

PREFACE

The diverse and even profoundly contradictory criticisms to which Luther has been subjected are apt to cause dismay to anyone who undertakes to occupy himself more closely with his biography. This divergence of opinions is a result not only of the divided confessional standpoint, but also of deviating historical evaluations of the facts. Even the Catholic opponents of Luther have never agreed on many points.

In my work on Luther, which appeared in three volumes in the course of 1911 to 1912, I endeavored to the best of my ability to establish a presentment of Luther and his work upon an unimpeachable basis, derived from all genuine sources.¹ For this purpose it was necessary to treat many aspects of the subject quite comprehensively. Others which presented fewer difficulties, could be passed over or summed up briefly. The labor involved in the removal of untenable conceptions prevented me from offering a uniform and well balanced biography in those comprehensive volumes.

For this reason I have always cherished a desire of submitting a more compact description and a proper delineation of the life of Luther in a less voluminous work based on the conclusions that have been established, particularly as supplemented by the researches into Luther's history which have since been instituted with extraordinary activity, especially as a result of the Luther jubilee of 1917. Meanwhile, a large number of special studies, great and small, have been published. Then, too, the Weimar Edition of Luther's works has presented, in its continuation volumes, the writings of Luther in a new form, resulting in considerable improvement over the previously edited texts. The Weimar undertaking has redounded in an eminent degree to the advantage of the Table Talks, which constitute an important source for the biography of Luther. The progress made thus far, was utilized by me, as far as practicable, in the special

¹ *Luther*, 3rd ed., Freiburg i. Br., 1924-1925, Herder. English translation by E. M. Lamond, 6 vols., London 1913-1917.

supplements to the third edition of my above mentioned three-volume work.

In presenting to the public this compendious biography of Martin Luther, which represents the fruit of several years' labor, I may be permitted to call attention to the fact that, in compiling it I have been encouraged by the appreciative reception which has been accorded to my larger work. In their discussion of this work, many Protestants who are not confirmed controversialists, have marked with approval my serious endeavor to observe objectivity and to give a calm, authentic presentation of a delicate subject.² Their statements show that an approximation between Catholic and Protestant views of Luther is possible on the basis of unprejudiced historical research. The contentious and irrelevant attacks made upon my work are of no consequence.³ Similar attacks will not disquiet me even after the appearance of the present biography. On the other hand, I shall gratefully avail myself of any clarification of points offered in a possible new edition of this volume.

It may not be superfluous to mention that the present volume is chiefly concerned with a lucid presentation of the development of Luther, of his mental constitution and the interior impulses which moved him throughout his life. His many frank communications concerning himself as well as his unbridled language about and against others, almost spontaneously lead to a true characterization of him. Luther is so communicative that the afore-mentioned diversity of opinions about him becomes quite inexplicable to the attentive investigator, the more he occupies himself with his writings, letters, and addresses. Owing to Luther's communicativeness, I did not wish to be sparing of the evidences which in part are inserted in the foot-notes of this volume. It was frequently possible to indicate them very briefly by citations of apposite pages in my larger work, "Luther."

Throughout the present work, in the annotations as well as in the

² In a volume entitled *Urteile von protestantischer Seite*, the firm of Herder collected and published a large number of these criticisms in 1912. The Swedish-Lutheran Archbishop Söderblom, who delivered a series of lectures on Luther in May, 1923, said of the modern Catholic investigation of Luther in general "that it has extended the horizon of the Reformation and called forth a radical revolution in the conception of Luther." (*Bayerischer Kurier*, Munich, May 9, 1923). His new conception of Luther, however, is certainly not at all acceptable.

³ Criticisms deserving of consideration were answered by me in part at the end of the third volume of my *Luther*, and also in a more extensive exposition in my article *Bemerkungen zur protestantischen Kritik meines Lutherwerkes* (*Theologische Revue*, 1919, pp. 1 sqq.)

text, I have limited my observations to the great struggle of the sixteenth century without digressing to controversial questions of the present age which suggest themselves almost irresistibly. The question, propounded in this book—and verily it is a sufficiently comprehensive question—rather is: What happened in that period of upheaval and, above all, how is the responsible author of the struggle to be judged in his interior and exterior life? I could impose this restriction upon myself all the more easily, since Luther is regarded by present-day Protestants more and more as a purely historical phenomenon. According to the acknowledgment of Protestant leaders, the present age has in general passed beyond his influence, and the little group which still professes his peculiar doctrines, is diminishing. It may be left to others, be they Protestant or Catholic, to draw appropriate inferences from the texts and facts here presented, which are not the product of theological prepossession, but of an independent study of the facts. In another work, entitled, *Der deutsche Luther im Weltkrieg und in der Gegenwart*, I have frankly discussed certain of these inferences.⁴ In the *Lutherstudien*, a selection of more exhaustive contributions on the subject of Luther appearing in single numbers, I have attempted to present in detail the new movements within the Protestant pale, especially as exemplified by the recent jubilee celebrations of the Reformation.⁵

May the present volume be perused by unprejudiced readers.

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⁴ Augsburg, 1924, published by Haas and Grabherr.

⁵ *Lutherstudien*, 6 Hefte, Freiburg, 1921 sqq.