

But, as usual, the great enemies of truth and light and liberty took the alarm. The archbishop of Mentz placed the printers of that city under strict censorship. Pope Alexander VI issued a bull prohibiting the printers of Mentz, Cologne, Treves, and Magdeburg from publishing any books without the express license of their archbishops. Finding that the reading of the Bible was extending, the priests began to preach against it from their pulpits. "They have found out," said a French monk, "a new language called Greek: we must carefully guard ourselves against it. That language will be the mother of all sorts of heresies. I see in the hands of a great number of persons a book written in this language called, '**The New Testament**;' it is a book full of brambles, with vipers in them. As to the Hebrew, whoever learns that becomes a Jew at once." Bibles and Testaments were seized wherever found, and burnt; but more Bibles and Testaments seemed to rise as if by magic from their ashes. The printers also were seized and burnt. "We must root out printing, or printing will root out us," said the vicar of Croydon in a sermon preached at Paul's Cross. And the university of Paris, panic-stricken, declared before the parliament, "There is an end of religion if the study of Greek and Hebrew is permitted."

The great success of the new translations spread alarm throughout the Romish church, she trembled for the supremacy of her own favourite Vulgate. The fears of the priests and monks were increased when they saw the people reading the scriptures in their own mother tongue, and observed a growing disposition to call in question the value of attending mass, and the authority of the priesthood. Instead of saying their prayers through the priests in Latin, they began to pray to God direct in their native tongue. The clergy, finding their revenues diminishing, appealed to the Sorbonne, the most renowned theological school in Europe. The Sorbonne called upon parliament to interfere with a strong hand. War was immediately proclaimed against books, and the printers of them. Printers who were convicted of having printed Bibles, were burnt. In the year 1534, about twenty men and one woman were burnt alive in Paris. In 1535 the Sorbonne obtained an ordinance from the king for the suppression of printing. "But it was too late," as an able writer observes; "the art was now full born, and could no more be suppressed than light, or air, or life. Books had become a public necessity, and supplied a great public want: and every year saw them multiplying more abundantly."²²⁵

While Rome was thus thundering her awful prohibitions against the liberty of thought, and lengthening her arm to persecute wherever the Bible had penetrated and found followers, at least all over France God was hastening by means of His own word and the printing press, that mighty revolution which was so soon to change the destinies of both Church and State. But had the catholics succeeded in their wicked designs, we should still have been groping our way amidst the thick darkness of the middle ages. Rome has ever been hostile to new inventions and improvements; especially if they tended to the diffusion of knowledge, the promotion of civilization, the diminishing of the distance between the clergy and the laity, or in any way weakening the power of the priesthood. Ignorance, slavery, superstition, blind subjection to priestcraft, are the chief elements of her existence. Of all inventions, none has exercised a greater influence on society than that of printing; and not only so; it is the preserver of all other inventions. Thus no thanks are due to the catholics for our modern civilization, and for the privileges of our civil and religious liberties. But the living God is above all the hostility of Rome, and will accomplish all the purposes of His grace.

The darkness of the middle ages is rapidly passing away. The **rising sun of the Reformation** will ere long dispel the gloom of Jezebel's long reign of a thousand years. Her boasted universal supremacy is no more, and will never again return. The pillars of her strength are already shaken and many causes are combining to hasten her complete overthrow. With these causes we shall soon become more familiar.

²²⁵ *History of the Huguenots, by Samuel Smiles, pp. 1-23.*

THE IMMEDIATE PRECURSORS OF LUTHER

We have traced with some care the chain of witnesses from the earliest period of the church's history till the beginning of the sixteenth century; we have only further to notice a **few** names which connect the noble line with the name and testimony of the great Reformer. There is no missing link in the divine chain. Of these the most noted were Jerome Savonarola, John of Wesalia, and John Wessilus of Groningen.

Jerome Savonarola, the descendant of an illustrious family, was born in 1452, at Ferrara. He was in early life the subject of deep religious feelings, and supposing he had been favoured with heavenly visions as to his mission, he retired from the world and entered the Dominican order at the age of twenty-one. He devoted himself to the study of the holy scriptures, with continual prayers, fastings, and mortifications. He appears to have been greatly interested in the prophetic scriptures, especially in such portions as the Apocalypse, which he was fond of expounding, and confidently maintained that the threatened judgments were near at hand. Having spent seven years in the Dominican convent of Bologna, he was removed by his superiors to St. Mark's at Florence. After some years he was elected prior, when he introduced a thorough reformation, and a return to the earlier simplicity of food and dress.

Savonarola was unequalled in his power as a preacher; but like many others at that time, he combined the politician's with the preacher's character. Reform was his one theme — reform and repentance he proclaimed as with the voice of a prophet. Reform in the discipline of the church, in the luxury and worldliness of the priesthood, and in the morals of the whole community. The Italians being peculiarly sensitive to all appeals respecting their rights as citizens, the vast cathedral of Florence was soon crowded by multitudes who eagerly hung on his words. His preaching assumed the form of prophecy, or of one authorized to speak in the name of God; although it does not appear that his predictions were more than the result of a firm conviction in the government of God and in the fulfilment of prophecy according to the principles revealed in the holy scriptures. But though he was more or less mixed up with the political factions in Italy, he was an earnest Christian and a true reformer. He unsparingly denounced the usurpation of Lorenzo de Medici, the despotism of the aristocracy, and the sins of the prelates and clergy he mourned over the cold indifference to spiritual things which marked the character of the age. "The church had once," he said, "her golden priests, and wooden chalices; but now the chalices were gold and the priests wooden — that the outward splendour of religion had been hurtful to spirituality." So resistless was his eloquence, which partook of a prophetic character, as if he were the messenger of an offended God whose vengeance was already impending over Italy, that the multitudes believed in his heavenly mission. The people were so controlled by his appeals that the moral effect of his warnings was speedily perceptible throughout the city. "By the modesty of

their dress,” says Sismondi, “their discourse, their countenance, the Florentines gave evidence that they had embraced the reform of Savonarola.”

But his course was watched with the evil eye of Jezebel. Such a fearless witness was not fit to live, especially in Italy. The light must be quenched; but how to accomplish it was the difficulty, as many of the citizens were ready to pass through the flames as the substitutes of Savonarola. The church of Rome, backed by the partisans of the Medici, addressed herself to this fiendish work. As usual, her plans were founded on treachery and ended in persecution. The deceitful Alexander VI invited Savonarola in courteous language to visit him at Rome that he might confer with him on the subject of his prophetic gifts. But he knew the pope was not to be trusted notwithstanding his flattering words, and refused to obey. He next proposed to raise him to the cardinalate in the hope of getting him under his power; but Savonarola indignantly declared from the pulpit that he would have no other red hat than one dyed with the blood of martyrdom. The mask was now thrown off; blandishments were exchanged for threatenings and excommunications. He was denounced as a “*sower of false doctrine.*” His destruction was determined. The Franciscans, already jealous of the great fame of a Dominican, entered the conspiracy. An account of their plottings would be uninteresting to the reader; but they succeeded in diverting the people, and in accomplishing the downfall of their rival.

In the year 1498 Savonarola, and his two friends, Dominic and Silvester, were seized, imprisoned, and tortured. The nervous system of the great preacher, both from his labours and his ascetic exercises, had become so sensitive that he was unable to bear the agonies which were inflicted on him. “When I am in torture,” he said, “I lose myself, I am mad: that only is true which I say without torture.” In the meantime, two legates arrived from Rome with the sentence of condemnation from Alexander; the prisoners were taken the following day to the place of the signory, and, after the usual ceremony of degradation, were first hanged and then burnt. Their ashes were carefully collected by the Franciscans, and cast into the Arno; yet relics of Savonarola were preserved with veneration among his many friends and followers.

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF SAVONAROLA

The prior of St. Mark’s is spoken of in history, as the most faithful public witness for Christ that had yet appeared in Italy; but there was much in his course that was contrary to the spirit and calling of a true Christian, especially in his mixing up politics with religion. It is said that he thought to combine the characters of Jeremiah and Demosthenes — to weep over sin and denounce God’s judgments like the one, and to stir up the people to struggle for their liberties like the other. This was his mistake, owing to his ignorance of the teaching of the New Testament; and that which led to his dishonour and his downfall. But great allowance must be made for his education, circumstances, and the spirit of the age. Many of the later reformers fell into

the same snare. They had not learnt, in those revolutionary times, that the calling of the Christian is a heavenly one — that while the Jew was blessed with all temporal mercies in a pleasant land, the Christian is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. They did not see that the purpose of God in the present period is to gather out from among the nations a people for His name by the preaching of the gospel. (Acts 15) But how few even in the present day see that the church of God is an *out-calling*, and so ought to walk in separation from the world!

The highest good that the preacher can accomplish for his fellow men is to gather them out of the world to the rejected Saviour. But such preachers are neither popular nor understood, even in the last quarter of the nineteenth century: indeed we may raise the question — Is the state of “the churches” generally, as regards politics, in advance of the ideas of Savonarola? He interfered in the direction of public affairs in order that the republic of Florence might be to the honour of his Lord and Master. His motives were doubtless good, but he was entirely mistaken in thinking he could unite heavenly and earthly things. His grand idea is seen in the fact, that one of the coins struck whilst Florence was under his influence bore the inscription, “*Christ our king.*” But not only did this remarkable man desire to see a great Reformation in both Church and State, he also longed for the salvation of souls, while his own heart rejoiced in the glorious doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The following extract from his meditations on Psalm 31 during his imprisonment will give the reader an idea of his inmost thoughts as guided by the Holy Spirit of God. “No man can boast of himself; and if in the presence of God, the question were put to every justified sinner, Have you been saved by your own strength?’ all would with one voice exclaim, ‘Not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy name be the glory!’ Therefore, O God, I seek Thy mercy, and I bring Thee not my own righteousness: the moment Thou justifiest me by Thy grace, Thy righteousness belongs to me; for grace is the righteousness of God. So long, O man, as thou believest not, thou art, because of sin, deprived of grace. O God, save me by Thy righteousness, that is, by Thy Son, who alone was found righteous before Thee.” As taught of God, with what holy and lofty thoughts his mind must have been filled from the study, in a prison, of that most beautiful psalm of sorrow and triumphant praise!²²⁶

Ah! fairest city, who hast seen expire
Three chosen martyrs in devouring fire,
Who, linked together, amidst scorn and pain,
In dying smiled, and proved “to die is gain:” —
Thy rich and honoured stream, whose bosom wide
Doth those blest ashes, as its treasure hide,

²²⁶ J.C. Robertson, vol. 4, p. 548. Waddington, vol. 3, p. 383. *Universal History*, Bagster and Sons, London, vol. 6, p. 173.

Shall see the tyrant-chief at last expire.
And every infidel destroyed by fire;
Shall see all vice and evil come to nought,
And hail new light from heavenly regions brought.

John of Wesalia, a doctor of divinity at Erfurt, was distinguished for his boldness, energy, and opposition to Rome. He incurred the indignation of the monastic orders by preaching that men are saved by grace through faith, and not by a monastic life; that a man is eternally safe who believes in Christ though all the priests in the world should condemn and excommunicate him. He pronounced indulgences, the holy oil, and pilgrimages, to be of no avail; that the pope, bishops, and priests were not instruments of salvation. He was what would now be called *strictly calvinistic* in his views of grace. The archbishop of Mentz ordered his imprisonment; he was brought to trial before a council of priests in the year 1479, and notwithstanding his age, ill health, and feebleness, he was subjected to a puzzling examination of his opinions, which lasted five successive days. Some things he explained, some he disavowed, and some he retracted; but his judges had no mercy, though he was bending beneath the weight of years; he was condemned to perpetual penance by the holy Inquisition and soon perished in its dungeons.

John Wesselus, a native of Groningen, in Holland, was undoubtedly the most remarkable of the immediate forerunners of the Reformation. He was one of the most learned men of the fifteenth century. But happily for John Wesselus himself, and for thousands more, his light was not only that of human learning — he was taught of God. The light of the glorious gospel of the grace of God burned brightly in his heart, in his words, in his life. He was doctor in divinity successively at Cologne, Louvain, Heidelberg, and Groningen; and he boldly exposed many of the evil doctrines and flagrant abuses of the church of Rome. He was also for some years professor of Hebrew at the university of Paris, and even there he spoke out boldly. “All satisfaction for sin,” he declared, “made by men is blasphemy against Christ.” But the following testimony of Luther to the writings of John Wesselus makes it unnecessary to particularize his opinions.

About thirty years after the death of Wesselus, Luther was preaching the same doctrines which his forerunner had committed to writing, though he had not then seen any of his works. They had been led and taught by the same Holy Spirit, and instructed out of the same holy book, and fitted for the same work. The great reformer was so astonished and delighted when he first met with some of the writings of Wesselus, that he wrote a preface for a printed edition of his works in 1522, in which he says, “By the wonderful providence of God I have been compelled to become a public man, and to fight battles with those monsters of indulgences and papal decrees. All along I supposed myself to stand alone; yet have I preserved so much animation in the contest, as to be everywhere accused of heat and violence, and of hitting hard. However, the truth is, I have earnestly wished to have done with these followers of Baal

among whom my lot is cast, and to live quietly in some corner, for I have utterly despaired of making any impression on these brazen foreheads and iron necks of impiety. But behold, in this state of mind, I am told that even in these days there is in secret a remnant of the people of God. Nay, I am not only told so, but I rejoice to see a proof of it. Here is a new publication by Wesselus, of Groningen, a man of an admirable genius, and of an uncommonly enlarged mind. It is very plain he was taught of God, as Isaiah prophesied that Christians should be: and as in my own case, so with him, it cannot be supposed that he received his doctrines from men. If I had read his works before, my enemies might have supposed that I had learnt everything from Wesselus, such a perfect coincidence there is in our opinions. As to myself, I derive not only pleasure but strength and courage from this publication. It is now impossible for me to doubt whether I am right in the points which I have inculcated, when I see so entire an agreement in sentiment, and almost the same words used by this eminent person, who lived in a different age, in a distant country, and in circumstances very unlike my own. I am surprised that this excellent christian writer should be so little known; the reason may be that he lived without blood and contention, for this is the only thing in which he differs from me.”

We will only further relate an anecdote respecting Wesselus, which proves how thoroughly the spirit of the gospel had satisfied and filled his heart, and raised him above the most powerful temptation.

When Sixtus IV was raised to the pontifical throne, not forgetful of an acquaintance which he had formed with Wesselus in France, he offered to grant him any request he would make. The pious Dutchman gravely replied, “May he who is regarded as the supreme shepherd of the church on earth so act as that, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear he may hear Him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’” “That must be my care,” replied Sixtus; “but do you ask something for yourself.” “Give me, then,” said Wesselus, “out of the Vatican Library a Greek and a Hebrew Bible.” “You shall have them,” replied the pope; “but is not this folly? Why do you not ask for a bishopric, or something of that sort?” “Because,” said the unambitious professor, “I do not desire such things.”

He was allowed to end his days in peace in the year 1489, having reached the age of seventy. His last words were “God be praised! all I know is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”²²⁷

Ulric von Hutten, a German knight, having a reforming zeal, and being a great admirer of Luther, has found a place in most of the histories. Descended from an ancient family, and of brilliant talents, he distinguished himself in early life as a soldier, and afterwards as a literary adventurer, but greatly wanting, we fear, in moral weight. He published an acrimonious invective

²²⁷ Milner, vol. 3, p. 421.

against Erasmus, and a most effective satire against the court and tyranny of Rome. “Few books,” says Hallam, “have been more eagerly received than Hutten’s epistles at their first appearance in 1516.” But he was not long spared, either to unveil the abuses of popery, or advocate the doctrines of the Reformation. He died in 1523 at the early age of thirty-five. “He forms the link,” says d’Aubigné, “between the knights and the men of letters.” He was present at the siege of Padua in 1513, and his powerful book against popery appeared in 1516.

Reuchlin and Erasmus — these famous names — may be conveniently and appropriately introduced here. Although not reformers, they contributed much to the success of the Reformation. They were called “Humanists” — men eminent for human learning. The revival of literature, but especially the critical study of the languages in which the holy scriptures were written — Hebrew, Greek, and Latin — rendered the highest service to the first reformers. As in the days of Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the great Reformation was in immediate connection with the recovery and study of the written word of God. The Bible, which had lain so long silent in manuscript beneath the dust of old libraries, was now printed, and laid before the people in their own tongue. This was light from God, and that which armed the reformers with invincible power. Down to the days of Reuchlin and Erasmus the Vulgate was the *received text*. Greek and Hebrew were almost unknown in the West.

Reuchlin studied at the university of Paris. Happily for him, the celebrated Wesselus was then teaching Hebrew at that renowned school of theology. There he received, not only the first rudiments of the language, but a knowledge of the gospel of the grace of God. He also studied Greek, and learned to speak Latin with great purity. At the early age of twenty he began to teach philosophy, Greek, and Latin, at Basle; “and,” says d’Aubigné, “what then passed for a miracle, a German was heard speaking Greek.” He afterwards settled at Wittemberg — the cradle of the Reformation — instructed the young Melancthon in Hebrew, and prepared for publication the first Hebrew and German grammar and lexicon. Who can estimate all that the Reformation owes to Reuchlin, though he remained in the communion of the Romish church!

Erasmus, who was about twelve years younger than Reuchlin, pursued the same line of study, but with still higher powers and greater celebrity. From about 1500 to 1518, when Luther rose into notice, Erasmus was the most distinguished literary person in Christendom. He was born at Rotterdam in 1465; was left an orphan at the age of thirteen; was robbed by his guardians, who, to cover their dishonesty, persuaded him to enter a monastery. In 1492, he was ordained a priest, but he always entertained the greatest dislike for a monastic life, and embraced the first opportunity to regain his liberty. After leaving the Augustinian convent at Stein, he went to pursue his favorite studies at the university of Paris.

With the most indefatigable industry he devoted himself entirely to literature, and soon acquired a great reputation among the learned. The society of the poor student was courted by the varied talent of the time. Lord Mountjoy, whom he met as a pupil at Paris, invited him to England. His first visit to this country, in 1498, was followed by several others, down to the year 1515, during which he became acquainted with many eminent men, received many honours, formed some warm friendships, and spent most of his brightest days. He resided at both the universities, and, during his third and longest visit, was professor of Greek at Cambridge. All acknowledged his supremacy in the world of letters, and for a long time he reigned without a rival. But our object at present is rather to inquire, “What was his influence on the Reformation?”

Under the gracious, guiding hand of Him who sees the end from the beginning, Erasmus bent all his great mental powers, and all his laborious studies, to the preparation of a critical edition of the Greek Testament. This work appeared at Basle in 1516, one year before the Reformation, accompanied by a Latin translation, in which he corrected the errors of the Vulgate. This was daring work in those days. There was a great outcry from many quarters against this dangerous novelty. “His New Testament was attacked,” says Robertson; “why should the language of the schismatic Greeks interfere with the sacred and traditional Latin? How could any improvement be made on the Vulgate translation? There was a college at Cambridge, especially proud of its theological character, which would not admit a copy within its gates. But the editor was able to shelter himself under the name of Pope Leo, who had accepted the dedication of the volume.”

To question the fidelity of the Vulgate, was a crime of the greatest magnitude in the eyes of the Roman Catholic church. The Vulgate could no longer be of absolute exclusive authority; the Greek was its superior not only in antiquity, but yet more as the original text. At this time, Erasmus stood at the head of scholars and men of letters. He was patronized by the pope, many prelates, and by the chief princes of Europe. Sheltered behind such an ample shield, he was perfectly secure, and, knowing this, fearlessly went on with his great work.²²⁸

²²⁸ Although the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, published at Basle in 1516, was the first edition in which the original text of the Holy Scriptures was given to the learned world, it was not the first either as to design or printing. The Complutensian New Testament was finished in January 1514; but as it awaited the completion of the Bible and the license of the pope, it was not published until 1522. Thus it was that the edition of Erasmus appeared six years earlier than the Complutensian, though printed two years later.

This was the first Polyglott Bible, and since known as the Complutensian; Paris and London Polyglotts followed. This great work appears to have been the original conception of the celebrated Cardinal Ximenes, of Toledo, and executed at his expense. With a view to this he collected manuscripts, employed a number of scholars as editors, and imported type-cutters from Germany. The outlay is stated to have exceeded twenty-three thousand pounds — a vast sum in those days — but the yearly income of the Primate was four times that amount.

To give the reader some idea of the popularity of this singularly great, yet in some respects weak man, we may just notice that his book, entitled “Praise of Folly,” went through twenty-seven editions during his lifetime; and his “Colloquies” were so eagerly received, that in one year twenty-four thousand copies were sold. In these books he assailed with great power, and the most bitter satire, the inconsistencies of the monks — their intrusiveness and rapacity in connection with deathbeds, wills, and funerals and thus indirectly served the cause of the Reformation.²²⁹

Erasmus had many tempting offers as to pensions and promotion, but his love for his learned labours led him to prefer comparative poverty with perfect liberty. In 1516 he took up his abode at Basle, where his works were printed by Froben, and he diligently laboured in correcting proofs, and otherwise assisting that learned printer with his fine editions of classical works.

But the great work for which he seems to have been specially fitted by God was his **Greek New Testament**. “Erasmus,” says d’Aubigné, “thus did for the New Testament what Reuchlin had done for the Old. Henceforward divines were able to read the word of God in the original languages, and at a later period to recognize the purity of the reformed doctrines. The New Testament of Erasmus gave out a bright flash of light. His paraphrases on the Epistles, and on the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; his editions of Cyprian and Jerome; his translations of Origen, Athanasius, and Chrysostom; his “Principles of True Theology,” his “Preacher,” and his commentaries on various psalms, contributed powerfully to diffuse a taste for the word of God, and for pure theology. The result of his labours even went beyond his intentions. Reuchlin and Erasmus gave the Bible to the learned; Luther gave it to the people.”²³⁰

The chain of witnesses was now complete. Wesselus, Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Luther were linked together. The *silver line* of God’s grace is thus traceable from the days of the apostles, or at least from the days of Constantine, to the time of Luther. There was no room for a separate line of witnesses till after the union of Church and State. The existence and testimony of the Waldenses have been traced back to these early times. Then we have witnesses for Christ

The Complutensian Polyglott, in six volumes folio, was completed at Alcala, in Spain, in 1517, but the preparations were begun as early as 1502. These six noble volumes contain the Old Testament in Hebrew, Latin and Greek; and the New Testament in Greek and Latin, with a Hebrew dictionary, and other supplementary matter.

John Froben, an enterprising publisher at Basle, having heard of this forthcoming Bible, and eager to forestall it, urged Erasmus to undertake immediately an edition of the New Testament. The first was very faulty, as Froben’s haste gave him little leisure to do his work. It passed through three editions in six years: on the fourth and fifth editions Erasmus bestowed more pains, having seen the Complutensian in 1522. — See an able and useful book, entitled, “A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament,” by Dr. Scrivener: George Bell and Sons, London. See also some interesting particulars in J.C. Robertson’s Church History, vol. 4, p. 664.

²²⁹ J.C. Robertson, vol. 4, p. 673.

²³⁰ D’Aubigné, vol. 1, p. 166.

in the Paulicians, the Albigenses, the Wycliffites, the Bohemians, the Moravians, or United Brethren, Savonarola, and other individual Protestants in the different nations of Europe.

And now, having pursued our dreary way through the dark ages till the beginning of the sixteenth century, we find the Bible in the original languages, and the printing press standing ready to multiply copies by thousands and tens of thousands, and broad-cast them over the face of Christendom.

The way was thus prepared for the great change which was at hand. The unblushing wickedness of Rome, the blood of God's martyred saints, and the vast multitude of souls who were perishing for lack of knowledge all cried aloud for the hand that would shorten the dominion of the papacy, and rescue the nations of Europe from the darkness and bondage of a thousand years. This was now to be done, but not by mere scholarship, or by men of polite literature, but by faith in the word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 33

THE REFORMATION IN GERMANY

The exclusive dominion of the **Latin or Roman church** was now drawing to a close. Since the pontificate of Gregory the Great, or for nearly a thousand years, she had reigned supreme. But the oppressed Teuton was now raising the arm of rebellion against the tyranny of the Roman. The warfare ended in a great secession of the Teutons, in wresting from the papacy a large portion of her dominions, and in the breaking up of Christendom, like the ship in which Paul sailed to Rome.

It has been our desire to present to the reader a fair view of the real character and ways of the church of Rome during the long period of her dominion, and he must judge whether the history warrants our interpretation of the epistle to Thyatira. Our own convictions are a thousandfold deeper at the close than they were at the commencement of the history, that we have given a true interpretation, and made a just application of the words of the Lord to the church in Thyatira. We have only Him to serve and Him to please in writing this history. For no one else would we have waded through these thousand years. The amount that we write bears little proportion to the amount that must be read in order to be satisfied as to the truthfulness of what is written. Besides, a very large proportion of papal history is wholly unfit for our pages, or to come before the eye of civilized people, far less the eye of the Christian. Her adulteries and abominations are better left on the page that was written in a ruder age, as they will surely be consigned to a place peculiarly dark in the regions of hell.

For nearly three hundred years, by means of schools, new translations, versions, printing-presses, and the intolerance of the church, the Lord had been preparing the way for the accomplishment of His purpose; and, this being done, the feeblest instrument was sufficient to bring all these agencies into full action. "When the train is properly laid, an accidental spark may cause the explosion." To effect great results by small means is the way of divine providence, that the power may be seen to be of God, and not of man. An occasion was furnished, and Luther was the prepared instrument to reap the glorious harvest of the great Reformation. But much labour was bestowed on the field by many noble hearts and hands which were not privileged to gather its fruits, at least in this world. These may have been the *agents*, Luther was the *instrument*.

During these thousand years, we have been chiefly engaged with popery and the witnesses for Christ; now it must be popery and protestantism. But if the

reader would rightly understand the difference between the two, he must carefully consider what popery was down to the time of Luther's appearance.

POPERY AND MANKIND

Comparatively few in our peaceful times have any idea of the real nature and the comprehensive grasp of popery. During the long period of the middle ages it was fully developed; but its *nature* remains unchanged until the present hour. Times and circumstances have changed, not popery. The clergy, including the monks and friars, were a distinct class, and stood entirely apart from the rest of mankind. A broad, deep, impassable line separated the two communities — the clergy and the laity. The lives, the laws the property, the rights, and the social duties of the one were not only different from those of the other, but often antagonistic.

Education, such as it was, had become the exclusive privilege of the clergy. Whoever had any desire for knowledge, could neither obtain nor employ it but in connection with the churchman or the monastery. The younger sons of the nobility, and even of royalty, as the church became wealthy and powerful, joined the clerical community. By this means the most famous names in the land were found among the clergy, and the Church and State were thus welded together. The universities, the schools, the whole domains of the human intellect, were in their possession. The other great division of mankind — the laity — were kept in utter darkness and ignorance. And woe betide the man who would venture to point out some new road to intelligence, freedom, and power. The faintest glimmer of light was instantly extinguished, and the discovery denounced as magical and forbidden.

The priests alone could read, write, draw up State papers, or treaties, and frame laws. From the sacredness of their character, and their intellectual superiority, they were admitted to the courts and the councils of kings, they were the negotiators and the ambassadors of sovereigns. But royal secrets and compacts were not all they knew; the confessional laid open the whole heart of every one, from the highest to the lowest, before the eye of the priesthood. No act was beyond their cognizance, hardly any thought or intention was secret. There might be smothered murmurs at the avarice, pride, and licentiousness of the priest, still he was a priest, a bishop, a pope; his sacraments lost not their efficacy, his verdict of condemnation or absolution was equally valid. Those who openly doubted the power of the clergy in such matters were heretics, outcasts, proscribed, only fit fuel for the flames both now and evermore.

The pope, as was universally believed, combined in his own person all the attributes of supreme power in matters of religion and of government. The power of emperors and kings was derived, his was original. He was armed with divine authority to depose monarchs, to absolve subjects from their allegiance and from every other obligation; and, if needful, to dissolve all the

bonds of society. But above all, he was empowered to maintain the integrity of the faith as transmitted to him from his predecessors or defined by himself as head of the church, to repress dissent in every shape; to persecute to extermination all who ventured to dispute this supreme prerogative, as rebels and traitors to God and His church; and at any time to call upon the secular government, without compensation, to lavish life and money, labour and feeling, to enable him to maintain the integrity of the spiritual empire.²³¹

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Such, as we have now described, was the unlimited power of the Romish priesthood at the beginning of this century. No man was independent of the priest. He was lord of the human conscience. His power was absolute both over body and soul, over time and eternity. None could afford to incur his displeasure or to lie under his censure. Excommunication cut the man off, whatever his rank or station, from the church, beyond whose pale there was no possibility of salvation.

It is not a little remarkable that just at this time no danger seemed to threaten this towering, monstrous system of iniquity. From the Vatican down to the smallest congregation the sovereignty and tranquillity of the church appeared to be completely secured. The various heresies and commotions which had disturbed her for centuries had been suppressed by fire and sword, the complaints and petitions of her most faithful children had been rejected with insolent impunity; and the warnings of her sincerest friends were neglected or despised. Where were now the Waldenses, the Albigenses, the Beghards, the Lollards, the Bohemians and the various sectaries? They had been silenced or extinguished by papal management. True, there were many private murmurs against the injustice, frauds, violence, and tyranny of the court of Rome; also against the crimes, ignorance, and licentiousness of her whole priesthood; but the pontiffs had grown accustomed to these murmurings, and could either conciliate with their favours, or defy with their censures, as best suited their policy.

We can imagine the **false woman**, according to the language of St. John, surveying with exultation the pillars and bulwarks of her strength. “For she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” She heeded not the voice that had said, “Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.” (Rev. 18)

God’s time was come for at least a partial fulfilment of this prophecy. The word of arrest had gone forth. Just when she thought everything was safe and settled for ever, the end of her uncontrolled domination was at hand. But how was this to be accomplished? A reformation of the church in its head and

²³¹ Milman’s *Survey, Latin Christianity*, vol. 6, p. 357; Greenwood’s *Summary*, book 14, chap. 1.

members had been the general cry for ages; but all such demands and complaints she set at defiance. What now was to be done? Must some mighty angel come down from heaven to overthrow the despotism of Rome, and break the yoke of popery which has so long bound in fetters the bodies and souls of men? No! such agencies were not required and not used, that God may be glorified. That which the most powerful sovereigns with their armed legions utterly failed to effect, God fully and gloriously accomplished by an obscure monk in Saxony, single-handed.

This was **Martin Luther** of Eisleben. He was the voice of God that awoke Europe to this great work and called the labourers into the field. But if we would form a just estimate of God's chief instrument in this mighty work, and of the grace that qualified him, we must glance at what is important in the early life of the great Reformer. d'Aubigné, in his love of Luther, speaks of him as having experienced in his own soul the different phases of the Reformation before they were accomplished in the world, and exhorts his reader to study his life before he proceeds to the events that changed the face of Christendom.

THE FIRST PERIOD OF LUTHER'S LIFE

Martin Luther was descended from a poor but virtuous family, which had long dwelt in the domains of the Counts of Mansfeld, in Thuringia. "I am the son of a peasant," he used to say; "my father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather, were honest peasants." His father, **John Luther**, soon after his marriage removed to Eisleben in Saxony. There Luther was born, November 10th, 1483. It was on St. Martin's eve: the following day he was christened by the name of Martin, in honour of the saint on whose festival he was born.

His father was an upright and industrious man; frank in his manner, but disposed to carry the firmness of his character even to obstinacy. He was fond of reading, and improved his naturally strong understanding by studying such books as came within his reach. His wife, Margaret, was a humble, prayerful, pious woman, looked up to by her neighbours as a pattern of virtue.

The following summer, or when Martin was about six months old, the family removed back to Mansfeld, where they endured great poverty. "My father was a wood cutter," says Luther, "and my mother has often carried the wood on her back that she might procure the means of bringing up her children." But the Lord was not unmindful of these honest labours and raised them above such drudgery in due time. John became connected with the iron-mines at Mansfeld, and, by his habits of industry and the general respect he acquired by his good sense, he was brought into comparatively easy circumstances. He was chosen a member of the town council, and by the superior character of his mind he easily found his way to the best society in the district.

The father's fondest ambition was to make his eldest son a scholar; but he did not forget his early domestic education. As soon as he was old enough to

receive instruction, his pious parents spoke to him about the Lord Jesus and prayed with him by his bedside. Martin was sent very young to school. His first instructor was one George Emilius, the schoolmaster of the place. There he was taught the catechism, the commandments, the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the rudiments of Latin. But, according to the manners of the age, poor little Martin acquired his first religious education through many and severe floggings. From an early age he was trained in the school of poverty, hardship, and suffering, for a future life of warfare. On one occasion, as he himself relates, he was flogged by the unsparing Emilius fifteen times in the same day. His treatment at home was not more merciful.

“His father administered with conscientious rigour,” says one of his biographers, “what was long considered as the only instrument of moral or intellectual cultivation; and even his mother engaged in the system with so much zeal as to draw blood by her chastisements.” Martin's warm and resolute temper gave frequent occasions for punishment on this principle. “My parents,” he said in after life, “treated me harshly, so that I became very timid. My mother one day chastised me so severely about a nut, that the blood came; but they sincerely thought they were doing right.”²³²

THE SECOND PERIOD OF LUTHER'S LIFE

At the age of fourteen Martin had learned all that could be taught at Mansfeld, and having given some promise of proficiency, his father sent him to the Franciscan school at Magdeburg. But the severity of Luther's education did not cease when he left his father's house and the hard discipline of Emilius. He found himself at **Magdeburg** in the midst of strangers, without friends, without means, and without food enough to live upon. His spirit was crushed; he trembled in the presence of his masters, and had to employ the intervals of study in begging bread. When, with his young companions he went at Christmas through the neighboring villages singing carols, all were so timid, by reason of the menaces and tyranny with which teachers were then accustomed to rule over their pupils, that they ran away from a kind peasant, who came out with some food for them. Frightened at the sound of a loud voice calling, “Boys, where are you?” they fled. It was only his repeated calls and assurances that brought them back to partake of his bounty.

Here Luther remained about a year, but his difficulty in finding food was so great that, with the consent of his parents, he left and went to **Eisenach**, which contained a good school, where also his mother's relations resided. But his kindred who dwelt there either neglected him or were unable to help him. So hard were his circumstances that it seemed likely he would have to leave. But again, when pinched by hunger, he tried singing from door to door for a morsel of bread. This custom is still preserved in many German cities; and in some places the choral boys are expected to solicit contributions in aid of the

²³² Waddington's *Reformation*, vol. 1, p. 31; d'Aubigné's *Réformation*, vol. 1, p. 195.

funds of the institution. Such a mode of earning his bread was most humiliating to the mind of Luther. The frequent repulses he met with well-nigh broke his spirit; he shed many tears in secret, and indulged anxious thoughts about the future.

“Must I abandon all my fond hopes of education, of improvement, of advancement? must I go back to Mansfeld and be shut up in the mines for ever?” Such questions had become present realities to the young student. But there was One who was watching over him, though as yet he knew Him not, and who had destined him to work in other mines than those at Mansfeld. A Father’s hand was directing and weighing every trial; the enemy could not add a grain to their weight beyond the divine measure. He was training His future servant in the school of adversity; and when he had learnt his lesson the reward would come. A crisis in his history was at hand; the Lord’s time for relief had arrived.

LUTHER AND THE PIOUS URSULA

One day, as Luther was returning from his labours, greatly disappointed and disheartened, having sung before three successive houses unrewarded, a door suddenly opened; a woman appeared on the threshold, who invited him to come in, and relieved his wants. This was the kind-hearted Ursula, the wife of Conrad Cotta. She had noticed him before and had been struck with the sweetness of his voice and the seriousness of his expression. Conrad approved of his wife’s benevolence, and they agreed that he should remain with them as an adopted son. Relieved from his temporal cares, and enjoying the many privileges of a christian family, the naturally fine mind of Luther awoke to new sympathies, new joys, new hopes — to a new and happy existence. God in mercy had opened the hearts and the home of the good Ursula and her husband for the spirit-broken youth. We need scarcely add, that their love was *engraven* on the heart of Luther, and recorded in heaven to be *rewarded* for ever.

To his literary and scientific studies — which he now pursued with fresh vigour — he added the charms of music. In gratitude to his adopted mother, he learned in his hours of recreation to play on the flute and the lute, and to sing to the latter, for she was passionately fond of the melody of his voice as an accompaniment to the lute. Thus began that love of music which continued even to old age, and was often a solace to him in times of trouble and temptation. He composed tunes for many songs, and also the words as well as the airs of some very beautiful hymns.

In the genial atmosphere of the Cotta family, it was only natural that the character of Luther should undergo a great change. His anxieties were removed, his timidity disappeared, his mind was peaceful, his ways were cheerful and happy, and his remarkable talents made him the special favorite at the Franciscan school. Thus he spent four happy years. “He surpassed all his

fellows,” says Melancthon, “in eloquence, and compositions both in prose and verse.”

Trebonius, the superior of the convent and the head of the college, always raised his cap to salute the pupils when he entered the schoolroom. His colleagues, not adopting the same custom, expressed their surprise at his condescension. “There are among these boys,” he replied, “some whom God will one day make burgomasters, chancellors, doctors, and magistrates. Although you do not yet see them with the badges of their dignity, it is right that you should treat them with respect.” The youthful Luther was present, and no doubt often remembered the words of his esteemed teacher.

Encouraged by his early triumphs at Eisenach, and feeling that his course of study was secured, he thirsted for more extensive means of intellectual advancement and distinction. A university education was his great desire. His father, whose circumstances were improved, agreed to this, but wished him to study the law.

LUTHER ENTERS THE UNIVERSITY AT ERFURT

In the year 1501, Luther arrived at the University in **Erfurt**, then the most distinguished in Germany. He had reached his eighteenth year and entered with great eagerness into the studies of manhood. “My father,” says Luther “maintained me there with much love and faithfulness, and supported me by the sweat of his brow.” One of his biographers, moralizing on this grateful record of the son, observes: “And assuredly all the volumes of the history of mankind contain no record of a parent’s manual toil being recompensed by so glorious a harvest as that which sprang from the persevering industry of the miner of Mansfeld. Every drop that fell from that brow was converted by a watchful providence to the furtherance of its purposes, and made the means of fertilizing the mind, which it had ordained to change the predominant principles of the christian world.”²³³

There is reason to believe that other thoughts besides the cultivation of his intellect were exercising the mind of Luther at this time. The merciful intervention of God in the kindness of the Cotta family, and what he had seen and learnt there, made a deep and lasting impression on his inmost soul. He strongly objected to the study of Aristotle, although his system was in great repute at the college, and represented as the best, or rather the only, discipline for his reason. “Had Aristotle not been a man,” he used to say, “I should not have hesitated to take him for a devil;” so great was his aversion to the philosophy of the learned Greek. The works of the great scholastics of former ages, such as Scotus, Aquinas, Ockham, and Bonaventura, were recommended to him as the only means of piety and learning; but these, for meeting the need of a troubled conscience, were little better than the logic of Aristotle. Nevertheless, in the wisdom of God, it was necessary that he should become

²³³ Waddington, vol. 1, p. 34.

conversant with these writings that he might be the better able, and have the better ground, to expose their utter worthlessness as to the service and worship of God. He also studied the best Latin authors, and, being blessed with great powers of penetration, perseverance and a retentive memory, he made rapid progress in his studies, and early acquired the reputation of an expert and skilful dialectician.

In the year 1503 he took his first academic degree of Bachelor of Arts; and in 1505, he took that of Doctor in Philosophy. Having made considerable proficiency in several branches of literature, he began, in obedience to his father's wishes, to turn his attention to the subject of jurisprudence. But the Lord had other work for Luther: grace was already working in his heart. He was about that time given to much prayer; and used to say, "that prayer is the better half of studying" — a good maxim for all christian students.

LUTHER'S FIRST SIGHT OF A BIBLE

In a state of trembling anxiety about the salvation of his soul, he was one day searching the library at Erfurt for something new, when the hand of God directed him to a Bible. He read the title page — it is indeed the **Holy Bible!** He was greatly excited and interested as he rapidly turned over its leaves. He was then twenty years of age, and had not so much as seen the precious volume before. Let the Protestant reader note this — he had been brought up by pious parents, lived four years in a christian family, and had not even seen a Bible! The same ignorance of the word of God prevails in Roman Catholic communities to this hour. The Bible forms no part of a Catholic priest's education, and the people are forbidden to read it. Tens of millions are now in circulation, but in a strictly Roman Catholic district it would be difficult to find a single copy. Some extracts are used in the church service, and even pious Catholics are ready to believe that these extracts contain the substance of the whole Bible. Such is the narrow and precarious foundation on which their faith is built, and such the blinding, ruinous power of that fearful system of darkness and idolatry.

But we have also, as Protestants, to remember that the Bible is not its own power, or its own interpreter. For "what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in Him? even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." Without the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit, through faith in Christ Jesus, there can be no right understanding of the word of God, and no true subjection of heart to its absolute authority. Hence some of the protestant axioms, though sounding well and of importance as contrasted with popery, are nevertheless incorrect and misleading, such as, "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible." This is quite true when speaking of the Bible as a standard; but if it be meant that the Bible is its own power and interpreter, it is false; for the Holy Spirit would be thereby practically excluded. "The right of private judgment" has also been much talked of by Protestants; but its effects have been most mischievous. Pride of

intellect, the competency of human reason, and insubjection to the revealed will of God, are some of the evil fruits of this Protestant parent principle; although it was originally intended to contrast with the boasted infallibility of the Romish priesthood, and the enslaved mind of the laity.

How can a lost sinner, condemned already, have any private or individual rights? He has no rights save to a place among the lost. But if God is pleased to speak to him, he is bound to listen — only to listen; he has no right to reason on what God may be pleased to say; he can have no opinion of his own on divine things. People do not really believe that they are lost; they believe that they have sins — that they are guilty; but they do not believe that in their present state they are “condemned already.” Most people know neither that they are lost, nor that they are saved; hence they talk of their rights as free men. But some may inquire, “What then is the use of our reason if we are not to exercise it?” To read, search, and learn the mind of God from His word, is surely the highest exercise of the human mind, and the richest privilege. But hear what another says:

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

“Scripture in hand, diligent in study, what is my safeguard as to understanding it? My own competency? Its suitability to what is in me and around, which is most divinely true? Oh, no!... Let man humbly take his place of subjection, and God will not deny Himself — the Spirit never fails to honour the Lord Jesus; and it is written, ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.’ Blessed ground this for man’s soul to rest upon in contrast with the neologian or infidel ground of human competency and human diligence. To the spirit of obedience and subjection all is sure.”²³⁴ *Doing*, according to the word of the Lord, must go before *knowing*. There must be a readiness to do His will if we would know or understand His doctrine; but the pride of man would put it the other way — I must know His word, before I yield obedience to His will.

To Romanist as well as to Protestant, the oracles of God had been committed, and **that Sacred Book** will be the ground of men’s judgment before the great white throne; but, historically, the one kept it laid up in the napkin, affirming that it was too sacred for the eyes of men to see or the ears of men to hear; the other brought it forth to the light, broadcast it over all lands, and caused its voice to be heard on the open highway, and in the streets and lanes of the city. Thus was the Reformation accomplished. Deep in the credulity and devotion of the multitude had Rome struck her roots; and she stood firm and unshaken until access was gained to the minds of the common people. And this was done by the free circulation of the Bible. “The movement was from above, in the great grace of God. The Spirit, still testifying to Jesus, Lord of all, gave its tongue and voice to the word. God was with it in the vessels He

²³⁴ See *The Present Testimony*, vol. 1, p. 52.

had afore prepared for the work: and whether in quickening, throwing light upon the path to glory, and upon those that travelled in it; or convicting and discovering Satan, with his slaves on their downward march of rebellion towards hell, it was the Holy Spirit who was the power of understanding, and proclamation, and application of the word." We now return to the history of Luther.

Again and again, Luther found his way to the library in the monastery. With increasing delight he examined the unsoiled pages of the Latin Bible, and wished in his heart that he might some day possess such a treasure. He was astonished at the mass of knowledge it contained, and arrested by its simple narratives, especially such as the history of Hannah and the young Samuel. But attractive as the word of God became to him, and much as he enjoyed reading it, he was far from seeing the way of salvation. The excessive labour which enabled him to pass his examinations with honours occasioned a dangerous illness. When death seemed approaching, what was his refuge? "O Mary, help me!" he kept calling loudly through the night. He knew not a more powerful saviour than the Virgin Mary. "Had I died at that time," he said years after, "I should have died relying upon Mary." The true ground of a sinner's pardon and salvation had never been presented to him; and he had received the most perfect education which home and the church, with her universities could give.

LUTHER BECOMES A MONK

Encouraged by the dignities and the popularity which he had gained, he felt disposed, with returning health, to apply himself entirely to the study of law; and began to teach the ethics of Aristotle with other branches of philosophy. While thus engaged in secular pursuits, a singular and solemn event occurred which gave a new direction to his whole future life. One of his favorite college friends, Alexius, was cut off suddenly, and probably by the hand of violence; but the particulars of his death are uncertain: the results however were certain and important. Luther trembled. What would become of my soul, were I thus called away without warning? The terrors of death which had affected him before returned with redoubled violence and took possession of his whole soul. While in this state of mental agitation, and the solemn question of his soul's salvation still unsettled, he was overtaken by a dreadful thunderstorm near Erfurt. The lightning flashed, the thunder rolled, the terrified Luther threw himself upon the ground, imagining that the hour of death, judgment, and eternity were come. Encompassed with the terrors of death and ignorant of his way to God by the faith of Jesus, he called upon St. Anne, and made a vow that, if the Lord would deliver him from this danger, he would abandon the world, and shut himself up in a convent for the rest of his days.

The storm passed, Luther re-enters Erfurt, but not to resume his lectures, not to pursue the study of the law: his vow was upon him; he resigned his brilliant

prospects for the obscurity of a cloister. This was the customary usage in those days for all who became seriously religious, in the hope of obtaining a holiness that would fit them to meet God. He knew it would greatly distress his father, and this thought pained him exceedingly, but his resolution was unalterable. About a fortnight after the event, on the 17th of August, 1505, he invited a few of his university friends to supper. As usual, music and conversation enlivened the social meeting. At an advanced hour in the evening Luther communicated his intention. This was his farewell entertainment — his farewell to the world. That same night, in spite of every remonstrance, he entered the **Augustinian convent** at Erfurt.

Luther could do nothing coldly or feebly. See him now leaving his friends, his books, his clothes, and in the darkness of the night hastening to the convent gate. “Open to me, in the name of God,” he cried. “What do you want?” replied the friar. “To consecrate myself to God.” The gate opened; Luther entered, and it closed again. He was now separated from his parents, his friends, his studies, the world; but, according to the notions of that time, his soul was now perfectly safe, he was alone with God.

LUTHER’S EXPERIENCE AS A MONK

The motives by which Luther was actuated in taking this hasty step he thus explains about sixteen years later: “I was never in heart a monk, nor was it to mortify the lust of my fleshly appetites, but, tormented with horror and the fear of death, I took a forced and constrained vow.” Immediately after his entry into the convent, he sent back to the university his robe and ring of office; he parted with the clothes he had worn up till then, that nothing might remain that could remind him of the world he had renounced. His father was greatly grieved by all these proceedings, and his friends at Erfurt were utterly astonished. Only the monks rejoiced; they were no doubt flattered by so distinguished a doctor becoming one of their order.

But the lingering desire of Luther’s heart for more reading and contemplation was not to be indulged in the monastery. No sooner had he entered than he was subjected, notwithstanding his high reputation in the university, to the most degrading monastic drudgery. He was ordered to sweep out the dormitories, to wind up the clock, to open and shut the gates, to perform the duties of porter, and to be the menial servant of the cloister. But this was not all. He must be publicly mortified; the high-minded student must be humbled. When the poor monk was tired with his manual labors, and expecting rest and some time for reading and study, he was urged to turn out with his wallet and beg for the convent. He was told that it was not by study that he would benefit the community, but rather by begging bread, corn, eggs, fish, meat, and money. And thus he wandered forth with his sack through the streets of Erfurt, begging from door to door; but not now as a poor singing boy, but as a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy.

This was a severe education for Luther, but it was no doubt permitted and overruled by an all-wise providence, that he might gain through personal experience a more minute acquaintance with monastic life, and a keener sense of its delusions, than he could have learnt in any other way. But the enemy, as he often does, went too far. The university was ashamed to see one of its late honorable members laden with the monastery's breadbag, and begging, it might be, at the doors of his old friends. The prior of the convent was spoken to, and Luther was released from those errands of mendicity.

LUTHER'S CONVERSION

Having obtained some relaxation from his menial duties, Luther now returned to his studies with fresh zeal. Reading and meditation were his delight. The works of the Fathers, especially of St. Augustine, attracted his attention. In a certain spot of the convent there was a Bible fastened by a chain, and thither the young monk often resorted to read the word of God, though as yet he had no spiritual discernment of its meaning. One of the friars, named **John Lange**, with whom Luther became acquainted, possessed considerable knowledge both of the Greek and Hebrew, languages which Luther had not yet found time to study. But his opportunity was now come, and he embraced it with great eagerness and industry. It was thus, in the seclusion of his cell, and with the help of John Lange, that he began to learn Greek and Hebrew, and thereby laid the foundation of the greatest and most useful of all his works — the translation of the Bible into the German tongue. Reuchlin's Hebrew Lexicon had just appeared, which greatly assisted him.

But Luther's reading and exercises of mind on the scriptures, from not understanding them, only increased his distress. To have the assurance of salvation was the one great desire of his agitated soul. Without this nothing could give him rest. He had entered the cloister, he had become a monk, he had struggled unceasingly against the evil of his own heart, he had spent whole nights on his knees on the floor of his cell, he had exceeded all his brethren in watchings, fastings, and mortifications, but in monkish perfection he had found no relief; it only plunged him into deeper despair, and well nigh cost him his life. Through the rigour of his asceticism he weakened his body till his mind wandered, and then he imagined that he saw and was surrounded with ghosts and demons. But why was this? some may inquire; was he not sincere? Most surely, but he sought to obtain peace with God by means of his own religious exercises, and in this he was bitterly disappointed. He was attempting to do the work for himself which Christ had done for him — and done perfectly. And are not thousands in the present day doing the very same thing that Luther did, only less sincere, less earnest, less self-denying? They are looking to themselves — it may be only to their feelings, or it may be to their doings or their reasonings, or their realizings. Still, self is the object before the mind, not Christ and His finished work. "Look unto me," says the blessed Lord; and what will the immediate result be? Salvation! — instant, complete, personal salvation! "Look unto Me, and be ye saved all the ends of

the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” (Isa. 45:22) And to this truth every soul must bow before it can taste the sweetness of peace with God. But Luther was still ignorant of the sublime simplicity and the moral glory of the gospel of the grace of God.

At this period of Luther’s history, he thought nothing too great a sacrifice that might enable him to attain that holiness which would secure salvation now and heaven at last. He really thought to purchase eternal happiness by his own exertions; such is the darkness of the church of Rome, and such was the delusion of one of her most faithful sons. In after years, when he knew better, he wrote to **Duke George of Saxony**: “I was indeed a pious monk, and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer I should have carried my mortifications even to death, by means of watchings, prayers, readings, and other labours.” Admission into heaven by his own merits was the end at which he aimed, and which he pursued with a zeal that endangered his life.

From the strictness and abstemiousness of his monastic life he became subject to fits of depression. On one occasion, overwhelmed with a sense of his own wretchedness and sinfulness, he locked himself up in his cell, and for several days and nights refused to admit any one. A friendly monk, who knew something of the state of his mind, burst open his cell, and was alarmed to find him with his face on the ground, and in a state of insensibility. He was, after some difficulty, restored by the sweet singing of a few chorister boys, but he fainted again — the burden was still there. He required, not the soft music of a hymn, but the sweeter music of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And this, through the mercy of God, was near at hand.

LUTHER AND STAUPITZ

John Staupitz, whom the Lord sent to Luther with a message of mercy, was vicar-general of the Augustines for all Germany. Historians speak of him in the highest terms. “He was indeed of noble descent,” says one, “but he was far more illustrious through the power of his eloquence, the extent of his learning, the uprightness of his character, and the purity of his life.”²³⁵ It is matter of thankfulness, and worthy of note, to find such a godly man filling such an important office even in the last stage of papal degeneracy. His influence was great and good. He possessed the esteem of Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, who founded the university of Wittenberg under his direction.

A visitation of this good man — the vicar-general — to inspect the monastery at Erfurt was announced just about the time when the anguish of Luther’s mind had reached its height. The wasted frame, the melancholy appearance,

²³⁵ Waddington, vol. 1, p. 47.

yet the earnest resolute look of the young monk attracted the attention of Staupitz. From past experience he knew well the cause of his dejection, and most kindly instructed and comforted him. He assured Luther that he was entirely mistaken in supposing that he could stand before God on the ground of his works or his vows, that he could only be saved by the mercy of God, and that mercy must flow to him through faith in the blood of Christ. "Let your principal occupation be the study of the scriptures," says Staupitz; and along with this good advice he presented Luther with a Bible, which of all things on earth he most desired.

A ray of divine light had penetrated the dark mind of Luther. His conversations and correspondence with the vicar-general greatly helped him, but he was still a stranger to peace with God. His bodily health again gave way under the conflicts of his soul. During the second year of his residence in the convent he became so dangerously ill, that he had to be removed to the infirmary. All his former terrors returned at the approach of death. He was still ignorant of the value of the finished work of Christ to the believer, and so were his teachers. The frightful image of his own guilt, and the demands of God's holy law, filled him with fear. Not being a common-place man, and passing through an experience which common-place men could not understand, he was alone, he could tell his griefs to none.

One day, as he lay, overwhelmed with despair, he was visited by an old monk, who spoke to him of the way of peace. Won by the kindness of his words, Luther opened his heart to him. The venerable father spoke to him of the efficacy of faith, and repeated to him that article in the Apostles' Creed, "*I believe in the forgiveness of sins.*" These few simple words, with the Lord's blessing, seem to have turned the mind of Luther from works to faith. He had been familiar with the form of these words from his childhood, but he had only repeated them as a form of words, like thousands of nominal Christians in all ages. Now they filled his heart with hope and consolation. The old monk, hearing him repeating the words to himself, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," as if to fathom their depth, interrupted him by saying that it was not a mere *general* but a *personal* belief. I believe in the forgiveness, not merely of David's sins, or of Peter's sins, but of *my sins*. Even the devils have a general but not a personal belief. "Hear what St. Bernard says," added the pious old monk, "The testimony of the Holy Ghost to thy heart is this, *thy sins are forgiven thee.*" From this moment divine light entered the heart of Luther, and, step by step, through the diligent study of the word and prayer, he became a great and honoured servant of the Lord.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONVERSION OF LUTHER

This is the simple story of Luther's conversion, and a genuine conversion it was, through the grace of God, but, so far as Luther's mind was concerned, it was not a very solid work. The measure and character of the truth presented by Staupitz and the old monk could not have fortified him against the attacks

of the enemy. With so little knowledge of the mind of God, the love of Christ, the completeness of His work, of deliverance through death and resurrection, a converted soul might soon be filled and harassed with doubts and fears. And this is what we find on all hands in the present day. Very few have settled peace with God. They *hope*, they *trust*, that they are saved, but there is very little of the full assurance of faith. And why? Just because of defective views of their own lost state and of the work of Christ as perfectly meeting that state. Take one text as an illustration: "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. 10:14) Surely, if we rightly apprehended the dignity and the glory of the sufferer, what would our faith be in the value of His sacrifice, of His one offering? There is no repetition, no second application, of the blood; it can never lose its efficacy. We may be daily cleansed with the water of purification, but the idea of a second application of the blood of propitiation is unknown in scripture. Once washed in that precious blood, the conscience is perfect for ever. That word, "for ever," means not so much eternally, as continuously, permanently, uninterruptedly perfect before God, even as Christ always is. God can never overlook that which has so perfectly blotted out sin, so perfectly glorified Himself, so perfectly vanquished every foe, and so perfectly obtained eternal redemption for every believer.

Up till the time that Luther met with Staupitz and the aged monk, he was, to use his own words, "in the swaddling bands of popery, and had not seen its evils." And this is true in a certain sense, of thousands still. They are in the swaddling-bands of their respective systems of doctrine and church-standing, without having ever carefully examined these things by the word of God. Consequently they are strangers to that happy liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. Luther was converted, but he was by no means out of the house of bondage. The unswathing of his soul was through unbelief, a slow process. He knew almost nothing of the privileges and blessings of the children of God, and of their standing in Christ. But *we* know from scripture what his blessings were, and what the blessings are of every converted soul. Immediately the woman touched the hem of the Redeemer's garment, the *fountain* of her disease was dried up. By the slender touch of faith the *virtue* that was in Jesus was made her own. Beautiful illustration of the newly-converted soul standing before God in all the virtue, the excellencies, the life, the righteousness, the peace, the joy, the happy liberty of Christ Himself! Eternal life has taken the place of spiritual death, divine righteousness of human sin, and nearness to God of moral distance. Such is the blessing of every soul the first moment of its conversion, though it may be on the borders of despair from the darkness of its condition, as Luther was.

Take another illustration — the penitent thief on the cross. A few moments after his conversion he enters heaven with Christ, and as fitted for that holy place as Christ Himself. "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." The immediate consequence of faith in Christ is meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. See also Luke 23: 39-43; Mark 5: 25-34; Col. 1:12, 13, 14.

LUTHER A PRIEST AND A PROFESSOR

He had spent three eventful years in the cloister at Erfurt. But these years were not lost to him. The general cultivation of his mind, the discipline of his soul, his study of Hebrew and Greek, were so many branches of needed education for his future career in the Lord's service. Besides, it was the place of his **spiritual birth**, and the place where he first heard of justification by faith — that divine doctrine on which so much of his subsequent work was built.

In the year 1507 he was ordained a priest, at which ceremony his father was present though still dissatisfied with the course of his son. Luther had now received power from the bishop to offer sacrifice for the living and the dead, and to convert, by muttering a few words, the unleavened cake into the real body and blood of the Lord. Luther submitted to and accepted these popish pretensions, though against his convictions, and with fear and trembling, but his soul never completely recovered from the effects of this blasphemous ordination. A judicial blindness as to the scriptural simplicity of the Lord's supper settled down upon his mind. He was enabled, by the grace of God, to throw off and denounce many of Rome's superstitions, but never fully her crowning enormity, transubstantiation.

Staupitz, the faithful friend and patron of Luther, placed him, at the age of twenty-five, in a position suited for the display of his powerful and active mind, and the further development of his character. He was invited by the Elector Frederick, at the suggestion of the vicar-general, to occupy a chair of philosophy in his rising university. He removed to **Wittemberg** in the year 1508. But though called to be a professor he did not cease to be a monk; he lodged in a cell in the Augustinian convent. The subjects on which he was appointed to lecture were the physics and dialectics of Aristotle. This was uncongenial employment for one who was hungering and thirsting after the word of God. Neither physical science nor moral philosophy suited the spirit of his mind. But again, we may say, it was part of his needed education. He who had passed through the cloister must now occupy for a time the chair of scholastic philosophy, that he might be better fitted to expose the evils, and combat the errors, of both systems, and emancipate the minds of men from their influence.

In the mean time, though he was attracting the youths of Wittemberg by the force and style of his lectures, he was zealously applying himself to the study of Greek and Hebrew. His desire was to drink at the fountain, and He who saw the great desire of his heart and the labour of his life opened up the way for him. In a few months after his arrival at the university he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, which entitled him to lecture on theology, or on the Bible. He now felt himself in his proper sphere, and determined to communicate that only which he learnt from the word of God. His first

discourses were on the Psalms, and then he passed to Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

His precious meditations on these portions in his quiet cell both at Erfurt and Wittenberg, gave a character to his lectures altogether new. He spoke, not merely as an eloquent schoolman, but as a Christian who felt the power of the great truths he taught. When he reached, in his expositions, the last clause of Romans 1:17, "**the just shall live by faith,**" a light, we may say, beyond the brightness of the sun, filled his whole soul. The Spirit of God clothed the words with light and power to the understanding and to the heart of Luther. The grand doctrine of justification by faith alone he received into his heart as from the voice of God. He now saw that eternal life was to be obtained not by penance but by faith. The whole story of the German Reformation is connected with these few words. In their light he explained the scriptures of the Old and New Testament; by their truth he exposed the falsehoods of popery, he thrilled the heart of Europe, he brought the reign of imposture to an end, and accomplished the great Reformation. Alone he stood before all authority — before all the world — on the truth of the word of God, "*the just shall live by faith.*" God's word is true popery is a lie; the one must fall, the other must triumph truth is health to the soul, a lie is deadly poison. These principles of eternal righteousness were now firmly fixed in the heart of Luther by the Spirit of God; and, simple as they may appear, he was enabled, through faith in the word of God, to triumph over popes, bishops, clergy, kings, and emperors, raising the standard of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, without works of law.

The great work was now begun, but the workman had still some lessons to learn.

LUTHER VISITS ROME

Some disputes having arisen between the vicar-general and several of the Augustinian monasteries, Luther was selected as a fit person to represent the whole matter before His Holiness in Rome. It was necessary, in the wisdom of God, that Luther should know Rome. As a monk in the far north, he only thought of the pope as the most holy father and of Rome as the city of the saints; and these prejudices and delusions could only be dispelled by personal observation: intelligence did not circulate then as now.

In the year 1510, penniless and barefoot, Luther **crossed the Alps**. A meal and a night's rest he begged at the monasteries or the farm-houses as he went along. But scarcely had he descended the Alps, when he found monasteries of marble and the monks feeding on the most sumptuous fare. All this was new and surprising to the frugal monk of Wittenberg. But when Friday came, what was his astonishment to find the tables of the Benedictines groaning with dainty meats? He was so moved with indignation that he ventured to say "The church and the pope forbid such things." For this remonstrance, some say, he

nearly atoned with his life. Having received a friendly hint to be off, he quitted the monastery, travelled through the burning plains of Lombardy, and reached Bologna, dangerously ill. Here the enemy turned his thoughts in upon himself, and he became greatly troubled with the sense of his own sinfulness, for the prospect of death filled him with fear and terror. But the words of the apostle, "the just shall live by faith," like a ray of light from heaven, chased the dark clouds away, changed the current of his thoughts, and restored his peace of mind. With returning strength he renewed his journey, and after passing through Florence, and toiling under an oppressive Italian sun through the long tract of the Apennines, he at length drew near to the seven-hilled city.

We must preface **Luther's entry into Rome** by reminding our readers that, though he had received the truth of the gospel, he was still a papist, and that his devotion to the papacy partook of the vehemence of bigotry. Rome, to the rude German, was the holy city, sanctified by the tombs of the apostles, the monuments of saints, and the blood of martyrs. But alas! the Rome of reality was widely different from the Rome of his imagination. As he approached the gates, his heart beat violently. He fell on his knees, and, with his hands raised to heaven, he exclaimed, "Holy Rome, I salute thee! Blessed Rome, thrice sanctified by the blood of thy martyrs!" With all sorts of affectionate and respectful terms he thus saluted the metropolis of Christendom. And under the influence of this wild enthusiasm he hastened to the holy places, listening to all the legends by which they are consecrated; and all that he saw and heard he most devoutly believed. But his heart was very soon sickened with the profanity of the Italian priests. One day, when he was repeating Mass with great seriousness, he found that the priests at an adjoining altar had already repeated seven Masses before he had finished one. "Quick! quick!" cried one of them, "send our Lady back her Son," making an impious allusion to the transubstantiation of the bread into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Profanity could scarcely reach a higher pitch. Luther's disenchantment was complete, and the purpose of God in his education was accomplished.

Luther had expected to find in Rome an austere religion; "her brow circled with griefs, resting on the bare earth, quenching her thirst with the dew of heaven, clothed like the apostles, making her way along stony paths, and the gospel under her arm; but in place of this he saw the triumphal pomp of the pontiff; the cardinals in litters, on horseback, or in carriages, glittering with precious stones, and covered from the sun by a canopy of peacocks' feathers. The gorgeous churches, and the more gorgeous rituals, and the pagan splendour of the paintings, were to Luther, whose heart was heavy with thoughts of the priests' profanity, utterly unbearable. What was the Rome of Raphael, of Michael Angelo, of Perugino, and Benvenuto, to the poor German monk, who had travelled four hundred leagues on foot, expecting to find that which would deepen his devotion and strengthen his faith?"

Yet such was the power of educational superstition in Luther, notwithstanding his knowledge of scripture, and his bitter disappointment in Rome, that one day, wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the pope to all who should ascend on their knees what is called **Pilate's staircase**, he was humbly creeping up those steps, which he was told had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome, when he thought he heard a voice, loud as thunder, crying, "*The just shall live by faith.*" Amazed, he rises from the steps up which he was dragging his body; ashamed at seeing to what a depth superstition had plunged him, he flies with all haste from the scene of his folly.

Having transacted the business on which he was sent, he fumed his back for ever upon the pontifical city. "Adieu! Rome," he said; "let all who would lead a holy life depart from Rome. Everything is permitted in Rome except to be an honest man." He had no thought then of leaving the Roman church, but, perplexed and troubled, he resumed to Saxony.

Soon after Luther's' return to Wittenberg, on the pressing solicitation of Staupitz, he took the degree of Doctor in Divinity. The Senate also gave him the pulpit of the parish church, which opened up for him at once a sphere of the greatest usefulness. But Luther, alarmed at the responsibility, showed some reluctance to accept a dignity of such spiritual importance. As his friendly vicar sought to remove his scruples, and pressed the service upon him, he submitted, and in the performance of his pulpit duties he had the rare opportunity of preaching the word of God and the gospel of Christ in the cloisters of his convent, the chapel of the castle, and in the collegiate church. His voice, says history, was fine, sonorous, electrifying; his gesticulations were easy and noble. A bold originality ever marked the mind of Luther, charming many by its novelty, and overpowering others by its force. He had acquired during the last four or five years a respectable acquaintance both with Greek and Hebrew; he had read deeply the New Testament; he was fully assured that justification by faith was the peculiar doctrine of the gospel; that the word of God was the primary and fundamental means of the revival and reformation of the church.

From the year 1512 to the memorable year 1517 Luther was a bold intrepid herald of the word of life. In all things he longed only to know the truth, to shake off and cast from him the falsehoods and superstitions of Rome. And thus we leave Luther for the present, engaged in his glorious work, while we must refer for a few moments to the state of things in the church which brought John Tetzel and his indulgences into the neighbourhood of Wittenberg.²³⁶

²³⁶ D'Aubigné, vol. 1. Froude's *Short Studies*, vol. 1. Waddington's *Reformation*, vol. 1. *Universal History*, vol. 6, Bagster and Sons.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 34

THE FIRST PAPAL JUBILEE

The avarice of the Roman clergy, and the superstition of the people, had been greatly excited by the Crusades. For two hundred years these were the source of enormous wealth and power to the church, and of incalculable misery, ruin, and degradation to the nations of Europe. In these so-called holy wars about six millions of Europeans perished, and about two hundred millions of money were expended; besides, the property of the crusader was commonly placed during the expedition under the bishop's protection, and in case of his death — which generally happened — it remained in his hands. But happily that which “stands singularly marked in the temple of history as a monument of human absurdity, of unanimous infatuation,” came to an end with the close of the thirteenth century.

In the year 1291 **Acre**, the last military station held by the Christians in Palestine, fell into the hands of the Turks. The unbelievers were then in possession of the sepulchre of Christ, and of all the holy places and objects of pilgrimage. Thus ended the great papal scheme and the boasted glory of the Crusades to the Holy Land.

Two grave questions now arose: How is the papal treasury to be filled, and the desire of the people for indulgences to be satisfied? The pope wants money, the people want their sins forgiven and are willing to pay for it. To meet these two important objects, the pope discovered a new and most successful way. We have reached the last year of the thirteenth century, said Boniface; let the first year of the fourteenth be a year of Jubilee. Palestine was irrecoverably lost; the cross and the Saviour's sepulchre were in the hands of the Saracens; but the holy city of Rome, and the tombs of the apostles were open to the pilgrims. By skilfully changing the place of pilgrimage from Jerusalem to Rome the desired end was gained. Never was superstition more successful.

On the 22nd of February, 1299, a bull was issued, promising indulgences of extraordinary fulness to all who, within the following year, should, with due penitence and devotion, visit the **tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul** — the Romans once a day for thirty successive days, and strangers for fifteen. The bull was immediately promulgated throughout Christendom. It asserted that all who should confess and lament their sins, and devoutly make pilgrimage to the tomb of the “chief of the apostles,” should receive a plenary indulgence; or, in other words, *a complete remission of all sins, past, present, and to come*. An indulgence of this kind had hitherto been limited to the crusaders; the consequence was that all Europe was in a frenzy of religious excitement.

Multitudes hastened to Rome from all parts. The welcome sound of the Jubilee drew all western Christendom into this vast peaceful crusade. "Throughout the year, the roads in the remotest parts of Germany, Hungary, Britain, were crowded with pilgrims of all ages, of both sexes, who sought to expiate their sins, not by an armed and perilous pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but by a less costly, and a less dangerous, journey to Rome."

THE GOLDEN YEAR

The calculations of the number cannot be easy or accurate; but we are assured by those who assisted at the ceremony, that there were always about two hundred thousand present in the city, and the total concourse of the year has been fixed at two millions. The wealth which flowed into the papal coffers from the Jubilee was enormous. Supposing that each individual gave only a small sum, what a royal treasure must have been collected! But offerings were heaped up on the altars. It was called by the Romans the **Golden Year**. An eye-witness tells us that he saw two priests with rakes in their hands, employed day and night in raking, without counting, the heaps of gold and silver that were laid on the tombs of the apostles. Nor was this tribute, like offerings or subsidies for crusades, to be devoted to special uses, such as provisions or freight of armies, but it was entirely at the free and irresponsible disposal of the pope. But from the benefits of this indulgence the enemies of the church were to be excluded, or rather the enemies of Boniface.

Christendom, with the exception of a few noted rebels against the See of Rome, had now received the gift of pardon and eternal life, and in return, of its own accord, heaped up at the pope's feet this extraordinary wealth. The authorities had taken wise and effective measures against famine for such accumulating multitudes, but many were trampled down, and perished by suffocation.

The experiment far exceeded the expectations of the pope and his partisans. Boniface had proposed that the Jubilee should be celebrated every hundredth year, but the advantages to the church were so great, that the interval was naturally thought to be too long. Clement VI, therefore, repeated the Jubilee in 1350, which drew vast multitudes of pilgrims to Rome, and incredible wealth. The numbers were nearly as great as in 1300. The streets leading to the churches which were to be visited — St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and St. John Lateran — were so crowded as to admit of no movement, except with the stream of the multitudes. High prices were charged by the Romans for food and lodgings, many had to spend their nights in the churches and streets, and not a few of the poor deluded pilgrims perished. Urban VI, in 1389, reduced the interval to thirty-three years, the supposed length of time to which the life of our Lord on earth extended. Finally, Paul II in 1475, established that the festival of the Jubilee should be celebrated every twenty-five years, which continues to this day to be the interval at which the great festival is observed.

With the great **religious impostures** of the dark ages, and the sin of deluding a credulous people, we have become familiar; but it is truly heart-breaking to find that such blasphemies are believed and practised in our own day, notwithstanding the state of education and the number of witnesses to the truth of the word of God and the finished work of Christ. The following extract from a bull that was issued by the pope in 1824, appointing the Jubilee for the ensuing year, will explain what we mean.

“We have resolved, by virtue of the authority given to us from heaven, fully to unlock that sacred treasure composed of the merits, sufferings, and virtues of Christ our Lord, and of his virgin mother, and of all the saints which the Author of human salvation has entrusted to our dispensation. To you, therefore, venerable brethren, patriarchs, primates, archbishops, bishops, it belongs to explain with perspicuity the power of indulgences; what is their efficacy in the remission, not only of the canonical penance, but also of the temporal punishment due to the divine justice for past sin; and what succour is afforded out of this heavenly treasure, from the merits of Christ and His saints, to such as have departed real penitents in God’s love, yet before they had duly satisfied by fruits worthy of penance, for sins of omission and commission, and are now purifying in the fire of purgatory.”²³⁷

THE SALE OF INDULGENCES

Leo the tenth ascended the papal throne in the year 1513. He was the third son of Lorenzo de Medici, the Magnificent, and brought with him to the pontifical court the refined, luxurious, and expensive style of his family. Besides, Michael Angelo had furnished him with finished design of St. Peter’s, which was then in progress, and greatly increased his expenditure. The important question now was, how to find money to complete the grand cathedral, and to replenish the papal treasury for the purposes of Leo’s pontificate?

The letters of Luther to this pontiff are misleading. He seems not to have known Leo’s character, though he had so much to do with him, they have all the appearance of flattery. While Leo has the reputation of being one of the most polished and cultivated men of his day, he was far from being even a moral man. His court was gay, he was devoted to pleasure, and utterly careless of the duties of religion. Compared with his immediate predecessors — the dissolute Alexander VI, whose name can never be mentioned without loathing — and the wild warrior-pope, Julius II, whose stormy career filled a great part of Europe with blood and massacres — compared, we say, with such popes, the person and court of Leo would present a favourable contrast; and Luther no doubt addressed him under his superstitious veneration for the head of the church, and because of his fame as a man of learning.

²³⁷ Gardner’s *Faiths of the World*, vol. 2, p. 252.

To meet the various and heavy expenses of the extravagant Leo, the cry for money became louder and louder. “Money! money!” was the cry. “It was money,” says one, “not charity, that covered a multitude of sins.” Necessity suggested that the **price of indulgences** should be lowered, and that clever salesmen should be employed to push the trade all over Europe. The plan was adopted; but God overruled the shameless traffic for the accomplishment of the Reformation, and for the overthrow of the despotism of Rome. Germany, it was agreed, should be the first and especially favoured place with the sale of indulgences, as the geographical position of the country might have prevented many of the faithful from reaping the advantages of the Jubilee in Rome.

The original idea of indulgences seems to have been nothing more than a shortening of the outward penance imposed on penitents by the payment of a fine, such as we have constantly decreed in our courts of law — say, “Fined in fifty pounds, or six months' imprisonment.” If the money is paid, it is placed to the credit of the criminal, and he is released and receives his discharge. In like manner the poor deluded papist supposes that the indulgence which he buys is placed to his credit in the statute-book of heaven, which balances the account against him for lies, slanders, robberies, murders, and wickedness of all kinds; or, as some have compared it, to a letter of credit on heaven, signed by the pope, in consideration of value received. Of course, if the delinquent's sins are great and many, he must pay heavily for his indulgences.

This **pardon system** expanded, and was so worked by the priesthood, that it became the means of enormous wealth to the papacy. Works meet for repentance were demanded from the sinner — and all were sinners — works such as fasting, castigation, pilgrimages, and after death so many years in purgatory. But the sinner was reminded that the burden of these works might be removed, and the years of purgatorial fire shortened, through the power delegated by Christ to the blessed Peter and his successors, on certain conditions. The easiest of these conditions to the penitent, and the most convenient to the pope, was “money! money!”

THE POPE'S AGENTS — JOHN TETZEL

The speculation of Leo was a great commercial success. He sent out suitable agents into different parts of Europe with sacks of indulgences and dispensations. For a given amount a dispensation could be purchased to eat meat on Fridays and fast days, to marry one's near relation, and to indulge in every forbidden pleasure. The pedlars moved on; they extolled their wares with shouts and jokes; they assured the people that pardon and the salvation of their souls could now be purchased at greatly reduced prices. Crowds of buyers came forward, and the money of the faithful flowed in plentifully. At length they appeared in Saxony. The Archbishop of Mayence, and other spiritual dignitaries, had promised the pope their support in this shameless and iniquitous traffic, in consideration that they would receive a share of the

profits; so business went on increasingly and uninterruptedly until the noisy hawkers came near to Wittenberg.

Amongst the many salesmen in this great papal fair, one man in particular attracted the attention of the spectators; this was the Dominican monk, John Tetzel, a name which has acquired an odious notoriety in European history. These dealers traversed the country in great state, lived in good style, and spent money freely. When the procession approached a town, a deputy waited on the magistrate, and said, "The grace of God and of the holy father is at your gates." Such a proclamation in those times of superstition was enough to move the quietest cities of Germany to the greatest excitement. The clergy, priests, nuns, town-councils, and trades with their banners, men and women, old and young, went out to meet the merchants, bearing lighted tapers in their hands, and advancing to the sound of music. The streets everywhere were hung with flags; bells were pealed; nuns and monks walked in procession, crying, "Buy! buy!" The great merchant monk himself sat in a chariot, holding a large red cross in his hand, and with the papal bull on a velvet cushion before him. The churches were the sale-rooms; the arms of the pope were hung on the red cross, and placed before the altar. Tetzel now ascended the pulpit, and loudly extolled in rude eloquence the efficacy of indulgences.²³⁸

A SPECIMEN OF TETZEL'S PREACHING

Take the following extracts as a specimen of the blasphemous speeches of this **daring impostor**, and all under the sanction of the pope and the archbishop of the place.

"Indulgences are the most precious and the most noble of God's gifts. Come, and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned. I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven, for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons. There is no sin so great that an indulgence cannot remit. But, more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living but for the dead. Priest! noble! merchant! wife! youth! maiden! do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the bottom of the abyss? We are suffering horrible torments! a trifling alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not! Oh, stupid and brutish people, who do not understand the grace so richly offered! Why, the very instant your money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies liberated to heaven. The Lord our God no longer reigns, He has resigned all power to the pope."

The wild harangue of the coarse bellowing monk being over, the terrified and superstitious crowd hastened to purchase the pardon of their sins and the deliverance of their friends from the fires of purgatory. From the royal

²³⁸ See d'Aubigné, vol. 1, p. 322. Froude's *Short Studies*, vol. 1, p. 96.

family down to those who lived on alms, all found money to buy forgiveness. Money poured in plentifully; the papal chest overflowed; but alas! alas! the moral effects were fearful. The easy terms on which men could obtain the pope's licence for every species of wickedness, opened the way to the grossest immorality, and insubjection to all authority. Even Tetzel himself was convicted of adultery and infamous conduct at Innsbruck, and sentenced by the Emperor Maximilian to be put into a sack and thrown into the river; but the Elector Frederick of Saxony interfered, and obtained his pardon. The unblushing Dominican proceeded on his way as the representative of his holiness the pope, just as if nothing had happened.

LUTHER'S PUBLIC APPEAL

A.D. 1517

Things were now coming to a crisis. Luther, who had been watching narrowly the progress of Tetzel, stepped forward; made his grand appeal to the common sense and to the conscience of the German people; nailed his **theses to the church door at Wittemberg**, and in ninety-five propositions challenged the whole Catholic church to defend Tetzel and the sale of indulgences.

The axe was now laid at the root of the tree. The germs of the Reformation were contained in these propositions. "The pope's indulgence," said Luther, "cannot take away sins; God alone remits sins, and He pardons those who are truly penitent without help from man's absolutions. The church may remit penalties which the church inflicts. But the church's power is in this world only, it extends not beyond death. Who is this man who dares to say that for so many crowns the soul of a sinner can be saved? Every true Christian participates in all the blessings of Christ, by God's grace, and without a letter of indulgence." Such was the style of Luther's noble protest, though mixed with much that still savoured of Catholicism.

Luther had now entered the field against the doctrine and the abuses of the church of Rome. The university and the whole city of Wittemberg were in commotion. All read the theses; the startling propositions passed from mouth to mouth; pilgrims from all quarters then present in Wittemberg, carried back with them the famous theses of the Augustinian monk, circulating the news everywhere. "This was the first electric flash," says Pfizer, "from the torch that was kindled at the funeral pile of the Martyred Huss, and, reaching the remotest corner of the land, gave the signal of mighty future events." In less than fourteen days, it is said, these theses were read through every part of Germany; and, ere four weeks had elapsed, they had overspread the whole of Christendom, as if the angels of heaven had been the messengers to exhibit them to universal gaze.

Rome clamoured for fire and faggot. "The religious houses all Germany over," says Froude, "were like kennels of hounds howling to each other across

the spiritual waste. If souls could not be sung out of purgatory, their occupation was gone. But to the young laymen, to the noble spirits all Europe over, Wittemberg became a beacon of light shining in the universal darkness.” Had Luther not been guided by the wisdom of God, he might have been swept away by his sudden popularity; but of himself, through grace, he thought very little, and remained quietly at his post in the Augustinian church at Wittemberg, waiting till God in His own time and way called him forth.

LUTHER AT HEIDELBERG

In the spring of 1518 a general assembly of the Augustinian order was held at Heidelberg: Luther, by invitation, was present. His friends, knowing the designs and treachery of the Dominicans, did all they could to dissuade him from going; but Luther was not the man to be hindered by the fear of danger from the accomplishment of what he believed to be his duty. His trust was in the living God. So favourable an opportunity for preaching the gospel, the spread of the truth, and the diffusion of his propositions, was not to be neglected. He started on the 13th of April, with a guide who assisted him to carry his baggage, and performed the greater part of the journey on foot.

General curiosity, the name of Luther, the fame of his theses, attracted large crowds to the city and the university of Heidelberg. Here, before a large assembly, he disputed with five doctors of divinity on a variety of subjects, but relating chiefly to theology and philosophy. His knowledge of scripture, of the traditional dogmas of the church, his want of respect for the name and system of Aristotle, his great argumentative power, proved to his opponents that he was a polemic of no common order. He returned to Wittemberg, well protected and accompanied by many friends.

The wonderful effect produced by these controversies moved Tetzl to attempt a reply to Luther’s attack on the sale of indulgences. Full of vain boasting and blasphemy, he asserts and reasserts the power of the pope, and of the clergy as deputed by him, fully and for ever to forgive all sins. In answer to these daring assertions, Luther wrote a further series of propositions which he termed “**Resolutions,**” or explanations of his former theses. In this treatise the *Reformer* is more distinctly seen. He brings prominently forward the great truth of the Reformation — that man is justified by faith alone without deeds of law. “For he hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

Luther now challenges the decision of the pope himself. He sent him a copy of his Resolutions, accompanied by a very humble letter, dated May 30th, 1518. Utterly careless as Leo really was as to the interests of religion, he could not treat with entire indifference the letter of Luther; especially as the emperor Maximilian had solicited his interference about the same time. He ordered Luther to be sent to Rome and there to answer for his audacity. Luther

refused to obey the summons, declaring, however, his readiness to appear and defend his cause before pious, impartial, and learned judges in Germany. The pope, finding that Luther was under the protection of Frederick elector of Saxony, wrote to that prince desiring him to deliver the heretical monk to the **Cardinal Thomas Cajetan**, who had full instructions how to act with regard to the disobedient doctor. But, to the praise of that singularly wise and excellent prince, he refused to obey the pope's orders and protected Luther. The pope was now obliged to propose less hasty, less blood-thirsty, and more formal measures. Accordingly the citation to Rome was changed into a summons to Augsburg, which Luther declared his intention to obey.

LUTHER AT AUGSBURG

Some of his friends, concerned for the safety of his valuable life, attempted to dissuade him from his purpose; but regardless of danger, and confiding in the watchful care of divine providence, he was determined to appear. In his monk's brown frock, he started on foot from Wittemberg, and accompanied by the citizens, high and low, to the gates, he cheerfully walked to Augsburg.

The cardinal assumed the appearance of a tender and compassionate father, and addressed Luther as his dear son; giving him to understand, however, in plainest language that the pope insisted on recantation, and that he would accept of nothing else. "Condescend then," said Luther, "to inform me in what I have erred." The cardinal and his Italian courtiers, who had expected the poor German monk to fall down on his knees and plead for pardon, were astonished at his calm but dignified manner. "I am here to command," replied Cajetan, "not to argue." "Rather," answered Luther, "let us reason on the points in dispute and settle them by the decisions of sacred scripture." "What!" exclaimed the cardinal, "do you think the pope cares for the opinion of a **German boor**? The pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend *you* — *you*, a wretched worm like *you*? I tell you, No! and where will you be then — where will you be then?"

Mark the noble answer, not of a poor monk merely, but of the man of God in trying circumstances. "Then, as now, in the hands of Almighty God." Rome was vanquished. The court dissolved. "To the amazement of the proud Italian, a poor peasant's son — a miserable friar of the provincial German town — was prepared to defy the power and resist the prayers of the sovereign of Christendom." Though armed with full power to crush his victim, he had to return to Rome and report his defeat, and tell his master that neither remonstrances, threatenings, entreaties, nor promises of the highest distinction could move the stubborn German from his wicked heresies. The faithful witness, finding his person in extreme peril, secretly left the place and returned to Wittemberg.

Incensed to the utmost by this failure, the pope wrote again to the Elector, entreating him to render up the criminal to justice or expel him from his dominions. Frederick hesitated. Many serious questions were involved in an open collision with the pope. Rather than bring his prince into trouble, Luther seriously thought of escaping to France. But He who “turneth the hearts of kings whithersoever he will,” led the good Elector to throw the shield of his protection over his subject.

As nothing satisfactory had resulted from the mission of Cajetan, Leo dispatched another agent in the person of the papal nuncio, **Charles von Miltitz**. This emissary brought with him a golden rose, richly perfumed, as a present from the pope to the Elector Frederick. This gift was usually esteemed as a special token of the pontiff’s favour, but in this instance it was doubtless intended as a bribe to the hesitating Frederick.

On reaching Saxony, Miltitz met with his old friend Spalatin, who made him acquainted with the real state of things in Germany. He assured the legate, that the divisions of the church were chiefly owing to the falsehoods, impostures, and blasphemies of Tetzl the indulgence-seller. Miltitz appeared to be astonished, and summoned Tetzl to appear before him at Altenburg and answer for his conduct. But things were greatly changed with the Dominican; he was no longer going from town to town with his papal bull and gilt car, but was hiding from the anger of his enemies in the college at Leipsic. “I should not care,” he wrote to Miltitz, “about the fatigue of the journey if I could leave Leipsic without danger to my life; but the Augustinian, Martin Luther, has so excited and aroused the men of power against me, that I am nowhere safe.” What an end, and what a picture, of those who engage to be the servants of men against God and His truth! With a bad conscience, and as a mean coward, he died shortly after this in great misery. But mark the contrast in the moral courage of the servant of God and of His truth, travelling on foot from Wittemberg to Augsburg.

LUTHER AT ALTENBURG

The papal legate soon saw the general popularity of Luther’s cause, and adopted a course directly opposite to that of the haughty Cajetan. He approached him with great demonstrations of friendliness, addressing him as “**My dear Martin.**” His grand object was to allure the Reformer by flattery and deception to recant, and so bring the dispute to a close. And so far the crafty nuncio succeeded. He was a cunning diplomatist and a fawning papist, and Luther for the moment was caught in the snare.

“I offer,” said Luther, “on my part, to be silent for the future on this matter, and to let it die away of itself, provided my opponents are silent on their part.” Miltitz accepted the offer with overflowing joy, kissed the heretical monk, induced him to write a penitent letter to the pope, and lavished on him every expression of affection and kindness. Thus the great controversy

between truth and falsehood, between the papacy and the dawning Reformation, seemed on the point of being terminated; but the Reformation was not to be hindered by Luther's apparent reconciliation to Rome.

Just at this time, when Luther was silenced, when he had concluded an unworthy peace with Rome, another voice is heard. **Doctor Eck**, the author of the *Obelisk*, and the champion of the papacy, challenged Carlstadt, the friend of Luther, to a public disputation on the contested points of theology, and Luther's declaration on indulgences. This aroused the energies, and awoke the eloquence, of Luther once more. A public discussion was conducted soon after at Leipsic, which lasted several weeks. Doctor Eck contended for the papacy, and Luther and Carlstadt for the Reformation. These celebrated discussions were overruled by God for the spread of the truth, not only over Germany, but over all Christendom. Luther's appeals to scripture created in the minds of many — especially in the minds of the students of the universities of Leipsic and Wittemberg — a spirit of inquiry which nothing short of the solid truth of God could satisfy. Thus the work of the Lord progressed, and the mind of Europe was prepared for the great revolution which was so soon to take place.

DISTINGUISHED MEN OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Here we may pause for a moment and note some of the great actors which now crowd the scene of this busy epoch. The age of the Reformation is one of the most remarkable in history for great men and great events.

Martin Luther, the one whom the Spirit of God is especially using, stands before us the most central and the most prominent figure. In his situation of peculiar danger, he might think that he was almost done; but God was gathering around him some of those distinguished men who early declared their entire sympathy with his position, and engaged all their powers in its defence. In the year 1518 Philip Melancthon was appointed professor of Greek in the university at Wittemberg; and from that period he became the intimate friend and the faithful fellow-labourer of the Reformer, even to the end of his life. Oecolampadius, professor at Basle, Ulric Zwingle, doctor of divinity at Zurich, Martin Bucer, and many others, did a gracious providence raise up just at this time, who have ever since been numbered among the most illustrious instruments of the Reformation.

The imperial throne falling vacant by the death of Maximilian in January 1519 proved favourable to the cause of Reform. The attention of the court of Rome was diverted from the affairs of Luther to the more pressing business of the new emperor. And Frederick, during the interregnum as vicar of the empire, was able to afford Luther a still more secure protection. The imperial crown was offered by the electors to Frederick, but he declined the perilous distinction, not caring to trouble himself with the weight of empire. The election fell on Maximilian's grandson Charles — grandson also of Ferdinand

the Catholic. The youthful, handsome, and chivalrous princes, — Henry VIII king of England, and Francis I king of France, — aspired also to the imperial dignity, but the hereditary claims and possessions of Charles speedily turned the balance in his favour. He was sovereign of Spain, of Burgundy and the low countries, of Naples and Sicily, of the new empire of the Indies, and the discovery of America by Columbus added, to his many kingdoms, the new world. Since the days of Charlemagne, no monarch had swayed a sceptre over such vast dominions.

The pope, though at first opposed to the elevation of Charles, from the conflicting interests of the Vatican, withdrew his objections, seeing he would be elected; and Charles was crowned at Aix-la-Chapelle, on the 22nd of October, 1520.

Thus at the early age of nineteen, as **Charles V** emperor of Germany, he assumed the imperial power. He is described as a youth of great intelligence, with a strong natural taste for military exercises. He was remarkable for a gravity and sedateness far beyond his years, and most amiable when it suited him. He possessed the subtlety and penetration of the Italian, with the taciturnity and reserve of the Spaniard; and withal he was a firm and devoted Catholic. “He was pious and silent,” said Luther; “I will wager that he does not talk so much in a year as I do in a day.”

This is the man to whom Luther’s case must now be referred. No fitter man could have been found to execute the decrees and do the work of the Vatican. The pious reflections of d’Aubigné on this change of government are worthy of the warm-hearted biographer of Luther. “A new actor was about to appear on the scene. God designed to bring the Wittemberg monk face to face with the most powerful monarch that had appeared in Christendom since the days of Charlemagne. He selected a prince in the vigour of youth, and to whom everything seemed to announce a long reign... and to him he opposed that lowly Reformation, begun in the secluded cell of a convent at Erfurt by the anguish and the sighs of a poor monk. The history of this monarch and of his reign was destined, it would seem, to teach the world an important lesson. It was to show the nothingness of all the strength of man when it presumes to measure itself with the weakness of God. If a prince, a friend to Luther, had been called to the imperial throne, the success of the Reformation might have been ascribed to his protection. If even an emperor opposed to the new doctrines, but yet a weak ruler, had worn the diadem, the triumph of this work might have been accounted for by the weakness of the monarch. But it was the haughty conqueror at Pavia who was destined to vail his pride before the power of God’s word; and the whole world beheld the man who found it an easy task to drag Francis I a prisoner to Madrid obliged to lower his sword before the son of a poor miner!”²³⁹

²³⁹ Vol. 2, p. 109. See also Froude’s *Short Studies on Great Subjects* vol. 1. *Universal History*, Bagster, vol. 8. Waddington’s *Reformation*, vol. 1. Mosheim, vol. 3.

LUTHER AND THE BULL OF EXCOMMUNICATION

We return to Luther and the close of the debate at Leipsic. Dr. Eck, the famous papal theologian, irritated by his defeat, and burning with rage against Luther, hurried away to Rome that he might obtain a bull of excommunication against his opponent. Unable to refute the earnest and fervent appeals of the Reformer to the word of God, he immediately sought his condemnation and destruction. Such has ever been the way of the emissaries of Rome.

Overcome by the clamorous and the importunate applications of Eck and his friends, especially the Dominicans, Pope Leo, most unwisely, as most think, issued the desired bull on the 15th of June, 1520. Luther's writings were condemned to the flames, and he himself delivered over to Satan as a wicked heretic, unless he recanted and implored the clemency of the pontiff within sixty days. But the time was past for Luther and his friends to be silenced by ecclesiastical thunders. Had such a thing happened fifty years before, it would have been widely different. But neither Leo, Charles, Henry, nor Francis, knew the state of the public mind in Germany, or the silent but sure effects of the printing press throughout Europe. He who saw Guttenberg pulling at his press, Columbus returning from the discovery of America, Vasco di Gama from having doubled the Cape of Storms, or the learned Greeks scattered over the nations of Europe after the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, saw events which revived reaming, which expanded the human mind, and which aroused it from the lethargy into which it had fallen during the long dark night of the middle ages.²⁴⁰

Before the **bull of Leo** reached Wittemberg, the best part of Germany was at heart with Luther, but especially the students, the artisans, and the tradesmen. He saw the ground on which he stood. The decisive step must now be taken. Open war must be proclaimed. He had written the most submissive and pacific letters to the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the princes, and the learned men; he had appealed from the pontiff to the supreme tribunal of a general council, but all to no purpose. He now determined to withdraw from the church of Rome and publicly to resist her authority. On the 10th of December, 1520, at nine in the morning, public notice having been given, Luther took the bull, together with a copy of the pontifical canon law, and some of the writings of Eck and Emser, and in the presence of a vast crowd of spectators committed them to the flames. This being done without the city walls, Luther re-entered, accompanied by the doctors of the university, the students, and the people. Having thus thrown off the yoke of Rome, he addressed the people as to their duty with great energy. The public caught his fire and the whole nation rallied around him. Luther was now set at liberty. The tie which had so long bound him to Rome was broken. From this time he assumed the attitude of an open and uncompromising antagonist of the pope

²⁴⁰ James White's *Eighteen Christian Centuries*, p. 381.

and of his emissaries. He also published many pamphlets against the Romish system and for the truth of God.

LUTHER AND CHARLES THE FIFTH

Leo, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, thus defied by Luther, son of the miner of Mansfield, turned to Charles for help. He reminded the youthful emperor of the vows he had just taken — as *the advocate and defender of the church*; and called upon him to inflict due punishment upon that audacious and rebellious monk — Martin Luther. Considerable anxiety prevailed in many quarters as to what would be the policy of the new emperor. Will he sympathize with the principles of progress which are everywhere at work in literature, politics, and religion? or will he be the pliant instrument of the papal power? were questions of great importance at that moment.

Charles was reserved. He had many things in hand. Two years elapsed before he was at leisure to take up the question. The interval was profitably employed by Luther and his friends. During the years 1518-19-20, the numerous pamphlets and expositions of the word of God, which issued from the press, had done their work. By the good providence of God, the new opinions were making rapid progress not only in Germany, but in Switzerland, France, and England. The deeply-rooted prejudices of many centuries were being overturned in the minds of multitudes in many parts of Europe.

Charles at length found that something more than polemical discussion was required to arrest the progress of a movement which threatened to overthrow the religion of his ancestors and disturb the peace of his empire. His first diet, or assembly of the States of the German monarchy, was appointed to be held at **Worms**. Before this assembly he cited Luther to appear and answer for his contumacious conduct. The pope and his party now expected that by fair means or foul, they would certainly get rid of their adversary. But the Elector, knowing the treachery of the ecclesiastics, and suspecting that Luther might meet with the fate of John Huss and Jerome of Prague, when they attended the Council of Constance, would only consent to his subject going to Worms on two conditions: — “1, That he should have a safe-conduct under the Emperor’s hand and seal; 2, That Luther, if judgment went against him, should be free for the time to return to the place from which he had come; and that he, the Elector, should determine afterwards what should be done with him.” Luther himself was ready to obey the citation when the Elector was satisfied as to his safety.

THE DIET OF WORMS

A.D. 1521 — JANUARY TILL MAY

The monk of Erfurt, armed with the word of God, and confidence in the divine presence, had put to flight the army of indulgence-sellers, had gained

an easy victory over the pope's legate at Augsburg, and the champions of the papacy in the halls of Leipsic. He had also replied to the thunders of the pope by burning his bull at Wittemberg. Rome was paralysed. Her strength was spent. Her threatenings were disregarded. The so-called church could no longer carry things in the old style. Men had begun to think for themselves, and to think how far such orders should be obeyed. But a good Catholic prince was now on the throne of the empire, and the final struggle must be with him.

Charles, the faithful servant of St. Peter, opened the diet on the 28th of January, the festival of Charlemagne. Never before, in any age of the world, had so many kings, princes, prelates, nobles, and powers of this world, met together in diet. "Electors, dukes, archbishops, landgraves, margraves, counts, bishops, barons, and lords of the realm, as well as the deputies of the towns, and the ambassadors of the kings of Christendom, thronged with their brilliant trains the roads that led to Worms. Great questions, affecting the peace of Europe, of the world, and the triumph of truth, were here to be fully and gravely discussed." But *we* have chiefly to do with Luther and the Reformation.

Aleander, the pope's nuncio, a man of great eloquence, addressed the Emperor, the princes, and the deputies, for about three hours. He had Luther's books before him and the papal bulls. He had said all that Rome could say against the books and their author. He maintained that there were errors enough in Luther's writings to burn a **hundred thousand heretics**. The power of his oratory and the enthusiasm of his language produced a deep impression on the assembly. Murmurs soon arose from every quarter against Luther and his partisans. But it is perfectly clear from Meander's long oration, that his one grand object was to prevent the bold Reformer from being cited to appear. The papal party dreaded the prominence which would necessarily be given to the new opinions by the presence of Luther in so august an assembly. Leo wrote himself to beg that Luther's safe-conduct should not be observed. The bishops agreed with the pope that safe-conducts could not protect heretics.

LUTHER'S SUMMONS AND SAFE-CONDUCT

The young Emperor was encompassed with difficulties. Placed between the papal nuncio and the Elector, to whom he was indebted for his crown, what must he do? He wished to please both: to spare or to sacrifice a monk was a small consideration with Charles, but not so in the sight of Him who overrules all rulers. Luther must bear witness for the truth of God and against the lie of Satan in that great assembly. The Emperor at length made up his mind. Luther's appearance before the diet seemed the only means likely to terminate an affair which engaged the attention of all the empire. At last the summons and safe-conduct were sent, and Luther prepared to obey the imperial mandate.

On the 2nd of April, Luther took leave of his friends and began his journey. He rode in a modest conveyance, accompanied by his friends Schurff, Amsdorf, and Suaven; the imperial herald with the safe-conduct rode in front. Luther discovered at every stage of his journey, that gloomy forebodings filled the hearts of all friends. He was warned that “foul play was intended, that he was condemned already that his books had been burned by the hangman, and that he was a dead man if he proceeded.” But Luther, undismayed, replied, “I trust in God Almighty, whose word and commandments I have before me. “He preached at several places on his way, and accepted the entertainment of his friends. But as he drew near to Worms, the storm which he had raised became more violent. The enemies of the Reformation were boiling with indignation when they heard he was approaching the city. Spalatin, the Elector’s chaplain, and Luther’s faithful friend, sent a messenger to meet him with these words, “Do not enter Worms!” But the intrepid monk, full of holy courage, turned his eyes on the messenger, and said, “Tell your master, I will go if there are as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses.” On the morning of the 16th of April, he discovered the walls of the ancient city. Noblemen of high rank went out to meet him, and more than two thousand accompanied him to his lodgings. From the pavement to the roofs of the houses, every place seemed covered with spectators.

The following day he was conducted to the diet by the marshal of the empire, Ulrich of Pappenheim. The crowd that filled the streets to see him pass along was so great that it was necessary to lead him through private houses and gardens to the hall of audience. Many of the knights and nobles who thronged the body of the hall spoke encouragingly to Luther as he pressed his way to the council chamber. One, who probably had received the truth and loved the Saviour, reminded him of the Master’s words, “When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.” Another, though clad in gleaming armour, touched him on the shoulder with his gauntlet, saying, “Pluck up thy spirit, little monk: some of us here have seen warm work in our time, but neither I nor any knight in this company ever needed a stout heart more than thou needest it now. If thou hast faith in these doctrines of thine, go on in the name of God.” “Yes, in the name of God,” said Luther, throwing back his head, “in the name of God forward!”

LUTHER APPEARS BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY

To one who had been educated and trained amid the retirement of a cloister, the sight of such an assembly must have been overwhelming. There sat Charles, sovereign of half the world. And there on either side of him were ranged the peers and potentates of the German empire — bishops and archbishops, cardinals in their scarlet robes, papal nuncios in their official magnificence, ambassadors from the mightiest kingdoms of Christendom, to say nothing of deputies and officials. Such was the assembly of the States-

General at Worms. And gathered, the reader may ask, for what? It was really to hear the trial and judge the son of a poor miner. Dressed in his monk's frock and hood, pale-faced and worn with the fatigues and hazards of his recent life, he stood silent and self-possessed in the midst of more than five thousand spectators. "Yet prophet-like that lone one stood, with dauntless words and high," answering all questions with force and modesty.

After a moment of intense stillness, **the chancellor of Treves** addressed him in a loud voice, first in Latin and then in German: "Martin Luther, You are called upon by his imperial Majesty to answer two questions: first, Do you admit that these books," pointing to about twenty volumes placed on a table, "were written by you? Secondly, Are you prepared to retract these books, and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions you have advanced there?" Then Luther replied: That, in respect to the first question, he did undoubtedly acknowledge these books, and would never disclaim any one of them. As to the second, he asked that some further space for consideration might be granted him, that he might so frame his answer as neither to offend the word of God nor endanger his own soul. One day was granted. Whatever may have been Luther's reason for this request we need not stay to inquire: one thing is certain, that it was overruled by God to discover and reveal the secret springs of Luther's strength and courage, and the strength and courage of faith in all ages. That wonderful prayer which was offered up shortly before his second appearing, is the most precious document in the whole history of the Reformation. We cannot characterize it; we give it from d'Aubigné's history.

LUTHER'S PRAYER

For a moment Luther felt troubled; his eye was off the blessed Lord; he was thinking of the many great princes before whom he had to stand; his faith grew weak, he was like Peter when he looked at the waves in place of the Person of Christ, he felt as if he would sink. In this state of soul he fell on his face and groaned deep thoughts which could not be uttered. It was the Spirit making intercession for him. A friend hearing his distress, listened, and was privileged to hear the broken cries of a broken heart ascending to the throne of God.

"O Almighty and Everlasting God! How terrible is this world! Behold, it openeth its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in Thee!... How weak is the flesh, and Satan how strong! If it is only in the strength of this world that I must put my trust, all is over!... My last hour is come; my condemnation has been pronounced!... O God! O God!... O God! Do Thou help me against all the wisdom of the world! Do this; Thou shouldest do this... Thou alone... for this is not my work, but Thine. I have nothing to do here, nothing to contend for with these great ones of the world! I should desire to see my days flow on peaceful and happy. But the cause is Thine... And it is a righteous and eternal cause. O Lord! help me! Faithful and unchangeable God! in no man do I place my trust. It would be vain! All that is

of man is uncertain, all that cometh of man fails... O God! my God! hearest Thou me not?... Thou hidest Thyself! Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it well!... Act, then, O God!... Stand at my side, for the sake of Thy well-beloved Jesus Christ, who is my defence, my shield, and my strong tower.”

After a short time of silent struggling with the Lord, he again broke out in those short, deep, broken utterances, which must be experienced before they can be understood. It is the breaking of the bones of carnal confidence and self-importance; this is being broken down in the presence of God “Lord! where stayest Thou?... O my God! where art Thou?... Come! Come! I am ready!... I am ready to lay down my life for Thy truth... patient as a lamb. For it is the cause of justice — it is Thine!... I will never separate Thyself from me, neither now nor through eternity!... And though the world should be filled with devils... though my body, which is still the work of Thy hands, should be slain, be stretched upon the pavement, should be cut in pieces... reduced to ashes... my soul is Thine?... Yes! Thy word is my assurance of it. My soul belongs to Thee! It shall abide for ever with Thee... Amen... O God! help me!... Amen.”

This prayer explains the state of Luther’s mind and the character of his communion with God, better far than any description from the pen of his biographer. Here the living God is qualifying His servant for His work by giving him to taste the bitterness of death. (2 Cor. 4: 7-12) Luther was but emerging from the darkness of superstition; he had not fully learnt the blessed truth of death and resurrection, of his oneness with Christ, of his acceptance in the Beloved. But his nearness to God, the power of his prayer, and the reality of his communion, refresh our hearts after an interval of three hundred years.

LUTHER’S SECOND APPEARANCE

The fruits of his prayer were soon to be seen. Finding himself again standing before Charles, the chancellor began by saying, “Martin Luther, Yesterday you begged for a delay, which has now expired... Reply, therefore, to the question put by his Majesty. Will you defend your books, or will you retract them?” Luther turned towards the Emperor, and with a serious countenance, wherein modesty, mildness, and firmness, were strikingly blended, he entered fully into the contents of his books. Much that he said must have been very gratifying to the Germans, but most galling to the Romans. Take the following as an example: — “In one class of my books I have written against the papacy and the doctrines of the papists, as of men who by their iniquitous tenets and examples have desolated the christian world both with temporal and spiritual calamities. Their false doctrines, their scandalous lives, their evil ways, are known to all mankind. And is it not evident that the human doctrines and laws of the popes entangle, torment, and grieve the consciences of the faithful, while at the same time the crying and perpetual extortions of

Rome swallow up the wealth and the riches of Christendom, and especially of this illustrious nation!" But such explanations of his books were not what the diet required. He was pressed for a distinct avowal of retractation. "Will you or will you not retract?" exclaimed the orator of the diet.

Luther now replied without hesitation. "Since your most serene Majesty and the princes require from me a clear, simple, and precise answer, I will give it thus: — I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is as clear as day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God, *I cannot and I will not retract*, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience." And then, looking round on the assembly — on all that was mighty in power, on all that was venerable for antiquity — he nobly said, "*Here I take my stand; I cannot do otherwise: may God be my help! Amen.*"

Astonished at a display of courage and veracity entirely new to them, many of the princes found it difficult to conceal their admiration, while others were utterly confounded. But, as some have said, in these words, in Luther's honest protest, the whole heart and meaning of the Reformation lay. Were men to go on for ever saying that this and that was true, because the pope affirmed it? or were the decrees of popes and the canons of councils thenceforward to be tried, like the words of other men, by the ordinary laws of evidence, by the infallible standard of the word of God? The death-knell of Absolutism was rung.

When Luther had ceased speaking, the chancellor said, "Since you do not retract, the Emperor and the States of the empire will consider what course they must adopt towards an obstinate heretic. The diet will meet tomorrow morning to hear the Emperor's decision."

The general effect produced on the diet both by the address and the demeanour of Luther was unquestionably favourable to his position. He gave his enemies cause to fear him. In the presence of so many powerful ecclesiastics, who were thirsting for his blood, he feared not to denounce in his usual vigorous style the iniquities of popery. But what was even more for the cause of Reform, he inspired his friends with his own confidence in the truth. After a night of restless anxiety and discussion by all parties, the morning came, and with it heavy tidings for Luther. The policy of the Vatican prevailed in the councils of Charles. The following edict he presented to the diet: -

"Descended from the christian emperors of Germany, from the Catholic kings of Spain, from the archdukes of Austria, from the dukes of Burgundy, who have all been renowned as defenders of the Roman faith, I am firmly resolved to imitate the example of my ancestors. A single monk, misled by his own

folly, has risen against the faith of Christendom. To stay such impiety, I will sacrifice my kingdoms, my treasures, my friends, my body, my blood, my soul, and my life. I am about to dismiss the **Augustinian Luther**, forbidding him to cause the least disorder amongst the people, I shall then proceed against him and his adherents, as contumacious heretics, by excommunication, by interdict, and by every means calculated to destroy them. I call on the members of the States to behave like faithful Christians.”

Severe as this sentence may appear, it was far from satisfying the papists. They endeavoured to procure the violation of the safe-conduct, and re-enact the tragedy perpetrated by their ancestors at Constance. “The Rhine,” said they, “should receive his ashes as it had received those of John Huss a century ago.” But these treacherous suggestions were overthrown by the spirit of national honour which prevailed among the German princes, and which animated the greater part of the diet. There remained now one only hope for the papal party, and that — we blush to write — assassination. “A plot,” says Froude, “was formed to assassinate Luther on his return to Saxony. The insulted majesty of Rome could be vindicated at least by the dagger. But this, too, failed. The Elector heard what was intended. A party on horse, disguised as banditti, waylaid the Reformer upon the road, and carried him off to the Castle of Wartburg, where he remained out of harm’s way till the general rising of Germany placed him beyond the reach of danger.”²⁴¹

REFLECTIONS ON THE APPEARANCE OF LUTHER AT WORMS

That such a thing should have happened at all, was of itself a signal victory over the papacy. His entry into Worms was like a **triumphal procession**. There, although a twice-condemned, excommunicated heretic and cut off from all human society, he is privileged to stand before the most august assembly in the world. The pope had condemned him to perpetual silence, and he is now invited, in most respectful language, to speak before thousands. And, by the good providence of God, he was permitted to address attentive hearers from all parts of Christendom, at considerable length and with great boldness, yet without interruption and almost without reproof. “An immense revolution,” says d’Aubigné, “had thus been effected by Luther’s instrumentality. Rome was already descending from her throne, and it was the voice of a monk that caused this humiliation.” The mere fact of his trial at Worms announced to the world that the spell of popery was broken, and that the victory of the Reformation was secured. A poor, persecuted, friendless, solitary monk sets himself against the majesty of the triple crown. The secular arm is called in, but the Emperor refuses to execute the pope’s decree. The ban falls to the ground. A spiritual power superior to both prevails, and the shout of triumph is heard in many lands.

²⁴¹ *Short Studies on Great Subjects.*

It is perfectly clear that neither pope, prelate, nor sovereign knew the real condition of the public mind. A generation had grown up to manhood who had been taught by the men of letters to think for themselves and to have opinions of their own. Luther knew that his own thoughts about popery and the word of God were the thoughts of thousands. Nevertheless he stood alone in that assembly as God's witness for the truth. He maintained the private right of reading and interpreting the word of God, the duty of submitting to its authority, in the face of the high-handed assumption of both church and emperor. Among all the princes present Luther had not so much as one openly avowed protector, or even a single advocate of any rank or influence, in the assembly. But the God who strengthened Elijah to withstand the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, and who stood by Paul when he appeared before the nobles and princes of this world, and before Caesar himself, gave a wisdom and power to the monk of Wittenberg which nothing could overcome, and which made all men to see that true spiritual power and happy liberty were only to be found in a good conscience, through faith in the truth, but more especially through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.²⁴²

²⁴² *Universal History*, Bagster, vol. 7, p. 18. Waddington, vol. 1, p. 364. d'Aubigné, vol. 2, p. 347. For lengthy details, see Milner, vol. 4.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 35

LUTHER AT WARTBURG

The sudden and mysterious disappearance of Luther caused no small anxiety to his friends and triumph to his foes. The most extraordinary rumours were circulated throughout the provinces, so that Luther's name, and character, and works, were more eagerly talked of now than ever. But as secrecy was necessary to his safety, friends as well as enemies were kept for some months uncertain as to the place of his concealment.

Wartburg castle, the place of his captivity, and which he called his "Patmos," had been the ancient and impregnable residence of the landgraves of Thuringia, and overlooked, from its mountain situation, the neighbourhood of Eisenach, the place of his mother's nativity, and the scene of his own early education. That no suspicion might be excited as to his real character, he was obliged to throw off his frock and cowl, allow his beard and hair to grow, and assume the attire and the title of a country gentleman — **Squire George**. For the rigid monk, the active Reformer, the daring antagonist of Rome, the change was extreme. He was frequently visited with severe attacks of bodily illness and mental distress. In some of his letters, dated from the Isle of Patmos, he complains bitterly of the indolent habits he was contracting, and the consequences of his sumptuous fare. But though he was cut off from his public labours in the university and the pulpit, he was most diligent with his pen. His enemies thought him a great deal too active in his retreat. He laboured with indefatigable industry, and published many new books. It was in this retirement that he commenced the greatest and the most useful of all his works — the translation of the Bible into the German language. During his solitude, in the summer months of 1521, he actually finished the New Testament; and he also took great pains to improve his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages, for the purpose of rendering his intended version of the whole Bible more complete.

REFLECTIONS ON LUTHER'S CAPTIVITY

Here we may pause a moment, and learn a useful lesson. Like a chained eagle, Luther sits all day in the midst of the dark forests of Thuringia, gloomily brooding over the degraded state of the church and clergy, and violently agitated as to the results of the diet of Worms, the welfare of his friends, and the progress of truth. The chain galls him; he has not accepted it from the Lord, his health suffers; he passes whole nights without sleep, the **melancholy tendencies** of his mind increase, and he imagines that he is incessantly assaulted by Satan. "Believe me," he writes, "I am delivered over

to a thousand imps of Satan in this solitude; and it is much easier to contend with incarnate fiends — that is, men — than with wicked spirits in high places.” He longs to be at liberty, and to stand in the front of the battle; and, fearing lest he should be accused of deserting the field, he exclaimed, “I would rather be stretched on coals of fire than lie here half dead.” And all mankind would say, “a crisis has come, the active efforts, the resistless appeals of Luther are more needful now than ever, for if the leader of this mighty movement be constrained to retire at such a moment, the cause of truth must suffer, and its enemies triumph. But in spite of all human reasoning, the Master says, No. My ways are not as your ways, nor My thoughts as your thoughts. The captivity of My servant shall be the liberty of millions.” And so it proved. No event in his history tended so much to enrich his mind, or mature his views as to the nature and extent of the reform which the condition of things around required, besides the books which he wrote, and the scriptures which he translated. May we learn to bow, well-pleased, when the Master’s orders are to be quiet, as well as when He says, Go forth and serve in the field to which I have called you, and for which I have fitted you. Moses in Midian, Paul in Arabia, and John in Patmos, are divine lessons for all the Lord’s servants.

LUTHER RETURNS TO WITTEMBERG

During his absence at the Wartburg there was found no one among his followers who was properly qualified to maintain the reformed doctrines or direct the reformed community. The mild and peaceful scholar, **Philip Melancthon**, had a gentle and fruitful mind well fitted to enrich others but unsuited for the tumult and the storm of republican notions, combined with religious fanaticism. **Andrew Carlstadt**, a doctor of Wittemberg, an early friend of Luther, and by no means ignorant of the truth, was induced to head a few fanatical persons who fancied they were in immediate communication with deity, and arrogated to themselves the title of prophets and apostles. Their numbers increased; youths from the university joined them. They denounced Luther’s attempt at Reformation to be neither sufficiently extensive, nor thorough. In their extravagant enthusiasm they proclaimed, “Woe! woe! woe!” to the false church and corrupt bishops. They entered churches, broke and burnt images, and proceeded to other excesses, which endangered the dawn of liberty and the peace of the commonwealth. The civil authorities interfered, and several of the zealots were cast into prison.

The cry for Luther was universal. He heard it at Wartburg. Without the consent of the Elector, and with much danger to his life, he hastened to the scene of confusion. Among the names who have obtained a memorial in history by this folly, we are most familiar with Nicholas Stork Mark Stubner, Martin Cellary, and Thomas Munzer. The latter **Munzer** — appears again in 1525, at the head of a rebellion of the peasants, which was called the peasants’ war.

Luther returned from his Patmos to Wittemberg in the month of March, 1522. He was received by doctors, students and citizens, with sincere demonstrations of joy and affection. His triumph was easy, but all by moral power. "I will preach," he said, "I will speak, I will write; but I will constrain none, for faith is a voluntary act. I stood up against the pope, indulgences, and papists, but without violence or tumult. I put forward God's word, I preached and wrote this was all I did." He ascended the pulpit, and his powerful voice resounded once more through the agitated multitudes. On seven following days he delivered seven sermons. "They were followed by the most complete success," says the historian. "Every symptom of disorder immediately disappeared; the city was restored to its former tranquillity, the university to its legitimate studies and rational principles and Carlstadt, the unfortunate author of the confusion, overwhelmed by the predominance of a superior genius withdrew not long afterwards from the field of his disgrace." Luther was greatly opposed to violence. His fine principle was — before you can advantageously remove the objects of idolatry, such as images, you must first remove the errors from the minds of the worshippers. And this he sincerely believed could only be done by the word of God, which he longed to present to his nation in their own forcible tongue.

LUTHER AND THE GERMAN BIBLE

When peace was established he turned to his favourite object — the translation of the New Testament, and after it had undergone the more critical revision of Melancthon, he published it in the September of 1522. The appearance of such a work, and at a time when the minds of all men were in a most excited condition, produced, as might be supposed the most extraordinary effects. As if carried on the wings of the wind, it spread from one end of Germany to the other, and to many other countries. "It was written," according to d'Aubigné, "in the very tone of the holy writings, in a language yet in its youthful vigour, and which for the first time displayed its great beauties, it interested, charmed, and moved the lowest as well as the highest ranks." Even the papal historian, Maimbourg, confesses that "**Luther's translation** was remarkably elegant, and in general so much approved, that it was read by almost everybody throughout Germany. Women of the first distinction studied it with the most industrious and persevering attention, and obstinately defended the tenets of the Reformer against bishops, monks, and Catholic doctors." It was a national book. It was the book of the people — the book of God. This work served more than all Luther's writings to the spread and consolidation of the reformed doctrines. The Reformation was now placed on its own proper foundation — the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

The following statistics show the wonderful success of the work: "A second edition appeared in the month of December; and by 1533 seventeen editions had been printed at Wittemberg, thirteen at Augsburg, twelve at Basle, one at Erfurt, one at Grimma, one at Leipsic, and thirteen at Strasburg."

Meanwhile Luther proceeded in the accomplishment of his great work — the translation of the Old Testament. With the assistance of Melancthon and other friends, the work was published in parts as they were finished, and wholly completed in the year 1530. Luther's great work was now done. Hitherto he had spoken, but now God Himself was to speak to the hearts and consciences of men. Vast, wonderful, mighty thought! The divine testimonies of truth presented to a great nation, which had hitherto been "perishing for lack of knowledge." The divine word no longer to be concealed under an unknown tongue; the way of peace no longer to be obscured by the traditions of men; and the testimony of God Himself concerning Christ and salvation rescued from the superstitions of the Romish system.

THE GENERAL PROGRESS OF THE REFORMATION

The mighty movement on which we have now entered knew no limit, no end. The awakening in the German empire, the revival of the gospel, and the rising interests of the Reformation, had deeply affected the general state of Europe. Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Spain, France, and the British isles, were drawn into the stream of the great religious revolution. It soon ceased to be a merely local, or even a national, question; it became the great overwhelming topic of the time. Every government found that the Reformation formed part of its scheme and policy, willingly or unwillingly, and that the constitutions of the most ancient kingdoms were shaken by this new contest about religion.

Men were passing to and fro, and ever carrying fresh tidings of the wonderful things that were being done. Vessels were arriving at all harbours, and secretly discharging packages of new translations, and of the pamphlets and sermons of the Reformers. The interest became universal. But it was not to be expected that the old church, when backed up by the civil power, would allow the new opinions to grow up in her very bosom without a struggle to crush them. Nevertheless, earnest-minded men, seeing that a Reformation was needed, and quite unable to stifle their convictions, preached Christ boldly. Some true, honest hearts were found in those sifting times beneath the monkish gown, men who dared to preach Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth — that God only could forgive sins through faith in the precious blood of Christ. The clergy, perceiving that such doctrines were destructive of their power, their privileges, their very existence, raised the loud cry of "*Heresy! Heresy!*" Church excommunications were followed by royal edicts; persecution was waged against the preachers, apprehensions became frequent, the torture was applied, the flames were kindled, and from this time the thrilling stories of Protestant martyrs and martyrdoms begin. For a time bigotry triumphs, the godly suffer, but the power of the Lord and His truth mightily prevail.

But out on these troubled waters we cannot venture at present. We must return for a short time to Germany, and witness the rise of **Protestantism**, which gave a new direction to the spiritual history of mankind.

THE REFORMATION AND HENRY THE EIGHTH

The rapid diffusion of Luther's New Testament, and the immense effect which it produced in the homes of the people, awakened the deepest apprehensions of the papal party. The temporal powers, influenced by the ecclesiastics, prohibited, under the most severe penalties, the circulation of the condemned book. One of the greatest kings of Christendom now rose up against the audacious monk of Wittenberg. The gallant **Henry VIII** of England, who had been destined by his father for the church, thought the present a good opportunity to show his talent, and wrote a book on the seven sacraments, in answer to Luther's treatise on the "Babylonish Captivity." None of the Reformer's compositions so excited the indignation of the papists as his "Babylonish Captivity." Need we wonder, then, that such an advocate was flattered and caressed by the pope, and complimented with the name, "**Defender of the Faith**," which is still one of the titles of the English crown? In reply to his royal assailant, Luther was not remarkable for his moderation, but betrayed by his irritable temper to use an abusive style of language which would have been better repressed.

Towards the close of the year 1521, an important change took place in the policy of the Vatican. Pope Leo died. Yes the brilliant but notoriously immoral Leo died — died, no longer to judge, but to be judged; no longer to roll out his thunders against heretics, but to be himself measured by the standard of eternal truth, and weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. He died denouncing the doctrine of justification by faith, as destructive of all moral obligations, while he and his dissolute cardinals were dissipating their time and health in prodigal and luxurious pleasures, and in promoting expensive and licentious spectacles at the theatre. He was succeeded by **Adrian VI**, a man more rigid in his morals than Leo, but no less opposed to the truth of the gospel.

LUTHERAN CHURCHES

Soon after Luther's return from Wartburg, the States of the empire assembled in **Diet at Nuremberg**. The bishops, who formed a numerous portion of the assembly, called loudly for the execution of the sentence which had been given against the arch-heretic. But after some altercation and without coming to any agreement, the diet was adjourned till the autumn following.

Meanwhile the Reformer, in open defiance of the papal excommunication and the imperial edict, was going on steadily with his own proper work, preaching and writing, and Melancthon with his theology. It may be justly said of this period that "the word of God mightily grew and prevailed." Monks left their monasteries, and became active instruments in propagating the gospel; and

Luther mentions, in a letter to Spalatin, the escape of nine nuns from their convents, among whom he speaks of Catherine von Bora, who afterwards became his wife. New services of worship were being gradually introduced into what were now termed Lutheran churches, but with great delicacy and tenderness. As a wise man, Luther exercised great patience towards those who were but creeping slowly out of the old system into the new. After his noble stand at Worms, he appears very little in what we may call the outworks of the Reformation. There he witnessed for God and His truth as few men have ever done. There is a grandeur and a moral sublimity in his position on that occasion which stands alone in his history. The true moral glory of the Reformation declines from that moment. The political element enters, and soon predominates. The outward aggressive action and the protection of the reformed churches fall into the hands of the temporal princes. This was the failure, the sad failure, the original sin, of the Reformers. But we shall see it more fully when we examine the epistle to Sardis.

The attention of the new pope, Adrian VI, had been turned to the affair of Luther, and to the restoration of the peace of the church. He professed to lament the great abuses of the papal See under his predecessor, and decided on adopting a different line of policy. On the 25th of November, 1522, he addressed a "Brief" to the diet re-assembled at Nuremberg. He deplored the ravages of the church through the perversity of a heretic, whom neither the paternal admonition of Leo nor his condemnation, confirmed by the edict of Worms, had been able to silence. He entreated the sovereigns to have recourse to the sword, he reminded them how God had punished Dathan and Abiram for their resistance to the high priest, and pressed upon them the noble example of their pious ancestors, who had, by an act of perfect justice, delivered the world from the heretics, Huss and Jerome, who were even at this moment revived in Luther.

"THE HUNDRED GRIEVANCES"

The papal party rose up in a body, and shouted for vengeance on Luther; but the great body of the temporal princes judged rather that the moment had arrived when they might shake off the burden and the bondage of Rome under which they had so long groaned, and of which they had so often complained, but to no good purpose. Thus it was that, while contending for the doctrines of the Reformation, they prepared the memorial of "**The Hundred Grievances,**" so celebrated in the annals of Germany.

The contrast between the temporal and the spiritual elements now became manifest in the great Reformation movement, though acting together for the humiliation and overthrow of the universal oppressor. It was no longer the friendless, the single-handed, monk meeting, in the power of God and His truth, the Goliath of popery, or the peaceful triumphs of Worms, but angry, political strife, and military enterprise. The light and truth of God in connection with the Reformation seem to have been arrested at this period of

its history. We fail to discover any advancement in the farther apprehension of truth by the Reformers from the time that the princes came forward to extend it by the sword. Though Luther was a man of the most genuine faith, he failed to see the effects of the co-operation of the princes for their own selfish ends. But it wrought a spiritual blight on the results and triumphs of faith.

The “Grievances” need not be enumerated here; they were chiefly of an ecclesiastical character, and such as all other nations in Christendom groaned under. Oppressive taxation, perpetual levies of tenths under false pretences, the intrusion of cardinals into the best benefices, the ignorance and entire incapacity of the resident pastors, the pernicious superabundance of festivals, the profusion of absolutions and indulgences, the exactions of the clergy for the administration of the sacraments; indeed the universal venality of things sacred, and the general immorality of the spiritual order. “But though the object of the princes,” says Waddington “was no more than to reform the externals of the church while that of Luther was to regenerate the religion at any peril to the church, yet the diversity of their views might not at the moment be perceptible to either, through the ardour of a common hatred, and, to a certain extent, a common cause.”²⁴³ Nevertheless, we may add, the results were ruinous to the progress of light and truth.

EVENTS ADVERSE TO THE REFORMATION

While the Reformation, through the instrumentality of Luther, was gathering strength, and spreading rapidly in all parts of Europe, several evils arose to retard its progress and disgrace its character.

In the autumn of 1524 the **German peasants**, long oppressed by the exhausting, consuming, system of popery, rose in rebellion against their ecclesiastical tyrants. Besides the pomp and luxury of the higher clergy, the whole swarm of inferior clergy was likewise to be supported. But this was not all; new orders were perpetually rising up, and the old mendicants spread like locusts over the whole surface of the country, and devoured with impunity the substance of the people. There had long been deep murmurings and partial outbreaks, but the universal excitement of the moment seemed to give the signal for a general rising. Nearly all the provinces in Upper Germany were in a state of insurrection. Like some sudden tornado, they fell on the religious houses, plundered monasteries, demolished images, and were guilty of other similar excesses. As was usual in those times, the spiritual nobles and the locust friars had given the greatest provocation to revolt, so they were the first against whom the torrent of popular indignation was directed.

The greatest part of this furious rabble consisted of peasants, and hence the calamity has been called the *war of the peasants*. The sedition, at its commencement, was altogether of a civil nature, for these poor peasants only

²⁴³ Dean Waddington, vol. 2, pp. 43-45.

wished to be relieved from some part of their burdens, and to enjoy greater freedom. But some pernicious fanatics joined them, and turned it into a religious and holy war. The storm raged violently for some time, but, as usual, it passed off in the defeat and slaughter of the insurgents. In the unfortunate battle of the peasants with the army of the German princes, at Mulhausen, 1525, **Thomas Munzer**, their principal leader, was taken prisoner and publicly executed.

The papists and the enemies of the Reformation endeavoured to identify these wild tumults with the principles of Luther, but entirely without ground. They were unconnected with his followers, and not directly occasioned by his writings.

THE ANABAPTISTS

After the death of Munzer and the destruction or dispersion of the peasants, another sect arose, usually called **Anabaptists**, because they immersed all their converts after they had been already christened. This sect greatly troubled and perplexed the Reformers. What the Gnostics were to the Fathers, what the Manicheans were to the Catholics, such were the Anabaptists to the Reformers. They were purely fanatical. "The leaders claimed the gift of immediate inspiration, the privilege of direct and frequent intercourse with the Deity; and their deluded followers believed them. They had their visions and revelations of the past and the future; their numbers increased with great rapidity, and they followed everywhere in the train of the Reformation." Everywhere it was the cry of these enthusiasts, "No tribute, no tithes, all things in common, no magistrates, the kingdom of Christ is at hand, the baptism of infants is an invention of the devil." They sorely tried the spirit of Luther, as they spoke of themselves as the true and thorough Reformers. He observes concerning them: "Satan rages; the new sectarians called Anabaptists increase in numbers, and display great external appearances of strictness of life, as also great boldness in death, whether they suffer by fire or by water."

In the course of two years these fanatics had spread in considerable numbers over Silesia, Bavaria, Swabia, and Switzerland. But as some of their principles tended to the overthrow of social order, political decrees were issued against them. Persecution began; and as both the Saxon and the Swiss Reformers were opposed to them, they were everywhere visited by the civil power with the greatest severities. But they bore their sufferings with unconquerable fortitude. Neither sword, nor fire, nor gibbet, moved them to retractation of the show of fear. With the capture and the execution of their leaders at Munster, in 1536, the sect seems to have been suppressed.

THE SACRAMENTARIAN QUESTION

In the same year that the Anabaptists made their appearance (1524), a long and pernicious controversy arose among those who had withdrawn from the Romish communion, respecting the manner in which the body and blood of

Christ are present in the sacred supper. Luther and his adherents, while they renounced the papal error of **transubstantiation** — that the bread and wine after consecration remained no longer, but were transmuted into the body and blood of Christ — yet did maintain that persons coming to the sacred supper participated truly of the body and blood of Christ, together with the bread and wine. This doctrine gave rise to the term, **consubstantiation**. **Ulric Zwingle**, the Swiss Reformer, and his adherents were much more simple, being more fully delivered from the traditions of Rome. They maintained that the body and blood of the Lord are not present in the holy supper, but that the bread and the wine are merely symbols or emblems by which people should be moved to remember the death of Christ, and the blessing flowing therefrom.

As nearly all the Swiss divines, and not a few in Upper Germany, followed the teaching of Zwingle, and Luther and his friends contended strenuously for his doctrine, great disunion was created among the true friends of the Reformation, which was artfully fomented by the papists. But more of this afterwards, if the Lord will. We now turn to the

POLITICAL CHIEFS OF THE REFORMATION

The troubled state of the European nations, the frequent wars between Charles V and Francis I, and the threatening attitude of the Turks, so occupied and perplexed the Emperor, that during several years he could not give much attention to the concerns of Germany and especially to the difficult subject, the new heresy. In all this the hand of the Lord is most manifest. While Charles was keeping vigilant watch over his French, Spanish, and Italian affairs, Luther and his associates, by their writings, lectures, and admonitions, were spreading the truth, and deepening its hold on the hearts of the common people; and the political chiefs, or evangelical princes, were drawing closer and closer together for the defence of their faith and their political liberty.

The perfidious pope, **Clement VI**, and his able nuncio, **Campeggio**, were determined to have the edict of Worms enforced and the complete extirpation of the Lutheran heresy. But this could not be done without the co-operation of powerful sovereigns. Charles had been slow in obeying papal orders. But a variety of circumstances seemed to combine at this moment which favoured the policy of the Vatican, and threatened to extinguish the infant Reformation. But God is above all. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take council together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” (Ps. 2: 2-4) The sword of the Emperor that was whetted for the slaughter of the Reformers, was turned through the treachery of the pope against Rome itself. Thus it happened: —

At the battle of Pavia, in 1526, Francis I was vanquished by Charles V and made his prisoner. As the captive King of France could be of no further service to the pope, he immediately transferred his friendship to his conqueror. An alliance was formed with the Emperor the King of England, and the Archduke Ferdinand. The principal article of this treaty was — “That all parties should unite their forces and march in arms against the disturbers of the Catholic religion and the insulters of the pope, and avenge every outrage committed against the See of Rome.” By the craft of Satan, the same spirit prevailed in other negotiations of the great powers at this same moment. The treaty of Madrid, which restored Francis to liberty, provided that he should join the alliance. The three most powerful princes of Europe were now in association with the pope for the express purpose of executing the decrees of Worms, and for the extermination by fire and sword of the Lutheran confederacy.

THE FIRST DIET OF SPIRES

The Diet of Spires, which opened in June 1526, was to strike the decisive blow. Ferdinand, the Emperor’s brother, presided. The oft-repeated imperial message to the diet was read. It demanded that all contentions respecting religious subjects should cease; that the church customs should be maintained entire; that the edict of Worms should be speedily executed, and that the Lutherans should be forcibly destroyed. The princes of Germany, from not only a common object but a common danger, drew closer together. The chief of these were — John, Elector of Saxony; Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, the Archduke of Prussia; George and Casimir, Margraves of Brandenburg; the Elector Palatine; the Dukes of Lunenburg, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg; and the Princes of Anhalt and Henneberg. They met in conference and passed the following resolution: -

“That they would use their utmost exertions to advance the glory of God, and to maintain a doctrine in conformity with His word, rendering thanks to Him for having revived in their time the true doctrine of justification by faith, which had been long buried under a mass of superstition; and that they would not permit the extinction of the truth, which God had so lately revealed to them.”

This is the **virgin resolution** of the princes, and the simplest and the purest they ever promulgated. There is nothing political, social, or financial here. The firmness of the evangelical party, their refusing to obey the edict of the Emperor, astonished the papists. But a voice from Him who is above all and over all, brought the discussions of the diet to a speedy termination. Ambassadors arrived from the King of Hungary, representing the calamities with which that country was overwhelmed, and the danger which threatened all Europe from the triumphant progress of the Turks. This drew the attention of Ferdinand off Luther, and hurried him to his own dominions which lay in that quarter.

What the victorious arms of Solyman accomplished in the case of Ferdinand, the treachery of Clement did in the case of Charles. Scarcely had Francis I escaped from his captivity, when the pope, dreading the power of Charles in Italy, entered into an alliance with the French, the Duke of Milan, and the Venetians, against Charles. At the same time he absolved Francis from his oath, and authorized the violation of the treaty of Madrid. This so inflamed the resentment of the Emperor, that he abolished the pontifical authority throughout Spain, made war upon the pope in Italy, captured the city by his general, Charles of Bourbon; which was given up to all the horrors of a sack. The life and property of Rome were in the hands of the infuriated German and Spanish soldiers. The pope himself was treated with much personal abuse and indignity. There are few passages in history in which the overruling hand of a retributive Providence is more plainly manifested.

In the midst of these perplexities, a resolution was duly passed, which turned out most favourable for the Reformers. It was to this effect: "That a petition should be presented to the Emperor, urging him to call a free council without delay; and that in the meantime every one should be at liberty to manage the religious concerns of his own territory, in the manner he saw fit, yet under a due sense of his accountability to God and to the Emperor."

The Reformers, returning home, diligently improved this opportunity for strengthening and extending the cause of reform. Great changes were effected in their forms of worship and in the regulation of their religious affairs; and many inveterate superstitions were expelled. The princes and the people became more and more declared; and the foundation of the future division into Catholic and Protestant States, was laid in the history of the Reformation from 1526 to 1529.

THE SECOND DIET OF SPIRES

In the early spring of 1529, the Emperor called the famous Second Diet of Spires. The states of the empire assembled with great readiness. "The papal party especially mustered all their forces and assumed a warlike and insulting attitude. Never on any like occasion had there appeared so large an assemblage of spiritual nobles; and these more than any betrayed by their looks and manners the malignity of their designs. One or two princes, who had hitherto been considered neutral or even favourable to the Reformation, now declared against it. Others came, attended by considerable escorts of cavalry, breathing hatred and defiance. Nothing less was meditated than the immediate extinction of the heresy by the sword."

The imperial message assumed a high and despotic tone. The Emperor complained of the changes in religion, and the disrespect which had been shown to his own authority: for he claimed to be the chief of the christian world, and demanded unreserved obedience to his decrees. He observed that the religious innovations which he had proscribed were daily increasing in

numbers, and that too under the pretext of the edict of Spire in 1526, which edict, by virtue of his absolute power, he abrogated as in direct opposition to his orders.

The decree of the Emperor was highly offensive and grievous to the German nobles. It struck at the very root of their privileges and their independence. The evangelical princes and the deputies of the free cities took up a strong but a just position. They affirmed that the edict of Spire had been drawn up according to the usual forms; that the commissioners to the Emperor had consented to it in his name; that it was the legal act of the whole body of the Republic; and that it was beyond the imperial power to annul it.

THE PROTEST

The discussions which arose on this subject were long and often furious. The Catholics had their most able and artful disputants present, such as the celebrated **Eck**. To the oft repeated cry, "The execution of the edict of Worms," was now added, "The abrogation of the edict of Spire." But the Reformers were firm and united, and they reasoned with great justice. At length, Ferdinand, who presided in the diet demanded with an imperious tone, the unconditional submission of the German princes to the decision of the Assembly. *The Reformers protested*. This was on the 19th of April, 1529. That simple act being disregarded by the papists, the Reformers presented on the following day, in writing, a second and more elaborate remonstrance, and appealed to the Emperor and a future council. On that account the Reformers received the designation of **The Protestants**. This is the origin of the term which is now used to denote all those numerous churches and sects which protest on principle against the doctrines, rites, and ceremonies of the church of Rome.

This noble manifesto, which no doubt perplexed the papal party by its firmness and its justice, was signed by John, Elector of Saxony, Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, George of Brandenburg, Ernest and Francis of Lunenburg, Wolfgang of Anhalt, and by the deputies of fourteen imperial cities. But the signatures of no theologians, no doctors of divinity, no university professors, appear. The great Reformation, or religious revolution, has passed into the hands of the powers of this world. There was no Luther at Spire as at Worms. Still both he and his friends were labouring in their studies their pulpits, their universities, for the peaceful progress of the word of God, and the triumphs of the gospel of His grace. And the Lord knows how to estimate and reward the labours of His servants. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." (1 Cor. 4:5)

Here **papal Christianity** receives its deadly wound. The reign of Jezebel, as to her absolute authority, is now judged an intolerable tyranny. The Teutonic

mind, which never entirely threw off its native independence, now throws off the galling yoke of Rome. Historically the Thyatiran period closes here. The Protestant period commences, as shadowed forth in the epistles to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, though all four run on to the end. Then every true Christian in all the different systems in Christendom will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and in due time come *with Him* in full manifested glory; when divine judgment will be executed on a ripened apostasy.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 36

PROTESTANTISM

The *Protest* of the Reformers at the second Diet of Spire, in 1529, forms a distinct epoch in the history of the Reformation and of the church. At the same time, we must bear in mind that **Protestantism** is not a novelty. The antiquity of the Roman Catholic religion is one of the vain boasts of her advocates. Popery, they say, is the offspring of antiquity; but Protestantism is the child of yesterday — of Luther and Calvin. The term, we may admit, in its acceptation in the sixteenth century was a novelty, but not that which it represented. The truth of God and its authority over the conscience were what the Protestants contended for. In this sense, Protestantism is as old as Christianity; and has always existed, though overlaid, from the time of Constantine to the sixteenth century, by a mass of error and ever accumulating superstitions.

During this dark and dreary period we have many Protestants. Despotism and error reigning, the faithful and the truth of God existing, necessarily brought out the principles of Protestantism. Besides the Paulicians, the Nestorians, and the Armenians in the East; we have our well-known friends in the West — the Waldenses, the Albigenses, the Wycliffites, and the Bohemians. There were others distinguished by various appellations, such as the Cathari, Leonists, etc.; but these were the four great branches of the noble stock of witnesses for Christ and His gospel; and though called by different names, had one common origin and one common faith.

The Protestantism with which we have now to do, *historically*, dates from the second **Diet of Spire**, 1529. Then it drew its first breath. But in a short time it was embodied in the national constitution of Germany, and stood armed in defence, if needed, of religion and liberty. This was Protestantism in its political form, which alas! savoured not of Christianity, or of the church of God, the body of Christ.

But here we must pause for a little, and meditate on the Lord's address to the church in **Sardis**. The commencement of the Protestant part of Christendom is the right moment to introduce it. There we have the estimate, not of the partial or prejudiced pen of the historian, but of the Lord Himself. This is deeply solemn, but unspeakably precious. May He give us to see His own mind on this great subject!

THE EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Rev. 3: 1-6)

We have seen the general state and the active agencies of popery during the middle ages: we have now to contemplate an entirely new period of the history of the church, and a new order of things as the result of the great Reformation. Many of the moral features of the former periods no doubt exist in Sardis, but its character is sufficiently distinct to mark it as a fresh epoch in ecclesiastical and civil history.

The first four churches, which we have looked at, describe the state of things before the Reformation; the last three represent the general aspect of the professing body after the days of Luther. But we must be careful to distinguish between that positive work of the Spirit of God by means of the reformers, and that lifeless formalism which so soon appeared in the Lutheran and reformed churches, and which too plainly corresponds with the sad condition of Sardis. Scarcely had they tasted the blessings of deliverance from the oppression of Rome when they fell into a state of bondage to the governments of the world, and consequently, a state of spiritual deadness. The Lord Jesus touchingly refers to the same state of things in His address, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” This is the condition of that which is known as *Protestantism*, after the days of the first reformers. True Christians, of course, are not dead, their “life is hid with Christ in God,” but the systems they are in, the Lord here declares to be without vitality. An orthodox creed, outward correctness, a name to live, the unclean spirit of popery gone out, the house swept and garnished, characterises Protestantism; but that awful word from the lips of Jesus — *thou art dead*, stamps its real character as seen by Him. The various systems of our national churches, and of the great professing bodies of dissenters, are described by that fatal word, “*dead*,” — the living reality is gone.

But a glance at the different parts of the Epistle to Sardis will enable us to understand more fully the Lord’s estimate of the various **Protestant systems** by which we are surrounded.

1. As usual in these epistles, the character which the Lord takes is divinely suited to the condition of those whom He is addressing. “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” Here the Lord presents Himself as having for faith, all the fulness of the Holy Spirit, and all authority in government, seven being the symbol of perfection. And this plenitude of spiritual blessing which is in Christ and at His disposal, remains for ever unaltered by the failure or outward ruin of the church so that both the body corporate, and individual Christians are without excuse if they flee for help to mere human resources.

But alas! this was the very snare into which the reformers fell. It happened in this way, and as we still see around us the effects of that mistake, we shall do well to examine it carefully.

2. The two things — the spiritual and the ecclesiastical — which we here see united in Christ, were separated by the reformers. This was the great error of the Reformation. They never saw or understood this truth. In their anxiety to obtain complete deliverance from the threatening power of the pope, backed by Catholic princes; the reformers placed themselves under the protection of the Protestant princes. This was their failure; and from the first **Diet of Spires** in 1526, they almost disappear from the notice of history. They overlooked the grand truth, that all needed power for the church, both inward and outward, spiritual and governmental, dwells in the Head, and that neither the tyranny of Rome, nor the feebleness of a few reformers, weaken in the least this blessed reality. “Whatever the failure of the church may be,” says one, “however it may have coalesced with the world, this remains always true, that the full divine competency of the Holy Ghost in His various attributes is its portion, under Him who is the Head of the church which He cares for, loves, and watches over.”²⁴⁴ He has also the seven stars. It is not said here as it is in the address to Ephesus, “He that holdeth the seven stars *in His right hand;*” but “*He* that hath the seven stars.” In Sardis, although the stars are not seen “in His right hand,” the blessed Lord had not given them up; *this* He could never do, He still has them *under* His hand, we may say, though not *in* it. “These things saith He that *hath* the seven stars.”

But it may be necessary, in explanation of the stars, before going farther, to say a few words.

“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” Throughout scripture “stars” symbolize subordinate power, just as the *sun* symbolizes supreme power; and the “angels” give the idea of representation.²⁴⁵ “Then said they, It is his angel,” or the representative of Peter, whom they believed to be in prison; and surely the angel whom Jacob wrestled with was the angel of Jehovah, for Jacob called the place “the face of God.” (Acts 12; Gen. 32) The

²⁴⁴ *Lectures on the addresses to the Seven Churches.* J.N.D.

²⁴⁵ See Chapter 7: “The Address to the Church of Ephesus”.

instruction, then, which we gather from the meaning of these two words, is perfectly plain and most important; namely, that the angel of the church ought to be the display of spiritual power, as representing Christ on the earth. The responsibility of the professing church is thus placed in the most solemn point of view. Whatever may be the condition of things in the professing church, the Lord Jesus is the one who has the seven Spirits of God, and who has the seven stars; or in other words, all the power of the Spirit, and all ecclesiastical authority. This is what Christ is in His own fulness of blessing for the church, and for the individual Christian also; and surely we ought to be a fair expression of Him who is our life, our wisdom, and our power in this world. May we be kept more in the spirit of obedience and dependence — nearer to Him, *in His right hand*.

3. We think it scarcely necessary to add, after what has been said, that the titles “star” and “angel” give no sanction to the idea of clericalism or humanly appointed ministers. The system which has prevailed since the Reformation leaves a wide door for even unconverted men, if intellectual. But how different the divine system is as seen here! The “stars” have a character of authority under Christ, and act in His name, who is the Head of government, and as “angels” are representatives of the churches, and characterize them to the eye of Christ. What a sublime picture, we may exclaim, of moral identification with Christ and the assembly of God, these titles give! And one man was both. “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” He was the expression of Christ to the church in subordinate power, and of the church to Christ in its moral condition. To such divinely appointed and divinely qualified ministers, there could be no objection in any age or in any country. For such we should never cease to pray.

Having now seen, as we believe, the mind of Christ as to what He is in Himself for His church in all ages and conditions, we shall be better able to understand the position of the Reformed churches as shadowed forth by the state of things in Sardis.

4. In the **old Catholic system**, salvation was made a question, not merely of faith in Christ Jesus, but of church privilege. Every blessing was made to depend on connection with the church of Rome. There was no pardon of sin, no peace with God, no eternal life in Christ, no salvation for the soul, outside of her communion. It was this daring blasphemous dogma that gave her such enormous power during the dark ages, and which made her excommunications the most insupportable inflictions that could possibly be laid on either persons or nations. When the church uttered her voice of censure, the victim of her thunders knew no power of resistance. There was not a man, from the haughtiest monarch to the meanest subject, that did not tremble where the bolt fell. War, famine, pestilence, were tolerable, being temporal calamities; but the pope’s curse blasted the soul for ever, and doomed it to an endless hell. No matter how genuine a man’s faith and piety might be, if he did not belong to the holy Catholic church, and enjoy the

benefit of her sacraments, salvation was impossible. This fearful doctrine, which was then believed, made the church everything — teacher lawgiver, saviour — and fellowship with her the only way to heaven whatever the individual character might be. She also claimed the privilege of saying who were to be called saints and who were not; who were to go direct to heaven after death, and who were to go to purgatory, and how long they were to be detained there. Every man's place and importance, both in time and in eternity, could only be settled by that which called itself the church, the spouse of Christ.

But this monstrous evil which was concealed for centuries in the most congenial darkness, was brought to light at the Reformation. The ripened mass of corruption could escape the execration of mankind no longer. Many rose up in rebellion against it, declared the whole system of popery to be the lie of Satan, and the protest of Luther to be the truth of God. But the reformers, in place of trusting in Christ who presents Himself to faith as superior to all circumstances and making Him their refuge and strength, fell into the snare of looking to the civil magistrate as a sheltering arm from the persecutions of Rome, and as the one who should regulate the movements of the seven stars. Ecclesiastical authority — the appointment of ministers — passed into the hands of the powers of this world. This was the failure of Protestantism from the beginning. Take the testimony of another.

“Thus Protestantism was always wrong, **ecclesiastically**, because it looked up to the civil ruler as the one in whose hand ecclesiastical authority was vested; so that if the church had been, under popery, the ruler of the world, the world now became, in Protestantism, the ruler of the church... Sardis describes what followed the Reformation, when the glow and fervour of truth and the first flush of blessing had passed away, and a cold formalism had set in... In Protestant lands, there has always been a measure of liberty of conscience. But the object of God is not merely to deliver either from gross evils, or from mere details, but that the soul should be right with God, and should allow the Lord to have His way and glory — liberty for the Lord to work by the Holy Ghost according to *His* will. When He is allowed His right place, there is the blessed fruit of it in love and holy liberty. It is not a human liberty derived from the power of the world that we want — though God forbid that we should speak a word against the powers that be, in their own sphere — but the liberty of the Holy Ghost. It is the sin of Christians to have put the powers that be in a false position. The Lord Jesus touches the root of the whole matter in the way He presents Himself to the church of Sardis. Whether it is spiritual power or the outward authority flowing from it, the Lord claims it all as belonging to Himself... When there is faith to look to Him in His place as Head of the church, He will assuredly supply every need. If He listens to the simplest cry of His lambs, does He not enter into the deeper need of His church, which is always His most beloved object? He took His

Headship of the church only in heavenly glory, and He went there not merely to *be*, but to *act*, as the Head.”²⁴⁶

5. In renouncing the errors of popery with reference to the power of the church, the reformers were drawn into an opposite mistake in attaching too much importance to **individual opinion**. On the Catholic principle, the *church* makes the Christian; on the Protestant principle, *Christians* make the church; and consequently, practically viewed, Christ loses His right place in both. A man, the priest would say, can only receive good to his soul from his present connection with Holy Mother Church; the moment he ceases to belong to her, he is lost, the only means of pardon and salvation being the holy sacraments. To be cast out of the church is like being cast into hell; of course, if there be repentance, or ground of some kind for priestly absolution, the soul may be delivered from its awful doom, and restored to the favour of the church, which is eternal life. But man’s place in heaven, on earth, or in hell, must be determined and settled by the church. This is the great foundation principle of Roman Catholicism, and that which gives the priesthood such unlimited power over their deluded votaries. But this kind of influence is not confined to Romanism; it prevails more or less wherever the priestly element is owned: and has done so since the early days of the fathers.

The results of the unhallowed power in the hands of the Romish priesthood became utterly intolerable to all classes of society about the beginning of the sixteenth century. A protest was raised; it soon overspread the whole of Christendom; the Bible was appealed to as of absolute authority **justification by faith** alone without the deeds of the law became the watchword of the reformers. The galling yoke of Rome was thrown off. This was the work of God’s Spirit, and the energy that accomplished the Reformation was all of Him. One result of this great revolution, and that which characterized it, was the transfer of power and importance from the church to the individual. The idea of the church as the dispenser of blessing was rejected, and every man was called upon to read the Bible for himself, examine for himself, believe for himself, be justified for himself, serve God for himself, as he must answer for himself. This was the new-born thought of the Reformation — always right, but it had long been denied by the usurpation of Romanism — individual blessing first, church formation afterwards, was the new order of things; but alas! the true idea of the church of God was then completely lost, and not recovered till the present century, as we shall see by-and-by, the Lord willing.

So far, the reformers were right. The Lord only builds living stones on the rock-foundation; but the Lord’s own place and work in the assembly by the Holy Ghost being lost sight of, men began to unite and build churches, so-called, after their own minds. A great variety of churches or religious societies speedily sprang up in many parts of **Christendom**; but each country

²⁴⁶ *Lectures on the Revelation — Sardis*, by W.K.

carried out its own idea as to how the church should be formed and governed: some thought that church power should be vested in the hands of the civil magistrate; others thought that the church should retain that power within herself; and this difference of opinion resulted in the national and innumerable dissenting bodies which we still see everywhere around us. But the mind of Christ as to the character and constitution of His church, so largely taught in the epistles, seems to have been entirely overlooked by the leaders of the Reformation. Individual faith, as the grand saving principle for the soul, was everywhere insisted on, thank the Lord; and men's souls were saved and God was thereby glorified; but that being secured, men might combine and make churches to suit their own mind. Nothing is more manifest to the student of church history with his New Testament before him than this painful fact.

For example, we read in Ephesians 4, "There is *one body*, and *one spirit*," but according to Protestantism we should read, "There are *many* bodies and one spirit." But there cannot be more than *one* of *divine* constitution. Again, we read, "Endeavouring to *keep the unity of the Spirit*." This plainly means the unity of the Spirit's forming — the Holy Ghost being the formative power of the church which is Christ's body. Christians are the *units* formed by the Holy Spirit into a perfect unity. This we are to endeavour to "keep," not to *make* — to endeavour to maintain, exhibit, carry out in practice. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:12, 13)²⁴⁷

6. Not only are the religious systems represented by Sardis without life, but the *works* of those who belong to them are incomplete. "I have not found thy works *perfect* before God," saith the Lord Jesus. He looks for fruit according to the standard given, and the resources placed at the disposal of faith. He presents Himself as the One who has all perfectness in spiritual power and energy for His church, and as looking for fruit which answers to Himself. He cannot lower His standard in dealing with our shortcomings. "Remember therefore," He says, "how thou hast *received* and *heard*, and hold fast, and repent." He calls their attention in this solemn warning to the *grace* they had received, and the *word* they had heard. He looks for works complete, according to the measure of grace received, and the truth communicated. But, alas, under the plea of "there is no perfection" either in the church or in the individual, the idea of obedience according to the word of God has lost its proper place in the minds of Christians generally.

Take an example of what we mean — a common case.

²⁴⁷ See this subject fully handled in two lectures on Corinthians 12 and 14, by W.K.

A young man is converted through the visit of an evangelist. He has no associations or friends in one place of worship more than in another; but now he must attend somewhere. He is recommended to visit the different churches within reach of his residence, and *settle down* where he thinks he will receive the most good. This is the criterion he is to judge by — his own good. Our own blessing is, no doubt, a most important thing, and ought not to be overlooked; but when it is made the *chief* things, rather than the will of Christ, it must result in darkness of mind and barrenness of soul. Obedience to the word of God would surely be a deeper spring of blessing to our souls than merely seeking our own good, to the neglect of God's mind about the church as revealed in the epistles. But, alas, the common saying is, "There is good in all denominations, but none are all good therefore we must judge for ourselves, and choose the one we think the nearest to scripture — there is no system perfect." But this trite saying, however plausible, can only apply to human systems of religion. God's system must be perfect; and no system will suit Him that is not perfect. The imperfections of those who are in God's system, or endeavouring to carry it out, do not affect its divine perfection.

The distinction between a system and those who are in it, is often lost sight of. Supposing that a few weak or even faulty Christians were gathered to God's centre, that would not make the centre weak or faulty; but supposing, on the other hand, that a company of the best Christians in all Christendom were gathered to a human centre, that would not make it divine. Christ is God's centre, and those who are gathered to that centre by the power of the Holy Ghost are on God's ground, in His presence, and will surely receive His blessing. This should be our *chief object* — to be where God is, in the full assurance of faith, and trust Him for the good of our souls. "For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20; Eph. 4:3, 4)

The difference between the great system of Sardis, and those who were in it, is very manifest in the Lord's message to them. "I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." The church must be judged, not by a lifeless system, but by the resources which it has in Christ the head. The painful fact that things are not now as they were at the beginning, is no reason why Christians should make churches after their own minds and govern them by their own laws. But this has been the sin and practice of Protestantism until their name is *legion*. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard," is the Lord's most solemn warning to Sardis, and to Protestants generally. The revealed word of God should be our only guide and authority, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ our only power. He recalls the church to these two grand points — *grace received, truth heard*. These form the measure of her responsibility, and the standard by which He must judge the great system of Sardis.

7. The **coming of the Lord** is here spoken of as if the church had fallen to the level of the world. “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” This is very similar to what is said with regard to the world in 1 Thessalonians 5:2: “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” The Lord looks for His people to take a distinct path in separation from the world; but in this Sardis failed. “I have not found thy works perfect before God.” There was great conformity to the world. Even in Thyatira, the saints of God are commended for their earnestness, notwithstanding the evil and for their last works being more than the first. But the idea of obedience to the word of God and separation from the world is little known in Protestantism. Therefore they must share the world’s portion. “I will come on thee as a thief.” As such He will come on the mere professing mass, but not so on the true believer.

“Thou hast a few names,” He says, “even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.” This is real comfort to those who are walking with the Lord in separation from the world. It is the world as a moral scene that defiles the Christian’s garments. The few *names* here signify *individuals*. The Lord knows each one by name who is walking faithfully on the earth, and assures them that they will walk with Him in heaven. Blessed are the overcomers; instead of a blotted name, He will confess them by name before His Father and before His angels.

Having thus examined the meaning of the message to Sardis, and its application to what took place after the Reformation, we now return with mingled feelings to its history. Unfeignedly thankful for that great work of God’s Spirit; unfeignedly sorry for the failure of man which so soon appeared. But it may be well to refresh the reader’s mind with a glance at the successive conditions of the professing church of God on earth, before going further.

In Ephesus, we have the church cooling down in her love to Christ. “Thou hast left thy first love.” This is the origin of all the failure that has since followed. In Smyrna, suffering under persecution from Satan. In Pergamos, worldliness; the church dwelling in the world where Satan’s throne is. In Thyatira, corruption: suffering the prophetess Jezebel to teach, to seduce the Lord’s servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. In Sardis, deadness; Jezebel is not here, Sardis had got away from her and her corruptions. A great name to live — a great profession and appearance of Christianity, but no vital power.

THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES

A.D. 1526-1529

In illustration of our exposition of the Epistle to Sardis and in proof of what we have said of the constitution of the Lutheran churches, we will now refer

to their original organization. And that the truth on this point may be fairly and fully stated, we will quote from d'Aubigné, who has said all for **Luther and the Reformation** that can be said.

“The reform needed some years of repose that it might increase and gain in strength: and it could not enjoy peace unless its great enemies were at war with each other. The madness of Clement VII was as it were the *lightning-conductor* of the Reformation, and the ruin of Rome built up the gospel. It was not only a few months' gain; from 1526 to 1529 there was a calm in Germany by which the Reformation profited to organize and extend itself.

“The papal yoke having been broken, the ecclesiastical order required to be re-established. It was impossible to restore their ancient jurisdiction to the bishops; for these Continental prelates maintained that they were in an especial manner, the pope's servants. A new set of things was therefore called for, under pain of seeing the church fall into anarchy. Provision was made for it. It was then that the evangelic nations separated definitely from that despotic dominion which had for ages kept all the west in bondage.

“Already on two occasions the Diet had wished to make the reform of the church a national work. The Emperor, the pope, and a few princes were opposed to it. The Diet of Spire had therefore resigned to each state the task that it could not accomplish itself.

“But what constitution were they about to substitute for the papal hierarchy?

“They could, while suppressing the pope, preserve the episcopal order; it was the form most approximate to that which was on the point of being destroyed.

“They might, on the contrary, reconstruct the ecclesiastical order, by having recourse to the sovereignty of God's word, and re-establishing the rights of the christian people. This form was the most remote from the Roman hierarchy. Between these two extremes there were several middle courses... Evangelical Germany, at the moment in which she began to try her hand on ecclesiastical constitutions, began with that which trenched the deepest on the papal monarchy.”²⁴⁸

The reader will plainly see from these few extracts, that the princes of Germany, in re-constituting the church, were guided by expediency, or political principles. Although they may have been sincere in desiring to act in conformity with the word of God, yet it never seems to have crossed their minds that God has given a constitution for His church in the New Testament. He has not given to man the liberty of adding to, or altering a single word of, that divine constitution, any more than He gave to the Jews the liberty of adding to, or altering a single pin in the tabernacle. But as we have gone very fully into the question of the inauguration, constitution, and discipline of the

²⁴⁸ D'Aubigné, vol. 4, pp. 26-47.

church in the early part of our first volume, we need say nothing more on that subject here. Everything should be tried by the standard of God's word, and whatever has not the sanction of that word should be given up.

THE FIRST PLANTING OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES

The **Reformation in Germany** can hardly be said to have begun with the lower classes. In Switzerland the movement was democratic, in Germany it was imperial. The princes stood in the front rank of the battle, and sat on the first bench in the council. "The democratic organization," says d'Aubigné, "was therefore compelled to give way to an organization, conformable to the civil government." This is a full admission that the constitution of the Lutheran churches was purely human, purely political. Christ as the centre, and the Holy Ghost as the gathering power to that centre, are entirely overlooked. Therefore the Lord pronounces all such systems as "dead." Christ, the Holy Spirit, the word of God, are all talked of and believed in, but none of them have their right place in the Lutheran or the reformed churches: consequently, they are without vitality. It was particularly among the higher classes that Luther found his supporters. "He admitted the princes as representatives of the people; and henceforward, the influence of the state became one of the principal elements in the constitution of the evangelical church."

Re-formation, we have to bear in mind, is not *formation*. The original proclamation of the truth and the formation of the church at Pentecost, should be the Reformer's guide. Re-formation is the turning of our thoughts to the beginning, or to the word and grace of God, and Re-forming the church in accordance with His grace and truth. And surely, if the church was formed in the first century without the princes of this world, could it not be Re-formed without them in the sixteenth or nineteenth? d'Aubigné very naturally asks this question, which shows that he felt there was a serious defect somewhere; for why call in a power to Re-form, which was not required in forming the church at the beginning? The idea of the church, as the assembly of God, or as the body of Christ, was now completely lost. Even the Catholics, though in a wicked and corrupt way, speak of maintaining the unity of the church. The Protestants started wrong on this point, and from that day until now, they have been going farther and farther from the truth as to the "one body."

Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, an enterprising and magnanimous prince, has the reputation of being the first in completing an ecclesiastical constitution for the churches of his hereditary states, and which was set forward as a model for the new churches of Christendom.

THE DEATH OF FREDERICK

In the year 1525, **Frederick** the Wise, Elector of Saxony, died. He had been the friend and protector of Luther, though not much of a reformer. John, his

brother and successor, was of a very different character. He was a thorough Lutheran and reformer. In ecclesiastical matters he assumed an absolute supremacy. He caused the constitution and government of the churches, the form of public worship, the duties and the salaries of the clergy to be drawn up by Luther and Melancthon, and to be promulgated by his deputies in the year 1527. “Being fully satisfied as to the truth of Luther’s doctrines, and clearly perceiving the utter impossibility of preserving them, if the pontiff’s authority were maintained, he took upon himself an entire jurisdiction in religious matters. He made provision for placing pious and competent teachers over all the churches, and for the removal of unsuitable ones. His example was soon followed by the other princes and states of Germany, that had cast off the dominion of the Roman Pontiff.”²⁴⁹ Such was the foundation or first planting of the Lutheran and reformed churches.

The effect of such decided measures, as may easily be supposed, was soon manifest. Dissensions among the princes immediately followed. The moderation of Frederick had kept them tolerably united; but the proceedings of John made it obvious, that he was determined to separate the churches of his territory from the church of Rome. This awoke the fears of the Catholic princes, and led them to consult together for the defence of the old religion, and for the punishment of the daring innovators. An alliance was also formed by the Lutheran princes, and it was only the troubled state of Europe that prevented a civil war. The hands of Charles being full with his wars in different places, the Reformers were left undisturbed till the year 1529 — the year so famous in the history of the Reformation, and second only to the one we are now approaching, 1530. But we must notice one or two things which led to its importance. And first of all

THE APPEAL OF THE PRINCES

By the efforts of the popish party at the **second Diet of Spires** in 1529, the edict issued against Luther at Worms in 1521 was confirmed, and all innovations in religion were forbidden. Against this decision the majority of the evangelical princes entered their solemn and deliberate protest.²⁵⁰ But not satisfied with merely expressing their dissent from the decree of the Diet, the protesters re-assembled immediately after its dissolution, and had a document drawn up in due form, in which they review what had passed in the assembly, state their grievances, assign reasons in justification of the step they had taken, and with respectful firmness re-assert the sacred rights of conscience on matters of salvation, and finally appeal to the Emperor and to a future General Council. The document concludes as follows: “We therefore appeal for ourselves, for our subjects, and for all who receive or who shall hereafter receive the word of God, from all past, present, or future vexatious measures, to his imperial majesty, and to a free and universal assembly of holy

²⁴⁹ Mosheim, vol. 3, p. 122.

²⁵⁰ See Chapter 35: “The Protest”.

Christendom. “This document filled twelve sheets of parchment; the signatures and seals, which were nearly the same as had been affixed to the protest, were now affixed to the appeal.”²⁵¹

A copy of this remonstrance was immediately despatched to the Emperor under the charge of three deputies. Charles was then on his way from Spain to Italy. They found him at Placentia, but met with the most discouraging reception. He was much irritated with this freedom and daring opposition to his will. The spirited tone of the memorial wounded his pride, and in a rage he ordered the deputies to be placed under arrest, and commanded them not to leave their apartments, nor to write a line to the Protestant princes, on pain of death. But in a short time he softened down, set them at liberty, and went on his way to Bologna, where he spent several months with the pope, Clement VII.

Meanwhile the Protestant chiefs were not inactive; they were employing the most effectual means for the furtherance of the Reformation and for the strengthening of their own position with the people. On the fifth of May, eleven days after the appeal was drawn up, it was printed and published by the Landgrave, and on the thirteenth, by the Elector. The great question between the Catholics and the Protestants had now taken a definite form, and was fairly before all Christendom.

MEETINGS OF THE PROTESTANTS

The apprehensions of the princes, as to the intentions of the Emperor, were now confirmed. His violent treatment of the deputies, and his present friendship with the pope, were significant signs of the severe measures he was meditating. The Protestant leaders now thought that it was high time for them to consult for their protection against the offended and indignant Charles. Meetings were held in the summer of 1529, at Rothach, Schwabach, Nuremberg, and Smalcald, but nothing definite was agreed upon, in consequence of the diversity of opinion which prevailed on the subject of the Lord’s supper. It was formally decided at one of their meetings, “that unity on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist was essential to any religious alliance among Christians.” But, alas, alas, the Reformers were already two camps by means of the sacramentarian controversy.

The papal party were well acquainted with the bitter pamphlets which had already been written by Luther and Zwingle on this subject, and were artfully using them to widen the breach between their followers. During the sitting of the Diet of Spires, the Reformers were continually taunted by the Catholics on this point: “You boast of your attachment to the pure word of God, and yet you are nevertheless disunited.” The Landgrave of Hesse was deeply pained by these public taunts, and determined to use every means possible to accomplish a reconciliation between the Swiss and Saxon Reformers. For this purpose he

²⁵¹ D’Aubigné, vol. 4, p. 83.

appointed a Conference to be held at **Marburg** in 1529, and invited Luther and Zwingli, and some other principal doctors and theologians of both parties.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 37

THE SACRAMENTARIAN CONTROVERSY

The doctrine of the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist had been established in the Romish church since the fourth Lateran Council in the year 1215. For three hundred years the mass and transubstantiation had been the principal bulwarks of Rome, and her greatest blasphemy. The idea of the corporeal presence of Christ in the holy supper threw a halo of sacred importance around it, excited the imagination of the people and fixed it deeply in their affections. It was the origin of many ceremonies and superstitions, of great wealth and dominion to the priesthood, and the most stupendous miracles were said to be wrought by the consecrated bread, both among the living and the dead. It thus became the corner stone of the papal edifice.

Luther, as a priest and a monk, firmly believed in this mystery of iniquity, and never was, throughout his whole career, delivered from its delusion. He sinned against God and his own conscience when he accepted priestly ordination, and from that period a judicial blindness seems to have rested on his mind as to the power of the priest over the elements. **Transubstantiation**, or the actual conversion of the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ, by priestly consecration, was then, as it still is, the recognised doctrine of the church of Rome. Those who doubt this are denounced as infidels.

As a reformer, Luther gave up the term *transubstantiation* and adopted, if possible, the still more inexplicable term of **consubstantiation**. He renounced the papal idea that the bread and wine after consecration remained no longer, but were changed into the material body and blood of Christ. His strange notion was, that the bread and the wine remained just what they were before — real bread and real wine — but that there was also together with the bread and wine, the material substance of Christ's human body. No invention of man, we may freely affirm, ever equalled this popish doctrine in absurdity, inconsistency and irreconcilable contradictions. "The hands of the priest," said the Pontiff Urban, in a great Roman Council, "are raised to an eminence granted to none of the angels, of creating God, the Creator of all things, and of offering Him up for the salvation of the whole world. This prerogative, as it elevates the pope above angels, renders pontifical submission to kings an execration." To all this the sacred synod, with the utmost unanimity,

responded, Amen. Surely this is the last test of human credulity, and the consummation of human blasphemy.²⁵²

ZWINGLE'S EARLY VIEWS

Ulric **Zwingle**, the great Swiss Reformer, and compeer of Luther, differed entirely from both the teaching of Rome and the Saxon Reformers as to the real presence of Christ in the holy supper. The Swiss had long held opinions contrary alike to the Roman and the Saxon. At an early period of Zwingle's christian course his attention had been attracted by the simplicity of scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper. In the word of God he read that Christ had left this world and gone to His Father in heaven; and that this was to be a matter of special faith and hope to His disciples. This we find clearly taught in the Acts of the Apostles: "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him to into heaven." Thus we see that the blessed Lord ascended personally, bodily, visibly; and that He shall return in like manner, but not until the close of the present dispensation, or church period. "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things." (Acts 1:10, 11, 3:21)

The words of our blessed Lord; "This is **My body**," — "This is **My blood**;" Zwingle maintained to be figurative in their character, and to imply nothing more than that the sacramental bread and wine were simply symbols or emblems of Christ's body, and that the ordinance or institution is commemorative of His death for us. "This do in remembrance of Me... For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come." (1 Cor. 11: 22-28)

For several years, Zwingle had privately entertained these views of the Lord's supper, but knowing the hold that the old church doctrine had on the minds of the ignorant and superstitious people, he did not openly avow them. But believing that the time would soon come for the public promulgation of the truth, and foreseeing the opposition he would have to encounter, he diligently, though in a private way, sought to spread the truth and strengthen his position. Letters on the subject were sent to many learned men in Europe, so as to influence them to examine the word of God, even if they did not agree with the views of the Swiss Reformers. But while Zwingle was thus quietly waiting for the right moment to speak aloud, another, with more zeal than wisdom, imprudently wrote a pamphlet against Luther's doctrine of the Lord's supper, and raised the storm of controversy, which raged with great violence for four years.

²⁵² For the authority of this incredible blasphemy, see Edgar's *Variations of Popery*, p. 384.

CARLSTADT, LUTHER, AND ZWINGLE

Andrew Bodenstein, better known as **Dr. Carlstadt**, once a professor at Wittenberg, commenced the attack. This man has the reputation of having been both able and learned, and really devoted to the cause of the Reformation; but from his extreme views on that subject and the impetuosity of his spirit, his measures were sweeping and revolutionary. He would have all the images destroyed, and all the rites of popery abolished at once. We have met with him before. He was one of the earliest and warmest friends of Luther, but he had rejected Luther's notion of the real presence in the Eucharist, and that was the unpardonable sin in the eyes of the Reformer. He had also given too much countenance and encouragement to the excesses of the **Anabaptists**, or "the celestial prophets" as they were called, and this gave Luther a show of reason for visiting with the same condemnation the Sacramentaries and the Anabaptists. But this was most unjust, as Zwingle and his followers were as opposed to the fanaticism of the so-called prophets, as were Luther and his colleagues.

In refutation of Dr. Carlstadt, Luther wrote a pamphlet against these prophets in 1525, in which he says: "Dr. Carlstadt has fallen away from us, and become our bitterest foe. Although I deeply regret this scandal, I still rejoice that Satan has shown the cloven foot, and will be put to shame by these his heavenly prophets, who have long been peeping and muttering in concealment, but never would come fairly out until I enticed them with a guilder: that, by the grace of God, has been too well laid for me to rue it. But still the whole infamy of the plot is not yet brought forward, for still more lies concealed which I have long suspected. I know also, that Dr. Carlstadt has long been brewing this heresy in his mind though till now he has not found courage to spread it abroad."

Zwingle was now persuaded that the time for silence was past. Although he sympathized with Carlstadt's views of the Eucharist, he greatly objected to his offensive style and levity.

He published in the year 1525, an important treatise "concerning true and false religion." His own views of the Eucharist are fully and clearly stated in this book, besides his utter condemnation of the seditious spirit of the Anabaptists, and the errors of the papists on the subject in dispute. An opponent soon appeared in a pamphlet, "against the new error of the Sacramentaries." To this Zwingle replied in the same year, 1525; and took occasion to remind his opponents, the Lutherans, that they should be less personal in their abuse, and more rational and scriptural in their arguments. There was a mildness and respect in the writings of the Swiss, which the Saxons were utter strangers to; even Melancthon, at times, became the reflection of his violent master.

Æcolampadius, the intimate friend of Zwingle, was preaching the simple doctrine of the New Testament, as to the Lord's supper, at Basle, just about this time. But finding that his enemies were associating him with Carlstadt, he published and defended his own views. The effect of this book was great: written in such a christian spirit, so full of the closest reasoning, and the fairest arguments, both from the scriptures and the most eminent among the fathers, that many were drawn to consider the new opinions. Erasmus himself was well nigh converted by the book. "A new dogma has arisen," he writes to a friend, "that there is nothing in the Eucharist but bread and wine. To confute this is now a very difficult matter; for John Æcolampadius has fortified it by so many evidences and arguments, that the very elect might almost be seduced by it."

An abusive reply to this book very soon appeared, signed by fourteen German theologians, with a preface written by Luther. Zwingle was deeply offended, and complained of the insults offered to a brother reformer by his German brethren. "I have seen nothing in this age," he says, "less praiseworthy than this reply, on account both of the violence offered in it to Holy Writ, and of its immoderate pride and insolence. Æcolampadius, of all men the most harmless, a very model of every sort of piety and learning, he, from whom most of them have learnt what they know of literature, is so infamously treated by them, with such filial ingratitude, that we are called upon, not for reproaches, but for execrations."²⁵³

Thus the controversy went on. Luther was deeply grieved and astonished to find so many learned and pious men holding the same views as Zwingle; and many of whom he had entertained the highest opinion now expressed themselves favourable to the new views. This was gall and wormwood to the spirit of Luther, and filled him with inexpressible grief and anger. In his letters and writings at this time he expressed himself in the most unmeasured and unguarded terms. He calls them "his Absaloms, sacrament-conjurers, in comparison with whose madness the papists are mild opponents — the Satanic instruments of my temptation." Luther's followers took up the tone of their master, and he transferred to this controversy all the vehemence and obstinacy of his own nature. From about the close of the year 1524 till the year 1529, Luther had written so violently against the Swiss, and so little against the papists, that it was sarcastically said by Erasmus, "the Lutherans are eagerly returning to the bosom of the church."

SUMMONS TO MARBURG

Such were the christian doctors, and such their feelings whom the political Landgrave sought unweariedly to reconcile. The thought is a truly humiliating one, and casts a dark shade over the character of Luther. Philip, in his pacific exertions, showed much more of a christian spirit on this and former

²⁵³ Waddington, vol. 2, pp. 346-370.

occasions than the great Reformer though it may not have been from the Christian's point of view. But we do not judge motives; there is One who will judge the secrets of all men." (1 Cor. 4:5)

The connection of this great dispute with the political movements of Germany, made it one of intense interest and anxiety to the Protestant chiefs. It was the one great hindrance to their union; and without unity what could be done in the presence of such powerful adversaries as Rome and the Emperor? The papal theologians had been watching with malicious satisfaction the growth and bitterness of this disgraceful dissension, and were using all their art to profit by it. The Landgrave evidently grieved over this division more than the theologians of Wittenberg, and now determined without further delay to bring about a conference, and if possible, a reconciliation between the leaders of the different parties. On the great fundamental truths of revelation, the German and the Swiss reformers were agreed. Only on one point did they differ — the manner in which Christ is present in the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist. It appears that Philip thought the whole question little more than a dispute about words, as he says, "The Lutherans will hear no mention of alliance with the Zwinglians; well then, let us put an end to the contradictions that separate them from Luther." Accordingly, he summoned the principal divines of Saxony, Switzerland, and Strasburg, to meet together at Marburg in the autumn of 1529.

Zwingle accepted the invitation with all gladness, and made ready to appear at the time appointed. But Luther generally so bold and dauntless, as we have repeatedly seen expressed the greatest unwillingness to meet Zwingle. The several pamphlets that had passed between them on the subject in question had produced such an impression on his mind of the power of Zwingle, that he sought by the most unworthy means to avoid meeting him. The Landgrave's repeated entreaties, however, at length prevailed. Thus wrote Luther to Philip:

"I have received your commands to go to Marburg to a disputation with Œcolampadius and his party, about the Sacramentarian difference, for the purpose of peace and unity. Though I have very faint expectation of such unity, yet as I cannot too highly commend your zeal and care thereon, so will I not refuse to undertake a hopeless, and to us, perhaps, a dangerous office; for I will leave no foundation for our adversaries to say that they were better inclined to concord than myself. I know very well that I shall make no unworthy concession to them... And if they do not yield to us, all your trouble will be lost." His private letters at this time express the same opinion and breathe the same spirit. The whole question was discussed, and closed in the mind of Luther before he started on his journey. But his mind was far from being at ease. He had a certain conviction that the victory would be awarded to the Swiss. This conviction is fully proved by the following propositions.

1. Luther wrote to say for himself and Melancthon, that they could only attend the conference on condition that “some honest papists should be present as witnesses against those future Thrasons and vain-glorious saints... If there were no impartial judges the Zwinglians would have a good chance to boast of victory.” This is a strange passage in the history of the Saxon divines, and exhibits a **backward movement** from the principles of the Reformation; but especially in the case of the author of the “Babylonish Captivity,” and the denouncer of Antichrist. Had Luther forgotten that the papists were pledged to the real presence more than any other party in Christendom? And yet he proposes them as *impartial judges*. What a change, at least for the moment, in that great man! How can we account for this? Luther is no longer standing on the sure ground of the word of God, but on the false ground of an absurd superstition. He could not have the sense of the divine presence or approval. And little wonder that he manifested such weakness and inconsistency. In place of trusting in the living God and setting at nought popes and emperors, he pitifully turns to his old enemies to be his friends and refuge in the approaching discussion. What a solemn lesson for all Christians! May the written and living Word be our resource and refuge at all times. We need only further add, that Philip was too warm an antipapist to give any heed to Luther’s proposal; it therefore fell to the ground, leaving to its authors the disgrace which impartial history has assigned to it.

2. In a letter, generally ascribed to Melancthon, written to the Prince Elector as early as May 14th, he goes farther still. “Let the prince refuse to permit our journey to Marburg, so that we may allege this excuse.” “But the Elector,” says d’Aubigné, “would not lend himself to so disgraceful a proceeding; and the reformers of Wittemberg found themselves compelled to accede to the request of the Landgrave.”

3. Another proposition was suggested, which shows still more the fear and misgiving of the Saxon divines — “that among the theologians to be summoned from Switzerland to the controversy, Zwingle should not be one.” But neither could this proposal be entertained; the invitations had been given, and Philip was already too much offended by the obstinacy of Luther to listen to his requests. These little matters are only worth recording as showing the difference of the same man when he stands for the truth of God, and when he contends for the foolish dogma of consubstantiation. In the former case he stands by faith, and grace gives him moral courage, firmness, and nobility of bearing; but in the latter, we find him exhibiting the most pitiful features of weakness, distrust, and dissimulation. It is the presence of God and faith in Him that makes the vast difference; as the poet sings:

“Is God for me? I fear not, though all against me rise;
When I call on Christ my Saviour, the host of evil flies
My friend, the Lord Almighty, and He who loves me, God!
What enemy shall harm me, though coming as a flood?
I know it, I believe it, I say it fearlessly

That God, the highest, mightiest, for ever loveth me,
At all times, in all places, He standeth by my side
He rules the battle's fury, the tempest, and the tide."

THE CONFERENCE AT MARBURG

The senate of Zurich had positively refused to allow Zwingle to go to Marburg, lest any harm should befall him. But *he* felt that his presence at the conference was necessary for the welfare of the church, and that he must go! Accordingly he prepared for his journey, and started during the night, with only one friend to accompany him — Rodolph Collin, the Greek professor. He left the following note for the Senate, "If I leave without informing you, it is not because I despise your authority, most wise lords; but because, knowing the love you bear towards me I foresee that your anxiety will oppose my going." They arrived safely at Basle, where they were joined by Œcolampadius; and at Strasburg, where they were joined by Bucer, Hedio, and Sturm. The company reached Marburg on September 29th. Luther and his friends on the 30th. Both parties were courteously received by Philip, and entertained in the castle at his own table.

The Landgrave, not ignorant of the bitter feelings which the late controversy had produced between the chiefs of the parties, wisely proposed, that previously to the public conference, the theologians should have a private interview for the purpose of paving the way to reconciliation and unity. Knowing the tempers of the men, he directed Luther to confer with Œcolampadius, and Melancthon with Zwingle. But so many accusations as to false doctrine were brought against the Swiss by the Saxon divines, that little progress was made towards unity, and the main question became more complicated. The **public disputation** was accordingly appointed for the following day, October 2nd, 1529.

The general conference was held in an inner apartment of the castle, in the presence of the Landgrave and his principal ministers, political and religious, the deputies of Saxony Zurich, Strasburg, and Basle, and of a few learned foreigners. A table was placed for the four theologians — Luther, Zwingle, Melancthon, and Œcolampadius. As they approached, Luther, taking a piece of chalk, steadily wrote on the velvet cover of the table, in large letters, HOC EST CORPUS MEUM — "This is my body." He wished to have these words continually before him, that his confidence might not fail, and that his adversaries might be confounded. "Yes," said he, "these are the words of Christ, and from this rock no adversary shall dislodge me."

All parties having assembled, the Chancellor of Hesse opened the conference. He explained its object, and exhorted the disputants to a christian moderation, and the re-establishment of unity. Then Luther, instead of proceeding at once to the question of the Eucharist, insisted on a previous understanding concerning other articles of faith, such as the divinity of Christ, original sin,

justification by faith etc. etc. The Saxon divines professed to regard the Swiss as unsound on these and other subjects. What Luther's object could be, in seeking to widen the field of debate, we pretend not to say; but the Swiss replied that their writings bore sufficient evidence, that on all these points there was no difference between them.

The Landgrave, to whom belonged the direction of the meeting, signified his assent, and Luther was compelled to give up his project; but he was evidently angry and ill at ease in his own mind, and said, "I protest that I differ from my adversaries with regard to the doctrine of the Lord's supper, and that I shall always differ from them. Christ said, '*This is My body.*' Let them show me that a body is not a body. I reject reason, common sense, carnal arguments, and mathematical proofs. God is above mathematics. We have the word of God, we must adore and perform it." Such was the commencement of this celebrated debate. The impetuous headstrong Saxon, had written his text on the velvet, and was now pointing to it, and saying, "No consideration shall ever induce me to depart from the literal meaning of these words, and I shall not listen either to sense or reason, with the words of God before me." And all this was done and said, be it observed, before the deliberations were so much as opened, or a single argument had been advanced. This declaration, coupled with the notorious obstinacy of its author, was enough to crush every hope of a satisfactory termination to the conference.

But the Swiss, notwithstanding Luther's high-handed style, did not decline the argument. They no doubt knew his measure, cared little for his arrogant assertions, and probably never counted on his conversion. "It cannot be denied," said Œcolampadius mildly, "that there are figures of speech in the word of God; as *John is Elias, the rock was Christ, I am the vine.*" Luther admitted that there were figures in the Bible, but he denied that this last expression was figurative.

Œcolampadius then reminded Luther that the blessed Lord says in John 6, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; *the flesh profiteth nothing.*" "Now Christ who said to the people of Capernaum, *the flesh profiteth nothing*, rejected by these words, the oral manducation of the body. Therefore he did not establish it at the institution of the supper."

"I deny," retorted Luther vehemently, "the second of these propositions. There was a material eating of Christ's flesh, and there was a spiritual eating of it. It was the former, the material eating, of which Christ declared that it profiteth nothing."

Œcolampadius hinted that this was in effect to surrender the argument. It admitted that we were to eat spiritually, and if so, we did not eat bodily, the material manducation being in that case useless.

“We are not to ask of what use,” replied Luther; “everything that God commands becomes spirit and life. If it is by the Lord’s order that we lift up a straw, in that very action we perform a spiritual work. We must pay attention to Him who speaks, and not to what He says. God speaks: Then, worms, listen! God commands: let the world obey! And let us all fall down together, and humbly kiss the word.”

We may just notice in passing, that there is no ground for supposing that the question of **the Eucharist** is referred to in **John 6**. It was not even instituted for some time after this. Incarnation, death, and ascension are the fundamental truths which the Lord is here unfolding to the Jews, as the only means of eternal life and of all spiritual blessings. “Himself the eternal life which was with the Father before all worlds, He took flesh that He might not only reveal the Father, and be the perfect pattern of obedience as man, but that He might die in grace for us, and settle the question of sin for ever glorifying God absolutely, and at all cost, on the cross. Except the corn of wheat (as He Himself taught us) fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; dying it brings forth much fruit. His death is not here regarded as an offering to God, as elsewhere often, but the appropriation of it by the believer into his own being... He only is life, yet this not in living, but in dying for us, that we might have it in and with Him, the fruit of His redemption, eternal life as a present thing but only fully seen in resurrection-power, already verified and seen in Him, ascended up as man, where He was before as God, by-and-by to be seen in us at the last day, manifested with Him in glory.

“Jesus, therefore, come down to earth, put to death, ascending again to heaven, is the doctrine of this chapter. As come down and put to death, He is the food of faith during His absence on high. For it is on His death we must feed, in order to dwell spiritually in Him and He in us.”²⁵⁴

We now return to **Marburg**.

Zwingle, just at this moment, interfered in the discussion. He pressed and greatly troubled the spirit of Luther by his reasoning from the scriptures, science, the senses, etc., but he took his stand first on the ground of scripture. After quoting a number of passages in which the sign is described by the very thing signified, he introduced the argument which had been started by Æcolampadius in the morning, namely, John 6. Concluding that, in consideration of our Lord’s declaration, *the flesh profiteth nothing*, we must explain the words of the Eucharist in a similar manner.

Luther. — “When Christ says the flesh profiteth nothing, He speaks not of His own flesh, but of ours.”

Zwingle. — “The soul is fed with the Spirit, and not with the flesh.”

²⁵⁴ For a fuller opening up of this subject, see *Bible Treasury*, vol. 10, p. 357; and *Synopsis*, vol. 3, p. 432.

Luther. — “It is with the mouth that we eat the body; the soul does not eat it, we eat it spiritually with the soul.”

Zwingle. — “Christ’s body is therefore a corporeal nourishment, and not a spiritual.”

Luther. — “You are captious.”

Zwingle. — “Not so; but you utter contradictory things.”

Luther. — “If God should present me wild apples, I should eat them spiritually. In the Eucharist, the mouth receives the body of Christ, and the soul believes His words.”

There was now great confusion and contradiction in the language of Luther; as if the *four words* were to be taken neither “figuratively nor literally; and yet he seemed to teach that they were to be taken in both senses.” Zwingle thought that an absurdity had been reached, and that no good could be attained by proceeding farther in this line of argument. He maintained from a wider view of the scriptures, that the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist are not the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus, but only the representatives of that body and blood.

Luther was, however, by no means shaken. “*This is My body,*” he repeated, pointing with his finger to the words written before him. ““*This is My body,*’ and the devil himself shall not drive me from that. To seek to understand it is to fall away from the faith.”

But although no favourable impression was produced on the mind of Luther, many of the hearers were struck by the clearness and simplicity of Zwingle’s arguments, and many minds were opened to the truth on this important subject. **Francis Lambert**, the principal theologian of Hesse, who had constantly professed the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist, was amongst the most notable of the converts. He was the personal friend and a great admirer of Luther, but conscience moved him to confess the truth. “When I came to this conference,” he said, “I desired to be as a sheet of blank paper on which the finger of God might write His truth. Now I see it is the Spirit that vivifies, the flesh profiteth nothing. I believe with *Æcolampadius* and *Zwingle*.” The *Wittenberg* doctors greatly lamented this defection; but turned it off by exclaiming, “Garlic fickleness!” “What!” replied the ex-Franciscan, formerly of *Avignon*, “was *St. Paul* fickle because he was converted from *Pharisæism*? And have we ourselves been fickle in abandoning the lost sects of *popery*?”

Great agitation now prevailed in the hall, but the hour to adjourn had arrived, and the disputants retired with the prince to dinner.

In the afternoon the conversation was resumed by Luther, who said, “I believe that Christ’s body is in heaven, but I also believe that it is in the sacrament. It

concerns me little whether that be against nature, provided that it is not against faith. Christ is substantially in the sacrament, such as He was born of the virgin.”

Æcolampadius, quoting 2 Corinthians 5:16, said, “We know not Jesus Christ after the flesh.”

“After the flesh means,” said Luther, “in this passage, after our carnal affections.”

“Then answer me this, Dr. Luther,” said Zwingle, “Christ ascended into heaven; and if He is in heaven as regards His body, how can He be in the bread? The word of God teaches us that He was in all things made like unto His brethren. (Heb. 2:17) He therefore cannot be at the same instant on every one of the thousand altars at which the Eucharist is being celebrated.”

“Were I desirous of reasoning thus,” replied Luther, “I would undertake to prove that Jesus Christ had a wife; that he had black eyes, and lived in our good country of Germany. I care little about mathematics.”

“There is no question of mathematics here,” said Zwingle, “but of St. Paul who wrote to the Philippians, that Christ took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”

Finding himself in danger of being moved or drawn away from his original position, he flew back to his four words, exclaiming, “Most dear sirs, since my Lord Jesus Christ says, *Hoc est corpus meum*, I believe that His body is really there.”

Wearied with the inflexible obstinacy and unreasonableness of Luther, Zwingle moved rapidly towards him, and striking the table, said to him: “You maintain then, doctor, that Christ’s body is locally in the Eucharist; for you say, *Christ’s body is there — there — there*. *There* is an adverb of place. Christ’s body is then of such a nature as to exist in a place. If it is in a place, it is in heaven, whence it follows that it is not in the bread.”

“I repeat,” replied Luther warmly, “that I have nothing to do with mathematical proofs. As soon as the words of consecration are pronounced over the bread, the body is there, however wicked be the priest who pronounces them.”

Let the reader note this saying. It is certainly blasphemy, though not intentionally so by this deluded man. According to this dogma, the Lord, willing or not willing, must descend into the idolatrous bread of the priest, however wicked he may be, the moment he mutters the words of consecration. This is popery in its most daring blasphemy.

The Landgrave, perceiving that the discussion was growing hot, proposed a brief recess. As reason and fairness are all on one side, there is little interest in watching the progress of the debate. Zwingli and Œcolampadius had established their propositions by scripture, philosophy, and the testimony of the most ancient fathers, but all were met by the one unvarying answer, “*This is My body.*” And as if to insult and exasperate the Swiss divines, Luther seized the velvet cover on which the words *Hoc est corpus meum* were written, pulled it off the table, held it up before their eyes saying, “See, see, this is our text, you have not yet driven us from it, as you had boasted, and we care for no other proofs.”

After such an exhibition of weakness and folly, with the assumption of infallibility, there was no hope of drawing Luther from his hold, and no good reason for prolonging the conference. The discussion, however, was resumed the following morning, but at the close of the day the hostile parties were no nearer a reconciliation. A severe epidemic, in the form of the **sweating sickness**, had broken out in Germany about this time, and had reached Marburg during the conference, and no doubt hastened its termination. The ravages of the plague were frightful; all were filled with alarm and anxious to leave the city.

“Sirs,” exclaimed the Landgrave, “you cannot separate thus; can nothing more be done to heal the breach? Must this one point of difference irreconcilably divide the friends of the Reformation?” “Is there no means,” said the chancellor, “of the theologians coming to an understanding, as the Landgrave so sincerely desires?”

“I know of but one means for that,” replied Luther, “and this it is; let our adversaries believe as we do.” “We cannot,” replied the Swiss. “Well then,” said Luther, “I abandon you to God’s judgment, and pray that He will enlighten you.” “We will do the same,” added Œcolampadius. Zwingli was silent, motionless, but deeply moved while these words were passing. At length his lively affections gave way, and he burst into tears in the presence of all.

A PROPOSAL FOR TOLERATION AND UNITY

The conference was ended, and nothing had been done towards unanimity. Philip and other mediators endeavoured at least to establish an understanding of mutual toleration and unity. The theologians, one after another, were invited into his private chamber: there he pressed, entreated, warned, exhorted, and conjured them. “Think,” said he, “of the salvation of the christian republic, and remove **all** discord from its bosom.” Politically, things were threatening: Charles V and the pope were uniting in Italy; Ferdinand and the Roman Catholic princes were uniting in Germany. Union among all the Protestants seemed the only thing that could save them. So Philip believed,

and toiled exceedingly to accomplish it; but the intractable and imperious disposition of Luther stood in his way.

The Swiss doctors entered most heartily into the wishes of the Landgrave. “Let us,” said Zwingle, “confess our union in all things in which we are agreed, and as for the rest, let us forbear and remember that we are brethren. Respecting the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus, as to the grand doctrine of salvation, there is no point of discord.”

“Yes, yes!” cried the Landgrave, “you agree! give then a testimony of your unity, and recognize one another as brothers.” “There is no one upon earth,” said Zwingle, “with whom I more desire to be united than with you, approaching the Wittemberg doctors.” Œcolampadius, Bucer, and Hedio said the same.

This most christian movement seemed for the moment to produce the desired effect. Many hearts were touched even among the Saxons. “Acknowledge them! acknowledge them!” continued the Landgrave, “acknowledge them as brothers!” Even Luther’s obduracy seemed to be giving way. The keen eye of Zwingle seeing what he hoped was a measure of relenting, he burst into tears — tears of joy — approaches Luther, holds out his hand, and begged him only to pronounce the word “brother.” But, alas! that glowing heart was doomed to a cruel disappointment. When all eyes were fixed on the two leaders, and all hearts full of hope that the **two families of the Reformation** were about to be united, Luther coldly rejected the hand thus offered, with this cutting reply, “You have a different spirit from ours;” which was equal to saying, “We are of the Spirit of God, you are of the spirit of Satan.” “These words,” says d’Aubigné, “communicated to the Swiss, as it were, an electrical shock. Their hearts sank each time Luther repeated them, and he did it frequently.” “Luther’s refusing to shake hands with Zwingle,” says Principal Cunningham, “which led that truly noble and brave man to burst into tears, was one of the most deplorable and humiliating, but at the same time solemn and instructive, exhibitions of the deceitfulness of sin and the human heart the world has ever witnessed.”²⁵⁵

A brief consultation now took place among the Wittemberg doctors, but the result was not more conciliatory. Luther, Melancthon, Agricola, Brenz, Jonas, and Osiander, conferred together.

Turning towards Zwingle and his friends, the Saxons said “We hold the belief of Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist to be essential to salvation, and we cannot in conscience regard you as in the communion of the church.”

“In that case,” replied Bucer, “it were folly to ask you to recognize us as brethren. We think that your doctrine strikes at the glory of Jesus Christ, who

²⁵⁵ D’Aubigné’s *History of the Reformation*, vol. 4, pp. 88-126; Cunningham’s *Lectures on the Reformation*, p. 218.

now sits at the right hand of God. But seeing that in all things you acknowledge your dependence on the Lord, we look at your conscience, which compels you to receive the doctrine you profess, and we do not doubt that you belong to Christ.”

“And we,” said Luther, “declare to you once more that our conscience opposes our receiving you as brothers.”

“Well, doctor,” answered Bucer, “if you refuse to acknowledge as brethren those who differ from you in any point, you will not find a single brother in your own ranks.”

The Swiss had exhausted their solicitations. “We are conscious,” said they, “of having acted as in the presence of God.” They were on the point of leaving: they had manifested a truly Catholic christian spirit, and the feeling of the conference was in their favour and also of their doctrine. Luther perceiving this, and especially the indignation of the Landgrave, appeared to soften down considerably. He advanced towards the Swiss and said; “We acknowledge you as friends, we do not consider you as brothers and members of Christ’s church; but we do not exclude you from that universal charity which we owe even to our enemies.”

Although this concession was only a fresh insult, the Swiss resolved to accept what was offered them without disputation. The Swiss and the Saxons now shook hands, and some friendly words passed between them. The Landgrave was overjoyed that so much had been gained, and at once called out for a report of this important result. “We must let the christian world know,” said he, “that except the manner of the presence of the body and blood in the Lord’s supper, you are agreed in all the articles of faith.” This was resolved upon, and Luther was appointed to draw up the articles of the Protestant faith.

A “**Formula of Concord**” was immediately drawn up by Luther. It consisted of fourteen articles; rather general in their character — such as the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, Original Sin, Justification by faith, the Authority of the scriptures, the Rejection of tradition, and lastly, the Lord’s supper, which was spoken of as a *spiritual feeding* on the very body and very blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the thirteen articles as they were read, one by one, the Swiss gave their hearty amen. And although the terms in which the fourteenth was expressed appeared to them objectionable, yet being somewhat obscure and capable of different interpretations, they agreed to sign the articles without causing further discussion. This important document received the signatures of both parties on October 4th, 1529. A desire was expressed to cherish towards one another the spirit of christian charity, and to avoid all bitterness in maintaining what each deemed to be the truth of God.

The confession of Marburg was now sent to the press. Its appearance gave the Saxons some ground for saying that the Swiss had signed Luther’s creed; that

they had recanted all their errors; that on the Eucharist alone excepted. That they were prepared to retract even that, but they had been deterred by fear of the vulgar; and that they had produced no argument against the doctrine of Luther, except their own inability to believe it. Reports such as these flew rapidly through every part of Germany; but they were false reports. The reader must have observed that the courage and confidence of the Swiss increased as the contest advanced, and that their fairness and gentleness were mightier far than the unreasonableness and haughtiness of their adversaries.

On Tuesday, October 5th, after a four days' conference, the Landgrave left Marburg early. The doctors and their friends soon followed, but the amount of truth which had been brought out, and the opinions expressed, were widely propagated in Germany, and many hearts were turned to the simplicity of the New Testament in observing the Lord's supper.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE AT MARBURG

With feelings of the deepest gratitude and the most unfeigned humiliation, we would pause awhile, and meditate on the late scenes at Marburg. With gratitude to God for having given such publicity to the teaching of scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper; but with mourning and humiliation over the inconsistency of one who had so much influence there. The doctrines so clearly taught by the Swiss, had been little known in Germany till that time. Consubstantiation having been adopted by Luther and his followers, the true meaning and object of that sacred institution were unknown. Great interest was awakened in all parts by the newly-discovered truths, which were embraced by an immense number of persons. It spread rapidly throughout all Germany, and may have been an everlasting blessing to thousands of precious souls. Lambert, as we have seen, was converted to the views of Zwingle; and the Landgrave himself, a short time before his death, declared that the conference had induced him to renounce the error of consubstantiation.

Thus God in His own goodness overruled these unseemly debates for the spread of the truth, and for the accomplishment of His own gracious purposes. Little did Luther contemplate the merciful use that God would make of that conference; and that, when *he*, Luther, was caring only for his own reputation, God was caring for the advancement of the Reformation.

But alas! what is man — fallen, self-seeking man! Where is now the Luther of the early days of the Reformation? Why has the heart that was so large, liberal, and considerate of all, so soon degenerated into the most undisguised and intolerant bigotry? The answer is plain — then he stood for God by faith; now he stood in pride as **the head of a party**. And this explains not only the wonderful change that had come over the spirit of Luther, but the ignoble failure of many distinguished men from that day until now. At the Diet of Worms and other places, Luther, almost alone, fought for the truth of God against the lie of Satan, but at Marburg he fought for the lie of Satan, in the

form of his new dogma against the truth of God. Some may be ready to say that he was fighting for the truth according to his conscience; so far it may have been so. But it will be remembered that he resisted all peaceful investigation of the truth, all reasonable means for arriving at a proper understanding of those “four words” — *This is my body* — and seemed only to care for the maintenance of his own authority and power as the chief of his party. There was no concern manifested by either Luther or any of the Saxons for the general interest of the gospel, or for the triumph of the Reformation. Thus was the great and blessed work of Luther marred and vitiated by the most absurd and foolish dogma ever proposed to the credulity of man.

The position and danger of a **party leader** in the things of God, are clearly expressed in the following opinion of Luther. “At Marburg, Luther was pope. By general acclamation the chief of the evangelical party, he assumed the character of a despot; and to sustain that part in spiritual matters, it is necessary to create the prejudice of *infallibility*. If he once yielded any point of doctrine — if he once admitted that he had fallen into error — the illusion would cease, and with it the authority that was founded on it. It was thus at least with the multitude. He was obliged by the very position which he believed he occupied, or which he wished to occupy, to defend in the loftiest tone every tenet that he had once proclaimed to the people...

“Upon the whole, he lost both influence and reputation by that controversy. By his imperious tone, and elaborate sophistry he weakened the affections and respect of a large body of intelligent admirers. Many now began to entertain a less exalted opinion of his talents, as well as of his candour. Instead of the self-devotion and magnanimity which had thrown such a lustre over his earlier struggles, a vain-glorious arrogance seemed to be master of his spirit; and but for the indulgence of this ignoble passion, the mantle, which might have wrapped Germany and Switzerland in one continuous fold, was rent asunder. He was no longer the genius of the Reformation. Descending from that magnificent position, whence he had given light to the whole evangelical community, he was now become little more than the head of a party, then, indeed, the more conspicuous and powerful section of the reformers, but destined in after times to undergo reverses and defections, which have conferred the appellation of Lutheran on an inconsiderable proportion of the Protestant world.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Dean Waddington, vol. 2, p. 401.