

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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

"exceedingly happy and peaceful of heart."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the fears of the spiritual struggles at once rearose in his mind—a mental state in which man regards God as his enemy and feels himself as if pierced by a lance. Then "one does not know whether God is the devil or the devil God."<sup>3</sup>

On October 7, 1538, he again says that he is in the throes of a mortal agony. In this same year he complains that the devil "accused him severely before God." But soon after he declares that while he is assailed by doubts and stumbles at times, this is often the case with Christians; "even though I stumble, yet I am resolved to stand by what I have taught." Only fanatics, he thinks, never stumble, "they stand firm."

In order to overcome his phobias, Luther makes use of the most diverse remedies, some of which have already been referred to in this book. "Quickly inveigh against the papists," was his slogan, especially during temptations concerning the doctrine of justification. He excites in himself a "bold anger" or some other distracting emotion. According to his own confession, he also sought a remedy in sexual enjoyment with his Kate and in jovial intercourse with his friends. "A strong drink of beer," according to his directions, is apt to be of benefit when melancholy thoughts afflict one. Of course, devotional and theological helps are also to be applied. "When I seize the Bible, I have triumphed." Only the correct text did not always suggest itself to him or excitement rendered it lame when it was found. The thought: "Thou shalt become a great man through temptation" was invoked, but often proved inoperative.<sup>4</sup>

The defects of his concept of faith strongly re-acted upon his scruples and temptations. According to that doctrine, life powerfully inspired by faith lacked sufficient support. Faith meant the acceptance of revelation, but more frequently and aggressively, a confident trust in God. The acceptance of revelation was made difficult for him, nay, logically impossible by the arbitrary way in which he impugned the books of the Bible, which form the basis of revelation.<sup>5</sup> In his interpretation of those parts of the Bible which he acknowledged as authentic, Luther opened wide the gates of a subjectivism diametri-

<sup>2</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 4777.

<sup>3</sup> Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 352.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 387 sqq.

cally opposed to faith.<sup>6</sup> In dealing with faith as fiduciary confidence in the mercy of God he was exposed to the oppressive experience that, notwithstanding his boldness, this faith was unstable in its presuppositions. It depended on vacillating emotions. The appropriation of the merits of Christ, the cloak of His justice, was a very difficult and mostly unattainable matter for a conscience weighed down by guilt. Moreover, he himself had declared that man was not free to do good, but God alone could infuse a feeling of the possession of the merits of Christ into the heart. But who could vouch for the operation of God? Owing to his theory of predestination, Luther and his followers did not even know whether they were destined for eternal punishment by the mysterious will of the Most High, despite their acquired feeling of certitude. How, then, were doubts and disquietude to be cured? One realizes that the temptations suffered by Luther must have found a fertile soil in his doctrinal system.<sup>7</sup>

He confesses, in 1543, that he did not feel quite sure that his was a steadfast, fiduciary faith, but that it still lagged behind that of ordinary believers. "I cannot believe it," he said in 1540, "and yet I teach others. . . . I know it is true, but I am unable to believe it. . . . Oh, if only a man could believe it!"<sup>8</sup> By means of these words, he naturally does not intend to deny his faith, but to describe the freshness of that religious fervor which distinguishes a true Christian and which he, in the days of his youth, had observed everywhere among Catholics. Not a day does he waste, he writes in 1542; "but the devil is an evil spirit . . . as I do not fail to realize day by day; for a man waxes cold, and the more so, the longer he lives."

Even in his last sermon at Eisleben, he speaks of "the sin which still persists in us, and which compels us not to believe. We, the best of Christians, also do the same. . . . In view of the weakness of faith, we feel trepidation and anxiety."

Toward the close of his life, Luther's temptations became fewer. At least the discussion of them becomes constantly rarer in his writings and conversations. It seems that he had succeeded, to a certain degree, in lulling them to sleep. The application of the antidotes which have been enumerated above, may not have been ineffectual.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, pp. 356 sqq.

<sup>7</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 5462; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 361.

<sup>8</sup> *Tischreden*, *ibid.*, n. 4864; Grisar, *op. cit.*, V, 360 sq. The following passages, *ibid.*, pp. 361 and 368.

The gymnastics of which he had made use to stifle his conscience produced an unenviable result: lassitude and indifference appeared simultaneously. "Towards the close of life," he says, "such temptations cease, whilst other maladies remain."

The other maladies which continued to afflict him, were his morbid states, which at all times had co-operated with his temptations and had at least contributed to strengthen them. His permanent heart trouble, as is known, often resulted in precordial distress; and his overwrought nerves exacted their tribute in the form of mental suffering. Thus, in connection with other bodily infirmities, an intolerable psychological condition developed, namely, a tormenting sense of fear, which restlessly sought and found an object in the unrest of his conscience. As a result, his "temptations" often assumed an intensity akin to that of the death agony, a phenomenon which would hardly be capable of explanation without the presence of bodily infirmities.<sup>9</sup> Inversely, the poor man's physical condition was undoubtedly affected by his struggles of conscience. On the other hand, he assures us that there were frequent periods of temptation which he sustained in a state of perfectly good health.

Without any doubt, the phobias originated not merely in disease, as has been maintained; but disease and spiritual attacks combined to assail his soul, and his conscience had to bear the brunt of the attack.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, his violent apostasy from the Catholic Church, then universally acknowledged, could not have taken place without a lengthy and profound agitation of conscience. It cannot be repeated too often that Luther's terrific assault upon the papacy was inevitably accompanied by a life of interior storm and stress, which could scarcely be allayed, especially in a man who had enjoyed the interior peace of the Church for so long a time. It is of such struggles of conscience as the real objects of his temptations that the unfortunate man speaks when he tremblingly asks himself the questions: Are you alone gifted with understanding? Has mankind been in error until your advent? Did the Almighty really abandon His Church and acquiesce in her being immersed in error? Even his consciousness of great success and the eulogies of his adherents were bound to prove ineffectual in view of such terrible thoughts.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 333.

<sup>10</sup> Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 321 sqq.

If he was less frequently assailed by storms of conscience in his advanced years, this is due in part to the exhaustion which finally over-powered him and which produced a certain apathy. Other dismal features of his mental life associated themselves with this condition, which, in its totality, constituted a truly abnormal state of soul.

## 2. ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS

The first of the abnormal traits of Luther's psychology was his fear of the devil.

Numerous facts and utterances hitherto quoted attest how consciously and persistently he moved in the imaginary sphere of the power of darkness.

Fearfully he ever beholds this power about him. As he progresses in age, the whole world becomes more and more the "kingdom of the devil," as he styles it in 1544. The devil governs it and devastates it by his tools, "the Turk, the Jew, the pope"; but, he maintains, "he shall be under Christ to all eternity."<sup>11</sup>

Before Luther's time popular belief in the devil had assumed an exaggerated form. It had become firmly established, especially among the mining folk, from whom Luther descended, in consequence of the uncanny labors which they performed within the bowels of the earth. Even learned men were infected by this superstition. Had the sober doctrine of Holy Writ and the Church been adhered to, the faithful would have been preserved from many aberrations in this sphere. Luther magnified and coarsened the maniacal ideas which his parental home and the tendency of his age had implanted in his mind. He confirmed this belief among the Germans, whereas, had he wished to be a true reformer of ecclesiastical life, he would have found a very useful field for his activity in correcting them and the other moral diseases of his age. Up to his time, however, no one had delineated the devil and his works with so much detail, no one had addressed the people on the subject with such a weight of personality and such urgent and apparently religious instructions as Luther.

In his Large Catechism, where he speaks of the damage wrought by the devil, he tells how Satan "breaks many a man's neck, drives others out of their mind or drowns them in the water"; how he "stirs up strife and brings

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 275.

murder, sedition, and war; also causes hail and tempests, destroying the corn and the cattle, and poisoning the air," etc.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein he writes in his Home-Postil and in his Church-Postil, where he attributes to Satan every evil with which mankind is afflicted. His own experiences are frequently reflected in his excited ebullitions, especially when he touches upon the demoniac fury with which his faith had been assailed. In connection with the latter he asserts that the devil is more at home in Holy Scripture than all the universities and scholars. "Whosoever attempts to dispute with him," he says, "will assuredly be pitched on the ash heap." He is convinced that madness is in every case due to the devil, who always employs mad men as his instruments. How many people, he says, has the devil seized bodily, especially when they had caused him trouble in virtue of a pact! According to his own confession, Luther often was frightened by demons. There are less of them at large now because they have entered into his enemies, the heretics, Anabaptists, and fanatics. Luther has the faculty of furnishing a fertile account of the various species of devils, their habitations, and the forms which they assume.

He is most prolix, however, in his statements and reflections on the demons' attitude toward himself. It is he whom the evil powers have selected to make war upon, because of his great mission. This mania throws him into a state of misery and mental darkness and he imagines "nightly encounters" in which he is compelled to contend with the enemy of the Gospel; hence, all the supposed obstacles to the rapid propagation of his religion among the papists; hence, all those remarkable phantoms which hold his mind in their powerful spell.

When, towards the end of his life, in 1546, he was compelled to journey to Eisleben, he writes that an assembly of devils congregated in that town in order to prevent the establishment of peace which he contemplated.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, he believed that he actually saw the devil, even more plainly than at the time he sojourned in the castle of Coburg.<sup>14</sup> Thus, one evening, as he stood praying at the window of his domicile, he saw the devil perched on a nearby street fountain, jeering at him, thus insinuating that he was his sworn enemy. He hastened to his friend, Michael Coelius, the court preacher of Mansfeld, who lived in the house, and amid tears apprised him of what he had seen. Coelius narrates the incident in his funeral oration on Luther. His physician, Ratzeberger, adds that Luther informed Coelius

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278. The following citations *ibid.*, pp. 279, 281, 284.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 130.

and Jonas that the devil had showed him his posterior and told him that he would achieve nothing in Eisleben.

The whole affair, naturally, was purely a hallucination. It is reminiscent of the hallucinations which Luther had at other times, for example, at the Wartburg and the Coburg, as a result of his excited mental condition.

Once, at Wittenberg, he descried the devil in the garden beneath his window in the shape of a huge wild boar, which disappeared when he boldly jeered at it.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the disputation with the devil on the Mass, as was shown above, was but a fiction of his pen. It may be questioned whether the frequent nightly attacks launched by Satan always occurred without hallucinations. According to his own statement, a vulgar "*Leck mich . . .*" often banished them. He seriously states in his Home-Postil: "The devil is always about us in disguise, as I myself have witnessed, taking, e. g., the form of a hog, of a burning wisp of straw, and such like."<sup>16</sup>

Luther was also much annoyed by witches, whom he calls "harlots of the devil." "I wanted to burn them myself," he says, "according to the usage of the law, where the priests commenced to stone the guilty ones."<sup>17</sup> On another occasion he declares against the female corrupters of milk, that "the method of Doctor Pommer is the best"—a reminiscence of the latter's treatment of the butter-vat. Luther's declarations against witches, as contained in his Table Talks, became universally known and together with his writings, which are replete with demoniac thoughts, fatefully contributed to the bloody persecution of witches.<sup>18</sup>

Luther was very much inclined to assume that persons subject to violent attacks of hysteria were possessed by the devil. However, he did not wish to resort to the customary ecclesiastical exorcism with its commands addressed to the devil, but restricted himself to prayer. "God knows the time when the devil must depart." The success of prayer, however, usually appeared rather dubious.

In January, 1546, he experienced a peculiar encounter with the supposed devil in the sacristy of the parish church of Wittenberg. In the presence of

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131 sqq.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 132.

<sup>17</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 3979.

<sup>18</sup> N. Paulus, *Hexenwahn und Hexenprozess, vornehmlich im 16. Jahrhundert* (1910), pp. 488 sqq.

several doctors, ecclesiastics, and students, the devil was to be driven out of a girl of eighteen, a native of Ossitz, near Meissen, by the prayers of Luther and his attendants. It is evident from the accounts of two participants that the girl was in a highly hysterical condition. These two witnesses are Frederick Staphylus, a future convert to Catholicism, and Sebastian Fröschel, Luther's deacon. When, after the recitation of a somewhat lengthy prayer, Luther noticed no sign of the devil's departure, he applied his foot to the patient to signify his disdain for the devil. The poor creature whom he had thus insulted, followed him with threatening looks and gestures. The door could not be opened, as it had been bolted, and the key mislaid. Since the window, which was bolted with iron bars, did not permit of escape, Luther, the devil's greatest and best-hated foe on earth, says Staphylus, "ran about hither and thither, seized with fright," constantly pursued by the infuriated girl, and writhed and deported himself like a person in despair. Finally the sacristan passed in a hatchet, with which Staphylus burst open the door, and thus liberated Luther from his desperate plight. The pious Fröschel says that afterwards reports came to Wittenberg to the effect that the evil spirit no longer tormented the girl, as formerly.<sup>19</sup>

Luther's expectation of the end of the world is another dark trait which pervades his life and assumes a more vivid hue in his later years. He makes various estimates as to when the end may be expected.<sup>20</sup> On one occasion he says it will come in fifty years. Then again he predicts that the catastrophe will have happened by 1548. "We shall yet experience the fulfillment of the Scriptures." The idea circulated widely. His eccentric pupil and friend, Michael Stiefel, despite Luther's opposition, anticipated the date by assigning the year 1533, the eighteenth of October, at exactly eight o'clock in the morning, as the date of the world's end. At this hour he assembled his trembling parishioners in church, and, as nothing happened, was severely censured by Luther.

The end of the world was frequently predicted by other, even by great, men. In Luther's case, however, the expectation is accompanied by unusual agitation and morbid symptoms. It springs from the idea of his vocation and success. He revealed Antichrist in the papacy, and this revelation, according to the Bible, was to be followed immediately by the advent of the Great Judge. This theory he sets forth in detail and with the greatest seriousness in his tract against Catharinus,

<sup>19</sup> Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. VI, pp. 137 sq.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, pp. 242, 248.

appealing to the celebrated passage of St. Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians and the misunderstood prophecy of Daniel.

There is something visionary about his proclamations concerning the end of the world, and for this reason they deserve closer consideration.<sup>21</sup>

Many signs in nature, human society, and the empire of Satan, he held, announced the end of the world, as did also the ever increasing brutalization of the masses and the upper classes. In his fantastic interpretation of the monk-calf, he adduces the horrors of the papacy in corroboration of his prophecy. In old age he says of himself: "Let the Lord call me hence, I have committed, seen, and suffered sufficient of evil." At that time he was able to find even a certain consolation in reflecting on the end of the world, and to speak of the "dear Judgment Day," which was to liberate him from the difficulties which surrounded his work, and from the struggles within his own soul. The great successes which he finally experiences, appear to him to signify the last flaring up of the light. "The light is approaching extinction; it still makes a mighty effort, but thereafter it will be extinguished in a twinkle." Oppressive dreams of the impending judgment visit him. He overcomes the impression by hoping vigorously and longing for his departure from this vale of tears. Thus a mixture of dread and consolation, of fear and satisfaction is prevalent in his expectation of the end of the world.

So sure is he in his calculations that, in view of the brevity of time still allotted, he does not concern himself particularly about the discipline of the Church in the future, e. g., about the institution and order of public worship.<sup>22</sup>

The spiritual exhaustion which overwhelmed him towards the end of his life had a share in this indifference. It also belongs to the dark side of his spiritual life. Luther exclaims in his apathy: "Let everything collapse, stand, perish, as it may. Let matters take their course as they are, since, after all, matters will not change. . . . Germany has had its day and will never again be what it once was." Thus he writes in 1542.<sup>23</sup> He is "tired of this life," he writes in the same year;

<sup>21</sup> For proofs of the following *ibid.*, pp. 242 sqq. Cf. the passages cited by Kroker, *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., index to Vol. VI, s. v. "Tag, jüngster."

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, p. 522.

<sup>23</sup> In a letter to the preacher Probst at Bremen, on March 26, 1542. *Briefwechsel*, XIV, p. 218; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 226; the following passages, *ibid.*, pp. 230 sq., 246 sqq.

"all thoughts concerning plans and rendering aid begone from me! All is vanity." And again in 1543: "We will let things take their course as they may." He regards his words: "Let happen what may" as inspired by Christ, who will seize the reins Himself. The ailments, too, which he suffered, contributed to this despondency. He was afflicted alternately by oppression of the heart and by violent and whirling sensations in the head, accompanied by a ringing in the ears, and by sufferings caused by gallstone and other maladies.

"Distemper, melancholy, and severe afflictions," says Ratzeberger, oppressed him. This physician believes that the mental sufferings which Luther sustained contributed to his death.<sup>24</sup> Luther is profoundly grieved at his inability "to proceed effectively" against the papists, "so great is the immensity of the papistic monster."<sup>25</sup> He sees the advent of the Tridentine Council and he execrates and curses it.<sup>26</sup> With avidity he gives credence to the fable that the Emperor and the Pope had despatched ambassadors to the Grand Turk with gifts and an offer of peace, ready to prostrate themselves before the infidel ruler in long Turkish garments. He says that this is "a token of the coming of the end of all things."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in the disturbed state of his mind he believed the most incredible things. He felt that he was repeatedly saved from the danger of being poisoned by the papists, who pursued him with deadly intent. He preached in poisoned pulpits without injury to himself. Witches endeavored in vain to destroy him and his family. Hired incendiaries convulsed the districts which adhered to him; but the devil raved in vain.

Dissatisfaction with Wittenberg finally induced him to abandon that city forever. Although he had bidden adieu to his Wittenberg hearers on a former occasion, and although he wanted to depart from the ungrateful city in the beginning of 1544, he did not carry out his plan until the end of July, 1545. After careful preparation<sup>28</sup> he betakes himself to Zeitz, whence he addresses a letter to his wife, declaring that he will never come back and requesting her to return to the estate of her family at Zulsdorf and to restore the Black Monastery to the Elector. He says he is resolved to beg for his bread in his old age. From Zeitz he repairs to Merseburg, where, on August 2, he con-

<sup>24</sup> Grisar, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 344.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341 sqq.

fers upon the canon of the cathedral chapter, George von Anhalt, a so-called ordination as bishop of the diocese that had been abolished by Duke August of Saxony. From Merseburg he proceeds to Leipsic, where he preaches on the twelfth of August. He was prevailed upon to return to Wittenberg only after most strenuous efforts put forth by Melanchthon and Bugenhagen, who had been appointed emissaries of the city, the University, and the Elector.

After his return he felt better for a while. Owing to the devotion shown him by his followers, his mental depression yielded to a lively spirit of enterprise. It was a sudden transition, such as not infrequently occurred in his interior life, an idiosyncrasy of psychopathic sufferers.<sup>29</sup> The enemies were made to sense the old Luther in the new polemical literature which he produced. But melancholia once more returned, though apparently not accompanied by his former temptations.

Because of his suspicion of the teaching of others, association with him is described as intolerable, since he always suspected deviations from his own doctrinal position and would brook no differences of opinion. Melanchthon, who held different opinions on various points, e. g., on the Eucharist, complained bitterly and wrote afterwards that he was forced to put up with "an ignominious servility" in his association with Luther. He compares himself with the unfortunate Prometheus chained to the rock and describes Luther as the demagogue Cleon and the impetuous Hercules.<sup>30</sup> Forced to linger, as it were, in the cave of Cyclops, and not feeling secure against the secret wrath of Luther, he also desired to leave Wittenberg and announced his readiness "to slink away"—such is his expression.<sup>31</sup>

One particularly prominent trait in the spiritual life of Luther is his extraordinary capacity for self-delusion. The inward necessity of continually justifying anew to the world, and no less to himself, his pretended calling, the overwhelming ambition of belittling his antagonists and augmenting the number of his own followers and,

<sup>29</sup> John Joseph Mangan, in *Life, Character, and Influence of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1927), at pp. 87-88 of volume two, makes the following observations on Luther, which confirm Father Grisar's position. He says: "As our study of Erasmus has led us to decide definitely that he was a neurasthenic, so our study of Luther has convinced us that he was a psychopath, if not always, then most assuredly at intervals."—The author advances a number of proofs in substantiation of his assertion, which appear very interesting, as some of them are based upon medical observations. (Tr.)

<sup>30</sup> Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 252 sqq.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 347.

finally, his inevitable and constant perplexities, resulted in most curious expressions of self-delusion, which sometimes contradicted the views he entertained at other times.

Thus the moral corruption developing under the new evangel on occasion would appear terrible to him only because the gospel which he preached was pure and holy, and light intensifies the shadows. As there is no light in the papacy, he contends, its horrible evils and vices are not so noticeable. He ascribes the corruption of his followers to the devil, who would discredit the evangel, but on other occasions admits that it was caused by his *sola fides* doctrine which implied the inefficacy of good works.<sup>32</sup>

A few examples will show how arbitrarily his mental processes contravened the ordinary laws of experience and the rules of logic, in order to conform with the idea of his vocation, which dominated him with morbid force.

God continuously performs miracles in confirmation of his doctrine. In response to the prayers of the Lutherans, He destroys the enemies of His teaching. "By my prayers I have brought about the death of Duke George of Saxony; by means of our prayers we intend to encompass also the death of others." With the greatest apparent naïveté he finds his doctrines confirmed by the ancient doctors of the Church, such as St. Augustine, whereas in matter of fact they state the exact contrary. He cannot comprehend why the whole world does not agree with him and says that malice alone prevents the papists from accepting what is so evidently right; or, rather, they accept it in secret, as the pope and the Roman curia do, but they do not wish to honor him and the truth. The most horrible infidelity is rampant under the papacy. The papists do not heed "that God incessantly attacks them with many wounds, plagues, and signs." Has He not confirmed the Lutheran religion by the sudden death of Zwingli?

I am in duty bound to proclaim to the world what I "feel inwardly through the spirit of God." Indeed, I permit myself to be guided by God "as the wind and the waves propel the ship." Opposition and the din of battle are but the seal of divine approbation on my work. In the Peasants' War he boldly asserted that God commanded him to proclaim that the peasants were to be slain like dogs. In a spirit of defiance he afterwards vouches, with regard to his whole doctrinal system, that he will abide "by the first mandate of the vocation received from on high," by the "firstfruits of the received spirit," even "if God or Christ should announce the contrary" (!) He may not yield, since, in his own imagination, his victory over the papacy is already assured. "This majesty has fallen," "it has been destroyed" by the "spirit of the mouth of the Lord." "The Church will be without a pope."

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 210 sqq.; Vol. VI, pp. 331 sq.

since he will fall just as the Turk. "Even now he is singing Eli, Eli," because he has been struck. Soon men will say, *Expiravit*—"he has breathed his last." "My adversaries will have neither the Word nor the Cross." They all avoid the Cross.

"Here I, a poor monk, and a poor nun must come to the rescue. We two comprehend the article of the Cross and raise it up; for this reason the Word and the Cross are sufficient; they give us assurance."

Thus the series of illusions outlined above is concluded with the remarkable tableau showing how Luther and his Kate raise up the Cross in the sight of the world—they who had bound themselves by a solemn vow before the altar of God to embrace His Cross in a life of voluntary chastity, poverty, and obedience. How different the reality! To what extent the Cross disappears in Luther's conception of the married state and sexual life will be seen in a subsequent section.

### 3. FROM FREEDOM TO VIOLENT INTOLERANCE

The reversion of his early attitude on religious liberty and spiritual independence also belongs to the remarkable features of Luther's later life. This contradiction must be emphasized because rationalist Protestants of the present time like to quote Luther's earlier utterances, which seem to imply the destruction of all positive Christian belief.<sup>33</sup>

It is well known that Luther by no means intended to substitute rationalism for revealed Christianity. Nevertheless, in the first years of his polemics he advanced to such an extent in his antagonism to Catholic doctrine as apparently to antagonize all dogma. Relative to practice, he at that time permitted the obligation and dignity of the law to recede in an unwarranted manner. It is known that the liberty of opinion which emerged in consequence, and the loose morals of his adherents, as disclosed especially by the visitations of 1527–1528, led him to employ greater caution. The law and the fear of divine chastisement were inculcated by him more strictly, and belief in the revealed doctrines which he regarded as certain was emphasized with great severity. The controversy with Zwingli caused Luther to draw up a formal series of articles of faith. The Augsburg Confession fur-

<sup>33</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. V, n. 5515,

nished a certain basis, which was afterwards expanded and sanctioned by the publication of the so-called Schmalkaldic Articles. The controversy aroused by the Antinomianism of Agricola once more restored the law to its legitimate position and set new limits to liberty of teaching. Present-day Protestant theologians speak of a restriction of teaching and doctrinal torpidity on the part of the aging Luther. Many would prefer to progress along the path which he blazed in his early career as a reformer, holding that a healthy evolution can only take place where there is complete freedom, and lamenting that Luther's promising spring was succeeded by no summer.<sup>34</sup>

It is not true, however, that Luther's declarations in favor of liberty ceased altogether in his later years. His principle of the untrammeled formation of a personal religious conviction on the part of each individual in accordance with his private interpretation of the Bible, was never abandoned. After he had rejected the teaching authority of the Church, instituted by God for the preservation of dogma, there was really nothing left for him to do but to uphold an unlimited subjectivism. He contradicts himself, therefore, when he demands unconditional adherence to an objective sum of truths. All the more so, as he boldly sets up his own personal opinions in place of the venerable authority of the Church. True, he tried to conceal this substitution as much as possible. He assures his adherents that they must follow Christ, not him, but at the same time proceeds, in part unconsciously, on the assumption that his mandates must be obeyed. But, it may be asked, where is the necessary guarantee of truth if his judgment, hence the view of one person, is to be depended upon as to what constitutes the teaching of Christ, and what part of the ancient teaching and revelation is to be retained in the prescribed articles of the new evangel?

The reverersions to a more positive attitude, occasionally noticed in Luther, were, therefore, fundamentally only a more brutal emphasis of the Wittenberg doctrine, which was his own. For him the change was a necessity; and even though it appears as grossly inconsistent, it nevertheless redounded to the future benefit of Protestantism by assisting it in carrying on during the coming centuries, until the scepticism of a new era and the advent of the so-called historical method and the modern spirit of independence shook Lutheranism with destructive force.

<sup>34</sup> Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 237 sqq.

In his tribunal at Wittenberg Luther strove to protect *his truth* by all means. He hurled the most violent invectives not only at the papists, but also at the "heretics" in his own camp, who dared to deviate from his theological teaching. He assails not only the Zwinglians, but also Karlstadt, Bucer, Capito, Grickel (Agricola) and Jeckel (Jacob Schenck) among many others.

"They are knaves," thus he inveighs against them. "They would readily assail and surprise us, just as if we were blind and ignorant of their methods."<sup>35</sup> "By God's grace I am more learned than all the sophists and theologians of the schools." But "they have a high opinion of themselves, which, indeed, is the cause and well-spring of all heresies, for, as St. Augustine says, 'Ambition is the mother of all heresies.'"<sup>36</sup> "It all comes from obstinacy and conceit and the ideas of natural reason, which puffs itself up."

Whilst in this frame of mind, it appears to have been impossible for Luther to realize that he actually condemned himself by these declarations uttered at various times.

The heretics—he says on another occasion—cannot be sure of their cause. First of all, they ought "to be certain of their mission." "One ought to be certain of it before God, whilst by all means one ought to be able to say before the people: 'If anyone knows better, let him say so; I will gladly yield to God's Word when I am better instructed.'"

He asks them: Where are your miracles? With a boldness that is truly extraordinary he demands miraculous signs from the sectaries. He himself needs none in attestation of his teaching; for his mission is an ordinary one, whereas their pretended mission is extraordinary. Were he to petition God, he says, God would endow him with "the gift of raising the dead, or of performing other miracles." However, he does not ask God for these gifts, since "the rich gift of interpreting the Scriptures is sufficient" for him.

In his reaction against the doctrinal liberty which he himself inaugurated Luther goes so far as to advocate compulsory measures against those who differ with him. In 1525 he had enunciated the principle: "The [secular] authorities are not to hinder anyone from teaching and believing what he pleases."<sup>37</sup> In 1530—originally induced thereto by the agitation of the Anabaptists—he demands the exercise of force and bloody repression on the part of his Elector and the other Protestant rulers. Not only are those Anabaptists who rebel against the authority of the State to be dealt with harshly, but also those who

<sup>35</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. III, n. 2896b. The other passages cited in small print will be found *apnd* Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 279 sqq.

<sup>36</sup> This and the following quotations *ibid.*, VI, pp. 248 sqq.

are not in rebellion. "These also are not to be tolerated, but are to be treated as public blasphemers." To deviate from his teaching is equivalent to "public blasphemy" and deserving of death. "The authorities shall hand over knaves of that ilk to their proper master, to wit, Master Hans" (*i. e.*, the hangman). The Sacramentarians and the papists, too, being blasphemers, must not be tolerated.

At the end of October, 1531, Melanchthon, who was known for his humane disposition, developed in detail the reasons for employing the sword against the Anabaptists. These reasons apply to all who "reject the office of public preaching and teach that men can become holy in some other manner, without sermons and ecclesiastical worship." Luther subscribed his name to these reasons, saying, "It pleases me." In his sermons on St. Matthew, which were delivered about this time, he says: "It is not allowed to everyone to excogitate his own ideas, formulate his own doctrine, permit himself to be called Master and dominate or censure anyone else"; "it is one of the greatest and most injurious vices on earth, whence all factious spirits originate."

Thus sectaries, especially Anabaptists, were executed in Electoral Saxony, the rulers appealing to the Wittenberg theologians and jurists in justification of their procedure.<sup>37</sup> Luther never revoked his intolerant views; on the contrary, he constantly intensified them as he approached the end of his life.<sup>38</sup>

Certain formidable barriers which had been erected by him and Melanchthon at the faculty of Wittenberg, were intended to safeguard this supreme tribunal and citadel of pure orthodoxy against the incursions of "heretical" opinions. The statutes of the theological faculty, which were probably drawn up in 1533, invested that body with the right of deciding all matters of faith. The proper observance of this provision was guaranteed by the fact that Luther presided over the faculty uninterruptedly from 1535 until his death.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, after 1535, there was prescribed, at the instigation of the Elector, an "Ordination Oath," preceded by a theological examination, for all preachers and pastors sent out by the University. In the certificate of ordination of Heinrich Bock (dated May 17, 1540, and signed by Luther, Bugenhagen, Jonas, and Melanchthon) it is set forth that

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 254 sq.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256 sqq. Cfr. N. Paulus, *Protestantismus und Toleranz im 16. Jahrhundert* (1911), Ch. I.

<sup>39</sup> Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. VI, pp. 262 sq.

Bock had undertaken to "preach to the people steadfastly and faithfully the pure doctrine of the gospel which our Church confesses." It is also stated that he adheres to the "consensus" of the "Catholic Church of Christ."<sup>40</sup> "Catholicity" here is understood in a sense which does not ordinarily attach to the word. "Ordination" merely consisted in the declaration that the candidates were authorized to serve as ministers.

Naturally many opponents within his own camp reproached Luther with lack of liberty in the exercise of the ministry. They charged, and not without justification, that the Wittenbergers proposed "to breathe new life into despotism, to seat themselves in the chair, and to exercise jurisdiction just as the pope had done heretofore."<sup>41</sup> Luther was dubbed "the Pope of Wittenberg" (*Papa Albiacus*), an epithet which became increasingly popular when his talented and scholarly opponent, Sebastian Franck, whose writings enjoyed a wide circulation, developed Luther's subjectivism to its logical conclusions and combated the Lutheran ecclesiastical system, demanding unrestricted liberty. This intrepid challenger was everywhere pursued by verdicts and demands for execution on the part of Luther and Melanchthon.<sup>42</sup> Simon Lemnius (Lemchen), a Protestant humanist of Wittenberg, was another public opponent of Luther's theological despotism. Banished from Wittenberg in 1538, he avenged himself by the publication of a caustic "Apology," the complete text of which became known to historians but recently. In it he unmercifully castigates the spiritual tyranny exercised by Luther. "He sits like a dictator at Wittenberg and rules"; thus the "Apology," "and what he says must be taken as law."<sup>43</sup> However, it must be noted that Lemnius, because of other attacks upon the conduct of Luther's circle, did not bequeath to posterity the reputation of a respectable controversialist, his attacks being very frivolous in diction and content and also untrue. He composed a revolting poem in which he depicts Luther as suffering from dysentery. Luther retorted with a "Merd-Song" of his own, in which he paid his respects to Lemnius in language that was no less vulgar than his opponent's.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of such attacks Luther maintained his tribunal at Witten-

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266 sqq.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>44</sup> *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 4032. Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. VI, p. 288.

berg. "Whosoever shall despise the Wittenberg School," he declared, "is a heretic and an evil man; for in this school God has revealed His Word."<sup>45</sup> And he adhered to this solemn pronouncement. In 1542 he went so far as to demand that the leading citizens of Meissen, who had embraced his doctrine, should "signify their approval of everything which has hitherto been done by us and shall be done in the future."<sup>46</sup>

Luther's intolerance also animated his co-workers, especially Melanchthon.<sup>47</sup> A. Hänel in the *Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte* passes the following judgment upon the latter: As far as Protestantism is concerned, "liberty of belief" was "denied at every point." In fervent words Melanchthon sanctioned the execution of the "heretic" Michael Servetus by Calvin in 1554 as "a pious and memorable example for all posterity."<sup>48</sup> It has been previously noted that he wished God would send a "bold assassin" to "despatch" the heretical King Henry VIII of England.<sup>49</sup> Martin Bucer, to mention but one more of Luther's associates, asserted that the civil authority "was obliged to abolish false doctrine and perverse public worship," and that all the bishops and the clergy must obey it as the sole existing authority.<sup>50</sup>

The new religion was, as a matter of course, capable of enforcing such demands only by availing itself of its intimate connection with the secular authority. By surrendering the religious discipline to the civil government, the Protestant Church became a compulsory State institution, a nursery of despotic encroachments upon the spiritual domain. Luther himself says of it: "Satan is still Satan; under the papacy he pushed the Church into the world sphere and now, in our day, he seeks to bring the State system into the Church."<sup>51</sup>

The Church, whose invisibility and purely spiritual power Luther had hitherto so forcibly emphasized, in his hands became a visible institution, which asserted its visibility all too strongly, and became accustomed to marshal all temporal forces and to insure its preservation with the aid of the secular arm. The tragic fate of Luther's theory

<sup>45</sup> *Tischreden*, *ibid.*, n. 5126; Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> Grisar, *ibid.*, VI, p. 279.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>48</sup> Grisar, *op. cit.*, VI, pp. 266 sqq.

<sup>49</sup> Grisar, *op. cit.*, VI, pp. 269 sqq.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 12. Respecting Melanchthon, Bucer, etc., see the proofs in Paulus, *Toleranz*.

<sup>51</sup> Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 320.

of the Church has led many a Protestant scholar to assert, quite truly, that there is no room for a church in Luther's system. It is even doubted whether he intended to found a church in any true sense of the word.<sup>52</sup> Protestants have frankly exposed the inherent contradiction between his pronouncements on religious authority and the duty of secular rulers and his persistent assertion of individual liberty and the claims of his gospel.<sup>53</sup>

Luther's retreat from the position which he had originally assumed merely contributed to a clearer disclosure of the contradictions inherent in the principal ideas of his system. The intrinsic contradictions are especially manifest in the sphere of morality. For this reason, we will devote a special chapter to the ethical aspects of Luther's doctrine and practice.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307, quoting Martin Rade.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321 sq. Cf. Th. Pauls, *Luthers Auffassung von Staat und Volk*, Bonn, 1925, a book which unjustifiably credits Luther with too much systematization.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LUTHER ON MORALITY AND MATRIMONY. THE BIGAMY OF PHILIP OF HESSE

#### I. LUTHER'S ETHICAL TEACHING IN GENERAL

The ethical system of Luther was vitally influenced by his conception of the gospel, which in his opinion was essentially only forgiveness of sin, a cloak covering guilt, the quieting of an "affrighted conscience." To gain a sense of confidence was the starting-point of the new doctrine. Luther's supreme gain was to acquire certainty of salvation through an active faith in the appropriation of the merits of Christ. This thought is the guiding star also of his ethics.

Protestants say that Luther erected ethics upon its genuine foundation, which had been ignored up to his time. This claim, however, is disproved by certain leading declarations of his, which raise the question how a true ethical system could originate under such conditions. Luther taught that man is not a free agent, but a mute "pillar of salt," either controlled by the grace of God which is operative within him, or subject to the domination of the devil, without any activity on his part. His reason in religious matters resembles a lunatic.<sup>1</sup> In consequence of an ineradicable original guilt, sin persists in man's inordinate concupiscence; even the just man, *i. e.*, he who is regarded as just by God, remains a sinner. Sin is merely covered up by fiduciary faith in the blood of Christ. The "golden cloak of grace" due to the merits of the Redeemer does everything. Good works are devoid of supernatural merit and have no significance for Heaven. Every man is predestined for Heaven or hell by a hidden decree of God.<sup>1</sup>

It is fair to ask: What moral inducement is there in Luther's hypothesis to combat the perversity of human nature? Is there any moral responsibility? Can there be any such thing as Christian morality? At a time when the renown of Luther was not so great as it is since the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Protestant theologian K. F. Stäudlin openly declared that "no genuine Christian ethic could

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 3 sqq.