

CHAPTER XVI

PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

I. ENGAGING CHARACTERISTICS

In reviewing the life of Luther in the former Black Monastery of Wittenberg, our attention is first attracted to his relations with Catherine. Although there were weighty objections to their marriage from the Catholic point of view, and although it was severely censured by the jurists who upheld the canon law of the Church, it nevertheless presented a favorable exterior appearance. It had to be admitted that peace, harmony, and mutual good will governed the union of the ex-monk and the former nun. So far as known, neither ever violated the pretended marriage. Luther expressed himself in words of gratitude and appreciation for the aid and comfort which he derived from his wife, even though, on occasion, he scourged her willfulness in partly serious and partly facetious language.

Luther's children were compelled to learn and practice their religion. As they grew up, they, on the whole, caused no dishonor to the family. They were not endowed with any special talents, nor did they distinguish themselves in their positions in life.

The home life of the family was subject to considerable unrest, caused by the fact that relatives and students occupied the former monastic cells and ate at Luther's table. In addition, quite a few strangers visited Wittenberg, who wished to see and converse with Luther. Moreover, the agitation caused by Luther's controversies, which so visibly vibrates in his correspondence, quite naturally affected his domestic life, as his Table Talks frequently testify.

On the other hand Luther's family life displayed many attractive traits. Thus, when his daughter Magdalen, a sweet and pious child, died at the age of thirteen, Luther was seized with a sorrow so profound as to move even the modern reader to tears.¹ Thanks to his letters, his admirers are likewise enabled to participate in the happy hours he spent in his family circle. Luther is frequently pictured as

¹ Cf. Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, p. 596.

a happy father sitting with his family under the Christmas tree. But the Christmas tree was not introduced till several centuries after his death. Luther's family life at Wittenberg is usually celebrated by Protestant biographers as the model and archetype of that of an evangelical pastor. But we must not forget—to mention only one point—that the Reformer's home, being the center of a tremendous religious conflict, cannot have been so devout and tranquil as we are asked to believe.

Luther desired every father of a family to interpret the Bible to his family and to address them on religious matters in accordance with a prescribed plan. He himself set the example. When, in 1532, sickness prevented him from preaching in church, he preached to his household in the Black Monastery. This custom gave rise to his "*Hauspostille*," *i. e.*, book of instructions for home use. It was intended as a guide for others and undoubtedly did much good. It was first edited in 1544 by Vitus Dietrich.² Of larger scope and wider influence was the "*Kirchenpostille*," a collection delivered in public. Of these, he published the sermons for the winter semester in 1540. The sermons for the summer semester were brought into shape and published by Cruciger in 1545.³ A very large number of Luther's sermons had been circulating in separate editions or in smaller compilations since their delivery.

Luther's sermons are invariably distinguished by great freshness and practicality. They display a forcefulness of diction and a diversity of thought, the like of which is scarcely met with elsewhere. He possessed sufficient talent to become a second Berthold of Regensburg. It must be admitted, however, that the addresses are often monotonous on account of frequent repetitions and show lack of preparation and reliance upon the author's innate gift of speech. Sometimes his auditors were bored by his noisome and tedious attacks upon the ancient Church and her doctrines. Despite these defects, however, Luther's sermons were so diligently copied that a large number of copies, made by various individuals, are still extant. The new Weimar edition of Luther's works reproduces them all, thereby occasionally bestowing unmerited honor on addresses which were delivered without due preparation and order.

² Weimar ed., Vol. LII; Erl. ed., Vols. I-VI.

³ Cf. Weimar ed., Vol. VII, p. 463; 10, I, 1; 17, II, 21; 22. Erl. ed., Vol. VII, 2 ed., p. 134; Vol. VIII, pp. 11, 173; Vol. IX, p. 1; Vol. X, 2 ed., p. 133; Vol. XI, p. 191; Vol. XII, p. 1.

In their originality some of his better sermons, and also some of the inferior ones, are reminiscent of Luther's maxim: "Ascend the pulpit, open your mouth, and then stop."⁴ Luther frequently addressed similar maxims to his preachers.

Despite his facility in the use of words, the voluminousness of his sermons is a source of amazement. He was anxious to produce moral effects no less than to confirm his new doctrine and to eradicate popery. Relative to morality, he felt a profound obligation to counteract the decline of ethical standards, which was a concomitant of the new freedom proclaimed by his gospel. His very desire to preserve the good repute of his religious innovation impelled him to issue frequent warnings and reproofs. Moreover, as he had abolished the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the office of preaching was advanced to the most prominent place in his church. Everything was made dependent upon the "Word," which was supposed to be experienced interiorly and to persist without the aid of the Catholic means of grace and the weight of ecclesiastical authority.

Luther intended to introduce the interdict when to his sorrow he saw how weak was the influence exercised by his Wittenberg pulpit and how scandals grew apace. He always had felt the need of some kind of ecclesiastical discipline, though at the same time he never gave up the idea of a "church apart of true believers," who having expressly obligated themselves to observe religion and morality, should take their stand alongside the partly heathen masses of the national Church.⁵ The plan proved impracticable. As the Protestant theologian Drews says, Luther himself "was uncertain and wavered in the details of his plan. He had but little bent to sketch out organizations even in his head; to this he did not feel himself called."⁶ This was also the reason why his proposal to introduce the ban, which he made in 1538, and again in a sermon at Wittenberg on February 23, 1539, came to naught. He was compelled to lament: "They refuse to hear of excommunication."⁷ Which utterance recalls the words of the Elector: "If only people could be found who would let themselves be excommunicated!" And yet there was question only of the so-called minor excommunication, namely, exclusion from

⁴ Thus Kroker (*Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. VI, p. 643) translates the saying (*ibid.*, Vol. IV, n. 5171a): "*Ascendat suggestum, aperiat os et desinat*" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 5171b.)

⁵ Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 133 sqq.

⁶ Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 140.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186,

divine worship, or at least from the Lord's Supper, and prohibition to act as sponsor at baptism. It was Luther's intention that not only the ecclesiastical authorities, but the entire congregation, should inflict the ban, just as was the rule in Hesse, under the "Regulations for Church Discipline" drawn up for that country.

Luther, to be sure, was not unwilling to exercise severity. Thus he writes to Antony Lauterbach at Pirna: "I am pleased with Hesse's example of the use of excommunication. If you can establish the same thing, well and good. But the centaurs and harpies of the court will look at it askance. May the Lord be our help! Everywhere license and lawlessness continue to spread among the people, but it is the fault of the civil authorities."⁸

In a sermon of February 23, 1539, wherein he vigorously developed the idea of the lesser excommunication, he maintained the duty of the entire congregation to co-operate in the enforcement of the ban. After the public denunciation of an obdurate member, the congregation was to lift its voice in prayer against him, assist in the formal expulsion, and participate in the readmission of the excommunicate to public worship.⁹ When he saw that his zeal was not appreciated, Luther threatened public offenders all the more violently with harsh treatment after death: "Let them go to the devil, and if they die, let them be buried on the rubbish-heap like dogs." Whoever obstinately remains away from the Lord's Supper lives "in a self-inflicted ban" and is to be delivered to the civil authority.¹⁰

The civil government was obliged by law to lend its aid to support ecclesiastical discipline. Luther favored this procedure; for "facts have shown"—thus he wrote to Spalatin in 1527—"that men despise the evangel and insist on being compelled by the law and the sword."¹¹ In 1529 he demanded that even those who had no religion yet should "be driven to attend the sermon" in order that they may know what is right or wrong.¹² According to his Small Catechism, the masses must be "held and driven to the faith." Particularly should they be held to attend catechetical instruction, as he advised Margrave George of Brandenburg. At Wittenberg those who persistently neglected to

⁸ On April 2, 1543; *Briefwechsel*, Vol. XV, p. 131; cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 188.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Grisar, V, p. 189, where more passages are given. *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 5174; Vol. V, n. 5438.

¹¹ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. VI, p. 262.

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 743 sq., where the following passages may be found.

attend the sermons were threatened with "banishment and the law." The court ordained that there be "universal attendance at church." In 1557 we hear of a fine imposed upon violators; in case of poverty they were "to be punished by being fastened to the church or a prison by means of an iron collar." The oppressive policy of the State Church of Saxony resulted from the force of circumstances and the endeavor to achieve some kind of union among Protestants. The State transferred its rule to the spiritual sphere, which usurpation, even at its inception, provoked loud protests from Luther and many preachers. Nevertheless, the process of evolution could not be arrested.

History is obliged to chronicle many instances where Luther displayed great courage for the sake of preserving religious discipline and ecclesiastical customs. A case in point is that of Hans von Metzsch, a haughty captain and governor of Wittenberg, who led a dissolute life. In 1531 Luther notified this powerful man that he was excluded from ecclesiastical communion and forbade him—though not publicly—to receive the Lord's Supper. When Metzsch married his mistress in accordance with the prescribed regulations, a reconciliation was effected. Nevertheless, in 1538, Luther again censured the governor, this time with increased vigor, because of his affronts against public worship and the preachers. He pronounced invalid the absolution which the deacon Fröschel had granted to him, and, in a statement served upon him by two deacons, demanded that Metzsch reform and become reconciled with the Church and with those whom he had offended. At the same time he apprised him that he would incur excommunication if he refused to conform with these demands. Metzsch was also threatened with major excommunication on the part of the prince in case he continued recusant. The subsequent course of events is doubtful; it appears, however, that some kind of peace was again patched up.¹⁸ In the following year, Luther inveighed from the pulpit against a citizen of Wittenberg who had approached the Lord's Supper though he had committed a murder and was unreconciled with the Church. He insisted that this man render strict satisfaction before being readmitted to church.

Mention has been made on a previous page of the courage which Luther displayed at the time of the pestilence. Unmindful of the danger of contagion, he remained at his post, although many proved

¹⁸ Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, pp. 438 sq.

themselves deserters. He resolutely endeavored to be of service to the afflicted and to encourage his clerical assistants in persevering by the power of his example. As early as 1527, during those critical days when Wittenberg and its environs were ravaged by the epidemic, he composed a treatise: "Whether One Should Flee from Death," which contained beautiful and encouraging thoughts calculated to comfort the afflicted.¹⁴

Courageously and lovingly he used his influence on many occasions to secure redress for those who were the victims of injustice.¹⁵ Because of the esteem in which he was held, and his willingness to minister to others, his aid and intercession with the Elector were frequently invoked. His petitions, as a rule, were effective. His protestations against oppression, even though they assumed most vigorous forms, were usually heeded at court. On one occasion he called himself the supporter of the poor and defender of their rights. At times it happened that, in his short-sightedness, he permitted himself to become interested in cases where justice was on the side of the other party. Frequently he displayed undue credulity and anger. A case in point—it was on the occasion when he assumed the honorary titles quoted above—is furnished by his advocacy of the cause of Hans von Schönitz of Halle, who had been legally executed by the Elector Albrecht of Mayence for serious crimes which he had committed. The brother of the executed man together with one Louis Rabe succeeded in convincing Luther that the Archbishop, whom Luther cordially hated, was guilty of murder. In 1535, and again in 1536, Luther published two letters against Albrecht concerning this case. In 1538 he composed a treatise on the alleged Schönitz scandal, in which he forcibly vented his indignation.¹⁶

A merchant from Kölln on the Spree, Hans Kohlhase, who had failed to obtain a favorable verdict in a lawsuit, became enraged and declared a private feud against the entire commonwealth of Electoral Saxony. It was a procedure incomprehensible to our age, which finds its explanation only in the then prevalent conditions. With the aid of a mercenary mob from Brandenburg, Kohlhase began to "rob,

¹⁴ Weimar ed., Vol. XXIII, pp. 333 sqq.; Erl. ed., Vol. XXII, pp. 317 sqq.; Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, pp. 171 sqq.

¹⁵ Köstlin-Kawerau, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

¹⁶ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 106 sq.; Köstlin-Kawerau, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 419, 422; see also the note in the third German ed. of Grisar's *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 1009 sqq. (this note is not contained in Lamond's English translation).

burn, capture, and hold to ransom," according to his own formal announcement. Conflagrations, attributed to his revengeful spirit, broke out in Wittenberg and its environs. The Elector was disposed to effect an amicable settlement and Kohlhase sought Luther's advice. He received a trenchant reply, in which Luther vigorously espoused the cause of law and order and demanded that vengeance be left to God. At the same time he addressed ardent religious exhortations to the offender. Kohlhase, however, being dissatisfied with the offers of the Elector, continued his depredations. Luther prophesied in his Table Talks that Kohlhase would be drowned in his own blood. He was executed at Berlin, March 22, 1540, being broken on the wheel on account of excesses committed in Brandenburg. Fable has seized upon the story of this gruesome adventurer and his relation to Luther. Popular biographers of Luther still love to relate how Kohlhase, in disguise, knocked at Luther's door one dark night and, being admitted by the latter, explained his quarrel in the presence of Melanchthon, Cruciger, and others, became reconciled with God and his fellowmen, and promised to abstain from violence in future.¹⁷

To some extent this legend (originating with a chronicler who gives no authority for his statements) is reminiscent of the conciliatory attitude which Luther assumed toward his enemy Karlstadt when the latter, plunged in direst need after the Peasants' War, approached Luther in 1525 and asked him to intercede for him with the Elector, so that he might be permitted to return to the country. Luther, having obtained Karlstadt's promise that he would change his doctrines, magnanimously procured for him the permission he craved.¹⁸

Luther was frequently generous towards the poor, even beyond his humble means. His simple way of life made it possible for him to practice benevolence. He lived frugally and was satisfied with but little of this world's goods. This fact was generally known and, in view of his meager income, the court and the city gladly helped him along with gifts of money and food. Poor students were the chief beneficiaries of his solicitude; for he was very much concerned that the support of the students of the University of Wittenberg should be assured. His amiable disposition and sociability strongly attracted

¹⁷ Grisar, *Luther* (Engl. tr.), Vol. V, pp. 117 sqq.; *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 4088, 4315, 4536.

¹⁸ Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 718 sq.

the students, who were charmed by his fame no less than by his robust physique and characteristically flashing eyes.

Luther's lectures, which began in the early hours of the morning, were carefully prepared and embodied practical directions for the usually large audiences which attended them. His graphic interpretations of the Bible and his meditations, which at times bordered on the mystical, were interspersed with frequent sallies (not always phrased in choice language) against Catholic dogmas, the papists, and the enemies in his own camp, the so-called *Schwärmer* (fanatics). When they disagreed with him, he did not spare even the most highly esteemed Fathers of the Church. With a self-consciousness that made a profound impression on the short-sighted young men to whom he lectured, he exalted his own opinions above those of others. Proofs of this are amply supplied by his Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and his exposition of Genesis, which he commenced in 1535, but which was published by someone else, and not very accurately.¹⁹

There is extant also a collection of proverbs made by Luther, which did not, however, appear in print until 1900.²⁰ It reflects his efforts to preserve and increase the treasury of German proverbial sayings of which he was wont to avail himself so liberally. Besides these, we have the theological disputations held before the faculty under his direction and amid constant interruptions on his part. These disputations (1535-1545) were edited in a stately volume by Dr. Paul Drews in 1896. They show many traces of Luther's passionate nature and are characterized by rude diction and an attempt to go to extremes in expression as well as content.

2. RELIGIOUS POETRY AND CHURCH HYMNS

A new sphere was opened to Luther's successful endeavors in the field of hymnology. In the days of his youth he had become familiar with the hymns of the Catholic Church and learned to appreciate the value of congregational singing. He realized that poetry and songs within and without the church are apt means for conveying religious thoughts to the hearts of the people. Quite naturally he made use of this means in the furtherance of his gospel. By his successful

¹⁹ Weimar ed., Vols. XLII-XLIV.

²⁰ Weimar ed., Vol. LI, pp. 645 sqq.

poetical compositions he created a preëminent and efficacious position for the religious hymn within the Protestant cult. It supplemented the sermon and the defective liturgy within the church and aroused the minds of the faithful with a religious and also a militant fervor outside the church walls.

The thirty-fifth volume of the Weimar edition of Luther's works contains all the hymns composed by him, as collected by Lucke.²¹ The series commences with "Ein neues Lied wir heben an" (composed in 1523) and, "Nu freut euch, liebe Christen gemein." In the following year Luther was most prolific in the production of church hymns. His "Enchiridion geistlicher Gesänge," published in that year, consisted of twenty-five hymns, of which fifteen were his own work. Somewhat later in the same year, Luther and John Walther, a cantor stationed at the court of Torgau, published a "Geistliches Gesangbüchlein" in Wittenberg. This hymn-book, as revised in 1529, contained several new hymns, notably the celebrated "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott" (A mighty fortress is our God)²² and also, "Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich" and "Herr Gott, dich loben wir." Other hymns of Luther originated in the period from 1535 to 1546. The battle-hymn, "Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort, Und steur des Papsts und Türken Mord" (Preserve us, O Lord, in Thy Word, and check the atrocities of Pope and Turk), was written in 1537.

Luther did not set any of his hymns to music. The melodies were partly supplied by Walther and many of them are adaptations of earlier melodies or chorals familiar to the people from Catholic days.

The singing of anthems or secular songs (chorals) by the younger members of Luther's household was a favorite means of recreation after meals. Luther gives expression to his delight thereat in a poem, "To Lady Music," which prefaced an edition of one of the above-mentioned hymnals. The conclusion of the poem ardently eulogizes the nightingale because of her praise of God: "She sings and flits in praise of Him, And naught her ardent soul can dim; Thus, too, my lyre would sound His praise, And thank Him through the endless days." In another preface Luther develops an excellent discourse on the educational value of spiritual hymns. In his opinion they should assist the young "in getting rid of amorous and carnal songs." All should be convinced that "not all the arts are overthrown by the

²¹ Cf. also Erl. ed., Vol. LVI, pp. 291 sqq.

²² Grisar, *Lutherstudien*, n. 2: "Luthers Trutzlied." Cf. Lucke, Weimar ed., Vol. LIII.

gospel, . . . but I would like to see all the arts, especially music, serve Him who has bestowed and created them."

Ratzeberger, the physician, tells of another motive of Luther's predilection for the art of music. Luther, he says, "discovered that he was relieved of great depression by music during his temptations and melancholy spells."²³ In matter of fact, the soothing strains of the church hymns often helped to assuage the storms that agitated his soul. In a letter to the composer Senfl, who was in the service of Duke William of Bavaria, and whose motets he esteemed very highly, he acknowledged that music had often "refreshed his spirit and relieved him of great troubles."²⁴ He requested Senfl to set to music the text of the Psalm, "In peace I will sleep and rest" (Ps. IV, 9); for this verse afforded him consolation for his approaching death. He was as weary of the world as it was of him. The letter to Senfl incidentally embodied an attempt on Luther's part to regain the favor of the Bavarian court. Luther, who was desirous of obtaining a foothold in Bavaria, evidently attached great importance to the friendship and activity of this highly esteemed composer.

3. THE TABLE TALKS

Luther's Table Talks are of great importance as sources for his personality and work. These original effusions from his communicative lips are a profound revelation of his inmost being and often cast a bright light on the events of his age and life.

Formerly the utilization of the Table Talks was a difficult matter, as there were only inadequate editions extant, such as the old German compilation of John Aurifaber, the Latin *Colloquia* of H. Bindsel, originally collected by Antony Lauterbach, and other collections. There was wanting a critical compilation going back to the oldest textual tradition, as embodied in the transcript of Luther's utterances made by various individuals. This task has now been performed by a painstaking Protestant investigator, Ernst Kroker. In six large volumes he has collected 7,075 speeches or addresses, reproduced in the most exact possible order and in accordance with the sequence of the recorders and the time.²⁵ In this manner, the value of the Table Talks as historical sources is very much enhanced.

²³ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. II, p. 171.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vols. I-VI (1912-1921).

The students who had found lodging in the cells of the former Black Monastery were wont to assemble daily about Luther's table, where the places of honor, next to Luther and his Kate, were occupied by invited guests from afar, or by friends who lived in the city of Wittenberg. The students listened attentively to the conversations, in most of which Luther acted as spokesman. Many instructive matters were discussed here, many notable thoughts uttered for the benefit of the education of his auditors, designed to be imparted later on to their friends and acquaintances. The students soon grew accustomed to take down in shorthand, either in Latin or in German, as much of the conversation as they could. Luther observed this, but did not protest; on the contrary, he frequently asked them to write down this or that utterance. Kate once jestingly remarked that the copyists should be obliged to pay for this privilege, just as they were obliged to pay for their lectures at the university.²⁶

Nevertheless, the conversation was quite unconstrained. Luther often uttered remarkable opinions on Biblical passages, on theological or philosophical doctrines, on individuals of both camps, the Protestant as well as the Catholic, or on his own experiences, on natural phenomena, on matters pertaining to the present or the future. The conversation became especially animated when strangers participated therein. Before all else, however, the audience liked to listen to Luther himself, the honored and admired oracle of his younger disciples. Cordatus, one of the copyists, repeatedly expressed his displeasure, when the loquacious Kate or the talkative Jonas did not allow Luther sufficient opportunity for speaking.

The first direct copies were made by the students in their rooms. They were somewhat polished and either jealously preserved or circulated for the instruction of others. There were collectors who compiled reports which were derived from diverse sources and originated at various times. Anton Lauterbach's collection, made with great diligence, is the largest. In it the talks are grouped according to the topics discussed and the various points of view expressed. Besides Lauterbach's printed work, many such collections have come down to us, whereas none of the original papers written at table have been preserved. The general fidelity of the old copies is vouched for not only by the character and the purpose of the authors, but also by the observation that, where the same discourse is reported by various parties, there is

²⁶ Cf. the exposition in Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 217-241, for which, however, Kroker's edition was not yet available.

usually substantial agreement, despite grammatical or other formal variations. Misunderstandings of one or the other copyist, omissions, even in important matters, mistakes owing to inadvertence in the course of reproduction, are, of course, not excluded. This circumstance must be taken into consideration when the Table Talks are quoted.²⁷

Kroker in his edition supplies the parallel passages and furnishes pertinent emendations. Hence, these literary remains of Luther's table must be regarded, in general, as an adequate historical source concerning his character and life. Kroker rightly rejects, for example, the objections of Otto Scheel to important passages which differ from the latter's theories.²⁸

Of course, it must not be overlooked that the Table Talks are ephemeral—"children of the moment." While they correctly and vividly reproduce the ideas of the speaker, minus the cool reflection which prevails in the writing of letters and still more of books, they contain frequent exaggerations and betray a lack of moderation. The lightning-like flashes which they emit are not always true. The momentary exaggerations of the speaker at times beget contradictions which conflict with other talks or literary utterances. Frequently humorous statements were received as serious declarations. Humor and satire of a very pungent kind play a great part in these talks.

The recording of the Table Talks commenced with the year 1531, or possibly 1529. They are continued, with interruptions, in longer or more abbreviated and detached communications of the students up to the last meal taken by Luther.

In point of time the transcripts of Vitus Dietrich and those embodied in the collection of Dietrich and Rörer are the first.²⁹ These are followed by three groups of copyists and collectors. The older group consists of John Schlaginhaufen (for years 1531 and 1532), Cordatus (after 1531), Lauterbach, Weller and Corvinus. The middle group, who compiled the *Tischreden* from 1536 to 1539, consists of some of the above-mentioned writers. Among these Lauterbach is especially noted for his diaries, which cover the years 1538 and 1539. The later group, from 1540 to 1546, is composed of John Mathesius, who supplies an excellent source of information, Caspar Heydenreich, Jerome Besold, Magister Plato, John Stoltz, and John Aurifaber.³⁰ In

²⁷ See Kroker's introduction to Vol. I of his edition.

²⁸ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. V, pp. XIV sqq.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. XVI. Cfr. Kroker in the *Lutherstudien*, edited by the collaborators of the Weimar edition (1917), pp. 178 sqq.

³⁰ Cfr. *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. I, p. XI and the introductions to the various parts in the following volumes.—The transcripts of Besold are to be published in the Weimar ed. by J. Haussleiter. Cf. his treatise in the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Vols. XIX sqq.

addition to this, each one of these groups embraces various smaller manuscripts, such as those of Pastor Khumer and George Rörer.

The most ample information is furnished by Anton Lauterbach, who has arranged his notes in topical order.³¹ The most exact reporter, however, is George Rörer, the versatile secretary of the committee which revised Luther's translation of the Bible.

In the course of the present work we have cited many a typical passage from the Table Talks. These, and the multifarious discourses themselves, display extraordinary versatility and profound feeling. Even though we are compelled to criticize these Talks severely, it must be acknowledged that Luther's utterances are permeated by many sound, stimulating, and pious thoughts.³² Thus there are beautiful expressions on the attributes of God, particularly His love and mercy, on the duties of the faithful and their obligations in everyday life, on the cure of souls, on preaching and education, on charity, on the vices of the age, on the virtues and vices of great men, past and present, and so on. It was as much the purpose of the Table Talks to benefit the hearers spiritually as to cheer them up and to amuse them. If we take up at random numbers 5553 to 5577, in which Mathesius, availing himself of Heydenreich's notes, supplies his readers with detailed information, we may well marvel at the abundance of profound and practical ideas. In discoursing on the blindness of the Jews and the night of God's wrath against them, for example, Luther becomes so deeply moved that he folds his hands in prayer and exclaims: "O heavenly Father, let us remain in the light of the sun, and permit us not to become recreant to Thy Word!"³³ It is not to be wondered at that Protestants have published many anthologies of interesting and instructive passages taken from Luther's Table Talks. Their good features, with which alone most Protestants are familiar, have contributed to a general overestimation of the Table Talks.

Voluminous collections of the Table Talks were published at an early period. That by Aurifaber appeared in 1566 at Eisleben and went through several editions. It was reprinted by K. Förstemann and H. Bindseil in 1844³⁴ and found its way into the Erlangen edition

³¹ These notes form the essential, nay, almost literal content of Bindseil's *Colloquia*.

³² Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 262 sqq.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, 225 sqq.

³⁴ M. Luthers *Tischreden oder Colloquia*. (Based on Aurifaber's text, but collated with the redactions of Stangwald and Selnecker.)

of Luther's collected works as late as 1854 sqq.³⁵ This version is defective, not only because of frequent arbitrary rearrangements of the subject-matter and changes in the style of the original text (which changes were made for the sake of fluency or clearness), but also on account of an attempt at rendering certain utterances less objectionable and at toning down extremely blunt expressions.

The learned historian J. G. Walch (died in 1775), in common with other Protestant scholars, regretted the publication of the Table Talks. He says that passages in Luther's colloquies "were revealed which should have remained unpublished" and surmises that his indiscretions were the result of "a perversion of the human will."

On the other hand, many friends of Luther were edified by the Table Talks. Among the original copyists, for instance, Cordatus places them at the head of Luther's writings and regards them as "more precious than the oracles of Apollo." Mathesius recalls with gratitude the "many precious things" he heard at Luther's table, and certifies that the ex-monk never uttered "an improper word."³⁶ In his more recent and popular edition of Luther's Table Talks, Förstemann declares them to be the most important part of Luther's spiritual legacy because in them "the stream of his genius flows clearest." According to Bindseil and Müllensiefen, in their introduction to the *Colloquia*, Luther's Table Talks display "the noblest flower of his nation," and the repulsive and uncouth passages, while, of course, not entirely excusable, contribute to the "complete characterization of the great man," since they show the "furrows and faults that formed a part of his personality."³⁷

The "furrows and faults" revealed in the Table Talks are, as a matter of fact, so prominent that they overshadow the better features and the eulogies which we have quoted are well-nigh beyond understanding. Among these glaring defects are innumerable unjust accusations, polemical exaggerations, and crying distortions of the Catholic faith. This applies above all to Luther's immoderate and blunt expressions, not to say the vulgar obscenities with which he assails the pope, the monastic orders, the Mass, etc. The earlier champions of the Catholic cause are to be pardoned for having again and

³⁵ Vols. LVII-LXII.

³⁶ Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 224 sq.

³⁷ The cited passages are given more completely in Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 223, 228, 221, 228 sq., 222.

again adverted to the sad phenomenon of this filth in their characterization of Luther. The Table Talks were known to the Catholics of a later period mostly through the selections thus made from them by the earlier controversialists. Hence, the opinion formerly entertained by many Catholics that the Table Talks were mainly a collection of obscenities. This opinion is as much an exaggeration as the Protestant eulogies mentioned above. To convince oneself that the colloquies abound in vulgar and obscene passages, side by side with excellent features, one need but read a few pages of them at random or peruse the excerpts which the author of the present book felt it necessary for the sake of historical truth to reproduce in his larger work on Luther.³⁸

Suffice it to remark here that the sphere of the ventral functions constitutes the most fertile soil of his amplifications and comparisons. The students around his table frequently indicate improper remarks in their manuscripts by signs, such as I or X, where their pen hesitates to express the dirty word. As noticed before, Luther employs such expressions with predilection in his references to the pope and Catholicism. The hatred which inspires his shameless utterances makes them all the more repulsive. In the entire scope of German letters there is nothing that may be compared with these excrescences of Luther's eloquence, least of all among the representatives of religion or the heralds of the religious reformation, to whom, of course, he wishes to belong, though it is quite true that his century was distinguished for its coarseness.³⁹ Caspar Schatzgeyer, one of the mildest among the Catholic apologists, in rebuking Luther's coarseness and vulgarity, says that he befouls the face and garments of his foes with such a mass of vituperative filth (*conviciorum stercore*) that they are forced to save themselves by flight from the intolerable stench and dirt. "Never," he says, "in any literary struggle has a larger array of weapons of that sort been seen."⁴⁰

Luther used these weapons also against some of those who professed the new faith. Thus he censures the nobility who refused to provide an income for the Protestant ministers. They exasperate us unto evacuation, he says, and continues: "Then *adorabunt nostra stercore* . . . we are as ready to part as *ein reiffer dreck und ein weit*

³⁸ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 228 sqq.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 236 sq.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Arssloch."⁴¹ Naturally the devil who inspires him and others with doubts and fears, receives his share of abuse. The manner in which he teaches his hearers to despise Satan is too revolting to be quoted. A hint is supplied by the previously mentioned butter-vat of Bugenhagen. On the other hand, it should be noted, if this be necessary, that it is not his object to arouse sensuality. His language is coarse, not lascivious; it arouses disgust, not the evil passions of man's lower nature.

In that age and in the succeeding century the unhappy after-effects of this coarseness led to a certain corruption of the German language, due to the fact that it came from the mouth of a man who was so highly admired as Luther, and that his Table Talks were read in every home. The dregs of vulgarity which had been stirred up by Luther were for a long time a sad dowry of the so-called "Grobian Age" and the polemical literature against Catholics.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

CHAPTER XVII

PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS (Continued)

I. DURATION AND WANING OF TEMPTATIONS

Luther's vigorous, nay, coarse language was not infrequently intended by him to drown the interior scruples about his conduct and teaching.

He called his phobias "temptations" (*Anfechtungen*). From 1527 to 1528, a particularly stormy period in his life, they attained to an extraordinary intensity. After a brief calm, during his sojourn in the castle of Coburg, the gloomy spells returned. He tells us that at that time affliction and sadness of spirit seized him to such an extent as to produce a contraction of the heart.¹ Thereupon the struggle gradually abated. Of his serious illness during the diet of Schmalkalden, 1537, he says: "I would have died in Christ, without any temptations and very composedly." Recollecting this same affliction in 1540, he said to his friends: "At the close of life, all temptations cease; for then the Holy Spirit abides with the faithful believer, forcibly restrains the devil, and pours perfect rest and certainty into the heart."

He ascribed the acquisition of his strong faith to the terrible storms he had experienced. Heretics, on the other hand—so he assures us—were devoid of strong faith, even if they died for it; they possessed only obstinacy, inspired by the devil.

For two weeks he experienced a "spiritual malady," as he styles it in 1537, during which he practically lived without food and sleep. He consoled himself, however, by having recourse to the Apostle Paul, who was also "unable to comprehend" what was proper. When such "spiritual temptations present themselves," he says, "and when I add: 'cursed be the day on which I was born,' then there is trouble."

Again, in 1537, when exhausted in consequence of overwork and indisposition, he protests that he was willing to die; for now he was

¹ Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 346 sqq., for the passages quoted in the text.