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Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
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Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
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Luther and the Reformation: The Life-Springs of Our Liberties

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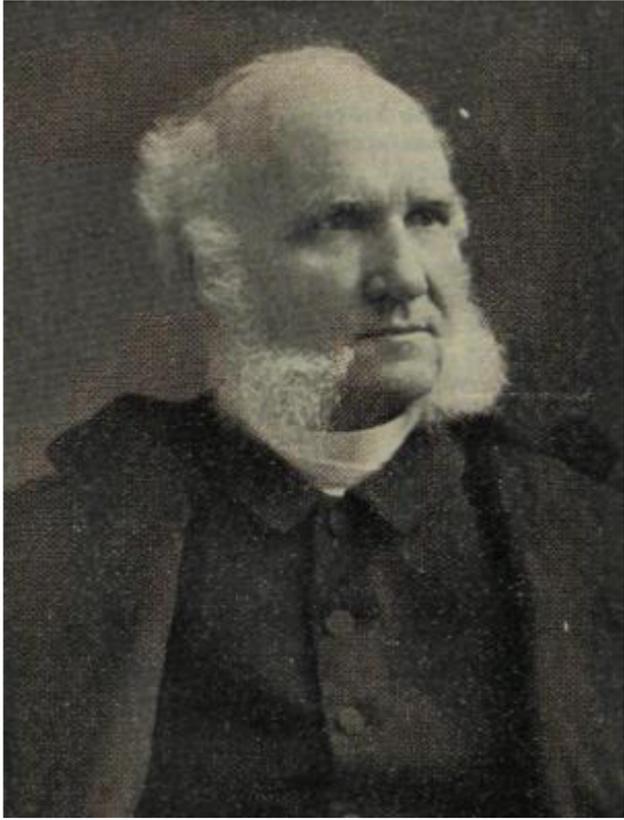
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PREFACE.

The first part of this book presents the studies of the Author in preparing a Memorial Oration delivered in the city of New York, November 10, 1883, on the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. The second part presents his studies in a like preparation for certain Discourses delivered in the city of Philadelphia at the Bi-Centennial of the founding of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There was no intention, in either case, to make a book, however small in size. But the utterances given on these occasions having been solicited for publication in permanent shape for common use, and the two parts being intimately related in the exhibition of the most vital [Pg 4]springs of our religious and civil freedom, it has been concluded to print these studies entire and together in this form, in hope that the same may satisfy all such desires and serve to promote truth and righteousness.

Throughout the wide earth there has been an unexampled stir with regard to the life and work of the great Reformer, and these presentations may help to show it no wild craze, but a just and rational recognition of God's wondrous providence in the constitution of our modern world.

And to Him who was, and who is, and who is to come, the God of all history and grace, be the praise, the honor, and the glory, world without end!

Thanksgiving Day, 1883.

LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION.

A rare spectacle has been spreading itself before the face of heaven during these last months.

Millions of people, of many nations and languages, on both sides of the ocean, simultaneously engaged in celebrating the birth of a mere man, four hundred years after he was born, is an unwonted scene in our world.

Unprompted by any voice of authority, unconstrained by any command of power, we join in the wide-ranging demonstration.

In the happy freedom which has come to us among the fruits of that man's labors we bring our humble chaplet to grace the memory of one whose worth and services there is scarce capacity to tell.

Human Greatness.

Some men are colossal. Their characters are so massive, and their position in history [Pg 10]is so towering, that other men can hardly get high enough to take their measure. An overruling Providence so endows and places them that they affect the world, turn its course into new channels, impart to it a new spirit, and leave their impress on all the ages after them. Even humble individuals, without titles, crowns, or physical armaments, have wrought themselves into the very life of the race and built their memorials in the characteristics of epochs.

History tells of a certain Saul of Tarsus, a lone and friendless man, stripped of all earthly possessions, forced into battle with a universe of enthroned superstition, encompassed by perils which threatened every hour to dissolve him, who, pressing his way over mountains of difficulty and through seas of suffering, and dying a martyr to his cause, gave to Europe a living God and to the nations another and an everlasting King.

We likewise read of a certain Christopher Columbus, brooding in lowly retirement upon the structure of the physical universe, ridiculed, frowned on by the learned, repulsed by court after court, yet

launching out into the unknown seas to find an undiscovered hemisphere, and opening the way for persecuted Liberty to cradle the grand empire of popular [Pg 11]rule amid the golden hills of a new and independent continent.

And in this category stands the name of Martin Luther.

He was a poor, plain man, only a doctor of divinity, without place except as a teacher in a university, without power or authority except in the convictions and qualities of his own soul, and with no implements save his Bible, tongue, and pen; but with him the ages divided and human history took a new departure.

Two pre-eminent revolutions have passed over Europe since the beginning of the Christian era. The one struck the Rome and rule of emperors; the other struck the Rome and rule of popes. The one brought the Dark Ages; the other ended them. The one overwhelmed the dominion of the Cæsars; the other humiliated a more than imperial dominion reared in Cæsar's place. Alaric, Rhadagaisus, Genseric, and Attila were the chief instruments and embodiment of the first; *Martin Luther* was the chief instrument and embodiment of the second. The one wrought bloody desolation; the other brought blessed renovation, under which humanity has bloomed its happiest and its best.

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The Papacy.

Since Phocas decreed the bishop of Rome the supreme head of the Church on earth there had grown up strange power which claimed to decide beyond appeal respecting everybody and everything—from affairs of empire to the burial of the dead, from the thoughts of men here to the estate of their souls hereafter—and to command the anathemas of God upon any who dared to question its authority. It held itself divinely ordained to give crowns and to take them away. Kings and potentates were its vassals, and nations had to defer to it and serve it, on pain of *interdicts* which smote whole realms with gloom and desolation, prostrated all the industries of life, locked up the very graveyards against decent sepulture, and consigned peoples and generations to an irresistible damnation. It was omnipres-

ent and omnipotent in civilized Europe. Its clergy and orders swarmed in every place, all sworn to guard it at every point on peril of their souls, and themselves held sacred in person and retreat from all reach of law for any crime save lack of fealty to the great autocracy. [1] The money, the armies, the lands, [Pg 13]the legislatures, the judges, the executives, the police, the schools, with the whole ecclesiastical administration, reaching even to the most private affairs of life, were under its control. And at its centre sat its absolute dictator, unanswerable and supreme, the alleged Vicar of God on earth, for whom to err was deemed impossible.

Think of a power which could force King Henry IV., the heir of a long line of emperors, to strip himself of every mark of his station, put on the linen dress of a penitent, walk barefooted through the winter's snow to the pope's castle at Canossa, and there to wait three days at its gates, unbefriended, unfed, and half perishing with cold and hunger, till all but the alleged Vicar of Jesus Christ were moved with pity for his miseries as he stood imploring the tardy clemency of Hildebrand, which was almost as humiliating in its bestowal as in its reservation.

Think of a power which could force the English king, Henry II., to walk three miles of a flinty road, with bare and bleeding feet, to Canterbury, to be flogged from one end of the [Pg 14]church to the other by the beastly monks, and then forced to spend the whole night in supplications to the spirit of an obstinate, perjured, and defiant archbishop, whom four of his over-zealous knights, without his orders, had murdered, and whose inner garments, when he was stripped to receive his shroud, were found alive with vermin!

Think of a power which, in defiance of the sealed safe-conduct of the empire, could seize John Huss, one of the worthiest and most learned men of his time, and burn him alive in the presence of the emperor!

Think of a power which, by a single edict, caused the deliberate murder of more than fifty thousand men in the Netherlands alone!

Efforts at Reform.

To restrain and humble this gigantic power was the desideratum of ages. For two hundred years had men been laboring to curb and tame it. From theologians and universities, from kings and emperors, from provinces and synods, from general councils, and even the College of Cardinals—in every name of right, virtue, and religion—appeal after appeal and solemn effort after effort were made to reform the Roman court and free the world from the [Pg 15]terrible oppression. Wars on wars were waged; provinces on provinces were deluged with blood; coalitions, bound by sacred oaths, were formed against the giant tyranny. And yet the hierarchy managed to maintain its assumptions and to overwhelm all remedial attempts. Whether made by individuals or secular powers, by councils or governments, the result was the same. The Pontificate still triumphed, with its claims unabridged, its dominion unbroken, its scandals uncured.

A general council sat at Constance to reform the clergy in head and members. It managed to rid itself of three popes between whom Christendom was divided, when the emperor moved that the work of reform proceed. But the cardinals said, How can the Church reform itself without a head? So they elected a pope who was to lead reform. Yet a day had hardly passed before they found themselves in a traitor's power, who reaffirmed all the acts of the iniquitous John XXIII., who had just been deposed for his crimes, and presently endowed him with a cardinal's hat!

When this pope, Martin V., died, the cardinals thought to remedy their previous mistake. They would secure their reforms before electing a pope. So they erected themselves into [Pg 16]a standing senate, without which no future pope could act. And they each took solemn oath, before God and all angels, by St. Peter and all apostles, by the holy sacrament of Christ's body and blood, and by all the powers that be, if elected, to conform to these arrangements and to use all the rights and prerogatives of the sublime position to put in force the reforms conceded to be necessary.

But what are oaths and fore-pledges to candidates greedy for office? The tickets which elected the new pope had hardly been counted when he absolved himself from all previous obligations, disowned the senate of cardinals he had helped to erect, began his

career with violence and robbery, plundered the cities and states of Italy, religiously violated all compacts but those which favored his absolute supremacy, brought to none effect the reform Council of Basle, deceived Germany with his specious and hollow concessions, averted the improvements he had sworn to make, and by his perfidy and cunning managed to retain in subordination to the old régime nearly the whole of that Christendom which he had outraged!

In spite of the efforts of centuries, this super-imperial power held by the throat a struggling world.

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To break that gnarled and bony hand, which locked up everything in its grasp; to bring down the towering altitude of that olden tyranny, whose head was lifted to the clouds; to strike from the soul its clanking chains and set the suffering nations free; to champion the inborn rights of afflicted humanity, and conquer the ignorance and imposture which had governed for a thousand years,—constituted the work and office of the man the four hundredth anniversary of whose birth half the civilized world is celebrating to-day.

Time of the Reformation.

It has been said that when this tonsured Augustinian came upon the stage almost any brave man might have brought about the impending changes. The Reformers before the Reformation, though vanquished, had indeed not lived in vain. The European peoples were outgrowing feudal vassalage, and moving toward nationalization and separation between the secular and ecclesiastical powers. Travel, exploration, and discovery had introduced new subjects of human interest and contemplation. Schools of law, medicine, and liberal education were being established and largely attended. The common mind was losing faith in the pro [Pg 18]fessions and teachings of the old hierarchy. Free inquiry was overturning the dominion of authority in matters of thought and opinion. The intellect of man was beginning to recover from the nightmare of centuries. A mightier power than the sword had sprung up in the art of printing.

In a word, the world was gravid with a new era. But it was not so clear who would be able to bring it safely to the birth.

There were living at the time many eminent men who might be thought of for this office had it not been assigned to Luther. Reuchlin, Erasmus, Hütten, Sickingen, and others have been named, but the list might be extended, and yet no one be found endowed with the qualities to accomplish the work that was needed and that was accomplished.

Frederick the Wise.

The Saxon Elector, Frederick the Wise, was the worthiest, most popular, and most influential ruler then in Europe. He could have been emperor in place of Charles V. had he consented to be. The history of the world since his time might have been greatly different had he yielded to the general desire. His principles, his attainments, his wisdom, and his [Pg 19]spirit were everything to commend him. He founded the University of Wittenberg in hope that it would produce preachers who would leave off the cold subtleties of Scholasticism and the uncertainties of tradition, and give discourses that would possess the nerve and power of the Gospel of God. He sought out the best and most pious men for his advisers. He was the devoted friend of learning, truth, and virtue. By his prudence and foresight in Church and State he helped the Reformation more than any other man then in power. Had it not been for him perhaps Luther could not have succeeded. But it was not in the nature of things for the noble Elector to give us such a Reformation as that led by his humble subject. It is useless to speculate as to what the Reformation might have become in his hands; but it certainly could never have become what we rejoice to know it was, while the probabilities are that we would now be fighting the battles which Luther fought for us three and a half centuries ago.

Reuchlin.

Reuchlin was a learned and able man, and deeply conscious of the need of reform. When the Greek Argyrophylos heard him read and [Pg 20]explain Thucydides, he exclaimed, "Greece has retired

beyond the Alps." He was the first Hebrew scholar of Germany, and served to restore the Hebrew Scriptures to the knowledge of the Church. He held that popes could err and be deceived. He had no faith in human abnegations for reconciliation with God. He saw no need for hierarchical mediations, and discredited the doctrine of Purgatory and masses for the dead. He bravely defended the cause of learning against the ignorant monks, whom he hated and held up to merciless ridicule. He was a brilliant and persuasive orator. He was an associate and counselor of kings. He gave Melanchthon to the Reformation, and did much to promote it. Luther recognized in him a great light, of vast service to the Gospel in Germany. But Reuchlin could never have accomplished the Reformation. The vital principles of it were not sufficiently rooted in him. He was a humanist, whose sympathies went with the republic of letters, not with the wants of the soul and the needs of the people. When he got into trouble he appealed to the pope. And though he lived to see Luther in agonizing conflict with the hierarchy of Rome, he refrained from making common cause with him, and died in connection [Pg 21]with the unreformed Church, whose doctrines he had questioned and whose orders he had so unsparingly ridiculed.

Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Erasmus was a notable man, great in talent and of great service in preparing the way for the Reformation. He turned reviving learning to the study of the Word. He produced the first, and for a long time the only, critical edition of the New Testament in the original, to which he added a Latin translation and notes. He paraphrased the Epistle to the Romans—that great Epistle on which above all, the Reformation moved. Though once an inmate of a monastery, he abhorred the monks and exposed them with terrible severity. He had more friends, reputation, and influence than perhaps any other private man in Europe. And he was deep in the spirit of opposition to the scandalous condition of things in the Church. But he never could have given us the Reformation. He said all honest men sided with Luther, and as an honest man his place would have been by Luther's side; but he was too great a coward. "If I should join Luther," said he, "I could only perish with him, and I do not mean to

run my neck into [Pg 22]the halter. Let popes and emperors settle matters." – "Your Holiness says, Come to Rome; you might as well tell a crab to fly. If I write calmly against Luther, I shall be called lukewarm; if I write as he does, I shall stir up a hornet's nest.... Send for the best and wisest men in Christendom, and follow their advice." – "Reduce the dogmas necessary to be believed to the smallest possible number. On other points let every one believe as he likes. Having done this, quietly correct the abuses of which the world justly complains."

So wrote Erasmus to the pope and to the archbishop of Mayence. Such was his ideal of reformation—a thing as impossible to bring into practical effect as its realization would have been absurd. It is easy to tell a crab to fly, but will he do it? As well propose to convert infallibility with a fable of Æsop as to count on bringing regeneration to the hierarchy by such counsels.

The waters were too deep and the storms too fierce for the vacillating Erasmus. He did some excellent service in his way, but all his counsels and ideas failed, as they deserved. Once the idol of Europe, he died a defeated, crushed, and miserable man. "Hercules could not fight two monsters at once," said he, "while [Pg 23] I, poor wretch! have lions, cerberuses, cancers, scorpions, every day at my sword's point.... There is no rest for me in my age, unless I join Luther; and that I cannot, for I cannot accept his doctrines. Sometimes I am stung with desire to avenge my wrongs; but my heart says, Will you in your spleen raise hand against your mother who begot you at the font? I cannot do it. Yet, because I bade monks remember their vows; because I told persons to leave off their wranglings and read the Bible; because I told popes and cardinals to look to the apostles and be more like them,—the theologians say I am their enemy."

Thus in sorrow and in clouds Erasmus passed away, as would the entire Reformation in his hands.

Ulric von Hütten.

Ulric von Hütten, soldier and knight, equally distinguished in letters and in arms, and called the Demosthenes of Germany, was a

zealous friend of reform. He had been in Rome, and sharpened his darts from what he there saw to hurl them with effect. All the powers of satire and ridicule he brought to bear upon the pillars of the Papacy. He helped to shake the edifice, and his plans and spirit might have [Pg 24]served to pull it down had he been able to bring Europe to his mind; but it would only have been to bury society in its ruins.

Ulrich Zwingli.

Ulrich Zwingli is ranked among Reformers, and he was energetic in behalf of reform. But he fell a victim to his own mistakes, and with him would have perished the Reformation also had it depended upon him. Even had he lived, his radical and rationalistic spirit, his narrow and fiery patriotism, his shallow religious experience, and his eagerness to rest the cause of Reformation on civil authority and the sword, would have wrecked it with nine-tenths of the European peoples.

Melanchthon.

Philip Melanchthon was a better and a greater man, and did the Reformation a far superior service. Luther would have been much disabled without him, and Germany has awarded him the title of its "Preceptor." But no Reformation could have come if the fighting or directing of its battles had been left to him. Even with the great Luther ever by his side, he could hardly get loose [Pg 25]from Rome and retain his wholeness, and when he was loose could hardly maintain his legs upon the ground that had been won.

Calvin.

John Calvin was a man of great learning and ability. Marked has been his influence on the theology and government of a large portion of the Reformed churches. But the Reformation was twelve years old before he came into it. It had to exist already ere there could be a Calvin, while his repeated flights to avoid danger prove how inadequate his courage was for such unflinching duty as ren-

dered Luther illustrious. He was a cold, hard, ascetic aristocrat at best, more cynical, stern, and tyrannical than brave. The organization for the Church and civil government which he gave to Geneva was quite too intolerant and inquisitorial for safe adoption in general or to endure the test of the true Gospel spirit. Under a régime which burnt Servetus for heresy, threw men into prison for reading novels, hung and beheaded children for improper behavior toward parents, whipped and banished people for singing songs, and dealt with others as public blasphemers if they said a word against the Reformers or failed to go to church, the cause [Pg 26]of the Reformation could never have commanded acceptance by the nations, or have survived had it been received. The famous "Blue Laws" of the New England colonies have had to be given up as a scandal upon enlightened civilization; but they were largely transcribed from Calvin's code and counsels, including even the punishing of witches. For the last two hundred years the Calvinistic peoples have been reforming back from Calvin's rules and spirit, either to a better foundation for the perpetuation and honor of the Church or to a rationalistic skepticism which lets go all the distinctive elements of the genuine Christian Creed—the natural reaction from the hard and overstrained severity of a legalistic style of Christianity.

With all the great service Calvin has rendered to theological science and church discipline, there was an unnatural sombreness about him, which linked him rather with the Middle Ages and the hierarchical rule than with the glad, free spirit of a wholesome Christian life. At twenty-seven he had already drawn up a formula of doctrine and organization which he never changed and to which he ever held. There was no development either in his life or in his ideas. The [Pg 27]evangelic elements of his system he found ready to his hand, as thought out by Luther and the German theologians. They did not originate or grow with him. And had the Reformation depended upon him it could never have become a success. So too with any others that might be named.

Luther the Chosen Instrument.

We may not limit Providence. The work was to be done. Every interest of the world and of the kingdom of God demanded it. And if

there had been no Luther at hand, some one else would have been raised up to serve in his place. But there *was* a Luther, and, as far as human insight can determine, he was the only man on earth competent to achieve the Reformation. And he it was who did achieve it.

Looked at in advance, perhaps no one would have thought of him for such an office. He was so humbly born, so lowly in station, so destitute of fortune, and withal so honest a Papist, that not the slightest tokens presented to mark him out as the chosen instrument to grapple with the magnitudinous tyranny by which Europe was enthralled.

But "God hath chosen the weak things of [Pg 28]the world to confound the things that are mighty." Moses was the son of a slave. The founder of the Hebrew monarchy was a shepherd-boy. The Redeemer-King of the world was born in a stable and reared in the family of a village carpenter. And we need not wonder that the hero-prophet of the modern ages was the son of a poor toiler for his daily bread, and compelled to sing upon the street for alms to keep body and soul together while struggling for an education.

It has been the common order of Providence that the greatest lights and benefactors of the race, the men who rose the highest above the level of their kind and stood as beacons to the world, were not such as would have been thought of in advance for the mighty services which render their names immortal. And that the master spirit of the great Reformation was no exception all the more surely identifies that marvelous achievement as the work of an overruling God.

Luther's Origin.

Luther was a Saxon German—a German of the Germans—born of that blood out of which, with but few exceptions, have sprung the ruling powers of the West since the last [Pg 29]of the old Roman emperors. He came out of the bosom of the freshest, strongest, and hardiest peoples then existing—the direct descendants of those wild Cimbrian and Teutonic tribes who, even in their heathenism, were the most virtuous, brave, and true of all the Gentiles.

Nor was he the offspring of enfeebled, gouty, aristocratic blood. He was the son of the sinewy and sturdy yeomanry. Though tradition reports one of his remote ancestors in something of imperial place among the chieftains of the semi-savage tribes from which he was descended, when the period of the Reformation came his family was in like condition with that of the house of David when the Christ was born. His father and grandfather and great-grandfather, he says himself, were true Thuringian peasants.

Luther's Early Training.

In the early periods of the mediæval Church her missionaries came to these fiery warriors of the North and followed the conquests of Charlemagne, to teach them that they had souls, that there is a living and all-knowing God at whose judgment-bar all must one day stand to give account, and that it would [Pg 30]then be well with the believing, brave, honest, true, and good, and ill with cowards, profligates, and liars. It was a simple creed, but it took fast hold on the Germanic heart, to show itself in sturdy power in the long after years.

This creed, in unabated force, descended to Luther's parents, and lived and wrought in them as a controlling principle. They were also strict to render it the same in their children.

Hans Luther was a hard and stern disciplinarian, unsparing in the enforcement of every virtue.

Margaret Luther [2] was noted among her neighbors as a model woman, and was so earnest in her inculcations of right that she preferred to see her son bleed beneath the rod rather than that he should do a questionable thing even respecting so small a matter as a nut.

From his childhood Luther was thus trained [Pg 31]and attempered to fear God, reverence truth and honesty, and hate hypocrisy and lies. Possibly his parents were severer with him than was necessary, but it was well for him, as the prospective prophet of a new era, to learn absolute obedience to those who were to him the representatives of that divine authority which he was to teach the world supremely to obey.