A. Spaeth

An Original Account
of
Luther's Death

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AN ORIGINAL ACCOUNT OF LUTHER'S DEATH.

RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE KRAUTH MEMORIAL LIBRARY, MOUNT AIRY.

A few months ago my friend, Mr. Jacob Rommel, of Philadelphia, sent me, for our Seminary library, a volume of Luther's writings, formerly in possession of his mother-in-law, the late Mrs. L. Bremer, née Scheuermann. It proved to be the "Auslegung der Episteln und Evangelien von Ostern bis Advent, D. Mar. Lut. Aufs neu zugerichtet. Wittenberg. Gedruckt durch Hans Lufft. MDLIIII, dem Fuersten Georg von Anhalt, etc. Von Casp. Creutziger D.," containing Luther's sermons on the Epistles and Gospels from Easter to the 26th Sunday after Trinity, "revised and enlarged by my good friend, Doct. Casp. Creutziger," as Luther himself states in a preface of his own.

On examining the large folio volume, which is in its original binding and very well preserved, I was surprised and delighted to find on the fly leaf at the end of the book, and partly on the back cover, a full account of the death of Martin Luther, written in a clear and legible hand and somewhat ornamental chirography, together with a brief report of the funeral service held in Eisleben, on February 19, 1546, and the sermon preached by Dr. Jonas.

The following is a fac-simile copy of that interesting record, procured through the kindness of the Rev. Luth. D. Reed, the director of the library, with an exact transcription of the German text, together with an English translation.

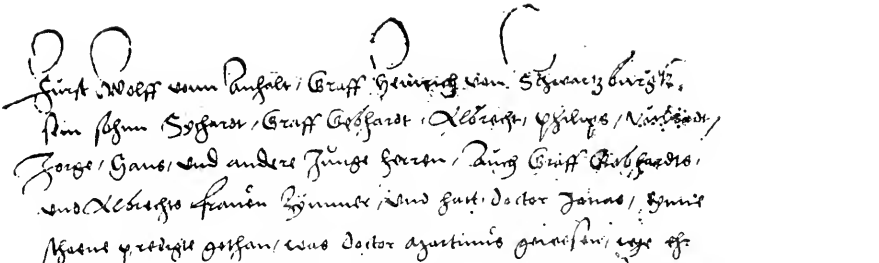
Anno · 1 · 5 · 46 · den 17 Februarij
Aschwichens nach Valentini.

Nach dem abendt nach essens und dy ehr Herrn der Doctor Martinus Luther Schwarz verlaget sich und die ganzen, das man ihm aber mit warmen kissen gerichten und Lessen Kopff wolt wegen, darumb von Ihnen zugerichtet, ewige Kürde vom Nachtmandorff, Heuren ist der Doctor krank, genen Kopff wolt hinnahm, Bitterlich geschrien. Hilfft ihn der Kirchen, ihn hantierte, ihn andere Kunst Kunde, Das der Kopff 10 Stuck. Da drauff macht ihnen Zibelle, Hilfft ihn auch ihn ihr, So wurde ihn Semen hemdlein, Anderesmen Kutzfell, vom Oelitz, Das ihr ihme die Kirchen Hoffnung soll. Als aber dieselbige ihnen warm gemacht wardt, Steig ihr aus dem bette und sagt Doctor Dona, Ich bin hoch Schwach, Ich trage ich wenig ihr Esselessen ein, und gieng ihn der Kirchen zimmer oder Lege hin und wider legt sich darnach auff das hantbettlein, und klagte ihr die Brust sehr hart, Sahe das ihmer es ihm warm das Kirzeuse, Also auch machet ihn mit tuchern und warmette kissen, und ihnen auff ihnen, Sprach ihr Liebste ihnen, Das machet ihnen warm Herlich, Ich hett aber sehr geschwitzt, Da trostet ihnen ihr Hieronymus Calius, Welcher dankbarn Doctor Dona, ihr ihm wenig, Item Joannes Rivi, Pfarer, und sein hemdlein, Aber der Doctor sprach, Ich ist von Kritter todtes Schwes, Ich wurde nicht geist aufgeholfen, Dan die Krankheit mehret sich, Da Kirchen machet ihnen und hat ihnen erzet Harlem, Aber da ihnen ihn der, mit Zapfen Vil Lauendel wasser, rosmarin Essig, und andere Kerlinch, welcher wasser 9 S Graff Salbey und 5 9 gemahl, mit Kraten, 9 Bestrichen, Kieng ihr ihm also Gesunde.

Es danckt dir herrgott, himelischer vater, das du mir deinen
lieben sohn, offenbaret hast, ihn den ich geglaubet, den ich be-
kant, und geprediget habe, den ich geliebet, und gelobet. Aber
die gottlosen, ihnen schenden, lestern, und schmähen dich, dein
lieben sohn Christum, auch dich meinen lieben heilandt heim
himelischer vater, dir wolle es ihnen dissen, das lassen
müsse, das ich bey dir ewig leben werde, Et dixit, Sic deus
dilexit mundum, ut filium suum unigenitum daret, ut omnis
qui credit in eum non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam. Deus
qui salvos facis sperantes in te, et redimis ex morte,
Dolam sprang ehr ich fuer dahin, und sprang 3 mahl, Pater
in manus tuas commendo tibi spiritum meum.
Darnach sprang er hell, und machte rüttelter und rückte, und
rieff ihm, aber er antwortet nicht, Do sprang mahr ihme
Papa vix wohr die mahr, und rieff kurtz bey seinen nahmen
Doctor Jonas, und der ajetzt, Doctor Martine, Reverende pater
Wolter ehr ang auff Christum, und die lehr, so ihr ihm seinen
nahmen gesagt, Amen, Sprang er das mahr dreu,
ehr herum kam Ja.
Also wandt ehr sich auff
die rechte Seitenn, und fieng ahn Rutzelnn, ehr auff sein
gesicht hatt ejnnel stunde, Das mach der Gestrenge Gottes
Aber wie das ist ehr zu schwachen, mit stillem Gebeum des
athemes, und einschlaff, Dienstag 2 und 3 ihm vor ajetzt
tage, ihm Herrn Schuberling, mit grosser gedult, Gott wolle
uns allen, genedigligen helffen. Amen.

D · M · L.

Wir können nicht wissen, was ihm jedermann wolle
Wir können aber wissen, was wir wollen
Gestorben hatt D. Martinus Luther, ahn die wunde, ge-
storben 13 tage vorhr seinem todte C.
Auff den Freitag den 19 Februarij, nach 2 ehr nach ajetzteg
hat machet Doctor ajetzinium L. Jon Eisleben Jm. C. Anderes
ehr die Kirchen getragen, ihm Tage in Eldergesing. Sonst ihme



TRANSCRIPT OF THE GERMAN ORIGINAL.

Anno. 1. 5. 4. 6. den 17 February,

Mithwochens nach Valentini

Auff denn abenth nach essens umb vly vhr wyrth der Herr Doctor VIII 2
Martinus Luther schwach, beclaget sich vmb die Brust, Als mahn
yhnen aber, mit warmen tucheren gerieben, vnd zwen loffel vohl
weyns darynnen von Eynhorn eyngeschabet, welche Curdi vonn
Wolff Ramsdorff, zuuorn, ehr der Doctor tranck, eynen loeffel vohl
eynnahm, zutrinken gegebenen. Schlieff ehr ihn der
stubenn, yhm faulbette, bey anderthalbe stunde, das der seyger
10 schlug, Do bracht mahn yhnen zubette, schlieff bys vmb
eyn vhr, Do weckte ehr seynen famulum
Ambrosium Ruthfelt, vonn Oelitz, das ehr yhme die stuben
heyssen solt, Als aber dieselbige schonn warm gehaltenn
wartt, steyg ehr aus dem bette vnnd sagt Doctor Jona, Ich
bin ssehr schwach, Ich sorge ich werde zw Eysslebenn bleyben,
vnd gleng ihn der stubenn, eynmal oder zwey hin vnd wydder
Legt sich dornach auff das faulbettlein, vnd clagte ess druckte
yhnen vmb die brust sehr hartt, Aber doch schonet es ihm (ihne)
noch des hertzens, Alsso rieb mahn ihn mit tuchern
vnd wermette kussen, vnd pfuel auff yhnen, Sprach ess
hulffe yhnen, das mahn yhnen warm hieltte, Ehr hette aber
sehr geschwytzt. des trostet yhnen her Michael Coelius,
welcher benebenen Doctor Jonas bey ihm wahr, Item Joannes Aurifober, und sein famulus. Aber der Doctor sprach, Jha,
ess ist eyn kaltter todtes schweys, Ich werde meyn geist auff-

gebenn, dan die krankheitt mehret sich, Do schlckte
mahn eylents vnd lies beyde ertzte hoelenn, Aber do wyr
yhnen yhn des, mit Aqua vitae, Lauendel wasser, rossen
Essig, vnd andere sterkung, welcher wasser vnser g. g. Graff Albrecht
vnd s. g. gemahl, mit brachten, x* bestrichen, fieng ehr ahn
also zuredende.
Ich dancke dyr hergott, hymlischer vatter, das dw myr deynen
liebenn sohn offenbaret hast, ihn den ich geglaubet, den ich be-
kant, vnd geprediget habe, den ich geliebet, vnd gelobet, Aber
die gottlossen yhnen schenden, lestern, vnd schmehen, Ich bytt
dich, O herre Jesu Christe, las dyr meyne ssele befolenn ssein
O himlischer vatter, Ich weys ob ich schoen diessen leyb lassen
muss, das ich bey dyr ewyg leben werde, Et dixit, Sic deus
dilexit mundum, ut filium suum unigenitum daret, vt omnis
qui credit in eum non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam, Deus
qui saluos facis sperantes in te, Et reducis ex morte,
Wolan, sprach ehr ich fhar dahin, vnd sprach 3mahl, Pater
in manus tuas commendo tibi spiritum meum.
Darauff schweyg ehr stylle, vnd mahn rutteltte, vnd kultte, vnd
ryff yhm, Aber ehr anthwortt nicht, Do streich mahn yhme
Aqua vitae vohr die nase, vnd ryff lautt bey seynem nahmen
Doctor Jonas, vnd her Michel, Doctor Martine, Reuerende pater
Wollet yhr auch auff Cristum, vnd die lehr, sso ihr ihn seynem
nahmen gethann, sterbenn, Sprach ehr das mahns deut-
lich hoerenn konth. Jha. Alsso want ehr sich auff
die rechte seyttenn, vnd fieng ahnn zuschlaffen, bys auf eyn
guette halbe vyrttel stunde, das mahn der besserung hoffte
Aber ihn des thet ehr eyn schnarchen, mit tyffem hoelenn, des
atthams, vnd entschlieff, zwuschen 2 und 3 vhren vohr Mit-
tage, yhm herren seuberlich, mit grosser gedult, Gott wolle
vns allen, genediglichen helffenn. Amen.

D. M. L.

Wyr konnen nicht thuen, was eyn Eyderman wyll.
Wyr konnen aber thuen, was wyr wollenn.
Diesse wortt hatt. D. Martinus Lutther, ahn die wanth ge-
schriebenn 13 tage vohr seynem todtte.

Auff den Freitag den 19 February, nach 2 vhr nach Mittag
hatt mahn Doctor Martinum. L. zw Eysleben zw S. Andres
ihn die Kirchen getragen, yhm Kohr nyddergesetz, seynt yhme
Furst Wolff vonn Anhalt, Graff Heinrich von Schwartzburgk
sein sohnn Sychardt, Graff Gebhardt, Albrecht, Philips, Vulradt,
Jorge, Hans, vnd andere Junge herren, Auch Graff Gebhardts
vnd Albrechts frauen Zymmer, vnd hatt Doctor Jonas, eynne

*A letter stricken out.

schoene predigte gethan, was Doctor Martinus gewesen, wye ehr geschrieben, vnd was ehr geschrieben, Auch wye ehr seynn Ende hatt beschlossenn, vnd entschlaffenn, Vnd zum drytten die wortt Pauli ausgelegt, und seynh bey sso vnd ihn solcher predigte mehr dan 4000 menschen gewesen, Gott bescher vns auch eyn sseliges Ende. Amen.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

Anno 1546, February the 17th, on Wednesday after Valentine's day, toward evening, after supper, about seven o'clock, Doctor Martinus Luther became sick (weak) and complained of pains in his chest. But after he had been rubbed with warm towels and had taken two spoons full of wine, with shavings of Einhorn in it, of which Curdi von Wolf Ramsdorf had first tasted a spoon full, before the doctor, he slept in the (sitting) room, on the lounge for an hour and a half. When the clock struck ten he was put to bed and slept until one o'clock. Then he wakened his servant (famulus) Ambrosius Rutfelt of Oelitz and told him to make fire in the room. But as the room was already warm, he rose from the bed and said: "Doctor Jonas, I am very weak; I fear I shall never leave Eisleben." He then walked up and down in the room once or twice. After this he lay down on the lounge and complained of great oppression on the chest, though, thus far, the heart was not affected. When he was rubbed with towels and his pillows and covers were warmed he said, it was a relief to be kept warm, but that he was in a great sweat. The by-standers, Michael Coelius, Doctor Jonas, Johannes Aurifaber and his servant comforted him, saying, that was a good sign. But the Doctor said, this is a cold death-sweat, I am going to give up the ghost, for I am getting worse. Thereupon both physicians were hurriedly summoned. But when we had meanwhile rubbed him with Aqua Vitae, lavender water, aromatic vinegar and other stimulants, which our gracious Count Albrecht and his wife had brought, he began to speak thus:

"I thank Thee, Lord God, heavenly Father, that Thou hast revealed unto me Thy dear Son, in whom I believed, whom I confessed and preached, whom I loved and lauded,

but whom the godless dishonour, blaspheme and revile. I pray Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, let my soul be commended to Thee. O heavenly Father, I know, though I must give up this body, that I shall live forever with Thee. Et dixit, Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut filium suum unigenitum daret, ut omnis qui credit in eum,, non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam, Deus, qui salvos facis sperantes in Te et reducis ex morte. I am ready to depart." Then he said three times, "Pater, in manus tuas commendo tibi spiritum meum." After this he was silent. When they shook him and called him, he did not answer. They then applied Aqua Vitae to his nostrils and called him loudly by name. Doctor Jonas and Michael (Coelius) asked him: "Doctor Martine, Reverende pater, are you now ready to die in the faith of Christ and the doctrine which you preached in His name?" Thereupon he said, so that it could be heard distinctly, "Yes." Then he turned on his right side and slept for some minutes (eine gute halbe viertel Stunde), so that we hoped he was getting better. Then came the death-rattle, a deep drawn breath, and he was gone. Thus he departed peacefully and patiently in the Lord between two and three o'clock a. m. God be merciful unto us all and help us. Amen.

D. M. L.

We cannot do what every one wills
But we can do what we will.

These words were written on the wall by Doctor Martinus Luther thirteen days before his death.

On Friday, February 19th, 2 p. m. Doctor Martinus L. was taken to St. Andrew's Church, in Eisleben. The coffin was placed in the chancel. There were present Prince Wolf von Anhalt, Count Heinrich von Schwarzburg, his son Sychardt, Count Gebhardt, Albrecht, Philips, Vulradt, Jorge, Hans and other young gentlemen also the ladies of Count Gebhardt and Albrecht. Doctor Jonas preached a beautiful sermon, showing what Doctor Martinus had been, how and what he wrote, and how at last he departed in peace. In his

third part he explained and applied the words of Paul. There were more than 4,000 people present at this sermon. May God grant unto us also to depart in peace. Amen.

A close examination of this account convinced me that it must have been written not only by a cotemporary, but, evidently, by an eye-witness. Being anxious to ascertain, if possible, the personality of the writer, but not sufficiently acquainted with the autographs of men, that might have to be considered in this connection, I secured a photographic reproduction of the whole record, made by Mr. A. T. Michler, one of our students, and my friend Mr. Frederik Hassold, of Mount Airy. This photograph I sent to Prof. Dr. Theol. W. Walther, of Rostock, a well-known specialist on Luther and his writings, requesting him to examine the matter thoroughly and to give me his opinion concerning the probable writer and the value of the whole record.

Dr. Walther at once took a lively interest in the matter and proved himself a most helpful and generous assistant in clearing up the mystery. He wrote to me, December 19, 1909: "This record is of the highest interest. Its *contents* confirm throughout the other accounts of Luther's death, which were known thus far. But its *form* shows, that these statements are not based on any of the other accounts known to us, but are entirely original and independent. Its importance is increased by the fact that this record was evidently not intended for publication or for any outsider, but is simply an entry in a postil, a book written by Luther himself, and printed two years before. It is also manifest that it never occurred to the writer that any one should be bent on spreading false rumours concerning Luther's death.

The first entry which deals with Luther's death, was probably written in the very night of Luther's departure, or on the day following, for it ends with a certain sign, which indicates a conclusion. The same sign (looking somewhat like a capital C in Latin script. A. S.), appears also at the end of the whole entry. Later on, after the funeral service in Eisleben, there follows an addition, dealing with that service.

As nothing is said on the removal of the body (to Wittenberg. A. S.) we must suppose that the addition was made immediately after the service in Eisleben, and that the writer was not present at the famous service in Wittenberg, inasmuch as nothing is added on this point.

That the writer was an eye-witness must be inferred from his statements concerning the funeral service, as he gives the number of attendants, the names of certain persons, and the contents of the sermon of Justus Jonas, in a form which can only be explained from hearing that discourse and not from reading it after it was printed. But the writer was also present at the death of Luther, as he states: 'when *we* had meanwhile rubbed him with Aqua Vitae.' And he was a subject of the Count of Mansfeld, as we read: 'which *our* gracious Count Albrecht, etc., had brought along.'

I do not know the hand-writing. But its character (der Ductus) seems to indicate, that the writer was not a scholar but a professional clerk. Now the following citizens of Mansfeld were present at Luther's death: Aurifaber, Coelius, the two physicians, the druggist, Count Albrecht and wife, and the town clerk, Hans Albrecht. The account was not written by Aurifaber or Coelius, nor by Count Albrecht and wife as they are mentioned by name in the record. Nor was it written by one of the physicians or the druggist, inasmuch as the word 'we' is used before they entered the house, where Luther died. Consequently the town clerk in whose house in Eisleben Luther lived and died, is the writer of this account.

In the hope that some one might recognize the handwriting I sent the photographs to G. Buchwald in Leipzig, and he forwarded them to G. Kawerau in Berlin. Neither of them knows the handwriting. But Kawerau insists that the words 'we' and 'our' show the writer to have been a Mansfelder, and that only Hans Albrecht could have been the writer.

Consequently we have here a new record of an eyewitness who, while writing without any special design, fully confirms the narrative of other eyewitnesses. We also learn from him some minor details, such as an utterance of Luther's, written on the wall in Albrecht's house.

Dr. Buchwald asks to have the photographs returned to him, so that he may have a fac-simile prepared for the next Luther Almanac."

So far Dr. Walther's letter. In the "Deutsche Lutheraner" (Jan. 20, 1910) I published a short statement concerning our discovery, with part of Dr. Walther's letter. Thereupon I received a communication from the Rev. H. Rembe, Hamilton, Ont., recommending Professor Dr. H. Groessler, of Eisleben, as an authority on the local history of Mansfeld and quite familiar with the archives of Eisleben. It was hoped that there he might find other documents from the hand of the town clerk, Hans Albrecht, and thus be able to prove his authorship. I at once addressed a letter to that gentleman, accompanied by a copy of the photographs, and begged for his co-operation in the matter. Unfortunately Dr. Groessler had just died when my letter reached its address.

Dr. Walther has since published an article on our discovery in the Allgemeine Lutherische Kirchenzeitung of February 18, 1910, which contains a somewhat fuller statement of the points made in his letter of December 19, 1909, and dwells particularly on the importance of this document over against the malicious slanders spread by Romanists with reference to Luther's death. He says: "This discovery would have been of still greater importance, if it had occurred twenty years ago, at the time when the former editor of the Germania (a violent Romanist periodical, A. S.) sent forth his book on Luther's death, in which he charged that Luther ended by suicide."

It is with reference to this particular point that we wish to add a few words to the statements of Dr. Walther which really cover the whole ground. In 1889 there appeared in Mayence a pamphlet entitled: "Luther's Lebensende. Eine historische Untersuchung von Paul Majunke," which claimed to have been written not for the people, but only for scholars (fuer wissenschaftliche Kreise). In the preface to the second edition (January, 1890) the author contends, that even the most hostile reviewer of his pamphlet had been "unable to disprove the genuineness of the documents referred to and the credibility of the facts narrated." The whole pamphlet of

82 pages consists of the following parts: 1. "The fabricated report on Luther's death" (Der verabredete Bericht ueber Luther's Tod). 2. "The rumors concerning Luther's death." Majunke charges the Lutherans themselves with being the authors of certain awful rumors concerning the death of Luther. In evidence he offers the following proof to his "scholarly readers": Christopher Longolius, a theologian, highly recommended by Erasmus, published an Oratio ad Lutheranos, Cologne, 1546, in which he says: "Nostis, hominem altero crure claudum, humero strumosum, oculo captum, ac morbo tum commitiali, tum eo, qui libidinem ejus obscoenis pustulis indicet, foede misereque confectum." Inasmuch as this statement is addressed to Lutherans, and as he says, *Nostis*, you know, it is evident that the Lutherans must have been perfectly familiar with the circumstances. Quod erat demonstrandum!

3. "The first authentic report on Luther's death." This, according to Majunke, was published by Henricus Sedulius, in his Praescriptiones adversus haereses, Antwerpiae, 1606, sixty years after Luther's death. It says that a servant of Luther, who in later years returned to the Church of Rome, whose name no one ever knew, had found Luther on the morning of February 18, 1546, "Juxta lectum suum pensilem et misere strangulatum." Dr. Walther in his article for the Allg. Luth. Kirchenzeitung, shows conclusively, that Cochlaeus himself, one of the most violent adversaries of Luther, completely demolishes this statement, when, in the later editions of his work "De actis et scriptis Lutheri" he published the report of a loyal Roman Catholic, the Eisleben druggist, who had been called in to give an enema to the dying man.

4. "Luther's state of mind toward the close of his life," which according to the opinions commonly in vogue among Romanists, was one of utter despair and demoralization.

In an appendix are given the "Historia vom christlichen Abschied des ehrwuerdigen Herrn Dr. Mart. Lutheri," the official report on Luther's death, written by Jonas, Coelius and Aurifaber; the funeral sermon preached by Coelius in Eisleben, Febr. 20, 1546; the complete statement of Sedulius

in his Praescriptiones adversus haereses, Antwerp, 1606; and some utterances of Roman Catholic writers of the nineteenth century concerning Luther's death, among them Moehler, Doellinger, Janssen, not one of whom stultifies himself by even a remote reference to the legend which Majunke has undertaken to resuscitate.

His whole publication is, in reality, hardly worthy of a respectful consideration and a serious refutation. But the fact that a pamphlet of this character could be written and printed at the close of the nineteenth century of our Christian era, and that, within one month of its first appearance, a second edition should be found necessary, proves that the document discovered in the volume of Luther's Summer-Postill has an important and providential mission, even though it comes twenty years after Majunke's unscrupulous slanders. It overthrows the very foundation of Majunke's whole fabrication, viz., the claim that the official report on Luther's death was not a statement of simple historical facts, but an artfully constructed document, prepared for the purpose of hushing up and contradicting certain unpleasant rumors that had been in circulation concerning the death of the great reformer. We know that even before the "Historia" was written, Justus Jonas, only about an hour after Luther's death, had sent to the Elector a full account of the last days and the dying hours of Luther, which he dictated to the secretary of Count Albrecht adding in an autograph postscript, that "none of them had been able in their great sorrow, to write in his own hand." (See: Des seligen Zeugen Gottes, Dr. Martin Luther's merkwuerdige Lebensumstaende, etc. von Friedrich Siegemund Keil. Dritter Theil. Leipzig 1754. pp. 270-273.)

But even though this letter and the official "Historia" afterwards prepared by Jonas, Coelius and Aurifaber should have been influenced by a natural desire to represent the dying scene in the most favorable and edifying form for the public eye, no such design can possibly be charged to this account of the town clerk of Eisleben. It was written under the first, vivid impression of the solemn scenes at Luther's

death bed which the writer had been privileged to witness. It was written for no other eyes, except his own, or possibly the members of his family. It is from beginning to end characterized by a striking simplicity, even naivete. There is no careful choosing of words, no posing whatsoever. The man who had been present at the last hours of that illustrious servant of God and who had listened to his last words of prayer and confession felt himself irresistibly compelled to fix the memorable scene on paper. So he sat down, probably in the early morning hours of the 18th of February, and entered into a book of Luther's own sermons, which had often refreshed his soul, this simple-hearted artless account of the hero's death, which will henceforth stand as an original and unassailable record, confirming all the essential features of the later official accounts, and utterly demolishing the diabolical slanders of the Romanists of the seventeenth as well as the nineteenth century.

ADOLPH SPAETH.

Mount Airy, March, 1909.

DATE DUE

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