

CHAPTER I

LUTHER'S YOUTH

I. EISLEBEN AND MANSFELD

In the night of November 10-11, 1483, there was born to the miner John Luther at Eisleben a son who was destined to achieve distinction. The house in which Martin Luther was born was situated on the so-called Lange Strasse, in the southwestern part of the little city, which was encircled by walls and towers. Even at the present day the somewhat deteriorated building is partially preserved, the upper story only having been reconstructed because of a fire in 1689.

The house in which Martin first saw the light of day lay within the limits of St. Peter's parish. On the day succeeding his birth, the infant was brought to the parish church. As it was the feast of St. Martin of Tours, a bishop and monastic founder, the name Martin was given to the child in baptism; and thus the saint who was commemorated on that day became his patron. In accordance with this custom, the name of Martin was presumably likewise selected for Bucer, who will be frequently mentioned as a subsequent helper of Luther. The Sacrament which ushered the son of John Luther into the halls of Catholic Christianity was administered by the pastor, Bartholomew Rennebecher. The sacred rites were performed in the Gothic tower chapel which is still preserved in its pristine condition. Upon entering the chapel, one is vividly carried back to that hour. Profound thoughts are aroused by the impression of the hallowed semi-darkness of the venerable walls and the sight of the precious side-altar, ornamented with ancient statues of saints that look down solemnly upon the worshippers. The local memorials of men frequently mentioned in history, which are so sedulously sought to-day, possess an undoubted historic value. The traces related to Luther's person, were preserved with an uncommon love by his friends and adherents. Tradition, however, has interwoven errors with the truth. There is no historical warrant either for the baptismal font, which is pointed out in the chapel as Luther's, or for the

older superimposed part, despite its inscription which proclaims that Martin was baptized here.¹

As one steps out of the chapel, which is surmounted by a tower, into the church of St. Peter and contemplates its stately exterior, the Gothic forms still recall the period of Luther's youth. The church had been gradually completed by 1513; but the tower, without its present crown and the baptistery upon which its heavy pile is erected, dates from 1474.

The friendly little city of Eisleben participated in the general zeal for building churches which at that time proclaimed the religious devotion and Christian charity of the faithful in many parts of Germany. The large church which was dedicated to St. Andrew and in which Luther delivered his last sermons, was rebuilt in the fifteenth century in conformity with an older plan and adorned with two tall, pointed spires. In the year 1462, the church of St. Nicholas was completed. In that part of the town called the "new city," built by Count Albrecht von Mansfeld in 1511, a church was erected in honor of St. Ann, the patroness of the mining industry, for the benefit of the resident miners. The mining of copper ore, extracted from the near-by hills, constituted even then, as it had for a long time previously thereto, the chief industry of the city. The industry was very much promoted by the counts of Mansfeld, who ruled Eisleben as the capital of their county.

Martin's father at the time of his son's birth resided only temporarily in the beautifully situated and ambitious city. He had settled with his family in this city some time before, in the hope of acquiring a better income. Previously he had lived in Möhra, a village near Eisenach, whence the Luthers originated. There he lived, a descendant of a race of peasants, engaged in husbandry. In his Table-Talks, Martin Luther says: "My great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father were real peasants."² In another passage, after stating: "I am the son of a peasant," he adds, to indicate that he is not ashamed of his descent: "Peasants have become kings and emperors."³ Indeed, he ever remained conscious of the fact that something of the sturdiness of the Saxon country-folk inhered in him.

¹ *Beschreibende Darstellung der älteren Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler der Provinz Sachsen*, Heft XVIII: *Mansfelder Gebirgskreis*, von H. Grössler und A. Brinkmann (Halle, 1893), p. 145.

² *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., V, Nr. 5574.

³ *Ibid.*, Nr. 6250: "Ego sum rustici filius," etc.

The hardy population of Möhra counted among its number a younger brother of John Luther, who also bore the name of John, which had been given to him in honor of his god-father, regardless of its being a repetition of the same name in the family. The first John was referred to as the elder, or big John; his younger brother as the younger, or little John. In the extant fragmentary court records of Mansfeld, whither he had gone, the name of the younger brother occurs repeatedly. According to these documents little John achieved notoriety on account of certain brutal acts for which he was sentenced. During one of his frequent visits to the tavern, he struck his neighbor's hand with a knife or inflicted bleeding gashes on his head. Once in the course of a brawl he beat his opponent on the head with a tankard until the blood flowed.⁴ Perhaps it was this same irascible uncle of whom James, an elder brother of Martin, states in the Table Talks of 1540, that he trapped two Franciscan monks in a hole that was infested by wolves.⁵

It is related of Luther's father that he was a serious-minded, severe, and industrious man. At times, however, he drank to excess, so the Table Talks assure us; and then, contrary to his habitual nature, he was in high spirits and jovial. In this respect he differed, as Luther tells us, from a nephew named Polner, who became vicious and dangerous and compromised the Gospel in his frequent lapses from sobriety.⁶ The father, according to Luther's expression, was endowed with "a robust, solid body." As he practised hard manual labor, so too, Margaret his wife, was habituated to unremitting toil. From the scanty notices which history has preserved, she appears to have been an industrious housewife. Besides Martin, Margaret had a number of other children who caused her sufficient cares and worry. Luther recalls that she was wont to carry home on her back the wood that was needed for the household. Margaret Luther, née Ziegler, was a native of Franconia. There was no alien blood in her family, and certain early opponents of Luther were unjustified in claiming to have discovered that Luther's ancestors originated in Slavic Bohemia, in order to connect him with the country of the heretic Hus. Luther is a good Old-Ger-

⁴ *Zeitschrift des Harzvereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, XXXIX (1906), art. by W. Möllenbergs, pp. 169 sqq. In adverting to the acts of violence the name "Hans Luder" is frequently mentioned without distinction of person; so in Nrs. 7 and 8, where the aggressor inflicts bloody blows upon two persons with a knife.

⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., IV, Nr. 4891.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Nr. 5050 of the year 1540: "Reliqui ebrii sunt laeti et suaves, ut pater meus," etc.

man name. It is identical with Lothar (Luothar) and signifies: the pure one. This fact is stressed occasionally by Luther in his Table Talks. However, in the first years of his public appearance he spelled his name Ludher or Luder. The form Luder or Lueder likewise appears in the family record. He complained that his enemies spelled the name Lotter (Lotterbube), which signifies a vagrant scamp. In the beginning of his revolt he used, for a time, the more euphonious Greek term Eleutherios or Eleutherius (freeman, liberator). Later on he jocosely derived his Christian name Martin from Mars, the valiant god of war.⁷

The Luthers had left Möhra and removed to Eisleben, because John believed that the mining industry of the latter city would afford him a better subsistence. At Eisleben, according to his son, he became a "metallicus," or poor miner. The poor miner, however, must soon have become conscious of the meagerness of his prospects for advancement, for, in the year succeeding the birth of Martin, towards the middle of 1484, he repaired with his family to Mansfeld, the center of a flourishing mining industry.⁸ The traveller of to-day, who follows the road from Eisleben, passes friendly villages of frame dwellings, conspicuous for their protruding upper story, a style of building customary in that country. Continuing his journey, he soon comes upon hills of dross and stones and smoking furnaces, which even to-day form a characteristic picture of the city of Mansfeld, lying between rising hills and green fields and woods. Upon his arrival, he is greeted by the ancient castle of the counts of Mansfeld, majestically enthroned on the hill at his right. To his left and in the immediate vicinity of the small hollow of the valley, lies the moderately sized city itself, situated on a rising plain. A broad street, originally somewhat steep and at Luther's time the only thoroughfare of the city, wends its way upward between the houses. At the right there is an inconspicuous dwelling which is described as the former residence of Luther's parents. Only a small part of the old homestead of the Luthers is preserved. The letters I. L. and the date 1530 are inscribed upon a semi-circular arch above the door. It is reminiscent of James Luther, Martin's elder brother, who, in the

⁷ *Ibid.*, Nr. 4378; II, Nr. 1829. *Briefwechsel* I, p. 19 of the year 1514: "F[rat]er M[artinus] Luder; cf. pp. 44, 47, 53, 65 of the year 1516.

⁸ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., V, Nr. 6250: "Darnach ist mein Vater nach Mansfelt gezogen und daselbs ein Bergkheuer worden. Daber bin ich."

year of the death of his father, thus perpetuated his property right. For a long time the parents of Martin lived in poverty and anxiety during their occupancy of this house.

Only gradually did the miner succeed in improving his condition. In speaking of his early youth, Martin Luther tells us that hard toil was the lot of his parents. At a later date he narrates how he and two other lads once collected sausages. It happened during a procession of poor schoolboys singing in the streets. A burgher approached them, offering to give them sausages, but as he addressed the children, albeit in fun, in a rough tone of voice, they fled, not understanding the well-meant joke. Thus, says Luther, men in their shortsightedness and ignorance often fear God when He wishes to bestow benefits upon them.⁹

He first attended school in Mansfeld. The school was situated somewhat higher up the street than his parental home, to the right of an extended place similar to a plaza. It is partially preserved even to this day. It was one of the elementary schools, known as Latin schools, in which, according to an extensive custom, the students were introduced to the rudiments of Latin immediately after their first lessons in reading and writing. Reading was learned by means of the catechism and the primer; the elements of Latin were acquired by the recitation of the usual Latin prayers, such as the Pater Noster and the Credo. These were arduous and toilsome years for young Martin. The severity of the teachers and the vexatious declensions and conjugations lingered in his memory for many years. According to the customs that obtained in the schools of those days, there was an "*asinus*" (ass) which was wrapped around the lazy or ignorant pupil. There was also among the pupils a "*lupus*" (wolf) appointed to this office by the preceptor; it was his duty to record for punishment the omissions of his schoolmates. Punishment was inflicted summarily at the end of the week. Luther states in his Table Talks that he had once been disciplined with the rod fifteen times on a certain forenoon. If true, this was due either to great lack of diligence, or to stubbornness; or it was a penalty for misconduct of which he had been guilty for a whole week.¹⁰ His later complaints concerning the abuse of the rod in the schools of Mansfeld and in

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, Nr. 137: "cum caneremus ad colligenda farcimina" etc. Cf. *ibid.*, III, Nr. 2936; V, Nrs. 5804, 59892a.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, V, Nr. 5571.

the schools in general, are too specific to exculpate his teachers and many of their colleagues in other places from the charge of excessive severity. The age was strongly biased in favor of the rod. There were laws against such excesses, but we have no guarantee that they were observed.

Undoubtedly the stern discipline of the school contributed to intimidate the character and depress the spirits of young Luther.

He retains one pleasant reminiscence of his school days, when he gratefully mentions in his writings how an elder pupil, Nicholas Semler, often carried him to school in his arms; for the ascent of the street, especially when covered with ice and snow, was assuredly a hardship.

There were not many pleasant memories of his paternal home which accompanied him in life. He did not experience the joyousness of youth.

He avers, it is true, that his parents meant it well with him. His father, ordinarily not communicative, with thoughts engrossed in his labors, and his mother, who was similarly inclined, undoubtedly told him about religion and its consolations; for they were loyal Catholics. Thus, Martin heard from his father the edifying narrative of the happy death of Count Günther of Mansfeld (1475), made beautiful by the great trust he placed in the redemptive merits of the death of Christ.¹¹ When, in 1530, the dying John Luther, who at the time espoused the religious party of his son, was asked whether he confidently accepted the traditional teachings of salvation, he replied with simplicity and bluntness: "I would in truth be a knave did I not believe in them." He had never been qualified by his educational attainments to pass judgment on the orthodoxy of the new doctrines. For the rest he respected the sacerdotal state during Martin's youth, though he freely indulged in criticisms of it after his own blunt manner. On occasion, too, he expressed his indignation at monasticism, perhaps on account of its obvious faults or because it was the fashion of the age, when monasteries, their possessions or mendicant practices were disliked by many.¹²

Despite the high veneration in which the Church was held in his

¹¹ M. Ratzeberger, *Chronik*, ed. by Neudecker (Jena, 1850), p. 42, who, however, disregarding other matters, distorts the affair in conformity with the idea of the new Gospel.

¹² *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., III, Nr. 3556a: "Er hat der Mönche Schalkheit wohl erkannt." Thus Luther in 1537, undoubtedly because of his father's opposition to his entering the monastic state. In this connection it is also necessary to take into consideration Luther's

parental home, young Luther did not enjoy an excessive amount of loving and solicitous religious care. The school and the Church had to supply the deficit; and they did.

In general, the external discipline to which his parents subjected him was too rigorous. This caused an aversion to the father on the part of the son, which lasted for a long time, so that, as the latter says, the father found it necessary to regain the lost affection of his son. Unfortunately both father and mother, Luther subsequently complains, could not distinguish between the disposition and the spirit of their children and drove the son to despondency (*usque ad pusillanimitatem*).¹³ His own sad experience is reflected in his admonition to all parents not to indulge in excessive severity, but to "associate the apple with the rod" in the training of their offspring. "My mother," he says, "flogged me until I bled on account of a single nut."¹⁴ It is surprising that Luther never in later life mentions his mother with a friendly and warm feeling, despite the frequency with which he recalls the days of his childhood and boyhood. The consoling picture of a mother's love, which accompanies most men on their journey through life, was apparently denied him. Mother and father, it appears, often acted in anger. The latter, for example, became "thoroughly enraged," as Luther himself says, when his son entered the monastery. Hence, there is no exaggeration in the statement of Albert Freitag that there is discernible in the boy Luther "a substratum of the melancholy which pervaded his parental home";¹⁵ nor in that of Friedrich von Bezold who says that his "disposition was intimidated and wrapped in gloom" early in life.¹⁶

The pupils of the Mansfeld school were obliged to attend divine service diligently. They worshipped in the parish church which was dedicated to St. George and lay almost directly opposite the school. This church originated in the thirteenth century. Rebuilt in the year 1497, when Luther was a boy, it still exhibits the same form in which his eyes beheld it. A large statue of St.

disposition relative to his former vocation. The same is true of his expression concerning his father in the *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., I, Nr. 881: "Semper fruit iniquus monasticae vitae." Cf. In Genesim, Weimar ed., XLIV, p. 411, and Ratzeberger, *Chronik*, p. 49.

¹³ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., III, Nr. 3566.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1918, Heft 2, p. 264.

¹⁶ *Geschichte der deutschen Reformation* (Berlin, 1890), p. 248.

George, the gallant knight, in the act of slaying the dragon, graces the beautiful Gothic portal. The windows are exquisitely decorated. The interior is adorned with richly carved Gothic altars ornamented with figures of the saints. An altar of St. Ann, patroness of miners, was erected in 1502.

The well-regulated divine services were bound to send more cheerful thoughts into the soul of the child and to touch his heart with the supernatural destiny of man.

The singing of the congregation and of the boys' choir was especially treasured in the memory of Luther. They produced a beneficial influence upon him. The boy was endowed with a high voice. Docile and highly talented, he mastered the melody both according to form and spirit. He remained a life-long friend of sacred music. We may picture him in imagination as he and the other youthful choristers, vested in their white gowns, are led by the cantor or the sub-cantor from school to church to participate in the liturgical solemnities. The psalms, responsories, antiphons, the Magnificat and the litanies still lived in him when he had attained to a man's estate. They were venerable melodies, handed down from former ages, in the Latin text of which the singers were carefully exercised by the cantor. Instruction in ecclesiastical chant constituted an important part of the educational methods of the school; it was adapted to their spiritual content as well as to their external rendition. Besides the liturgical hymns there were the religious songs of the people, such as the "fine hymn" at Pentecost, as Luther styles it: "*Nu bitten wir den Heiligen Geist*," and the Easter hymn, "*Christ ist erstanden*," etc. "In the days of the papacy," says Luther at a later period of his career, "there were excellent songs." That Luther was the first to introduce congregational singing is a claim not founded on fact, but on prejudice. He himself adequately refutes this prejudice. "Congregational singing flourished before the Reformation."¹⁷

The boy learned and loved every phase of the regular ecclesiastical life of Catholicism without meeting with any "reformatory" tendencies. The veneration of the Saints, reminiscent of the august communion of all the servants of God here on earth and in the realms of Heaven, the reception of the Sacraments and attendance at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the processions in the cemetery and to

¹⁷ Hans Preuss, *Luthers Frömmigkeit* (Leipzig, 1917), p. 52.

the chapel of the departed, as well as those through the decorated streets of the little city, the blessings and ceremonies of the Church no less than the sermons of the clergy—everything made him feel at home in the great spiritual house of God founded by Jesus Christ. There is prejudice in the frequent assertion of non-Catholics that there was “over-emphasis of good works in Roman piety and divine service” which thus “suppressed pious impulses.” The congregation and the boy Luther, on the contrary, knew “that men assembled to praise and worship God”; “the heart was truly raised aloft and joyousness replete with life was imparted to it.”¹⁸ Luther heard of the Vicar of Christ, Innocent VIII (1484–1492), who governed all Christendom with spiritual power from his see at Rome. He sympathetically sensed the danger with which the advancing forces of Islam threatened the faithful, and which urged the latter to have recourse to prayer, and perhaps his lips recited the prayer for deliverance from the Turkish menace at the sound of the “Turkish bell,” a practice introduced about the year 1456. He always treasured the memory of St. George, the patron saint of his church, to whose legendary story it was his delight to give a beautiful spiritual significance. Of the public customs of his boyhood he boasted that all games, such as dice and cards and even dances, had been prohibited, whereas, in his old age, he saw them gain ground.¹⁹ It is known that the most widely read book of those days, which was probably also perused by the boy Martin, who had a passion for reading, was the excellent life of Christ written by the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony (died 1377), a work firmly grounded upon Christian doctrine and following in the attractive footsteps of St. Bernard. Rivaling Ludolph’s book as a guide to the interior life was Henry Seuse’s “Of Eternal Wisdom” and the “Imitation of Christ” by the immortal Thomas à Kempis. All these writings were permeated with genuine religiosity and the most solid piety, undiminished by even a taint of “reformatory” thought. The principal spiritual companion of youth, however, was the catechism, concerning which Luther’s pupil, Mathesius, admits that God has “wonderfully retained it in the parish churches, for which we must thank our God and the ancient schools.”²⁰

¹⁸ Otto Scheel, *Luthers Stellung zur bl. Schrift*, I, pp. 17, 19.

¹⁹ Tischreden, Weimar ed., IV, Nr. 126.

²⁰ Mathesius, p. 16.

According to the latter authority, young Luther learned his catechism "diligently and rapidly."²¹

On the other hand, his boyhood days were unfortunately contaminated by the superstitions which prevailed in his parental home and, in general, among his Saxon and German contemporaries. Incredible notions of the devil, expressed in the crassest of anecdotes, haunted the minds of the people. Mysterious and credulous meanings were attached to ordinary phenomena of nature. This evil of superstition was deeply rooted especially among the miners. Their dangerous occupation in the mysterious bowels of the earth awakened dismal phantasies. They feared that preternatural powers spied on them with evil intent; then, too, they expected their assistance in discovering rich ores; or, finally, as Luther's speeches attest, they were familiar with queer deceptions which they imputed to them. The death of a younger brother in the parental home was attributed to witchcraft.²² Many stories were told about Dame Hulda and her strange apparitions. Luther learned that devils inhabit forests, lakes, and streams, and use water-sprites to deceive men. He was told of a lake in the neighborhood of Mansfeld which was filled with captive devils who caused a storm whenever a stone was cast into the water. In conformity with his traditions, Luther steadfastly maintained that the devil had carnal intercourse with women. Changelings as well as goiters were caused by him. In his childhood, he says, there were many witches in Saxony. One of these lived in the vicinity of his father's house, and his mother had to make every possible effort to protect the family against her. It often happened that the children screamed frantically when subjected to incantations. The same witch, by means of her diabolical craft, brought on the death of a clergyman who had opposed her activity, by means of the ground over which he passed. In his youth Luther had seen many persons whose sickness or death had been caused by witches. "When I was a boy," he says, "I was told of an old woman who had brought misfortune upon a peace-loving husband and wife" against whom the devil had attempted his insidious wiles in vain. The witch induced them to lay sharp knives under their pillows and influenced them to believe that one party intended to murder the other; this

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Weimar ed., XL, I, p. 315: "*Frater mibi occisus per beneficia.*"

being so true, she averred, as the fact that they would discover knives under their respective pillows. As a consequence, the husband cut his wife's throat. Thereupon the evil one appeared to the old woman and, without approaching her, presented her with a pair of shoes on a long pole. Why do you not approach more closely? asked the witch, and the devil replied: Because you are more wicked than I, you have succeeded wherein I failed.²³

In his early sermons, delivered in 1516 and 1518, Luther mentions the most superstitious things; indeed, strange ideas of this character permeate his entire life. The excrescences of popular credulity, into which he was introduced as a boy, were combated by the Church, but without avail. Books that were held in high esteem even furthered the abuse, as for instance the "Hexenhammer," which was published in 1487 by two Inquisitors. Ofttimes superstitious powers were ignorantly ascribed to ecclesiastical practices, such as the sacramentals and the veneration of the Saints. It is scarcely necessary to emphasize that the rational use of the blessings of the Church and the veneration of the Saints were as little favorable to these errors as the doctrinal teachings of the Church and of Sacred Scripture concerning the devil. The popular imagination created its own worlds. What was invisible was distorted and rendered visible; what was sacred was subjected to profanation. Thus statues of St. Christopher that were erected on the gates of the cities, and on the churches, even in the churches, were made immensely large, because numerous prayer books declared that whoever saw Christopher once a day, was protected against the evil spirits and sudden death. In his youth, these giant statues were round about him. The legend of St. Christopher made a lasting impression upon his mind, but, like that of St. George and other legends, he interpreted it critically and in a spiritual sense. Nevertheless, his criticism of the legends did not dispel his other superstitions.

2. MAGDEBURG AND EISENACH

About Easter, 1497, when Martin was fourteen years of age, his parents sent him to Magdeburg to continue his studies. The eminent talents which he displayed were deserving of a better education than that which Mansfeld offered. In the city on the Elbe there lived a

²³ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., II, Nr. 1429.

citizen of Mansfeld, Paul Mossauer by name, who was an official at the archiepiscopal curia. It appears that the poor boy had been recommended to him, for Martin ate his meals with him and, perhaps, also lodged in his house. The range of his ideas was enlarged in that ancient city, which even at that time was famed for its magnificent cathedral and other splendid buildings. Martin had reason to be satisfied with the teaching and the treatment he received at school. He was instructed by the Brethren of the Common Life,²⁴ who undoubtedly furnished the major portion of his higher training.²⁵

In respect of educational and ecclesiastical matters, the road he now trod was decidedly a fortunate and very fruitful one; for the Brethren belonged to a community that was permeated by a profoundly religious spirit, whose efforts of reform within the Church blossomed forth splendid results at that time. Originating in the Netherlands through the efforts of Geert Groote, who distinguished himself by his labors for the Church, the society of the Brethren spread to Germany. They were representatives of the so-called "*devotio moderna*," a new conception of monastic piety more in conformity with the requirements of the age, according to which, in addition to prayers and begging, an active and timely efficacy was to be cultivated in behalf of mankind. The Brethren particularly devoted themselves to the education of the youth who attended the existing schools, but they also erected schools of their own. Everywhere they laid special emphasis on devotional lectures, by means of which they desired to foster the religious life of their pupils.²⁶ Among their students who became celebrated men were the pious Thomas à Kempis, the scholarly Gabriel Biel, the astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa. Thomas à Kempis, having completed his studies under the guidance of the Brethren, became a canon regular of the Order of St. Augustine in the monastery of Agnetenberg near Zwolle, where he died in 1471, in the ninety-second year of his life. His writings, above all his *Imitation of Christ*,

²⁴ Undoubtedly their popular name (Loll Brothers) was derived from *lulhen*, to sing softly (in choir).

²⁵ *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 402, 15 June, 1522. Cf. E. Barnikol, *Luther in Magdeburg* (see note 26), pp. 3 sqq., 54. Probably Luther attended the elementary instructions of the pensioners of the Brethren.

²⁶ Cf. Barnikol, "Die Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben," in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Supplementary number, 1917; ib., "Das Magdeburger Brüderhaus," in the *Theolog. Arbeiten aus dem rhein.-wiss. Predigerverein*, Series of 1922, pp. 8 sqq., and "Luther in Magdeburg und das dortige Brüderhaus," ib., series of 1917, pp. 1 sqq.

faithfully reflect the spirit which he imbibed in his youth from his teachers, the Brethren of the Common Life. The Fraternity lived and labored in complete harmony with the Church. It was absolutely free from that aversion to the existing hierarchy which was formerly ascribed to it by uninformed Protestant writers. Those so-called "reformatory tendencies" which would qualify the Fraternity as a kind of precursor of the Protestant Reformation cannot be attributed to it in any sense. The constitutions, which were composed by Henry of Ahaus, the founder of the German Brethren, are animated throughout by the spirit of ecclesiastical submission; and the documents which we possess descriptive of the activities of the Brethren, confirm their loyalty to the Church.²⁷

Luther's sojourn at Magdeburg lasted but a year, and few details of it have been handed down to us. Mathesius, a pupil of Luther, says: "The boy, like many a child of honest and wealthy parents, begged for bread and cried out his *panem propter Deum*."²⁸ Luther also confesses that he was "Partekenhengst" during his stay at Magdeburg and subsequently at Eisenach.²⁹ This was a term of contempt applied to scholars who collected small donations contributed for their sustenance, by singing before the residences of the burghers or in other ways. Mathesius is correct in his assertion that even sons of well-to-do parents were sent out to engage in this humiliating practice of begging so that they might learn humility and sympathy for the poor. In Luther's case it can hardly have been the impoverished condition of his paternal home that compelled him to go begging.

Once, while sick with a fever in Magdeburg, he dragged himself to the kitchen and, without stopping, drank the contents of a vessel of fresh water. Thereupon he was seized with a profound slumber. When he awoke, the fever had left him. This event is narrated by Luther's friend, the physician Ratzeberger, who was impressed by it on ac-

²⁷ Paul Mestwerdt, *Die Anfänge des Erasmus, Humanismus und der *devotio moderna** (Vol. II of *Studien zur Kultur und Geschichte der Reformation*, ed. by the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte), Leipzig, 1917. The author, on pp. 83 sqq., establishes proof of the decidedly Catholic attitude of the Brethren. He calls (p. 86) the writings of Thomas à Kempis "a classical memorial of the piety of the adherents of the '*devotio moderna*'"—O. Scheel I, p. 85: "The Brethren never abandoned Catholicism. Their 'modern' devotion was erected entirely on the foundation of Catholic piety. This must, alas, be emphasized to-day; for the Brethren have been made precursors of the Reformation."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁹ Weimar ed., XXX, II, p. 576.

count of its peculiar circumstances. He perceived that the robust frame of the boy was endowed with endurance.³⁰

Luther tells us how deeply impressed he was by an edifying scene he once witnessed in the streets of Magdeburg. A certain prince William of Anhalt-Zerbst, who had become a Franciscan monk and assumed the name of Lewis, passed him with a beggar's sack hanging about him. The body of the prince had been reduced to a shadow from fasting, night watches, and flagellations. A strapping brother of the Order, a companion of his, more competent to carry the sack and its burden, walked alongside of the staggering man, because the latter, imbued with a spirit of penance, wished to bear the burden alone.³¹ For thirty years the noble brother Lewis, a disciple of the Saint of Assisi, had borne the habit of his Order with honor until his 48th year, in 1504, when death relieved him of his burden. He performed the functions of a guardian in the houses of his Order in Magdeburg and Halle. He was known for his kindness and charity, no less than for the fearlessness with which he criticized the sins of the mighty, for his delicate art of mediation in their quarrels, and for his solicitude in behalf of the poor and oppressed. The establishment of new houses of his Order, especially in Prussia, was attributed to his successful labors.³² The rare example of renunciation of the world which he displayed, was highly esteemed, especially because he was the eldest child of his parents. Four sons of these parents embraced the religious state. The historian of the Reformation in the city of Zerbst praises "the earnest and profoundly sincere piety" which characterized the princely family during the time prior to the religious schism.³³ In his Magdeburg days Luther was filled with admiration for the man whose countenance he was often privileged to see. He was yet free from the animus that impelled him in later days to condemn him and his monastic state.

If the lad had been given an opportunity to extend the time of his sojourn at Magdeburg, there is no doubt but that the instructions imparted at that place, and his association with the Brethren of the

³⁰ Ratzeberger, pp. 41 sq.: "Er kreuchet auf Händen und Füssen abwärts in die Kuchen," etc.

³¹ Weimar ed., 38, p. 105: "Er trug den Sack wie ein Esel, das er sich zur Erde krümmen musste," etc.

³² L. Lemmens, O.F.M., *Aus ungedruckten Franziskanerbrieden des 16. Jahrh. Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien*, Heft 20 (1911), pp. 8 sqq.

³³ H. Becker-Lindau, *Reformationsgeschichte der Stadt Zerbst*, in *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Anhaltische Geschichte*, Vol. XI, (Dessau, 1910), p. 250.

Common Life, would have affected his career most advantageously. About Easter of the subsequent year (1498), however, he had to transfer his residence to Eisenach, where he continued his studies at the Latin school. It is possible that the internal crisis which overtook the house of the Brethren at Magdeburg, contributed to this exchange.³⁴ Relatives of his parents lived at Eisenach, with whom the student was expected to establish connections. A brother-in-law, Conrad Hutter, sexton of the church of St. Nicholas, extended a cordial welcome to the young student. In grateful remembrance Luther invited him in after years to attend the celebration of his first Mass.

At Eisenach, too, the industrious scholar experienced the directions of a benevolent Providence and was further inducted into the spiritual life. At school and in the families of his acquaintances the religious life of the town furnished him with an adequate spiritual cultivation and a healthful interior development. In order to sustain himself, the young beggar, who was endowed with the gift of song, continued to solicit alms at the doors of the burghers, at least in the beginning of his student days at Eisenach. Shortly afterwards he was supported by a burgher named Henry Schalbe, designated as Heinricianus in the old report, whose son he escorted to school.³⁵ Later on a still better home opened its doors to him. It was the residence of Kuntz Cotta. The wife of this opulent native of Eisenach, who was descended from an Italian family, was Ursula Schalbe, a charitable lady who is said to have rescued the poor student from the streets, an act which many later Protestant authors describe with touching sentimentality. Matthesius simply says that the pious matron invited him to partake of the hospitality of her table, "because she cherished a strong affection for the boy on account of his singing and fervent praying in church."³⁶ Luther does not mention her name; only once does he refer to his "hostess" of Eisenach (a reference which might mean the wife of Henry Schalbe), and avers that he learned from her the saying that there is nothing on earth superior to the love of a woman for one so fortunate as to win it.³⁷ He entered this saying as a marginal note in his translation of the Proverbs chap. 31, where Solomon sings the praises of the virtuous and industrious housewife, the priceless treasure of her husband. At Eisenach the house where Frau Cotta is sup-

³⁴ Barnikol, *Das Magdeburger Brüderhaus* (see note 26), p. 40.

³⁵ Tischreden, Weimar ed., V, Nr. 5362.

³⁶ Matthesius, p. 17.

³⁷ Weimar ed., XLIII, p. 692.

posed to have lavished her benevolence upon Luther is still indicated to the traveller. According to the better topographers of the town, the residence of the Cottas is unknown.

Besides the Schalbes and the Cottas, who were devoted to the Catholic faith, Luther became intimate with the vicar of the collegiate church of St. Mary at Eisenach, John Braun, and his circle of friends. Braun was versed in music and the humanities. With gratitude and love Luther later on recalls his friendly and congenial intercourse with him, in whose company music and song furnished many a happy and inspiring hour.³⁸ In a letter to Braun, written during his student days at Erfurt, Luther recalls his sister Catherine, whose versatility in singing induced him to refer to her jocosely as "Cantharina" (the singer).³⁹ He also desired the presence of Braun at his first Mass.

It is probable that Luther underwent his greatest spiritual experience in the small Franciscan monastery at the foot of the Wartburg, which rises above Eisenach. The monastery was known as the Schalbian college, because it depended upon the Schalbe family for its endowment and juridical status. The Fathers at the college became his dear friends, as is revealed by the correspondence concerning his first Mass. He says that the excellent men of this monastery deserved well of him.⁴⁰ This monastery of discalced monks beneath the Wartburg nurtured lively local remembrances of St. Elizabeth, the celebrated landgravine of Thuringia.

As the talented boy ascended the towering castle which commanded the surrounding country, it is small wonder that he was animated by lofty sentiments of veneration for the princess, who was the counterpart on a larger scale to the Magdeburg monk of princely descent. There his ideas of the service of God and the significance of the things of this world became enlarged. The example of the sainted princess, who ministered with her own hands to the sick and indigent in the hospital she herself had founded at Eisenach, was for him an effective and beautiful illustration of applied Christianity in the most attractive form of humility, charity, and heroism. The beautiful popular

³⁸ *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 1, letter to Braun, April 22, 1507. Cf. Degering (see following note), p. 88.

³⁹ H. Degering, *Aus Luthers Frühzeit: Briefe aus dem Eisenacher und Erfurter Lutherkreise, 1497-1510*, in the *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, Vol. XXXIII (1916), Heft 3 and 4; Sonderdruck, p. 78.—*Briefwechsel*, XVII, p. 82.

⁴⁰ *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 3, to Braun, April 22, 1507.

legend of the miracle of the roses and the narrative of the cruel banishment of Elizabeth and her children moved him more than the living monuments of the days of German knighthood and the contests of troubadours which were enclosed by the walls of the castle. Thence he would cast his eyes upon Eisenach itself, a city of churches and replete with pious traditions of Elizabeth. The city was girdled by a large wall, surmounted by many round, square and hexagonal towers, and a moat filled with water. In the fifteenth century, the city with its vast belt of walls, was no longer the residence of counts. Like the one-time lively Wartburg, it had become a quiet place. The churches, however, were the scenes of an active religious life. This was especially true of the three parish churches, each one of which boasted a school. The Romanesque church of St. Nicholas was located in the north of the town, the church of Our Lady in the south. Another church, dedicated to St. George, had been practically reconstructed in 1515. In addition to the churches, several monasteries opened their chapels to the faithful. There were about seventy priests in the town, of whom some were not actively engaged in the ministrations of religion. All too generous provision had been made for the religious requirements of the population.

The school which Luther attended, the so-called trivium, was situated in the immediate vicinity of the parish church of St. George. John Trebonius—such was the humanist form of his name—was its rector. "He was an imposing and a learned man and a poet," in the words of the physician Ratzeberger. Melanchthon reports that Luther in later life praised his talents. He drilled his pupils thoroughly in the Latin grammar of Donatus and in the syntax book of Alexander. The "asinus" and the "lupus" were not absent. It was customary to study ecclesiastical as well as classical literature. In order to master the church calendar, the students of Eisenach, as in many other places, memorized the so-called "cisio-janus," a composition in Latin hexameters which rendered the sequence of the feasts of the ecclesiastical year by abbreviation of the introductory words. "Cisio" signified circumcision, the feast of the Circumcision of Christ, the first feast in January. Prosody and the preliminaries of the "art of oratory," and poetry were taught. The cantor played an important part. Besides the cantor, there were a master and probably other preceptors, who functioned under the rector, Trebonius. The latter manifested great respect towards his pupils. When he entered the class-room, he was

wont to remove his biretta until the pupils were seated, because, so he said, there might be some among his scholars who were destined to occupy stations of dignity, such as the office of burgomaster, chancellor, doctor or regent. Luther long maintained grateful and friendly connections with the urbane Trebonius.

A prophet lived at that time in the larger Franciscan monastery of Eisenach. The privilege of indulging in public prophecy was denied to him, since the Brethren wisely confined the fantastic and dangerous man to his cell. The name of this prophet was John Hilten. Luther scarcely heard of him during his sojourn at Eisenach, but afterwards, in 1529, he got Hilten to communicate his prophecies to him. He then pretended to discover that his own opposition to the Pope had been foretold by Hilten "at the time of his youth."⁴¹ By means of astrological calculations and a bold application of passages of Daniel and the Apocalypse to the evils of the age, against which he agitated with excessive zeal, Hilten had discovered that Rome was destined to fall about the year 1514. He never mentioned Luther. According to his prognostications, the year 1651 would witness the end of the world. Prophecies which actually came true, such as the advance of the Turks, invested him with a certain reputation. Towards the close of his life, at the end of the fifteenth century, Hilten is said by witnesses to have recanted his various theological errors, especially his erroneous and invidious propositions concerning the monastic life, which he uttered in his exaggerated enthusiasm for the Franciscan rule. He died at peace with his Order and the Church. It is not true that he was immured alive, as asserted by Ernest L. Enders.⁴² In his *Apologia for the Augsburg Confession*, Melanchthon erroneously cites him as a papal witness to "evangelical truth." It was even greater perversion of the truth when Luther stated some years afterwards that Hilten was murdered because he foretold that the execution of John Hus "must be avenged; another shall come, whom the contemporaries will yet see."⁴³

After a three years' stay Luther left Eisenach. The memory of the town always remained dear to him. His father ordered him to continue his studies at the university of Erfurt in Thuringian Saxony. Erfurt, with its struggling university, was the property of the arch-

⁴¹ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., III, Nr. 3795, of the year 1538.

⁴² *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 198, in note 1 to Friedrich Myconius's letter to Luther concerning Hilten.

⁴³ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., III, Nr. 3795, of the year 1538.

bishop of Mayence and subject to the protectorate of the Elector of Saxony. John Luther was determined that Martin should become a proficient jurist, one who could qualify for dignities and offices. In order to achieve this object, Martin had first to complete what is now called the curriculum of the liberal arts as a preparation for a professional course.

In the interim, John Luther had so improved his financial status that he was able to support his son adequately during his academic years. Whereas previously, according to Luther's admission, his parents had been engaged in a bitter struggle for the necessities of life, in later years the industrious father became the lessee of a number of forges and pits. Mines at that time were operated under a leasehold, and often subleased. Moreover, as early as 1491, John had become a member of the "Council of Four" of the section of the city in which he resided. He held the same office again in 1502. The members of the "Council of Four" were associated with the city council in the government of their district. John's repeated elections indicate that he was regarded as an intelligent and a practical man who gradually improved his economic condition. In the spring of 1501, he sent his promising son, now in his eighteenth year, to the university city on the Gera.

3. LUTHER AS A STUDENT AT ERFURT

Young Luther was next concerned with his reception into one of the existing students' inns of the university town. "Burses" or "contubernia" were terms used to designate the homes to which all students of the Alma Mater were obliged to belong, in virtue of a time-honored prescription. Here they usually lived under the supervision of one of the masters of the university. Aided by the master, or by someone else, the students were directed in their scientific pursuits. By the payment of a small tuition fee they had board and lodging in common. At first Luther resided in the "burse" known as Porta Coeli, which he afterwards exchanged for that of St. George in the parish of that name. Thus St. George, the patron saint of his Mansfeld parish, accompanied him also on his road to knowledge. In a verbose letter, the earliest preserved from his pen, Luther announced his residence at the Porta Coeli to his paternal friend Braun at Eisenach. He signs "Martinus viopolitanus" (Martin of Mansfeld),

and refers to himself as the "bothersome hair-splitter,"—an allusion, no doubt, to his inclination to criticize.⁴⁴

Erfurt at that time enjoyed an eminent reputation for learning. Since the university of Prague, in consequence of the Hussite controversy and the consequent emigration of the Germans, had lost its exalted position in the academic world, Erfurt was called the New Prague. Its faculty of law in particular became celebrated. No less distinguished were the members of the philosophical faculty and its preparatory courses in the quadrivium of the liberal arts. In respect of the study of philosophy, strictly speaking, Luther came under the influence of two excellent teachers, Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomew Arnoldi of Usingen. Prior to his admission to the higher branches of learning, custom constrained him to complete the study of grammar, rhetoric, and poetics. This preparatory discipline was indispensable for those students whose knowledge of these branches of learning was incomplete. Martin, though he was well versed in these branches, availed himself of this course in order to perfect his style, as evidenced by the fluent Latinity of his later writings as well as his early letters. He endeavored to catch the spirit of the classical authors. Among the poets, he first familiarized himself with the writings of an excellent neo-Latin poet, who was highly celebrated in his day, Baptista Mantuanus, whose real name was Giovanni Spagnolo. At one time general of the Carmelite Order, he was a pious and austere man, who was later beatified by Leo XIII. In due course of time Luther read Ovid's Heroics or Love Epistles and the poems of Vergil. The study of scholastic theology, he asserts, prevented him from reading more of these authors. This statement, however, is not to be accepted literally, for he found time to read the comedies of Plautus, and, either at the same time or somewhat later, Horace, Juvenal, and Terence, from whom he was able to quote in his later years. Jerome Emser, his subsequent adversary, explained to him Reuchlin's comedy of "Sergius."

The so-called "minor logic" constituted a part of the subject-matter of the first lectures in the faculty of liberal arts. The Old and the New Logic, interpreted by the aid of Aristotle, was the next

⁴⁴ Letter of September 5, 1501, with excuse for delay. First appearance of text in H. Degering, *Aus Luthers Frühzeit*, in the *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, Vol. XXXIII, (1916), p. 78. Afterwards in Luther's *Briefwechsel*, Vol. XVII, ed. by P. Flemming (Leipzig, 1920), p. 82. The letter is undoubtedly authentic.

step in his studies. With the Stagirite as a guide, the student then learned "natural philosophy, *i. e.*, the physics of Aristotle, and read his treatises on the soul and on spherical astronomy. Although the subjects of the ancient trivium still pertained to the faculty of arts, the subjects of the quadrivium were freely treated. The lectures were delivered in the "burses" or in the auditorium of the so-called Old College. They were accompanied by constant exercises and disputations. These "exercises and disputations" often commenced as early as six in the morning; they stimulated industry, sharpened the wits, and cultivated the faculty of oral expression.

In this respect, too, the faculty of arts of the University of Erfurt revealed itself as a medium of a general academic training, well adapted to the requirements of the age, preparing the student for the higher branches of learning, theology, jurisprudence, or medicine. Aristotle, who was celebrated almost universally as the Philosopher, was the supreme pathfinder to scholarly independence.

The bachelor's degree, the lowest academic honor, was the proximate aim of Luther. He obtained this degree as soon as possible, in the autumn of 1502, by means of a severe test in the presence of five examiners. As "baccalaureus of the liberal arts" he now wore the gown of his office according to the constitutions of the faculty, since he was now a member of the teaching staff. This first academic distinction prepared the way for the master's degree. But, before he could achieve this honor, it was necessary for him to devote himself to protracted study. In the meantime he was obliged to assist beginners in the studies he had completed. This was the rule of the university. A strict law regulated the curriculum of studies and the scientific occupation of the teachers at the universities of that day.

Nevertheless, a certain freedom of life prevailed, and the students found frequent opportunities for pleasantries and merriment.

Young Luther had experienced this at the very threshold of his academic career, when he was obliged, like all newcomers, to take the so-called "deposition" in order to become a full-fledged student in the eyes of his associates. On this occasion the newcomer (*Bean*) was compelled to masquerade with horns and elongated ears, and swine's teeth were attached to the corners of his mouth. Then, by means of a plane, he was fashioned into the proper academic form. The merry procedure was crowned by a baptism with water or wine. Originally a certain spiritual significance had been attached to this ceremony: it was

intended to hold up to the freshman the moral aims which he was to pursue through the renunciation of his shortcomings. When Luther was professor at Wittenberg in later years, he alluded to the symbolic meaning of this "deposition."

The life of the beneficiaries of the various "burses" was invested with manifold privileges. Although the constitutions of some, e. g., the Porta Coeli, were strict and decisive in their religious and educational import, they were not always conscientiously observed. In comparison with the beginnings of the "burses," there was possibly a lack of zeal and vigilance in Luther's student days. In some instances, the frequentation of taverns was expressly permitted. The life of the students at Erfurt must have been rather unrestrained. The relatively large number of students (at that time an average of over 300 were enrolled annually) leads us to expect excesses. In 1530 Luther says that the University of Erfurt was "a place of dissolute living and an ale-house," in which subjects the students were interested in preference to everything else.⁴⁵ His added remark that "there were neither lecturers nor preachers" at this institution, is evidently to be characterized as a polemical exaggeration directed against a Catholic university. For there were deserving preachers at Erfurt, though they did not preach the new Gospel; and there were also respectable professors, as he himself attests in his reference to Trutvetter and Usingen. Nevertheless, the acrid judgment just cited reveals a modicum of evil experiences made at Erfurt. The city council in a measure harbored immorality by allowing prostitutes to live together upon the payment of a tax, a custom which prevailed also in other cities. Even among the clergy of Erfurt there were open infractions of chastity. It is questionable, however, whether Luther meant Erfurt, when in his Table Talks he said he knew a city where the mistresses of clergymen were honored as Madame Deaconess, Madame Provost, Madame Cantor, etc.⁴⁶ "Gossip may have seized upon many a story and embellished it with its own peculiar frivolity," says Otto Scheel.⁴⁷ When, at a later period, Luther speaks of his own youth he states that the clergy were not suspected of adultery and immorality, whereas, since then, dissoluteness had constantly increased.⁴⁸ At all events, Erfurt,

⁴⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., II, Nr. 2719b.

⁴⁶ Erlangen ed., LX, p. 280 (Chap. 27, Nr. 1301).

⁴⁷ Scheel, I, p. 136.

⁴⁸ *Opp. Exeg.*, IX, p. 260.

during the student days of Luther, was a city whose inhabitants observed the moral law and were imbued with a profound religious faith—a city replete with well-attended churches and numerous busy monasteries whose bells never ceased ringing by day and by night.

The splendid church of Our Lady excelled all other churches. Erected on a hill, it overlooked the entire city. The church of St. Severus, which was situated next to it, still presents a magnificent sight. A few decades before Luther used to visit this church, St. John Capistran preached from the lower steps of the mighty terrace which leads up to the hill, and stories were told of numerous conversions and miraculous cures. In the year 1502, while Luther was present, the city and the plaza witnessed the solemn procession of the jubilee which was arranged under the auspices of the papal legate, Raymond Peraudi of Gurk, accompanied by the general reception of the Sacraments and a plenary indulgence. Like the jubilee indulgence granted on a previous occasion, in 1488, that of 1502 was a source of spiritual renovation for citizens and students. For a number of years the voice of an Augustinian monk, John Genser (Jenser) von Paltz, the scholarly promoter of papal indulgences, resounded through the spacious edifice. He was a profoundly pious man, endowed with a powerful gift of speech. His associate, the Augustinian John von Dorsten, rivaled him as a preacher of great popularity and impressive forcefulness. Indeed, the Augustinian monastery excelled all others in learning and practical activity. By means of their confraternities, monasteries, and churches, these monks educated the faithful to a more active religious life. Perhaps young Luther, the son of a miner, may have experienced a sort of predilection for the confraternity of St. Ann, the patroness of miners, which was directed by the Augustinians. We shall see that he supplicated St. Ann, when, during a storm, he made his vow to enter a monastery.

But, until that time, he devoted two years to preparing himself for the master's degree. During this time he studied the logic of Aristotle, certain questions of natural philosophy, mathematics in general, and several minor branches of the old quadrivium; and, finally, moral philosophy, politics, and metaphysics. All these subjects were learned in the light of Aristotle and with the assistance of preceptors who explained the writings of the Stagirite to the student.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Cf. Scheel, I, pp. 157 sqq.; 170 sqq., where the branches of study are set forth in detail for the period before and after the baccalaureate.

In its application of the Aristotelian philosophy, and in the study of philosophy in general, the University of Erfurt claimed to pursue a purified course, which at that time was designated as "modern." Trutvetter and Usingen, the principal teachers of Luther, were outspoken representatives of the *via moderna*, as were also their fellow-instructors. At other universities there were advocates of the new as well as adherents of the old method. The old system favored the so-called philosophy of realism, whereas the new system betrayed a nominalistic tendency. The latter originally derived its name from the fact that it held that all universal concepts were mere names (*nomina*.) The better class of Nominalists were strictly Catholic and avoided the dangers ordinarily attached to Nominalism. William of Ockham, the daring and skeptical "*Doctor invincibilis*" (died at Munich in 1347), was the accepted leader of the Nominalist school. But there were men like the learned and influential Gabriel Biel, as well as the Erfurt professors mentioned above, who knew how to avoid the reefs of Ockhamism.

Nominalism was a stage in the decline of Scholasticism. The hey-day of Scholasticism was past; logical investigations and useless hair-splitting were in vogue. The barren subtleties of Terminism, so-called, were an evil, though a very large and living stream of learning was still flowing. The Scholastics of the thirteenth century, especially Thomas of Aquin, who followed a moderate realism, had offered a better foundation and, according to content and form, a better school. St. Thomas had brought the Aristotelian philosophy into a better organic union with Catholic truth. But his writings were not properly utilized. We shall see how certain deficiencies of his Erfurt training avenged themselves upon Luther. In many respects he claimed to be a consistent Ockhamite; in some points he went beyond him, in others he abandoned him. It is important to bear in mind, however, that he imbibed no reformatory ideas from his teachers at Erfurt, but learned to combat the Nominalism of Ockham, wherever it deviated from true philosophy to the detriment of dogma.

The same attitude was maintained toward the authority of Aristotle. Although he reigned supreme in natural philosophy, the Catholic school contradicted his theses as far as they were in conflict with the Christian faith. Divine revelation as a source of knowledge was

rightly regarded as inviolable against the objections of pagan philosophy.

As yet Luther had not occupied himself with the study of the Sacred Scriptures, with which he was acquainted only through the widely spread excerpts of the *postillæ* or *plenaria*. These books, which contained principally the pericopes of the Sunday gospels and epistles, as well as the very sententious so-called history-bibles, all composed in German, were in the hands of the clergy and laity.

Luther relates in his Table Talks how, while yet a student at Erfurt, he accidentally happened upon a complete Bible, and how the Old Testament story of Anna, the mother of Samuel, made him realize what inspiring narratives were contained in the historical books of the Old Testament.⁵⁰ The book with which he became acquainted on that occasion, was a volume of the university library. He was unable to read the whole Bible at the time, but he felt a lively desire to make himself more familiar with the Sacred Scriptures. But the great expense of a complete Bible in those days, when the art of printing was in its infancy, permitted him to buy only a *postilla* for his own use. He was amazed to discover many passages which did not appear in the liturgy of the Church. According to his own testimony, Luther was twenty years of age when he made his first acquaintance with the complete Bible. This late discovery, however, is not surprising. How many persons twenty years of age may there have been, even among the highly educated, who never had a complete Bible in their hands, and how many such individuals might not be found to-day? There was no reason for Protestant writers to adorn the story of this event with romantic embellishments and to assert that Luther then and there became the great discoverer of the Bible, which, in the days that preceded his birth, lay hidden under a bench and fastened to a chain. At most it was fastened to a chain in this sense that it was secured for the sake of safety and general utility. Even at the present day, all manuscripts in the Laurentian Library of Florence are secured by a chain.

Luther also informs us that once, when he and a companion journeyed to Mansfeld, he injured his leg with the sword, which he, as a bachelor, was wont to carry as a badge of his academic

⁵⁰ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., I, Nr. 116; III, Nr. 3767; 5, Nr. 5346. I see no reason to doubt this statement.

status. The accident happened half a mile from Erfurt, and blood flowed so profusely from the wound that he was in danger of death. He lay helpless on the ground, pressing the swelling wound with his hand until his companion had summoned a surgeon from the city, who bandaged the wound. At death's door, he tells us, he implored the aid of the Mother of God. "Then would I have died, placing full confidence in the help of Mary." In his room at Erfurt, the following night, the wound broke open. Feeling faint, he once more invoked the Bl. Virgin Mary. While lying convalescent on his bed, he sought distraction by learning to play the lute, an accomplishment which he ever afterwards cherished.⁵¹

The playing of the lute proved a great advantage to him. It helped him to dispel a natural tendency to melancholia, and also enabled him to amuse and entertain his fellow-students. Crotus Rubeanus, who in later years became a celebrated free-thinker, was a room-mate of Luther's. In a letter to the latter, dated April 28, 1520, Crotus writes: "You were at one time the musician, you were the learned philosopher in my *contubernium*."⁵² This statement reveals not only Luther's musical accomplishment, but also his zeal in the pursuit of his studies. His success in philosophy was especially esteemed by his fellow-students. Mathesius ascribed to him "a great earnestness and special diligence" in his studies. "Though naturally an alert and jovial young fellow," he says, "yet he commenced his studies every morning with prayer and a visit to the church." Mathesius writes this in his sermons on Luther in order to represent the piety of his young companion as exemplary.⁵³

Luther at this time had deeply-rooted Christian convictions as well as loyalty to the clergy and the head of the Church. The anti-ecclesiastical ideas of Ockham were completely alien to him. According to his subsequent declarations, he dismissed, by means of prayer and acts of faith, the objections to the teaching of the Church which he occasionally met with in Ockham's works. He heard bitter complaints about the condition of the Church, but they did not produce any impression upon him at the time. An old man from Meiningen, with whose son, who was also a student at Erfurt, Luther was well acquainted, visited him during his illness and spoke to him

⁵¹ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., V, Nr. 6428. Cf. I, Nr. 119.

⁵² *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 391.

⁵³ Mathesius, p. 19. The laudatory expression of Crotus also serves a partisan purpose.

about a great change which was bound to come, since the present state of affairs could not continue. When Luther complained of his indisposition, the man consoled him, saying: "Do not feel aggrieved, you will be a great man some day." Luther mentions this conversation in his Table Talks for the year 1532, and comments upon it as follows: "There I heard a prophet." "I mean," he adds, "that the change of which the old man spoke, has taken place."⁵⁴ Such fanciful prophecies as those of the man of Meiningen and of Hilten of Eisenach, captivated him, not in his student days, but in later life.

During 1503 and 1504 his mind was absorbed by his efforts to qualify himself for the attainment of the degree of master of arts. At the beginning of 1505, he took the examination, which was held around the feast of Epiphany. Among the seventeen students who were examined, Luther took second honors. The examination was followed by the solemn presentation of the insignia of the master's office, a brown biretta and a ring. Luther informs us that on such occasions the new masters were publicly honored amid great pomp. At eventide, accompanied by torch-bearers, they rode horseback through the city amid flourish of trumpets, the noisy acclamation of the populace, and the pleasures of Bacchus. They were obliged to give a supper to the faculty, for which, characteristically enough, the minimum and not the maximum number of participants was designated.

In compliance with his father's wishes, Luther, now a master of arts, entered the faculty of law. He commenced to study in preparation for the secular career which his parents had chosen for him. His father was even planning an advantageous marriage for him. Formerly he addressed his son, while yet a bachelor, with the familiar personal pronoun "du" (you); but henceforth he addressed him with the honorary title "Ihr" (you). With a great outlay he purchased a *Corpus Juris* for the young law student.

The faculty of jurisprudence of the University of Erfurt in those days had several professors of renown. Henning Göde in particular was an excellent representative of Canon Law. We do not know what lectures Luther attended during the first few months, that is, the period which preceded his sudden entrance into

⁵⁴ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., I, Nr. 223; II, Nr. 1368, 2520. The visitor designated in these passages probably was one and the same person.

the monastery. He appears not to have been satisfied. It is fair to assume that he had no inclination for the study of law. His subsequent strong condemnation of lawyers and their science justify the inference of an early opposition. Then, too, his mind was so much taken up with spiritual matters that he regarded the lectures on law and the private studies which it entailed as too arid, of small profit for heart and head. He did not suffer from a lack of emotional capacity, as the near future soon revealed, but rather possessed a superabundance of emotion, which was destined to become dangerous for him.

Did he, perhaps, permit his philosophy of life to be influenced at that time by the humanistic tendencies, whose history in Germany is so intimately connected with that of the University of Erfurt? Some writers have assumed that a very strong influence was exerted upon the impressionable youth by the neo-humanistic movement which commenced at that time, and which was fostered to excess by certain circles in Erfurt. It has been alleged that the seeds of the future reformer were sown in Luther's soul by the poets and the untrammelled critics who had been alienated from the Church. This view needs rectification. To a certain extent, young Luther became surcharged with the ideas of his age, which sought to imitate the classical form of the ancients without becoming enthusiastic over their pagan philosophy. The school of the trivium, especially under Trebonius at Eisenach, formally directed his mind into that channel. His first Latin essays manifest an affected, humanistically inspired style. Usingen and Trutvetter, his Erfurt teachers of the "liberal arts," although Scholastics and Nominalistic philosophers, were neither unfamiliar with nor hostile to humanism. They cultivated the sound old German humanism which, corresponding with that of the Middle Ages, was favored by the statutes of the University. This was the kind of humanism of which they endeavored to learn the forms and which fructified their ideas. It was devoid of that corrosive and repulsive element which characterized the new humanism about to commence at Erfurt. The movement with which Luther had affiliated himself, was marked by a reverential attitude towards the Church. As yet he did not study Greek, but he read the Latin classics with such enthusiasm that it redounded to his great advantage in acquiring versatility of form in Latin as well as in his German mother-tongue. When he entered

the monastery, he took with him the comedies of Plautus and the poems of Vergil and disposed of all his other books to a bookseller. It was only in proportion as his devotion to the Bible increased that his predilection for humanism declined.

The neo-humanistic school did not assume shape at Erfurt until after the doors of the monastery had closed behind Luther.⁵⁵ He was not in contact with its spirit, least of all with the anti-ecclesiastical endeavors of the canon Mutianus Rufus (Conrad) of Gotha, the chief of the rising neo-humanism, who, since 1507, gradually formed more intimate connections with the Erfurt humanists, Eobanus Hessus, Crotus Rubeanus, John Lang, Peter and Henry Eberbach, and others. From 1515 to 1520 the neo-humanists prevailed mightily at the University. In collaboration with the talented and frivolous Crotus Rubeanus, they launched, in 1515, a hostile publication against the Scholastics and the monks, which appeared under the title of *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*. Luther's contact with Crotus, of which the latter afterwards boasted, was restricted to their association in the burse of St. George. Both were members of that small band of young friends (*consortium*) who celebrated Luther's departure from the University and accompanied him to the gates of the monastery.

Another humanist, George Spalatin, a native of Spalt, afterwards Luther's friend and most effective helper in the religious innovations, was a student of Erfurt from 1498 to 1502, and returned thither for a brief period in 1505 as a private tutor, when through the mediation of Mutianus he obtained a position as teacher at the monastery of Georgental. We have no authority for saying that this man exerted a strong influence upon Luther during the days he spent at Erfurt while yet a layman. But a strange tradition among Catholics in Spalt, which originated there several decades later, attached itself to the name of Spalatin and other natives of Spalt who associated with Luther in Erfurt.⁵⁶ It is to the effect that Luther, while a young monk, became enamored of the daughter of a widow whose acquaintance he made in Spalatin's home. This affair, so it was alleged, was the beginning of his renunciation of the monastic life and of the Catholic faith. It is not necessary to refute this fable. The fall of the Augustinian friar is not to be attributed to a desire

⁵⁵ Proof offered by Scheel I, pp. 223 sqq.

⁵⁶ Grisar, *Luther*, III, pp. 284 sqq.

for matrimony, but to quite other causes. The story of Luther's love affair in Erfurt was probably circulated by George Ferber, a native of Spalt.⁵⁷

In addition to the men mentioned above, Luther in his academic years was associated with Caspar Schalbe, who was happy to procure Luther's intercession with the Elector of Saxony when accused of a crime against morality before that sovereign in later years.⁵⁸

Certain declarations of his contemporaries are not favorable to Luther's student life. We refer to Jerome Emser of Dresden, who came in contact with him at Erfurt, and to Jerome Dungersheim, a professor at the university of Leipsic. Emser, who was secretary of the Duke of Saxony, was engaged in open warfare with Luther in 1520 because of the latter's writings against the Catholic Church. At that time he wrote a letter to him containing personal reproaches which is no longer preserved. Thereupon Luther upbraided him because of his past life. Emser, indeed, was not innocent, according to his own admission. In a counter-reply he says, among other things: "What need was there for you to reproach me publicly with past mistakes, most of which are inventions, because of a letter which tells the truth about you? What do you think is known to me of great derelictions (*flagitia*) on your part?" He did not desire to mention these derelictions because it was not his purpose to repay evil for evil. "That you also fell," he continues, "I believe to be attributable to the same cause which effected my fall, namely, the cessation in our day of that public morality which permits young men to live as they please, unpunished, and to take all sorts of liberties."⁵⁹ Luther never replied to these reproaches.

The other witness is Dungersheim of Leipsic. He was a scholarly man and zealous in behalf of the Church. In a printed pamphlet directed against Luther he appeals directly to communications which, as he avers, originated with one of the companions who escorted him to the portals of the monastery and charges him with gross shortcomings in his student years. Besides these reproaches, he mentions, in another polemical writing, "bad habits" which were attributed to Luther and says it must have been due to the latter and the neglect of prayer that Luther now maintained the impossibility for a monk

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

to observe his vow of chastity.⁶⁰ It must be remembered, however, that at that time a strong sentiment prevailed against Luther at Leipsic and many an unfavorable rumor was launched against him which had no foundation in fact, as, for instance, his alleged petition to the Holy See for permission to marry on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Rome, in 1510. But Dungersheim reechoes the report of a companion of Luther. It is possible that both witnesses relied upon the communications of a comrade of Luther. As in the previous instance, so now Luther preferred to ignore the allegations made against him.

Luther afterwards denied that he suffered strong temptations against chastity while he was a monk.⁶¹ In his bizarre manner he repeatedly asserts that the devil reproached him not with moral transgressions, but with his monastic virtues and the celebration of Mass: these were the sins of his youth. On one occasion, however, at the conclusion of his solemn profession of the Last Supper, he concedes that he "spent his youth in a damnable manner and lost it"; but he adds that the greatest sin he committed was the celebration of the Mass.⁶² At another period of his later life, he once more alludes to the sins of his youth, namely, the Mass "and this or that youthful act"; that he often enjoyed internal "rest and good days" until he was shaken with fright "of despair and the fear of God's wrath."⁶³ Spiritually he often vacillated between extremes. All depended, as the last quotation shows, on his ability to form a strong conception of God's mercy. Then he imagined—we speak of his later years—that "it is only a temptation of Satan, the greatest temptation, in fact, when he says: God hates sinners, and you are a sinner." "It is simply false that God hates sinners." "If He hated sinners, He would not have sacrificed His Son for them." "We have the forgiveness of sins," etc. "However, many whom we do not know must thus struggle in the world."⁶⁴ These violent and sudden internal transitions are a sample of his temperament in later years.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26 sq. The two documents of Dungersheim of Ochsenfurt, quoted in this passage, were combined by him with others in 1531 in a volume which bears the title: *Aliqua Opuscula Magistri Hieronymi Dungersheim . . . contra Lutherum edita.*

⁶¹ Grisar, *Luther* (original German ed.), III, p. 1003.

⁶² Erlangen ed., XXX, p. 371; Grisar, I, p. 27.

⁶³ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., I, Nr. 141: "quod sacrificavi in missa, quod hoc aut illud feci adolescens."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

It is possible that his soul was afflicted with a similar tension, albeit in a milder degree, already in his youth.

While a student at Erfurt, Luther maintained friendly and stimulating relations with his benefactors and friends at Eisenach. Trebonius, his former teacher, inquires sympathetically of Luther's friend, the student Louis Han at Erfurt, concerning the welfare and progress of "my Martin." He sends him a message encouraging him to strive after "wisdom and discipline." The letter is one of a recently published (1916) collection pertaining to the Eisenach circle, with whom Trebonius and Luther's benefactor at that place, John Braun, were associated.⁶⁵

What is still more important, some of the letters of this collection seem to be written by Luther himself. The Latin inscription of the old collector over the Latin letters, which had been copied in many instances without the address or name of the sender, reads very definitely: "Twenty-four letters of Luther and his teachers and friends of Eisenach and Erfurt."⁶⁶ The letters were collected shortly after 1507, supposedly at Eisenach, for the purpose of furnishing models of style in epistolary correspondence for the use of schools. Luther is the author of the verbose letter of the 27th or 28th of April, 1507, in which he invites Trebonius to attend his first Mass, and jocosely subscribes himself as "Martinus Lutherus Augustiniaster," an attempted witticism meaning "an inferior Augustinian."⁶⁷ Luther is also to be regarded as the author of the letter to Braun, dated September 5, 1501, in which he speaks of the commencement of his studies at Erfurt. It is probable that a third letter, dated February 23, 1503, is likewise the product of his pen.⁶⁸ The editor of the collection refers to the spirit and mood of this letter as a proof of Luther's authorship. The unsigned document was addressed to a spiritual "benefactor and dearest friend." Others have rejected this assumption on the ground that the contents do not quite agree with what we know of Luther the student (or rather with what some pretend to know!). An eminent Protestant theologian, however, has taken exception to this criticism by remarking that the supposition that Luther must have been entirely free from the

⁶⁵ Cf. note 44, *supra*; Degering, p. 90, letter of February 5, 1505.

⁶⁶ Degering, p. 71.

⁶⁷ *Briefwechsel*, XVII, p. 84; Nr. 16 of Degering's collection.

⁶⁸ Cf. text and note in Degering, p. 85.

mistakes of his fellow-students has no "historical support."⁶⁹ The recipient of the letter had praised the writer, who declines the compliment in stilted humanistic phraseology and says that he "is surfeited with human weakness, dereliction, and negligence in every respect, interiorly and exteriorly," "that habit rules like a second nature" and "the times are evil, men are worse, their works replete with wickedness. Prevented by gluttony and drunkenness, I have hitherto [since my last letter?] neither written nor read anything good; for, being placed in the midst of men, I have lived with men. But as soon as I had torn myself away, I at once seized my pen, in order to reply to you, most cherished father."⁷⁰ In the course of the letter, which does not offer anything very remarkable, the writer requests the loan of a work by Nicholas of Lyra, which he had seen in the library of his correspondent. Reference is probably made to one of the religious tracts of Lyra, who was famous as a Biblical commentator. The style of the letter, both in its humanistic composition and in various peculiarities, corresponds entirely with the two other letters of the collection ascribed to Luther no less than with his oldest previously known letters. The letter, moreover, harmonizes with the above-mentioned accusations against the young student. It must be noted, however, that a certain exaggeration attaching to the form of his admissions is attributable to the style and character of the writer. In a letter written to Staupitz in 1519, and in another written to Melanchthon in 1521, Luther also complains of his gluttony, though the expression is not to be taken in its literal sense.⁷¹ The vigorous words, in which the young student emphasizes the decline of morality, are quite as energetic as those contained in his first lectures, sermons and letters at the commencement of his public career.

Taking all things into consideration, it cannot be denied that young Luther was very probably the author of the letter with which we are concerned. In a publication on Luther which appeared in 1917, at the time of the Luther jubilee, a certain Lutheran churchman

⁶⁹ Hermann Jordan in *Theologie der Gegenwart*, 1917, pp. 158 sq.: "I regard Degering's assumption as not absolutely impossible; but it is as much a pure hypothesis lacking historical support as the assumption that Luther as a student must have been entirely free from the intemperance of his comrades."

⁷⁰ "Crēpulis et ebrietatis impeditus bucusque minime quid boni scripserim aut legerim, quia constitutus cum hominibus conversabar cum hominibus."

⁷¹ Grisar, *Luther*, II, p. 87.

writes: "Must we not believe that the man who was seized with fear of sin in the monastery, who was personally acquainted with sin, possessed a weak heart of profound depth and obscure corners, at the sight of which he, at times, closed his eyes with trembling, but into which he had descended with wide-open and burning eyes when his evil hour was upon him? Why, else, should he have experienced such biting qualms of conscience and such indescribable fear?"⁷²

For the rest Luther already in his youth suffered from a natural inclination towards melancholia. Nature, the severe discipline of his parental home, and the first school which he attended, produced a certain depressed atmosphere in his soul. This never quite left him, although it was frequently interrupted by intermittent periods of great mental uplift and inspiration. Of his inclination to religious melancholia, not to say despair, he wrote in 1528, in a letter to one who suffered from the same malady, that he "was not unacquainted with it since his youth."⁷³ He regarded melancholia and despondency as the inseparable portion of man. "Melancholia is born in us, the devil fosters the *spiritus tristitiae*."⁷⁴ "From the days of my boyhood (*a pueritia mea*)," we read in the Table Talks, "Satan foresaw in me something of that which he must now suffer [in virtue of my Gospel]. Therefore he sought with incredible frenzy to injure and obstruct me, so much so that I often asked myself in amazement: 'Am I the only one of all mortals whom he pursues?'"⁷⁵

There is another indication that a very singular temperament resided in the highly gifted soul of Luther. This must be taken into consideration in judging the catastrophe which drove him precipitately into a monastery.

"Despairing of myself" (*desperans de me ipso*), he tells us, he entered the monastery.⁷⁶

"Internal anxiety," says a Protestant student of Luther, "or despair of himself led him into the monastery,"⁷⁷ at the same time emphasizing the "godliness" in which Luther learned to exercise him-

⁷² G. Tolzien, *Landessuperintendent, Martin Luther* (Schwerin, 1917), p. 4. Tolzien seems to be ignorant of the testimonies of Emser and Dungersheim. It is remarkable how consistently they are passed over by all, even scholarly, Protestant biographers of Luther.

⁷³ *Briefwechsel*, VI, p. 173.

⁷⁴ Weimar ed., VIII, p. 574.

⁷⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., II, Nr. 1279; cf. Nr. 2342ab.

⁷⁶ Text from Rörers *Handschriften*, published by E. Kroker in the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Vol. V, (1908), p. 346.

⁷⁷ Scheel, *Martin Luther*, II, 2nd ed., p. 7.

self already as a layman. However, godliness was not the sole driving power which impelled young Luther. In view of his early religious training it is hardly possible to dispute that the most pious impulses often influenced him. Yet, despite his sentiment of despair, he was subject to other factors, namely, in addition to his natural temperament, the well-founded premonition that the life of a layman was accompanied by moral dangers with which he felt himself unable to cope. In his subsequent attacks upon the monastic vow of chastity, he applies a proverb which says: "Monks and clerics are mostly the product of despair." In the case of Luther, "despondency" connotes chiefly a depressing sense of moral incompetence and the experienced inability to preserve chastity.⁷⁸

Another Protestant biographer speaks of the "psychical abnormality" of Luther in his youth, though, of course, his "especially tender and impressionable conscience" is again emphasized.⁷⁹ A third author exaggerates when he says that the young man's "nervous system was unsettled from early youth," and attributes this trouble to his excessively severe training.⁸⁰ These statements indicate that we are confronted with a complicated phenomenon. At all events, the existence of a somewhat disordered constitution, grounded in his very soul, must be assumed. It was united to the depressing idea of guilt, to which the ambitious youth appears often to have given free rein. Both together, the disordered condition of his nerves and the strong sense of guilt, may possibly explain the fear which, as we shall see, pursued him in a most terrifying manner in the monastery, and which reappeared ever and anon throughout his life. During his monastic years, according to his own statements, he ever sought the aid of a merciful God in his struggles amid great despair, without being able to discover Him in the Catholic faith, and most Protestant biographers hold that he was taken up with this quest even in his student days, until he finally sailed into the haven of rest upon the discovery of the new Gospel. This theory, as we shall show later, is not correct. There is no proof whatever that Luther, prior to the time when he entered the monastery, had a sense of insufficiency of the Catholic faith and consequently struggled to find a merci-

⁷⁸ Erlangen ed., XXI, p. 359. Cf. *iBid.*, X, p. 400, and XIII, p. 130, where he adduces the "proverb": "Despair makes the monk," applying it to the necessity of gaining a livelihood.

⁷⁹ Böhmer, p. 50.

⁸⁰ A. Hausrath, *Luthers Leben*, Vol. I, p. 4.

ful God. Let us quote here the words of another Protestant biographer, who, in this instance, judges correctly. Such a construction, he says, "is neither supported by the facts known to us, nor has it any probability." "He [Luther] does not doubt the sufficiency of ways and means. All things as yet co-exist 'naïvely' or succeed one another in the normal Catholic rotation."⁸¹

The same author rightly rejects the favorite assumption that the generality of mankind at that time was agitated by a knowledge or feeling of the insufficiency of the Catholic way of life and yearned for better things—which yearning was bound to captivate the frank soul of young Luther. "It is an erroneous impression to hold that the human race, prior to the rise of Luther, was moved by a passionate spiritual commotion and an impatient quest after a more profound religious philosophy of life."⁸² Many authors endeavored to discover in that age such a highly significant preparation, a great prelude, as it were, to the Reformation. Leading authors have discussed "the lively consciousness of guilt which inspired the people of that age, for the relief of which many thousands made great exertions," but in vain, until Luther appeared as the liberator and prophet. Up to his advent "the mighty desire for certitude in matters of salvation exhausted itself in a gra-

⁸¹ Scheel, I, p. 26. Scheel properly excludes from the juvenile period of Luther a struggle for a merciful God in the sense of most biographers of Luther and as a motive for his entrance into the monastery (pp. 242 sqq.). According to him, Luther's resolution to become a monk was not "the natural result of a long struggle for God's mercy" (p. 243). The hastily composed Latin and German transcript of a sermon delivered by Luther on February 1, 1534, furnished by Rörer, supplies us with the following reading: "*Ego fui XV annis monachus et tamen nunquam potui baptismō me consolari. Ach quando vis semel fromm werden? donec fierem monachus. Non edebam, non vestiebar, friere, papa, antichristus treib mich da hin, qui abstulit baptismum*" (Weimar ed., XXXVII, p. 661). In this entire passage Luther speaks of his monastic period; hence the words "donec fierem monachus" are to be attributed to a misconception of the copyist, as Scheel observes in his notes (Weimar ed., XXXVII, p. 519). While it is not permissible to translate these words by: "as long as I was a monk," especially on account of the *fierem*, it is probable nevertheless that Luther intended to say something similar. The German text of the whole passage (Weimar ed., XXXVII, p. 661), which appears in the form of a sermon originally reported by Cruciger, concludes with the following words: "and by such thoughts I have been driven to embrace monasticism." The text is a corruption without foundation in fact. Luther apparently had made his polemical assertion, that he arrived at his new doctrine in consequence of his struggle for a merciful God, so popular that his followers unconsciously extended his struggles and doubts to the time prior to his entrance into the monastery, though he himself does not supply us with one word to that effect.

⁸² K. Holl, *Luther*, Tübingen, 1923, p. 13.

dation and excess of ecclesiastical performances without obtaining any repose."⁸³ This is not the place to present a characterization of the true ecclesiastical state of affairs. We are at a point in the development of Luther, when he had had no opportunity to survey the surrounding world. The student is still traveling his own road, immersed in his studies and occupied with the affairs of his soul.

While he traveled this road, did the thought of embracing the monastic state occasionally arise in his mind? Although he himself is reticent about this matter, we may well believe that this thought did engage his attention. For it is not likely that when his sudden resolve was forced from him, the idea of the monastic life entered his mind all at once. It is to be assumed psychologically that the question of the monastic state had agitated him for some time, even though he had not made a decision.⁸⁴ May not the wish to secure the salvation of his soul by becoming a monk have dawned on him while he was in a melancholy frame of mind, overwhelmed with a sense of weakness, vacillation and fear of going completely astray on account of his youthful frivolity? His assertion that he became a monk out of despair, points to such a strong impulse. His early religious education, then the active religious life at Erfurt, the example and activity of the religious Orders at the latter place, e. g., the Carthusians, whose very strict life he had observed; furthermore, his intercourse with pious preceptors, such as Usingen, who eventually became an Augustinian; finally, reminiscences of Magdeburg, such as that of the princely discalced monk and mendicant: all these things might have induced him to contemplate the monastic life.

An event, however, was destined to happen which impelled him to form a precipitous and premature resolution which was fraught with momentous consequences.

4. LUTHER'S PRECIPITATE ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

On July 2, 1505, as the young man was returning from a visit to his parents at Magdeburg, a violent storm overtook him not far from Erfurt. As he was travelling alone near Stotternheim a bolt of lightning struck in his immediate vicinity and prostrated him

⁸³ F. von Bezold, *Gesch. d. deutschen Reformation*, Berlin, 1890, pp. 248, 242.

⁸⁴ Thus H. Preuss in *Theol. Literaturblatt* (Leipsic, 1916), p. 94.

to the ground. In consequence of his fall, as we know from a newly discovered source,⁸⁵ his foot sustained a severe injury (*fracto prope-modum pede*). The realization of the danger of death forced this vow from his lips: "Do thou help, St. Ann; I will become a monk."⁸⁶ His power of self-control deserted him almost completely. His friend Jonas later would have it that, at the same time "a terrible manifestation from heaven" appeared to him, which the frightened Luther interpreted as a sign that he should become a monk.⁸⁷ The idea of some kind of a vision actually formed itself, and Luther himself probably conceived it. For, immediately after the event he expressed the belief that the thunder-clap was for him a call from Heaven to dedicate himself to God in the religious life. He says that "intimidations from heaven had called him to that state." He advised his father that he had received a heavenly call to the monastery. John Oldecop, a pupil of the young monk, following Luther's representation of the event, said that Luther "entered the monastery in consequence of strange fears and specters."

When his father, in opposition to Martin's monastic vocation, used the word "specter," he merely meant, in the usage of those days, a sudden excitement and imagination. Luther himself, after he had deserted the monastery, said that he "made a forced vow while surrounded by death"; that force made him a monk; that he made his vow amid "consternation"; and he adds: "I became a monk against my will and desire."⁸⁸ All the references in this passage pertain to the vow he had made in the course of a raging storm, but not to the voluntary profession made at the close of his novitiate upon twelve months' mature reflection, in virtue of which he became a monk.

After his return to Erfurt, having happily escaped the danger, he decided to keep his vow at once and entered the Augustinian monastery. His friends counseled against such a step. He himself

⁸⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., V, Nr. 5373.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, Nr. 4707.

⁸⁷ Report of 1538, published by P. Tschackert in the *Theol. Studien und Kritiken* (1897), 578. The report is not reliable in several points.

⁸⁸ Weim. ed., VIII, p. 573: "neque libens et cupiens fiebam monachus". Cf. the words to his father in the foreword to *De votis* on his vow during the thunder-storm: "spontaneum et voluntarium non erat." K. Zickendraht ("Was hat Luther im Juli 1505 bei Stotternheim erlebt?" in the *Zeitschr. für Kirchengeschichte*, 1922, p. 142) correctly conceived the so-called apparition as the "influence of an electric disturbance on the nervous system" and adduces analogous examples.

desisted for a time and even admits that he regretted his vow. Nevertheless, he finally insisted upon keeping it and determined to carry it out without consulting his parents.

The vow, made under pressure of overwhelming fear, cannot be regarded as valid. It lacked the most necessary preliminary condition, namely, freedom of the mind and deliberation. Any well-informed spiritual adviser could have told him that. In view of reasonable doubt, a release from the vow could have been obtained.⁸⁹ Luther, however, was obstinately determined to follow the higher voice which he supposed had called him.

Considering the character of Luther, his qualities and natural propensities, as they gradually developed after he had embraced the religious life, we must conclude that this singular man was not made for the monastery.

The monastic vocation presupposes qualifications entirely at variance with those possessed by Luther's undisciplined nature, dominated by imagination, and especially self-will. No one who is conversant with the religious state and its requirements, will attribute to him a genuine vocation to that state, which is one of renunciation, obedience, and peaceful cohabitation with spiritual brethren. Nevertheless, he announced his immediate entrance to the prior, and severed his connection with the bursar. Fourteen days after the storm he celebrated his departure in the company of his invited comrades and other guests. He entertained them for the last time on his flute, mingling plaintive strains with merry tunes. He said: "To-day you still see me, but to-morrow you will see me no more." On the following morning—it was the seventeenth of July, the feast of St. Alexius—he went forth with courageous steps to the portals of the monastery, accompanied by a few sorrowing friends. The prior received him with a joyful embrace. He was glad to be able to welcome this promising young scholar into his community.

Luther was twenty-two years of age when the portals of the monastery closed upon him, and a new future began for him within its sacred precincts.

Prior to his entrance and the commencement of his novitiate, he was obliged by custom to spend a short time of probation in a segregated room. Then he was invested with the habit and commenced his probationary year. The habit of his Order consisted of a white

⁸⁹ N. Paulus in *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 1921, pp. 85 sq.

gown with a white scapular, over which a black vestment was worn. The scapular was furnished with a white cowl and a white shoulder-cape. The mantle, worn only on official occasions, was equipped with a black cowl and a black shoulder-cape. The habit which Luther wore about the house, was entirely white and had no cowl.

Internal peace was not to be the lot of the entrant: The very haste with which he entered the monastery must have made its impression upon the young monk; for the step he took signified a great and life-long sacrifice. The fright which he had experienced during the storm still agitated him. Amid flashes of lightning he beheld the tribunal of an angry God who demanded an account of him. Moreover, the emotion of fear, which had lately been awakened in him, tortured him. Melanchthon, supported by subsequent communications from him, says that terror had attacked Luther, "at first, and mostly in the course of that year," *i.e.*, about the time he began his monastic career.⁹⁰ The same authority, referring to the frequent attacks of terror (*terrores*), in Luther's subsequent life, writes: "As he told us, and as many know, he was often convulsed when he meditated on the wrath of God, or reflected upon striking examples of punishment inflicted by His justice. He was subject to such profound fear that he almost gave up the ghost."⁹¹ This testimony is very valuable in explaining the condition of Luther's soul at that time as well as afterwards.

When the lightning struck, he sustained a terrible nervous shock, which must have profoundly affected his future. This fact constrains us to reconsider his previous condition.

As we have seen, Luther was inclined to nervousness. The melancholia which always depressed him, was largely of a nervous kind. The thoughts of despondency which accompanied him, arose principally from an unhealthy psychological substratum. It appears that this constitutional evil was in part the result of hereditary oneration. The excitable temperament of his mother, who, on one occasion, chastised him until he bled on account of a nut, may have been transmitted to the son. From his father he had inherited not only tenacity of purpose, perseverance, an indefatigable zest for work, and energy in the pursuit of his aims, but also a conspicuous

⁹⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, I, p. 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

irritability concerning his own ideas and contradictions on the part of others.

It is related of his father that he struck a peasant dead in a quarrel at Möhra, in the period preceding his removal to Eisleben and thence to Mansfeld. He beat his adversary so violently with a harness—although he had not intended to kill him—that the man succumbed to the blow. The earliest mention of this homicide is made not two hundred years after the event, as has been maintained, but during the very life-time of Martin Luther; it is publicly averred in print three times by George Witzel (Wicel), a well-informed contemporary, who had formerly been a Lutheran, but afterwards, from 1533 to 1538, functioned as a Catholic priest at Eisleben. The charge of this polemical writer was never denied by Martin Luther. Nor has one word in contradiction to it been uttered by any of his contemporary friends and literary defenders. It was only at a later date that objections were voiced by Luther's friends. According to the Protestant historian, Johann Karl Seideman (1859), "the contention, which has ever and anon been revived, is decided by the testimony of Wicel."⁹²

When, furthermore, his father became "thoroughly enraged," as Luther himself puts it, at his son's unexpected and hasty entrance into the monastery; when the father, somewhat reconciled, attended the first Mass of his son at Erfurt and became infuriated at his son on account of his violated paternal right; and when, finally, Martin Luther, mindful of his treatment at home, indulged in the exaggerated expression that his parents had driven him into the monastery by the bad treatment which they accorded him;⁹³ then, indeed, the character of John Luther appears sufficiently sanguine to favor the assumption that the son inherited this characteristic from his father. The most recent Protestant biographer of Luther describes the father as possessing a sanguinary temperament.

Under these conditions the terrible shock which Martin sustained when the thunderbolt felled him to the ground, was bound to produce incurable results in one whose very constitution was neurotic.

Medical authorities tell us that, as a rule, neither time nor medical skill can completely master the effects of such a nervous shock in

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 16. F. Falk, *Alte Zeugnisse über Luthers Vater und die Möhraer*, in *Hist.-pol. Blätter*, Vol. CXX (1897), pp. 415-425.

⁹³ Erlangen, ed., LXI, p. 274 (=Tischbreden, Weimar); Mathesius, *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 235.

the case of neurotics. Recent experiences of those who sustained shell-shock in the World War confirm this conclusion. The former malady of nervous fear usually attained a degree that was beyond control. And even where there was no predisposition, incurable results often supervened. We are constrained, therefore, to regard Luther, after the thunderbolt had driven him into the monastery, as a monk who was afflicted with an extreme case of "nerves" and deserved commiseration; as one who, even in his subsequent career, often was sorely tried by suffering. We are able to comprehend his complaints about the states of fear with which he was seized both during his monastic life and after he had abandoned it, and which he compares with the genuine death agony.

The Augustinians of Erfurt did not perceive this state of affairs. They were too happy at the reception of a new member whose talents for preaching and teaching were so promising. They attached great importance to the reports of the candidate concerning his call from Heaven. A scholarly member of the Order, John Nathin, professor of theology in the *studium generale* of the Augustinians at Erfurt, said at that time to the nuns at Mühlhausen that Luther had entered the monastery like another Paul, miraculously converted by Christ.⁹⁴ In later years he spoke of the antagonist of the Church in a different language, saying, e. g., that "the spirit of apostasy had descended upon Luther," i. e., he had evolved his doctrine under the influence of the devil.⁹⁵ There were other brethren of the Order who could not understand his peculiarities. They afterwards said superstitiously to John Cochläus, his celebrated opponent, that young Luther must have had intercourse with the devil. Others, again, regarded him as an epileptic.⁹⁶ His epileptic or seemingly epileptic attacks in the choir will receive more detailed attention in the sequel.

It did not take long before strange stories began to be told of Luther's tragic resolve to enter the monastery. Thus Mathesius reports that the sudden death of a dear companion who had been stabbed, had frightened Luther quite as much as the thunderbolt, so that he entered the monastery startled at the wrath of God and the Last Judgment. In his brief reference to this matter, Melanchthon says

⁹⁴ Grisar, *Luther*, I, p. 4, quoted from Dungersheim.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 353.

that Luther at that time lost a dear friend, who perished in an accident. According to Oldecop, that friend was "suffocated" by lightning at his side. Ludwig von Seckendorff asserts in his History of Lutheranism (1692), on the authority of Bavarus' manuscripts (1548 sqq.), that the name of Luther's friend who died a sudden death was Alexius or Alexis. It is probable, however, that the name was formed from that of St. Alexius, on whose feastday Luther entered the monastery. Of the other circumstances mentioned, only one appears to be based on certain evidence, namely, that a friend of Luther died rather suddenly in 1505. The public records of Erfurt are silent concerning any murder, although they note that one of the students who was to be promoted to the master's degree with Luther became seized of a severe sickness during the days of the examinations and soon after passed away. Probably this event had a terrifying effect upon Luther. Yet it is striking that Luther himself never makes mention of this comrade whom death carried off so suddenly.⁹⁷ He is conscious only of his own danger during the storm and of his sudden vow. Somewhat later an epidemic in Thuringia and Erfurt claimed for its victims two students of Luther's acquaintance. This fact did not, however, influence his resolve. The pestilence spread even after he had taken up his abode with the Augustinians. The tradition of Luther's resolution to become a monk has been correctly preserved by Crotus Rubeanus, who had befriended Luther in his youth. He writes on October 16, 1519, basing his statement on Luther's own words: "While you returned from your parents, a heavenly stroke of lightning dashed you to the ground before the city of Erfurt like another Paul, and drove you into the monastery of the Augustinians."⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Scheel, I, p. 246.

⁹⁸ *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 208.

CHAPTER II

LUTHER'S FIRST YEARS IN THE MONASTERY

I. NOVITIATE, PROFESSION, FIRST MASS

The completion of a year's novitiate was the first obligation incumbent on the new monk. During this probationary period he was not permitted to study. Prayer, pious reading, labor and penances, service in the choir, and mastering the rules and life of the Order occupied his time. For this purpose the novices were assigned to the direction of an elder monk. Luther was placed under an experienced novice-master whom he praised in later years as a wise and sympathetic religious. The master of novices explained to him the statutes of the Order, which John Staupitz, at that time superior of the entire congregation, had composed in 1504 on the basis of the old constitutions, adapted with wise discretion to the needs of the age. They were detailed and precise, but tolerated many dispensations in the monastic observance. The master of novices also saw to it that the young novice entrusted to his care diligently read the Bible.

The statutes enjoined upon all the duty of "reading the Bible with fervor, to hear it read with devotion, and to learn it with assiduity." To hold that the Sacred Scriptures were not in the hands of the faithful, even of the pious, in the days when Luther was a youth, is a wide-spread error. In the case of Luther himself, who afterwards rendered this statement current, there was not a day "on which the Word of the Scriptures was not perceived abundantly by ear and intellect. It came to be a permanent companion, a monitor and comforter, a judge and a benefactor."¹ From that day a pronounced inclination towards the Bible began to take hold of him.

Besides the Bible, the young novice joyfully saturated his mind with the writings of St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, those profound and sympathetic teachers of the Middle Ages. His spiritual director understood how to comfort and guide the novice, who at

¹ Scheel, *M. Luther*, II, 2 ed., p. 2.