

CHAPTER 22 : FROM THE LEIPSIK DISPUTATION TO THE DIET OF WORMS, 1521

At this point of great danger for Luther, various German nobles and magistrates offered him their assistance. One of the most powerful knights of Franconia, Sylvester of Schaumburg, sent his son all the way to Wittenberg with a letter to Luther, saying, "If the electors, princes, magistrates fail you, come to me. God willing, I shall soon have collected more than a hundred gentlemen, and with their help I shall be able to protect you from every danger." Francis of Sickingen, one of those knights who united the love of letters to that of arms, whom Melancthon styled "a peerless ornament of German knighthood," offered Luther the asylum of his castle. "My services, my goods, and my body, all that I possess are at your disposal," wrote he. Ulrich of Hutten, who was renowned for his verses not less than for his deeds of valor, also offered himself as a champion of the Reformer. His mode of warfare, however, differed from Luther's. Ulrich was for falling on Rome with the sword, Luther sought to subdue her by the weapon of the Truth. "It is with swords and with bows," wrote Ulrich, "with javelins and bombs that we must crush the fury of the devil." "I will not have recourse to arms and bloodshed in defense of the gospel," said Luther, shrinking back from the proposal. "It was by the Word that the Church was founded, and by the Word also it shall be re-established."

When the danger was thus at its height, the Emperor Maximilian died (1519). Negotiations and intrigues were now set on foot for the election of a new emperor. These became a rampart around the Reformed movement. The Pope, who wished to carry a particular candidate, found it necessary, in order to gain his object, to conciliate the Elector Frederick, whose position as regent, and whose character for wisdom, gave him a potential voice in the electoral college. This led to a clearing of the sky in the quarter of Rome. King Charles was finally elected the new emperor of the German states. His hereditary kingdom, inherited through Ferdinand and Isabella, was Spain. To this magnificent domain, the seat of so many opulent towns, around which was spread an assemblage of corn-bearing plains, wooded sierras, and vegas, on which the fruits of Asia mingled in rich luxuriance with those of Europe, were added the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, Flanders and the rich domains of Burgundy; and now the death of his grand-father, the Emperor Maximilian, had put him in possession of the States of Austria. Nor was this all; the discovery of Columbus had placed a new continent under his sway; and how large its limit, or how ample the wealth that might flow from it, Charles could not, at that hour, so much as conjecture. So wide were the realms over which this young prince reigned. Scarcely had the sun set on their western frontier when the morning had dawned on their eastern.

Meantime, Luther was now reading the writings of John Huss, and, to his surprise, he found in them the doctrine of Paul—that which it had cost himself such agonies to learn—respecting the free justification of sinners. "We have all," he exclaimed, half in wonder, half in joy, "Paul, Augustine, and myself, been Hussites without knowing it! and he added, with deep seriousness, "God will surely visit it upon the world that the truth was preached to it a century ago, and burned?" It was now that he proclaimed the great truth that the Sacrament will profit no man without faith, and that it is folly to believe that it

will operate spiritual effects of itself and altogether independently of the disposition of the recipient.

It was now, too, that Luther published his famous appeal to the emperor, the princes, and the people of Germany, on the Reformation of Christianity. This was the most graphic, courageous, eloquent, and spirit-stirring production which had yet issued from his pen. It may be truly said of it that its words were battles. The sensation it produced was immense. It was the trumpet that summoned the German nation to the great conflict.

"The time for silence," said Luther, "is past, and the time to speak is come." And verily he did speak.

In this manifesto Luther first of all draws a most masterly picture of the Roman tyranny. Rome had achieved a three-fold conquest. She had triumphed over all ranks and classes of men; she had triumphed over all the rights and interests of human society; she had enslaved kings; she had enslaved Councils; she had enslaved the people. She had effected a serfdom complete and universal. By her dogma of Pontifical supremacy she had enslaved kings, princes, and magistrates. She had exalted the spiritual above the temporal in order that all rulers, and all tribunals and causes, might be subject to her own sole absolute and irresponsible will, and that, unchallenged and unpunished by the civil power, she might pursue her career of usurpation and oppression. Has she not, Luther asked, placed the throne of her Pope above the throne of kings, so that no one dare call him to account? The Pontiff enlists armies, makes war on kings, and spills their subjects' blood; nay, he challenges for the persons of his priests immunity from civil control, thus fatally deranging the order of the world, and reducing authority into prostration and contempt. By her dogma of spiritual supremacy Rome had vanquished Councils. The Bishop of Rome claimed to be chief and ruler over all bishops. In him was centered the whole authority of the Church, so that let him promulgate the most manifestly erroneous dogma, or commit the most flagrant wickedness, no Council had the power to reprove or depose him. Councils were nothing, the Pope was all. The Spiritual supremacy made him the Church: the Temporal, the World. By her assumed sole and infallible right of interpreting Holy Scripture, Rome had enslaved the people. She had put out their eyes; she had bound them in chains of darkness, that she might make them bow down to any god she was pleased to set up, and compel them to follow whither she was pleased to lead—into temporal bondage, into eternal perdition. The Reformer called on all ranks in his nation to combine for their emancipation from a vassalage so disgraceful and so ruinous.

The Fatherland, the Reformer told the Germans, was being gnawed to the very bones by the Papacy. Annats, palliums, commendams, administrations, indulgences, reversions, incorporations, reserves—such were a few, and but a few, of the contrivances by which the priests managed to convey the wealth of Germany to Rome. Was it a wonder that princes, cathedrals, and people were poor? The wonder was, with such a cormorant swarm preying upon them, that anything was left. All went into the Roman sack which had no bottom. Here was robbery surpassing that of thieves and highwaymen, who expiated their offences on the gibbet. Here were the tyranny and destruction of the gates of hell, seeing

it was the destruction of soul and body, the ruin of both Church and State. Talk of the devastation of the Turk, and of raising armies to resist him! there is no Turk in all the world like the Roman Turk.

The instant remedies which he urged were the same with those which his great predecessor, Wyckliffe, a full hundred and fifty years before, had recommended to the English people, and happily had prevailed upon the Parliament to so far adopt. The gospel alone, which he was laboring to restore, could go to the root of these evils, but they were of a kind to be corrected in part by the temporal power. Every prince and State, he said, should forbid their subjects giving annats to Rome. Kings and nobles ought to resist the Pontiff as the greatest foe of their own prerogatives, and the worst enemy of the independence and prosperity of their kingdoms. Instead of enforcing the bulls of the Pope, they ought to throw his ban, seal, and briefs into the Rhine or the Elbe. Archbishops and bishops should be forbidden, by imperial decree, to receive their dignities from Rome. All causes should be tried within the kingdom, and all persons made amenable to the country's tribunals. Festivals should cease, as but affording occasions for idleness and all kinds of vicious indulgences, and the Sabbath should be the only day on which men ought to abstain from working. No more cloisters ought to be built for mendicant friars, whose begging expeditions had never turned to good, and never would; the law of clerical celibacy should be repealed, and liberty given to priests to marry like other men; and, in fine, the Pope, leaving kings and princes to govern their own realms, should confine himself to prayer and the preaching of the Word. "Hearest thou, O Pope, not all holy, but all sinful? Who gave thee power to lift thyself above God and break His laws? The wicked Satan lies through thy throat.—O my Lord Christ, hasten Thy last day, and destroy the devil's nest at Rome. There sits 'the man of sin,' of whom Paul speaks, 'the son of perdition.'"

Luther well understood what a great orator since has termed "the expulsive power of a new emotion." Truth he ever employed as the only effectual instrumentality for expelling error. Accordingly, underneath Rome's system of human merit and salvation by works, he placed the doctrine of man's inability and God's free grace. This it was that shook into ruin the Papal fabric of human merit. By the same method of attack did Luther demolish the Roman kingdom of bondage. He penetrated the fiction on which it was reared. Rome takes a man, shaves his head, anoints him with oil, gives him the Sacrament of orders, and so infuses into him a mysterious virtue. The whole class of men so dealt with form a sacerdotal order, distinct from and higher than laymen, and are the divinely appointed rulers of the world.

This falsehood, with the grievous and ancient tyranny of which it was the corner-stone, Luther overthrew by proclaiming the antagonistic truth. All really Christian men, said he, are priests. Had not the Apostle Peter, addressing all believers, said, "Ye are a royal priesthood"? It is not the shearing of the head, or the wearing of a peculiar garment, that makes a man a priest. It is faith that makes men priests, faith that unites them to Christ, and that gives them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whereby they become filled with all holy grace and heavenly power. This inward anointing—this oil, better than any that ever came from the horn of bishop or Pope—gives them not the name only, but the nature, the

purity, the power of priests; and this anointing have all they received who are believers on Christ.

Thus did Luther not only dislodge the falsehood, he filled its place with a glorious truth, lest, if left vacant, the error should creep back. The fictitious priesthood of Rome—a priesthood which lay in oils and vestments, and into which men were introduced by scissiors and the arts of necromancy—departed, and the true priesthood came in its room. Men opened their eyes upon their glorious enfranchisement.

Luther's appeal was successful. Like a peal of thunder it rang from side to side of Germany. It sounded the knell of Roman domination in that land. The movement was no longer confined to Wittenberg; it was henceforward truly national. It was no longer conducted exclusively by theologians. Princes, nobles, burghers joined in it. It was seen to be no battle of creed merely; it was a struggle for liberty, religious and civil; for rights, spiritual and temporal; for the generation then living, for all the generations that were to live in the future; a struggle, in fine, for the manhood of the human race.

Luther's thoughts turned naturally to the new emperor. What part will this young potentate play in the movement? Presuming that it would be the just and magnanimous one that became so great a prince, Luther carried his appeal to the foot of the throne of Charles V.

This was all more than Pope Leo and the Vatican could tolerate. So in 1520 the Sacred College fulminated the bull of excommunication against Luther. The bull condemned as scandalous, heretical, and damnable, forty-one propositions extracted from the writings of Luther. The obnoxious propositions are simple statements of gospel truth. Failing to obey this summons, Luther and his adherents were pronounced incorrigible and accursed heretics, whom all princes and magistrates were enjoined to apprehend and send to Rome, or banish from the country in which they happened to be found. The towns where they continued to reside were laid under interdict, and every one who opposed the publication and execution of the bull was excommunicated in "the name of the Almighty God, and of the holy apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul."

The Pope advanced with excommunications in one hand and flatteries in the other. Immediately on the back of this terrible fulmination came a letter to the Elector Frederick from Leo X. The Pope in this communication dilated on the errors of that "son of iniquity," Martin Luther; he was sure that Frederick cherished an abhorrence of these errors, and he proceeded to pass a glowing eulogium on the piety and orthodoxy of the elector, who he knew would not permit the blackness of heresy to sully the brightness of his own and his ancestors' fame. There was a day when these compliments would have been grateful to Frederick, but he had since drunk at the well of Wittenberg, and lost his relish for the Roman cistern. The object of the letter was transparent, and the effect it produced was just the opposite of that which the Pope intended. From that day Frederick of Saxony resolved with himself that he would protect the Reformer.

Luther next passed in review the Sacramental theory of the Church of Rome. The priest

and the Sacrament – these are the twin pillars of the Papal edifice, the two saviors of the world. Luther, in his Babylonish Captivity, laid his hands upon both pillars, and bore them to the ground. Grace and salvation, he affirmed, are neither in the power of the priest nor in the efficacy of the Sacrament, but in the faith of the recipient. Faith lays hold on that which the Sacrament represents, signifies, and seals—even the promise of God; and the soul resting on that promise has grace and salvation. The Sacrament, on the side of God, represents the offered blessing; on the side of man, it is a help to faith which lays hold of that blessing. "Without faith in God's promise," said Luther, "the Sacrament is dead; it is a casket without a jewel, a scabbard without a sword." Thus did he explode the opus operatum, that great mystic charm which Rome had substituted for faith, and the blessed Spirit who works in the soul by means of it. At the very moment when Rome was advancing to crush him with the bolt she had just forged, did Luther pluck from her hand that weapon of imaginary omnipotence which had enabled her to vanquish men.

The bull of excommunication arrived at Wittenberg in October, 1520. It had ere this been published far and wide, and almost the last man to see it was the man against whom it was fulminated. But here at last it is. Luther and Leo: Wittenberg and Rome now stand face to face—Rome has excommunicated Wittenberg, and Wittenberg will excommunicate Rome. Neither can retreat, and the war must be to the death.

The bull could not be published in Wittenberg, for the university possessed in this matter powers superior to those of the Bishop of Brandenburg. It did, indeed, receive publication at Wittenberg, and that of a very emphatic kind, as we shall afterwards see, but not such publication as Eck wished and anticipated. The arrival of the terrible missive caused no fear in the heart of Luther. On the contrary, it inspired him with fresh courage. The movement was expanding into greater breadth. He saw clearly the hand of God guiding it to its goal.

Meanwhile the Reformer took those formal measures that were necessary to indicate his position in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of the Church which had condemned him, and in the eyes of posterity. He renewed his appeal with all solemnity from Leo X to a future Council. This was not Luther's affair only, but that of all Christendom, and accordingly he accompanied his protest against the bull by a solemn appeal to the "emperor, the electors, princes, barons, nobles, senators, and the entire Christian magistracy of Germany," calling upon them, for the sake of Catholic truth, the Church of Christ, and the liberty and right of a lawful Council, to stand by him and his appeal, to resist the impious tyranny of the Pope, and not to execute the bull till he had been legally summoned and heard before impartial judges, and convicted from scripture. Should they act dutifully in this matter, "Christ, our Lord," he said, "would reward them with His everlasting grace. But if there be any who scorn my prayer, and continue to obey that impious man, the Pope, rather than God," he disclaimed all responsibility for the consequences, and left them to the supreme judgment of Almighty God.

The Papal See had delegated two special envoys to the German imperial court of Charles to look after the affair of Luther—Marino Caraccioli and Girolamo Aleander. This matter now held the first place in the thoughts of the Pope and his counselors. They even forgot

the Turk for the time. All their efforts to silence the monk or to arrest the movement had hitherto been in vain, or rather had just the opposite effect. The alarm in the Vatican was great. The champions sent by Rome to engage Luther had one after another been discomfited. Tetzl, the great indulgence-monger, Luther had put utterly to rout. Cajetan, the most learned of their theologians, he had completely baffled. Eck, the ablest of their polemics, he had vanquished; the plausible Miltitz had spread his snares in vain, he had been outwitted and befooled; last of all, Leo himself had descended into the arena; but he had fared no better than the others; he had been even more ignominiously handled, for the audacious monk had burned his bull in the face of all Christendom, after receiving it.

Where was all this to end? Already the See of Rome had sustained immense damage. Pardons were becoming unsaleable. Annats and reservations and first-fruits were, alas! withheld; holy shrines were forsaken; the authority of the keys and the ancient regalia of Peter was treated with contempt; the canon law, that mighty monument of Pontifical wisdom and justice, which so many minds had toiled to rear, was treated as a piece of lumber, and irreverently thrown upon the burning pile; worst of all, the Pontifical thunder had lost its terrors, and the bolt which had shaken monarchs on their thrones was daringly flung back at the thunderer himself. It was time to curb such audacity and punish such wickedness.

The two envoys at the court of the emperor left no stone unturned to bring the matter to an issue. Of the two functionaries the more zealous was Aleander, who has already come before us. An evil prestige attached to him for his connection with the Papal See during the most infamous of its Pontificates, that of Alexander VI; but he possessed great abilities, he had scholarly tastes, indefatigable industry, and profound devotion to the See of Rome. She had at that hour few men in her service better able to conduct to a favorable issue this difficult and dangerous negotiation. Luther sums up graphically his qualities. "Hebrew was his mother-tongue, Greek he had studied from his boyhood, Latin he had long taught professionally. He was a Jew, but whether he had ever been baptised he did not know. He was no Pharisee, however, for certainly he did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, seeing he lived as if all perished with the body. His greed was insatiable, his life abominable, his anger at times amounted to insanity. Why he seceded to the Christians he knew not, unless it were to glorify Moses by obscuring Christ."

Aleander opened the campaign with a bonfire of Luther's writings at Cologne. "What matters it," said some persons to the Papal delegate, "to erase the writing on paper? it is the writing on men's hearts you ought to erase. Luther's opinions are written there." "True," replied Aleander, comprehending his age, "but we must teach by signs which all can read."

Aleander, however, wished to bring something else to the burning pile—the author of the books even. But first he must get him into his power. The Elector of Saxony stood between him and the man whom he wished to destroy. He must detach Frederick from Luther's side. He must also gain over the young emperor Charles. The last ought to be no difficult matter.

Born in the old faith, descended from an ancestry whose glories were entwined with Catholicism, tutored by Adrian of Utrecht, surely this young and ambitious monarch will not permit a contemptible monk to stand between him and the great projects he is revolving! Deprived of the protection of Frederick and Charles, Luther will be in the nuncio's power, and then the stake will very soon stifle that voice which is rousing Germany and resounding through Europe! So reasoned Aleander; but he found the path beset with greater difficulties than he had calculated on meeting.

Neither zeal nor labor nor adroitness was lacking to the nuncio. He went first to the emperor. "We have burned Luther's books," he said—the emperor had permitted these piles to be kindled—"but the whole air is thick with heresy. We require, in order to its purification, an imperial edict against their author." "I must first ascertain," replied the emperor, "what our father the Elector of Saxony thinks of this matter."

It was clear that before making progress with the emperor the elector must be managed. Aleander begged an audience of Frederick. The elector received him in the presence of his counselors, and the Bishop of Trent. The haughty envoy of the Papal court assumed a tone bordering on insolence in the elector's presence. He pushed aside Caraccioli, his fellow-envoy, who was trying to win Frederick by flatteries, and plunged at once into the business. This Luther, said Aleander, is rending the Christian State; he is bringing the Empire to ruin; the man who unites himself with him separates himself from Christ. Frederick alone, he affirmed, stood between the monk and the chastisement he deserved, and he concluded by demanding that the elector should himself punish Luther, or deliver him up to the chastiser of heretics, Rome.

The elector met the bold assault of Aleander with the plea of justice. No one, he said, had yet refused Luther; it would be a gross scandal to punish a man who had not been condemned; Luther must be summoned before a tribunal of pious, learned, and impartial judges.

This pointed to the Diet about to meet at Worms, and to a public hearing of the cause of Protestantism before that august assembly. Than this proposal nothing could have been more alarming to Aleander. He knew the courage and eloquence of Luther. He dreaded the impression his appearance before the Diet would make upon the princes. He had no ambition to grapple with him in person, or to win any more victories of the sort that Eck so loudly boasted. He knew how popular his cause already was all over Germany, and how necessary it was to avoid everything that would give it additional prestige. In his journeys, wherever he was known as the opponent of Luther, it was with difficulty that he could find admittance at a respectable inn, while portraits of the redoubtable monk stared upon him from the walls of almost every bedroom in which he slept. He knew that the writings of Luther were in all dwellings from the baron's castle to the peasant's cottage. Besides, would it not be an open affront to his master the Pope, who had excommunicated Luther, to permit him to plead his cause before a lay assembly? Would it not appear as if the Pope's sentence might be reversed by military barons, and the chair of Peter made subordinate to the States-General of Germany? On all these grounds the Papal nuncio was resolved to oppose to the uttermost Luther's appearance before the

Diet.

Aleander now turned from the Elector of Saxony to the emperor. "Our hope of conquering," he wrote to the Cardinal Julio de Medici, "is in the emperor only." In the truth or falsehood of Luther's opinions the emperor took little interest. The cause with him resolved itself into one of policy. He asked simply which would further most his political projects, to protect Luther or to burn him? Charles appeared the most powerful man in Christendom, and yet there were two men with whom he could not afford to quarrel, the Elector of Saxony and the Pontiff. To the first he owed the imperial crown, for it was Frederick's influence in the electoral conclave that placed it on the head of Charles of Austria. This obligation might have been forgotten, for absolute monarchs have short memories, but Charles could not dispense with the advice and aid of Frederick in the government of the Empire at the head of which he had just been placed. For these reasons the emperor wished to stand well with the elector.

On the other hand, Charles could not afford to break with the Pope. He was on the brink of war with Francis I, the King of France. That sovereign had commenced his reign by crossing the Alps and fighting the battle of Marignano (1515). This victory gained Francis I the fame of a warrior, and the more substantial acquisition of the Duchy of Milan. The Emperor Charles meditated despoiling the French king of this possession, and extending his own influence in Italy. The Italian Peninsula was the prize for which the sovereigns of that age contended, seeing its possession gave its owner the preponderance in Europe. This aforesaid frequent contest between the Kings of Spain and France was now on the point of being resumed. But Charles would speed all the better if Leo of Rome were on his side.

It occurred to Charles that the monk of Wittenberg was a most opportune card to be played in the game about to begin. If the Pope should engage to aid him in his war with the King of France, Charles would give Luther into his hands, that he might do with him as might seem good to him. But should the Pope refuse his aid, and join himself to Francis, the emperor would protect the monk, and make him an opposing power against Leo. So stood the matter. Meanwhile, negotiations were being carried on with the view of ascertaining on which side Leo, who dreaded both of these potentates, would elect to make his stand, and what in consequence would be the fate of the Reformer, imperial protection or imperial condemnation.

In this fashion did these great ones deal with the cause of the world's regeneration. The man who was master of so many kingdoms, in both the Old and the New Worlds, was willing, if he could improve his chances of adding the Dukedom of Milan to his already overgrown possessions, to fling into the flames the Reformer, and with him the movement out of which was coming the reformation.

The imperial court moved forward to Worms. Charles had summoned the Diet for the 6th of January, 1521. In his circular letters to the several princes, he set forth the causes for which it was convoked. One of these was the concerting of proper measures for checking those new and dangerous opinions which so profoundly agitated Germany, and

threatened to overthrow the religion of their ancestors.

The Diet was opened on the 28th of January, 1521. It was presided over by Charles. The Papal nuncios were night and day importuning him to execute the Papal bull against Luther. If he should comply with their solicitations and give the monk into their hands, he would alienate the Elector of Saxony, and kindle a conflagration in Germany which all his power might not be able to extinguish. If, on the other hand, he should refuse Aleander and protect Luther, he would thereby grievously offend the Pope, and send him over to the side of the French king, who was every day threatening to break out into war against him in the Low Countries, or in Lombardy, or in both.

The vacillations of the imperial mind can be traced in the conflicting orders which the emperor was continually sending to the Elector Frederick. One day he would write to him to bring Luther with him to Worms, the next he would command him to leave him behind at Wittemberg. Meanwhile Frederick arrived at the Diet without Luther.

The opposition which Aleander encountered only roused him to yet greater energy—indeed, almost to fury. He saw with horror the Protestant movement advancing from one day to another, while Rome was losing ground. Grasping his pen, he wrote a strong remonstrance to the Cardinal de Medici, the Pope's relative, to the effect that "Germany was separating itself from Rome;" and that, unless more money was sent to be scattered amongst the members of the Diet, he must abandon all hope of success in his negotiations, Rome listened to the cry of her servant. She sent not only more ducats, but more anathemas. Her first bull against Luther had been conditional, inasmuch as it called on him to retract, and threatened him with excommunication if, within sixty days, he failed to do so. Now, however, the excommunication was actually inflicted by a new bull, fulminated at this time (6th January, 1521), and ordered to be published with terrible solemnities in all the churches of Germany. This bull placed all Luther's adherents under the same curse as himself; and thus was completed the separation between Protestantism and Rome.

This new step simplified matters to both Aleander and Luther, but it only the more embroiled them to the emperor and his councilors. The politicians saw their path less clearly than before. It appeared to them the wiser course to stifle the movement, but the new ban seemed to compel them to fan it. This would be to lose the Elector even before they had gained the Pope; for the negotiations with the court of the Vatican had reached as yet no definite conclusion. They must act warily, and shun extremes.

A new device was hit upon, which was sure to succeed, the diplomatists thought, in entrapping the theologians of Wittemberg. There was at the court of the emperor a Spanish Franciscan, John Glapio by name, who held the office of confessor to Charles. He was supple, plausible, and able. This man undertook to arrange the matter which had baffled so many wise heads; and with this view he craved an interview with Gregory Bruck, or Pontanus, the councilor of the Elector of Saxony. Pontanus was a man of sterling integrity, competently versed in theological questions, and sagacious enough to see through the most cunning diplomatist in all the court of the emperor. Glapio was a

member of the reform party within the Roman pale, a circumstance which favored the guise he now assumed. At his interview with the councilor of Frederick, Glapio professed a very warm regard for Luther; he had read his writings with admiration, and he agreed with him in the main. "Jesus Christ, he said, heaving a deep sigh, "was his witness that he desired the reformation of the Church as ardently as Luther, or any one." He had often protested his zeal on this head to the emperor, and Charles sympathized largely with his views, as the world would yet come to know.

From the general eulogium pronounced on the writings of Luther, Glapio excepted one work—the Babylonish Captivity. That work was not worthy of Luther, he maintained. He found in it neither his style nor his learning.

Luther must disavow it. As for the rest of his works, he would propose that they should be submitted to a select body of intelligent and impartial men, that Luther should explain some things and apologize for others; and then the Pope, in the plenitude of his power and benignity, would reinstate him. Thus the breach would be healed, and the affair happily ended. Such was the little artifice with which the wise heads at the court of Charles hoped to accomplish so great things. They only showed how little able they were to gauge the man whom they wished to entrap, or to fathom the movement which they sought to arrest. Pontanus looked on while they were spreading the net, with a mild contempt; and Luther listened to the plot, when it was told him, with feelings of derision.

The negotiations between the emperor and the court of the Vatican, which meanwhile had been going on, were now brought to a conclusion. The Pope agreed to be the ally of Charles in his approaching war with the French king, and the emperor, on his part, undertook to please the Pope in the matter of the monk of Wittenberg. The two are to unite, but the link between them is a stake.

The emperor prepared to fulfill his part of the arrangement. It was hard to see what should hinder him. He had an overwhelming force of kingdoms and armies at his back. The spiritual sword, moreover, was now with him. If with such a combination of power he could not sweep this troublesome monk from his path, it would be a thing so strange and unaccountable that history might be searched in vain for a parallel to it.

When they had assembled, the emperor produced and read the Papal brief which had lately arrived from Rome, enjoining him to append the imperial sanction to the excommunication against Luther, and to give immediate execution to the bull. A yet greater surprise awaited them. The emperor next drew forth and read to the assembled princes the edict which he himself had drawn up in conformity with the Papal brief, commanding that it should be done as the Pope desired.

Yet the storm did not burst. We have seen produced the Pope's bull of condemnation; we have heard read the emperor's edict empowering the temporal arm to execute the spiritual sentence; we have only a few days to wait, so it seems, and we shall see the Reformer dragged to the stake and burned. But to accomplish this one essential thing was yet lacking. The constitution of the Empire required that Charles, before proceeding further,

should add that "if the States knew any better course, he was ready to hear them." The majority of the German magnates cared little for Luther, but they cared a good deal for their prescriptive rights; they hated the odious tyranny and grinding extortions of Rome, and they felt that to deliver up Luther was to take the most effectual means to rivet the yoke that galled their own necks. The princes craved time for deliberation. Aleander was furious; he saw the prey about to be plucked from his very teeth. But the emperor submitted with a good grace. "Convince this assembly," said the politic monarch to the impatient nuncio.

Aleander was to plead for Rome, the mother and mistress of all churches: he was to vindicate the principedom of Peter before the assembled puissances of Christendom. He had the gift of eloquence, and he rose to the greatness of the occasion. The nuncio was more effective in those parts of his speech in which he attacked Luther, than in those in which he defended the Papacy. His charges against the Reformer were sweeping and artful. He accused him of laboring to accomplish a universal ruin; of striking a blow at the foundations of religion by denying the doctrine of the Sacrament; of seeking to raze the foundations of the hierarchy by affirming that all Christians are priests; of seeking to overturn civil order by maintaining that a Christian is not bound to obey the magistrate; of aiming to subvert the foundations of morality by his doctrine of the moral inability of the will; and of unsettling the world beyond the grave by denying purgatory. The portion of seeming truth contained in these accusations made them the more dangerous. "A unanimous decree," said the orator in closing his speech, "from this illustrious assembly will enlighten the simple, warn the imprudent, decide the waverers, and give strength to the weak... But if the axe is not laid at the root of this poisonous tree, if the death-blow is not struck, then... I see it overshadowing the heritage of Jesus Christ with its branches, changing our Lord's vineyard into a gloomy forest, transforming the kingdom of God into a den of wild beasts, and reducing Germany into that state of frightful barbarism and desolation which has been brought upon Asia by the superstition of Mahomet. I should be willing," said he, with consummate art, "to deliver my body to the flames, if the monster that has engendered this growing heresy could be consumed at the same stake, and mingle his ashes with mine."

The nuncio had spoken for three hours. The fire of his style, and the enthusiasm of his delivery, had roused the passions of the Diet; and had a vote been taken at that moment, the voices of all the members, one only excepted, would have been given for the condemnation of Luther. The Diet broke up, however, when the orator sat down, and thus the victory which seemed within the reach of Rome escaped her grasp.

When the princes next assembled, the fumes raised by the rhetoric of Aleander had evaporated, and the hard facts of Roman extortion alone remained deeply imprinted in the memories of the German barons. These no eloquence could efface. Duke George of Saxony was the first to present himself to the assembly. His words had the greater weight from his being known to be the enemy of Luther, and a hater of the evangelical doctrines, although a champion of the rights of his native land and a foe of ecclesiastical abuses, he ran his eye rapidly over the frightful traces which Roman usurpation and venality had left on Germany. Annats were converted into dues; ecclesiastical benefices were bought and

sold; dispensations were procurable for money; stations were multiplied in order to fleece the poor; stalls for the sale of indulgences rose in every street; pardons were earned not by prayer or works of charity, but by paying the market-price of sin; penances were so contrived as to lead to a repetition of the offence; fines were made exorbitant to increase the revenue arising from them; abbeys and monasteries were emptied by commendams, and their wealth transported across the Alps to enrich foreign bishops; civil causes were drawn before ecclesiastical tribunals: all which "grievous perdition of miserable souls" demanded a universal reform, which a General Council only could accomplish. Duke George in conclusion demanded that such should be convoked.

To direct past themselves the storm of indignation which the archbishops and abbots saw to be rising in the Diet, they laid the chief blame of the undeniable abuses, of which the duke had presented so formidable a catalogue, at the door of the Vatican. So costly were the tastes and so luxurious the habits of the reigning Pope, they hinted, that he was induced to bestow Church livings not on pious and learned men, but on jesters, falconers, grooms, valets, and whosoever could minister to his personal pleasures or add to the gaiety of his court. The excuse was, in fact, an accusation.

A committee was appointed by the Diet to draw up a list of the oppressions under which the nation groaned. This document, containing a hundred and one grievances, was presented to the emperor at a subsequent meeting of the Diet, together with a request that he would, in fulfillment of the terms of the capitulation which he had signed when he was crowned, take steps to effect a reformation of the specified abuses.

The Diet did not stop here. The princes demanded that Luther should be summoned before it. It were unjust, they said, to condemn him without knowing whether he were the author of the incriminated books, and without hearing what he had to say in defense of his opinions. The emperor was compelled to give way, though he covered his retreat under show of doubting whether the books really were Luther's. He wished, he said, to have certainty on that point. Alexander was horror-struck at the emperor's irresolution. He saw the foundations of the Papacy shaken, the tiara trembling on his master's brow, and all the terrible evils he had predicted in his great oration, rushing like a devastating tempest upon Christendom. But he strove in vain against the emperor's resolve, and the yet stronger force behind it, in which that resolve had its birth—the feeling of the German people. It was concluded in the Diet that Luther should be summoned. Alexander had one hope left, the only mitigating circumstance about this alarming affair, even that Luther would be denied a safe-conduct.

But this proposal he was ultimately unable to carry, and on the 6th of March, 1521, the summons to Luther to present himself within twenty-one days before the Diet at Worms was signed by the emperor. Enclosed in the citation was a safe-conduct, addressed "To the honorable, our well-beloved and pious Doctor Martin Luther, of the order of Augustines," and commanding all princes, lords, magistrates, and others to respect this safe-conduct under pain of the displeasure of the Emperor and the Empire.

Luther accordingly proceeded to Worms, to face the tribunal of German political leaders

and Romish ecclesiastics. Upon reaching the Diet, Luther was questioned by John Eck, spokesman of the Diet. Eck raised these two questions of Luther before the Diet, saying: "Martin Luther, his sacred and invincible Majesty has cited you before his throne, with advice and counsel of the States of the Holy Roman Empire, to answer two questions. First, do you acknowledge these books," pointing with his finger to a pile of volumes on the table, "to have been written by you? Secondly, are you prepared to retract and disavow the opinions you have advanced in them?"

Luther acknowledged the first charge.

"Most gracious Emperor, and most gracious Princes and Lords," said he, "the books that have just been named are mine. As to the second, seeing it is a question which concerns the salvation of souls, and in which the Word of God than which nothing is greater in heaven or in earth—is interested, I should act imprudently were I to reply without reflection. I entreat your imperial Majesty, with all humility, to allow me time, that I may reply without offending against the Word of God."

Nothing could have been more wise or more becoming in the circumstances. The request for delay, however, was differently interpreted by the Papal members of the Diet. He is breaking his fall, said they—he will retract. He has played the heretic at Wittemberg, he will act the part of the penitent at Worms. Had they seen deeper into Luther's character, they would have come to just the opposite conclusion. This pause was the act of a man whose mind was thoroughly made up, who felt how unalterable and indomitable was his resolve, and who therefore was in no haste to proclaim it, but with admirable self-control could wait for the time, the form, the circumstances in which to make the avowal so that its full and concentrated strength might be felt, and it might appear to all to be irrevocable.

The Diet deliberated. A day's delay was granted the monk. Tomorrow at this time must he appear again before the emperor and the assembled estates, and give his final answer.

The next day arrived, and Luther again faced the tribunal. Dr. Eck rose and demanded his answer. Luther's answer boiled down to this: let him but be convinced from the Word of God and right reason that he was in error, and he should not need to be asked twice to retract, he would be the first to throw his books into the flames.

But Luther's answer did not satisfy Dr. Eck, so he rose and proceeded to query Luther:

"You have not answered the question put to you. We did not call you here to bring into question the authority of Councils; there can be no dispute on that point here. We demand a direct and precise answer: will you, or will you not, retract? "

Unmoved, Luther replied:

"Since your most Serene Majesty, and your High Mightiness, require from me a direct and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this. I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the Councils, because it is clear as day they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or on plain and clear grounds of reason, so that conscience shall bind me to make acknowledgment of error, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything contrary to conscience."

And then, looking round on the assembly, he said—and the words are among the sublimest in history—

"HERE I STAND. I CAN DO NO OTHER. MAY GOD HELP ME. AMEN."

The impression which these words made on the princes was overpowering, and a murmur of applause, as emphatic as the respect due to the imperial presence permitted, burst out in the Diet. Not from all, however; its Papal partisans were dismayed. The monk's NO had fallen upon them like a thunderbolt.

Luther was bidden withdraw for a little; and during his absence the Diet deliberated. It was easy to see that a crisis had arisen, but not so easy to counsel the steps by which it was to be met. They resolved to give him another opportunity of retracting. Accordingly he was called in, led again in front of the emperor's throne, and asked to pronounce over again—now the third time—his YES or NO. With equal simplicity and dignity he replied that "he had no other answer to give than that which he had already given." In the calmness of his voice, in the steadfastness of his eye, and in the leonine lines of his rugged German face, the assembly read the stern, indomitable resolve of his soul. Alas! for the partisans of the Papacy. The No could not be recalled. The die had been cast irrevocably.

The Elector Frederick was overjoyed at the appearance Luther had made before the Diet. The force and pertinence of his matter, the eloquence of his words, his intrepid yet respectful bearing, had not only delighted the sovereign of Saxony, but had made a deep impression on the princes of the Diet. From that hour many of them became attached friends of Luther and the Reformation. Some of them openly avowed their change of sentiment at the time; in others the words of Luther bore fruit in after-years. Frederick was henceforward more resolved than ever to protect the Reformer; but knowing that the less his hand was seen in the matter, the more effectually would he further the cause and shield its champion, he avoided personal intercourse with the Reformer. On one occasion only did the two men meet.

The mortification of the Papal party was extreme. They redoubled their activity; they laid snares to entrap the Reformer. They invited him to private conferences with the Archbishop of Treves; they submitted one insidious proposal after another, but the constancy of the Reformer was not to be overcome. Meanwhile Alexander and his conclave had been closeted with the emperor, concocting measures of another kind. Accordingly, at the meeting of the Diet next day, the decision of Charles, written in his

own hand, was delivered and read. It set forth that after the example of his Catholic ancestors, the Kings of Spain and Austria, etc., he would defend, to the utmost of his ability, the Catholic faith and the Papal chair. "A single monk," said he, "misled by his own folly, has risen against the faith of Christendom. To stay such impiety, I will sacrifice my kingdom, my treasures, my friends, my body, my blood, my life, and my soul. I am about to dismiss the Augustine Luther. I shall then proceed against him and his adherents as contumacious heretics, by excommunication, by interdict, and by every means calculated to destroy them."

But the zeal of Charles had outrun his powers. This proscription could not be carried out without the consent of the States. The announcement of the emperor's decision raised a storm in the Diet. Two parties instantly declared themselves. Some of the Papal party, especially the Elector of Brandenburg, demanded that Luther's safe-conduct should be disregarded, and that the Rhine should receive his ashes, as it had done those of John Huss a century before. But, to his credit, Louis, Elector Palatine, expressed instant and utter abhorrence of the atrocious proposal. True, he said, Huss was burned at the stake, but ever since calamity has never ceased to pursue Germany. We dare not, said he, erect a second scaffold. He was joined by Duke George, whose repudiation of the proposed infamy was the more emphatic that he was Luther's avowed enemy. That the princes of Germany should for a moment entertain the purpose of violating a safe-conduct, was a thing he held impossible. They never would bring such a stain upon the honor of the Fatherland; nor would they open the reign of the young emperor with such an evil augury. The Bavarian nobles, though mostly Papal, also protested against the violation of the public faith. The proposition met with the fate it deserved.

The result of so many conflicting yet conspiring circumstances was that Luther departed in peace from those gates out of which no man had expected ever to see him come alive. Surrounded by twenty gentlemen on horseback, and a crowd of people who accompanied him beyond the walls, Luther left Worms. His journey back was accomplished amid demonstrations of popular interest more enthusiastic even than those which had signalized his progress thither. A few days after he was gone, the emperor fulminated his "edict" against him, placing him beyond the pale of law, and commanding all men, whenever the term of Luther's safe-conduct expired, to withhold from him food and drink, succor and shelter, to apprehend him and send him bound to the emperor.

Meanwhile the Reformer was going on his way. Along the journey home, a troop of horsemen, wearing masks and completely armed, rushed suddenly upon him. The wagon in which he sat was stopped, the waggoner thrown to the ground, and while one of the masks laid firm hold of Amsdorff, another pulling Luther hastily out of the car, raised him to the saddle, and grasping his horse's bridle-rein, plunged quickly with him into the forest of Thuringia. All day long the troop of horsemen wandered hither and thither in the wood, their purpose being to defy pursuit. When night fell they began to ascend a mountain, and a little before midnight they came under the walls of a castle that crowned its summit. The drawbridge was let down, the portcullis raised, and the cavalcade passing in, the troopers dismounted in the rocky court of the castle. The captive was led up a single flight of steps, and ushered into an apartment, where he was told he must

make a sojourn of unknown length, and during it must lay aside his ecclesiastical dress, attire himself in the costume of a knight, which lay ready to his hand, and be known only by the name of Knight George.

When morning broke, and Luther looked from the casement of his apartment, he saw at a glance where he was. Beneath him were the forest glades, the hamlets, and all the well-known scenes that adjoin Eisenach; although the town itself was not in view. Farther away were the plains around Mora, and bounding these was the vast circle of the hills that sweep along on the horizon. He could not but know that he was in the Castle of the Wartburg, and in friendly keeping.

Thus suddenly the man on whom all eyes were fixed was carried off, as if by a whirlwind, no one knew whither; nor could any one in all Germany, save his captors, tell whether he was now dead or alive. The Pope had launched his bolt, the emperor had raised his mailed hand to strike, on every side destruction seemed to await the Reformer; at that moment Luther becomes invisible. The Papal thunder rolls harmlessly along the sky—the emperor's sword cleaves only the yielding air.

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CHAPTER 22 : FROM THE LEIPSIK DISPUTATION TO THE DIET OF WORMS, 1521

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy

concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.