

CHAPTER VI

SIGNS OF THE COMING TEMPEST IN STATE AND CHURCH

LUTHER'S OPINIONS OF THE AGE

I. CURRENTS OF THE NEW AGE

Powerful movements which, proclaiming an intellectual revolution and connected more or less intimately with the revival of the study of classical antiquity, pervaded the Western world since the fifteenth century, and presaged a new period in the history of mankind. This agitation was bound to react on young Luther.

The newly invented art of printing had at one stroke created a world-wide community of intellectual accomplishments and literary ideas, such as the Middle Ages had never dreamt of. By the exchange of the most diverse and far-reaching discoveries the nations came into closer proximity with one another. The spirit of secular enterprise awakened as from a long sleep at the astounding discovery of new countries overseas with unsuspected treasures.

As a result of the increased facility of intellectual intercourse and of the development of scientific methods, criticism began to function with an efficiency greater than ever before in all departments of knowledge. Yielding to an ancient urge, the larger commonwealths made themselves increasingly independent of their former tutelage by the Church. They strove after liberty and the removal of that clerical influence whence they had largely derived their durability and internal prosperity in the past. And in proportion as they struggled for autonomy, the opulent cities, the knightly demesnes and principalities, particularly in Germany, tried to throw off the fetters which hitherto had oppressed them, and to increase their power. In brief, we find everywhere a violent break with former restrictions, a determined advance of subjectivism at the expense of solidarity and the traditional order of the Middle Ages, but especially at the expense of the supremacy of the spiritual power of the Church,

which thus far alone had preserved mankind from the dangers of individualism.

Influenced by the spirit of the Renaissance and the awakening of historical memories, the spirit of nationalism became more powerful than ever before in the life of peoples. The segregation of national ambitions became ever more pronounced, in spite of the increased solidarity of commerce. The Germans became more keenly conscious of being a unit which had a right to develop along its own lines in opposition to the Latin nations. Luther very skillfully utilized this national spirit in his public conflict. He boldly aroused this spirit in the Germans, "his dear brethren," who had been reduced to servitude by the papacy, with a view to separate them from the universal Church. If the patriotic sentiment of the Germans had been kept within due bounds and had been animated by Christian ideals, it would have been a great good. Aside from other considerations, it might have led to a healthy competition with other civilized nations. In reality, however, it descended down to the individual principalities within the boundaries of Germany. The territorial rulers who concurred with Luther, promoted it to the advantage of their own power. In consequence, the empire increasingly became a cumbersome machine, and the authority of the emperor, the august head of the empire in virtue of his coronation by the pope, waned visibly, especially since the imperial reforms so warmly favored by Maximilian I (d. January 12, 1519) virtually failed and the immense and far-flung empire consolidated under Maximilian's successor, Charles V, almost completely absorbed the attention of that ruler to the detriment of his German subjects, not to speak of the impairment which the authority of this Catholic emperor experienced through Luther's widely-published attacks, made partly in the direct interest of his own ecclesiastical revolt and partly in the service of those petty German territorial rulers who were loyal to him and whose interests conflicted with those of the empire.

In course of time the German rulers obtained a certain ecclesiastical régime within their respective countries, and it came to pass that, at the close of the Middle Ages, besides the ecclesiastical princes, the secular princes were vested with extensive authority in the external administration of religious affairs. They derived this authority in part from the Roman See, which sought to protect and promote the interests of the Church by the aid of loyal Catholic rulers; in

part they had acquired it as an inheritance from their forebears and maintained it against the passive or active opposition of the bishops.

This ecclesiastical régime exercised by territorial princes was a colossal danger when the religious struggles began in the sixteenth century.

True, some of the princes, *e. g.*, the well-intentioned Duke George of Saxony and the dukes of Bavaria, employed their ecclesiastical power successfully in defense of the existing ecclesiastical conditions. Many others, however, especially Luther's territorial lord, the Elector of Saxony, constantly incited by him, and landgrave, Philip of Hesse, made of the ecclesiastical privileges they had gained a bulwark for the religious innovation. Thus the ecclesiastical authority of the territorial lords formed a convenient transition to the establishment of a Protestant ecclesiastical régime. Manifestly it was a double-edged sword which was thus wielded by the secular arm in the distribution of benefices, the temporal administration or partial disposition of church property, the control of innumerable ecclesiastical patronages and the superintendence of monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions. It happened that large territories were torn with ease from the faith and jurisdiction of the Church, as it were overnight. Even in principalities that remained Catholic, the reforms initiated by the Church authorities, *e. g.*, in the monasteries, were in many instances obstructed or interrupted by selfish rulers. And the acts of the reigning princes were repeated in the great free cities of the empire, and even in smaller cities, where the secular authorities had come into possession of similar powers.

It is remarkable how this tendency of transferring ecclesiastical functions and rights to secular rulers is noticeable in Luther's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, written at the time when he began to drift away from the Church. The young monk there asserts that the clergy are remiss in the performance of their duties concerning the administration of pious foundations. "As a matter of fact," he exclaims, "it were better and assuredly safer, if the temporal affairs of the clergy were placed under the control of the worldly authorities." The laity, he explains, are aware of the inefficiency of the clergy, and "the secular authorities fulfill their obligations better than our ecclesiastical rulers." It is a question whether he perceived the far-

reaching import of his words as a kind of prelude to the coming secularization.¹

In any event, Luther was aware of the opposition existing between the secular powers, and even between the common laity, and the clergy, which smouldered in many places at that time. A certain aversion and hostility toward the entire clergy, commencing with the curia and the episcopate, and extending to the lower secular clergy and the monks, had become widely prevalent and was foisted by the secular authorities. In virtue of the pious donations that had accumulated in the course of centuries, the Church had become too wealthy. Thus, in the diocese of Worms, about three-fourths of all property belonged to ecclesiastical proprietors. Everywhere the Church possessed a plenitude of privileges which provoked envy, as, for illustration, in the judicial forum, in her exemption from taxation, and in the honors bestowed upon her. Jealousy and envy engendered hatred and contentions in many places. True, an immense share of the income of the Church constantly flowed to charitable institutions; other sums were allotted with papal sanction to, or else arbitrarily appropriated by, the secular authorities to cover particular needs. Large sums were remitted to the Roman curia in the form of ordinary or extraordinary taxes. The wealth of the Church was alluring, and the large subsidies from Germany to Rome especially were a constant occasion for complaint. The payments to the papal treasury had, as a matter of fact, become too onerous. The urgent requirements of the administration of the universal Church, especially since the exile of the popes at Avignon, had resulted in constantly increasing imposts levied on the faithful in the various countries for the benefit of Rome. The *annates*, the *servitia* and other taxes, and the revenues derived from indulgences had constantly increased. In Germany complaints were rife that the material resources of the country were too heavily assessed. The so-called "*courtesans*," i. e., benefice-hunters provided with Roman documents entitling them to certain benefices, by their avaricious practices helped to render the papal curia still more odious.

At the commencement of his controversy Luther assiduously collected every unfavorable detail concerning the financial practices of the curia, so as to paint a collective picture of them for propaganda purposes. In this task he was assisted by a former official of the

¹ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 283 sq.

Roman curia who had come to Wittenberg. True and exaggerated reports of the pomp displayed at the court of Rome and of the papal expenditures for secular purposes reacted upon the discontented like oil poured into a fire.

A historical expression of this bitter feeling is furnished by the so-called *Gravamina*, official lists of complaints submitted to successive diets by the princes and estates against the excessive burdens and the inequality of rights. In many respects these complaints met with the approval of men who were sincerely attached to the Church, such as Dr. Eck. Similarly the cities had their *Gravamina* against the bishops, the citizens and town councilors against the chapters and the other clergy. The spiritual principalities repeatedly experienced a clash of arms as a result of the quarrels pertaining to jurisdiction or possession.

In this way it appeared—and the more recent researches concerning local conditions confirm the impression—that one reason for the great defection was antagonism to the papal government and to the clergy, originating in material interests. The aversion to Rome was all the more dangerous because it was shared by a large number of the clergy, oppressed by taxes. These were clouds that heralded an approaching storm. Nevertheless, the reform for which many serious-minded churchmen clamored was not excluded, but merely delayed. The existing discontent did not engender a desire for a new religion, and the Catholic dogmas remained sacred. But when Luther proclaimed his new doctrines, which implied the destruction of ecclesiastical unity, the existing discontent accelerated the revolution.

2. ABUSES IN THE LIFE OF THE CLERGY

When Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1462), a man who has merited the gratitude of Germany, proclaimed his programme of reforms, he indicated with complete frankness the reasons for the corruption of the ecclesiastical system. They were: the admission of many unworthy candidates to the clerical state, sacerdotal concubinage, the accumulation of benefices, and simony. Towards the end of the fifteenth century complaints had multiplied against immorality among the clergy. "The numerous decrees of bishops and synods do not admit of a doubt but that a large part of the Ger-

man clergy flagrantly transgressed the law of celibacy."² A recommendation made to the dukes of Bavaria in 1447, voicing the opinion of many friends and sponsors of a sound reform, declared that the work of reformation had to begin with the improvement of the morals of the clergy, for here was the root of all evils in the Church. True there were districts where the clergy was irreproachable and praiseworthy, e. g., the Rhineland, Slesvig-Holstein, and the Allgäu. But in Saxony, the home of Luther, and in Franconia and Bavaria, there were reports of many and grave abuses. A work entitled *De Ruina Ecclesiae*, formerly ascribed to Nicholas of Clémanges, says that at the beginning of the fifteenth century there were bishops who, for a money consideration, permitted their priests to live in concubinage, and Hefele in his *Konziliengeschichte* adduces a number of synodal decrees which prohibited bishops to accept money or gifts in consideration of their tolerating or ignoring the practice of concubinage.³

In addition to living in concubinage, many of the better situated clergy were steeped in luxury and presumptuous arrogance, thus repelling the people, and especially the middle class, which was conscious of its own self-sufficiency.

In connection with the unduly multiplied small religious foundations without clergy, the number of clergymen had increased to such an extent that their very number suggests the idea that many of them had no genuine vocation to the clerical state, and that lack of work constituted a moral danger for many. Thus, at the end of the fifteenth century, two churches in Breslau had 236 "altarists," whose only service consisted in saying Mass at altars erected by pious donations and endowed with petty benefices. Besides saying Mass daily, these "altarists," of whom there was a vast multitude throughout the country, had but one obligation, namely, to recite the Breviary. In 1480 there were 14 "altarists" and 60 vicars, besides 14

² Janssen-Pastor, *Gesch. des deutschen Volkes*, Vol. I, 18th ed., p. 709. On the synods, see Hefele-Hergenröther, *Konziliengesch.*, Vol. VIII. Cf. Janssen-Pastor, *op. cit.*, 680 sq., and H. Grisar, *Ein Bild aus dem deutschen Synodal Leben im Jahrhundert vor der Glaubensspaltung*, in the *Histor. Jahrbuch*, Vol. I (1880), pp. 603-640.

³ Nicolaus de Clemangiis, *De Ruina Ecclesiae*, c. 22, in Herm. von der Hardt, *Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium* (Helmstadt., 1700), I, 3, col. 23 sq. Hefele, *op. cit.*, VII, pp. 385, 416, 422, 594; VIII, p. 97. John de Segovia, *Hist. Syn. Basil.*, II (Vindob. 1873), p. 774: "Quia in quibusdam regionibus nonnulli jurisdictionem ecclesiasticam habentes pecuniarios questus a concubinariis percipere non erubescunt, patiendo eos in tali foeditate sordescere."

canons, stationed at the cathedral of Meissen. In Strasburg the minster boasted 36 canonries, St. Thomas Church 20, old St. Peter's 17, new St. Peter's 15, All Saints 12. The number of canonries was augmented by numerous foundations for vicars and "summissaries," so called because they celebrated high Mass in place of the canons. There were no less than 63 "summissaries" at the minster of Strasburg, not to mention 38 chaplains. John Agricola reports—although only on the strength of an *on dit* ("it is alleged")—that there were 5,000 priests and monks at Cologne; on another occasion he estimates the number of monks and nuns in that city alone at 5,000. It is certain that the "German Rome" on the Rhine at that time had 11 foundations, 19 parish churches, more than 100 chapels, 22 cloisters, 12 hospitals, and 76 religious convents.⁴

The bishop of Chiemsee traces the corruption of the clergy principally to the fact that the spiritual and temporal rulers abused the right of patronage, both by their appointments and their arbitrary interference. This opinion is shared by Geiler of Kaysersberg, who blames the laity, in particular the patrons among the nobility, for the deplorable condition of the parishes and asserts that illiterate, malicious, and depraved individuals were engaged in lieu of the good and honorable.

In contrast with "the higher clergy, who reveled in wealth and luxury," the condition of the lower clergy in no wise corresponded to the dignity of their state. "Beyond the tithes and stole-fees, which were quite precarious, they had no stipends, so that poverty, and at times avarice, constrained them to gain their livelihood in a manner which exposed them to public contempt. 'There can be no doubt that a very large portion of the lower clergy had become unfaithful to the ideal of their state, so much so that one is justified in speaking of a clerical proletariat both in the higher sense, as well as in the ordinary and literal sense.' This clerical proletariat was prepared to join any movement which promised to abet its lower impulses."⁵

The condition created by the all too frequent incorporation of parishes with monasteries was deplorable. Where many parishes were incorporated with one monastery, incompetent pastors were frequently sent, there was no supervision, and the care of souls declined.

⁴ Janssen-Pastor, *l. c.*, pp. 705 sq.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 703-704. J. E. Jörg, *Deutschland in der Revolutionsperiode 1522-1526* (Freiburg, 1851), p. 191, employs the phrase "clerical proletariat."

One of the chief causes of the decline of the higher clergy and the episcopate was the interference of the secular authorities and worldly-minded noblemen in church affairs.

Not only were spiritual prerogatives frequently usurped by the princes and lesser authorities, but large numbers of cathedral benefices and diocesan sees were arbitrarily conferred on noblemen and princely scions, so that the most influential offices were occupied in many places by individuals who were unworthy and without a proper vocation. "When the storm broke loose at the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century, the following archdioceses and dioceses were administered by sons of princes: Bremen, Freising, Halberstadt, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Mayence, Merseburg, Metz, Minden, Münster, Naumburg, Osnabrück, Paderborn, Passau, Ratisbon, Spires, Verden, and Verdun."⁶ As a rule, the bishops who came from princely houses were dependent upon their relatives and were drawn into secular and courtly activities, even if their education had not radically repressed their ecclesiastical sense, as, for instance, in the case of the powerful archbishop of Mayence, Albrecht of Brandenburg.

An additional evil was the concentration of prominent episcopal sees. "The archbishop of Bremen was also bishop of Verden, the bishop of Osnabrück was also bishop of Paderborn, the archbishop of Mayence was also archbishop of Magdeburg and bishop of Halberstadt. George, palsgrave of the Rhine and duke of Bavaria, was provost of the cathedral of Mayence when but thirteen and successively became vicar capitular of Cologne and Treves, provost of the foundation of St. Donatian at Bruges, incumbent of the parishes of Hochheim and Lorch on the Rhine, and, lastly, in 1513, bishop of Spires. By special privilege of Pope Leo X, conferred under date of June 22, 1513, he, a sincere and pious man, was given possession of all these benefices in addition to the bishopric of Spires."⁷ "The higher clergy," laments a contemporary in view of the worldly bishops, "are chiefly to blame for the wretched condition of the parishes. They appoint unfit persons to administer parishes, whilst they themselves collect the tithes. Many endeavor to concentrate as many benefices as possible in their own hands, without satisfying the obligations attached to them, and dissipate the ecclesiastical revenues in luxurious expenditures lavished on servants, pages, dogs, and horses.

⁶ Janssen-Pastor, *I. c.*, p. 703.

⁷ *Ibid.*

One endeavors to outdo the other in ostentation and luxury."⁸ The decline and indolence of the episcopate furnishes one of the most important explanations of the rapid defection from the ancient Church after Luther had set the ball a-rolling.

The religious tragedy of the sixteenth century is a perfectly insoluble riddle except on the assumption that there was great corruption within the Church. It is, however, a mistake to think that the abuses were engendered by the nature of the Church, and that, therefore, her doctrines and her hierarchy had necessarily to be abandoned. Her exterior life, it is true, was greatly disfigured; yet there was vitality in her soul and her salutary powers were unbroken. Placed in the midst of mankind and exposed to the frailties of the world in her human element, the Church, as the preceding centuries of her existence show, is subject to periods of decline in her exterior manifestation, without, however, being deprived of the hope of seeing her interior light shine forth anew and her deformity vanish in God's appointed time. She celebrated such a renaissance after the decline of the spiritual life in the eleventh century, in consequence of the warfare which the great pope Gregory VII and his successors waged upon the tyranny of the secular rulers and the numerous infractions of clerical celibacy. She experienced a similar rejuvenation in the sixteenth century, after the anti-ecclesiastical elements had drained off into the new ecclesiastical system, to which they had been attracted by the offer of emancipation from the commandments of the Church.

3. BRIGHTER PHASES

For the rest there are many bright spots in the ecclesiastical conditions of pre-Lutheran Germany. This is true especially of the life of the common people, which went on in conformity with the old spirit, nay, even became more truly religious despite all obstacles. It is true also of the various religious orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, as well as of many portions of the secular clergy. A modern Protestant historian writes: "We hear of grave defects. . . . And again we hear of so many monasteries imbued with seriousness and character, of so many diligent efforts made for the improvement of the parochial clergy, of such eager solicitude for the faithful, of such fruitful fostering of studies within the Church, that we

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 700.

hesitate to assume that vice and loathsomeness ruled absolutely. We shall be compelled to establish the fact that gratifying and deplorable things are to be found side by side; that there are some phenomena which are depressing in the highest degree, but many others which are elevating; and that the relationship which they bore to one another was such as no one may venture to describe in numbers.”⁹

From the very beginning of his internal defection from the dogmatic teaching of the Church, Luther had no appreciation of these elevating and gratifying conditions. His preconceived delineation of affairs does not constitute an objection to the brighter pages which ought to be adduced.

As an illustration: in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, where he expresses the thought that “the temporalities of the clergy ought to be administered by the secular authorities,” he outdoes himself in unduly generalized complaints against the clergy. Thus he says: What Paul demanded of the servants of the Church, is “done by no one at the present day. They are priests only in appearance. . . . Where is there one who does the will of the Founder? . . . The laity are beginning to penetrate the mysteries of our iniquity (*mysteria iniquitatis*). . . . Beyond proceeding against such as violate their liberties, possessions, and rights, the ecclesiastical authorites know naught else but pomp, ambition, unchastity, and contentiousness.” They are one and all “whitened sepulchres.”¹⁰

Such exaggerated invectives are associated in his earliest literary productions and letters with those fantastic descriptions which we were constrained to adduce on previous pages.

Thus, in 1516, he wrote to Spalatin to dissuade the Elector of Saxony from promoting Staupitz to a bishopric: He who becomes a bishop in these days falls into the most evil company; all the wickedness of Greece, Rome, and Sodom were to be found in the bishops. A pastor of souls was regarded as quite exemplary if he merely pushed his worldly business, and prepared for himself an insatiable hell with his riches.¹¹

Everywhere he perceived only dark gloom, because he discovered that the Gospel as he understood it was everywhere forgotten; for, where the “word of truth” does not reign, there can be only “dark iniquity.” “The whole world,” he exclaims as early as 1515, or in the period immediately succeeding, “the whole world is full of, yea, deluged with, the filth of false doctrine.” Hence, it is not astonishing that there is prevalent in Christen-

⁹ G. von Below, *Die Ursachen der Reformation*, in the *Histor. Bibliothek*, ed. by the *Histor. Zeitschrift*, München, 1917, pp. 19 sq.

¹⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, p. 284.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 57.

dom "so much dissension, anger, covetousness, pride, disobedience, vice, and intemperance, in consequence of which charity has grown completely cold, faith has become extinguished, and hope has vanished." etc.¹²

In view of these unrestrained and exaggerated effusions on the decline of the Church, which pervade his whole life and are expanded into a condemnation of all previous ages as the kingdom of Antichrist, it is well to observe that they are inspired mainly by his new dogmatic and pseudomystical views. They are anything but historical and balanced judgments, and one can but marvel at the thought that they have influenced the evaluation of the Middle Ages for so long a time among Protestant scholars. To-day, however, well informed Protestant writers are beginning to speak differently of Luther's unjustified and impassioned verdicts.

It is conceded that his discourses were based on "a one-sided and distorted view" of things, and that he painted the history of the Middle Ages, directed by the popes, as "a dark night."¹³

With respect to medieval theology, we read that it is necessary to repudiate resolutely "the caricature we meet with in the writings of the reformers" and "the misunderstandings to which they gave rise."¹⁴

A historian of the Reformation, writing in 1910, conceded that the history of the close of the Middle Ages was "an almost unknown terrain up to a few years ago;" "the later Middle Ages seemed to be useful only to serve as a foil for the story of the reformers, whose dazzling colors, when superimposed on a gray background, shone forth with greater brilliancy;" only since Janssen has "a more intensive study of the close of the Middle Ages" been made, and it has been discovered that "the Church had not yet lost its influence over souls." "An increasing acquaintance with the Bible toward the end of the Middle Ages must be admitted" and "preaching in the vernacular was not neglected to the extent frequently assumed."¹⁵

The first volume of Janssen's History, despite the necessary modifications made in later editions, clearly reveals that there was a striking revival in many spheres of ecclesiastical life before Luther.

¹² *Sermo praescriptus praeposito in Litzka*, Weimar ed., I, pp. 10 sqq.; *Opp. Lat. Var.*, I, pp. 29 sqq.

¹³ Walter Koehler, 1907; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 116.

¹⁴ Wm. Maurenbrecher, 1874; *ibid.*

¹⁵ Walter Friedensburg, quoted by Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 117.

Popular religious literature flourished to a certain extent under the fostering care of the new art of printing. It is impossible to assume that such excellent and frequently reprinted works as *Der Schatzbehälter des Heils* (The Treasure Trove of Salvation), *Das Seelenwurzgärtlein* (The Little Aromatic Garden of the Soul), *Der Christenspiegel* (The Mirror for Christians), *Der Seelenführer* (The Spiritual Guide of the Soul), etc., should not have awakened a response in the morals of the people and the general sentiment of the age. Booklets on penance and confession, treatises on matrimony, books on death, pictorial catechisms with instructive illustrations, explanations of the faith and the current prayers, printed tables with the commandments of God and a catalogue of domestic duties, as well as many similar publications were widely disseminated among the people. Excellent books of sermons were found in the hands of the clergy. The classic work of Thomas à Kempis went through no less than fifty-nine editions in several languages before the year 1500. The admirable pedagogical writings of Jacob Wimpfeling, who was styled the "teacher of Germany," were published in thirty different editions within twenty-five years. Among the products of the press the Bible ranked supreme. The first artistic work from the press of Koberger (in Nuremberg) was the splendid German Bible of 1483, which Michael Wohlgemut had oramented with more than a hundred woodcuts. It was entitled "the most excellent work of the entire Sacred Scripture . . . according to correct vernacular German, with beautiful illustrations."¹⁶

The making of religious woodcuts and copper-plate engravings flourished as perhaps never before. Sculptures and paintings vied with one another in fervor, depth of thought, and beauty of execution. Like all the artistic products of that day, they are permeated by tenderness and sincere piety. This phase of art production is a favorable mirror of the life of the people.

In the town-church of Wittenberg, sculpture has bequeathed to us two splendid models in the richly ornamented baptismal font of 1457, a creation of Herman Vischer, and in the artistically constructed pulpit of the Luther Hall, in which Luther is said to have preached frequently. The principal portal of the church is still adorned with figures sculptured in the lovely style in vogue at the

¹⁶ Janssen-Pastor, *Gesch. des deutschen Volkes*, Vol. I, 20th ed., p. 23.

close of the Middle Ages. In the center the enthroned Madonna with her Child looks down upon and invites the worshipers. Sculptures such as this attractive group of saints reveal as clearly as the popular books just mentioned, how far the people were removed from regarding religion as a source of horror and fear, as Luther will have it. In life as well as in art, they, on the contrary, harmoniously combined a loving trust in Jesus, the Divine Lord, and confidence in the intercession of His servants, the Saints, grouped around Mary, with the gravity of the idea of the eternal Judge, who appears on the outside of the town-church of Wittenberg, a large statue set in the wall. The majestic figure, with a sword protruding from the mouth, in compliance with the Bible, inspires the beholder with a sense of awe. It is not impossible that Luther's morbid fear of God's judgment attached itself to such pictures, for the healthy piety of the Middle Ages was wont to place them beside the monuments of its confidence and childlike hope of salvation, as a counterpoise to the spirit of levity.

Ecclesiastical architecture, finally, constituted a splendid field of artistic endeavor. It was the center of all art. There is scarcely another age in the history of architecture like the century from 1420 to 1520, in which town and country witnessed the erection of so many houses of worship—most of them still in existence—constructed in the devotional and joyful style of the late Gothic. The confraternity of the German builders was the chief bearer of this great movement, and it was one of the most popular institutions of the time. The large sums which the faithful contributed towards the erection of these often marvelous structures, attest the charity and the idealism that actuated the soul of the nation.

In his journey to Rome, which took him through the heart of Germany, Luther had ample opportunities of seeing and admiring the artistic creations of architecture, sculpture, and painting, some of which are still extant, whilst others have perished. But the monk of Wittenberg had no taste for such things. There is not a sentence of his writings or addresses which betrays any appreciation of the mighty impetus of ecclesiastical life represented by the works of art in churches and monasteries. In fact, neither his tongue nor his pen reveals any genuine appreciation of art. He lived a secluded life in his own narrow world, which fact explains the rigor of many of his judgments.

4. PREPONDERANCE OF DANGEROUS ELEMENTS

Having depicted the favorable aspects of the age, it is necessary once more to revert to its shadows. They must have constituted a source of grave danger to the Church, to judge of certain writings of unbiased and noble-minded contemporaries, such as the indictment of the bishop of Chiemsee, Berthold Pirstinger, published in 1519 under the title, *Onus Ecclesiae*, a phrase borrowed from the Apocalypse. True, in spite of the "burdens" imposed upon the Church he hoped for an internal restoration of the same, based on the unchangeable foundation of the faith. He mournfully addresses Christ as follows: "Grant that the Church may be reformed, which has been redeemed by Thy blood, and is now, through our fault, near destruction!" After a dismal description of existing conditions, he says that the "episcopate is now given up to worldly possessions, sordid cares, tempestuous feuds, worldly sovereignty." He complains that "the prescribed provincial and diocesan synods are not held"; that the shepherds of the Church do not remain at their posts, although they exact heavy tributes; and that the conduct of the clergy and the laity had become demoralized, and so on.¹⁷

Trithemius, Wimpfeling, Brant, Geiler von Kaysersberg, and Dr. John Eck, joined in the lament of the Bishop of Chiemsee.

"Of the Lamentation of the Church" (*De Planctu Ecclesiae*) was the title of a work which had enjoyed quite a wide circulation before Luther's day. It was reprinted at Ulm in 1474, and again at Lyons in 1517. It was originally composed against the faults of the papacy during the Avignon period, by the Franciscan Alvarez Pelayo, a man of strict morality and whole-heartedly devoted to the Church. The new reprints of this work addressed the contemporaries of Luther in the severe language of Pelayo on the persecution of the Church by those who were instituted as her protectors.¹⁸ In another censorious composition, *De Squaloribus Curiae*, many justifiable complaints were registered side by side with unfounded reproaches. The work entitled *De Ruina Ecclesiae* gained new importance at the end of the fifteenth century.

Luther's mental depression and distorted notions cannot be traced to this kind of literature. Yet it is known from reliable sources that he read other books of a similar tenor, such as the elegant works

¹⁷ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, p. 48; Vol. II, pp. 45-47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

of the pious Italian poet Mantuanus, who indignantly describes the moral corruption of his country, extending to the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries at Rome. In the writings of the new humanists he found an echo, alloyed with bitter contempt, of what he himself had heard at Rome, fortified by all the complaints of the age against the clergy and the monks. We know that he did not approve their attitude, in so far as it antagonized religion, nor was he himself a humanist; but humanism with its critical activity, as developed everywhere, especially in Germany under the influence of Erasmus, proved to be a great help to him in his revolt against the Church authorities.

The papacy gradually came to regret the favor which it had extended to, and the hopes it had placed in, the nascent humanism in Rome and Italy. Among the German Humanists, Conrad Mutianus of Gotha (d. 1526) was the chief promoter of the anti-ecclesiastical movement. He was a man who had gone so far as to abandon Christianity for a time. From this group originated the "Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum," a clever and biting satyre on monks, scholastics, and friends of the papal curia. Crotus Rubeanus, its principal author, had gathered a circle of younger Humanists about him at an earlier stage of his career, among them Eobanus Hessus, Peter and Henry Eberbach, John Lang, Spalatin for a time, and other talented men desirous of innovation. Erfurt became the headquarters of this group, which was very clamorous in prose and verse.

Justus Jonas also lived at Erfurt. He was a Humanist who later associated himself for life with Luther. While yet a student of law in 1506, he became affiliated with the Humanistic circles of that city. He called Erasmus his "father in Christ" and, in company with Caspar Schalbe, made a pilgrimage to him in the Netherlands. In the same year Jonas, who was a priest and canon of St. Severus, became rector of the University of Erfurt, an event which greatly fortified the position of the neo-Humanists. The Leipsic disputation and the letters of Luther aroused his enthusiasm. When Luther journeyed to the diet of Worms, in 1521, Jonas set out to meet him at Weimar, accompanied him to Worms, and subsequently was called to Wittenberg as provost of the castle-church and professor of canon law. Here, as early as 1521, having obtained his doctorate, Justus Jonas taught theology in concordance with the ideas of Luther. By his intimate attachment to Luther he gained the praise and friendship of such a questionable man as Ulrich von Hutten.

Ulrich von Hutten, humanist and knight, took an active part in the literary feud of Reuchlin against the "Obscurantists." In 1517 he circulated the treatise of Laurentius Valla, an Italian, against the so-called Donation of Constantine, with a view of making a breach in the system of the Roman hierarchy and in a malicious libel ridiculed the conduct of the celebrated theologian Cajetan at the diet of Augsburg. In 1519 he dedicated to his patron, Archbishop Albrecht of Mayence, a work on a cure for syphilis which he had taken with temporary success. He had contracted this disease in consequence of his dissolute life. Wielding a pen skilled in polemics this adventurous Humanist launched his attacks on Rome, thereby becoming the pathfinder of religious schism. Towards his offers of forcible support, Luther prudently assumed a reserved attitude, preferring the protection of his prince to the mailed fist of the revolutionary. Politically, too, Hutten was a revolutionist. Like his friend Franz von Sickingen, he was inspired by the ideal of a powerful and independent knighthood. He fought with Sickingen in the army of the Swabian League when it undertook the expulsion of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg. Afterwards he lived in the Ebernburg, Sickingen's castle in the Palatinate, the so-called "Inn of Justice." Here he devoted himself to the composition of popular and witty writings directed against the clergy and the princes.

The highly revered prince of the Humanists was Erasmus of Rotterdam, at one time an Augustinian canon of Emaus at Gouda, a scholar of prodigious learning and an epoch-making critic, whose ambition it was, not only to introduce a new Humanistic form of speech into ecclesiastical science, but also to reconstruct theology along Humanistic lines, thereby exposing its dogmas to the danger of extinction. While he wished to remain loyal to the Church, his caustic and frequently derisive criticism of things ecclesiastical, Scholasticism, monasticism, and the hierarchy, so influenced the minds of his idolizing followers, both learned and illiterate, as to render the greatest assistance to the work of Luther. His opponents coined the phrase that his writings contained the egg which Luther hatched. At all events, his initial sympathy for Luther was one of the causes that induced almost the entire powerful and wide-spread neo-Humanistic party to join the reform movement of Wittenberg, until finally, about 1524, when it had been clearly demonstrated that the religious struggles were redounding to the disadvantage of the sci-

ences, a reaction set in and Erasmus began to write against Luther.

The great services which Erasmus rendered in behalf of the text of Sacred Scripture and his excellent editions of the writings of the Fathers, remained undisputed and were acknowledged even by his adversaries. In 1516 he issued his first edition of the Greek New Testament, accompanied by a translation into classical Latin, which was followed by his Biblical "Paraphrases." In 1521 he took up his abode near the printing-presses of Basle, whence, in 1529, the disturbances caused by the new religion compelled him to remove to Freiburg in Breisgau. Everywhere in his solitary greatness he was an oracle of the learned. But his character was disfigured by weakness of conviction and pronounced self-conceit. He lacked the power of leadership, such as that trying and dangerous epoch demanded, especially since his unfavorable characteristics were also impressed upon his Humanistic admirers.

Besides Humanism, there were in those critical decades certain other factors which constrain us to speak of a preponderance of imminent dangers.

The minds of men had not yet completely divested themselves of the consequences of the conciliar theories begotten in the unhappy period of the Council of Basle, and of the schisms that preceded it, with its two anti-popes in addition to the one true pope. Here and there the Hussite theories, which had taken deep root in Bohemia, made themselves felt in Germany. A worldly spirit and an unbridled desire for wealth, which the newly inaugurated international commerce and the attractive trade-routes to distant countries aroused in the upper classes of society, were evidenced by the growing evil of usury, against which Luther took a stand in two sermons delivered in 1519 and 1520, though he lacked "an adequate comprehension of the existing conditions."¹⁹ In the lower strata of society, especially among the peasant class, the long-nurtured discontent with oppressive conditions began here and there to issue in unrest and revolt. Lingering politico-social ideas of Hussitism coöperated in this respect with aspirations after a higher standard of living, awakened by the influx of wealth. The unrest was increased by opposition to the introduction into Germany, about 1520, of the Christian-Roman system of jurisprudence, interspersed with Ger-

¹⁹ Thus Köstlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, Vol. I, p. 279.

manic principles. A fanatical preacher of social revolution in favor of the lower classes was the prophet Hans Böhm, a piper of Niklas-hausen in the Tauber valley. The "Bundschuh"—*i. e.*, the strapped shoe commonly worn by peasants—was the symbol of revolts which broke out in many places, first in 1486, then in 1491 and 1492, but especially in 1513 and 1514, and again in 1517. The social revolution of 1525, with the new Gospel of the "liberty of the Christian man" as its background, was thus gradually prepared.

Only a man of superhuman powers could have banished the threatening dangers of the age in the name of religion and an amelioration of the traditional social order. Who can tell what course events might have taken if at that time saintly men had inspired the people with a reviving spiritual vigor, repeating the example of ancient leaders in reshaping their age? But the teacher of Wittenberg, who took it upon himself to direct the course of events, was no such leader, as the sequel showed.

Many hailed the generous young emperor, Charles V, as the leader who would conduct men out of the religious and social crisis. This young ruler of a world-wide monarchy was animated by the best of intentions. In all sincerity he, as emperor-elect, rendered the customary oath of fealty to the Church on the occasion of his coronation, before he was anointed by the archbishop of Cologne and girded with the "sword of Charles the Great." The oath he took bound him "to preserve and defend in every way the Holy Catholic Faith, as handed down," and "at all times to render due submission, respect, and fealty to the Roman Pontiff, the Holy Father and Lord in Christ, and to the Holy Roman Church." During a life replete with wars and disappointments, Charles honestly endeavored to perform in his beloved Germany the duties which he had assumed; but the religious schism overwhelmed him and finally paralyzed the vigor and determination with which he had begun his career despite constant diversions.

The papacy, too, after Leo X, manifested many hopeful traits of energy and efforts at reform, especially in the brief pontificate of Adrian VI; but there was missing that towering personality on the pontifical throne which might have averted the catastrophe. It was necessary that the idea of a true, distinct from a false, reform of the Church should make its way gradually at Rome and in Germany,

until it triumphed at the great Council of Trent in Charles Borromeo and Pope St. Pius V, after the Church had sustained immense losses. But no matter what the popes of Luther's day might have done in the interest of reform, in Luther's eyes their endeavors would have been futile; for he was firmly convinced that they had become rulers of the kingdom of Antichrist.

CHAPTER VII

THE YEAR OF THE BAN

I. BEFORE THE BAN

The friendly invitation which had been extended to Luther to visit Rome, occasioned by the distorted reports of Miltitz, was barren of results. The papal brief addressed to the "beloved son" was suppressed by the Saxon court, and Luther never knew of it. Nor was this a misfortune; for it would only have been the occasion of misinterpretation and derision. Luther was unflinchingly resolved to carry out his programme and the Saxon Elector artfully and perseveringly continued his maneuvers to shield the rebellious monk.

It was to the advantage of both that Miltitz with his unfortunate efforts at reconciliation did not disappear from the scene. He invented the proposal that Luther should present himself to the archbishop-elector of Treves as a non-partisan judge. In the course of these negotiations he pretended that this archbishop had been legitimately appointed by Cardinal Cajetan to render a judicial verdict in the matter. It was a phantom that did not materialize. Extremely strange and dubious is the statement which Frederick of Saxony attributed to the archbishop of Treves, that Pope Leo X was prepared to make Luther a cardinal if he would retract his errors.

Relative to the policy of Leo X in the great questions of that day, especially in that of the election of a German emperor, there is no doubt that it strongly affected his attitude toward the Saxon Elector and, mediately, toward the latter's protégé. For some time Leo had favored the promotion of Frederick of Saxony, the most esteemed and influential German prince of the time, to the dignity of emperor to succeed the deceased Maximilian I. Subsequently he promoted the cause of the youthful Charles V, even though his election to that dignity would have placed him in dangerous proximity to the capital of Christendom as King of Naples.

The most decisive step taken by Luther after the Leipsic disputation and prior to his condemnation by Rome, was the publication, in