

MARTIN LUTHER.

Dr. Martin Luther's *Briefe*, Senschreiben und Bedenken . . . bearbeitet Von Dr. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette. 5 vols. 8vo. Berlin, 1825.

The Life of Martin Luther. Compiled from reliable sources. By Rev. William Stang. New York, F. Pustet & Co., 1883. 12mo. 112 pp.

N EARLY three-quarters of a century ago the monarch of the Scandinavian kingdom of Denmark summoned the Protestant world to do honor to Martin Luther; and now another potentate, fresh from the Canossa to which he has been led by his boastful premier, the man of blood and iron, muezzin-like renews the call. Germany and Scandinavia again strive to do homage to Luther; statues, addresses, medals, will mark the epoch; a ripple will be seen in this country, but in England and other Protestant lands not even a ripple seems to be discernible. A certain lack of human freedom, a certain tinge of absolute power seems necessary to fit man for a complete appreciation of Martin Luther.

The attention thus called to Luther makes it necessary for Catholics at large to know and understand what the real Luther was, and to distinguish him from the false ideal which will everywhere be presented to a deluded public in these days. The Rev. Mr. Stang's brief sketch of the reformer will be a ready means of giving Catholics a true knowledge of the character and acts of the man.

Luther is the boast of Protestantism, little more than a boast, yet the only man in the great apostasy of the sixteenth century whom its adherents can use to arouse popular enthusiasm. In the history of the Church heresiarchs generally have been men of great intellect, framers of a system with symmetry and form, men removed from the busy world, holding to their theories with unwavering earnestness. They were men who could find followers to sway the masses, but could not themselves evoke personal enthusiasm. But in Luther came a man with no system, who said and unsaid with equal vehemence, who appealed to the lowest passions of the masses, and gave the widest scope to sensuality, by decking it in a flimsy cloak of sentimentality and calling it a religion.

Loud, boisterous, fond of good cheer, good company and indulgence, he stands out with a kind of personal attractiveness that

arouses a sympathetic feeling that for three centuries and a half has made him a rallying-point among those who revolted from the Catholic Church with the cry, "Non serviam."

It is not easy to understand how a man so gross and sensual, so vacillating and uncertain in doctrines, so full of contempt for almost everything that had for centuries been regarded with reverence, could have been instrumental or influential in leading any large number of intelligent Catholics out of the Church; and it is really only the fact that he was so instrumental that makes intelligent men in our day continue to render him a form of hero worship.

Three centuries and a half have reduced the amount of Christianity in the various reformed churches to a very slight remnant. While the Church stands as it did then, with its Papal and hierarchical system, its creed, its worship, its evangelical counsels, ever creating lives devoted to sanctification, to the relief of ignorance and poverty, of all human woes and miseries, Protestantism, in the Germany of Luther and the Switzerland of Calvin, has reached the uttermost rationalism, the existence of God is barely recognized, the inspiration, authenticity and creditableness of the Scriptures, which they made the sole rule of faith, are impugned in pulpit, university and literature; the idea of a church founded by Christ, with a worship, a priesthood, a deposit of faith, is scouted; the fall of man, the need of redemption, atonement, are denied. But whether they retain nothing of Christianity but the name, or very little except the name, we see them ever ready to extol the name of Martin Luther. The advocate of arbitrary power, the man who would crush the people beneath the iron heel of Cæsarism, the Nihilist and Communist who would annihilate all government and with it the whole social system, alike render homage to the name of Martin Luther. It is not that the man in himself was entitled to respect, but simply as the popular type of the movement which wrested country after country from Catholicity. Men may throw away all Christianity, like your infidel and agnostic, or veil it under a mask of rationalism, or fritter it away, but on one point they all agree, as to that there is no division of sentiment, and that is blind hatred of and opposition to the Catholic Church, and as the symbol of this, nothing suits them all better than Martin Luther.

Thus Froude, who certainly has a minimum of Christianity, is now the eulogist of Luther, and ends a rhapsody by declaring "that any faith, any piety, is alive now in Europe, even in the Roman Church itself . . . is due in large measure to the poor miner's son, who was born in a Saxon village four hundred years ago."

He was born in a Saxon village of a violent race, born in a village to which his father fled after slaying a fellow-man. Accord-

ing to his mother's statement, he came into the world on the 10th of November, and, so far as she could recollect in later years, in 1483. After learning the rudiments at home, he became a poor scholar at Eisenach, hospitably sheltered by the Cotta family. He was a lover of books, and at last entered the university of Erfurt.

Here he found professors, some at least of whom were imbued with the doctrines of Wicklif and Huss. The press was already disseminating books through Germany, and the universities and monasteries were the earliest purchasers. It was in the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt that the young student first saw a complete printed Bible, one of several purchased by the house, some of the numerous editions that had poured from the press in Latin and in German.¹

He was twenty years old when he took his degree in philosophy. While pursuing further studies with a view of becoming a professor of law, the death of a comrade, killed by a lightning-stroke at his side, made him suddenly resolve to renounce the world. At night-fall he knocked at the portal of the Augustinian convent, and begged admission. He was received, renouncing his insignia of master, resisting alike the entreaties of his scholars and the anger of his father. He entered on his novitiate with great fervor, but was often in deep melancholy and despondency. That he might be a reprobate was the one overpowering thought. Fasting, austerities, prayer, the counsels of confessors and directors, nothing brought peace to his mind, even after his religious profession and his ordination as a priest, till a passage in St. Bernard on the Annunciation gave his thoughts a new direction. He passed from the depths of despair to the heights of presumption. He believed himself justified in the sight of God by the merits of Christ, and by the very force of his infallible conviction one of the elect.

But doubts recurred, and a mind of real ability, unhinged by interior trials, unbalanced by exact learning, and already adopting unorthodox views, was stimulated to pride by the reputation he had acquired. When, after a visit to Rome, where the pomp of the court and much that he saw gave a shock to the plain Augustinian from a German village, he was appointed professor in the newly founded university at Wittenberg, he began to teach philosophy. His knowledge was but elementary; he hated the Aristotelian philosophy, and the whole system of the schoolmen, including

¹ At the Caxton Exhibition in London, in 1878, there were sixty copies of different Bibles, printed in Latin or in German, all dating prior to the year 1503, when Luther attained his twentieth year. Of course this did not represent every edition issued; but at all events there was the distinct proof that the whole Bible had been set up and printed sixty-two times at least between 1450 and 1503. Yet doubtless in the present Luther revival, hundreds will declare that Luther never saw a Bible till after he was a priest, and was then utterly astonished to find that such a book existed.

St. Thomas. An exact logical system was always something abhorrent to him, and to which he could not submit. His lectures were brilliant tirades against the very philosophy which he was appointed to teach. He was also assigned to preach in the town, and he soon became popular. In the sermons of Luther at this time, as they have come down to us, his doctrine of justification by faith alone constantly appears, and as a necessary sequence, the priesthood, sacraments, indulgences, intercessory prayer, fast and pilgrimages are made little of, or directly censured as unavailing.

That a professor in a university just created by the Pope should, in his professor's chair and in the pulpit, pursue this course, shows that in Germany the standard of orthodoxy was very low, and the attachment to the Church and its whole system very feeble. Luther's language apparently received no censure from any superior in his order or in the Church, and no voice was raised to controvert the utterances of the bold young Augustinian. The doctrines of Wicklif and Huss were silently permeating the schools and monasteries.

Germany had been gradually drifting away from unity in government, from unity in faith. The faith spread over the Roman empire, gathering into the fold in time the Celtic nations to the limits of Ireland and Scotland, turned last of all to the Germanic and Scandinavian tribes, and won the Angles, Saxons, and Danes in Britain; the Franks in Gaul conquered to be conquered, who overthrew the Roman Celtic power to yield to the Church. These German tribes sent apostles to other bands of their race, and their rulers employed force. Before the end of the eighth century the Franks forced the Saxons to profess Christianity and receive baptism. They rose in rebellion against a Church which was made, in their eyes, odious and oppressive, but they were crushed. But the work of force went on. Pomerania and the Isle of Rugen, crushed by arms, abandoned their idols and sullenly accepted Christianity as the twelfth century was nearing its close. The first missionary to the Prussians died the death of a martyr in 997, almost at the close of the first millennium of Christianity. Two hundred years later a regular crusade was carried against the fierce pagans of Prussia, who were overcome by the Teutonic knights in 1243, and after a series of insurrections finally crushed forty years later.

Thus for five centuries the work had gone on. In 1300 thousands of Germans were still pagan in heart, though forced to appear outwardly as Catholics. The work of real conversion advanced slowly; and at the opening of the sixteenth century in a general relaxation, religious instruction, the frequentation of the sacraments, the eradicating of superstitions were all neglected, and

in many parts there was little knowledge of Christianity, a longing for the old days of pagan sensual indulgence, a spirit of revolt against the spirit of mortification inculcated by the Church, of which the religious orders, then true to their rule, were the heralds and exemplars. The doctrines of Huss had found a field ready, and were spreading in secret.

The government which had grown up in Germany had, from an early day, shown a stubborn resolve to subject the Church to its will. The bishops and clergy were to be its creatures, dependent on its will; the constitution of the Church was to be moulded by its ideas, and isolated from the Church in other states. England and France occasionally took up the same line of policy, but Germany adhered to it persistently and doggedly.

Christ avowed that he was a king, and his kingdom, though not *of* the world, worldly, was *in* the world, and to abide. He bade his disciples pray for the coming and establishment of that kingdom, the Church. It was to extend to all nations; Christ sent his apostles, not to obtain sanction or investiture from kings and princes, but to teach the nations, to teach the king on his throne and the swineherd in his cot. The nations, as such, were to become disciples and subjects of the kingdom.

The Church, with its papal organization, existing in all lands, in all ages, is the only institution on earth that realizes the conception of this kingdom of God. The German rulers would not acknowledge the Church; the part within their civil rule was to be modelled, guided, ruled, not by the Sovereign Pontiff, but by themselves.

With each state, great and petty, acting on this theory, the Church would be an impossibility; it could be one neither in doctrine nor in ministry, neither in worship nor in practice. It would not be a body corporate, even to the extent of the Freemasons and other similar bodies. It would be a mere bundle of discordant and disjointed members.

In the Catholic conception the supernatural prevailed; the power flowed from above. But in the German idea the supernatural character of the Church was completely ignored; and the Christian had no supernatural character in the eye of the law; he was a mere intelligent animal, to be trained like a horse or a dog, so as to be useful to the state.

From this rose the long struggle with the Popes, and in the German heart there was no homage, no allegiance, no loyalty to the Holy See as the central power in the Church. Abuse of the Popes had been so constant and so common, that it excited no astonishment, evoked no censure.

Wicklif had, like the Minnesingers, attacked with every violence

the religious orders, especially the mendicant friars. From his day, satires and caricatures of monks and friars multiplied, and wit helped to spread the ridicule and contempt thus engendered. Huss and Jerome of Prague had naturalized this policy, as well as Wicklif's spirit of rebellion and heresy in Germany.

The religious orders, instituted and designed to aid the parochial clergy and bishops, by the example of a stricter life, by instructing the more ignorant and neglected, became too frequently, by relaxation, a source of scandal, instead of an auxiliary power. The libels launched against them gained double force from every scandal.

The period of fervent orthodox Catholicity in Germany thus narrows down to a very brief period, and in no part of Christendom was the old underlying heathendom, with its deification of sensuality, stronger, or the supernatural element weaker.

With a government thus hostile to the Church as a kingdom, with a people thus long severed in heart from the papacy, to which human freedom and man's emancipation owes so much, with thousands still clinging to old pagan memories, and longing to be freed from the requirements of Christianity, with weakness in the Church itself, it needed but some trivial incident to call into play all these agencies and sweep Catholicity aside.

If we figure to ourselves the country as perfectly, earnestly Catholic, attached to the Holy See, instructed in the faith and exemplary in the observance of God's law and the frequentation of the sacraments, a revolt and apostasy like that of the sixteenth century is an impossibility. But where people had long been taught to look upon the head of the Church as an enemy, we can see that any one who rose to pour on the name of the Pope every filthy and obscene epithet that a bestial nature could suggest, would not meet strong censure from any, but would be hailed with guffaws by the crowd. The same mob would hail with delight any one who promised sensual indulgence.

The country and the time were ripe for a pagan revival, and Luther, whose mind had been straying more and more widely from the standard of orthodoxy, unsustained by any sound theological basis, needed only a pretext to begin the war.

Men were drifting away from orthodoxy in many parts; each petty scholar aimed to do himself, unaided, the work of reform which councils of the Church were struggling to accomplish. Among these men, Luther had a wide correspondence, and to them he wrote freely. Hatred of the Pope, of the religious orders, of the trammels of religion, inspired them all; and all seemed to recognize the fact that Luther, from his exemplary life as a religious and a priest, from his position as professor in a university,

and from his eloquence, which had already been recognized, would be the best possible leader in the eyes of the people. They recognized his ability for their purpose, his obstinacy and violence; but we see by his letters that he did not work alone. Thus, in 1520, sending one of his treatises to Spalatinus, he says: "I beg you polish up all carefully with well-used file. I was oppressed with some unaccountable trouble of mind when writing them. I will show them to other friends before they are published."

Then came the jubilee granted by Pope Leo X., in which the alms, usually given on such occasions, was to be devoted to the erection of St. Peter's at Rome. The Archbishop of Mentz confided the preaching of this jubilee to John Tetzel, a Dominican friar, of known learning. Toward the close of the year 1517, the jubilee preacher reached Juterbock, a town within a few miles of Wittenberg, and crowds gathered to hear him.

Luther announced that he would preach on indulgences, and, shutting himself up in his cell for several days, prepared his discourse. He admits that he had never studied the question of indulgence, and began by denying that satisfaction was part of the sacrament of penance. He denied that anything beyond contrition was needed for the remission of sin. This denial of temporal punishment for sin, and the necessity of it as satisfaction for sin, of course left no place for any indulgence or commutation of it. As he denied the indulgence to be of any avail to the living, he also declared it to be fruitless when applied to the dead. He maintained that even after receiving the sacrament of penance, the gaining of an indulgence plunged the Christian back into the filth of his sin. With tirades against the schoolmen, he urged his hearers to disregard indulgences, and give any alms they had to spare, not to the building of St. Peter's, but to the poor. The famous sermon that opened the war on the Church is a specimen of Luther's style. There is no accurate reasoning, no grasp of the subject, but plenty of violent declamation. Tetzel's reply was the plain, distinct utterance of a theologian. Luther's retort was characteristic: "I laugh at your words as I do at the braying of an ass; instead of water I recommend to you the juice of the grape; and instead of fire, inhale, my friend, the smell of a roast goose. I am at Wittenberg. I, Doctor Martin Luther, make it known to all inquisitors of the faith, bullies and rock-splitters, that I enjoy here abundant hospitality, an open house, a well-supplied table, and marked attention; thanks to the liberality of our duke and prince, the Elector of Saxony."

Can any man believe such a one to be raised up by God to guide men in the way of salvation?

Many suppose, from the exaggerated statements of Protestant

writers, that Father Tetzel ignorantly or wilfully misrepresented the nature of indulgences, and sold them as pardons for sins. The nature of indulgences was, however, clearly defined in ordinary manuals for the use of the clergy, then in print, such as the *Discipulus de Eruditione Christi Fidelium*, issued at Cologne in 1504, where contrition and confession are laid down as absolutely necessary to the valid gaining of an indulgence, as well as the performance of the prescribed acts. Tetzel's sermons are in print, with his announcement of the jubilee; and they all make contrition and confession a requisite. Nor does Luther in his sermon accuse Tetzel of misstating or misrepresenting Catholic doctrine; he himself attacks the Catholic doctrine of the necessity of satisfaction in conjunction with contrition.

With a hypocrisy that does not generally rank as a mark of sanctity or divine mission, Luther at once wrote to three different bishops, apologizing for his sermon. He did not in this correspondence accuse Tetzel of error, but complained of the error into which his words led weak minds. The Bishop of Brandenburg urged him not to print his sermon; Luther said in reply: "I am well content,"¹ but he nevertheless did print it. He had determined to follow up the subject, and, at midnight, on the last day of October, 1517, the porter of the Augustinian monastery posted on the outer pillars of the Church of All Saints ninety-five theses prepared by Luther.

In the popular literature of our day these are represented as learned objections to the whole system of Catholic truth and discipline. The whole ninety-five bear on indulgences, but scarcely one raises a solid objection. Some are inconsistent with others; some merely satirical cuts at the Holy See; some are merely puerile.

In the short time since his sermon he had changed his views. In the sermon he said: "I maintain that it is impossible to prove from the Scripture that divine justice demands from the sinner any other penance or satisfaction than reformation of the heart; and that it in no part enjoins concurrence of acts or deeds;" but his third thesis asserts: "And He (Christ) does not mean (by 'do penance') an inward repentance merely, which is insufficient unless accompanied by mortification of the flesh."

In his letter to the Archbishop of Mentz he had said: "For man does not become assured of his salvation by any episcopal act, since he cannot become secure by the infused grace of God, and the apostle commands us to work out incessantly our own salvation in fear and trembling, and that even the just can scarcely

¹ De Wette, *Dr. Martin Luther's Briefe*, i., p. 71.

be saved."¹ His nineteenth thesis declares: "The souls in purgatory are not assured of their salvation, however we who are on earth may be certain of it." Strange medley! For how can men in life, before Christ pronounces judgment on them, be certain that they are elect, and the souls of the departed who are already judged and not in hell, not know certainly that they are not damned when they had already been certain in life!

The thirty-eighth and seventy-first theses read: "We must not undervalue the pardon of the Pope, which is, *as I have said*, a declaration of divine forgiveness." "Whoever speaks against the truth of the apostolic pardon, let him be anathema."

Yet while he thus openly challenged any one to controvert the authority of the Pope to grant indulgences, and took the Catholic side, he showed his usual instability or hypocrisy in his correspondence. Thus, soon after he wrote to his friend Spalatinus: "Yet I will say two things, first, to *you alone, and our friends*, until the thing is published, that it seems to me now that there is nothing in indulgences except an illusion of souls, and that they are absolutely good for nothing, except to those who snore and are torpid in the way of Christ."

He either put forward these two theses as a blind, to enable him to claim orthodoxy, or was ready to-day to refute as heresy what yesterday he offered to defend as orthodox.

As soon as these theses were circulated, the charge was made that they had been drawn up by Luther, at the command of Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, or, at least, to gratify that prince, in order to annoy and attack the Archbishop of Mentz, by whom the jubilee had been proclaimed in Germany. This appears from Luther's own letters, for he tells Spalatinus that he took care that those who might think any part of the theses applied to them, should receive copies before any were seen in the hands of the Grand Duke or his court. (De Wette, i., p. 70; see also 92, 93.)

Yet, in the following March, addressing Christopher Scheuer, of Nuremberg, one not in the immediate circle, and whose respect he evidently desired to retain, he declared: "It was not my intention or wish to disseminate them, but first to confer as to them with a few residing near and around us, so that, if condemned by the judgment of the many, they might be suppressed, or, if approved, published." (De Wette, i., p. 95.)

The constant hypocrisy appears again, for it was one thing to submit theses to a few private friends for their opinion, before publication, and a very different thing to do what Luther really did, post them, on the eve of a great holiday of the year, on the doors

¹ De Wette, Dr. Martin Luther's Briefe, i., p. 68.

of a church to which the Pope had granted special indulgences only a few years before. That occasion and that church had called, if ever, for a due and proper exposition of the doctrine of indulgences by the fathers of the Augustinian convent, and if they had left the people so ill instructed as to their nature and the mode of making them aids to a holy life, Luther and his associates were to blame.

The theses were posted up, and they were a summons to war against the Church; they were widely disseminated, and became the topic of the hour with all who were eager for change. Luther soon after visited several cities of Germany, putting forth new propositions, each wilder than those preceding, like those at Heidelberg, where he maintained: "All the works of the just are mortal sins. There is no moral virtue without pride or dejection, that is, without sin. We are not made just by work."

The theologians met him with the close arguments of the schools, but Luther had no idea of dialectics, and despised them. His answer was violent vituperation; he loaded his antagonist with vile epithets, and rattled off, as his school have generally done since his day, in general abuse of the Church. "Come then to the point," he cried, "Aristarchuses, scholastics, hobgoblins, worms of earth, show forth and parade all the brilliancy of your learning."

As he sought to reach the masses, he soon dropped Latin, and wrote almost exclusively in German. As he went on, his violence and his boldness increased; dogma after dogma was attacked, yet he kept saying: "I dispute, I do not assert, and I dispute with fear." He even endeavored to secure the countenance of bishops, and had the hardihood to address in obsequious terms the Bishop of Brandenburg, whom he had so grossly deceived.

Of immense industry, he sent out Commentaries on the Lord's Prayer and on the Seven Penitential Psalms, and similar devotional tracts, as well as controversies, but all were imbued with the underlying principles with which he had begun, the sufficiency of faith alone for salvation, and the restriction of belief to such dogmas only as he could find clearly laid down in such books of Scripture as he chose to admit. His tracts were eagerly bought, and the presses issued them in large numbers.

Accused of heresy on all sides, by sound theologians, Luther, who had the support of princes, nobles, robber knights, and the debauched scholars, thought that he could gain the favor of Rome. But the Emperor Maximilian entreated the Pope to suppress the vain disputations which were unsettling the faith, and must inevitably entail disastrous results. Leo X., who, from the first reports, considered Luther's doings merely an outgrowth of the ordinary rivalry between religious orders, had, in August, 1518, ordered

the Bishop of Ascoli to summon Luther to appear at Rome within sixty days, to answer before judges appointed by His Holiness, in regard to the doctrines which he had put forth. The Pope instructed Cardinal Cajetan, his legate in Germany, in case Luther disobeyed the citation, to call upon the Emperor and princes to put a stop to his course till his orthodoxy had been inquired into.

Luther was still a Catholic priest, saying mass at Catholic altars and maintaining that he was sound in the faith. Yet he knew that the doctrines which he had been putting forth were contrary to the known and definite teachings of the Church. "I do not yet clearly see," he writes to Spalatinus, "in what way I can avoid the intended censures, unless the Prince comes to my aid. On the other hand, I would rather live under perpetual censure than have the Prince incur any reproach on my account. I have offered myself; believe and persuade others, as far as you wish or think it advisable, that I do so offer myself. I will never be a heretic; I may have erred in disputing; but I wish to establish nothing for myself, nor, on the other hand, do I wish to be a slave to the opinions of men." He had already written to Spalatinus to invoke the Prince's aid, and he now continues, in his eagerness to avoid going or being sent to Rome, to give an account of his doctrine. "To our learned and prudent friends, it seems best for me to ask our prince Frederick for a safe conduct through his states. If he refuses it, as I know he will, I shall have a very just exception and excuse for not appearing at Rome. If, therefore, you will in my name ask our illustrious Prince for a rescript, refusing me a safe conduct, and leaving me to my own risk, if I choose to go, you will serve me exceedingly, but you must act promptly; time is passing and the appointed day is approaching."

He boasted of his courage,¹ and in these days the boast will be repeated by his admirers, but the preceding gives us no very exalted idea of it. He vacillated and hesitated, and finally the University of Wittenberg, on their side, wrote to the Pope, and the Elector Frederick on his side wrote to the Pope's legate, to request that Luther might be permitted to proceed to Augsburg instead of to Rome for the purpose of giving an account of the doctrines which he had advanced.

He had on Trinity Sunday (May 30th) written to the Pope himself to justify his course, and with his wonted disingenuousness had said of his theses and strange doctrines: "They are disputations, not doctrines, not dogmas, set out as usual in an enigmatical

¹ He was brave when he knew he was safe. "I had no fear of their censures, as I was safe in the midst of Germany." Letter to Spalatinus, Aug. 23d, 1520. (De Wette, i., p. 480.)

form ; yet could I have foreseen it, I should certainly have taken part on my side, that they should be more easy to understand."

"Were I such a man as they wish me to appear, and all things had not been rightly handled by me in the course of disputation, it could not be that the most illustrious Prince Frederick, Duke of Saxony, Elector of the Empire, would permit such a pest in his university, pre-eminent as he is for his attachment to the Catholic apostolic truth."

"Wherefore, most blessed Father, I offer myself prostrate at the feet of thy Holiness, with all that I am and have ; quicken, slay, call, recall, approve, reprove, as shall please thee. I recognize thy voice as that of Christ abiding and speaking in thee. If I deserve death, I do not refuse to die."

Fénelon could not have expressed more complete submission to the judgment of the Apostolic See ; it remains to see whether Luther's actions corresponded to his language.

He set out for Augsburg with the sympathy of his many friends and students. He reached that city wearied and ill, as he tells us. On being received at a Carmelite convent he notified the Nuncio of his arrival, but would not appear before him until a safe conduct from the Emperor arrived. He had resolved not to retract. "I should prefer to die, and, what is a greater punishment, be forever deprived of your delightful society," he wrote to Melancthon, "than retract what is well said, and be an occasion for losing the fruit of our excellent studies." (De Wette, i., p. 146.)

At last Luther, attended by his friends, proceeded to the legate. Cardinal Cajetan received him with all kindness. Luther professed a willingness to disavow any expressions, if the legate convinced him that they were erroneous, but the Nuncio was not to be led into any dispute. He told the wilful man that he was there to receive his renunciation of his errors, not to argue. "What error have I taught ?" asked Luther. Cardinal Cajetan presented two errors. 1st. "That the merits of Christ are not the treasure of indulgences." 2d. "That faith alone is sufficient for justification." He showed decisions of the Holy See covering the ground, and again called on Luther to renounce his errors ; he asked three days to reply, but returned the next day with a protest, offering to submit his writings to the judgment of the Holy Father, and the universities of Basle, Fribourg, Louvain, and Paris. This he followed up by an elaborate defence, and when Cajetan found him obstinate, he said, "Do not return again. All is ended."

Yet the Nuncio wished to save the unfortunate man. He urged Staupitz and Linke to counsel submission to their friend, and, moved by them, Luther, on the 17th of October, wrote to Cardinal Cajetan, "I am affected, repentant. Henceforward I promise

you, my Father, to speak and act quite differently by God's assistance. I shall speak no more upon indulgences, provided you impose silence on all those who have brought me into this painful position."

"As to the retractation, my reverend and kind Father, which you and our Vicar demand so earnestly, my conscience in no wise permits me to make it, and nothing in the world, orders, counsels, or the voice of friendship, can make me speak or act against my conscience."

"I entreat you, therefore, with all humility, to refer this cause before our Holy Father, Pope Leo X., to the end that the Church may pronounce on what must be believed or rejected. I desire nothing else than to hear and follow the Church." (De Wette, i., p. 163.)

Even this slight step toward submission was too much for his pride. He at once prepared an appeal, and leaving it to be posted, fled in haste at night, guided by a peasant. In a letter to the Nuncio, he declared that he appealed even "from the Pope ill informed to the Pope better informed" (De Wette, i., p. 164). He drew up his appeal and then prepared a further appeal to a future council. An appeal to three courts in succession before there had been any decision, was certainly a strange course of proceeding. He denounced the Brief of Leo X. "It is incredible that anything so monstrous can issue from the Sovereign Pontiff, especially Leo X. Whoever then the scamp is that proposes to frighten me with such a decree in the name of Leo X., let him understand that I do understand nonsense, or if it really emanated from the Curia, I will teach them their most impudent temerity and wicked ignorance." (De Wette, i., p. 166.)

The same farce was enacted when Miltitz, in the name of the Pope, endeavored to recall Luther. There were the same outward professions of respect and submission, while to his friends he showed his stubborn resolve to retract nothing, and his utter contempt for all the constituted authorities of the Church. It was not till the dispute with Eck that he was forced to admit his doctrines were those of Huss, condemned at Constance, and then he insisted that a general council could err, shocking even the Elector Frederick, his constant friend. While deluding the Catholics and addressing the Emperor Charles V. in specious terms of submission, he began to denounce the Pope as Antichrist.

Pope Leo X. at last, in the Bull *Exsurge Domine et judica causam tuam*, issued June 15th, 1520, condemned forty-one propositions extracted from Luther's writings, and excommunicated him, if he did not retract before the lapse of sixty days. This Bull was formally published in some parts of Germany, derided in others, and burned by Luther, who, instead of submitting, wrote a treatise

denouncing it as a bull of Antichrist. The comparison of these two documents is in itself enough to condemn Luther. No unbiassed mind can read the fatherly, mild and temperate words of the Pope who seeks to win back an erring son, and not feel that the Spirit of God in his Church breathes through them; while Luther's seem prompted by the Spirit of Evil, and are utterly irreconcilable with the ideal of a Christian Church.

The universities to which he had appealed all condemned him, and thus condemned by the Pope and the universities, he ceased to be a Catholic. At the Diet of Worms he again poses as a hero; but he was not bold until he knew that he was safe under the protection of the Elector of Saxony, and the promised help of Franz von Sickingen, Count Schaumburg, Hartmuth von Kromberg, and other noble ruffians and titled highwaymen, of whom the very Emperor and the assembled states stood in awe, in their inability to repress their high-handed murders and robberies. Safe in their support, Luther at Worms refused even to submit to the decision of a general council, and was put under the ban of the empire; but it could not be enforced; and when the Diet of Nuremberg met, many princes were already Lutherans, and Catholicity had lost its hold in several states. They had become a "twofold Bohemia." (Luther in De Wette, i., p. 464.)

Luther set to work to give form to Protestantism, but every village had among the apostate monks and priests some reformer who refused to listen to him, but claimed a right to frame a religion of his own. This took its most terrible form in the Peasants' War, led by Thomas Münzer. They drew their doctrines from Luther's writings, but his attitude towards them presents him in a new aspect, that of a cruel and relentless oppressor. "They ought to be choked like mad dogs," he says. "Give the ass his fodder, burdens and the cudgel, says the wise man; give the peasants their oat-straw, and if they are not satisfied, give them stripes and musket-balls. Mercy will do them no good; let artillery rattle among them, or they will do a thousand times worse. Even to pity them is to deny and blaspheme God, and to try to pull Him down out of heaven. They ought to be choked like mad dogs." Fearing that Albert, Count of Mansfield, might deal mildly with them, he anxiously begs of Ruhel, one of his counsellors, to do what he can to prevent it. He exhorts every one to come to the rescue, to take up arms against the peasants, "to strike, stab, and slay, as best he can, and if he die in this holy crusade he will have a happy death."¹

This was against his own deluded followers. Of course against

¹ Four Lay Sermons, Lancaster, 1879, pp. 42-3, citing De Wette, i., p. 465-480; ii., pp. 669-670.

Catholics he was equally violent. "O that Charles were a man and would attack these Satans for Christ's sake!" he cried, on receiving the Bull of Leo X. (De Wette, i., p. 494.) Again: "I rejoice that Hutten has sallied out, and would that he might intercept Marinus and Aleandro." (Ib., p. 50.)

We have seen in our time the mob in Russia rising on the Jews. These Muscovites have drawn down on themselves the sternest reprobation in many countries where Luther is held in honor. Yet "Luther cordially hated the Jews, and advocated their ill treatment on principle. Not content with calling them by the most opprobrious names (ass-heads, lying mouths, devil's children, devils, young devils damned to hell), he consoles himself with the thought that they will be tormented, not in upper hell, nor in middle hell, but in hell's deepest depths. He tells us how they ought to be treated by Christian princes; how he would treat them, if he had the power.

"In the first place, he would burn every synagogue or school of theirs, and invite Christians to help the flames by throwing in pitch, brimstone and hell fire, if possible. Next, he would raze their houses to the ground; to sleep under a shed or in a stable is good enough for them. He would likewise take away from them their books, prayer-books, and Talmudist writings, and all their Bibles; not a leaf must be left to them. Finally he would imitate the good example set in France, and by our dear (Emperor) Charles in Bohemia and Spain, and drive them out of Germany, after depriving them of the wealth which they had stolen from Christians by their usury. So long as they are with us, or on our soil, they must not be allowed to praise or thank God or pray. They must not mention God's name in presence of a Christian. But it is better to hunt them out like mad dogs, that we may not partake of their sins and damnation."¹

The hatred of the Jews seemed to increase with his years, and the very last sermon that he delivered breathes the same spirit of violence. And yet we shall hear him extolled as the highest type of a tolerant mind:

Luther was now out of the pale of the Church. At his instigation and by his counsel, monks, nuns and friars had abandoned their cloisters and married, carrying off what they could; priests had in the same way violated their vows. Mass ceased to be said in many parts, or was said as each one's fancy dictated; princes seized the Church property and divided it among their courtiers. The parts of Germany to which the influence of Luther and his coloborers had extended were in a singular state. Religion was in

¹ Four Lay Sermons, citing Luther's Works (Erlangen edn.), xxxii., pp. 234, 238, 252-3, 259.

a perfect chaos. There was no settled doctrine, no recognized public worship of God, no regularly constituted clergy, but swarms of self-appointed preachers. Christianity, as it had been planted in Germany by Boniface, Virgil, Wilfrid, was abolished. In some countries of the world the pretence might be made that there was a Christianity there preceding the Roman system; for Germany no such pretence could be made. Its apostles were monks, and introduced the monastic life; they were sent by the Pope, and from the outset acknowledged the Sovereign Pontiff as the ultimate judge in matters of faith and discipline, as their ecclesiastical superior, the source from which their authority was derived. The public worship they introduced was the mass, in the language and according to the rite of Rome.

Yet the people generally clung to the faith. "Only for the princes and nobles," wrote Luther (Walch I, 2444), "we should not remain long. Let us pray for the Prince Elector that he may preserve the Church." "If I wished," he says elsewhere, "I could easily, with two or three sermons, make my people turn back to the Papacy and cause new pilgrimages and masses." "I know in truth that there are scarcely ten in Wittenberg, whom I could not seduce, if I would again use such holiness as I used when a monk under the Papacy." (Works, 6, 280, etc., cited in Stang.) He admits that he did away with the mass at the compulsion of the civil power.

In whom was there authority vested to rear up a new Christianity, to form a new scripture, a new faith, a new worship, never before recognized? That any man without direct authority from Almighty God should assume the right to do so, and impose his work on his fellow-men, with no warrant but his own fancy, is one of the most daring things in all human history. That any people should cast aside the Christianity, as originally established in their land, which had prevailed for centuries, and was in harmony with that prevailing throughout Christendom, and dating back beyond all civil institutions, cast it all aside and submit to creed and worship and ministry framed by men no better than themselves, and in many points men that the upright must have despised, is still more astounding. That men should submit to such degradation of their manhood, passes all comprehension. The Catholic recognizes the Church as established by Christ, who gave His Apostles power and made it their duty to teach. In obeying the Apostles and their successors, in receiving the faith, the worship, the ministry transmitted from them and by them, he preserves his dignity and his manhood; he bows to an authority instituted by God. But the Reformation in Germany swept all away. What was set up had no antecedent, no transmitted power or authority. It was the work of men usurping a divine function, without the shadow of a

pretence of divine commission. To bow to it is from a mere human point of view the deepest degradation to which man can sink.

Luther had erected himself into something more than Church, or Popes, or Councils. But he soon found that his followers were inclined to use the same liberty that he had assumed. His authority was defied on all sides. New teachers and new creeds appeared in all parts of Germany. His own principles, theories, and arguments were employed against him, and in religious matters chaos prevailed. In vain he endeavored to fall back on Catholic doctrines and the supernatural, and call on them, as he did on the Anabaptists, to prove their doctrine by miracles,¹ forgetting that he had no miracles to prove his own mission.

Luther had been able to destroy, but he was utterly unable to reconstruct. God, who is essentially the Spirit of Order, could never have sent any man as His minister merely to abolish, and then leave men without a guide as to the truths He wished them to know, the worship they were to render to Him.

Luther could not draw up a creed or institute a worship. Appealed to from all sides, he could only advise the civil powers to frame new religions for themselves. Some retained more of the Mass, others less; some retained what others rejected. If he did not, from the outset, avow the principle that the civil government had supreme jurisdiction over the faith of its subjects, and the worship to be rendered to Almighty God, he certainly, in the result, did so practically.

When, therefore, the meeting of the Diet at Augsburg made it necessary for the Protestant party to state distinctly its faith, Luther sinks to a secondary place. Unstable as water, how could he lay down a formula of faith when he was constantly denying one day what he had professed the day before? He declared the Church infallible (*De 1 Præcept.*, and in reply to *Priorato*), and that it is fallible (*In Postil. Dom.*, 1 post *Epiph.*); that we must submit to the Councils (*In Disput. Lips.*, art. 16, contra *Zuinglium*); and that we must not (*Contra Regem Angliæ*, chap. 15); he maintains that the civil government has power over the ministers of religion (*Ad. Christ. Nobiles Germaniæ*), and denies it (*Lib de Bello adv. Turc.*). He admitted that there was a hell (*Serm. Conven. de Condemnatione et Inferno*), and denied its existence (*In cap. 2, Jonæ*, in *cap. 5, Gen.*). He taught that the sacraments conferred grace (*De præp. ad mort*, *Epistola contra Regem Angliæ*), and he taught the very contrary (*In Adsert.*, art. 1, *Concio. de pœnitentia*; *De Captivitate Babil.*). He taught that there were seven Sacraments

¹ "Jussi tandem, ut miraculis probarent suam doctrinam, qua ultra et contra scripturas gloriarentur. Illi recusabant miracula, minati tamen sunt, fore ut credere tandem eis cogerer." Letter to Spalatinus, Apl. 12, 1522, *De Wette*, ii., p. 179.

(De Potestate Papæ, tom. ii. (Wittenb., 1551), tom. vii., p. 321); then reduces them to two (De Adoratione Sacram., vii., p. 373); increases them to three (Confess., art. 12, etc.), and even five (Serm. do Novo Testamento). He maintained each of the Sacraments and denied five of them. In baptism, he both admitted and denied that grace was conferred (De Captiv. Babylon.); that original sin is effaced (In cap. vi., Gen.); and that it is not (In Psal. li., etc.); he maintained that there was a purgatory, and that we should pray for the dead (Disput. Lips., cap. de Purgato.), and denied it (De Abroganda Missa. Priv.).

It was impossible for any one so uncertain and self-willed, so devoid of any solid foundation, to build up a system, or to prepare a creed that he would himself adhere to for twenty-four hours.

His moral character, too, had waned. He had declared repeatedly, and in the grossest terms, that man could not live without woman; he had encouraged monks, priests, and nuns to marry; his conduct at Worms had been so loose as to excite censure; and when Spalatinus urged him to marry, he replied that he had had four wives, and that they had married three away from him, and that he held the fourth only with the left hand; and when he finally married it was a tardy act of attempted reparation.¹

All this, with his foul language, which exhausted the vocabulary of coarseness, brutality, and indecency, and which showed habitual use of words that could become familiar only to men who associated with the most degraded of creatures, made him especially unfitted to be trusted with the delicate task of framing such a profession of faith as could be presented and maintained.

His power and influence had culminated. They were potent only for destruction, and he had carried destruction to its limit.

The Augsburg Confession, which is to this day the symbol of the Lutherans, and printed in the beginning of their prayer-books, is not the work of Martin Luther. It was drawn up by Melancthon, who corresponded with Luther, then at Coburg, but did not adhere to his views. Melancthon was really desirous of ending the schism and returning to unity; he was endeavoring to act honestly. Luther desired neither to restore the unity of the Church nor to act honestly. On the 28th of August, 1530, he wrote to Me-

¹ His "Esto peccator et pecca fortiter," addressed to Melancthon, in 1521, must, with his avowal of his own temptations and carnal desires, his denial of the possibility of even temporary continency, be regarded as intended especially to refer to sins of the flesh. He declared that he could find nothing in Scripture in condemnation of polygamy (De Wette, ii., p. 459), and, as is well known, allowed the Landgrave of Hesse to have two wives. Luther renewed, as far as he could, the old Indo-Germanic worship of lust, of which the *lingams* in India stand as monuments to this day.

lanchthon condemning him for not putting forward doctrines they did not believe, in order to gain time and delude their enemies; "For if," says he, "we avoid having force used against us, and gain peace, we shall easily amend our stratagems (*dolos*, and in many editions it is *mendacia*, lies) and lapses."

In this Confession the Lutherans denied that they wished to abolish Mass or Confession, and though editions vary, it so reads to this day in the Lutheran prayer-books. In regard to the Holy Eucharist, they used words evidently intended to deceive. "De cœna Domini docent quod corpus et sanguis Christi vere adsint et distribuuntur vescentibus in cœna Domini et improbant secus docentes." "As to the Lord's Supper, they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat at the Lord's Supper, and they condemn those who teach otherwise." (*Confessio Invariata*.) Luther's horrid denial of Free Will was covered up also in ambiguous phrases. The originals presented to Charles V., in Latin and German, were not published, but it is asserted that they were even stronger on this point.¹

Luther's influence at Augsburg prevented the return of Germany to the faith, and led to the hypocritical Confession, intended not to confess, but to conceal the real belief of those who made it.

This Confession, however, became a standard, and in the Protestant states of Germany each prince set to work to frame a religious system to keep his people from lapsing into utter heathenism. When the Scandinavian kings also revolted from the Church, they too, on the basis of Luther, modelled churches with creed, orders of ministry and service to suit themselves.

While the civil power was thus endeavoring to build up what he had levelled, and make a religion as part of the state police, Luther lived in comparative retirement with the nun Catharine Bora, whom he had married in 1525, and the family that grew up around them, studying and working, relaxing to enjoy music or potations with his friends, pouring out the strange medley of table talk which his admirers noted down and preserved for the amazement of future ages.

Of that marriage he wrote with his usual inconsistency, ascribing it alike to the devil and to God.

In them and in his letters he often deplores the decline of virtue and morality, of piety and charity among the people, and declares that men were better when under the old system.

¹ Luther, in his letter "An die Christen zu Strassburg," December 15th, 1524, tells them that he tried to give up the faith in the Real Presence to spite the Papists; and elsewhere relates how the devil finally convinced him that the Catholic doctrine was wrong. What a fearful way of dealing with the holiest things!

Yet he resolutely resisted all efforts to recall him to his early faith and give his aid to a cause in which he was no longer a leader. His virulence of language increased, if possible, and his words almost on his deathbed make one shudder. Well might the Reformed Church of Zurich write: "It is clearer than the sun, and cannot be denied, that no mortal ever wrote more foully, more uncivilly, or more indecently than Luther, and this beyond all limits of Christian modesty and sobriety."

Pretended translations of his *Tischreden*, or Table Talk, have been given, but if Luther was a man of God, full of the Spirit of the Gospel, why not give the work in full? We can brand as hypocrites those who speak of Luther as pure and good, and defy them to print a translation of the *Tischreden* without suppression and without toning down his language. They dare not show Luther to the deluded as he really is.

Luther's most potent work, which exercised an influence over the language of all Germany, and which has continued in use to the present time among Protestants in Germany, is his translation of the Bible, begun in the castle of Wartburg and completed in 1522. His great object was to make the version thoroughly German, and to make the sacred authors read as though they had written in German. "Great God," he wrote, "what a labor, to employ force to make the Hebrew poets express themselves in German!" To attain this, he often sacrificed accuracy, even where his strong prepossessions did not induce him to mistranslate on purpose. His version was clear, forcible, and at once became popular. He boasted that it was better as a translation than the Vulgate or Septuagint. His work made the Saxon dialect the classic language of Germany, and in comparison with his natural style, the earlier German translations by Catholics, though faithful to a nicety, seem harsh and obscure. It cannot be wondered at that Luther's Bible attained a wide popularity, and exercised a decided influence in the formation of the German language.

To the Reformers this Bible became everything. Martin Luther's main dogma was that nothing could be required to be believed that is not explicitly laid down in the Bible. The dogma, if accepted, must be rejected, for it is not itself explicitly laid down anywhere in the Bible. But Protestantism has never regarded this slight inconsistency, and where the Catholic doctrine is explicitly stated, as in the Real Presence, the Apostolic power of forgiving sins, Baptismal Regeneration, the Supremacy of St. Peter, the judicious insertion of a negative will always give the Protestant doctrine.

It is, however, amazing that Luther, who spent ten years translating the Bible, and made it the study of his life, should enunciate

such a dogma when he really had little reverence for the Bible. As he rejected the authority of the teaching Church, he had no guide but his own whim. He began by rejecting the deuterocanonical books entirely, although they had always been received by the Oriental churches, and especially by those who occupied the Holy Land, and who, consequently, had preserved the books continuously. But even for the books that he chose to retain, he showed little or no respect. Of the Pentateuch he says: "We have no wish either to see or hear Moses." Of Ecclesiastes: "This book should be more complete; it is mutilated; it is like a horseman riding without boots or spurs." He wished that Esther did not exist. The New Testament fared no better: "The first three (Gospels) speak of the works of our Lord rather than of his oral teachings; that of St. John is the only sympathetic, the only true Gospel, and should be undoubtedly preferred to the others. In like manner the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Paul are superior to the first three Gospels." The Epistle to the Hebrews did not suit him. "It need not surprise one to find here," he says, "bits of wood, hay, and straw." The Epistle of St. James, which so decidedly declares works with faith to be necessary, Luther denounced as "an epistle of straw." "There are many things objectionable in this book," he says of the Apocalypse; "to my mind it bears upon it no marks of an apostolic or prophetic character. . . . Every one may form his own judgment of this book; as for myself, I feel an aversion to it, and to me this is sufficient reason for rejecting it."

Thus did he pave the way for the Rationalists, who, in Germany, scarcely surpass him.

His pride was intense. He conceived himself directly illuminated by the Holy Ghost, and second only to the Godhead. For all others he had nothing but contempt and scorn. To him all must bow, and in that Satanic pride he felt the deepest loathing even of his followers, of whom he wrote: "Stercora nostra adorabunt et pro balsamo habebunt."

Such is Luther, but not such will he be presented in the commemorations about to take place. There his doubts, vacillations, and inconsistencies will be pardoned; his treatment of the Scriptures will be extolled; his low moral tone admired; his hatred of everything Catholic applauded; yet, really, the nineteenth century, in its dotage, ought not to insult human reason by holding up such a man as one raised up by God, as one who did any real service to religion or morality, or by honoring as the champion of human freedom one who persistently denied free will in man, or man's responsibility for his acts.