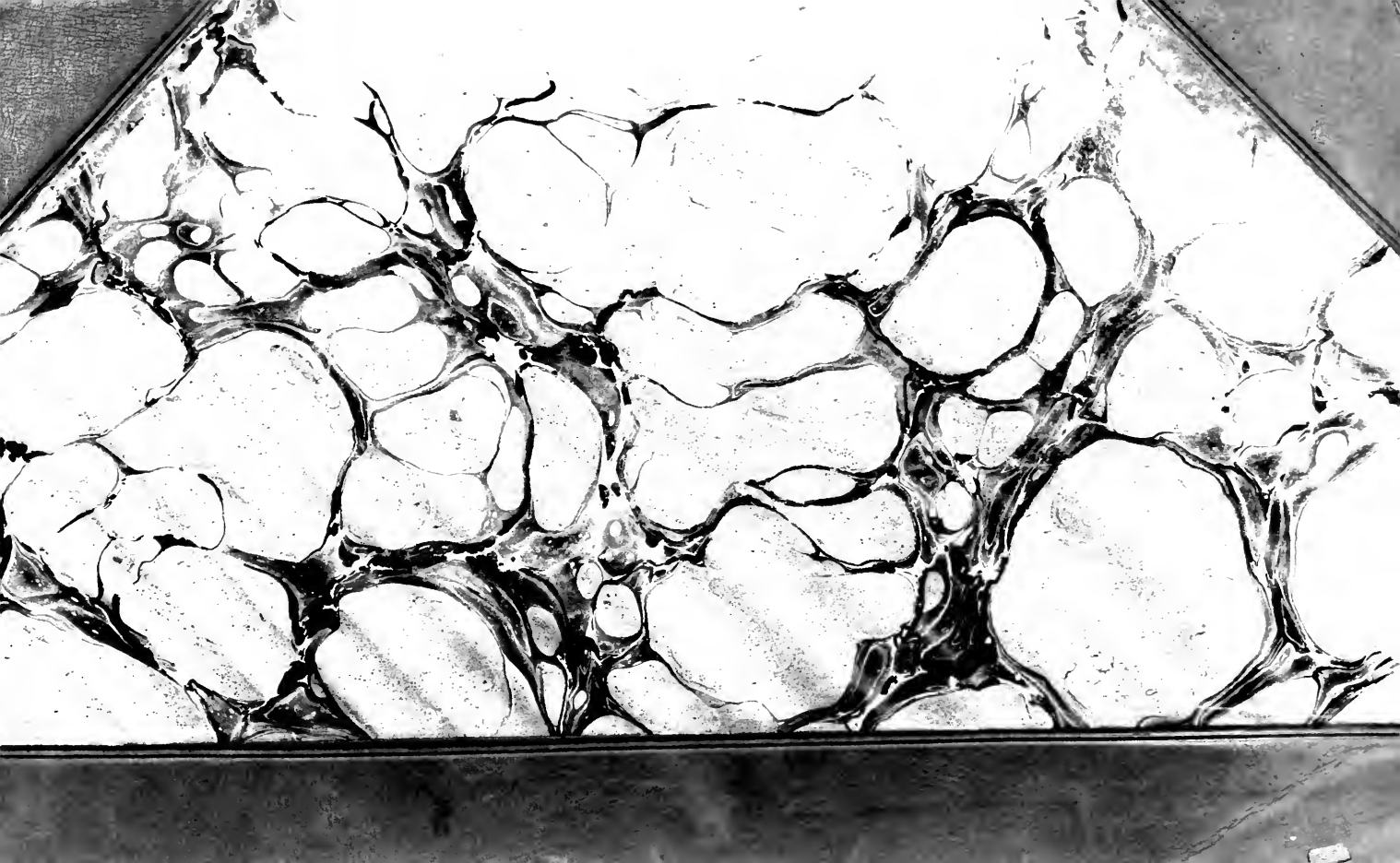

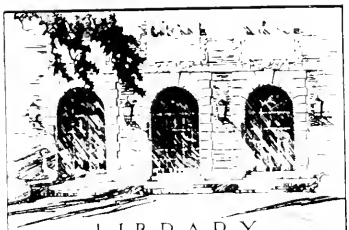

The Luther Commemoration and the Church of England

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1883

BY

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THE LUTHER COMMEMORATION AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

"As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."—1 PETER ii. 16.

IT is known, probably, to most here present that this Sunday is being observed throughout Protestant Germany as the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the birthday of Luther, who was born at Eisleben, in Saxony, on November 10th, 1483. No doubt the memory of the great reformer comes home with greater intensity of sympathy to the German than to any other European people. For he is emphatically the German national hero; he has been the inspiring principle of their later political and ecclesiastical freedom; he was the virtual creator of their literary language by his translation of the Bible; some of his hymns have all the might of popular national ballads, and awaken undying enthusiasm on all critical occasions when the hearts of assembled multitudes are deeply stirred.

The strength and the weakness of the entire people are reflected in the personal character of the reformer, vehement and impassioned, yet child-like in

religion; ardent for the satisfaction of the spiritual wants of the heart and exercised with deep moral problems, yet coarse in his tone, and easily open to the charge of irreverence; possessed with inflexible determination and fearless courage, yet tender in all the relations of domestic life; simple in his habits and proof against all the allurements of luxury; confessing a genuine pleasure in the beauties of outward nature, in music, in social intercourse; not a saint of either the ascetic or the pietistic type, but an ardent upholder of Christian liberty and an indomitable controversialist in questions of religious faith and practice.

But the commemoration is being held among many English-speaking communities of the Western continent, notably by many of our own Nonconformist societies. Is there any reason why the Church of England should refuse to take any notice of such a commemoration of a great name in Church history? Can the University of Oxford, if she wishes to prove herself alive and sensitive to the movements of thought and feeling in the contemporary religious world, be content to preserve a cold and dignified silence on such an occasion? I answer unhesitatingly, No. For whatever opinion we may form as to the personal character of Luther, and whatever judgment we may pronounce on some of the most signal acts of his career, which friends and foes have combined to cover with praise or blame, or apology or invective, history bears witness that Luther rather than any other leading reformer was the mightiest agent in the doctrinal Reformation of the Church of the sixteenth century, and the Church of England

as a Reformed Church, when it shook off subjection to the See of Rome as the supreme central authority of Christendom, owed more to Lutheran than to any other continental influences.

The first English reformers were disciples of Luther, rather than of Zwingli or Calvin. The distinctly new features, which on the revision of the public services of the Church were added to the sacramental offices, were derived from Lutheran sources. In the office for Holy Communion they come from "the Consultation" of Archbishop Hermann, drawn up for his diocese of Cologne, by Melancthon under Luther's superintendence; in the office for Baptism they came more immediately from Luther's own office, composed for the use of Nuremberg. Many of the Articles are either taken *verbatim* or slightly modified from the Confessions of Augsburg and Würtemberg. Theologians who look back with fond regret to the mediæval Church may please themselves with the verbal argument that the Church of England is not styled Protestant in any of her official formularies, but if we look to realities, and not mere words, the Church of England is Protestant, since the historical origin of that word implies that she protests against the errors of doctrine and practice prevalent in the unreformed Churches, which hold to the Roman obedience, and though the English and German Reformations took a very different outward form, owing to the diverse political circumstances of the two nations, yet Luther was the ruling spirit of the common Protestantism of the two movements. And in the pulpit of the University of Oxford it may be allowable to

recall the fact that Oxford had very early been affected by the influence of Luther's writings. So early as 1521, i.e., only four years after Luther had begun the great controversy by the publication of his Theses on the church door of Wittenberg, Archbishop Warham, the Chancellor, wrote to Cardinal Wolsey, telling him that he had received information from Oxford that "divers of that University were infected with the heresies of Luther, and of others of that sort, having among them a great number of books of the said perverse doctrine. The lewdness of one or two cankered members had induced no small number of young uncircumspect fools to give ear unto them."[1]

A complaint was made by Leyland, Bishop of Lincoln, that a certain monk, Dr. Rowham, in preaching before the University at St. Peter's-in-the-East, "had maintained certain opinions of Luther, comforting erroneous persons in their opinions, saying, 'Fear not them that kill the body.'" Wolsey summoned a conference of Oxford divines to London, who drew up a solemn condemnation of the new doctrines, which was sent down to Oxford, and publicly affixed on the dial of St. Mary's Church, facing the High Street. Curiously enough, some of the chief advocates of Lutheran views were found among the junior canons of Cardinal College, whom Wolsey himself had transplanted from Cambridge, and with them were united some of the fellows of the newly-founded Corpus Christi College.

A warm discussion on the personal character of

[1] Ellis' Original Letters. 3rd Series I. 239.

Luther arose in the University after the final settlement of the Church of England in the following century. Towards the end of the reign of James II., when under the patronage of the reigning monarch, a reaction towards the old Papal Church took place; one of the converts, Abraham Woodhead, of University College, wrote a book, entitled, "Considerations on the Spirit of Martin Luther, and the Original of the Reformation," in which he violently assailed the character of the reformer, and endeavoured thereby to disparage the Reformation, in which he had played so important a part. Woodhead was answered by no less a personage than Atterbury, then a young student of Christ Church.

After successfully vindicating the principle that the truth or falsehood of religious doctrine cannot stand or fall with the personal character of its upholders, Atterbury sums up his arguments with a remarkable sketch of Luther. "He was a man certainly of high endowments of mind and great virtues; he had a vast understanding, which raised him up to a pitch of learning unknown to the age he lived in; his knowledge in Scriptures was admirable, his elocution manly, and his way of reasoning with all the subtilty that these honest, plain truths he delivered would bear; his thoughts were bent always on great designs, and he had a resolution fitted to go through with them. The assurance of his mind was not to be shook or surprised, and that παῤῥησία of his (for I know not what else to call it) before the Diet of Worms, was such as might have become the days of the Apostles. His life was holy, and when he had leisure for retirements,

severe; his virtues active chiefly, and homiletical, not those lazy, sullen ones of the cloister. He had no ambition but in the service of God; for other things, neither his enjoyment nor wishes ever went higher than the bare conveniences of living. He was of a temper particularly averse to covetousness or any base sin; and charitable even to a fault, without respect to his own occasions. If among this crowd of virtues a failing crept in, we must remember that an Apostle himself has not been irreprovable; if in the body of his doctrine one flaw is to be seen, yet the greatest lights of the Church, and in the purest times of it were, we know, not exact in all their opinions. Upon the whole, we have certainly great reason to break out in the phrase of the prophet, and say, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings!' "

We need not adopt entirely as our own this language of Atterbury, we may be sensible that his praise is not sufficiently discriminating, and that from lack of spiritual sympathy he does not realize the theological importance of Luther's doctrine, and the intensity of the moral impulse produced by it, but it is, at all events, a manly protest against the defamation of a great name.

No doubt an Academic Society, such as is found in a University, would be naturally predisposed, in the first instance, to give its admiration and sympathy to erudite scholars, who took a less prominent part in the Reformation movement, such as Erasmus and Melancthon, rather than to the impetuous practical reorganizer of the ecclesiastical system, Luther, who

retained throughout life so much of the roughness of the Saxon peasant. It would be at once unjust and ungenerous to forget the eminent services which these great scholars, each in his measure, rendered to the cause of religious reformation.

Erasmus, by his Greek edition of the New Testament, aided in placing the sources of Christian truth in their primitive purity within the easier reach of men. But he was rather the literary than the religious Christian. With no deep theological convictions, and no strong spiritual yearnings, he was too timid and too fond of ease to enter upon the struggle which demanded a martyr's spirit; he could not brave unpopularity in breaking with the dominant system; when the crisis came he turned back from want of courage. The gentle Melancthon, with his many-sided learning, with a wider culture and greater elegance of style than his master, helped in the internal furtherance of the Reformation by his scientific methodization of doctrine. But a great social movement, whether in Church or State life, can only be effected by the iron will and intrepid courage of practical energy triumphing over opposition. Luther described himself as the rough-hewer and pioneer, Melancthon as the quiet tiller and planter, sowing and watering at his leisure. Deep learning may undermine the belief in a corrupt theology, but only an intense moral earnestness, combined with a strong practical personality, can reform a Church.

In estimating the services of Luther towards religious truth and liberty, we are under no necessity

of expressing unqualified adhesion to all his presentations of doctrine or approval of every act of his policy. For instance, we find ourselves unable both from personal conviction and from loyalty to our own Church to accept his doctrine of the manner of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The literal interpretation of the words of institution which seemed to Luther to necessitate, if we are faithful to the word of Scripture, belief in the theory of consubstantiation, is open to the same objection as the theory of transubstantiation, as implying a corporal rather than a spiritual presence, and is hard to reconcile with belief in the existence of the glorified body of Christ in heaven. And again Luther's doctrine of the universal priesthood of all Christians, which, rightly understood, is an undoubted principle of the theology of the New Testament, is at times pressed by him with such an exaggerated one-sidedness that it comes into conflict with the truth that a ministry in the Church is a Divine appointment. The officers of the Church are not only delegates and representatives of the congregation, but ambassadors of God and ministers of Christ, and the historic continuity of the ordination of ministers, though not an indispensable condition of the organization of a Christian community, is a witness to communion with the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church not lightly to be surrendered, But when these and other like reservations are made, members of the Church of England may gratefully call to mind the inestimable advantages which they, in common with the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches throughout the world,

owe to Luther for his vindication of two or three grand vital principles of Christian life.

First, we owe to Luther the revival and reassertion in its full prominence of the doctrine of justification or salvation of man by faith alone, and not on account of his own works or deservings, and thereby the restoration of peace, joy, and freedom to the Christian life. This profound spiritual truth, so dear to the troubled soul, so liable to perversion by the ungodly, was the master-thought of Luther's own personal religion, it was the point of departure for all his subsequent career of reformation. No doubt it was his manful and indignant protest against the shameless falsehood and venality of the system of indulgences, as propagated by men like Tetzel, which proved to be the spark lighting up the great fire of the Reformation; but the spiritual truth which, when realized in its full consequences, was destined to overthrow the contemporary ecclesiastical system, was that which was revealed to his consciousness in the inward experience of his monastic life at Erfurt. Distracted, then, by the torments of a self-accusing conscience, terrified by the thought of God as an angry Judge, weighed down by the contrast between his own sinfulness and the righteousness of God, he sought peace in vain by the performance of the most painful external exercises of penance. In mental agony he bemoaned his own wretchedness, and comfort came to him when the touching and simple words of one of the elder brethren of his convent, recalling to his mind the familiar words of the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," taught him that he must

believe in reference to himself that God had, through the death and passion of His Son, procured for him the forgiveness of all his sins. Then he began to perceive that this truth, that man is justified by faith without the works of the law, was the original doctrine of St. Paul and his fellow-Apostles; then he saw that so long as he was attempting to earn God's favour by his own good works, he was living in the spirit of a servant towards an exacting master, and not in that of a son towards a loving Father; then with the self-renouncing faith in the Divine promise of forgiveness, he entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and knew the joy of free and pure love. Deeper study of St. Paul's Epistles led Luther on to the fuller and more far-reaching development of this evangelical doctrine, which had been obscured and thrust out of sight by the current teaching of the Mediæval Church. Formalism there reigned supreme. A vast hierarchical ecclesiastical system had interposed itself between God and the soul of the individual man. Religion had become a service of fear. The great promise of forgiveness of sins through the mediation of Christ, of which baptism was the seal and pledge to each Christian, was lost sight of; every sin was to be confessed in all its circumstances to a priest, as wielding the authority of the Church, and absolution was to be obtained only upon the condition of the performance of certain penances, such as multiplied recitation of prayers, pilgrimages, bodily macerations; a rigid observance of external ceremonies was enforced on pain of spiritual penalties; beyond the grave were the dim mysterious sufferings of purgatory, the

relaxation of which rested only with the Supreme Ruler of the Church; external good works as the satisfaction to God for sin superseded the necessity of true contrition of heart, and faith in the all-sufficient atonement of Christ was terribly enfeebled by the doctrine that the mass was a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. The doctrine of justification by faith which Luther revived, and which our own Church has formally accepted in her 11th Article, broke through this hard bondage and tyranny, and pointed the way to Christian freedom and joy. It brought men into direct personal relation with God, and allayed the fears of a self-accusing conscience, conscious of sin, by directing men to place an absolute trust in the certainty of God's promise of forgiveness of sins to the penitent and believing soul. Faith in the promises of God as declared to mankind in Christ Jesus the Lord, and, applicable therefore to each individual, was proclaimed as the leading principle of the Gospel. Sacraments, ordinances, ceremonies, were all subordinate to this. This faith was not a mere subjective consciousness of forgiveness, but was based upon the word and promise of God. The Christian life was no longer to be regarded as a laborious effort to stand right in the sight of God, by a perpetual course of external good works, it was a joyful sense of God's reconciling love, which manifested itself in the performance of all duties towards God and towards man. Of course, it was inevitable that this doctrine of justification by faith only should be exposed to the charge of antinomianism and be thought prejudicial to morality.

It was capable of being abused by fanatical libertines. In handling it there was especial need of the apostolic warning that Christians should not "use their liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."

Luther, though he may occasionally in the heat of controversy have used exaggerated language in depreciation of legal righteousness, is most careful in his formal discussion of the doctrine to guard it against perversion. This caution is nowhere more emphatically displayed than in his famous treatise on Christian liberty, written in 1520. Hear his own clear language: "Although the Christian man is inwardly, as to his spirit, fully and abundantly justified by faith, yet he still remains in this mortal life upon earth, in which he must of necessity govern his own body, and have intercourse with men. Now here begin good works. Here is no sitting down at ease. Here certainly begins a care that the body, by fastings, watchings, labours, and other moderate disciplines, be exercised and brought into subjection to the spirit, so that it may obey, and be conformable to the inward man and to faith, and may not rebel or wander. But these works are not to be done with this opinion, that by them any one may become righteous before God, but with this view only, that the body may be brought into subjection and purified from its lusts, so that its eye might never be so much as turned, but with a desire to avoid concupiscence. We do not reject good works, but, on the contrary, we strenuously maintain and teach them, for we do not condemn the works for themselves, but for that impiously

added false opinion of seeking righteousness by them. Behold, this is the true Christian life; here is the true faith which worketh by love, that is, which goes forth with joy and delight in the work of perfect freedom; it serves its neighbours freely and spontaneously, because its own treasure is richly filled with the overflowing abundance which it possesses by faith."

The true relation between faith and works is illustrated by the Scriptural comparison of the tree and the fruits. "Good pious works never make a good pious man, but a pious man does good works, for it is evident that the fruits do not bear the tree, nor do trees grow upon the fruits, but the trees bear the fruit, and the fruits grow upon the trees; the trees must be before the fruits. He who will do good works must therefore not begin with the works, but with the person who is to do the works."

Modern theology, perhaps not unnaturally, recoils from the hard scholastic theories of imputed or infused righteousness with which the doctrine of justification by faith was encumbered in the progress of the Reformation controversy; yet in the long-run, in prospect of the hour of death and the day of judgment, we all practically confess that our own good works cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment. High Churchmen and Low Churchmen, Churchmen and Nonconformists, sing with fervour the now classic hymn,—

> "In my hands no price I bring,
> Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

All our life, we feel, ought to be one long protracted

act of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It has been said that although the evangelical doctrine is rejected by the Roman Church, it nevertheless lives within her pale as a hidden esoteric tradition, and is practically embraced by thousands, in place of the outward tradition which in theory is maintained. It is remarked by Martensen [2] that the doctrine is virtually implied in the old custom of the Roman Church, clearly symbolical, of holding a crucifix before the dying. For what else could this custom mean, except that the man now in the solemn hour of death must rely, not upon his own merits, not upon the merits of the saints, but solely upon the crucified Christ as the only Mediator?

The doctrine of free grace was the primitive doctrine of St. Paul. It did not stand in such prominence in the succeeding centuries, because theology was then more objective, and concerned itself rather with establishing orthodox belief, touching the Godhead and the Person of Christ.

When the system of the mediæval Church threatened to extinguish its apprehension altogether, by interposing the priesthood between God and the soul, and making absolution by the Church the absolute condition of reconciliation with God, it was reasserted by such precursors of the Reformation as John Huss; but it was reserved to Luther to revive it as the article of a standing or falling Church, and to proclaim its significance as the guarantee for Christian liberty, and the motive force of a real, and not a mere conventional, morality. Its proclamation

[2] "Christian Dogmatics," p. 394.

was a call to immediate conscious fellowship of men with God. It taught men to work from life rather than for life. Faith led up to the perfect love which "casteth out fear."

A second great service rendered by Luther to the Christian world was the reinforcement of the doctrine of the supremacy of Holy Scripture as the rule of faith. The primitive deposit of religious doctrine emanating from Christ Himself and His Apostles had in the course of the ages received vast accretions; pious opinions originally held by individual teachers had been elevated into necessary dogmas; theories elaborated by a subtle scholastic philosophy had been put upon the same level as the foundation facts of the Gospel; the Church had claimed for itself absolute power of adding new articles of faith, and not merely of more clearly formulating "the faith once delivered to the saints;" traditions, even of late origin, were forced upon the acceptance of all members of the Church, and not merely on the clergy; the final issue of this tendency to enlarge the area of necessary truth, is exhibited in the decree of the Council of Trent passed in the very year of Luther's death, which declared that the Church receives and venerates with equal feeling of piety and reverence, all the books of the Old and New Testament, and also the traditions relating as well to faith as to morals, as having, either from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the dictation of the Holy Ghost, been preserved by continuous succession in the Church.

The rule of faith thus propounded was not the primitive teaching contained in the original written

documents of the Christian Church, but this combined with a supposed traditional revelation concerning doctrine not to be found in the sacred writings, and which is equally certain, equally Divine, and equally to be embraced and reverenced with the sacred writings. The power of declaring the whole body of Christian doctrine was attributed to the Church as represented by a general Council, under the sanction of the Pope. Infallibility was claimed for the decisions of such Council. The authority of the Church became an arbitrary tyranny over the faith and conscience of its members, and was enforced by physical no less than by spiritual penalties.

When thoughtful men began to reflect upon the history of theological beliefs, they could not but perceive that oral tradition had been grievously corrupted; that many proofs of lately-accepted doctrine rested upon forged documents, notably those which were appealed to as establishing the papal supremacy, that the official theology of the Church contained portions distinctly contradictory to the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Councils and Popes had proved no security against the introduction of false doctrines. All private judgment was suppressed by the prohibition of the reading of the Bible in vernacular translations without licence. Against this mental and spiritual tyranny the Reformation was a protest. Luther and his adherents at the beginning of their movement proclaimed that there was no sure doctrine, but such as is conformable to the Word of God, that the Lord forbids the teaching of any other, and that they were resolved by the grace of God to maintain the pure and

exclusive teaching of His only word, such as is contained in the books of the Old and New Testament, without adding thereto what may be contrary to it. That is the principle which is enshrined in the standards of our own Church. These with no faltering utterance declare that whatsoever is not read in Holy Scripture nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith. Things ordained by Councils as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture. The Church is a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, but is limited by it in determining controversies of faith.

A third great service which Luther rendered to Christendom was that he effectually prepared the way to ecclesiastical and political liberty, by enabling Europe to break away from the absolute supremacy of the Papacy. There had been during the century preceding his era signs of murmuring and disaffection against the dominion over faith and conscience, and over many departments of civil life, exercised by the Papacy, but these had been nearly silenced by persecution or had only leavened the lower classes of men ; they had not enabled men to throw off the yoke. We, after the experience of three centuries and more of spiritual independence, can afford to look calmly and dispassionately upon the claims of the Pope to the spiritual empire of mankind. Even among the nations which still own obedience to the See of Rome, the old proud pretensions of that power are curtailed and restrained by rigid law. But in the beginning of the 16th

century the Papacy was still a mighty tyranny. It claimed for itself that the lordship of the whole earth had been given over to it by Christ. It depreciated temporal sovereignty as being ignoble and inferior, and indebted to its consecration by the Church for its warrant for exacting allegiance from its subjects. It exempted from the jurisdiction of the State all its own officers, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, even when they were guilty of grievous civil crimes: it had a vast independent system of administration of justice, invested with the power of punishing disobedience and heresy, if necessary, by the extreme civil penalty of death—it had the empire at its service. It had extinguished the liberty of national churches—a confederation of co-ordinate bishops had now been subjugated to a spiritual monarchy—the Pope claimed to be the infallible interpreter of Scripture, the only authority who had the right of summoning a general Council. It was the courage and undaunted energy of Luther which struck the mightiest blow in shattering this ecclesiastical autocracy.

In his soul-stirring address to the Christian nobility of the German nation he appealed to the princes and laity to help him in asserting the rights of each national church to reform itself, to recognize the laity as an integral part of the Church, entitled to a voice in its government, to refuse to accept the Pope alone or the hierarchy alone as lords over God's heritage. He sent forth a trumpet call to all enlightened Christian men to break down the three walls with which the dominant Papal system had fenced itself in, the first being the rigid

distinction between the clergy and laity by which the Church had been identified with the clergy; the second the infallibility of the Pope and his exclusive right to interpret Scripture; the third the sole right of the Pope to call a Council. He made an earnest plea for the gathering of a free national Council, or ultimately a free general Council, in which reformation both of doctrine and of discipline should be effected on the basis of Scripture. Of this book, which may be described as a great anti-Papal blast, 4000 copies were circulated in one month, and largely leavened public opinion both in Germany and England. We all know how the Pope answered the call to reformation by a bull of excommunication —how Luther, judging reform from within the Papal Court to be hopeless, proclaimed his open revolt from the Roman supremacy by the symbolical act of publicly burning the bull. But in the conflict with the Papacy, Luther stood at his highest pitch of greatness as displayed in fearlessness and righteous enthusiasm, when, spite of the risks against which even an imperial safeconduct could only dubiously guarantee him, he stood before the Emperor Charles V. and the assembled princes and prelates in the Diet of Worms (1521) and made the memorable reply to the demand for a recantation: "Unless I am conquered and convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, or by open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasons—for I believe neither Pope nor Councils alone, because it is manifest that they have often been mistaken and contradicted themselves—unless my conscience is taken captive by the Word of God, I can and will recant nothing, for it is

neither safe nor prudent to do aught against one's conscience. Here I stand—I can do no otherwise —God help me—Amen."

From that day forth the Reformation entered upon a new stage. It was no longer a question of scholastic and theological disputation. It passed into the arena of state policy and diplomacy. Like the Gospel at its first commencement, it seemed destined to bring upon the earth not peace but a sword. It separated whole nations—it originated religious wars—it stirred Europe to its foundations. It triumphed in the leading Teutonic nations—it was eventually hurled back in the Latin races. But it has broken for ever the absolute monarchy of the Pope. We Englishmen, who are free from the yoke which our fathers were not able to bear, we members of the English Church, which accepts the Royal supremacy as a guarantee of the freedom of our national Church from an external spiritual jurisdiction, and of the sacredness of civil government and of the obedience due by the clergy to the laws of the country of which they are citizens, should be ungrateful if we did not own our obligations to the solitary monk who defied the Pope in the cause of Christian freedom. Our fathers had felt the iron enter so deeply into their soul that, in the first outburst of newly-recovered independence, they inserted in the public Litany a petition which grates on the ear of modern sensibility, "From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome and all his detestable enormities, Good Lord, deliver us." It was happily removed in the days of Queen Elizabeth, even when the memories of the fires of the Marian persecution

were still fresh, but it was a cry of anguish of soul uttered to heaven by men who had suffered under the oppression. We can view things at this distance more impartially, and admit the value of the Roman supremacy as an engine of civilization at a certain phase of European history; but when we regard the crushing despotism into which it subsequently developed, we cannot lament, but thankfully hail its downfall—and that downfall is imperishably associated with the name of Luther.

It is doubtless easy for criticism, especially if animated by the spirit of a very narrow partisanship, to blame severely particular acts of the conduct of the great reformer, and to refuse any expression of enthusiastic admiration for a character in which grave errors and weaknesses may be detected. Alas! if we are to bestow admiration upon a faultless character, we shall have to be silent as to most of the great men who have made the world's history. And the disputants on either side in the great struggle of the Reformation will alike fall under condemnation. It would be dishonest for us to refrain from lamenting that Luther indulged, even in his last days, in unjustifiable words of bitter invective against his fellow-Protestants, who did not hold his own views on the doctrine of the Eucharist, and tolerated coarse caricatures of his theological opponents on the title-pages of some of his controversial works. It was the manner of the age. If we look at the books exhibited this very month in the British Museum, we find that exactly the same thing was done on the other side. Luther and the Pope alike are depicted as servants of the Prince

of Evil. The names of Anti-Christ and Satan are freely bandied about by both parties. We cannot sympathize with such a method of conducting controversy, but let us be equitable in our judgment. Let us not try the sixteenth century by the standard of the nineteenth. Comedy and satire were allowed then within the sacred region of theology, without offence to popular taste. Let us hope that we have gained in refinement and reverence, and be thankful for the improvement. But the right and genuine way of estimating the great men of the world's history, is to view them in their grand totality, to study the main purpose of their lives, and the great principles of which they have been the pioneers and advocates; to consider how far the world has been better, owing to the permanent influence of their life's labours. And if we judge that, spite of its partial success and some attendant evils, the reformation of religion in the sixteenth century has been a blessing to Christendom, there ought to be no unwillingness on our part to recognize that the foremost agent in that movement was the heroic Martin Luther.

Lastly, we hear murmurs of an objection that we Englishmen have nothing to do with Luther; he was not one of ourselves, he was a foreigner, he did not reform the Church of England. Let Protestant Germany commemorate her national hero; what is he to us? I confess that it is difficult to restrain some feeling of indignation when confronted with such narrow insular prejudices, which cannot rise to the conception of principles of national and ecclesiastical freedom transcending the petty limits of our

own country. Christendom is not bounded even by Pan-Anglicanism. If the Church of England is true to the spirit of her noblest representatives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, she will not be ashamed to boast her connection with the Reformation, and the theological as distinct from the political influences which effected that movement may be traced in large measure to Luther, Melancthon, and their Saxon fellow-workers. It is perfectly true that the English Reformation differed in many points from the German. It was guided more decidedly by ancient precedent; it preserved a more unbroken historical continuity with the past by the retention of the episcopal form of government, and by the universal employment in its worship of a prayer-book, which was a revision of the old liturgical offices purified from mediæval accretions. I hope that in this respect it is not an insular prejudice to believe that the Church of England has an enormous advantage over the chief forms of continental Protestantism, which may, perhaps, some day enable it to realize the celebrated confession of the Romanist writer, Count de Maistre, that "If ever there should be a movement towards reunion among the Christian bodies, it seems likely that the Church of England should be the one to give it impulse, for while it touches us of the Roman Church with the one hand, it touches with the other those with whom we have no point of contact."

The weakness of Protestantism lies in its internal divisions; the strength of Romanism is in its unity. Yet we dare not purchase unity at the price of truth, and by submission to an authority, which by assert-

ing its own infallibility makes reconciliation impossible. It would, however, be a noble ambition for the Church of England if under her leadership the Churches of the Reformation could be brought into more active sympathy with one another, if they could be taught to tolerate a diversity in ritual and practice, with a substantial unity in doctrine; if the articles and confessions of each separate community, necessitated by the controversies of the sixteenth century, could be held as having, indeed, a local use, but being altogether subordinate to the Catholic truths proclaimed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. The task is rendered intensely difficult for the Church of England by the unhappy secessions from her pale at home of organized communities of Christians, which tend to raise up foes out of her own household. The task is even more difficult now than it was 200 years ago.

In a century which we frequently condemn as dead and apathetic, efforts were made to accomplish it.

The notion of a *Fœdus Evangelicum*, which was to unite all national Protestant Churches, was present in 1707 to the mind of Archbishop Sharp, who entered into a correspondence with Lutheran divines of the Court of Frederick I. of Prussia for a greater approximation between the English and Lutheran Churches by the introduction of a moderate Episcopacy and a common liturgy.[3] In 1719, Archbishop Wake attempted a like work of mutual conciliation. "He desired to be on terms of cordial friendship with the Reformed Churches, notwithstanding their points of difference from that of

[3] "Life of Archbishop Sharp," vol. i. p. 405.

England. He could wish they had a moderate Episcopal government, according to the primitive model, nor did he yet despair of it, if not in his own time, perhaps in days to come. He would welcome a closer union among all reformed bodies, at almost any price. Any approximations in Church government or Church offices which might conduce to it he should, indeed, rejoice in."[4] It is not a sign of improvement that we in the nineteenth century have receded even from the aspiration after such a unity of sympathy. Men of all ecclesiastical parties in the Church of England freely avail themselves of the theological literature of eminent German Protestant theologians. If there were more intercourse we might, perhaps, impart, in return to the German Protestant Churches, a measure of our own practical energy in Church life, and stir them up to feel that a revival of the positive principles of the Reformation would be a remedy alike of dead orthodoxy and undogmatic liberalism. The task before the Christian Church of our time is not the same as that which Luther achieved. The modern Church has to vindicate the true and independent position of the Christian faith, in reference to the truths revealed by science, and the intricate problems of our complex social phenomena. Progress must be the Church's watchword, nor can she rest content only with the formulæ in which the controversies either of the fourth or the sixteenth century issued; but it would augur ill for the Church's success in performing the work allotted to her, if the present generation, with a proud and pitiful self-conceit, were to be unmindful

[4] "The English Church in the Eighteenth Century," Abbey and Overton, vol. i. p. 355.

of the pioneers of progress and reform in earlier generations, and be satisfied with enjoying the fruit of their labours while denying them even the poor recompense of a grateful commemoration.