

## **German Culture Past and Present**

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# **GERMAN CULTURE PAST AND PRESENT**

BY  
**ERNEST BELFORT BAX**

AUTHOR OF "JEAN PAUL MARAT," "THE RELIGION OF SOCIALISM,"  
"THE ETHICS OF SOCIALISM," "THE ROOTS OF REALITY," ETC., ETC.

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<a href="#">INTRODUCTORY:—SITUATION IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY</a>	
I. <a href="#">THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT</a>	0
II. <a href="#">POPULAR LITERATURE OF THE TIME</a>	8
III. <a href="#">THE FOLKLORE OF REFORMATION GERMANY</a>	9
IV. <a href="#">THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN TOWN</a>	1
V. <a href="#">COUNTRY AND TOWN AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES</a>	1
VI. <a href="#">THE REVOLT OF THE KNIGHTHOOD</a>	1
VII. <a href="#">GENERAL SIGNS OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL REVOLT</a>	1
VIII. <a href="#">THE GREAT RISING OF THE PEASANTS AND THE ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT</a>	1
IX. <a href="#">POST-MEDIÆVAL GERMANY</a>	2

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[6]

## PREFACE

The following pages aim at giving a general view of the social and intellectual life of Germany from the end of the mediæval period to modern times. In the earlier portion of the book, the first half of the sixteenth century in Germany is dealt with at much greater length and in greater detail than the later period, a sketch of which forms the subject of the last two chapters. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that while the roots of the later German character and culture are to be sought for in the life of this period, it is comparatively little known to the average educated English reader. In the early fifteenth century, during the Reformation era, German life and culture in its widest sense began to consolidate themselves, and at the same time to take on an originality which differentiated them from the general life and culture of Western Europe as it was during the Middle Ages.

To those who would fully appreciate the later developments, therefore, it is essential thoroughly to understand the details of the social and intellectual history of the time in question. For the later period there are many more works of a generally popular character available for the student and general reader. The chief aim of the sketch given in Chapters IX and X is to bring into sharp relief those events which, in the Author's view, represent more or less crucial stages in the development of modern Germany.

For the earlier portion of the present volume an older work of the Author's, now out of print, entitled *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages*, has been largely drawn upon. Reference, as will be seen, has also been made in the course of the present work to two other writings from the same pen which are still to be had for

those desirous of fuller information on their respective subjects, viz. *The Peasants' War* and *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (Messrs. George Allen & Unwin).

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## German Culture Past and Present

### INTRODUCTORY [ToC](#)

The close of the fifteenth century had left the whole structure of mediæval Europe to all appearance intact. Statesmen and writers like Philip de Commines had apparently as little suspicion that the state of things they saw around them, in which they had grown up and of which they were representatives, was ever destined to pass away, as others in their turn have since had. Society was organized on the feudal hierarchy of status. In the first place, a noble class, spiritual and temporal, was opposed to a peasantry either wholly servile or but nominally free. In addition to this opposition of noble and peasant there was that of the township, which, in its corporate capacity, stood in the relation of lord to the surrounding peasantry.

The township in Germany was of two [8]kinds—first of all, there was the township that was "free of the Empire," that is, that held nominally from the Emperor himself (*Reichstadt*), and secondly, there was the township that was under the domination of an intermediate lord. The economic basis of the whole was still land; the status of a man or of a corporation was determined by the mode in which they held their land. "No land without a lord" was the principle of mediæval polity; just as "money has no master" is the basis of the modern world with its self-made men. Every distinction of rank in the feudal system was still denoted for the most part by a special costume. It

was a world of knights in armour, of ecclesiastics in vestments and stoles, of lawyers in robes, of princes in silk and velvet and cloth of gold, and of peasants in laced shoe, brown cloak, and cloth hat.

But although the whole feudal organization was outwardly intact, the thinker who was watching the signs of the times would not have been long in arriving at the conclusion that feudalism was "played out," that the whole fabric of mediæval civilization was becoming dry and withered, and had either already begun to disintegrate or was on the eve of doing so. Causes of change had within the past half-century been working underneath the surface of social life, and were rapidly undermining the [9]whole structure. The growing use of firearms in war; the rapid multiplication of printed books; the spread of the new learning after the taking of Constantinople in 1453, and the subsequent diffusion of Greek teachers throughout Europe; the surely and steadily increasing communication with the new world, and the consequent increase of the precious metals; and, last but not least, Vasco da Gama's discovery of the new trade route from the East by way of the Cape—all these were indications of the fact that the death-knell of the old order of things had struck.

Notwithstanding the apparent outward integrity of the system based on land tenures, land was ceasing to be the only form of productive wealth. Hence it was losing the exclusive importance attaching to it in the earlier period of the Middle Ages. The first form of modern capitalism had already arisen. Large aggregations of capital in the hands of trading companies were becoming common. The Roman law was establishing itself in the place of the old customary tribal law which had hitherto prevailed in the manorial courts, serving in some sort as a bulwark against the caprice of the territorial lord; and this change facilitated the development of the bourgeois principle of private, as opposed to communal, property. In intellectual matters, [10]though theology still maintained its supremacy as the chief subject of human interest, other interests were rapidly growing up alongside of it, the most prominent being the study of classical literature.

Besides these things, there was the dawning interest in nature, which took on, as a matter of course, a magical form in accordance with traditional and contemporary modes of thought. In fact, like the flicker of a dying candle in its socket, the Middle Ages seemed at the beginning of the sixteenth century to exhibit all their own salient characteristics in an exaggerated and distorted form. The old feudal relations had degenerated into a blood-sucking oppression; the old rough brutality, into excogitated and elaborated cruelty (aptly illustrated in the collection of ingenious instruments preserved in the Torture-tower at Nürnberg); the old crude superstition, into a systematized magical theory of natural causes and effects; the old love of pageantry, into a lavish luxury and magnificence of which we have in the "field of the cloth of gold" the stock historical example; the old chivalry, into the mercenary bravery of the soldier, whose trade it was to fight, and who recognized only one virtue—to wit,

animal courage. Again, all these exaggerated characteristics were mixed with new elements, which distorted them further, [11] and which foreshadowed a coming change, the ultimate issue of which would be their extinction and that of the life of which they were the signs.

The growing tendency towards centralization and the consequent suppression or curtailment of the local autonomies of the Middle Ages in the interests of some kind of national government, of which the political careers of Louis XI in France, of Edward IV in England, and of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain were such conspicuous instances, did not fail to affect in a lesser degree that loosely connected political system of German States known as the Holy Roman Empire. Maximilian's first Reichstag in 1495 caused to be issued an Imperial edict suppressing the right of private warfare claimed and exercised by the whole noble class from the princes of the empire down to the meanest knight. In the same year the Imperial Chamber (*Reichskammer*) was established, and in 1501 the Imperial Aulic Council. Maximilian also organized a standing army of mercenary troops, called *Landesknechte*. Shortly afterwards Germany was divided into Imperial districts called circles (*Kreise*), ultimately ten in number, all of which were under an imperial government (*Reichsregiment*), which had at its disposal a military force for the punishment of [12] disturbers of the peace. But the public opinion of the age, conjoined with the particular circumstances, political and economic, of Central Europe, robbed the enactment in a great measure of its immediate effect. Highway plundering and even private war were still going on, to a considerable extent, far into the sixteenth century. Charles V pursued the same line of policy as his predecessor; but it was not until after the suppression of the lower nobility in 1523, and finally of the peasants in 1526, that any material change took place; and then the centralization, such as it was, was in favour of the princes, rather than of the Imperial power, which, after Charles V's time, grew weaker and weaker. The speciality about the history of Germany is, that it has not known till our own day centralization on a national or racial scale like England or France.

At the opening of the sixteenth century public opinion not merely sanctioned open plunder by the wearer of spurs and by the possessor of a stronghold, but regarded it as his special prerogative, the exercise of which was honourable rather than disgraceful. The cities certainly resented their burghers being waylaid and robbed, and hanged the knights wherever they could; and something like a perpetual feud always existed between the [13] wealthier cities and the knights who infested the trade routes leading to and from them. Still, these belligerent relations were taken as a matter of course; and no disgrace, in the modern sense, attached to the occupation of highway robbery.

In consequence of the impoverishment of the knights at this period, owing to causes with which we shall deal later, the trade or profession had recently received an accession of vigour, and at the same time was carried on more brutally and

mercilessly than ever before. We will give some instances of the sort of occurrence which was by no means unusual. In the immediate neighbourhood of Nürnberg, which was *bien entendu* one of the chief seats of the Imperial power, a robber-knight leader, named Hans Thomas von Absberg, was a standing menace. It was the custom of this ruffian, who had a large following, to plunder even the poorest who came from the city, and, not content with this, to mutilate his victims. In June 1522 he fell upon a wretched craftsman, and with his own sword hacked off the poor fellow's right hand, notwithstanding that the man begged him upon his knees to take the left, and not destroy his means of earning his livelihood. The following August he, with his band, attacked a Nürnberg tanner, whose hand was similarly treated, [14]one of his associates remarking that he was glad to set to work again, as it was "a long time since they had done any business in hands." On the same occasion a cutler was dealt with after a similar fashion. The hands in these cases were collected and sent to the Bürgermeister of Nürnberg, with some such phrase as that the sender (Hans Thomas) would treat all so who came from the city.

The princes themselves, when it suited their purpose, did not hesitate to offer an asylum to these knightly robbers. With Absberg were associated Georg von Giech and Hans Georg von Aufsess. Among other notable robber-knights of the time may be mentioned the Lord of Brandenstein and the Lord of Rosenberg. As illustrating the strictly professional character of the pursuit, and the brutally callous nature of the society practising it, we may narrate that Margaretha von Brandenstein was accustomed, it is recorded, to give the advice to the choice guests round her board that when a merchant failed to keep his promise to them, they should never hesitate to cut off *both* his hands. Even Franz von Sickingen, known sometimes as the "last flower of German chivalry," boasted of having among the intimate associates of his enterprise for the rehabilitation of the knighthood many gentlemen who had been accustomed to "let [15]their horses on the high road bite off the purses of wayfarers." So strong was the public opinion of the noble class as to the inviolability of the privilege of highway plunder that a monk, preaching one day in a cathedral and happening to attack it as unjustifiable, narrowly escaped death at the hands of some knights present amongst his congregation, who asserted that he had insulted the prerogatives of their order. Whenever this form of knight-errantry was criticized, there were never wanting scholarly pens to defend it as a legitimate means of aristocratic livelihood; since a knight must live in suitable style, and this was often his only resource for obtaining the means thereto.

The free cities, which were subject only to Imperial jurisdiction, were practically independent republics. Their organization was a microcosm of that of the entire empire. At the apex of the municipal society was the Bürgermeister and the so-called "Honorability" (*Ehrbarkeit*), which consisted of the patrician clans or *gentes* (in most cases), those families which were supposed to be descended from the original



chartered freemen of the town, the old Mark-brethren. They comprised generally the richest families, and had monopolized the entire government of the city, together with the right to administer its various sources of [16]income and to consume its revenue at their pleasure. By the time, however, of which we are writing, the trade-guilds had also attained to a separate power of their own, and were in some cases ousting the burgher-aristocracy, though they were very generally susceptible of being manipulated by the members of the patrician class, who, as a rule, could alone sit in the Council (*Rath*). The latter body stood, in fact, as regards the town, much in the relation of the feudal lord to his manor. Strong in their wealth and in their aristocratic privileges, the patricians lorded it alike over the townspeople and over the neighbouring peasantry, who were subject to the municipality. They forestalled and regrated with impunity. They assumed the chief rights in the municipal lands, in many cases imposed duties at their own caprice, and turned guild privileges and rights of citizenship into a source of profit for themselves. Their bailiffs in the country districts forming part of their territory were often more voracious in their treatment of the peasants than even the nobles themselves. The accounts of income and expenditure were kept in the loosest manner, and embezzlement clumsily concealed was the rule rather than the exception.

The opposition of the non-privileged citizens, usually led by the wealthier guildsmen not [17]belonging to the aristocratic class, operated through the guilds and through the open assembly of the citizens. It had already frequently succeeded in establishing a representation of the general body of the guildsmen in a so-called Great Council (*Grosser Rath*), and in addition, as already said, in ousting the "honorables" from some of the public functions. Altogether the patrician party, though still powerful enough, was at the opening of the sixteenth century already on the decline, the wealthy and unprivileged opposition beginning in its turn to constitute itself into a quasi-aristocratic body as against the mass of the poorer citizens and those outside the pale of municipal rights. The latter class was now becoming an important and turbulent factor in the life of the larger cities. The craft-guilds, consisting of the body of non-patrician citizens, were naturally in general dominated by their most wealthy section.

We may here observe that the development of the mediæval township from its earliest beginnings up to the period of its decay in the sixteenth century was almost uniformly as follows:[1] At first the township, or rather what later became the township, was represented [18]entirely by the circle of *gentes* or group-families originally settled within the mark or district on which the town subsequently stood. These constituted the original aristocracy from which the tradition of the *Ehrbarkeit* dated. In those towns founded by the Romans, such as Trier, Aachen, and others, the case was of course a little different. There the origin of the *Ehrbarkeit* may possibly be sought for in the leading families of the Roman

provincials who were in occupation of the town at the coming of the barbarians in the fifth century. Round the original nucleus there gradually accreted from the earliest period of the Middle Ages the freed men of the surrounding districts, fugitive serfs, and others who sought that protection and means of livelihood in a community under the immediate domination of a powerful lord, which they could not otherwise obtain when their native village-community had perchance been raided by some marauding noble and his retainers. Circumstances, amongst others the fact that the community to which they attached themselves had already adopted commerce and thus become a guild of merchants, led to the differentiation of industrial functions amongst the newcomers, and thus to the establishment of craft-guilds.

Another origin of the townsfolk, which must not be overlooked, is to be found in the [19]attendants on the palace-fortress of some great overlord. In the early Middle Ages all such magnates kept up an extensive establishment, the greater ecclesiastical lords no less than the secular often having several castles. In Germany this origin of the township was furthered by Charles the Great, who established schools and other civil institutions, with a magistrate at their head, round many of the palace-castles that he founded. "A new epoch," says Von Maurer, "begins with the villa-foundations of Charles the Great and his ordinances respecting them, for that his celebrated capitularies in this connection were intended for his newly established villas is self-evident. In that proceeding he obviously had the Roman villa in his mind, and on the model of this he rather further developed the previously existing court and villa constitution than completely reorganized it. Hence one finds even in his new creations the old foundation again, albeit on a far more extended plan, the economical side of such villa-colonies being especially more completely and effectively ordered." [2] The expression "Palatine," as applied to certain districts, bears testimony to the fact here referred to. As above said, the development of the township was everywhere on the same lines. The aim of the [20]civic community was always to remove as far as possible the power which controlled them. Their worst condition was when they were immediately overshadowed by a territorial magnate. When their immediate lord was a prince, the area of whose feudal jurisdiction was more extensive, his rule was less oppressively felt, and their condition was therefore considerably improved. It was only, however, when cities were "free of the empire" (*Reichsfrei*) that they attained the ideal of mediæval civic freedom.

It follows naturally from the conditions described that there was, in the first place, a conflict between the primitive inhabitants as embodied in their corporate society and the territorial lord, whoever he might be. No sooner had the township acquired a charter of freedom or certain immunities than a new antagonism showed itself between the ancient corporation of the city and the trade-guilds, these representing the later accretions. The territorial lord (if any) now sided, usually though not always, with the patrician party. But the guilds, nevertheless, succeeded in ultimately wresting

many of the leading public offices from the exclusive possession of the patrician families. Meanwhile the leading men of the guilds had become *hommes arrivés*. They had acquired wealth, and influence [21]which was in many cases hereditary in their family, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century they were confronted with the more or less veiled and more or less open opposition of the smaller guildsmen and of the newest comers into the city, the shiftless proletariat of serfs and free peasants, whom economic pressure was fast driving within the walls, owing to the changed conditions of the times.

The peasant of the period was of three kinds: the *leibeigener* or serf, who was little better than a slave, who cultivated his lord's domain, upon whom unlimited burdens might be fixed, and who was in all respects amenable to the will of his lord; the *höriger* or villein, whose services were limited alike in kind and amount; and the *freier* or free peasant, who merely paid what was virtually a quit-rent in kind or in money for being allowed to retain his holding or status in the rural community under the protection of the manorial lord. The last was practically the counterpart of the mediæval English copyholder. The Germans had undergone essentially the same transformations in social organization as the other populations of Europe.

The barbarian nations at the time of their great migration in the fifth century were organized on a tribal and village basis. The [22]head man was simply *primus inter pares*. In the course of their wanderings the successful military leader acquired powers and assumed a position that was unknown to the previous times, when war, such as it was, was merely inter-tribal and inter-clannish, and did not involve the movements of peoples and federations of tribes, and when, in consequence, the need of permanent military leaders or for the semblance of a military hierarchy had not arisen. The military leader now placed himself at the head of the older social organization, and associated with his immediate followers on terms approaching equality. A well-known illustration of this is the incident of the vase taken from the Cathedral of Rheims, and of Chlodowig's efforts to rescue it from his independent comrade-in-arms.

The process of the development of the feudal polity of the Middle Ages is, of course, a very complicated one, owing to the various strands that go to compose it. In addition to the German tribes themselves, who moved *en masse*, carrying with them their tribal and village organization, under the overlordship of the various military leaders, were the indigenous inhabitants amongst whom they settled. The latter in the country districts, even in many of the territories within the Roman Empire, still largely retained the [23]primitive communal organization. The new-comers, therefore, found in the rural communities a social system already in existence into which they naturally fitted, but as an aristocratic body over against the conquered inhabitants. The latter, though not all reduced to a servile condition, nevertheless held their land from

the conquering body under conditions which constituted them an order of freemen inferior to the new-comers.

To put the matter briefly, the military leaders developed into barons and princes, and in some cases the nominal centralization culminated, as in France and England, in the kingly office; while, in Germany and Italy, it took the form of the revived Imperial office, the spiritual overlord of the whole of Christendom being the Pope, who had his vassals in the prince-bishops and subordinate ecclesiastical holders. In addition to the princes sprung originally from the military leaders of the migratory nations, there were their free followers, who developed ultimately into the knighthood or inferior nobility; the inhabitants of the conquered districts forming a distinct class of inferior freemen or of serfs. But the essentially personal relation with which the whole process started soon degenerated into one based on property. The most primitive form of property—land—was at the outset [24] what was termed *allodial*, at least among the conquering race, from every social group having the possession, under the trusteeship of his head man, of the land on which it settled. Now, owing to the necessities of the time, owing to the need of protection, to violence, and to religious motives, it passed into the hands of the overlord, temporal or spiritual, as his possession; and the inhabitants, even in the case of populations which had not been actually conquered, became his vassals, villeins, or serfs, as the case might be. The process by means of which this was accomplished was more or less gradual; indeed, the entire extinction of communal rights, whereby the notion of private ownership is fully realized, was not universally effected even in the West of Europe till within a measurable distance of our own time. [3]

From the foregoing it will be understood that the oppression of the peasant, under the feudalism of the Middle Ages, and especially of the later Middle Ages, was viewed by him as an infringement of his rights. During the period of time constituting mediæval history, the peasant, though he often [25] slumbered, yet often started up to a sudden consciousness of his position. The memory of primitive communism was never quite extinguished, and the continual peasant-revolts of the Middle Ages, though immediately occasioned, probably, by some fresh invasion, by which it was sought to tear from the "common man" yet another shred of his surviving rights, always had in the background the ideal, vague though it may have been, of his ancient freedom. Such, undoubtedly, was the meaning of the Jacquerie in France, with its wild and apparently senseless vengeance; of the Wat Tyler revolt in England, with its systematic attempt to envisage the vague tradition of the primitive village community in the legends of the current ecclesiastical creed; of the numerous revolts in Flanders and North Germany; to a large extent of the Hussite movement in Bohemia, under Ziska; of the rebellion led by George Doza in Hungary; and, as we shall see in the body of the present work, of the social movements of Reformation Germany, in

which, with the partial exception of Ket's rebellion in England a few years later, we may consider them as virtually coming to an end.

For the movements in question were distinctly the last of their kind. The civil wars of religion in France, and the great rebellion [26] in England against Charles I, which also assumed a religious colouring, open a new era in popular revolts. In the latter, particularly, we have clearly before us the attempt of the new middle class of town and country, the independent citizen, and the now independent yeoman, to assert supremacy over the old feudal estates or orders. The new conditions had swept away the special revolutionary tradition of the mediæval period, whose golden age lay in the past with its communal-holding and free men with equal rights on the basis of the village organization—rights which with every century the peasant felt more and more slipping away from him. The place of this tradition was now taken by an ideal of individual freedom, apart from any social bond, and on a basis merely political, the way for which had been prepared by that very conception of individual proprietorship on the part of the landlord, against which the older revolutionary sentiment had protested. A most powerful instrument in accommodating men's minds to this change of view, in other words, to the establishment of the new individualistic principle, was the Roman or Civil law, which, at the period dealt with in the present book, had become the basis whereon disputed points were settled in the Imperial Courts. In this respect also, though to a lesser extent, may [27] be mentioned the Canon or Ecclesiastical law—consisting of papal decretals on various points which were founded partially on the Roman or Civil law—a juridical system which also fully and indeed almost exclusively recognized the individual holding of property as the basis of civil society (albeit not without a recognition of social duties on the part of the owner).

Learning was now beginning to differentiate itself from the ecclesiastical profession, and to become a definite vocation in its various branches. Crowds of students flocked to the seats of learning, and, as travelling scholars, earned a precarious living by begging or "professing" medicine, assisting the illiterate for a small fee, or working wonders, such as casting horoscopes, or performing thaumaturgic tricks. The professors of law were now the most influential members of the Imperial Council and of the various Imperial Courts. In Central Europe, as elsewhere, notably in France, the civil lawyers were always on the side of the centralizing power, alike against the local jurisdictions and against the peasantry.

The effects of the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the consequent dispersion of the accumulated Greek learning of the Byzantine Empire, had, by the end of the [28] fifteenth century, begun to show themselves in a notable modification of European culture. The circle of the seven sciences, the Quadrivium, and the Trivium, in other words, the mediæval system of learning, began to be antiquated. Scholastic philosophy, that is to say, the controversy of the Scotists and the Thomists, was now

growing out of date. Plato was extolled at the expense of Aristotle. Greek, and even Hebrew, was eagerly sought after. Latin itself was assuming another aspect; the Renaissance Latin is classical Latin, whilst Mediæval Latin is dog-Latin. The physical universe now began to be inquired into with a perfectly fresh interest, but the inquiries were still conducted under the ægis of the old habits of thought. The universe was still a system of mysterious affinities and magical powers to the investigator of the Renaissance period, as it had been before. There was this difference, however; it was now attempted to *systematize* the magical theory of the universe. While the common man held a store of traditional magical beliefs respecting the natural world, the learned man deduced these beliefs from the Neo-Platonists, from the Kabbala, from Hermes Trismegistos, and from a variety of other sources, and attempted to arrange this somewhat heterogeneous mass of erudite lore into a system of organized thought.

[29] The Humanistic movement, so called, the movement, that is, of revived classical scholarship, had already begun in Germany before what may be termed the *sturm und drang* of the Renaissance proper. Foremost among the exponents of this older Humanism, which dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, were Nicholas of Cusa and his disciples, Rudolph Agricola, Alexander Hegius, and Jacob Wimpheling. But the new Humanism and the new Renaissance movement generally throughout Northern Europe centred chiefly in two personalities, Johannes Reuchlin and Desiderius Erasmus. Reuchlin was the founder of the new Hebrew learning, which up till then had been exclusively confined to the synagogue. It was he who unlocked the mysteries of the Kabbala to the Gentile world. But though it is for his introduction of Hebrew study that Reuchlin is best known to posterity, yet his services in the diffusion and popularization of classical culture were enormous. The dispute of Reuchlin with the ecclesiastical authorities at Cologne excited literary Germany from end to end. It was the first general skirmish of the new and the old spirit in Central and Northern Europe.

But the man who was destined to become the personification of the Humanist movement, as the new learning was called, [30] was Erasmus. The illegitimate son of the daughter of a Rotterdam burgher, he early became famous on account of his erudition, in spite of the adverse circumstances of his youth. Like all the scholars of his time, he passed rapidly from one country to another, settling finally in Basel, then at the height of its reputation as a literary and typographical centre. The whole intellectual movement of the time centres round Erasmus, as is particularly noticeable in the career of Ulrich von Hutten, dealt with in the course of this history. As instances of the classicism of the period, we may note the uniform change of the patronymic into the classical equivalent, or some classicism supposed to be the equivalent. Thus the name Erasmus itself was a classicism of his father's name Gerhard, the German name Muth became Mutianus, Tritheim became Trithemius, Schwarzerd became Melancthon, and so on.

We have spoken of the other side of the intellectual movement of the period. This other side showed itself in mystical attempts at reducing nature to law in the light of the traditional problems which had been set, to wit, those of alchemy and astrology: the discovery of the philosopher's stone, of the transmutation of metals, of the elixir of life, and [31] of the correspondences between the planets and terrestrial bodies. Among the most prominent exponents of these investigations may be mentioned Philippus von Hohenheim or Paracelsus, and Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, in Germany, Nostrodamus in France, and Cardanus in Italy. These men represent a tendency which was pursued by thousands in the learned world. It was a tendency which had the honour of being the last in history to embody itself in a distinct mythical cycle. "Doctor Faustus" may probably have had an historical germ; but in any case "Doctor Faustus," as known to legend and to literature, is merely a personification of the practical side of the new learning.

The minds of men were waking up to interest in nature. There was one man, Copernicus, who, at least partially, struck through the traditionary atmosphere in which nature was enveloped, and to his insight we owe the foundation of astronomical science; but otherwise the whole intellectual atmosphere was charged with occult views. In fact, the learned world of the sixteenth century would have found itself quite at home in the pretensions and fancies of our modern theosophist and psychical researchers, with their notions of making erstwhile miracles non-miraculous, of reducing the marvellous to being [32] merely the result of penetration on the part of certain seers and investigators of the secret powers of nature. Every wonder-worker was received with open arms by learned and unlearned alike. The possibility of producing that which was out of the ordinary range of natural occurrences was not seriously doubted by any. Spells and enchantments, conjurations, calculations of nativities, were matters earnestly investigated at Universities and Courts.

There were, of course, persons who were eager to detect impostors: and amongst them some of the most zealous votaries of the occult arts—for example, Tritheim and the learned Humanist, Conrad Muth or Mutianus, both of whom professed to have regarded Faust as a fraudulent person. But this did not imply any disbelief in the possibility of the alleged pretensions. In the Faust-myth is embodied, moreover, the opposition between the new learning on its physical side and the old religious faith. The theory that the investigation of the mysteries of nature had in it something sinister and diabolical which had been latent throughout the Middle Ages, was brought into especial prominence by the new religious movements. The popular feeling that the line between natural magic and the black art was somewhat doubtful, that the [33] one had a tendency to shade off into the other, now received fresh stimulus. The notion of compacts with the devil was a familiar one, and that they should be resorted to for the purpose of acquiring an acquaintance with hidden lore and magical powers seemed quite natural.

It will have already been seen from what we have said that the religious revolt was largely economical in its causes. The intense hatred, common alike to the smaller nobility, the burghers, and the peasants, of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was obviously due to its ever-increasing exactions. The chief of these were the *pallium* or price paid to the Pope for an ecclesiastical investiture; the *annates* or first year's revenues of a church fief; and the *tithes* which were of two kinds, the great tithe paid in agricultural produce, and the small tithe consisting in a head of cattle. The latter seems to have been especially obnoxious to the peasant. The sudden increase in the sale of indulgences, like the proverbial last straw, broke down the whole system; but any other incident might have served the purpose equally well. The prince-bishops were in some instances, at the outset, not averse to the movement; they would not have been indisposed to have converted their territories into secular fiefs of the empire. It was only after [34]this hope had been abandoned that they definitely took sides with the Papal authority.

The opening of the sixteenth century thus presents to us mediæval society, social, political, and religious, in Germany as elsewhere, "run to seed." The feudal organization was outwardly intact; the peasant, free and bond, formed the foundation; above him came the knighthood or inferior nobility; parallel with them was the *Ehrbarkeit* of the less important towns, holding from mediate lordship; above these towns came the free cities, which held immediately from the empire, organized into three bodies, a governing Council in which the *Ehrbarkeit* usually predominated, where they did not entirely compose it, a Common Council composed of the masters of the various guilds, and the General Council of the free citizens. Those journeymen, whose condition was fixed from their being outside the guild-organizations, usually had guilds of their own. Above the free cities in the social pyramid stood the Princes of the empire, lay and ecclesiastic, with the Electoral College, or the seven Electoral Princes, forming their head. These constituted the feudal "estates" of the empire. Then came the "King of the Romans"; and, as the apex of the whole, the Pope in one function and the Emperor in another, crowned [35]the edifice. The supremacy, not merely of the Pope but of the complementary temporal head of the mediæval polity, the Emperor, was acknowledged in a shadowy way, even in countries such as France and England, which had no direct practical connection with the empire. For, as the spiritual power was also temporal, so the temporal political power had, like everything else in the Middle Ages, a quasi-religious significance.

The minds of men in speculative matters, in theology, in philosophy, and in jurisprudence, were outgrowing the old doctrines, at least in their old forms. In theology the notion of salvation by the faith of the individual, and not through the fact of belonging to a corporate organization, which was the mediæval conception, was latent in the minds of multitudes of religious persons before expression was given to it by Luther. The aversion to scholasticism, bred by the revived knowledge of the older



Greek philosophies in the original, produced a curious amalgam; but scholastic habits of thought were still dominant through it all. The new theories of nature amounted to little more than old superstitions, systematized and reduced to rule, though here and there the later physical science, based on observation and experiment, peeped through. In jurisprudence the epoch is marked by the [36]final conquest of the Roman civil law, in its spirit, where not in its forms, over the old customs, pre-feudal and feudal.

The subject of Germany during that closing period of the Middle Ages, characterized by what is known as the revival of learning and the Reformation, is so important for an understanding of later German history and the especial characteristics of the German culture of later times, that we propose, even at the risk of wearying some readers, to recapitulate in as short a space as possible, compatible with clearness, the leading conditions of the times—conditions which, directly or indirectly, have moulded the whole subsequent course of German development.

Owing to the geographical situation of Germany and to the political configuration of its peoples and other causes, mediæval conditions of life as we find them in the early sixteenth century left more abiding traces on the German mind and on German culture than was the case with some other nations. The time was out of joint in a very literal sense of that somewhat hackneyed phrase. At the opening of the sixteenth century every established institution—political, social, and religious—was shaken and showed the rents and fissures caused by time and by the growth of a new life underneath it. The [37]empire—the Holy Roman—was in a parlous way as regarded its cohesion. The power of the princes, the representatives of local centralized authority, was proving itself too strong for the power of the Emperor, the recognized representative of centralized authority for the whole German-speaking world. This meant the undermining and eventual disruption of the smaller social and political unities,[4] the knightly manors with the privileges attached to the knightly class generally. The knighthood, or lower nobility, had acted as a sort of buffer between the princes of the empire and the Imperial power, to which they often looked for protection against their immediate overlord or their powerful neighbour—the prince. The Imperial power, in consequence, found the lower nobility a bulwark against its princely vassals. Economic changes, the suddenly increased demand for money owing to the rise of the "world-market," new inventions in the art of war, new methods of fighting, the rapidly growing importance of artillery, and the increase of the mercenary soldier, had [38]rendered the lower nobility, as an institution, a factor in the political situation which was fast becoming negligible. The abortive campaign of Franz von Sickingen in 1523 only showed its hopeless weakness. The *Reichsregiment*, or Imperial governing council, a body instituted by Maximilian, had lamentably failed to effect anything towards cementing together the various parts of the unwieldy fabric. Finally, at the Reichstag held in Nürnberg, in December 1522, at which all the estates were represented, the *Reichsregiment*, to all intents and purposes, collapsed.

The Reichstag in question was summoned ostensibly for the purpose of raising a subsidy for the Hungarians in their struggle against the advancing power of the Turks. The Turkish movement westward was, of course, throughout this period, the most important question of what in modern phraseology would be called "foreign politics." The princes voted the proposal of the subsidy without consulting the representatives of the cities, who knew the heaviest part of the burden was to fall upon themselves. The urgency of the situation, however, weighed with them, with the result that they submitted after considerable remonstrance. The princes, in conjunction with their rivals, the lower nobility, next proceeded to attack the commercial monopolies, [39] the first fruits of the rising capitalism, the appanage mainly of the trading companies and the merchant magnates of the towns. This was too much for civic patience. The city representatives, who, of course, belonged to the civic aristocracy, waxed indignant. The feudal orders went on to claim the right to set up vexatious tariffs in their respective territories, whereby to hinder artificially the free development of the new commercial capitalist. This filled up the cup of endurance of the magnates of the city. The city representatives refused their consent to the Turkish subsidy and withdrew. The next step was the sending of a deputation to the young Emperor Karl, who was in Spain, and whose sanction to the decrees of the Reichstag was necessary before their promulgation. The result of the conference held on this occasion was a decision to undermine the *Reichsregiment* and weaken the power of the princes, by whom and by whose tools it was manned, as a factor in the Imperial constitution. As for the princes, while some of their number were positively opposed to it, others cared little one way or the other. Their chief aim was to strengthen and consolidate their power within the limits of their own territories, and a weak empire was perhaps better adapted for effecting this purpose than a stronger one, even [40] though certain of their own order had a controlling voice in its administration. As already hinted, the collapse of the rebellious knighthood under Sickingen, a few weeks later, clearly showed the political drift of the situation in the *haute politique* of the empire.

The rising capitalists of the city, the monopolists, merchant princes, and syndicates, are the theme of universal invective throughout this period. To them the rapid and enormous rise in prices during the early years of the sixteenth century, the scarcity of money consequent on the increased demand for it, and the impoverishment of large sections of the population, were attributed by noble and peasant alike. The whole trend of public opinion, in short, outside the wealthier burghers of the larger cities—the class immediately interested—was adverse to the condition of things created by the new world-market, and by the new class embodying it. At present it was a small class, the only one that gained by it, and that gained at the expense of all the other classes.

Some idea of the class-antagonisms of the period may be gathered from the statement of Ulrich von Hutten about the robber-knights already spoken of, in his

dialogue entitled "Predones," to the effect that there were four orders of robbers in Germany—the <sup>[41]</sup>*knights*, the *lawyers*, the *priests*, and the *merchants* (meaning especially the new capitalist merchant-traders or syndicates). Of these, he declares the robber-knights to be the least harmful. This is naturally only to be expected from so gallant a champion of his order, the friend and abettor of Sickingen. Nevertheless, the seriousness of the robber-knight evil, the toleration of which in principle was so deeply ingrained in the public opinion of large sections of the population, may be judged from the abortive attempts made to stop it, at the instance alike of princes and of cities, who on this point, if on no other, had a common interest. In 1502, for example, at the Reichstag held in Gelnhausen in that year, certain of the highest princes of the empire made a representation that, at least, the knights should permit the gathering in of the harvest and the vintage in peace. But even this modest demand was found to be impracticable. The knights had to live in the style required by their status, as they declared, and where other means were more and more failing them, their ancient right or privilege of plunder was indispensable to their order. Still, Hutten was right so far in declaring the knight the most harmless kind of robber, inasmuch as, direct as were his methods, his sun was obviously setting, while <sup>[42]</sup>as much could not be said of the other classes named; the merchant and the lawyer were on the rise, and the priest, although about to receive a check, was not destined speedily to disappear, or to change fundamentally the character of his activity.

The feudal orders saw their own position seriously threatened by the new development of things economic in the cities. The guilds were becoming crystallized into close corporations of wealthy families, constituting a kind of second *Ehrbarkeit* or town patriciate; the numbers of the landless and unprivileged, with at most a bare footing in the town constitution, were increasing in an alarming proportion; the journeyman workman was no longer a stage between apprentice and master craftsman, but a permanent condition embodied in a large and growing class. All these symptoms indicated an extraordinary economic revolution, which was making itself at first directly felt only in the larger cities, but the results of which were dislocating the social relations of the Middle Ages throughout the whole empire.

Perhaps the most striking feature in this dislocation was the transition from direct barter to exchange through the medium of money, and the consequent suddenly increased importance of the rôle played by usury in the social life <sup>[43]</sup>of the time. The scarcity of money is a perennial theme of complaint for which the new large capitalist-monopolists are made responsible. But the class in question was itself only a symptom of the general economic change. The seeming scarcity of money, though but the consequence of the increased demand for a circulating medium, was explained, to the disadvantage of the hated monopolists, by a crude form of the "mercantile" theory. The new merchant, in contradistinction to the master craftsman working *en famille* with his apprentices and assistants, now often stood entirely outside the

processes of production, as speculator or middleman; and he, and still more the syndicate who fulfilled the like functions on a larger scale (especially with reference to foreign trade), came to be regarded as particularly obnoxious robbers, because interlopers to boot. Unlike the knights, they were robbers with a new face.

The lawyers were detested for much the same reason (cf. *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages*, pp. 219-28). The professional lawyer class, since its final differentiation from the clerk class in general, had made the Roman or civil law its speciality, and had done its utmost everywhere to establish the principles of the latter in place of the old feudal law of earlier mediæval Europe. [44] The Roman law was especially favourable to the pretensions of the princes, and, from an economic point of view, of the nobility in general, inasmuch as land was on the new legal principles treated as the private property of the lord; over which he had full power of ownership, and not, as under feudal and canon law, as a *trust* involving duties as well as rights. The class of jurists was itself of comparatively recent growth in Central Europe, and its rapid increase in every portion of the empire dated from less than half a century back. It may be well understood, therefore, why these interlopers, who ignored the ancient customary law of the country, and who by means of an alien code deprived the poor freeholder or copyholder of his land, or justified new and unheard-of exactions on the part of his lord on the plea that the latter might do what he liked with his own, were regarded by the peasant and humble man as robbers whose depredations were, if anything, even more resented than those of their old and tried enemy—the plundering knight.

The priest, especially of the regular orders, was indeed an old foe, but his offence had now become very rank. From the middle of the fifteenth century onwards the stream of anti-clerical literature waxes alike in volume and intensity. The "monk" had become the [45] object of hatred and scorn throughout the whole lay world. This view of the "regular" was shared, moreover, by not a few of the secular clergy themselves. Humanists, who were subsequently ardent champions of the Church against Luther and the Protestant Reformation—men such as Murner and Erasmus—had been previously the bitterest satirists of the "friar" and the "monk." Amongst the great body of the laity, however, though the religious orders came in perhaps for the greater share of animosity, the secular priesthood was not much better off in popular favour, whilst the upper members of the hierarchy were naturally regarded as the chief blood-suckers of the German people in the interests of Rome. The vast revenues which both directly in the shape of *pallium* (the price of "investiture"), *annates* (first year's revenues of appointments), *Peter's-pence*, and recently of *indulgences*—the latter the by no means most onerous exaction, since it was voluntary—all these things, taken together with what was indirectly obtained from Germany, through the expenditure of German ecclesiastics on their visits to Rome and by the crowd of parasites, nominal holders of German benefices merely, but real recipients of German substance, who danced

attendance at the Vatican—obviously [46]constituted an enormous drain on the resources of the country from all the lay classes alike, of which wealth the papal chair could be plainly seen to be the receptacle.

If we add to these causes of discontent the vastness in number of the regular clergy, the "friars" and "monks" already referred to, who consumed, but were only too obviously unproductive, it will be sufficiently plain that the Protestant Reformation had something very much more than a purely speculative basis to work upon. Religious reformers there had been in Germany throughout the Middle Ages, but their preachings had taken no deep root. The powerful personality of the Monk of Wittenberg found an economic soil ready to hand in which his teachings could fructify, and hence the world-historic result. The peasant revolts, sporadic the Middle Ages through, had for the half-century preceding the Reformation been growing in frequency and importance, but it needed nevertheless the sudden impulse, the powerful jar given by a Luther in 1517, and the series of blows with which it was followed during the years immediately succeeding, to crystallize the mass of fluid discontent and social unrest in its various forms and give it definite direction. The blow which was primarily struck in the region of speculative thought and [47]ecclesiastical relations did not stop there in its effects. The attack on the dominant theological system—at first merely on certain comparatively unessential outworks of that system—necessarily of its own force developed into an attack on the organization representing it, and on the economic basis of the latter. The battle against ecclesiastical abuses, again, in its turn, focussed the ever-smouldering discontent with abuses in general; and this time, not in one district only, but simultaneously over the whole of Germany. The movement inaugurated by Luther gave to the peasant groaning under the weight of baronial oppression, and the small handicraftsman suffering under his *Ehrbarkeit*, a rallying-point and a rallying cry.

In history there is no movement which starts up full grown from the brain of any one man, or even from the mind of any one generation of men, like Athene from the head of Zeus. The historical epoch which marks the crisis of the given change is, after all, little beyond a prominent landmark—a parting of the ways—led up to by a long preparatory development. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the Reformation and its accompanying movements. The ideas and aspirations animating the social, political, and intellectual revolt of the sixteenth century can each be traced [48]back to, at least, the beginning of the fifteenth century, and in many cases farther still. The way the German of Luther's time looked at the burning questions of the hour was not essentially different from the way the English Wyclifites and Lollards, or the Bohemian Hussites and Taborites viewed them. There was obviously a difference born of the later time, but this difference was not, I repeat, essential. The changes which, a century previously, were only just beginning, had, meanwhile, made enormous progress.

The disintegration of the material conditions of mediæval social life was now approaching its completion, forced on by the inventions and discoveries of the previous half-century. But the ideals of the mass of men, learned and simple, were still in the main the ideals that had been prevalent throughout the whole of the later Middle Ages. Men still looked at the world and at social progress through mediæval spectacles. The chief difference was that now ideas which had previously been confined to special localities, or had only had a sporadic existence among the people at large, had become general throughout large portions of the population. The invention of the art of printing was, of course, largely instrumental in effecting this change.

The comparatively sudden popularization of [49]doctrines previously confined to special circles was the distinguishing feature of the intellectual life of the first half of the sixteenth century. Among the many illustrations of the foregoing which might be given, we are specially concerned here to note the sudden popularity during this period of two imaginary constitutions dating from early in the previous century. From the fourteenth century we find traces, perhaps suggested by the Prester John legend, of a deliverer in the shape of an emperor who should come from the East, who should be the last of his name; should right all wrongs; should establish the empire in universal justice and peace; and, in short, should be the forerunner of the kingdom of Christ on earth. This notion or mystical hope took increasing root during the fifteenth century, and is to be found in many respects embodied in the spurious constitutions mentioned, which bore respectively the names of the Emperors Sigismund and Friedrich. It was in this form that the Hussite theories were absorbed by the German mind. The hopes of the Messianists of the "Holy Roman Empire" were centred at one time in the Emperor Sigismund. Later on the rôle of Messiah was carried over to his successor, Friedrich III, upon whom the hopes of the German people were cast.

[50]*The Reformation of Kaiser Sigismund*, originally written about 1438, went through several editions before the end of the century, and was as many times reprinted during the opening years of Luther's movement. Like its successor, that of Friedrich, the scheme attributed to Sigismund proposed the abolition of the recent abuses of feudalism, of the new lawyer class, and of the symptoms already making themselves felt of the change from barter to money payments. It proposed, in short, a return to primitive conditions. It was a scheme of reform on a Biblical basis, embracing many elements of a distinctly communistic character, as communism was then understood. It was pervaded with the idea of equality in the spirit of the Taborite literature of the age, from which it took its origin.

The so-called *Reformation of Kaiser Sigismund* dealt especially with the peasantry—the serfs and villeins of the time; that attributed to Friedrich was mainly concerned with the rising population of the towns. All towns and communes were to undergo a constitutional transformation. Handicraftsmen should receive just wages;

all roads should be free; taxes, dues, and levies should be abolished; trading capital was to be limited to a maximum of 10,000 *gulden*; all surplus [51] capital should fall to the Imperial authorities, who should lend it in case of need to poor handicraftsmen at 5 per cent.; uniformity of coinage and of weights and measures was to be decreed, together with the abolition of the Roman and Canon law. Legists, priests, and princes were to be severely dealt with. But, curiously enough, the middle and lower nobility, especially the knighthood, were more tenderly handled, being treated as themselves victims of their feudal superiors, lay and ecclesiastic, especially the latter. In this connection the secularization of ecclesiastical fiefs was strongly insisted on.

As men found, however, that neither the Emperor Sigismund, nor the Emperor Friedrich III, nor the Emperor Maximilian, upon each of whom successively their hopes had been cast as the possible realization of the German Messiah of earlier dreams, fulfilled their expectations, nay, as each in succession implicitly belied these hopes, showing no disposition whatever to act up to the views promulgated in their names, the tradition of the Imperial deliverer gradually lost its force and popularity. By the opening of the Lutheran Reformation the opinion had become general that a change would not come from above, but that the initiative must rest with the people themselves—with the classes specially [52] oppressed by existing conditions, political, economic, and ecclesiastical—to effect by their own exertions such a transformation as was shadowed forth in the spurious constitutions. These, and similar ideas, were now everywhere taken up and elaborated, often in a still more radical sense than the original; and they everywhere found hearers and adherents.

The "true inwardness" of the change, of which the Protestant Reformation represented the ideological side, meant the transformation of society from a basis mainly corporative and co-operative to one individualistic in its essential character. The whole polity of the Middle Ages industrial, social, political, ecclesiastical, was based on the principle of the group or the community—ranging in hierarchical order from the trade-guild to the town corporation; from the town corporation through the feudal orders to the Imperial throne itself; from the single monastery to the order as a whole; and from the order as a whole to the complete hierarchy of the Church as represented by the papal chair. The principle of this social organization was now breaking down. The modern and bourgeois conception of the autonomy of the individual in all spheres of life was beginning to affirm itself.

The most definite expression of this new principle asserted itself in the religious sphere. [53] The individualism which was inherent in early Christianity, but which was present as a speculative content merely, had not been strong enough to counteract even the remains of corporate tendencies on the material side of things, in the decadent Roman Empire; and infinitely less so the vigorous group-organization and sentiment of the northern nations, with their tribal society and communistic traditions still mainly intact. And these were the elements out of which mediæval society arose.

Naturally enough the new religious tendencies in revolt against the mediæval corporate Christianity of the Catholic Church seized upon this individualistic element in Christianity, declaring the chief end of religion to be a personal salvation, for the attainment of which the individual himself was sufficing, apart from Church organization and Church tradition. This served as a valuable destructive weapon for the iconoclasts in their attack on ecclesiastical privilege; consequently, in religion, this doctrine of Individualism rapidly made headway. But in more material matters the old corporative instinct was still too strong and the conditions were as yet too imperfectly ripe for the speedy triumph of Individualism.

The conflict of the two tendencies is curiously exhibited in the popular movements of the Reformation-time. As enemies of the [54]decaying and obstructive forms of Feudalism and Church organization, the peasant and handicraftsman were necessarily on the side of the new Individualism. So far as negation and destruction were concerned, they were working apparently for the new order of things—that new order of things which *longo intervallo* has finally landed us in the developed capitalistic Individualism of the twentieth century. Yet when we come to consider their constructive programmes we find the positive demands put forward are based either on ideal conceptions derived from reminiscences of primitive communism, or else that they distinctly postulate a return to a state of things—the old mark-organisation—upon which the later feudalism had in various ways encroached, and finally superseded. Hence they were, in these respects, not merely not in the trend of contemporary progress, but in actual opposition to it; and therefore, as Lassalle has justly remarked, they were necessarily and in any case doomed to failure in the long run.

This point should not be lost sight of in considering the various popular movements of the earlier half of the sixteenth century. The world was still essentially mediæval; men were still dominated by mediæval ways of looking at things and still immersed in mediæval conditions of life. It is [55]true that out of this mediæval soil the new individualistic society was beginning to grow, but its manifestations were as yet not so universally apparent as to force a recognition of their real meaning. It was still possible to regard the various symptoms of change, numerous as they were, and far-reaching as we now see them to have been, as sporadic phenomena, as rank but unessential overgrowths on the old society, which it was possible by pruning and the application of other suitable remedies to get rid of, and thereby to restore a state of pristine health in the body political and social.

Biblical phrases and the notion of Divine Justice now took the place in the popular mind formerly occupied by Church and Emperor. All the then oppressed classes of society—the small peasant, half villein, half free-man; the landless journeyman and town-proletarian; the beggar by the wayside; the small master, crushed by usury or tyrannized over by his wealthier colleague in the guild, or by the town-patriciate; even



the impoverished knight, or the soldier of fortune defrauded of his pay; in short, all with whom times were bad, found consolation for their wants and troubles, and at the same time an incentive to action, in the notion of a Divine Justice which should restore all things, and the advent of [56]which was approaching. All had Biblical phrases tending in the direction of their immediate aspirations in their mouths.

As bearing on the development and propaganda of the new ideas, the existence of a new intellectual class, rendered possible by the new method of exchange through money (as opposed to that of barter), which for a generation past had been in full swing in the larger towns, must not be forgotten. Formerly land had been the essential condition of livelihood; now it was no longer so. The "universal equivalent," money, conjoined with the printing press, was rendering a literary class proper, for the first time, possible. In the same way the teacher, physician, and the small lawyer were enabled to subsist as followers of independent professions, apart from the special service of the Church or as part of the court-retinue of some feudal potentate. To these we must add a fresh and very important section of the intellectual class which also now for the first time acquired an independent existence—to wit, that of the public official or functionary. This change, although only one of many, is itself specially striking as indicating the transition from the barbaric civilization of the Middle Ages to the beginnings of the civilization of the modern world. We have, in short, before us, as already remarked, a [57]period in which the Middle Ages, whilst still dominant, have their force visibly sapped by the growth of a new life.

To sum up the chief features of this new life: Industrially, we have the decline of the old system of production in the countryside in which each manor or, at least, each district, was for the most part self-sufficing and self-supporting, where production was almost entirely for immediate use, and only the surplus was exchanged, and where such exchange as existed took place exclusively under the form of barter. In place of this, we find now something more than the beginnings of a national-market and distinct traces of that of a world-market. In the towns the change was even still more marked. Here we have a sudden and hothouse-like development of the influence of money. The guild-system, originally designed for associations of craftsmen, for which the chief object was the man and the work, and not the mere acquirement of profit, was changing its character. The guilds were becoming close corporations of privileged capitalists, while a commercial capitalism, as already indicated, was raising its head in all the larger centres. In consequence of this state of things, the rapid development of the towns and of commerce, national and international, and the economic backwardness of the [58]country-side, a landless proletariat was being formed, which meant on the one hand an enormous increase in mendicancy of all kinds, and on the other the creation of a permanent class of only casually-employed persons, whom the towns absorbed indeed, but for the most part with a new form of citizenship involving only the bare right of residence within the walls. Similar social phenomena were, of

course, manifesting themselves contemporaneously in other parts of Europe; but in Germany the change was more sudden than elsewhere, and was complicated by special political circumstances.

The political and military functions of that for the mediæval polity of Germany, so important class, the knighthood, or lower nobility, had by this time become practically obsolete, mainly owing to the changed conditions of warfare. But yet the class itself was numerous, and still, nominally at least, possessed of most of its old privileges and authority. The extent of its real power depended, however, upon the absence or weakness of a central power, whether Imperial or State-territorial. The attempt to reconstitute the centralized power of the empire under Maximilian, of which the *Reichsregiment* was the outcome, had, as we have seen, not proved successful. Its means of carrying into effect its own decisions were [59]hopelessly inadequate. In 1523 it was already weakened, and became little more than a "survival" after the Reichstag held at Nürnberg in 1524. Thus this body, which had been called into existence at the instance of the most powerful estates of the empire, was "shelved" with the practically unanimous consent of those who had been instrumental in creating it.

But if the attempt at Imperial centralization had failed, the force of circumstances tended partly for this very reason to favour State-territorial centralization. The aim of all the territorial magnates, the higher members of the Imperial system, was to consolidate their own princely power within the territories owing them allegiance. This desire played a not unimportant part in the establishment of the Reformation in certain parts of the country—for example, in Würtemberg, and in the northern lands of East Prussia which were subject to the Grand Master of the Teutonic knights. The time was at hand for the transformation of the mediæval feudal territory, with its local jurisdictions and its ties of service, into the modern bureaucratic state, with its centralized administration and organized system of salaried functionaries subject to a central authority.

The religious movement inaugurated by [60]Luther met and was absorbed by all these elements of change. It furnished them with a religious *flag*, under cover of which they could work themselves out. This was necessary in an age when the Christian theology was unquestioningly accepted in one or another form by wellnigh all men, and hence entered as a practical belief into their daily thoughts and lives. The Lutheran Reformation, from its inception in 1517 down to the Peasants' War of 1525, at once absorbed, and was absorbed by, all the revolutionary elements of the time. Up to the last-mentioned date it gathered revolutionary force year by year. But this was the turning point.

With the crushing of the peasants' revolt and the decisively anti-popular attitude taken up by Luther, the religious movement associated with him ceased any longer to have a revolutionary character. It henceforth became definitely subservient to the new

interests of the wealthy and privileged classes, and as such completely severed itself from the more extreme popular reforming sects.

Up to this time, though by no means always approved by Luther himself or his immediate followers, and in some cases even combated by them, the latter were nevertheless not looked upon with disfavour by large numbers of the [61]rank and file of those who regarded Martin Luther as their leader.

Nothing could exceed the violence of language with which Luther himself attacked all who stood in his way. Not only the ecclesiastical, but also the secular heads of Christendom came in for the coarsest abuse; "swine" and "water-bladder" are not the strongest epithets employed. But this was not all; in his *Treatise on Temporal Authority and how far it should be Obeyed* (published in 1523), whilst professedly maintaining the thesis that the secular authority is a Divine ordinance, Luther none the less expressly justifies resistance to all human authority where its mandates are contrary to "the word of God." At the same time, he denounces in his customary energetic language the existing powers generally. "Thou shouldst know," he says, "that since the beginning of the world a wise prince is truly a rare bird, but a pious prince is still more rare." "They" (princes) "are mostly the greatest fools or the greatest rogues on earth; therefore must we at all times expect from them the worst, and little good." Farther on, he proceeds: "The common man begetteth understanding, and the plague of the princes worketh powerfully among the people and the common man. He will not, he cannot, he purposeth not, longer to suffer your [62]tyranny and oppression. Dear princes and lords, know ye what to do, for God will no longer endure it? The world is no more as of old time, when ye hunted and drove the people as your quarry. But think ye to carry on with much drawing of sword, look to it that one do not come who shall bid ye sheath it, and that not in God's name!"

Again, in a pamphlet published the following year, 1524, relative to the Reichstag of that year, Luther proclaims that the judgment of God already awaits "the drunken and mad princes." He quotes the phrase: "Deposuit potentes de sede" (Luke i. 52), and adds "that is your case, dear lords, even now when ye see it not!" After an admonition to subjects to refuse to go forth to war against the Turks, or to pay taxes towards resisting them, who were ten times wiser and more godly than German princes, the pamphlet concludes with the prayer: "May God deliver us from ye all, and of His grace give us other rulers!" Against such utterances as the above, the conventional exhortations to Christian humility, non-resistance, and obedience to those in authority, would naturally not weigh in a time of popular ferment. So, until the momentous year 1525, it was not unnatural that, notwithstanding his quarrel with Münzer and the Zwickau enthusiasts, and with [63]others whom he deemed to be going "too far," Luther should have been regarded as in some sort the central figure of the revolutionary movement, political and social, no less than religious.

But the great literary and agitational forces during the period referred to were of course either outside the Lutheran movement proper or at most only on the fringe of it. A mass of broadsheets and pamphlets, specimens of some of which have been given in a former volume (*German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages*, pp. 114-28), poured from the press during these years, all with the refrain that things had gone on long enough, that the common man, be he peasant or townsman, could no longer bear it. But even more than the revolutionary literature were the wandering preachers effective in working up the agitation which culminated in the Peasants' War of 1525. The latter comprised men of all classes, from the impoverished knight, the poor priest, the escaped monk, or the travelling scholar, to the peasant, the mercenary soldier out of employment, the poor handicraftsman, or even the beggar. Learned and simple, they wandered about from place to place, in the market place of the town, in the common field of the village, from one territory to another, preaching the gospel of discontent. [64] Their harangues were, as a rule, as much political as religious, and the ground tone of them all was the social or economic misery of the time, and the urgency of immediate action to bring about a change. As in the literature, so in the discourses, Biblical phrases designed to give force to the new teaching abounded. The more thorough-going of these itinerant apostles openly aimed at nothing less than the establishment of a new Christian Commonwealth, or, as they termed it, "the Kingdom of God on Earth."

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## FOOTNOTES:

[1] We are here, of course, dealing more especially with Germany; but substantially the same course was followed in the development of municipalities in other parts of Europe.

[2] *Einleitung*, pp. 255, 256.

[3] Cf. Von Maurer's *Einleitung zur Geschichte der Mark-Verfassung*; Gomme's *Village Communities*; Laveleye, *La Propriété Primitive*; Stubbs's *Constitutional History*; also Maine's works.

[4] It should be remembered that Germany at this time was cut up into feudal territorial divisions of all sizes, from the principality, or the prince-bishopric, to the knightly manor. Every few miles, and sometimes less, there was a fresh territory, a fresh lord, and a fresh jurisdiction.

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## CHAPTER I [ToC](#)

### THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT

The "great man" theory of history, formerly everywhere prevalent, and even now common among non-historical persons, has long regarded the Reformation as the purely personal work of the Augustine monk who was its central figure. The fallacy of this conception is particularly striking in the case of the Reformation. Not only was it preceded by numerous sporadic outbursts of religious revivalism which sometimes took the shape of opposition to the dominant form of Christianity, though it is true they generally shaded off into mere movements of independent Catholicism within the Church; but there were in addition at least two distinct religious movements which led up to it, while much which, under the reformers of the sixteenth century, appears as a distinct and separate theology, is traceable in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the mystical movement connected with the names of Meister Eckhart and Tauler. Meister <sup>[66]</sup>Eckhart, whose free treatment of Christian doctrines, in order to bring them into consonance with his mystical theology, had drawn him into conflict with the Papacy, undoubtedly influenced Luther through his disciple, Tauler, and especially through the book which proceeded from the latter's school, the *Deutsche Theologie*. It is, however, in the much more important movement, which originated with Wyclif and extended to Central Europe through Huss, that we must look for the more obvious influences determining the course of religious development in Germany.

The Wyclifite movement in England was less a doctrinal heterodoxy than a revolt against the Papacy and the priestly hierarchy. Mere theoretical speculations were seldom interfered with, but anything which touched their material interests at once aroused the vigilance of the clergy. It is noticeable that the diffusion of Lollardism, that is of the ideas of Wyclif, if not the cause of, was at least followed by the peasant rising under the leadership of John Ball, a connection which is also visible in the Tziska revolt following the Hussite movement, and the Peasants' War in Germany which came on the heels of the Lutheran Reformation. How much Huss was directly influenced by the teachings of Wyclif is clear. The works of the latter were <sup>[67]</sup>widely circulated throughout Europe; for one of the advantages of the custom of writing in

Latin, which was universal during the Middle Ages, was that books of an important character were immediately current amongst all scholars without having, as now, to wait upon the caprice and ability of translators. Huss read Wyclif's works as the preparation for his theological degree, and subsequently made them his text-books when teaching at the University of Prague. After his treacherous execution at Constance, and the events which followed thereupon in Bohemia, a number of Hussite fugitives settled in Southern Germany, carrying with them the seeds of the new doctrines. An anonymous contemporary writer states that "to John Huss and his followers are to be traced almost all those false principles concerning the power of the spiritual and temporal authorities and the possession of earthly goods and rights which before in Bohemia, and now with us, have called forth revolt and rebellion, plunder, arson, and murder, and have shaken to its foundations the whole commonwealth. The poison of these false doctrines has been long flowing from Bohemia into Germany, and will produce the same desolating consequences wherever it spreads."

The condition of the Catholic Church, [68]against which the Reformation movement generally was a protest, needs here to be made clear to the reader. The beginning of clerical disintegration is distinctly visible in the first half of the fourteenth century. The interdicts, as an institution, had ceased to be respected, and the priesthood itself began openly to sink itself in debauchery and to play fast and loose with the rites of the Church. Indulgences for a hundred years were readily granted for a consideration. The manufacture of relics became an organized branch of industry; and festivals of fools and festivals of asses were invented by the jovial priests themselves in travesty of sacred mysteries, as a welcome relaxation from the monotony of prescribed ecclesiastical ceremony. Pilgrimages increased in number and frequency; new saints were created by the dozen; and the disbelief of the clergy in the doctrines they professed was manifest even to the most illiterate, whilst contempt for the ceremonies they practised was openly displayed in the performance of their clerical functions. An illustration of this is the joke of the priests related by Luther, who were wont during the celebration of the Mass, when the worshippers fondly imagined that the sacred formula of transubstantiation was being repeated, to replace the words *Panis es et carnem fies*, [69]"Bread thou art and flesh thou shalt become," by *Panis es et panis manebis*, "Bread thou art and bread thou shalt remain."

The scandals as regards clerical manners, growing, as they had been, for many generations, reached their climax in the early part of the sixteenth century. It was a common thing for priests to drive a roaring trade as moneylenders, landlords of alehouses and gambling dens, and even in some cases, brothel-keepers. Papal ukases had proved ineffective to stem the current of clerical abuses. The regular clergy evoked even more indignation than the secular. "Stinking cowls" was a favourite epithet for the monks. Begging, cheating, shameless ignorance, drunkenness, and debauchery, are alleged as being their noted characteristics. One of the princes of the

empire addresses a prior of a convent largely patronized by aristocratic ladies as "Thou, our common brother-in-law!" In some of the convents of Friesland, promiscuous intercourse between the sexes was, it is said, quite openly practised, the offspring being reared as monks and nuns. The different orders competed with each other for the fame and wealth to be obtained out of the public credulity. A fraud attempted by the Dominicans at Bern, in 1506, *with the concurrence of the heads of the order* [70] *throughout Germany*, was one of the main causes of that city adopting the Reformation.

In addition to the increasing burdens of investitures, annates, and other Papal dues, the brunt of which the German people had directly or indirectly to bear, special offence was given at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the excessive exploitation of the practice of indulgences by Leo X for the purpose of completing the cathedral of St. Peter's at Rome. It was this, coming on the top of the exactions already rendered necessary by the increasing luxury and debauchery of the Papal Court and those of the other ecclesiastical dignitaries, that directly led to the dramatic incidents with which the Lutheran Reformation opened.

The remarkable personality with which the religious side of the Reformation is pre-eminently associated was a child of his time, who had passed through a variety of mental struggles, and had already broken through the bonds of the old ecclesiasticism before that turning-point in his career which is usually reckoned the opening of the Reformation, to wit—the nailing of the theses on to the door of the Schloss-Kirche in Wittenberg on the 31st of October, 1517. Martin Luther, we must always bear in mind, however, was no Protestant in the English Puritan sense of the [71] word. It was not merely that he retained much of what would be deemed by the old-fashioned English Protestant "Romish error" in his doctrine, but his practical view of life showed a reaction from the ascetic pretensions which he had seen bred nothing but hypocrisy and the worst forms of sensual excess. It is, indeed, doubtful if the man who sang the praises of "Wine, Women, and Song" would have been deemed a fit representative in Parliament or elsewhere by the British Nonconformist conscience of our day; or would be acceptable in any capacity to the grocer-deacon of our provincial towns, who, not content with being allowed to sand his sugar and adulterate his tea unrebuked, would socially ostracise every one whose conduct did not square with his conventional shibboleths. Martin Luther was a child of his time also as a boon companion. The freedom of his living in the years following his rupture with Rome was the subject of severe animadversions on the part of the noble, but in this respect narrow-minded, Thomas Münzer, who, in his open letter addressed to the "Soft-living flesh of Wittenberg," scathingly denounces what he deems his debauchery.

It does not enter into our province here to discuss at length the religious aspects of the Reformation; but it is interesting [72] to note in passing the more than modern liberality of Luther's views with respect to the marriage question and the celibacy of

the clergy, contrasted with the strong mediæval flavour of his belief in witchcraft and sorcery. In his *De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiæ* (1519) he expresses the view that if, for any cause, husband or wife are prevented from having sexual intercourse they are justified, the woman equally with the man, in seeking it elsewhere. He was opposed to divorce, though he did not forbid it, and recommended that a man should rather have a plurality of wives than that he should put away any of them. Luther held strenuously the view that marriage was a purely external contract for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, and in no way entered into the spiritual life of the man. On this ground he sees no objection in the so-called mixed marriages, which were, of course, frowned upon by the Catholic Church. In his sermon on "Married Life" he says: "Know therefore that marriage is an outward thing, like any other worldly business. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride, buy, speak, and bargain with a heathen, a Jew, a Turk, or a heretic, so may I also be and remain married to such an one, and I care not one jot for the fool's laws which forbid it.... A heathen [73] is just as much man or woman, well and shapely made by God, as St. Peter, St. Paul, or St. Lucia." Nor did he shrink from applying his views to particular cases, as is instanced by his correspondence with Philip von Hessen, whose constitution appears to have required more than one wife. He here lays down explicitly the doctrine that polygamy and concubinage are not forbidden to Christians, though, in his advice to Philip, he adds the *caveat* that he should keep the matter dark to the end that offence might not be given. "For," says he, "it matters not, provided one's conscience is right, what others say." In one of his sermons on the Pentateuch [5] we find the words: "It is not forbidden that a man have more than one wife. I would not forbid it to-day, albeit I would not advise it.... Yet neither would I condemn it." Other opinions on the nature of the sexual relation were equally broad; for in one of his writings on monastic celibacy his words plainly indicate his belief that chastity, no more than other fleshly mortifications, was to be considered a divine ordinance for all men or women. In an address to the clergy he says: "A woman not possessed of high and rare grace can no more abstain from a man than from eating, drinking, sleeping, or other [74] natural function. Likewise a man cannot abstain from a woman. The reason is that it is as deeply implanted in our nature to breed children as it is to eat and drink." [6] The worthy Janssen observes in a scandalized tone that Luther, as regards certain matters relating to married life, "gave expression to principles before unheard of in Christian Europe"; [7] and the British Nonconformist of to-day, if he reads these "immoral" opinions of the hero of the Reformation, will be disposed to echo the sentiments of the Ultramontane historian.

The relation of the Reformation to the "New Learning" was in Germany not unlike that which existed in the other northern countries of Europe, and notably in England. Whilst the hostility of the latter to the mediæval Church was very marked, and it was hence disposed to regard the religious Reformation as an ally, this had not proceeded very far before the tendency of the Renaissance spirit was to side with Catholicism



against the new theology and dogma, as merely destructive and hostile to culture. The men of the Humanist movement were for the most part Free-thinkers, and it was with them [75] that free-thought first appeared in modern Europe. They therefore had little sympathy with the narrow bigotry of religious reformers, and preferred to remain in touch with the Church, whose then loose and tolerant Catholicism gave freer play to intellectual speculations, provided they steered clear of overt theological heterodoxy, than the newer systems, which, taking theology *au grand sérieux*, tended to regard profane art and learning as more or less superfluous, and spent their whole time in theological wrangles. Nevertheless, there were not wanting men who, influenced at first by the revival of learning, ended by throwing themselves entirely into the Reformation movement, though in these cases they were usually actuated rather by their hatred of the Catholic hierarchy than by any positive religious sentiment.

Of such men Ulrich von Hutten, the descendant of an ancient and influential knightly family, was a noteworthy example. After having already acquired fame as the author of a series of skits in the new Latin and other works of classical scholarship, being also well known as the ardent supporter of Reuchlin in his dispute with the Church, and as the friend and correspondent of the central Humanist figure of the time, Erasmus, he watched with absorbing interest the movement [76] which Luther had inaugurated. Six months after the nailing of the theses at Wittenberg, he writes enthusiastically to a friend respecting the growing ferment in ecclesiastical matters, evidently regarding the new movement as a Kilkenny-cat fight. "The leaders," he says, "are bold and hot, full of courage and zeal. Now they shout and cheer, now they lament and bewail, as loud as they can. They have lately set themselves to write; the printers are getting enough to do. Propositions, corollaries, conclusions, and articles are being sold. For this alone I hope they will mutually destroy each other." "A few days ago a monk was telling me what was going on in Saxony, to which I replied: 'Devour each other in order that ye in turn may be devoured (*sic*).' Pray Heaven that our enemies may fight each other to the bitter end, and by their obstinacy extinguish each other."

Thus it will be seen that Hutten regarded the Reformation in its earlier stages as merely a monkish squabble, and failed to see the tremendous upheaval of all the old landmarks of ecclesiastical domination which was immanent in it. So soon, however, as he perceived its real significance, he threw himself wholly into the movement. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that, although Hutten's zeal for [77] Humanism made him welcome any attempt to overthrow the power of the clergy and the monks, he had also an eminently political motive for his action in what was, in some respects, the main object of his life, viz. to rescue the "knighthood," or smaller nobility, from having their independence crushed out by the growing powers of the princes of the empire. Probably more than one-third of the manors were held by ecclesiastical dignitaries, so that anything which threatened their possessions and privileges seemed

to strike a blow at the very foundations of the Imperial system. Hutten hoped that the new doctrines would set the princes by the ears all round; and that then, by allying themselves with the reforming party, the knighthood might succeed in retaining the privileges which still remained to them, but were rapidly slipping away, and might even regain some of those which had been already lost. It was not till later, however, that Hutten saw matters in this light. He was, at the time the above letter was written, in the service of the Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, the leading favourer of the New Learning amongst the prince-prelates, and it was mainly from the Humanist standpoint that he regarded the beginnings of the Reformation. After leaving the service of the archbishop he struck up a personal friendship with Luther, instigated [78]thereto by his political chief, Franz von Sickingen, the leader of the knighthood, from whom he probably received the first intimation of the importance of the new movement to their common cause.

When, in 1520, the young Emperor, Charles V, was crowned at Aachen, Luther's party, as well as the knighthood, expected that considerable changes would result in a sense favourable to their position from the presumed pliability of the new head of the empire. His youth, it was supposed, would make him more sympathetic to the newer spirit which was rapidly developing itself; and it is true that about the time of his election Charles had shown a transient favour to the "recalcitrant monk." It would appear, however, that this was only for the purpose of frightening the Pope into abandoning his declared intention of abolishing the Inquisition in Spain, then regarded as one of the mainstays of the royal power, and still more to exercise pressure upon him, in order that he should facilitate Charles's designs on the Milanese territory. Once these objects were attained, he was just as ready to oblige the Pope by suppressing the new anti-Papal movement as he might possibly otherwise have been to have favoured it with a view to humbling the only serious rival to his dominion in the empire.

[79]Immediately after his coronation he proceeded to Cologne, and convoked by Imperial edict a Reichstag at Worms for the following 27th of January, 1521. The proceedings of this famous Reichstag have been unfortunately so identified with the edict against Luther that the other important matters which were there discussed have almost fallen into oblivion. At least two other questions were dealt with, however, which are significant of the changes that were then taking place. The first was the rehabilitation and strengthening of the Imperial Governing Council (*Reichsregiment*), whose functions under Maximilian had been little more than nominal. There was at first a feeling amongst the States in favour of transferring all authority to it, even during the residence of the Emperor in the empire; and in the end, while having granted to it complete power during his absence, it practically retained very much of this power when he was present. In constitution it was very similar to the French "Parliaments," and, like them, was principally composed of learned jurists, four being

elected by the Emperor and the remainder by the estates. The character and the great powers of this council, extending even to ecclesiastical matters during the ensuing years, undoubtedly did much to hasten on the substitution of the civil law for the [80]older customary or common law, a matter which we shall consider more in detail later on. The financial condition of the empire was also considered; and it here first became evident that the dislocation of economic conditions, which had begun with the century, would render an enormously increased taxation necessary to maintain the Imperial authority, amounting to five times as much as had previously been required.

It was only after these secular affairs of the empire had been disposed of that the deliberations of the Reichstag on ecclesiastical matters were opened by the indictment of Luther in a long speech by Aleander, one of the papal nuncios, in introducing the Pope's letter. In spite of the efforts of his friends, Luther was not permitted to be present at the beginning of the proceedings; but subsequently he was sent for by the Emperor, in order that he might state his case. His journey to Worms was one long triumph, especially at Erfurt, where he was received with enthusiasm by the Humanists as the enemy of the Papacy. But his presence in the Reichstag was unavailing, and the proceedings resulted in his being placed under the ban of the empire. The safe-conduct of the Emperor was, however, in his case respected; and in spite of the fears of his friends that a like fate [81]might befall him as had befallen Huss after the Council of Constance, he was allowed to depart unmolested.

On his way to Wittenberg Luther was seized, by arrangement with his supporter, the Kurfürst of Saxony, and conveyed in safety to the Castle of Wartburg, in Thüringen, a report in the meantime being industriously circulated by certain of his adherents, with a view of arousing popular feeling, that he had been arrested by order of the Emperor and was being tortured. In this way he was secured from all danger for the time being, and it was during his subsequent stay that he laid the foundations of the literary language of Germany.

Says a contemporary writer, [8] an eye-witness of what went on at Worms during the sitting of the Reichstag: "All is disorder and confusion. Seldom a night doth pass but that three or four persons be slain. The Emperor hath installed a provost, who hath drowned, hanged, and murdered over a hundred men." He proceeds: "Stabbing, whoring, flesh-eating (it was in Lent) ... altogether there is an orgie worthy of the Venusberg." He further states that many gentlemen and other visitors had drunk themselves to death on the strong Rhenish wine. Aleander was in danger [82]of being murdered by the Lutheran populace, instigated thereto by Hutten's inflammatory letters from the neighbouring Castle of Ebernburg, in which Franz von Sickingen had given him a refuge. The fiery Humanist wrote to Aleander himself, saying that he would leave no stone unturned "till thou who earnest hither full of wrath, madness, crime, and treachery shalt be carried hence a lifeless corpse." Aleander naturally felt

exceedingly uncomfortable, and other supporters of the Papal party were not less disturbed at the threats which seemed in a fair way of being carried out. The Emperor himself was without adequate means of withstanding a popular revolt should it occur. He had never been so low in cash or in men as at that moment. On the other hand, Sickingen, to whom he owed money, and who was the only man who could have saved the situation under the circumstances, had matters come to blows, was almost overtly on the side of the Lutherans; while the whole body of the impoverished knighthood were only awaiting a favourable opportunity to overthrow the power of the magnates, secular and ecclesiastic, with Sickingen as a leader. Such was the state of affairs at the beginning of the year 1521.

The ban placed upon Luther by the Reichstag marks the date of the complete rupture between the Reforming party and the old [83]Church. Henceforward, many Humanist and Humanistically influenced persons who had supported him withdrew from the movement and swelled the ranks of the Conservatives. Foremost amongst these were Pirckheimer, the wealthy merchant and scholar of Nürnberg, and many others, who dreaded lest the attack on ecclesiastical property and authority should, as indeed was the case, issue in a general attack on all property and authority. Thomas Murner, also, who was the type of the "moderate" of the situation, while professing to disapprove of the abuses of the Church, declared that Luther's manner of agitation could only lead to the destruction of all order, civil no less than ecclesiastical. The two parties were now clearly defined, and the points at issue were plainly irreconcilable with one another or involved irreconcilable details.

The printing-press now for the first time appeared as the vehicle for popular literature; the art of the bard gave place to the art of the typographer, and the art of the preacher saw confronting it a formidable rival in that of the pamphleteer. Similarly in the French Revolution, modern journalism, till then unimportant and sporadic, received its first great development, and began seriously to displace alike the preacher, the pamphlet, and the broadside. The flood of theological [84]disquisitions, satires, dialogues, sermons, which now poured from every press in Germany, overflowed into all classes of society. These writings are so characteristic of the time that it is worth while devoting a few pages to their consideration, the more especially because it will afford us the opportunity for considering other changes in that spirit of the age, partly diseased growths of decaying mediævalism and partly the beginnings of the modern critical spirit, which also find expression in the literature of the Reformation period.

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## FOOTNOTES:

[5]*Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. xxxiii. pp. 322-4.

[6]Quoted in Janssen, *Ein Zweites Wort an meine Kritiker* 1883, p. 94.

[7]*Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes*, vol. ii. p. 115.

[8]Quoted in Janssen, bk. ii. 162.

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[85]

## CHAPTER II [ToC](#)

### POPULAR LITERATURE OF THE TIME

In accordance with the conventional view the Reichstag at Worms was a landmark in the history of the Reformation. This is, however, only true as regards the political side of the movement. The popular feeling was really quite continuous, at least from 1517 to 1525. With the latter year and the collapse of the peasant revolt a change is noticeable. In 1525 the Reformation, as a great upstirring of the popular mind of Central Europe, in contradistinction to its character as an academic and purely political movement, reached high-water mark, and may almost be said to have exhausted itself. Until the latter year it was purely a revolutionary movement, attracting to itself all the disruptive elements of its time. Later, the reactionary possibilities within it declared themselves. The emancipation from the thralldom of the Catholic hierarchy and its Papal head, it was soon found, meant not emancipation from the arbitrary tyranny of the [\[86\]](#)new political and centralizing authorities then springing up, but, on the contrary, rather their consecration. The ultimate outcome, in fact, of the whole business was, as we shall see later on, the inculcation of the non-resistance theory as regards the civil power, and the clearing of the way for its

extremest expression in the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, a theory utterly alien to the belief and practice of the Mediaeval Church.

The Reichstag of Worms, by cutting off all possibility of reconciliation, rather gave further edge to the popular revolutionary side of the movement than otherwise. The whole progress of the change in public feeling is plainly traceable in the mass of ephemeral literature that has come down to us from this period, broadsides, pamphlets, satires, folk-songs, and the rest. The anonymous literature to which we more especially refer is distinguished by its coarse brutality and humour, even in the writings of the Reformers, which were themselves in no case remarkable for the suavity of their polemic.

Hutten, in some of his later vernacular poems, approaches the character of the less-cultured broadside literature. To the critical mind it is somewhat amusing to note the enthusiasm with which the modern Dissenting and Puritan class contemplates the period of [87] which we are writing—an enthusiasm that would probably be effectively damped if the laudators of the Reformation knew the real character of the movement and of its principal actors.

The first attacks made by the broadside literature were naturally directed against the simony and benefice-grabbing of the clergy, a characteristic of the priestly office that has always powerfully appealed to the popular mind. Thus the "Courtisan and Benefice-eater" attacks the parasite of the Roman Court, who absorbs ecclesiastical revenues wholesale, putting in perfunctory *locum tenens* on the cheap, and begins:—

I'm fairly called a Simonist and eke a Courtisan, And here to every peasant and every common man  
My knavery will very well appear. I called and cried to all who'd give me ear,  
To nobleman and knight and all above me: "Behold me! And ye'll find I'll truly love ye."

In another we read:—

The Paternoster teaches well How one for another his prayers should tell, Thro'  
brotherly love and not for gold, And good those same prayers God doth hold. So too  
saith Holy Paul right clearly, Each shall his brother's load bear dearly.

But now, it declares, all that is changed. [88] Now we are being taught just the opposite of God's teachings:—

Such doctrine hath the priests increased, Whom men as masters now must  
feast, 'Fore all the crowd of Simonists, Whose waxing number no man wists, The  
towns and thorps seem full of them, And in all lands they're seen with shame. Their  
violence and knavery Leave not a church or living free.

A prose pamphlet, apparently published about the summer of 1520, shortly after Luther's ex-communication, was the so-called "Wolf Song" (*Wolf-gesang*), which paints the enemies of Luther as wolves. It begins with a screed on the creation and fall of Adam, and a dissertation on the dogma of the Redemption; and then proceeds: "As one might say, dear brother, instruct me, for there is now in our times so great commotion in faith come upon us. There is one in Saxony who is called Luther, of whom many pious and honest folk tell how that he doth write so consolingly the good evangelical (*evangelische*) truth. But again I hear that the Pope and the cardinals at Rome have put him under the ban as a heretic; and certain of our own preachers, too, scold him from their pulpits as a knave, a misleader, and a heretic. I am utterly [89]confounded, and know not where to turn; albeit my reason and heart do speak to me even as Luther writeth. But yet again it bethinks me that when the Pope, the cardinal, the bishop, the doctor, the monk, and the priest, for the greater part are against him, and so that all save the common men and a few gentlemen, doctors, councillors, and knights, are his adversaries, what shall I do?" "For answer, dear friend, get thee back and search the Scriptures, and thou shalt find that so it hath gone with all the holy prophets even as it now fareth with Doctor Martin Luther, who is in truth a godly Christian and manly heart and only true Pope and Apostle, when he the true office of the Apostles publicly fulfilleth.... If the godly man Luther were pleasing to the world, that were indeed a true sign that his doctrine were not from God; for the word of God is a fiery sword, a hammer that breaketh in pieces the rocks, and not a fox's tail or a reed that may be bent according to our pleasure." Seventeen noxious qualities of the wolf are adduced—his ravenousness, his cunning, his falseness, his cowardice, his thirst for robbery, amongst others. The Popes, the cardinals, and the bishops are compared to the wolves in all their attributes: "The greater his pomp and splendour, the more shouldst thou beware of such an one; for he [90]is a wolf that cometh in the shape of a good shepherd's dog. Beware! it is against the custom of Christ and His Apostles." It is again but the song of the wolves when they claim to mix themselves with worldly affairs and maintain the temporal supremacy. The greediness of the wolf is discernible in the means adopted to get money for the building of St. Peter's. The interlocutor is warned against giving to mendicant priests and monks.

We have given this as a specimen of the almost purely theological pamphlet; although, as will have been evident, even this is directly connected with the material abuses from which the people were suffering. Another pamphlet of about the same date deals with usury, the burden of which had been greatly increased by the growth of the new commercial combinations already referred to in the Introduction, which combinations Dr. Eck had been defending at Bologna on theological grounds, in order to curry favour with the Augsburg merchant-prince, Fuggerschwatz.[91] It is called "Concerning Dues. Hither comes a poor peasant to a rich citizen. A priest comes also thereby, and then a monk. Full pleasant to read." A peasant visits a burgher when he is

counting money, and asks him where he gets it all from. "My dear peasant," says [91]the townsman, "thou askest me who gave me this money. I will tell thee. There cometh hither a peasant, and beggeth me to lend him ten or twenty gulden. Thereupon I ask him an he possesseth not a goodly meadow or corn-field. 'Yea! good sir!' saith he, 'I have indeed a good meadow and a good corn-field. The twain are worth a hundred gulden.' Then say I to him: 'Good, my friend, wilt thou pledge me thy holding? and an thou givest me one gulden of thy money every year I will lend thee twenty gulden now.' Then is the peasant right glad, and saith he: 'Willingly will I pledge it thee.' 'I will warn thee,' say I, 'that an thou furnishest not the one gulden of money each year, I will take thy holding for my own having.' Therewith is the peasant well content, and writeth him down accordingly. I lend him the money; he payeth me one year, or may be twain, the due; thereafter can he no longer furnish it, and thereupon I take the holding, and drive away the peasant therefrom. Thus I get the holding and the money. The same things do I with handicraftsmen. Hath he a good house? He pledgeth that house until I bring it behind me. Therewith gain I much in goods and money, and thus do I pass my days." "I thought," rejoined the peasant, "that 'twere only the Jew who did usury, but I hear that [92]ye also ply that trade." The burgher answers that interest is not usury, to which the peasant replies that interest (*Gült*) is only a "subtle name." The burgher then quotes Scripture, as commanding men to help one another. The peasant readily answers that in doing this they have no right to get advantage from the assistance they proffer. "Thou art a good fellow!" says the townsman. "If I take no money for the money that I lend, how shall I then increase my hoard?" The peasant then reproaches him that he sees well that his object in life is to wax fat on the substance of others; "But I tell thee, indeed," he says, "that it is a great and heavy sin." Whereupon his opponent waxes wroth, and will have nothing more to do with him, threatening to kick him out in the name of a thousand devils; but the peasant returns to the charge, and expresses his opinion that rich men do not willingly hear the truth. A priest now enters, and to him the townsman explains the dispute. "Dear peasant," says the priest, "wherefore camest thou hither, that thou shouldst make of a due [10] usury? May not a man buy with his money what he will?" But the peasant stands by his previous assertion, [93]demanding how anything can be considered as bought which is only a pledge. "We priests," replies the ecclesiastic, "must perforce lend moneys for dues, since thereby we get our living"; to which, after sundry ejaculations of surprise, the peasant retorts: "Who gave to you the power? I well hear ye have another God than we poor people. We have our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath forbidden such money-lending for gain." Hence it comes, he goes on, that land is no longer free; to attempt to whitewash usury under the name of due or interest, he says, is just the same as if one were to call a child christened Friedrich or Hansel, Fritz or Hans, and then maintain it was no longer the same child. They require no more Jews, he says, since the Christians have taken their business in hand. The townsman is once more about to turn the peasant out of his house when a monk



enters. He then lays the matter before the new-comer, who promises to talk the peasant over with soft words; for, says he, there is nothing accomplished with vainglory. He thereupon takes him aside and explains it to him by the illustration of a merchant whose gain on the wares he sells is not called usury, and argues that therefore other forms of gain in business should not be described by this odious name. But the peasant will have none of this <sup>[94]</sup>comparison; for the merchant, he says, needs to incur much risk in order to gain and traffic with his wares; while money-lending on security is, on the other hand, without risk or labour, and is a treacherous mode of cheating. Finding that they can make nothing of the obstinate countryman, the others leave him; but he, as a parting shot, exclaims: "Ah, well-a-day! I would to have talked with thee at first, but it is now ended. Farewell, gracious sir, and my other kind sirs. I, poor little peasant, I go my way. Farewell, farewell, due remains usury for ever more. Yea, yea! due, indeed!"

The above specimens of the popular writing of the time must suffice. But for the reader who wishes to further study this literature we give the titles, which sufficiently indicate their contents, of a selection of other similar pamphlets and broadsheets: "A New Epistle from the Evil Clergy sent to their righteous Lord, with an answer from their Lord. Most merry to read" (1521). "A Great Prize which the Prince of Hell, high Lucifer, now offereth to the Clergy, to the Pope, Bishops, Cardinals, and their like" (1521). "A Written Call, made by the Prince of Hell to his dear devoted, of all and every condition in his kingdom" (1521). "Dialogue or Converse of the Apostolicum, Angelica, and other <sup>[95]</sup>spices of the Druggist, anent Dr. Martin Luther and his disciples" (1521). "A Very Pleasant Dialogue and Remonstrance from the Sheriff of Gaissdorf and his pupil against the pastor of the same and his assistant" (1521). The popularity of "Karsthans," an anonymous tract, amongst the people is illustrated by the publication and wide distribution of a new "Karsthans" a few months later, in which it is sought to show that the knighthood should make common cause with the peasants, the *dramatis personæ* being Karsthans and Franz von Sickingen. Referring to the same subject we find a "Dialogue which Franciscus von Sickingen held fore heaven's gate with St. Peter and the Knights of St. George before he was let in." This was published in 1523, almost immediately after the death of Sickingen. "A Talk between a Nobleman, a Monk, and a Courtier" (1523). "A Talk between a Fox and a Wolf" (1523). "A Pleasant Dialogue between Dr. Martin Luther and the cunning Messenger from Hell" (1523). "A Conversation of the Pope with his Cardinals of how it goeth with him, and how he may destroy the Word of God. Let every man very well note" (1523). "A Christian and Merry Talk, that it is more pleasing to God and more wholesome for men to come out of the monasteries and to marry, than to tarry <sup>[96]</sup>therein and to burn; which talk is not with human folly and the false teachings thereof, but is founded alone in the holy, divine, biblical, and evangelical Scripture" (1524). "A Pleasant Dialogue of a Peasant with a Monk that he should cast his Cowl from him. Merry and fair to read" (1525).

The above is only a selection taken haphazard from the mass of fugitive literature which the early years of the Reformation brought forth. In spite of a certain rough but not unattractive directness of diction, a prolonged reading of them is very tedious, as will have been sufficiently seen from the extracts we have given. Their humour is of a particularly juvenile and obvious character, and consists almost entirely in the childish device of clothing the personages with ridiculous but non-essential attributes, or in placing them in grotesque but pointless situations. Of the more subtle humour, which consists in the discovery of real but hidden incongruities, and the perception of what is innately absurd, there is no trace. The obvious abuses of the time are satirized in this way *ad nauseam*. The rapacity of the clergy in general, the idleness and lasciviousness of the monks, the pomp and luxury of the prince-bishops, the inconsistencies of Church traditions and practices with Scripture, with which they could now be [97] compared, since it was everywhere circulated in the vulgar tongue, form their never-ending theme. They reveal to the reader a state of things that strikes one none the less in English literature of the period—the intense interest of all classes in theological matters. It shows us how they looked at all things through a theological lens. Although we have left this phase of popular thought so recently behind us, we can even now scarcely imagine ourselves back into it. The idea of ordinary men, or of the vast majority, holding their religion as anything else than a very pious opinion absolutely unconnected with their daily life, public or private, has already become almost inconceivable to us. In all the writings of the time, the theological interest is in the forefront. The economic and social groundwork only casually reveals itself. This it is that makes the reading of the sixteenth-century polemics so insufferably jejune and dreary. They bring before us the ghosts of controversies in which most men have ceased to take any part, albeit they have not been dead and forgotten long enough to have acquired a revived antiquarian interest.

The great bombshell which Luther cast forth on June 24, 1520, in his address to the German nobility, [11] indeed, contains strong appeals to the economical and political [98] necessities of Germany, and therein we see the veil torn from the half-unconscious motives that lay behind the theological mask; but, as already said, in the popular literature, with a few exceptions, the theological controversy rules undisputed.

The noticeable feature of all this irruption of the *cacoethes scribendi* was the direct appeal to the Bible for the settlement not only of strictly theological controversies but of points of social and political ethics also. This practice, which even to the modern Protestant seems insipid and played out after three centuries and a half of wear, had at that time the to us inconceivable charm of novelty; and the perusal of the literature and controversies of the time shows that men used it with all the delight of a child with a new toy, and seemed never tired of the game of searching out texts to justify their position. The diffusion of the whole Bible in the vernacular, itself a consequence

of the rebellion against priestly tradition and the authority of the Fathers, intensified the revolt by making the pastime possible to all ranks of society.

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## FOOTNOTES:

[9]See Appendix C.

[10]We use the word "due" here for the German word *Gült*. The corresponding English of the time does not make any distinction between *Gült* or interest, and *Wucher* or usury.

[11]*An der Christlichen Adel deutscher Nation.*

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[99]

## CHAPTER III[ToC](#)

### THE FOLKLORE OF REFORMATION GERMANY

Now in the hands of all men, the Bible was not made the basis of doctrinal opinions alone. It lent its support to many of the popular superstitions of the time, and in addition it served as the starting-point for new superstitions and for new developments of the older ones. The Pan-dæmonism of the New Testament, with its wonder-workings by devilish agencies, its exorcisms of evil spirits and the like, could not fail to have a deep effect on the popular mind. The authority that the book believed to be divinely inspired necessarily lent to such beliefs gave a vividness to the popular conception of the devil and his angels, which is apparent throughout the whole

movement of the Reformation, and not least in the utterances of the great Luther himself. Indeed, with the Reformation there comes a complete change over the popular conception of the devil and diabolical influences.

It is true that the judicial pursuit of witches [100]and witchcraft, in the earlier Middle Ages only a sporadic incident, received a great impulse from the Bull of Pope Innocent VIII (Dec. 5, 1484), entitled *Summis Desiderantes*, to which has been given the title of *Malleus Maleficorum*, or *The Hammer of Sorcerers*, directed against the practice of witchcraft; but it was especially amongst the men of the New Spirit that the belief in the prevalence of compacts with the devil, and the necessity for suppressing them, took root, and led to the horrible persecutions that distinguished the "Reformed" Churches on the whole even more than the Catholic.

Luther himself had a vivid belief, tinging all his views and actions, in the ubiquity of the devil and his myrmidons. "The devils," says he, "are near us, and do cunningly contrive every moment without ceasing against our life, our salvation, and our blessedness.... In woods, waters, and wastes, and in damp, marshy places, there are many devils that seek to harm men. In the black and thick clouds, too, there are some that make storms, hail, lightning, and thunder, that poison the air and the pastures. When such things happen, the philosophers and the physicians ascribe them to the stars, and show I know not what causes for such misfortunes and plagues." Luther relates numerous instances of personal [101]encounters that he himself had had with the devil. A nobleman invited him, with other learned men from the University of Wittenberg, to take part in a hare hunt. A large, fine hare and a fox crossed the path. The nobleman, mounted on a strong, healthy steed, dashed after them, when, suddenly, his horse fell dead beneath him, and the fox and the hare flew up in the air and vanished. "For," says Luther, "they were devilish spectres."

Again, on another occasion, he was at Eisleben on the occasion of another hare-hunt, when the nobleman succeeded in killing eight hares, which were, on their return home, duly hung up for the next day's meal. On the following morning, horses' heads were found in their place. "In mines," says Luther, "the devil oftentimes deceives men with a false appearance of gold." All disease and all misfortune were the direct work of the devil; God, who was all good, could not produce either. Luther gives a long history of how he was called to a parish priest, who complained of the devil's having created a disturbance in his house by throwing the pots and pans about, and so forth, and of how he advised the priest to exorcise the fiend by invoking his own authority as a pastor of the Church.

At the Wartburg, Luther complained of having been very much troubled by the Satanic [102]arts. When he was at work upon his translation of the Bible, or upon his sermons, or engaged in his devotions, the devil was always making disturbances on the stairs or in the room. One day, after a hard spell of study, he lay down to sleep in his bed, when the devil began pelting him with hazel-nuts, a sack of which had been

brought to him a few hours before by an attendant. He invoked, however, the name of Christ, and lay down again in bed. There were other more curious and more doubtful recipes for driving away Satan and his emissaries. Luther is never tired of urging that contemptuous treatment and rude chaff are among the most efficacious methods.

There was, he relates, a poor soothsayer, to whom the devil came in visible form, and offered great wealth provided that he would deny Christ and never more do penance. The devil provided him with a crystal, by which he could foretell events, and thus become rich. This he did; but Nemesis awaited him, for the devil deceived him one day, and caused him to denounce certain innocent persons as thieves. In consequence, he was thrown into prison, where he revealed the compact that he had made, and called for a confessor. The two chief forms in which the devil appeared were, according to Luther, those of a snake and a sheep. He further goes into the question of the [103]population of devils in different countries. On the top of the Pilatus at Luzern, he says, is a black pond, which is one of the devil's favourite abodes. In Luther's own country there is also a high mountain, the Poltersberg, with a similar pond. When a stone is thrown into this pond, a great tempest arises, which often devastates the whole neighbourhood. He also alleges Prussia to be full of evil spirits (!!).

Devilish changelings, Luther said, were often placed by Satan in the cradles of human children. "Some maids he often plunges into the water, and keeps them with him until they have borne a child." These children are placed in the beds of mortals, and the true children are taken out and hurried away. "But," he adds, "such changelings are said not to live more than to the eighteenth or nineteenth year." As a practical application of this, it may be mentioned that Luther advised the drowning of a certain child of twelve years old, on the ground of its being a devil's changeling. Somnambulism is, with Luther, the result of diabolical agency. "Formerly," says he, "the Papists, being superstitious people, alleged that persons thus afflicted had not been properly baptized, or had been baptized by a drunken priest." The irony of the reference to superstition, considering the "great [104]reformer's" own position, will not be lost upon the reader.

Thus, not only is the devil the cause of pestilence, but he is also the immediate agent of nightmare and of night sweats. At Mölburg in Thüringen, near Erfurt, a piper, who was accustomed to pipe at weddings, complained to his priest that the devil had threatened to carry him away and destroy him, on the ground of a practical joke played upon some companions, to wit, for having mixed horse-dung with their wine at a drinking bout. The priest consoled him with many passages of Scripture anent the devil and his ways, with the result that the piper expressed himself satisfied as regarded the welfare of his soul, but apprehensive as regarded that of his body, which was, he asserted, hopelessly the prey of the devil. In consequence of this, he insisted on partaking of the Sacrament. The devil had indicated to him when he was going to

be fetched, and watchers were accordingly placed in his room, who sat in their armour and with their weapons, and read the Bible to him. Finally, one Saturday at midnight, a violent storm arose, that blew out the lights in the room, and hurled the luckless victim out of a narrow window into the street. The sound of fighting and of armed men was heard, but the piper had disappeared. The next morning he [105] was found in a neighbouring ditch, with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross, dead and coal-black. Luther vouches for the truth of this story, which he alleges to have been told him by a parish priest of Gotha, who had himself heard it from the parish priest of Mölburg, where the event was said to have taken place.

Amongst the numerous anecdotes of a supernatural character told by "Dr. Martin" is one of a "Poltergeist," or "Robin Goodfellow," who was exorcised by two monks from the guest-chamber of an inn, and who offered his services to them in the monastery. They gave him a corner in the kitchen. The serving-boy used to torment him by throwing dirty water over him. After unavailing protests, the spirit hung the boy up to a beam, but let him down again before serious harm resulted. Luther states that this "brownie" was well known by sight in the neighbouring town (the name of which he does not give). But by far the larger number of his stories, which, be it observed, are warranted as ordinary occurrences, as to the possibility of which there was no question, are coloured by that more sinister side of supernaturalism so much emphasised by the new theology.

The mediæval devil was, for the most part, himself little more than a prankish Rübezahl, [106] or Robin Goodfellow; the new Satan of the Reformers was, in very deed, an arch-fiend, the enemy of the human race, with whom no truce or parley might be held. The old folklore belief in *incubi* and *succubi* as the parents of changelings is brought into connection with the theory of direct diabolic begettall. Thus Luther relates how Friedrich, the Elector of Saxony, told him of a noble family that had sprung from a *succubus*: "Just," says he, "as the Melusina at Luxembourg was also such a *succubus*, or devil." In the case referred to, the *succubus* assumed the shape of the man's dead wife, and lived with him and bore him children, until, one day, he swore at her, when she vanished, leaving only her clothes behind. After giving it as his opinion that all such beings and their offspring are wiles of the devil, he proceeds: "It is truly a grievous thing that the devil can so plague men that he begetteth children in their likeness. It is even so with the nixies in the water, that lure a man therein, in the shape of wife or maid, with whom he doth dally and begetteth offspring of them." The change whereby the beings of the old naïve folklore are transformed into the devil or his agents is significant of that darker side of the new theology, which was destined to issue in those horrors of the witchcraft-mania that reached their height at the beginning of the following century.

[107] One more story of a "changeling" before we leave the subject. Luther gives us the following as having come to his knowledge near Halberstadt, in Saxony. A

peasant had a baby, who sucked out its mother and five nurses, besides eating a great deal. Concluding that it was a changeling, the peasant sought the advice of his neighbours, who suggested that he should take it on a pilgrimage to a neighbouring shrine of the Mother of God. While he was crossing a brook on the way an impish voice from under the water called out to the infant, whom he was carrying in a basket. The brat answered from within the basket, "Ho, ho!" and the peasant was unspeakably shocked. When the voice from the water proceeded to ask the child what it was after, and received the answer from the hitherto inarticulate babe that it was going to be laid on the shrine of the Mother of God, to the end that it might prosper, the peasant could stand it no longer, and flung basket and baby into the brook. The changeling and the little devil played for a few moments with each other, rolling over and over, and crying, "Ho, ho, ho!" and then they disappeared together. Luther says that these devilish brats may be generally known by their eating and drinking too much, and especially by their exhausting their mother's milk, but they may not develop [108] any certain signs of their true parentage until eighteen or nineteen years old. The Princess of Anhalt had a child which Luther imagined to be a changeling, and he therefore advised its being drowned, alleging that such creatures were only lumps of flesh animated by the devil or his angels. Some one spoke of a monster which infested the Netherlands, and which went about smelling at people like a dog, and whoever it smelt died. But those that were smelt did not see it, albeit the bystanders did. The people had recourse to vigils and masses. Luther improved the occasion to protest against the "superstition" of masses for the dead, and to insist upon his favourite dogma of faith as the true defence against assaults of the devil.

Among the numerous stories of Satanic compacts, we are told of a monk who ate up a load of hay, of a debtor who bit off the leg of his Hebrew creditor and ran off to avoid payment, and of a woman who bewitched her husband so that he vomited lizards. Luther observes, with especial reference to this last case, that lawyers and judges were far too pedantic with their witnesses and with their evidence; that the devil hardens his clients against torture, and that the refusal to confess under torture ought to be of itself sufficient proof of dealings with the Prince of Darkness. [109] "Towards such," says he, "we would show no mercy; I would burn them myself." Black magic or witchcraft he proceeds to characterize as the greatest sin a human being can be guilty of, as, in fact, high treason against God Himself—*crimen læsæ majestatis divinæ*.

The conversation closes with a story of how Maximilian's father, the Emperor Friedrich, who seems to have obtained a reputation for magic arts, invited a well-known magician to a banquet, and on his arrival fixed claws on his hands and hoofs on his feet by his cunning. His guest, being ashamed, tried to hide the claws under the table as long as he could, but finally he had to show them, to his great discomfiture. But he determined to have his revenge, and asked his host whether he would permit

him to give proofs of his own skill. The Emperor assenting, there at once arose a great noise outside the window. Friedrich sprang up from the table, and leaned out of the casement to see what was the matter. Immediately an enormous pair of stag's horns appeared on his head, so that he could not draw it back. Finding the state of the case, the Emperor exclaimed: "Rid me of them again! Thou hast won!" Luther's comment on this was that he was always glad to see one devil getting the better of another, as [110] it showed that some were stronger than others.

All this belongs, roughly speaking, to the side of the matter which regards popular theology; but there is another side which is connected more especially with the New Learning. This other school, which sought to bring the somewhat elastic elements of the magical theory of the universe into the semblance of a systematic whole, is associated with such names as those of Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, and the Abbot von Tritenheim. The fame of the first-named was so great throughout Germany that when he visited any town the occasion was looked upon as an event of exceeding importance. [12] Paracelsus fully shared in the beliefs of his age, in spite of his brilliant insights on certain occasions. What his science was like may be imagined when we learn that he seriously speaks of animals who conceive through the mouth of basilisks whose glance is deadly, of petrified storks changed into snakes, of the stillborn young of the lion which are afterwards brought to life by the roar of their sire, of frogs falling in a shower of rain, of ducks transformed into frogs, and of men born from beasts; the menstruation of women he regarded as a venom whence proceeded [111] flies, spiders, earwigs, and all sorts of loathsome vermin; night was caused, not by the absence of the sun, but by the presence of the stars, which were the positive cause of the darkness. He relates having seen a magnet capable of attracting the eyeball from its socket as far as the tip of the nose; he knows of salves to close the mouth so effectually that it has to be broken open again by mechanical means, and he writes learnedly on the infallible signs of witchcraft. By mixing horse-dung with human semen he believed he was able to produce a medium from which, by chemical treatment in a retort, a diminutive human being, or *homunculus*, as he called it, could be produced. The spirits of the elements, the sylphs of the air, the gnomes of the earth, the salamanders of the fire, and the undines of the water, were to him real and undoubted existences in Nature.

Strange as all these beliefs seem to us now, they were a very real factor in the intellectual conceptions of the Renaissance period, no less than of the Middle Ages, and amidst them there is to be found at times a foreshadowing of more modern knowledge. Many other persons were also more or less associated with the magical school, amongst them Franz von Sickingen. Reuchlin himself, by his Hebrew studies, and especially by his introduction of [112] the Kabbala to Gentile readers, also contributed a not unimportant influence in determining the course of the movement. The line between the so-called black magic, or operations conducted through the



direct agency of evil spirits, and white magic, which sought to subject Nature to the human will by the discovery of her mystical and secret laws, or the character of the quasi-personified intelligent principles under whose form Nature presented herself to their minds, had never throughout the Middle Ages been very clearly defined. The one always had a tendency to shade off into the other, so that even Roger Bacon's practices were, although not condemned, at least looked upon somewhat doubtfully by the Church. At the time of which we treat, however, the interest in such matters had become universal amongst all intelligent persons. The scientific imagination at the close of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period was mainly occupied with three questions: the discovery of the means of transmuting the baser metals into gold, or otherwise of producing that object of universal desire; to discover the Elixir Vitæ, by which was generally understood the invention of a drug which would have the effect of curing all diseases, restoring man to perennial youth, and, in short, prolonging human life indefinitely; [113]and, finally, the search for the Philosopher's Stone, the happy possessor of which would not only be able to achieve the first two, but also, since it was supposed to contain the quintessence of all the metals, and therefore of all the planetary influences to which the metals corresponded, would have at his command all the forces which mould the destinies of men. In especial connection with the latter object of research may be noted the universal interest in astrology, whose practitioners were to be found at every Court, from that of the Emperor himself to that of the most insignificant prince or princelet, and whose advice was sought and carefully heeded on all important occasions. Alchemy and astrology were thus the recognized physical sciences of the age, under the auspices of which a Copernicus and a Tycho Brahe were born and educated.

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#### FOOTNOTES:

[12]Cf. Sebastian Franck, *Chronica*, for an account of a visit of Paracelsus to Nürnberg.

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## CHAPTER IV [ToC](#)

### THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN TOWN

From what has been said the reader may form for himself an idea of the intellectual and social life of the German town of the period. The wealthy patrician class, whose mainstay politically was the *Rath*, gave the social tone to the whole. In spite of the sharp and sometimes brutal fashion in which class distinctions asserted themselves then, as throughout the Middle Ages, there was none of that aloofness between class and class which characterizes the bourgeois society of the present day. Each town, were it great or small, was a little world in itself, so that every citizen knew every other citizen more or less. The schools attached to its ecclesiastical institutions were practically free of access to all the children whose parents could find the means to maintain them during their studies; and consequently the intellectual differences between the different classes were by no means necessarily proportionate to the difference in social position. So <sup>[115]</sup>far as culture and material prosperity were concerned, the towns of Bavaria and Franconia, Munich, Augsburg, Regensburg, and perhaps, above all, Nürnberg, represented the high-water mark of mediæval civilization as regards town life. On entering the burg, should it have happened to be in time of peace and in daylight, the stranger would clear the drawbridge and the portcullis without much challenge; passing along streets lined with the houses and shops of the burghers, in whose open frontages the master and his apprentices and *gesellen* plied their trades, discussing eagerly over their work the politics of the town, and at this period probably the theological questions which were uppermost in men's minds, our visitor would make his way to some hostelry, in whose courtyard he would dismount from his horse, and, entering the common room, or *Stube*, with its rough but artistic furniture of carved oak, partake of his flagon of wine or beer, according to the district in which he was travelling, whilst the host cracked a rough and possibly coarse jest with the other guests, or narrated to them the latest gossip of the city. The stranger would probably find himself before long the object of interrogatories respecting his native place and the object of his journey (although his dress would doubtless have given general evidence <sup>[116]</sup>of this), whether he were a merchant or a travelling scholar or a practiser of medicine; for into one of those categories it might be presumed the humble but not servile traveller would fall. Were

he on a diplomatic mission from some potentate he would be travelling at the least as a knight or a noble, with spurs and armour, and, moreover, would be little likely to lodge in a public house of entertainment.

In the *Stube* he would probably see, drinking heavily, representatives of the ubiquitous *Landsknechte*, the mercenary troops enrolled for Imperial purposes by the Emperor Maximilian towards the end of the previous century, who in the intervals of war were disbanded and wandered about spending their pay, and thus constituted an excessively disintegrative element in the life of the time. A contemporary writer<sup>[13]</sup> describes them as the curse of Germany, and stigmatizes them as "unchristian, God-forsaken folk, whose hand is ever ready in striking, stabbing, robbing, burning, slaying, gaming, who delight in wine-bibbing, whoring, blaspheming, and in the making of widows and orphans."

Presently, perhaps, a noise without indicates the arrival of a new guest. All hurry forth into the courtyard, and their curiosity is more <sup>[117]</sup>keenly whetted when they perceive by the yellow knitted scarf round the neck of the new-comer that he is an *itinerans scholasticus*, or travelling scholar, who brings with him not only the possibility of news from the outer world, so important in an age when journals were non-existent and communications irregular and deficient, but also a chance of beholding wonder-workings, as well as of being cured of the ailments which local skill had treated in vain. Already surrounded by a crowd of admirers waiting for the words of wisdom to fall from his lips, he would start on that exordium which bore no little resemblance to the patter of the modern quack, albeit interlarded with many a Latin quotation and great display of mediæval learning. "Good people and worthy citizens of this town," he might say, "behold in me the great master ... prince of necromancers, astrologer, second mage, chiromancer, agromancer, pyromancer, hydromancer. My learning is so profound that were all the works of Plato and Aristotle lost to the world I could from memory restore them with more elegance than before. The miracles of Christ were not so great as those which I can perform wherever and as often as I will. Of all alchemists I am the first, and my powers are such that I can obtain all things that man desires. My <sup>[118]</sup>shoe-buckles contain more learning than the heads of Galen and Avicenna, and my beard has more experience than all your high schools. I am monarch of all learning. I can heal you of all diseases. By my secret arts I can procure you wealth. I am the philosopher of philosophers. I can provide you with spells to bind the most potent of the devils in hell. I can cast your nativities and foretell all that shall befall you, since I have that which can unlock the secrets of all things that have been, that are, and that are to come."<sup>[14]</sup> Bringing forth strange-looking phials, covered with cabalistic signs, a crystal globe and an astro-labe, followed by an imposing scroll of parchment inscribed with mysterious Hebraic-looking characters, the travelling student would probably drive a roaring trade amongst the assembled townsmen in love-philtres, cures for the ague and the

plague, and amulets against them, horoscopes, predictions of fate, and the rest of his stock-in-trade.

As evening approaches, our traveller strolls forth into the streets and narrow lanes of the town, lined with overhanging gables that almost meet overhead and shut out the light of the afternoon sun, so that twilight seems [119]already to have fallen. Observing that the burghers, with their wives and children, the work of the day being done, are all wending toward the western gate, he goes along with the stream till, passing underneath the heavy portcullis and through the outer rampart, he finds himself in the plain outside, across which a rugged bridle-path leads to a large quadrangular meadow, rough and more or less worn, where a considerable crowd has already assembled. This is the *Allerwiese*, or public pleasure-ground of the town. Here there are not only high festivities on Sundays and holidays, but every fine evening in summer numbers of citizens gather together to watch the apprentices exercising their strength in athletic feats, and competing with one another in various sports, such as running, wrestling, spear-throwing, sword-play, and the like, wherein the inferior rank sought to imitate and even emulate the knighthood, whilst the daughters of the city watched their progress with keen interest and applauding laughter. As the shadows deepen and darkness falls upon the plain, our visitor joins the groups which are now fast leaving the meadow, and re-passes the great embrasure just as the rushlights begin to twinkle in the windows and a swinging oil-lamp to cast a dim light here and there in the streets. But as his company [120]passes out of a narrow lane debouching on to the chief market-place, their progress is stopped by the sudden rush of a mingled crowd of unruly apprentices and journeymen returning from their sports, with hot heads well beliquored. Then from another side-street there is a sudden flare of torches, borne aloft by guildsmen come out to quell the tumult and to send off the apprentices to their dwellings, whilst the watch also bears down and carries off some of the more turbulent of the journeymen to pass the night in one of the towers which guard the city wall. At last, however, the visitor reaches his inn by the aid of a friendly guildsman and his torch; and retiring to his chamber, with its straw-covered floor, rough oaken bedstead, hard mattress, and coverings not much better than horse-cloths, he falls asleep as the bell of the minster tolls out ten o'clock over the now dark and silent city.

Such approximately would have been the view of a German city in the sixteenth century as presented to a traveller in a time of peace. More stirring times, however, were as frequent—times when the tocsin rang out from the steeple all night long, calling the citizens to arms. By such scenes, needless to say, the year of the Peasants' War was more than usually characterized. In the days when every man [121]carried arms and knew how to use them, when the fighting instinct was imbibed with the mother's milk, when every week saw some street brawl, often attended by loss of life, and that by no means always among the most worthless and dissolute of the inhabitants, every dissatisfaction immediately turned itself into an armed revolt,

whether it were of the apprentices or the journeymen against the guild-masters, the body of the townsmen against the patriciate, the town itself against its feudal superior, where it had one, or of the knighthood against the princes. The extremity to which disputes can at present be carried without resulting in a breach of the peace, as evinced in modern political and trade conflicts, exacerbated though some of them are, was a thing unknown in the Middle Ages, and indeed to any considerable extent until comparatively recent times. The sacred right of insurrection was then a recognized fact of life, and but very little straining of a dispute led to a resort to arms. In the subsequent chapters we have to deal with the more important of those outbursts to which the ferment due to the dissolution of the mediæval system of things, then beginning throughout Central Europe, gave rise, of which the religious side is represented by what is known as the Reformation.

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#### FOOTNOTES:

[13]Sebastian Franck, *Chronica*, ccxvii.

[14]Cf. Tritheim's letter to Wirdung of Hasfurt regarding Faust. *J. Tritthemii Epistolarum Familiarum*, 1536, bk. ii. ep. 47; also the works of Paracelsus.

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[122]

#### CHAPTER V [ToC](#)

### COUNTRY AND TOWN AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

For the complete understanding of the events which follow it must be borne in mind that the early sixteenth century represents the end of a distinct historical period; and, as we have pointed out in the Introduction, the expiring effort, half-conscious and half-unconscious, of the people to revert to the conditions of an earlier age. Nor can the significance be properly gauged unless a clear conception is obtained of the differences between country and town life at the beginning of the sixteenth century. From the earliest periods of the Middle Ages of which we have any historical record, the *Markgenossenschaft*, or primitive village community of the Germanic race, was overlaid by a territorial domination, imposed upon it either directly by conquest or voluntarily accepted for the sake of the protection indispensable in that rude period. The conflict of these two elements, the mark [123]organization and the territorial lordship, constitutes the marrow of the social history of the Middle Ages.

In the earliest times the pressure of the overlord, whoever he might be, seems to have been comparatively slight, but its inevitable tendency was for the territorial power to extend itself at the expense of the rural community. It was thus that in the tenth and eleventh centuries the feudal oppression had become thoroughly settled, and had reached its greatest intensity all over Europe. It continued thus with little intermission until the thirteenth century, when from various causes, economic and otherwise, matters began to improve in the interests of the common man, till in the fifteenth century the condition of the peasant was better than it has ever been, either before or since within historical times, in Northern and Western Europe. But with all this, the oppressive power of the lord of the soil was by no means dead. It was merely dormant, and was destined to spring into renewed activity the moment the lord's necessities supplied a sufficient incentive. From this time forward the element of territorial power, supported in its claims by the Roman law, with its basis of private property, continued to eat into it until it had finally devoured the old rights and possessions of the village community. The [124]executive power always tended to be transferred from its legitimate holder, the village in its corporate capacity, to the lord; and this was alone sufficient to place the villager at his mercy.

At the time of the Reformation, owing to the new conditions which had arisen and had brought about in a few decades the hitherto unparalleled rise in prices, combined with the unprecedented ostentation and extravagance more than once referred to in these pages, the lord was supplied with the requisite incentive to the exercise of the power which his feudal system gave him. Consequently, the position of the peasant rapidly changed for the worse; and although at the outbreak of the movement not absolutely *in extremis*, according to our notions, yet it was so bad comparatively to his previous condition and that less than half a century before, and tended as evidently to become more intolerable, that discontent became everywhere rife, and only awaited the torch of the new doctrines to set it ablaze. The whole course of the movement shows a peasantry, not downtrodden and starved but proud and robust, driven to take

up arms not so much by misery and despair as by the deliberate will to maintain the advantages which were rapidly slipping away from them.

[125]Serfdom was not by any means universal. Many free peasant villages were to be found scattered amongst the manors of the territorial lords, though it was but too evidently the settled policy of the latter at this time to sweep everything into their net, and to compel such peasant communes to accept a feudal overlordship. Nor were they at all scrupulous in the means adopted for attaining their ends. The ecclesiastical foundations, as before said, were especially expert in forging documents for the purpose of proving that these free villages were lapsed feudatories of their own. Old rights of pasture were being curtailed, and others, notably those of hunting and fishing, had in most manors been completely filched away.

It is noticeable, however, that although the immediate causes of the peasant rising were the new burdens which had been laid upon the common people during the last few years, once the spirit of discontent was aroused it extended also in many cases to the traditional feudal dues to which, until then, the peasant had submitted with little murmuring, and an attempt was made by the country-side to reconquer the ancient complete freedom of which a dim remembrance had been handed down to them.

The condition of the peasant up to the [126]beginning of the sixteenth century—that is to say, up to the time when it began to so rapidly change for the worse—may be gathered from what we are told by contemporary writers, such as Wimpfeling, Sebastian Brandt, Wittenweiler, the satires in the *Nürnberger Fastnachtspielen*, and numberless other sources, as also from the sumptuary laws of the end of the fifteenth century. All these indicate an ease and profuseness of living which little accord with our notions of the word "peasant". Wimpfeling writes: "The peasants in our district and in many parts of Germany have become, through their riches, stiff-necked and ease-loving. I know peasants who at the weddings of their sons or daughters, or the baptism of their children, make so much display that a house and field might be bought therewith, and a small vineyard to boot. Through their riches, they are oftentimes spendthrift in food and in vestments, and they drink wines of price."

A chronicler relates of the Austrian peasants, under the date of 1478, that "they wore better garments and drank better wine than their lords"; and a sumptuary law passed at the Reichstag held at Lindau, in 1497, provides that the common peasant man and the labourer in the towns or in the field "shall neither make nor wear cloth that costs more than half a gulden the ell, neither shall [127]they wear gold, pearls, velvet, silk, nor embroidered clothes, nor shall they permit their wives or their children to wear such."

Respecting the food of the peasant, it is stated that he ate his full in flesh of every kind, in fish, in bread, in fruit, drinking wine often to excess. The Swabian, Heinrich Müller, writes in the year 1550, nearly two generations after the change had begun to

take place: "In the memory of my father, who was a peasant man, the peasant did eat much better than now. Meat and food in plenty was there every day, and at fairs and other junketings the tables did wellnigh break with what they bore. Then drank they wine as it were water, then did a man fill his belly and carry away withal as much as he could; then was wealth and plenty. Otherwise is it now. A costly and a bad time hath arisen since many a year, and the food and drink of the best peasant is much worse than of yore that of the day labourer and the serving man."

We may well imagine the vivid recollections which a peasant in the year 1525 had of the golden days of a few years before. The day labourers and serving men were equally tantalized by the remembrance of high wages and cheap living at the beginning of the century. A day labourer could then earn, with his keep, nine, and without keep, sixteen <sup>[128]</sup>groschen<sup>[15]</sup> a week. What this would buy may be judged from the following prices current in Saxony during the second half of the fifteenth century. A pair of good working-shoes cost three groschen; a whole sheep, four groschen; a good fat hen, half a groschen; twenty-five cod-fish, four groschen; a wagon-load of firewood, together with carriage, five groschen; an ell of the best homespun cloth, five groschen; a scheffel (about a bushel) of rye, six or seven groschen. The Duke of Saxony wore grey hats which cost him four groschen. In Northern Rhineland about the same time a day labourer could, in addition to his keep, earn in a week a quarter of rye, ten pounds of pork, six large cans of milk, and two bundles of firewood, and in the course of five weeks be able to buy six ells of linen, a pair of shoes, and a bag for his tools. In Augsburg the daily wages of an ordinary labourer represented the value of six pounds of the best meat, or one pound of meat, seven eggs, a peck of peas, about a quart of wine, in addition to such bread as he required, with enough over for lodging, clothing, and minor expenses. In Bavaria he could earn daily eighteen pfennige, or one and a half groschen, whilst a pound of sausage cost one pfennig, and a pound of the best <sup>[129]</sup>beef two pfennige, and similarly throughout the whole of the States of Central Europe.

A document of the year 1483, from Ehrbach in the Swabian Odenwald, describes for us the treatment of servants by their masters. "All journeymen," it declares, "that are hired, and likewise bondsmen (serfs), also the serving men and maids, shall each day be given twice meat and what thereto longith, with half a small measure of wine, save on fast days, when they shall have fish or other food that nourisheth. Whoso in the week hath toiled shall also on Sundays and feast days make merry after mass and preaching. They shall have bread and meat enough, and half a great measure of wine. On feast days also roasted meat enough. Moreover, they shall be given, to take home with them, a great loaf of bread and so much of flesh as two at one meal may eat."

Again, in a bill of fare of the household of Count Joachim von Oettingen in Bavaria, the journeymen and villeins are accorded in the morning, soup and vegetables; at midday, soup and meat, with vegetables, and a bowl of broth or a plate of salted or



pickled meat; at night, soup and meat, carrots, and preserved meat. Even the women who brought fowls or eggs from the neighbouring villages to the castle were given for their trouble—if [130]from the immediate vicinity, a plate of soup with two pieces of bread; if from a greater distance, a complete meal and a cruse of wine. In Saxony, similarly, the agricultural journeymen received two meals a day, of four courses each, besides frequently cheese and bread at other times should they require it. Not to have eaten meat for a week was the sign of the direst famine in any district. Warnings are not wanting against the evils accruing to the common man from his excessive indulgence in eating and drinking.

Such was the condition of the proletariat in its first inception, that is, when the mediæval system of villeinage had begun to loosen and to allow a proportion of free labourers to insinuate themselves into its working. How grievous, then, were the complaints when, while wages had risen either not at all or at most from half a groschen to a groschen, the price of rye rose from six or seven groschen a bushel to about five-and-twenty groschen, that of a sheep from four to eighteen groschen, and all other articles of necessary consumption in a like proportion![\[16\]](#)

In the Middle Ages, necessities and such ordinary comforts as were to be had at all were dirt cheap; while non-necessaries and [\[131\]](#)luxuries, that is, such articles as had to be imported from afar, were for the most part at prohibitive prices. With the opening up of the world-market during the first half of the sixteenth century, this state of things rapidly changed. Most luxuries in a short time fell heavily in price, while necessities rose in a still greater proportion.

This latter change in the economic conditions of the world exercised its most powerful effect, however, on the character of the mediæval town, which had remained substantially unchanged since the first great expansion at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries. With the extension of commerce and the opening up of communications, there began that evolution of the town whose ultimate outcome was to entirely change the central idea on which the urban organization was based.

The first requisite for a town, according to modern notions, is facility of communication with the rest of the world by means of railways, telegraphs, postal system, and the like. So far has this gone now that in a new country, for instance, America, the railway, telegraph lines, etc., are made first, and the towns are then strung upon them, like beads upon a cord. In the mediæval town, on the contrary, communication was quite a secondary matter, and [\[132\]](#)more of a luxury than a necessity. Each town was really a self-sufficing entity, both materially and intellectually. The modern idea of a town is that of a mere local aggregate of individuals, each pursuing a trade or calling with a view to the world-market at large. Their own locality or town is no more to them economically than any other part of the world-market, and very little more in any other respect. The mediæval idea of a town,

on the contrary, was that of an organization of groups into one organic whole. Just as the village community was a somewhat extended family organization, so was, *mutatis mutandis*, the larger unit, the township or city. Each member of the town organization owed allegiance and distinct duties primarily to his guild, or immediate social group, and through this to the larger social group which constituted the civic society. Consequently, every townsman felt a kind of *esprit de corps* with his fellow-citizens, akin to that, say, which is alleged of the soldiers of the old French "foreign legion" who, being brothers-in-arms, were brothers also in all other relations. But if every citizen owed duty and allegiance to the town in its corporate capacity, the town no less owed protection and assistance, in every department of life, to its individual members.

As in ancient Rome in its earlier history, [133]and as in all other early urban communities, agriculture necessarily played a considerable part in the life of most mediæval towns. Like the villages, they possessed each its own mark, with its common fields, pastures, and woods. These were demarcated by various landmarks, crosses, holy images, etc.; and "the bounds" were beaten every year. The wealthier citizens usually possessed gardens and orchards within the town walls, while each inhabitant had his share in the communal holding without. The use of this latter was regulated by the Rath or Council. In fact, the town life of the Middle Ages was not by any means so sharply differentiated from rural life as is implied in our modern idea of a town. Even in the larger commercial towns, such as Frankfurt, Nürnberg, or Augsburg, it was common to keep cows, pigs, and sheep, and, as a matter of course, fowls and geese, in large numbers within the precincts of the town itself. In Frankfurt in 1481 the pigsties in the town had become such a nuisance that the Rath had to forbid them *in the front* of the houses by a formal decree. In Ulm there was a regulation of the bakers' guild to the effect that no single member should keep more than twenty-four pigs, and that cows should be confined to their stalls at night. In Nürnberg in 1475 again, the Rath had to interfere with the [134]intolerable nuisance of pigs and other farm-yard stock running about loose in the streets. Even in a town like München we are informed that agriculture formed one of the staple occupations of the inhabitants, while in almost every city the gardeners' or the wine-growers' guild appears as one of the largest and most influential.

It is evident that such conditions of life would be impossible with town-populations even approaching only distantly those of to-day; and, in fact, when we come to inquire into the size and populousness of mediæval German cities, as into those of the classical world of antiquity, we are at first sight staggered by the smallness of their proportions. The largest and most populous free Imperial cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Nürnberg and Strassburg, numbered little more than 20,000 resident inhabitants within the walls, a population rather less than that of (say) many an English country town at the present time. Such an important place as Frankfurt-am-Main is stated at the middle of the fifteenth century to have had less than 9,000

inhabitants. At the end of the fifteenth century Dresden could only boast of about 5,000. Rothenburg on the Tauber is to-day a dead city to all intents and purposes, affording us a magnificent [135]example of what a mediæval town was like, as the bulk of its architecture, including the circuit of its walls, which remain intact, dates approximately from the sixteenth century. At present a single line of railway branching off from the main line with about two trains a day is amply sufficient to convey the few antiquaries and artists who are now its sole visitors, and who have to content themselves with country-inn accommodation. Yet this old free city has actually a larger population at the present day than it had at the time of which we are writing, when it was at the height of its prosperity as an important centre of activity. The figures of its population are now between 8,000 and 9,000. At the beginning of the sixteenth century they were between 6,000 and 7,000. A work written and circulated in manuscript during the first decade of the sixteenth century, "A Christian Exhortation" (*Ein Christliche Mahnung*), after referring to the frightful pestilences recently raging as a punishment from God, observes, in the spirit of true Malthusianism, and as a justification of the ways of Providence, that "an there were not so many that died there were too much folk in the land, and it were not good that such should be lest there were not food enough for all."

Great population as constituting importance [136]in a city is comparatively a modern notion. In other ages towns became famous on account of their superior civic organization, their more advantageous situation, or the greater activity, intellectual, political, or commercial, of their citizens.

What this civic organization of mediæval towns was, demands a few words of explanation, since the conflict between the two main elements in their composition plays an important part in the events which follow. Something has already been said on this head in the Introduction. We have there pointed out that the Rath or Town Council, that is, the supreme governing body of the municipality, was in all cases mainly, and often entirely, composed of the heads of the town aristocracy, the patrician class or "honorability" (*Ehrbarkeit*), as they were termed, who on the ground of their antiquity and wealth laid claim to every post of power and privilege. On the other hand were the body of the citizens enrolled in the various guilds, seeking, as their position and wealth improved, to wrest the control of the town's resources from the patricians. It must be remembered that the towns stood in the position of feudal over-lords to the peasants who held land on the city territory, which often extended for many square miles outside the walls. A small town [137]like Rothenburg, for instance, which we have described above, had on its lands as many as 15,000 peasants. The feudal dues and contributions of these tenants constituted the staple revenue of the town, and the management of them was one of the chief bones of contention.

Nowhere was the guild system brought to a greater perfection than in the free Imperial towns of Germany. Indeed, it was carried further in them, in one respect, than in any other part of Europe, for the guilds of journeymen (*Cesellenverbände*), which in other places never attained any strength or importance, were in Germany developed to the fullest extent, and of course supported the craft-guilds in their conflict with the patriciate. Although there were naturally numerous frictions between the two classes of guilds respecting wages, working days, hours, and the like, it must not be supposed that there was that irreconcilable hostility between them which would exist at the present time between a trade-union and a syndicate of employers. Each recognized the right to existence of the other. In one case, that of the strike of bakers towards the close of the fifteenth century, at Colmar in Elsass, the craft-guilds supported the journeymen in their protest against a certain action of the patrician Rath, which they considered to be a derogation from their dignity.

[138] Like the masters, the journeymen had their own guild-house, and their own solemn functions and social gatherings. There were, indeed, two kinds of journeymen-guilds: one whose chief purpose was a religious one, and the other concerning itself in the first instance with the secular concerns of the body. However, both classes of journeymen-guilds worked into one another's hand. On coming into a strange town a travelling member of such a guild was certain of a friendly reception, of maintenance until he procured work, and of assistance in finding it as soon as possible.

Interesting details concerning the wages paid to journeymen and their contributions to the guilds are to be found in the original documents relating exclusively to the journeymen-guilds, collected by Georg Schanz.[17] From these and other sources it is clear that the position of the artisan in the towns was in proportion much better than even that of the peasants at that time, and therefore immeasurably superior to anything he has enjoyed since. In South Germany at this period the average price of beef was about two denarii[18] a pound, [139] while the daily wages of the masons and carpenters, in addition to their keep and lodging, amounted in the summer to about twenty, and in the winter to about sixteen of these denarii. In Saxony the same journeymen-craftsmen earned on the average, besides their maintenance, two groschen four pfennige a day, or about one-third the value of a bushel of corn. In addition to this, in some cases the workmen had weekly gratuities under the name of "bathing money"; and in this connection it may be noticed that a holiday for the purpose of bathing once a fortnight, once a week, or even oftener, as the case might be, was stipulated for by the guilds, and generally recognized as a legitimate demand. The common notion of the uniform uncleanliness of the mediæval man requires to be considerably modified when one closely investigates the condition of town life, and finds everywhere facilities for bathing in winter and summer alike. Untidiness and uncleanliness, according to our notions, there may have been in the streets and in the dwellings in many cases, owing to inadequate provisions for the disposal of refuse and the like; but

we must not therefore extend this idea to the person, and imagine that the mediæval craftsman or even peasant was as unwholesome as, say, the East European peasant of to-day.

[140] When the wages received by the journeymen artisans are compared with the prices of commodities previously given, it will be seen how relatively easy were their circumstances; and the extent of their well-being may be further judged from the wealth of their guilds, which, although varying in different places, at all times formed a considerable proportion of the wealth of the town. The guild system was based upon the notion that the individual master and workman was working as much in the interest of the guild as for his own advantage. Each member of the guild was alike under the obligation to labour, and to labour in accordance with the rules laid down by his guild, and at the same time had the right of equal enjoyment with his fellow-guildsmen of all advantages pertaining to the particular branch of industry covered by the guild. Every guildsman had to work himself *in propriâ personâ*; no contractor was tolerated who himself "in ease and sloth doth live on the sweat of others, and puffeth himself up in lustful pride." Were a guild-master ill and unable to manage the affairs of his workshop, it was the council of the guild, and not himself or his relatives, who installed a representative for him and generally looked after his affairs. It was the guild again which procured the raw material, and distributed it in relatively equal [141] proportions amongst its members; or where this was not the case, the time and place were indicated at which the guildsman might buy at a fixed maximum price. Every master had equal right to the use of the common property and institutions of the guild, which in some industries included the essentials of production, as, for example, in the case of the woollen manufacturers, where wool-kitchens, carding-rooms, bleaching-houses and the like were common to the whole guild.

Needless to say, the relations between master and apprentices and master and journeymen were rigidly fixed down to the minutest detail. The system was thoroughly patriarchal in its character. In the hey-day of the guilds, every apprentice and most of the journeymen regarded their actual condition as a period of preparation which would end in the glories of mastership. For this dear hope they were ready on occasion to undergo cheerfully the most arduous duties. The education in handicraft, and, we may add, the supervision of the morals of the blossoming members of the guild, was a department which greatly exercised its administration. On the other hand, the guild in its corporate capacity was bound to maintain sick or incapacitated apprentices and journeymen, though after the journeymen had developed into a distinct class, and the [142] consequent rise of the journeymen-guilds, the latter function was probably in most cases taken over by the latter. The guild laws against adulteration, scamped work, and the like, were sometimes ferocious in their severity. For example, in some towns the baker who misconducted himself in the matter of the composition of his bread was condemned to be shut up in a basket which was fixed at

the end of a long pole, and let down so many times to the bottom of a pool of dirty water. In the year 1456 two grocers, together with a female assistant, were burnt alive at Nürnberg for adulterating saffron and spices, and a similar instance happened at Augsburg in 1492. From what we have said it will be seen that guild life, like the life of the town as a whole, was essentially a social life. It was a larger family, into which various blood families were merged. The interest of each was felt to be the interest of all, and the interest of all no less the interest of each.

But in many towns, outside the town population properly speaking, outside the patrician families who generally governed the Rath, outside the guilds, outside the city organization altogether, there were other bodies dwelling within the walls and forming *imperia in imperiis*. These were the religious corporations, whose possessions were often extensive, and who, dwelling within their own walls, shut [143] out from the rest of the town, were subject only to their own ordinances. The quasi-religious, quasi-military Order of the Teutonic Knights (*Deutscher Orden*), founded at the time of the Crusades, was the wealthiest and largest of these corporations. In addition to the extensive territories which it held in various parts of the empire, it had establishments in a large number of cities. Besides this there were, of course, the Orders of the Augustinians and Carthusians, and a number of less important foundations, who had their cloisters in various towns. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the pomp, pride, and licentiousness of the Teutonic Order drew upon it the especial hatred of the townsfolk; and amid the general wreck of religious houses none were more ferociously despoiled than those belonging to this Order. There were, moreover, in some towns, the establishments of princely families, which were regarded by the citizens with little less hostility than that accorded to the religious Orders.

Such were the explosive elements of town life when changing conditions were tending to dislocate the whole structure of mediæval existence. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 had struck a heavy blow at the commerce of the Bavarian cities which had come by way of Constantinople and [144] Venice. This latter city lost one by one its trading centres in the East, and all Oriental traffic by way of the Black Sea was practically stopped. It was the Dutch cities which inherited the wealth and influence of the German towns when Vasco da Gama's discovery of the Cape route to the East began to have its influence on the trade of the world. This diversion of Oriental traffic from the old overland route was the starting-point of the modern merchant navy, and it must be placed amongst the most potent causes of the break-up of mediæval civilization. The above change, although immediately felt by the German towns, was not realized by them in its full importance either as to its causes or its consequences for more than a century; but the decline of their prosperity was nevertheless sensible, even now, and contributed directly to the coming upheaval.

The impatience of the prince, the prelate, the noble, and the wealthy burgher at the restraints which the system of the Middle Ages placed upon his activity as an

individual in the acquisition for his own behoof, and the disposal at his own pleasure, of wealth, regardless of the consequences to his neighbour, found expression, and a powerful lever, in the introduction from Italy of the Roman law in place of the old canon and customary law [145] of Europe. The latter never regarded the individual as an independent and autonomous entity, but invariably treated him with reference to a group or social body, of which he might be the head or merely a subordinate member; but in any case the filaments of custom and religious duty attached him to a certain humanity outside himself, whether it were a village community, a guild, a township, a province, or the empire. The idea of a right to individual autonomy in his dealings with men never entered into the mediæval man's conception. Hence the mere possession of property was not recognized by mediæval law as conferring any absolute rights in its holder to its unregulated use, and the basis of the mediæval notions of property was the association of responsibility and duty with ownership. In other words, the notion of *trust* was never completely divorced from that of *possession*.

The Roman law rested on a totally different basis. It represented the legal ethics of a society on most of its sides brutally and crassly individualistic. That that society had come to an end instead of evolving to its natural conclusion—a developed capitalistic individualism such as exists to-day—was due to the weakness of its economic basis, owing to the limitation at that time of man's power over Nature, which deprived it of recuperative [146] and defensive force, thereby leaving it a prey not only to internal influences of decay but also to violent destructive forces from without. Nevertheless, it left a legacy of a ready-made legal system to serve as an implement for the first occasion when economic conditions should be once more ready for progress to resume the course of individualistic development, abruptly brought to an end by the fall of ancient civilization as crystallized in the Roman Empire.

The popular courts of the village, of the mark, and of the town, which had existed up to the beginning of the sixteenth century with all their ancient functions, were extremely democratic in character. Cases were decided on their merits, in accordance with local custom, by a body of jurymen chosen from among the freemen of the district, to whom the presiding functionaries, most of whom were also of popular selection, were little more than assessors. The technicalities of a cut-and-dried system were unknown. The Catholic-Germanic theory of the Middle Ages proper, as regards the civil power in all its functions, from the highest downward, was that of the mere administrator of justice as such; whereas the Roman law regarded the magistrate as the vicegerent of the *princeps* or *imperator*, in whose person was absolutely vested as its [147] supreme embodiment the whole power of the State. The Divinity of the Emperors was a recognition of this fact; and the influence of the Roman law revived the theory as far as possible under the changed conditions, in the form of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings—a doctrine which was totally alien to the Catholic

feudal conception of the Middle Ages. This doctrine, moreover, received added force from the Oriental conception of the position of the ruler found in the Old Testament, from which Protestantism drew so much of its inspiration.

But apart from this aspect of the question, the new juridical conception involved that of a system of rules as the crystallized embodiment of the abstract "State," given through its representatives, which could under no circumstances be departed from, and which could only be modified in their operation by legal quibbles that left to them their nominal integrity. The new law could therefore only be administered by a class of men trained specially for the purpose, of which the plastic customary law borne down the stream of history from primitive times, and insensibly adapting itself to new conditions but understood in its broader aspects by all those who might be called to administer it, had little need. The Roman law, the study of which was started <sup>[148]</sup>at Bologna in the twelfth century, as might naturally be expected, early attracted the attention of the German Emperors as a suitable instrument for use on emergencies. But it made little real headway in Germany itself as against the early institutions until the fifteenth century, when the provincial power of the princes of the empire was beginning to overshadow the central authority of the titular chief of the Holy Roman Empire. The former, while strenuously resisting the results of its application from above, found in it a powerful auxiliary in their Courts in riveting their power over the estates subject to them. As opposed to the delicately adjusted hierarchical notions of Feudalism, which did not recognize any absoluteness of dominion either over persons or things, in short for which neither the head of the State had any inviolate authority as such, nor private property any inviolable rights or sanctity as such, the new jurisprudence made corner-stones of both these conceptions.

Even the canon law, consisting in a mass of Papal decretals dating from the early Middle Ages, and which, while undoubtedly containing considerable traces of the influence of Roman law, was nevertheless largely customary in its character, with an infusion of Christian ethics, had to yield to the new <sup>[149]</sup>jurisprudence, and that too in countries where the Reformation had been unable to replace the old ecclesiastical dogma and organization. The principles and practice of the Roman law were sedulously inculcated by the tribe of civilian lawyers who by the beginning of the sixteenth century infested every Court throughout Europe. Every potentate, great and small, little as he might like its application by his feudal overlord to himself, was yet only too ready and willing to invoke its aid for the oppression of his own vassals or peasants. Thus the civil law everywhere triumphed. It became the juridical expression of the political, economical, and religious change which marks the close of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of the modern commercial world.

It must not be supposed, however, that no resistance was made to it. Everywhere in contemporary literature, side by side with denunciations of the new mercenary troops, the *Landsknechte*, we find uncomplimentary allusions to the race of advocates,



notaries, and procurators who, as one writer has it, "are increasing like grasshoppers in town and in country year by year." Whenever they appeared, we are told, countless litigious disputes sprang up. He who had but the money in hand might readily defraud his poorer neighbour in the name of law and right. "Woe is [150]me!" exclaims one author, "in my home there is but one procurator, and yet is the whole country round about brought into confusion by his wiles. What a misery will this horde bring upon us!" Everywhere was complaint and in many places resistance.

As early as 1460 we find the Bavarian estates vigorously complaining that all the courts were in the hands of doctors. They demanded that the rights of the land and the ancient custom should not be cast aside; but that the courts as of old should be served by reasonable and honest judges, who should be men of the same feudal livery and of the same country as those whom they tried. Again in 1514, when the evil had become still more crying, we find the estates of Württemberg petitioning Duke Ulrich that the Supreme Court "shall be composed of honourable, worthy, and understanding men of the nobles and of the towns, who shall not be doctors, to the intent that the ancient usages and customs should abide, and that it should be judged according to them in such wise that the poor man might no longer be brought to confusion." In many covenants of the end of the fifteenth century, express stipulation is made that they should not be interpreted by a doctor or licentiate, and also in some cases that no such doctor or licentiate [151]should be permitted to reside or to exercise his profession within certain districts. Great as was the economical influence of the new jurists in the tribunals, their political influence in the various courts of the empire, from the *Reichskammergericht* downwards, was, if anything, greater. Says Wimpfeling, the first writer on the art of education in the modern world: "According to the loathsome doctrines of the new jurisconsults, the prince shall be everything in the land and the people naught. The people shall only obey, pay tax, and do service. Moreover, they shall not alone obey the prince but also them that he has placed in authority, who begin to puff themselves up as the proper lords of the land, and to order matters so that the princes themselves do as little as may be reign." From this passage it will be seen that the modern bureaucratic State, in which government is as nearly as possible reduced to mechanism and the personal relation abolished, was ushered in under the auspices of the civil law. How easy it was for the civilian to effect the abolition of feudal institutions may be readily imagined by those cognizant of the principles of Roman law. For example, the Roman law, of course, making no mention of the right of the mediæval "estates" to be consulted in the levying of taxes or in other questions, the jurist [152]would explain this right to his too willing master, the prince, as an abuse which had no legal justification, and which, the sooner it were abolished in the interest of good government the better it would be. All feudal rights as against the power of an overlord were explained away by the civil jurist, either as pernicious abuses, or, at best, as favours granted in the past by the predecessors of the reigning monarch, which it was within his right to truncate or to abrogate at his will.

From the preceding survey will be clearly perceived the important rôle which the new jurisprudence played on the Continent of Europe in the gestation of the new phase which history was entering upon in the sixteenth century. Even the short sketch given will be sufficient to show that it was not in one department only that it operated; but that, in addition to its own domain of law proper, its influence was felt in modifying economical, political, and indirectly even ethical and religious conditions. From this time forth Feudalism slowly but surely gave place to the newer order, all that remained being certain of its features, which, crystallized into bureaucratic forms, were doubly veneered with a last trace of mediæval ideas and a denser coating of civilian conceptions. [153] This transitional Europe, and not mediæval Europe, was the Europe which lasted on until the eighteenth century, and which practically came to an end with the French Revolution.

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#### FOOTNOTES:

[15] One silver groschen = 1-1/5d.

[16] The authorities for the above data may be found in Janssen, i., vol. i., bk. iii., especially pp. 330-46.

[17] *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Gesellenverbände*. Leipzig, 1876.

[18] C. 1/5d. The denarius was the South German equivalent of the North German pfennig, of which twelve went to the groschen.

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## THE REVOLT OF THE KNIGHTHOOD

We have already pointed out in more than one place the position to which the smaller nobility, or the knighthood, had been reduced by the concatenation of causes which was bringing about the dissolution of the old mediæval order of things, and, as a consequence, ruining the knights both economically and politically—economically by the rise of capitalism as represented by the commercial syndicates of the cities; by the unprecedented power and wealth of the city confederations, especially of the Hanseatic League; by the rising importance of the newly developed world-market; by the growing luxury and the enormous rise in the prices of commodities concurrently with the reduction in value of the feudal land-tenures; and by the limitation of the possibilities of acquiring wealth by highway robbery, owing to Imperial constitutions, on the one hand, and increased powers of defence on the part of the trading [155]community, on the other—politically, by the new modes of warfare in which artillery and infantry, composed of comparatively well-drilled mercenaries (*Landsknechte*), were rapidly making inroads into the omnipotence of the ancient feudal chivalry, and reducing the importance of individual skill or prowess in the handling of weapons, and by the development of the power of the princes or higher nobility, partly due to the influence which the Roman civil law now began to exercise over the older customary Constitution of the empire, and partly to the budding centralism of authority—which in France and England became a national centralization, but in Germany, in spite of the temporary ascendancy of Charles V, finally issued in a provincial centralization in which the princes were *de facto* independent monarchs. The Imperial Constitution of 1495, forbidding private war, applied, it must be remembered, only to the lesser nobility and not to the higher, thereby placing the former in a decidedly ignominious position as regards their feudal superiors. And though this particular enactment had little immediate result, yet it was none the less resented as a blow struck at the old knightly privilege.

The mental attitude of the knighthood in the face of this progressing change in their [156]position was naturally an ambiguous one, composed partly of a desire to hark back to the haughty independence of feudalism, and partly of sympathy with the growing discontent among other classes and with the new spirit generally. In order that the knights might succeed in recovering their old or even in maintaining their actual position against the higher nobility, the princes, backed as these now largely were by the Imperial power, the co-operation of the cities was absolutely essential to them, but the obstacles in the way of such a co-operation proved insurmountable. The towns hated the knights for their lawless practices, which rendered trade unsafe and not infrequently cost the lives of the citizens. The knights for the most part, with true feudal hauteur, scorned and despised the artisans and traders who had no territorial

family name and were unexercised in the higher chivalric arts. The grievances of the two parties were, moreover, not identical, although they had their origin in the same causes.

The cities were in the main solely concerned to maintain their old independent position, and especially to curb the growing disposition at this time of the other estates to use them as milch cows from which to draw the taxation necessary to the maintenance of the empire. For example, at the [157]Reichstag opened at Nürnberg on November 17, 1522—to discuss the questions of the establishment of perpetual peace within the empire, of organizing an energetic resistance to the inroads of the Turks, and of placing on a firm foundation the Imperial Privy Council (*Kammergericht*) and the Supreme Council (*Reichsregiment*)—at which were represented twenty-six Imperial towns, thirty-eight high prelates, eighteen princes, and twenty-nine counts and barons—the representatives of the cities complained grievously that their attendance was reduced to a farce, since they were always out-voted, and hence obliged to accept the decisions of the other estates. They stated that their position was no longer bearable, and for the first time drew up an Act of Protest, which further complained of the delay in the decisions of the Imperial courts; of their sufferings from the right of private war, which was still allowed to subsist in defiance of the Constitution; of the increase of customs-stations on the part of the princes and prince-prelates; and, finally, of the debasement of the coinage due to the unscrupulous practices of these notables and of the Jews. The only sympathy the other estates vouchsafed to the complaints of the cities was with regard to the right of private war, which the higher nobles were also anxious to [158]suppress amongst the lower, though without prejudice, of course, to their own privileges in this line. All the other articles of the Act of Protest were coolly waived aside. From all this it will be seen that not much co-operation was to be expected between such heterogeneous bodies as the knighthood and the free towns, in spite of their common interest in checking the threateningly advancing power of the princes and the central Imperial authority in so far as it was manned and manipulated by the princes.

Amid the decaying knighthood there was, as we have already intimated, one figure which stood out head and shoulders above every other noble of the time, whether prince or knight, and that was Franz von Sickingen. He has been termed, not without truth, "the last flower of German chivalry," since in him the old knightly qualities flashed up in conjunction with the old knightly power and splendour with a brightness hardly known even in the palmiest days of mediæval life. It was, however, the last flicker of the light of German chivalry. With the death of Sickingen and the collapse of his revolt the knighthood of Central Europe ceased any longer to play an independent part in history.

Sickingen, although technically only one of the lower nobility, was deemed about the [159]time of Luther's appearance to hold the immediate destinies of the empire in

his hand. Wealthy, inspiring confidence and enthusiasm as a leader, possessed of more than one powerful and strategically situated stronghold, he held court at his favourite residence, the Castle of the Landstuhl, in the Rhenish Palatinate, in a style which many a prince of the empire might have envied. As honoured guests were to be found attending on him humanists, poets, minstrels, partisans of the new theology, astrologers, alchemists, and men of letters generally—in short, the whole intelligence and culture of the period. Foremost amongst these, and chief confidant of Sickingen, was the knight, courtier, poet, essayist, and pamphleteer, Ulrich von Hutten, whose pen was ever ready to champion with unstinted enthusiasm the cause of the progressive ideas of his age. He first took up the cudgels against the obscurantists on behalf of Humanism as represented by Erasmus and Reuchlin, the latter of whom he bravely defended in his dispute with the Inquisition and the monks of Cologne, and in his contributions to the *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum* we see the youthful ardour of the Renaissance in full blast in its onslaught on the forces of mediæval obstruction. Unlike most of those with whom he was first associated, Hutten [160] passed from being the upholder of the New Learning to the rôle of champion of the Reformation; and it was largely through his influence that Sickingen took up the cause of Luther and his movement.

Sickingen had been induced by Charles V to assist him in an abortive attempt to invade France in 1521, from which campaign he had returned without much benefit either material or moral, save that Charles was left heavily in his debt. The accumulated hatred of generations for the priesthood had made Sickingen a willing instrument in the hands of the reforming party, and believing that Charles now lay to some extent in his power, he considered the moment opportune for putting his long-cherished scheme into operation for reforming the Constitution of the empire. This reformation consisted, as was to be expected, in placing his own order on a firm footing, and of effectually curbing the power of the other estates, especially that of the prelates. Sickingen wished to make the Emperor and the lower nobility the decisive factors in his new scheme of things political. The Emperor, it so happened, was for the moment away in Spain, and Sickingen's colleagues of the knightly order were becoming clamorous at the unworthy position into which they found themselves rapidly being driven. [161] The feudal exactions of their princely lieges had reached a point which passed all endurance, and since they were practically powerless in the Reichstags, no outlet was left for their discontent save by open revolt. Impelled not less by his own inclinations than by the pressure of his companions, foremost among whom was Hutten, Sickingen decided at once to open the campaign.

Hutten, it would appear, attempted to enter into negotiations for the co-operation of the towns and of the peasants. So far as can be seen, Strassburg and one or two other Imperial cities returned favourable answers; but the precise measure of Hutten's

success cannot be ascertained, owing to the fact that all the documents relating to the matter perished in the destruction of Sickingen's Castle of Ebernburg.

It should be premised that on August 13th, previous to this declaration of war, a "Brotherly Convention" had been signed by a number of the knights, by which Sickingen was appointed their captain, and they bound themselves to submit to no jurisdiction save their own, and pledged themselves to mutual aid in war in case of hostilities against any one of their number. Through this "Treaty of Landau," Sickingen had it in his power to assemble a considerable force at a <sup>[162]</sup>moment's notice. Consequently, a few days after the issue of the above manifesto, on August 27, 1522, Sickingen was able to start from the Castle of Ebernburg with an army of 5,000 foot and 1,500 knights, besides artillery, in the full confidence that he was about to destroy the position of the Palatine prince-bishop and raise himself without delay to the chief power on the Rhine.

By an effective piece of audacity, that of sporting the Imperial flag and the Burgundian cross, Franz spread abroad the idea that he was acting on behalf of the Emperor, then absent in Spain; and this largely contributed to the result that his army speedily rose to 5,000 knights and 10,000 footmen. The Imperial Diet at Nürnberg now intervened, and ordered Sickingen to cease the operations he had already begun, threatening him with the ban of the empire and a fine of 2,000 marks if he did not obey. To this summons Franz sent a characteristically impudent reply, and light-heartedly continued the campaign, regardless of the warning which an astrologer had given him some time previously, that the year 1522 or 1523 would probably be fatal to him. It is evident that this campaign, begun so late in the year, was regarded by Sickingen and the other leaders as merely a preliminary canter to a larger and more <sup>[163]</sup>widespread movement the following spring, since on this occasion the Swabian and Franconian knighthood do not appear to have been even invited to take part in it.

After an easy progress, during which several trifling places, the most important being St. Wendel, were taken, Franz with his army arrived on September 8th before the gates of Trier. He had hoped to capture the town by surprise, and was indeed not without some expectation of co-operation and help from the citizens themselves. On his arrival he shot letters within the walls summoning the inhabitants to take his part against their tyrant; but either through the unwillingness of the burghers to act with knights, or through the vigilance of the Archbishop, they were without effect. The gates remained closed; and in answer to Sickingen's summons to surrender, Richard replied that he would find him in the city if he could get inside. In the meantime Sickingen's friends had signally failed in their attempts to obtain supplies and reinforcements for him, in the main owing to the energetic action of some of the higher nobles. The Archbishop of Trier showed himself as much a soldier as a Churchman; and after a week's siege, during which Sickingen made five assaults on

the city, his powder ran out, and he was forced to retire. He at once made <sup>[164]</sup>his way back to Ebernburg, where he intended to pass the winter, since he saw that it was useless to continue the campaign, with his own army diminishing and the hoped-for supplies not appearing, whilst the forces of his antagonists augmented daily. In his stronghold of Ebernburg he could rely on being secure from all attack until he was able to again take the field on the offensive, as he anticipated doing in the spring.

In spite of the obvious failure of the autumnal campaign, the cause of the knighthood did not by any means look irretrievably desperate, since there was always the possibility of successful recruitments the following spring. Ulrich von Hutten was doing his utmost in Würtemberg and Switzerland to scrape together men and money, though up to this time without much success, while other emissaries of Sickingen were working with the same object in Breisgau and other parts of Southern Germany. Relying on these expected reinforcements, Franz was confident of victory when he should again take the field, and in the meantime he felt himself quite secure in one or other of his strong places, which had recently undergone extensive repairs and seemed to be impregnable. In this anticipation he was deceived, for he had not reckoned with the new and more potent <sup>[165]</sup>weapons of attack which were replacing the battering-ram and other mediæval besieging appliances. Franz retired to his strong castle of the Landstuhl to await the onslaught of the princes which followed in the spring. After heavy bombardment Sickingen was mortally wounded on May 6th, and the place was immediately surrendered. The next day the princes entered the castle, where, in an underground chamber, their enemy lay dying.

He was so near his end that he could scarcely distinguish his three arch-enemies one from the other. "My dear lord," he said to the Count Palatine, his feudal superior, "I had not thought that I should end thus," taking off his cap and giving him his hand. "What has impelled thee, Franz," asked the Archbishop of Trier, "that thou hast so laid waste and harmed me and my poor people?" "Of that it were too long to speak," answered Sickingen, "but I have done nought without cause. I go now to stand before a greater Lord." Here it is worthy of remark that the princes treated Franz with all the knightliness and courtesy which were customary between social equals in the days of chivalry, addressing him at most rather as a rebellious child than as an insurgent subject. The Prince of Hesse was about to give utterance to a reproach, but he was interrupted by the Count <sup>[166]</sup>Palatine, who told him that he must not quarrel with a dying man. The Count's chamberlain said some sympathetic words to Franz, who replied to him: "My dear chamberlain, it matters little about me. It is not I who am the cock round which they are dancing." When the princes had withdrawn, his chaplain asked him if he would confess; but Franz replied: "I have confessed to God in my heart," whereupon the chaplain gave him absolution; and as he went to fetch the host "the last of the knights" passed quietly away, alone and abandoned. It is related by Spalatin that after his death some peasants and domestics placed his body in an old

armour-chest, in which they had to double the head on to the knees. The chest was then let down by a rope from the rocky eminence on which stands the now ruined castle, and was buried beneath a small chapel in the village below.

The scene we have just described in the castle vault meant not merely the tragedy of a hero's death, nor merely the destruction of a faction or party, it meant the end of an epoch. With Sickingen's death one of the most salient and picturesque elements in the mediæval life of Central Europe received its death-blow. The knighthood as a distinct factor in the polity of Europe henceforth existed no more.

[167]Spalatin relates that on the death of Sickingen the princely party anticipated as easy a victory over the religious revolt as they had achieved over the knighthood. "The mock Emperor is dead," so the phrase went, "and the mock Pope will soon be dead also." Hutten, already an exile in Switzerland, did not many months survive his patron and leader, Sickingen. The rôle which Erasmus played in this miserable tragedy was only what was to be expected from the moral cowardice which seemed ingrained in the character of the great Humanist leader. Erasmus had already begun to fight shy of the Reformation movement, from which he was about to separate himself definitely. He seized the present opportunity to quarrel with Hutten; and to Hutten's somewhat bitter attacks on him in consequence he replied with ferocity in his *Spongia Erasmi adversus aspergines Hutteni*.

Hutten had had to fly from Basel to Mülhausen and thence to Zürich, in the last stages of syphilitic disease. He was kindly received by the reformer, Zwingli of Zürich, who advised him to try the waters of Pfeffers, and gave him letters of recommendation to the abbot of that place. He returned, in no wise benefited, to Zürich, when Zwingli again befriended the sick knight, and sent him to a friend of his, the "reformed" pastor of the [168]little island of "Ufenau," at the other end of the lake, where after a few weeks' suffering he died in abject destitution, leaving, it is said, nothing behind him but his pen. The disease from which Hutten suffered the greater part of his life, at that time a comparatively new importation and much more formidable even than nowadays, may well have contributed to an irascibility of temper and to a certain recklessness which the typical free-lance of the Reformation in its early period exhibited. Hutten was never a theologian, and the Reformation seems to have attracted him mainly from its political side as implying the assertion of the dawning feeling of German nationality as against the hated enemies of freedom of thought and the new light, the clerical satellites of the Roman see. He was a true son of his time, in his vices no less than in his virtues; and no one will deny his partiality for "wine, women, and play." There is reason, indeed, to believe that the latter at times during his later career provided his sole means of subsistence.

The hero of the Reformation, Luther, with whom Melanchthon may be associated in this matter, could be no less pusillanimous on occasion than the hero of the New Learning, Erasmus. Luther undoubtedly saw in Sickingen's revolt a means of



weakening the Catholic <sup>[169]</sup>powers against which he had to fight, and at its inception he avowedly favoured the enterprise. In some of the reforming writings Luther is represented as the incarnation of Christian resignation and mildness, and as talking of twelve legions of angels and deprecating any appeal to force as unbefitting the character of an evangelical apostle. That such, however, was not his habitual attitude is evident to all who are in the least degree acquainted with his real conduct and utterances. On one occasion he wrote: "If they (the priests) continue their mad ravings it seems to me that there would be no better method and medicine to stay them than that kings and princes did so with force, armed themselves and attacked these pernicious people who do poison all the world, and once for all did make an end of their doings with weapons, not with words. For even as we punish thieves with the sword, murderers with the rope, and heretics with fire, wherefore do we not lay hands on these pernicious teachers of damnation, on popes, on cardinals, bishops, and the swarm of the Roman Sodom—yea, with every weapon which lieth within our reach, *and wherefore do we not wash our hands in their blood?*" <sup>[19]</sup>

It is, however, in a manifesto published in <sup>[170]</sup>July 1522, just before Sickingen's attack on the Archbishop of Trier, for which enterprise it was doubtless intended as a justification, that Luther expresses himself in unmeasured terms against the "biggest wolves," the bishops, and calls upon "all dear children of God and all true Christians" to drive them out by force from the "sheep-stalls." In this pamphlet, entitled *Against the falsely called spiritual order of the Pope and the Bishops*, he says: "It were better that every bishop were murdered, every foundation or cloister rooted out, than that one soul should be destroyed, let alone that all souls should be lost for the sake of their worthless trumpery and idolatry. Of what use are they who thus live in lust, nourished by the sweat and labour of others, and are a stumbling-block to the word of God? They fear bodily uproar and despise spiritual destruction. Are they wise and honest people? If they accepted God's word and sought the life of the soul, God would be with them, for He is a God of peace, and they need fear no uprising; but if they will not hear God's word, but rage and rave with bannings, burnings, killings, and every evil, what do they better deserve than a strong uprising which shall sweep them from the earth? *And we would smile did it happen.*" <sup>[20]</sup> <sup>[171]</sup>As the heavenly wisdom saith: 'Ye have hated my chastisement and despised my doctrine; behold, I will also laugh at ye in your distress, and will mock ye when misfortune shall fall upon your heads.'" In the same document he denounces the bishops as an accursed race, as "thieves, robbers, and usurers." Swine, horses, stones, and wood were not so destitute of understanding as the German people under the sway of them and their Pope. The religious houses are similarly described as "brothels, low taverns, and murder dens," He winds up this document, which he calls his "bull," by proclaiming that "all who contribute body, goods, and honour that the rule of the bishops may be destroyed are God's dear children and true Christians, obeying God's command and fighting against

the devil's order"; and, on the other hand, that "all who give the bishops a willing obedience are the devil's own servants, and fight against God's order and law."<sup>[21]</sup>

No sooner, however, did things begin to look bad with Sickingen than Luther promptly sought to disengage himself from all complicity or even sympathy with him and his losing cause. So early as December 19, 1522, he writes to his friend Wenzel Link: "Franz von Sickingen has begun war against the Palatine. <sup>[172]</sup>It will be a very bad business." (*Franciscus Sickingen Palatino bellum indixit, res pessima futura est.*) His colleague, Melancthon, a few days later, hastened to deprecate the insinuation that Luther had had any part or lot in initiating the revolt. "Franz von Sickingen," he wrote, "by his great ill-will injures the cause of Luther; and notwithstanding that he be entirely dissevered from him, nevertheless whenever he undertaketh war he wisheth to seem to act for the public benefit, and not for his own. He doth even now pursue a most infamous course of plunder on the Rhine." In another letter he says: "I know how this tumult grieveth him (Luther)," <sup>[22]</sup> and this respecting the man who had shortly before written of the princes that their tyranny and haughtiness were no longer to be borne, alleging that God would not longer endure it, and that the common man even was becoming intelligent enough to deal with them by force if they did not mend their manners. A more telling example of the "don't-put-him-in-the-horse-pond" attitude could scarcely be desired. That it was characteristic of the "great reformer" will be seen later on when we find him pursuing a similar policy anent the revolt of the peasants.

After the fall of the Landstuhl all <sup>[173]</sup>Sickingen's castles and most of those of his immediate allies and friends were of course taken, and the greater part of them destroyed. The knighthood was now to all intents and purposes politically helpless and economically at the door of bankruptcy, owing to the suddenly changed conditions of which we have spoken in the Introduction and elsewhere as supervening since the beginning of the century: the unparalleled rise in prices, concurrently with the growing extravagance, the decline of agriculture in many places, and the increasing burdens put upon the knights by their feudal superiors, and last, but not least, the increasing obstacles in the way of the successful pursuit of the profession of highway robbery. The majority of them, therefore, clung with relentless severity to the feudal dues of the peasants, which now constituted their main, and in many cases their only, source of revenue; and hence, abandoning the hope of independence, they threw in their lot with the authorities, the princes, lay and ecclesiastic, in the common object of both, that of reducing the insurgent peasants to complete subjection.

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## FOOTNOTES:

[19]Italics the present author's.

[20]Italics the present author's.

[21]*Sämmtliche Werke* vol. xxviii. pp. 142-201.

[22]*Corpus Reformationum*, vol. i. pp. 598-9.

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[174]

## CHAPTER VII[ToC](#)

### GENERAL SIGNS OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL REVOLT

Peasant revolts of a sporadic character are to be met with throughout the Middle Ages even in their halcyon days. Some of these, like the Jacquerie in France and the revolt associated with the name of Wat Tyler in England, were of a serious and more or less extended character. But most of them were purely local and of no significance, apart from temporary and passing circumstances. By the last quarter of the fifteenth century, however, peasant risings had become increasingly numerous and their avowed aims much more definite and far-reaching than, as a rule, were those of an earlier date. In saying this we are referring to those revolts which were directly initiated by the peasantry, the serfs, and the villeins of the time, and which had as their main object the direct amelioration of the peasant's lot. Movements of a primarily religious character were, of course, of a <sup>[175]</sup>somewhat different nature, but the tendency was increasingly, as we approach the period of the Reformation, for the two currents to merge one in the other. The echoes of the Hussite movement in Bavaria at the beginning of the century spread far and wide throughout Central Europe, and had by no means spent their force as the century drew towards its close.

From this time forward recurrent indications of social revolt with a strong religious colouring, or a religious revolt with a strong social colouring, became chronic in the Germanic lands and those adjacent thereto. As an example may be taken the movement of Hans Boheim, of Niklashausen, in the diocese of Würzburg, in Franconia, in 1476, and which is regarded by some historians as the first of the movements leading directly up to those of the Lutheran Reformation. Hans claimed a divine mission for preaching the gospel to the common man. Hans preached asceticism and claimed Niklashausen as a place of pilgrimage for a new worship of the Virgin. There was little in this to alarm the authorities till Hans announced that the Queen of Heaven had revealed to him that there was to be no lay or spiritual authority, but that all men should be brothers, earning their bread by the sweat of their brows, paying no more imposts or dues, holding land [176] in common, and sharing alike in all things. The movement went on for some months, spreading rapidly in the neighbouring territories. At last Hans was seized by armed men while asleep and hurried to Würzburg. The affair caused immense commotion, and by the Sunday following, it is stated, 34,000 armed peasants assembled at Niklashausen. Led by a decayed knight and his son, 16,000 of them marched to Würzburg, demanding their prophet at the gate of the bishop's castle. By promises and cajolery, they were induced to disperse by the prince-bishop, who, as soon as he saw they were returning home in straggling parties, treacherously sent a body of his knights after them, killing some and taking others prisoners. Two of the ringleaders were beheaded outside the castle, and at the same time the prophet Hans Boheim was burnt to ashes. Thus ended a typical religio-social peasant revolt of the half-century preceding the great Reformation movement.

In 1491 the oppressed and plundered villeins of Kempten revolted, but the movement was quelled by the Emperor himself after a compromise. A great rising took place in Elsass (Alsace) in 1493 among the feudatories of the Bishop of Strassburg, with the usual object of freedom for the "common man," [177] abolition of feudal exactions, Church reformation, etc. This movement is interesting, as having first received the name of the *Bundschuh*. It was decided that as the knight was distinguished by his spurs, so the peasant should have as his device the common shoe of his class, laced from the ankle through to the knee by leathern thongs, and the banner whereon this emblem was depicted was accordingly made. The movement was, however, betrayed and mercilessly crushed by the neighbouring knighthood. A few years later a similar movement, also having the *Bundschuh* for its device, took place in the regions of the Upper and Middle Rhine. This movement created a panic among all the privileged classes, from the Emperor down to the knight. The situation was discussed in no less than three separate assemblies of the States. It was, however, eventually suppressed for the time being. A few years later, in 1512, it again burst forth under the leadership of an active adherent of the former movement, one Joss Fritz, in Baden, at the village of Lehen, near the town of Freiburg. The organization in

this case, besides being widespread, was exceedingly good, and the movement was nearly successful when at the last moment it was betrayed. Even in Switzerland there were peasant risings in the early years of the [178]sixteenth century. About the same time the duchy of Würtemberg was convulsed by a movement which took the name of the "Poor Conrad." Its object was the freeing of the "common man" from feudal services and dues and the abolition of seignorial rights over the land, etc. But here again the movement was suppressed by Duke Ulrich and his knights. Another rising took place in Baden in 1517. Three years previously, in 1514, occurred the great Hungarian peasant rebellion under George Daze. Under the able leadership of the latter the peasants had some not inconsiderable initial successes, but this movement also, after some weeks, was cruelly suppressed. About the same time, too, occurred various insurrectionary peasant movements in the Styrian and Carinthian alpine districts. Similar movements to those referred to were also going on during those early years of the fifteenth century in other parts of Europe, but these, of course, do not concern us.

The deep-reaching importance and effective spread of such movements was infinitely greater in the Middle Ages than in modern times. The same phenomenon presents itself to-day in backward and semi-barbaric communities. At first sight one is inclined to think that there has been no period in the world's history when it was so easy to stir up a [179]population as the present, with our newspapers, our telegraphs, our aeroplane, our postal arrangements, and our railways. But this is just one of those superficial notions that are not confirmed by history. We are similarly apt to think that there was no age in which travel was so widespread and formed so great a part of the education of mankind as at present. There could be no greater mistake. The true age of travelling was the close of the Middle Ages, or what is known as the Renaissance period. The man of learning, then just differentiated from the ecclesiastic, spent the greater part of his life in earning his intellectual wares from Court to Court and from University to University, just as the merchant personally carried his goods from city to city in an age in which commercial correspondence, bill-brokers, and the varied forms of modern business were but in embryo. It was then that travel really meant education, the acquirement of thorough and intimate knowledge of diverse manners and customs. Travel was then not a pastime, but a serious element in life.

In the same way the spread of a political or social movement was at least as rapid then as now, and far more penetrating. The methods were, of course, vastly different from the present; but the human material to be dealt with was far easier to mould, and kept [180]its shape much more readily when moulded, than is the case nowadays. The appearance of a religious or political teacher in a village or small town of the Middle Ages was an event which keenly excited the interest of the inhabitants. It struck across the path of their daily life, leaving behind it a track hardly conceivable to-day. For one of the salient symptoms of the change which has taken place since that time is the

disappearance of local centres of activity and the transference of the intensity of life to a few large towns. In the Middle Ages every town, small no less than large, was a more or less self-sufficing organism, intellectually and industrially, and was not essentially dependent on the outside world for its social sustenance. This was especially the case in Central Europe, where communication was much more imperfect and dangerous than in Italy, France, or England. In a society without newspapers, without easy communication with the rest of the world, where the vast majority could neither read nor write, where books were rare and costly, and accessible only to the privileged few, a new idea bursting upon one of these communities was eagerly welcomed, discussed in the council chamber of the town, in the hall of the castle, in the refectory of the monastery, at the social board of the burgess, in the workroom, and, [181] did it but touch his interests, in the hut of the peasant. It was canvassed, too, at church festivals (*Kirchweihe*), the only regular occasion on which the inhabitants of various localities came together. In the absence of all other distraction, men thought it out in all the bearings which their limited intellectual horizon permitted. If calculated in any way to appeal to them it soon struck root, and became a part of their very nature, a matter for which, if occasion were, they were prepared to sacrifice goods, liberty, and even life itself. In the present day a new idea is comparatively slow in taking root. Amid the myriad distractions of modern life, perpetually chasing one another, there is no time for any one thought, however wide-reaching in its bearings, to take a firm hold. In order that it should do so in the *modern mind*, it must be again and again borne in upon this not always too receptive intellectual substance. People require to read of it day after day in their newspapers, or to hear it preached from countless platforms, before any serious effect is created. In the simple life of former ages it was not so.

The mode of transmitting intelligence, especially such as was connected with the stirring up of political and religious movements, was in those days of a nature of which we have now little conception. The sort of thing in [182] vogue then may be compared to the methods adopted in India to prepare the Mutiny of 1857, when the mysterious cake was passed from village to village, signifying that the moment had come for the outbreak. The sense of *esprit de corps* and of that kind of honour most intimately associated with it, it must also be remembered, was infinitely keener in ruder states of society than under a high civilization. The growth of civilization, as implying the disruption of the groups in which the individual is merged under more primitive conditions, and his isolation as an autonomous unit having vague and very elastic moral duties to his "country" or to mankind at large, but none towards any definite and proximate social whole, necessarily destroys that communal spirit which prevails in the former case. This is one of the striking truths which the history of these peasant risings illustrates in various ways and brings vividly home to us.

## CHAPTER VIII [ToC](#)

### THE GREAT RISING OF THE PEASANTS AND THE ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT [\[23\]](#)

The year following the collapse of Franz Sickingen's rebellion saw the first mutterings of the great movement known as the Peasants' War, the most extensive and important of all the popular insurrections of the Middle Ages, which, as we have seen in a previous chapter, had been led up to during the previous half-century by numerous sporadic movements throughout Central Europe having like aims.

The first actual outbreak of the Peasants' War took place in August 1524, in the Black Forest, in the village of Stühlingen, from an apparently trivial cause. It spread rapidly throughout the surrounding districts, having found a leader in a former soldier of fortune, Hans Müller by name. The so-called [\[184\]](#)Evangelical Brotherhood sprang into existence. On the new movement becoming threatening it was opposed by the Swabian League, a body in the interests of the Germanic Federation, its princes, and cities, whose function it was to preserve public tranquillity and enforce the Imperial decrees. The peasant army was armed with the rudest weapons, including pitchforks, scythes, and axes; but nothing decisive of a military character took place this year. Meanwhile the work of agitation was carried on far and wide throughout the South German territories. Preachers of discontent among the peasantry and the former towns were everywhere agitating and organizing with a view to a general rising in the ensuing spring. Negotiations were carried on throughout the winter with nobles and the authorities without important results. A diversion in favour of the peasants was caused by Duke Ulrich of Würtemberg favouring the peasants' cause, which he hoped to use as a shoeing-horn to his own plans for recovering his ancestral domains, from which he had been driven on the grounds of a family quarrel under the ban of the empire in 1519. He now established himself in his stronghold of Hohentwiel, in

Württemberg, on the Swiss frontier. By February or the beginning of March peasant bands were organizing throughout Southern [185]Germany. Early in March a so-called Peasants' Parliament was held at Memmingen, a small Swabian town, at which the principal charter of the movement, the so-called "Twelve Articles," was adopted. This important document has a strong religious colouring, the political and economic demands of the peasants being led up to and justified by Biblical quotations. They all turn on the customary grievances of the time. The "Twelve Articles" remain throughout the chief Bill of Rights of the South German peasantry, though there were other versions of the latter current in certain districts. What was said before concerning the local sporadic movements which had been going on for a generation previously applies equally to the great uprising of 1525. The rapidity with which the ideas represented by the movement, and in consequence the movement itself, spread, is marvellous. By the middle of April it was computed that no less than 300,000 peasants, besides necessitous townsfolk, were armed and in open rebellion. On the side of the nobles no adequate force was ready to meet the emergency. In every direction were to be seen flaming castles and monasteries. On all sides were bodies of armed countryfolk, organized in military fashion, dictating their will to the [186]countryside and the small towns, whilst disaffection was beginning to show itself in a threatening manner among the popular elements of not a few important cities. A slight success gained by the Swabian League at the Upper Swabian village of Leipheim in the second week of April did not improve matters. In Easter week, 1525, it looked indeed as if the "Twelve Articles" at least would become realized, if not the Christian Commonwealth dreamed of by the religious sectaries established throughout the length and breadth of Germany. Princes, lords, and ecclesiastical dignitaries were being compelled far and wide to save their lives, after their property was probably already confiscated, by swearing allegiance to the Christian League or Brotherhood of the peasants and by countersigning the "Twelve Articles" and other demands of their refractory villeins and serfs. So threatening was the situation that the Archduke Ferdinand began himself to yield, in so far as to enter into negotiations with the insurgents. In many cases the leaders and chief men of the bands were got up in brilliant costume. We read of purple mantles and scarlet birettas with ostrich plumes as the costume of the leaders, of a suite of men in scarlet dress, of a vanguard of ten heralds, gorgeously attired. As Lamprecht justly observes (*Deutsche Geschichte*, [187]vol. v. p. 343): "The peasant revolts were, in general, less in the nature of campaigns, or even of an uninterrupted series of minor military operations, than of a slow process of mobilization, interrupted and accompanied by continual negotiations with lords and princes—a mobilization which was rendered possible by the standing right of assembly and of carrying arms possessed by the peasants." The smaller towns everywhere opened their gates without resistance to the peasants, between whom and the poorer inhabitants an understanding commonly existed. The



bands waxed fat with plunder of castles and religious houses, and did full justice to the contents of the rich monastic wine-cellars.

Early in April occurred one of the most notable incidents. It was at the little town of Weinsberg, near the free town of Heilbronn, in Würtemberg. The town, which was occupied by a body of knights and men-at-arms, was attacked on Easter Sunday by the peasant bands, foremost among them being the "black troop" of that knightly champion of the peasant cause, Florian Geyer. It was followed by a peasant contingent, led by one Jäcklein Rohrbach, whose consuming passion was hatred of the ruling classes. The knights within the town were under the leadership of Count von Helfenstein. The entry of [188]Rohrbach's company into Weinsberg was the signal for a massacre of the knightly host. Some were taken prisoners for the moment, including Helfenstein himself, but these were massacred next morning in the meadow outside the town by "Jäcklein," as he was called. The events at Weinsberg produced in the first instance a horror and consternation which was speedily followed by a lust for vengeance on the part of the privileged orders.

In Franconia and Middle Germany the peasant movement went on apace. In Franconia one of its chief seats was the considerable town of Rothenburg, on the Tauber. The episcopal city of Würzburg was also entered and occupied by the peasant bands in coalition with the discontented elements of the town. The sacking of churches and throwing open of religious houses characterized proceedings here as elsewhere. The locking up of a large peasant host in Würzburg was undoubtedly a source of great weakness to the movement. In the east, in the Tyrol and Salzburg, there were similar risings to those farther west. In the latter case the prince-bishop was the obnoxious oppressor.

The most interesting of the local movements was, however, in many respects that of Thomas Münzer in the town of Mülhausen, in Thuringia. Thomas Münzer is, perhaps, the [189]best known of all the names in the peasants' revolt. In addition to the ultra-Protestantism of his theological views, Münzer had as his object the establishment of a communistic Christian Commonwealth. He started a practical exemplification of this among his own followers in the town itself.

Up to the beginning of May the insurrection had carried everything before it. Truchsess and his men of the Swabian League had proved themselves unable to cope with it. Matters now changed. Knights, men-at-arms, and free-lances were returning from the Italian campaign of Charles V after the battle of Pavia. Everywhere the revolt met with disaster. The Mülhausen insurgents were destroyed at Frankenhäusen by forces of the Count of Hesse, of the Duke of Brunswick, and of the Duke of Saxony. This was on May 15th. Three days before the defeat at Frankenhäusen, on May 12th, a decisive defeat was inflicted on the peasants by the forces of the Swabian League, under Truchsess, at Böblingen, in Würtemberg. Savage ferocity signalized the treatment of the defeated peasants by the soldiery of the nobles. Jäcklein Rohrbach

was roasted alive. Truchsess with his soldiery then hurried north and inflicted a heavy defeat on the Franconian peasant contingents at Königshaven, on the [190]Tauber. These three defeats, following one another in little more than a fortnight, broke the back of the whole movement in Germany proper. In Elsass and Lorraine the insurrection was crushed by the hired troops and the Duke of Lorraine; eastward, on the little river Luibas. In the Austrian territories, under the able leadership of Michael Gaismayr, one of the lesser nobility, it continued for some months longer, and the fear of Gaismayr, who, it should be said, was the only man of really constructive genius the movement had produced, maintained itself with the privileged classes till his murder in the autumn of 1528, at the instance of the Bishop of Brixen.

The great peasant insurrection in Germany failed through want of a well-thought-out plan and tactics, and, above all, through a want of cohesion among the various peasant forces operating in different sections of the country, between which no regular communications were kept up. The attitude of Martin Luther towards the peasants and their cause was base in the extreme. His action was mainly embodied in two documents, of which the first was issued about the middle of April, and the second a month later. The difference in tone between them is sufficiently striking. In the first, which bore the title, "An Exhortation to Peace on the Twelve Articles of [191]the Peasantry in Swabia," Luther sits on the fence, admonishing both parties of what he deemed their shortcomings. He was naturally pleased with those articles that demanded the free preaching of the Gospel and abused the Catholic clergy, and was not indisposed to assent to many of the economic demands. In fact, the document strikes one as distinctly more favourable to the insurgents than to their opponents.

"We have," he wrote, "no one to thank for this mischief and sedition, save ye princes and lords, in especial ye blind bishops and mad priests and monks, who up to this day remain obstinate and do not cease to rage and rave against the holy Gospel, albeit ye know that it is righteous, and that ye may not gainsay it. Moreover, in your worldly regiment, ye do naught otherwise than flay and extort tribute, that ye may satisfy your pomp and vanity, till the poor, common man cannot, and may not, bear with it longer. The sword is on your neck. Ye think ye sit so strongly in your seats, that none may cast you from them. Such presumption and obstinate pride will twist your necks, as ye will see." And again: "God hath made it thus that they cannot, and will not, longer bear with your raging. If ye do it not of your free will, so shall ye be made to do it by way of [192]violence and undoing." Once more: "It is not peasants, my dear lords, who have set themselves up against you. God Himself it is who setteth Himself against you to chastise your evil-doing."

He counsels the princes and lords to make peace with their peasants, observing with reference to the "Twelve Articles" that some of them are so just and righteous that before God and the world their worthiness is manifested, making good the words of the psalm that they heap contempt upon the heads of the princes. Whilst he warns the

peasants against sedition and rebellion, and criticizes some of the Articles as going beyond the justification of Holy Writ, and whilst he makes side-hits at "the prophets of murder and the spirits of confusion which had found their way among them," the general impression given by the pamphlet is, as already said, one of unmistakable friendliness to the peasants and hostility to the lords.

The manifesto may be summed up in the following terms: Both sides are, strictly speaking, in the wrong, but the princes and lords have provoked the "common man" by their unjust exactions and oppressions; the peasants, on their side, have gone too far in many of their demands, notably in the refusal to pay tithes, and most of all in the notion of <sup>[193]</sup>abolishing villeinage, which Luther declares to be "straightway contrary to the Gospel and thievish." The great sin of the princes remains, however, that of having thrown stumbling-blocks in the way of the Gospel—*bien entendu* the Gospel according to Luther—and the main virtue of the peasants was their claim to have this Gospel preached. It can scarcely be doubted that the ambiguous tone of Luther's rescript was interpreted by the rebellious peasants to their advantage and served to stimulate, rather than to check, the insurrection.

Meanwhile, the movement rose higher and higher, and reached Thuringia, the district with which Luther personally was most associated. His patron, and what is more, the only friend of toleration in high places, the noble-minded Elector Friedrich of Saxony, fell ill and died on May 5th, and was succeeded by his younger brother Johann, the same who afterwards assisted in the suppression of the Thuringian revolt. Almost immediately thereupon Luther, who had been visiting his native town of Eisleben, travelled through the revolted districts on his way back to Wittenberg. He everywhere encountered black looks and jeers. When he preached, the Münzerites would drown his voice by the ringing of bells. The signs of rebellion greeted <sup>[194]</sup>him on all sides. The "Twelve Articles" were constantly thrown at his head. As the reports of violence towards the property and persons of some of his own noble friends reached him his rage broke all bounds. He seems, however, to have prudently waited a few days, until the cause of the peasants was obviously hopeless, before publicly taking his stand on the side of the authorities.

On his arrival in Wittenberg, he wrote a second pronouncement on the contemporary events, in which no uncertainty was left as to his attitude. It is entitled, "Against the Murderous and Thievish Bands of Peasants."<sup>[24]</sup> Here he lets himself loose on the side of the oppressors with a bestial ferocity. "Crush them" (the peasants), he writes, "strangle them and pierce them, in secret places and in sight of men, he who can, even as one would strike dead a mad dog!" All having authority who hesitated to extirpate the insurgents to the uttermost were committing a sin against God. "Findest thou thy death therein," he writes, addressing the reader, <sup>[195]</sup>"happy art thou: a more blessed death can never overtake thee, for thou diest in obedience to the Divine word and the command of Romans xiii. 1, and in the

service of love, to save thy neighbour from the bonds of hell and the devil." Never had there been such an infamous exhortation to the most dastardly murder on a wholesale scale since the Albigenian crusade with its "Strike them all: God will know His own"—a sentiment indeed that Luther almost literally reproduces in one passage.

The attitude of the official Lutheran party towards the poor countryfolk continued as infamous after the war as it had been on the first sign that fortune was forsaking their cause. Like master, like man. Luther's jackal, the "gentle" Melanchthon, specially signalized himself by urging on the feudal barons with Scriptural arguments to the blood-sucking and oppression of their villeins. A humane and honourable nobleman, Heinrich von Einsiedel, was touched in conscience at the *corvées* and heavy dues to which he found himself entitled. He sent to Luther for advice upon the subject. Luther replied that the existing exactions which had been handed down to him from his parents need not trouble his conscience, adding that it would not be good for *corvées* to be given up, since the [196] "common man" ought to have burdens imposed upon him, as otherwise he would become overbearing. He further remarked that a severe treatment in material things was pleasing to God, even though it might seem to be too harsh. Spalatin writes in a like strain that the burdens in Germany were, if anything, too light. Subjects, according to Melanchthon, ought to know that they are serving God in the burdens they bear for their superiors, whether it were journeying, paying tribute, or otherwise, and as pleasing to God as though they raised the dead at God's own behest. Subjects should look up to their lords as wise and just men, and hence be thankful to them. However unjust, tyrannical, and cruel the lord might be, there was never any justification for rebellion.

A friend and follower of Luther and Melanchthon—Martin Butzer by name—went still farther. According to this "reforming" worthy a subject was to obey his lord in everything. This was all that concerned him. It was not for him to consider whether what was enjoined was, or was not, contrary to the will of God. That was a matter for his feudal superior and God to settle between them. Referring to the doctrines of the revolutionary sects, Butzer urges the authorities to extirpate all those professing a false religion. Such [197] men, he says, deserve a heavier punishment than thieves, robbers, and murderers. Even their wives and innocent children and cattle should be destroyed (*ap. Janssen*, vol. i. p. 595).

Luther himself quotes, in a sermon on "Genesis," the instances of Abraham and Abimelech and other Old Testament worthies, as justifying slavery and the treatment of a slave as a beast of burden. "Sheep, cattle, men-servants and maid-servants, they were all possessions," says Luther, "to be sold as it pleased them like other beasts. It were even a good thing were it still so. For else no man may compel nor tame the servile folk" (*Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. xv. p. 276). In other discourses he enforces the same doctrine, observing that if the world is to last for any time, and is to be kept going, it will be necessary to restore the patriarchal condition. Capito, the Strassburg

preacher, in a letter to a colleague, writes lamenting that the pamphlets and discourses of Luther had contributed not a little to give edge to the bloodthirsty vengeance of the princes and nobles after the insurrection.

The total number of the peasants and their allies who fell either in fighting or at the hands of the executioners is estimated by Anselm in his *Berner Chronik* at 130,000. It [198] was certainly not less than 100,000. For months after the executioner was active in many of the affected districts. Spalatin says: "Of hanging and beheading there is no end." Another writer has it: "It was all so that even a stone had been moved to pity, for the chastisement and vengeance of the conquering lords was great." The executions within the jurisdiction of the Swabian League alone are stated at 10,000. Truchsess's provost boasted of having hanged or beheaded 1,200 with his own hand. More than 50,000 fugitives were recorded. These, according to a Swabian League order, were all outlawed in such wise that any one who found them might slay them without fear of consequences.

The sentences and executions were conducted with true mediæval levity. It is narrated in a contemporary chronicle that in one village in the Henneberg territory all the inhabitants had fled on the approach of the Count and his men-at-arms save two tilers. The two were being led to execution when one appeared to weep bitterly, and his reply to interrogatories was that he bewailed the dwellings of the aristocracy thereabouts, for henceforth there would be no one to supply them with durable tiles. Thereupon his companion burst out laughing, because, said he, it had just occurred to him that he would [199] not know where to place his hat after his head had been taken off. These mildly humorous remarks obtained for both of them a free pardon.

The aspect of those parts of the country where the war had most heavily raged was deplorable in the extreme. In addition to the many hundreds of castles and monasteries destroyed, almost as many villages and small towns had been levelled with the ground by one side or the other, especially by the Swabian League and the various princely forces. Many places were annihilated for having taken part with the peasants, even when they had been compelled by force to do so. Fields in these districts were everywhere laid waste or left uncultivated. Enormous sums were exacted as indemnity. In many of the villages peasants previously well-to-do were ruined. There seemed no limit to the bleeding of the "common man," under the pretence of compensation for damage done by the insurrection.

The condition of the families of the dead and of the fugitives was appalling. Numbers perished from starvation. The wives and children of the insurgents were in some cases forcibly driven from their homesteads and even from their native territory. In one of the pamphlets published in 1525 anent the [200] events of that year we read: "Houses are burned; fields and vineyards lie fallow; clothes and household goods are robbed or burned; cattle and sheep are taken away; the same as to horses and trappings. The prince, the gentleman, or the nobleman will have his rent and due.

Eternal God, whither shall the widows and poor children go forth to seek it?" Referring to the Lutheran campaign against friars and poor scholars, beggars, and pilgrims, the writer observes: "Think ye now that because of God's anger for the sake of one beggar, ye must even for a season bear with twenty, thirty, nay, still more?"

The courts of arbitration, which were established in various districts to adjudicate on the relations between lords and villeins, were naturally not given to favour the latter, whilst the fact that large numbers of deeds and charters had been burnt or otherwise destroyed in the course of the insurrection left open an extensive field for the imposition of fresh burdens. The record of the proceedings of one of the most important of these courts—that of the Swabian League's jurisdiction, which sat at Memmingen—in the dispute between the prince-abbot of Kempten and his villeins is given in full in Baumann's *Akten*, pp. 329-46. Here, however, the peasants did not come off so badly as in some other places. [201] Meanwhile, all the other evils of the time, the monopolies of the merchant-princes of the cities and of the trading-syndicates, the dearness of living, the scarcity of money, etc., did not abate, but rather increased from year to year. The Catholic Church maintained itself especially in the South of Germany, and the official Reformation took on a definitely aristocratic character.

According to Baumann (*Akten, Vorwort*, v, vi), the true soul of the movement of 1525 consisted in the notion of "Divine justice," the principle "that all relations, whether of political, social, or religious nature, have got to be ordered according to the directions of the 'Gospel' as the sole and exclusive source and standard of all justice." The same writer maintains that there are three phases in the development of this idea, according to which he would have the scheme of historical investigation subdivided. In Upper Swabia, says he, "Divine justice" found expression in the well-known "Twelve Articles," but here the notion of a political reformation was as good as absent.

In the second phase, the "Divine justice" idea began to be applied to political conditions. In Tyrol and the Austrian dominions, he observes, this political side manifested itself in local or, at best, territorial patriotism. It [202] was only in Franconia that all territorial patriotism or "particularism" was shaken off and the idea of the unity of the German peoples received as a political goal. The Franconian influence gained over the Würtembergers to a large extent, and the plan of reform elaborated by Weigand and Hipler for the Heilbronn Parliament was the most complete expression of this second phase of the movement.

The third phase is represented by the rising in Thuringia, and especially in its intellectual head, Thomas Münzer. Here we have the doctrine of "Divine justice" taking precedence of all else and assuming the form of a thoroughgoing theocratic scheme, to be realized by the German people.

This division Baumann is led to make with a view to the formulation of a convenient scheme for a "codex" of documents relating to the Peasants' War. It may be taken as, in the main, the best general division that can be put forward, although, as we have seen, there are places where, and times when, the practical demands of the movement seem to have asserted themselves directly and spontaneously apart from any theory whatever.

Of the fate of many of the most active leaders of the revolt we know nothing. Several heads of the movement, according to a [203]contemporary writer, wandered about for a long time in misery, some of them indeed seeking refuge with the Turks, who were still a standing menace to Imperial Christendom. The popular preachers vanished also on the suppression of the movement. The disastrous result of the Peasants' War was prejudicial even to Luther's cause in South Germany. The Catholic party reaped the advantage everywhere, evangelical preachers, even, where not insurrectionists, being persecuted. Little distinction, in fact, was made in most districts between an opponent of the Catholic Church from Luther's standpoint and one from Karlstadt's or Hubmayer's. Amongst seventy-one heretics arraigned before the Austrian court at Ensisheim, only one was acquitted. The others were broken on the wheel, burnt, or drowned.

There were some who were arrested ten or fifteen years later on charges connected with the 1525 revolt. Treachery, of course, played a large part, as it has done in all defeated movements, in ensuring the fate of many of those who had been at all prominent. In fairness to Luther, who otherwise played such a villainous rôle in connection with the peasants' movement, the fact should be recorded that he sheltered his old colleague, Karlstadt, for a short time in the Augustine [204]monastery at Wittenberg, after the latter's escape from Rothenburg.

Wendel Hipler continued for some time at liberty, and might probably have escaped altogether had he not entered a protest against the Counts of Hohenlohe for having seized a portion of his private fortune that lay within their power. The result of his action might have been foreseen. The Counts, on hearing of it, revenged themselves by accusing him of having been a chief pillar of the rebellion. He had to flee immediately, and, after wandering about for some time in a disguise, one of the features of which is stated to have been a false nose, he was seized on his way to the Reichstag which was being held at Speier in 1526. Tenacious of his property to the last, he had hoped to obtain restitution of his rights from the assembled estates of the empire. Some months later he died in prison at Neustadt.

Of the victors, Truchsess and Frundsberg considered themselves badly treated by the authorities whom they had served so well, and Frundsberg even composed a lament on his neglect. This he loved to hear sung to the accompaniment of the harp as he swilled down his red wine. The cruel Markgraf Kasimir met a miserable death not

long after from dysentery, whilst Cardinal Matthaus [205]Lang, the Archbishop of Salzburg, ended his days insane.

Of the fate of other prominent men connected with the events described, we have spoken in the course of the narrative.

The castles and religious houses, which were destroyed, as already said, to the number of many hundreds, were in most cases not built up again. The ruins of not a few of them are visible to this day. Their owners often spent the sums relentlessly wrung out of the "common man" as indemnity in the extravagances of a gay life in the free towns or in dancing attendance at the Courts of the princes and the higher nobles. The collapse of the revolt was indeed an important link in the particular chain of events that was so rapidly destroying the independent existence of the lower nobility as a separate status with a definite political position, and transforming the face of society generally. Life in the smaller castle, the knight's *burg* or tower, was already tending to become an anachronism. The Court of the prince, lay or ecclesiastic, was attracting to itself all the elements of nobility below it in the social hierarchy. The revolt of 1525 gave a further edge to this development, the first act of which closed with the collapse of the knights' rebellion and death of Sickingen in 1523. The knight was [206]becoming superfluous in the economy of the body politic.

The rise of capitalism, the sudden development of the world-market, the substitution of a money medium of exchange for direct barter—all these new factors were doing their work. Obviously the great gainers by the events of the momentous year were the representatives of the centralizing principle. But the effective centralizing principle was not represented by the Emperor, for he stood for what was after all largely a sham centralism, because it was a centralism on a scale for which the Germanic world was not ripe. Princes and margraves were destined to be bearers of the *territorial* centralization, the only real one to which the German peoples were to attain for a long time to come. Accordingly, just as the provincial *grand seigneur* of France became the courtier of the King at Paris or Versailles, so the previously quasi-independent German knight or baron became the courtier or hanger-on of the prince within or near whose territory his hereditary manor was situate.

The eventful year 1525 was truly a landmark in German history in many ways—the year of one of the most accredited exploits of Doctor Faustus, the last mythical hero the [207]progressive races have created; the year in which Martin Luther, the ex-monk, capped his repudiation of Catholicism and all its ways by marrying an ex-nun; the year of the definite victory of Charles V. the German Emperor, over Francis I. the French King, which meant the final assertion of the "Holy Roman Empire" as being a national German institution; and last, but not least, the year of the greatest and the most widespread popular movement Central Europe had yet seen, and the last of the mediæval peasant risings on a large scale. The movement of the eventful year did not, however, as many hoped and many feared, within any short time rise up again from its



ashes, after discomfiture had overtaken it. In 1526, it is true, the genius of Gaismayr succeeded in resuscitating it, not without prospect of ultimate success, in the Tyrol and other of the Austrian territories. In this year, moreover, in other outlying districts, even outside German-speaking populations, the movement flickered. Thus the traveller between the town of Bellinzona, in the Swiss Canton of Ticino, and the Bernardino Pass, in Canton Graubünden, may see to-day an imposing ruin, situated on an eminence in the narrow valley just above the small Italian-speaking town of Misox. This was one of the ancestral strongholds of the family, well [208]known in Italian history, of the Trefuzios or Trevulzir, and was sacked by the inhabitants of Misox and the neighbouring peasants in the summer of 1526, contemporaneously with Gaismayr's rising in the Tyrol. A connection between the two events would be difficult to trace, but the destruction of the castle of Misox, if not a purely spontaneous local effervescence, looks like an afterglow of the great movement, such as may well have happened in other secluded mountain valleys.

The Peasants' War in Germany we have been considering is the last great mediæval uprising of the agrarian classes in Europe. Its result was, with some few exceptions, a riveting of the peasant's chains and an increase of his burdens. More than 1,000 castles and religious houses were destroyed in Germany alone during 1525. Many priceless works of mediæval art of all kinds perished. But we must not allow our regret at such vandalism to blind us in any way to the intrinsic righteousness of the popular demands.

The elements of revolution now became absorbed by the Anabaptist movement, a continuation primarily in the religious sphere of the doctrines of the Zwickau enthusiasts and also in many respects of Thomas Münzer. At first Northern Switzerland, especially the towns of Basel and Zürich, were the [209]headquarters of the new sect, which, however, spread rapidly on all sides. Persecution of the direst description did not destroy it. On the contrary, it seemed only to have the effect of evoking those social and revolutionary elements latent within it which were at first overshadowed by more purely theological interests. As it was, the hopes and aspirations of the "common man" revived this time in a form indissolubly associated with the theocratic commonwealth, the most prominent representative of which during the earlier movement had been Thomas Münzer.

But, notwithstanding resemblances, it is utterly incorrect, as has sometimes been done, to describe any of the leaders of the great peasant rebellion of 1525 as Anabaptists. The Anabaptist sect, it is true, originated in Switzerland during the rising, but it was then confined to a small coterie of unknown enthusiasts, holding semi-private meetings in Zürich. It was from these small beginnings that the great Anabaptist movement of ten years later arose. It is directly from them that the Anabaptist movement of history dates its origin. Movements of a similar character, possessing a strong family likeness, belong to the mental atmosphere of the time in

Germany. The so-called Zwickau prophets, for example, Nicholas Storch and his colleagues, seem in their general [210]attitude to have approached very closely to the principles of the Anabaptist sectaries. But even here it is incorrect to regard them, as has often been done, as directly connected with the latter; still more as themselves the germ of the Anabaptist party of the following years. Thomas Münzer, the only leader of the movement of 1525 who seems to have been acquainted with the Zürich enthusiasts, was by no means at one with them on many points, notably refusing to attach any importance to their special sign, rebaptism. Chief among the Zürich coterie may be mentioned Konrad Grebel, at whose house the sect first of all assembled. At first the Anabaptist movement at Zürich was regarded as an extreme wing of the party of the Church reformer, Zwingli, in that city, but it was not long before it broke off entirely from the latter, and hostilities, ensuing in persecution for the new party, broke out.

To understand the true inwardness of the Anabaptist and similar movements, it is necessary to endeavour to think oneself back into the intellectual conditions of the period. The Biblical text itself, now everywhere read and re-read in the German language, was pondered and discussed in the house of the handicraftsman and in the hut of the peasant, with as much confidence [211]of interpretation as in the study of the professional theologian. But there were also not a few of the latter order, as we have seen, who were becoming disgusted with the trend of the official Reformation and its leading representatives. The Bible thus afforded a *point d'appui* for the mystical tendencies now becoming universally prominent—a *point d'appui* lacking to the earlier movements of the same kind that were so constantly arising during the Middle Ages proper. Seen in the dim religious light of a continuous reading of the Bible and of very little else, the world began to appear in a new aspect to the simple soul who practised it. All things seemed filled with the immediate presence of Deity. He who felt a call pictured himself as playing the part of the Hebrew prophet. He gathered together a small congregation of followers, who felt themselves as the children of God in the midst of a heathen world. Did not the fall of the old Church mean that the day was at hand when the elect should govern the world? It was not so much positive doctrines as an attitude of mind that was the ruling spirit in Anabaptism and like movements. Similarly, it was undoubtedly such a sensitive impressionism rather than any positive dogma that dominated the first generation of the Christian Church itself. How this acted [212]in the case of the earlier Anabaptists we shall presently see.

The new Zürich sect, by one of those seemingly inscrutable chances in similar cases of which history is full, not only prospered greatly but went forth conquering and to conquer. It spread rapidly northward, eastward, and westward. In the course of its victorious career it absorbed into itself all similar tendencies and local groups and movements having like aims to itself. As was natural under such circumstances, we find many different strains in the developed Anabaptist movement. The theologian

Bullinger wrote a book on the subject, in which he enumerates thirteen distinct sects, as he terms them, in the Anabaptist body. The general tenets of the organization, as given by Bullinger, may be summarized as follows: They regard themselves as the true Church of Christ well pleasing to God; they believe that by rebaptism a man is received into the Church; they refuse to hold intercourse with other Churches or to recognize their ministers; they say that the preachings of these are different from their works, that no man is the better for their preaching, that their ministers follow not the teaching of Paul, that they take payment from their benefices, but do not work by their hands; that the Sacraments are improperly served, and that every [213]man, who feels the call, has the right to preach; they maintain that the literal text of the Scriptures shall be accepted without comment or the additions of theologians; they protest against the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone; they maintain that true Christian love makes it inconsistent for any Christian to be rich, but that among the Brethren all things should be in common, or, at least, all available for the assistance of needy Brethren and for the common cause; that the attitude of the Christian towards authority should be that of submission and endurance only; that no Christian ought to take office of any kind, or to take part in any form of military service; that secular authority has no concern with religious belief; that the Christian resists no evil and therefore needs no law courts nor should ever make use of their tribunals; that Christians do not kill or punish with imprisonment or the sword, but only with exclusion from the body of believers; that no man should be compelled by force to believe, nor should any be slain on account of his faith; that infant baptism is sinful and that adult baptism is the only Christian baptism—baptism being a sacrament which should be reserved for the elect alone.

Such seem to represent the doctrines forming the common ground of the Anabaptist groups [214]as they existed at the end of the second decade of the fifteenth century. There were, however, as Heinrich Bullinger and his contemporary, Sebastian Franck, point out, numerous divergencies between the various sections of the party. Many of these recalled other mediæval heretic sects, e.g. the Cathari, the Brothers and Sisters of the Spirit, the Bohemian Brethren, etc.

For the first few years of its existence Anabaptism remained true to its original theologico-ethical principles. The doctrine of non-resistance was strictly adhered to. The Brethren believed in themselves as the elect, and that they had only to wait in prayer and humility for the "advent of Christ and His saints," the "restitution of all things," the "establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth," or by whatever other phrase the dominant idea of the coming change was expressed. During the earlier years of the movement the Anabaptists were peaceable and harmless fanatics and visionaries. In some cases, as in Moravia, they formed separate communities of their own, some of which survived as religious sects long after the extinction of the main movement.

In the earlier years of the fourth decade of the century, however, a change came over a considerable section of the movement. In [215]Central and South-eastern Germany, notably in the Moravian territories, barring isolated individuals here and there, the Anabaptist party continued to maintain its attitude of non-resistance and the voluntariness of association which characterized it at first. The fearful waves of persecution, however, which successively swept over it were successful at last in partially checking its progress. At length the only places in this part of the empire where it succeeded in retaining any effective organization was in the Moravian territories, where persecution was less strong and the communities more closely knit together than elsewhere. Otherwise persecution had played sad havoc with the original Anabaptist groups throughout Central Europe.

Meanwhile a movement had sprung up in Western and Northern Germany, following the course of the Rhine Valley, that effectually threw the older movement of Southern and Eastern Germany into the background. These earlier movements remained essentially religious and theological, owing, as Cornelius points out (*Münsterische Aufruhr*, vol. ii. p. 74), to the fact that they came immediately after the overthrow of the great political movement of 1552. But although the older Anabaptism did not itself take political shape, it succeeded in keeping [216]alive the tendencies and the enthusiasm out of which, under favourable circumstances, a political movement inevitably grows. The result was, as Cornelius further observes, an agitation of such a sweeping character that the fourth decade of the sixteenth century seemed destined to realize the ideals which the third decade had striven for in vain.

The new direction in Anabaptism began in the rich and powerful Imperial city of Strassburg, where peculiar circumstances afforded the Brethren a considerable amount of toleration. It was in the year 1526 that Anabaptism first made its appearance in Strassburg. It was Anabaptism of the original type and conducted on the old theologico-ethical lines. But early in the year 1529 there arrived in Strassburg a much-travelled man, a skinner by trade, by name Melchior Hoffmann. He had been an enthusiastic adherent of the Reformation, and it was not long before he joined the Strassburg Anabaptists and made his mark in their community. Owing to his personal magnetism and oratorical gifts, Melchior soon came to be regarded as a specially ordained prophet and to have acquired corresponding influence. After a few months Hoffmann seems to have left Strassburg for a propagandist tour along the Rhine. The tour, apparently, had great success, the Baptist [217]communities being founded in all important towns as far as Holland, in which latter country the doctrines spread rapidly. The Anabaptism, however, taught by Melchior and his disciples did not include the precept of patient submission to wrong which was such a prominent characteristic of its earlier phase.

Some time after his reception into the Anabaptist body at Strassburg, Hoffmann, while in most other points accepting the prevalent doctrines of the Brethren, broke

entirely loose from the doctrine of non-resistance, maintaining, in theory at least, the right of the elect to employ the sword against the worldly authorities, "the godless," "the enemies of the saints." It was predicted, he maintained, that a two-edged sword should be given into the hands of the saints to destroy the "mystery of iniquity," the existing principalities and powers, and the time was now at hand when this prophecy should be fulfilled. The new movement in the North-west, in the lower Rhenish districts, and the adjacent Westphalia sprang up and extended itself, therefore, under the domination of this idea of the reign of the saints in the approaching millennium and of the notion that passive non-resistance, whilst for the time being a duty, only remained so until the coming of the Lord should give the signal for the saints to rise and join in the [218]destruction of the kingdoms of this world and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth. Hoffmann's whole learning seems to have been limited to the Bible, but this he knew from cover to cover. A diffusion of Luther's translation of the Bible had produced a revolution. The poorer classes, who were able to read at all, pored over the Bible, together with such popular tracts or pamphlets commenting thereon, or treating current social questions in the light of Biblical story and teaching, as came into their hands. The followers of the new movement in question acquired the name of Melchiorites. Hoffmann now published a book explanatory of his ideas, called *The Ordinance of God*, which had an enormous popularity. It was followed up by other writings, amplifying and defending the main thesis it contained.

Outwardly the Melchiorite communities of the North-west had the same peaceful character as those of South Germany and Moravia, holding as they did in the main the same doctrines. It was ominous, however, that Melchior Hoffmann was proclaimed as the prophet Elijah returned according to promise. Up to 1533 Strassburg continued to be regarded as the chief seat of Anabaptism, especially by Melchior and his disciples. It was, they declared, to be the [219]New Jerusalem, from which the saints should march out to conquer the world. Melchior, on his return journey to Strassburg from his journey northwards, proclaimed the end of 1533 as the date of the second advent and the inauguration of the reign of the saints. Owing to the excitement among the poorer population of the town consequent upon Hoffmann's preaching, the prophet was arrested and imprisoned in one of the towers of the city wall. But 1533 came and went without the Lord or His saints appearing, while poor Hoffmann remained confined in the tower of the city wall.

Meanwhile the new Anabaptism spread and fermented along the Rhine, and especially in Holland. In the latter country its chief exponent was a master baker at Harleem, by name Jan Matthys, who seems to have been a born leader of men. While preaching essentially the same doctrines as Hoffmann, with Matthys a Holy War, in a literal sense, was placed in the forefront of his teaching. With him there was to be no delay. It was the duty of all the Brethren to show their zeal by at once seizing the sword of sharpness and mowing down the godless therewith. In this sense Matthys

completed the transformation begun by Hoffmann. Melchior had indeed rejected the non-resistance doctrine in its absolute form, but he does not appear in his [220]teaching to have uniformly emphasized the point, and certainly did not urge the destruction of the godless as an immediate duty to be fulfilled without delay. With him was always the suggestion, expressed or implied, of waiting for the signal from heaven, the coming of the Lord, before proceeding to action. With Matthys there was no need for waiting, even for a day; the time was not merely at hand, it had already come. His influence among the Brethren was immense. If Melchior Hoffmann had been Elijah, Jan Matthys was Elisha, who should bring his work to a conclusion.

Among Matthys' most intimate followers was Jan Bockelson, from Leyden. Bockelson was a handsome and striking figure. He was the illegitimate son of one Bockel, a merchant and Bürgermeister of Saevenhagen, by a peasant woman from the neighbourhood of Münster, who was in his service. After Jan's birth Bockel married the woman and bought her her freedom from the villein status that was hers by heredity. Jan was taught the tailoring handicraft at Leyden, but seems to have received little schooling. His natural abilities, however, were considerable, and he eagerly devoured the religious and propagandist literature of the time. Amongst other writings the pamphlets [221]of Thomas Münzer especially fascinated him. He travelled a good deal, visiting Mechlin and working at his trade for four years in London. Returning home, he threw himself into the Anabaptist agitation, and, scarcely twenty-five years old, he was won over to the doctrines of Jan Matthys. The latter with his younger colleague welded the Anabaptist communities in Holland and the adjacent German territories into a well-organized federation. They were more homogeneous in theory than those of Southern and Eastern Germany, being practically all united on the basis of the Hoffmann-Matthys propaganda.

The episcopal town of Münster, in Westphalia, like other places in the third decade of the sixteenth century, became strongly affected by the Reformation. But that the ferment of the time was by no means wholly the outcome of religious zeal, as subsequent historians have persisted in representing it, was recognized by the contemporary heads of the official Reformation. Thus, writing to Luther under date August 29, 1530, his satellite, Melanchthon, has the candour to admit that the Imperial cities "care not for religion, for their endeavour is only toward domination and freedom." As the principal town of Westphalia at this time may be reckoned the chief city of the bishopric of Münster, this important [222]ecclesiastical principality was held "immediately of the empire." It had as its neighbours Ost-Friesland, Oldenburg, the bishopric of Osnabrück, the county of Marck, and the duchies of Berg and Cleves. Its territory was half the size of the present province of Westphalia, and was divided into the upper and lower diocese, which were separated by the territory of Fecklenburg. The bishop was a prince of the empire and one of the most important magnates of

North-western Germany, but in ecclesiastical matters he was under the Archbishop of Köln. The diocese had been founded by Charles the Great.

Owing to a succession of events, beginning in 1529, which for those interested we may mention may be found discussed in full detail in *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (124-71), by the present writer, the extreme wing of the Reformation party had early gained the upper hand in the city, and subsequently became fused with the native Anabaptists, who were soon reinforced by their co-religionists from the country round, as well as from the not far distant Holland; for it should be said that the Dutch followers of Hoffmann and Matthys had been energetic in carrying their faith into the towns of Westphalia as elsewhere. Without entering in detail into the events leading up to it, it is sufficient for our <sup>[223]</sup>purpose to state that by a perfectly lawful election, held on February 23, 1534, the Government of Münster was reconstituted and the Anabaptists obtained supreme political power. Hearing of the way things were going in Münster, Matthys and his followers had already taken up their abode in the city a little time before. The cathedral and other churches were stormed and sacked during the following days, while all official documents and charters dealing with the feudal relations of the town were given to the flames during the ensuing month. Both the moderate Protestant (Lutheran) and the Catholic burghers who had remained were indignant at the acts of destruction committed, and openly expressed their opposition. The result was their expulsion from the city; the condition of being allowed to remain became now the consent to rebaptism and the formal adoption of Anabaptist principles.

Münster now took the place Strassburg had previously held as the rallying point of the Anabaptist faithful, whence a crusade against the Powers of the world was to issue forth. The Government of Münster, though it officially consisted of the two Bürgermeister and the new Council, to a man all zealous Anabaptists, left the real power and initiative in all measures <sup>[224]</sup>in the hands of Jan Matthys and of his disciple, Jan Bockelson, of Leyden. The reign of the saints was now fairly begun. Various attempts at an organized communism were made, but these appear to have been only partially successful. One day Jan Matthys with twenty companions, in an access of fanatical devotion, made a sortie from the town towards the bishop's camp. Needless to say, the party were all killed. The great leader dead, Jan Bockelson became naturally the chief of the city and head of the movement.

Bockelson proved in every way a capable successor to Matthys. A new Constitution was now given by Bockelson and the Dutchmen, acting as his prophets and preachers. It was embodied in thirty-nine articles, and one of its chief features was the transference of power to twelve elders, the number being suggested by the twelve tribes of Israel. The idea of reliving the life of the "chosen people," as depicted in the Old Testament, showed itself in various ways, amongst others by the notorious edict establishing polygamy. This measure, however, as Karl Kautsky has shown, there is

good reason for thinking was probably induced by the economic necessity of the time, and especially by the enormous excess of the female over the [225]male population of the city. Otherwise the Münsterites, like the Anabaptists generally, gave evidence of favouring asceticism in sexual matters.

Considerations of space prevent us from going into further detail of the inner life of Münster under the Anabaptist regime during the siege at the hands of its overlord, the prince-bishop. This will be found given at length in the work already mentioned. As time went on famine began to attack the city.

It is sufficient for our purpose to state that on the night of June 24, 1535, the city was betrayed and that in a few hours the free-lances of the bishop were streaming in through all the gates. The street fighting was desperate; the Anabaptists showed a desperate courage, even women joining in the struggle, hurling missiles from the windows upon their foes beneath. By midday on the 25th the city of Münster, the New Zion, passed over once more into the power of its feudal lord, Franz von Waldeck, and the reign of the saints had come to an end. The vengeance of the conquerors was terrible; all alike, irrespective of age or sex, were involved in an indiscriminate butchery. The three leaders, Bockelson, Krechting, and Knipperdollinck, after being carried round captives as an exhibition through [226]the surrounding country, were, some months afterwards, on January 22, 1536, executed, after being most horribly tortured. Their bodies were subsequently suspended in three cages from the top of the tower of the Lamberti church. The three cages were left undisturbed until a few years ago, when the old tower, having become structurally unsafe, was pulled down and replaced, with questionable taste, by an ordinary modern steeple, on which, however, the original cages may still be seen. A papal legate, sent on a mission to Münster shortly after the events in question, relates that as he and his retinue neared the latter town "more and more gibbets and wheels did we see on the highways and in the villages, where the false prophets and Anabaptists had suffered for their sins."

The Münster incident was the culmination of the Anabaptist movement. After the catastrophe the militant section rapidly declined. It did not die out, however, until towards the end of the century. The last we hear of it was in 1574, when a formidable insurrection took place again in Westphalia, under the leadership of one Wilhelmson, the son of one of the escaped Anabaptist preachers of Münster. The movement lasted for five years. It was finally suppressed and Wilhelmson burned alive at Cleves on March 5, 1580. [227]Meanwhile, soon after the fall of Münster, the party split asunder, a moderate section forming, which shortly after came under the leadership of Menno Simon. This section, which soon became the majority of the party, under the name of Mennonites, settled down into a mere religious sect. In fact, towards the end of the sixteenth century the Anabaptist communities on the continent of Europe, from Moravia on the one hand to the extreme North-west of Germany on the other, showed



a tendency to develop into law-abiding and prosperous religious organizations, in many cases being officially recognized by the authorities.

The Anabaptist revolt of the fourth decade of the sixteenth century, though it may be regarded partly as a continuation or recrudescence, showed some differences from the peasant revolt of some years previously. The peasant rebellion, which reached its zenith in 1525, was predominantly an agrarian movement, notwithstanding that it had had its echo among the poorer classes of the towns. The Anabaptist movement proper, which culminated in the Münster "reign of the saints" in 1534-5, was predominantly a townsman's movement, notwithstanding that it had a considerable support from among the peasantry. The Anabaptists' leaders were not, as in the [228]case of the Peasants' War, in the main drawn from the class of the "man that wields the hoe" (to paraphrase the phraseology of the time); they were tailors, smiths, bakers, shoemakers, or carpenters. They belonged, in short, to the class of the organized handicraftsmen and journeymen who worked within city walls. A prominent figure in both movements was, however, the ex-priest or teacher. The ideal, or, if you will, the Utopian, element in the movement of Melchior Hoffmann, Jan Matthys, and Jan Bockelson—the element which expressed the social discontent of the time in the guise of its prevalent theological conceptions—now occupied the first place, while in the earlier movement it was merely sporadic.

After the close of the sixteenth century Anabaptism lost all political importance on the continent of Europe. It had, however, a certain afterglow in this country during the following century, which lasted over the times of the Civil War and the Commonwealth, and may be traced in the movements of the "Levellers," the "Fifth Monarchy men," and even among the earlier Quakers.

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## FOOTNOTES:

[23] Those interested will find the events briefly sketched in the present chapter exhaustively treated, with full elaboration of detail, in the two previous volumes of mine, *The Peasant's War in Germany* and *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (Messrs. George Allen & Unwin).

[24] Amongst the curiosities of literature may be included the translation of the title of this manifesto by Prof. T.M. Lindsay, D.D., in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition (Article, "Luther"). The German title is "Wider die morderischen und rauberischen Rotten der Bauern." Prof. Lindsay's translation is "Against the murdering, robbing Rats [*sic*] of Peasants"!

## CHAPTER IX [ToC](#)

### POST-MEDIÆVAL GERMANY

We have in the preceding chapters sought to give a general view of the social life, together with the inner political and economic movements, of Germany during that closing period of the Middle Ages which is generally known as the era of the Reformation. With the definite establishment of the Reformation and of the new political and economic conditions that came with it in many of the rising States of Germany, the Middle Ages may be considered as definitely coming to an end, notwithstanding that, of course, a considerable body of mediæval conditions of social, political, and economic life continued to survive all over Europe, and certainly not least in Germany.

We have now to take a general and, so to say, panoramic view embracing three centuries and a half, dating from approximately the middle of the sixteenth century to the present time. Our presentation, owing to exigencies of space, will necessarily take the form of a <sup>[230]</sup>mere sketch of events and general tendencies, but a sketch that will, we hope, be sufficient to connect periods and to enable the reader to understand better than before the forces that have built up modern Germany and have moulded the national character. In this long period of more than three centuries there are two world-historic events, or rather series of events, which stand out in bold relief as the causes which have moulded Germany directly, and the whole of Europe indirectly, up to the present day. These two epoch-making historical factors are (1) the Thirty Years' War and (2) the Rise of the Prussian Monarchy.

Owing to the success of Protestantism, with its two forms of Lutheranism and Calvinism in various German territories, the friction became chronic between Catholic and Protestant interests throughout the length and breadth of Central Europe. The Emperor himself was chosen, as we know, by three ecclesiastical electors, the

Archbishops of Köln, Trier, and Mainz, and by four princes, the Pfalzgraf, called in English the Elector Palatine, the Markgraves of Saxony and Brandenburg, and the King of Bohemia. The princes and other potentates, owing immediate allegiance to the empire alone, were practically independent sovereigns. The Reichstag, [231]instituted in the fifteenth century, attendance at which was strictly limited to these immediate vassals of the empire, had proved of little effect. This was shown when in the middle of the sixteenth century Protestantism had established itself in the favour of the mass of the German peoples. It was vetoed by the Reichstag, with its powerful contingent of ecclesiastical members. Of course here the economic side of the question played a great part. The ecclesiastical potentates and those favourable to them dreaded the spread of Protestantism in view of the secularization of religious domains and fiefs. This, notwithstanding that there were not wanting bishops and abbots themselves who were not indisposed, as princes of the empire, to appropriate the Church lands, of which they were the trustees, for their own personal possessions. After a short civil war an arrangement was come to at the Treaty of Passau in 1552, which was in the main ratified by the Reichstag held at Augsburg in 1555 (the so-called Peace of Augsburg); but the arrangement was artificial and proved itself untenable as a permanent instrument of peace.

During the latter part of the sixteenth century two magnates of the empire, the Duke of Bavaria on the Catholic side and the Calvinist, Christian of Anhalt, on the Protestant, [232]played the chief rôle, the Lutheran Markgrave of Saxony taking up a moderate position as mediator. Of the Reichstag of Augsburg it should be said that it had ignored the Calvinist section of the Protestant party altogether, only recognizing the Lutheran. In 1608 the Protestant Union, which embraced Lutherans and Calvinists alike, was founded under the leadership of Christian of Anhalt. It was most powerful in Southern Germany. This was countered immediately by the foundation under Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, of a Catholic League. The friction, which was now becoming acute, went on increasing till the actual outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618. The signal for the latter was given by the Bohemian revolution in the spring of that year.

The Thirty Years' War, as it is termed, which was really a series of wars, naturally falls into five distinct periods, each representing in many respects a separate war in itself. The first two years of the war (1618-20) is occupied with the Bohemian revolt against the attempt of the Emperor to force Catholicism upon the Bohemian people and with its immediate consequences. It was accentuated by the attempt of the Emperor Matthias to compel them to accept the Archduke Ferdinand as King. This attempt was countered through the election by the Bohemians of the Pfalzgraf, Friedrich V [233](the son-in-law of James I of England), who was called the Winter King from the fact that his reign lasted only during the winter months; for though the Protestant Union, led by Count Thurn, had won several victories in 1618 and even

threatened Vienna, the Austrian power was saved by Tilly and the Catholic League which came to its rescue. Many of the Protestant States, moreover, were averse to the Palatine Friedrich's acceptance of the Bohemian crown. The Bohemian movement was ultimately crushed by a force sent from Spain, under the Spanish general Spinola. The final defeat took place at the battle of the White Hill, near Prague, November 8, 1620.

The second period of the war was concerned with the attempt of the Catholic Powers to deprive Friedrich of his Palatine dominions. Here Count Mansfeld, with his mercenary army of free-lances, aided by Christian of Brunswick and others on the side of Friedrich and the Protestants, defeated Tilly in 1622. But later on Tilly and the Imperialists by a series of victories conquered the Palatinate, which was bestowed upon Maximilian of Bavaria. Mansfeld, notwithstanding that he had some successes later in the year 1622, could not effectually redeem the situation, Brunswick's army being entirely routed by Tilly in the following year at the battle of <sup>[234]</sup>Stadtlohn, which virtually ended this particular campaign.

The third period of the war, from 1624 to 1629, is characterized by the intervention of the Powers outside the immediate sphere of German or Imperial interests. France, under Richelieu, became concerned at the growing power of the Hapsburgs, while James I of England began to show anxiety at his son-in-law's adverse fortunes, though without achieving any successful intervention. The chief feature of this campaign was the entry into the field of Christian IV of Denmark with a powerful army to join Mansfeld and Christian of Brunswick in invading the Imperial and Austrian territories. But the savageries and excesses of Mansfeld's troops had disgusted and alienated all sides. It was at this time that Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland, was appointed general of the Imperial troops, and soon after succeeded in completely routing Mansfeld at the battle of Dessau Bridge in 1626. Four months later Tilly completely defeated Christian IV and his Danes at Lutter. Wallenstein, on his side, followed up his success, driving Mansfeld into Hungary. Mansfeld, in spite of some fugitive successes in the Austrian dominions in the course of his retreat, was compelled by Wallenstein to evacuate Hungary, shortly after which he <sup>[235]</sup>died. The campaign ended with the Peace of Lubeck in 1629.

The action of the Emperor Ferdinand in attempting to enforce the restitution of Church lands in North Germany was the proximate cause of the next great campaign, which constitutes the fourth period of the Thirty Years' War (1630-36). The immediate occasion was, however, Wallenstein's seizure of certain towns in Mecklenburg, over which he claimed rights by Imperial grant two years before. This, which may be regarded as the greatest period of the Thirty Years' War, was characterized by the appearance on the scene of Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish King. He was not in time, however, to prevent the sacking of Magdeburg by the troops of Tilly and Poppenheim. The former, nevertheless, was defeated by the

Swedes at the important battle of Breitenfeld in 1631. The following year the Imperial army was again defeated on the Lach. Thereupon Gustavus occupied München, though he was subsequently compelled by Wallenstein to evacuate the city. The last great victory of Gustavus was at Lützen in 1632, at which battle the great leader met his death. Wallenstein, who was now in favour of a policy of peace and political reconstruction, was assassinated in 1634 with the connivance of the Emperor. On September 6th <sup>[236]</sup> of the same year the Protestant army, under Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, sustained an overwhelming defeat at Nördlingen, and the Peace of Prague the following year ended the campaign.

The fifth period, from 1636 to 1648, has, as its central interest, the active intervention of France in the Central European struggle. The Swedes, notwithstanding the death of their King, continued to have some notable successes, and even approached to within striking distance of Vienna. But Richelieu now became the chief arbiter of events. The French generals Condé and Turenne invaded Germany and the Netherlands. Victories were won by the new armies at Rocroi, Thionville, and at Nördlingen, but Vienna was not captured. The Imperial troops were, however, again defeated at Zumarshauen by Condé, who also repelled an attempted diversion in the shape of a Spanish invasion of France at the battle of Lens in the spring of 1648. The Thirty Years' War was finally ended in October of the same year at Münster, by the celebrated Treaty of Westphalia.

The above is a skeleton sketch in a few words of the chief features of that long and complicated series of diplomatic and military events known to history as the Thirty Years' War. <sup>[25]</sup>

<sup>[237]</sup> The Thirty Years' War had far-reaching and untold consequences on Germany itself and indirectly on the course of modern civilization generally. For close upon a generation Central Europe had been ravaged from end to end by hostile and plundering armies. Rapine and destruction were, for near upon a third of the century, the common lot of the Germanic peoples from north to south and from east to west. Populations were as helpless as sheep before the brutal, criminal soldiery, recruited in many cases from the worst elements of every European country. The excesses of Mansfeld's mercenary army in the earlier stages of the war created widespread horror. But the defeat and death of Mansfeld brought no alleviation. The troops of Wallenstein proved no better in this respect than those of Mansfeld. On the contrary, with every year the war went on its horrors increased, while every trace of principle in the struggle fell more and more into the background. Everywhere was ruin.

<sup>[238]</sup> The population became by the time the war had ended a mere fraction of what it was at the opening of the seventeenth century. Some idea of the state of things may be gathered from the instance of Augsburg, which during its siege by the Imperialists was reduced from 70,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. What happened to the great commercial city of the Fuggers was taking place on a scale greater or less, according

to the district, all over German territory. We read of towns and villages that were pillaged more than a dozen times in a year. This terrific depopulation of the country, the reader may well understand, had vast results on its civilization. The whole great structure of Mediæval and Renaissance Germany—its literature, art, and social life—was in ruins. At the close of the seventeenth century the old German culture had gone and the new had not yet arisen. But of this we shall have more to say in the next chapter. For the present we are chiefly concerned to give a brief sketch of the second great epoch-making event, or rather train of events, which conditioned the foundation and development of modern Germany. We refer, of course, to the rise of the Prussian monarchy.

We should premise that the Prussians are the least German of all the populations of what constitutes modern Germany. They are more <sup>[239]</sup>than half Slavs. In the early Middle Ages the Mark of Brandenburg, the centre and chief province of the modern Prussian State, was an outlying offshoot of the mediæval Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, surrounded by barbaric tribes, Slav and Teuton. The chief Slav people were the Borussians, from which the name "Prussian" was a corruption. The first outstanding historic fact concerning these Baltic lands is that a certain Adalbert, Bishop of Prague, at the end of the tenth century went north on a mission of enterprise for converting the Prussian heathen. The neighbouring Christian prince, the Duke of Poland, who had presumably suffered much from incursions of these pagan Slavs, offered him every encouragement. The adventure ended, however, before long in the death of Adalbert at the hands of these same pagan Slavs.

The first indication of the existence of a Mark of Brandenburg with its Markgraves is in the eleventh century. There is, however, little definite historical information concerning them. The first of these Markgraves to attract attention was Albrecht the Bear, one of the so-called Ascanian line, the family hailing from the Harz Mountains. Albrecht was a remarkable man for his time in every way. Under him the Markgravate of Brandenburg was raised to be an electorate <sup>[240]</sup>of the empire. The Markgrave thus became a prince of the empire. It was Albrecht the Bear who first introduced a limited measure of peace and order into the hitherto anarchic condition of the Mark and its adjacent territories. The Ascanian line continued till 1319, and was followed by a period of political anarchy and disturbance, until finally Friedrich, Count of Hohenzollern, acquired the electorate, and became known as the Elector Friedrich I. Meanwhile the Order of the Teutonic Knights, who earlier began their famous crusade against the Borussian heathens, had established themselves on the territories now known as East and West Prussia. In spite of this fact and of the for long time dominant power of their Polish neighbours, the Hohenzollern rulers continued to acquire increased power and fresh territories.

At the Reformation Albrecht, a scion of the Hohenzollern family, who had been elected Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, adopted Protestantism and assumed the

title of Duke of Prussia. Finally, in 1609, the then Elector of Brandenburg, John Sigismund, through his marriage with Ann, daughter and heiress of Albrecht Friedrich, Duke of Prussia, came into possession of the whole of Prussia proper, together with other adjacent territories. The Prussian lands suffered much through the [241]Thirty Years' War during the reign of John Sigismund's successor, George Wilhelm. But the latter's son, Friedrich Wilhelm, the so-called Great Elector, succeeded by his ability in repairing the ravages the war had made and raising the electorate immensely in political importance. He left at his death, in 1688, the financial condition of the country in a sound state, with an effective army of 38,000 men. Friedrich I, who followed him, held matters together and got Prussia promoted to the rank of a kingdom in 1701. His son, Friedrich Wilhelm I, by rigid economies succeeded in raising the financial condition of the kingdom to a still higher level. The military power of the monarchy he also developed considerably, and is famous in history for his mania for tall soldiers.

We now come to the real founder of the Prussian monarchy as a great European Power, Friedrich Wilhelm I's son, who succeeded his father in 1740 as Friedrich II, and who is known to history as Friedrich the Great.

Friedrich no sooner came to the throne than he started on an aggressive expansionist policy for Prussia. The opportunity presented itself a few months after his accession by the dispute as to the Pragmatic Sanction and Maria Theresa's right to the throne of Austria. In the two wars which immediately followed, the [242]Prussian army overran the whole of Silesia, and the peace of 1745 left the Prussian King in possession of the entire country. East Friesland had already been absorbed the year before on the death of the last Duke without issue. In spite of the exhaustion of men and money in the two Silesian wars, Friedrich found himself ready with both men and money eleven years later, in 1756, to embark upon what is known as the Seven Years' War. Though without acquiring fresh territory by this war, the gain in prestige was so great that the Prussian monarchy virtually assumed the hegemony of North Germany, becoming the rival of Austria for the domination of Central Europe, the position in which it remained for more than a century afterwards. Nevertheless, after this succession of wars the condition of the country was deplorable. It was obvious that the first thing to do was the work of internal resuscitation. The extraordinary ability and energy of the King saved the internal situation. Agriculture, industry, and commerce were re-established and reorganized. It was now that the cast-iron system of bureaucratic administration, where not actually created, was placed on a firm foundation. But in external affairs Prussia continued to earn its character as the robber State of Europe *par excellence*.

[243]In 1772 Friedrich joined with Austria in the first partition of Poland, acquiring the whole of West Prussia as his share. A few years later Friedrich formed an anti-Austrian league of German princes, under Prussian leadership, which was the first

overt sign of the conflict for supremacy in Germany between Prussia and Austria, which lasted for wellnigh a century. By the time of his death—August 7, 1786—Friedrich had increased Prussian territory to nearly 75,000 square miles and between five and six millions of population.

Under Friedrich's nephew, Friedrich Wilhelm II, while the rigour of bureaucratic administration, controlled by a monarchical absolutism, continued and was even accentuated, the absence of the able hand of Friedrich the Great soon made itself apparent. As regards external policy, however, Prussia, while allowing territories on the left bank of the Rhine to go to France, eagerly saw to the increase of her own dominions in the east to the extent of nearly doubling her superficial area by her participation in the second and third partitions of Poland, which took place in 1783 and 1795 respectively. These external successes, or rather acts of spoliation, were, notwithstanding, counter-balanced at home by a degeneracy alike of the civil bureaucracy and of the army. The [244]country internally, both as regards morale and effectiveness, had sunk far below its level under Friedrich the Great. This showed itself during the great Napoleonic wars, when Prussia had to undergo more than one humiliation at the hands of Buonaparte, culminating in October 1806 with the collapse of the Prussian armies at Jena and Auerstädt. The entry of Napoleon in triumph into Berlin followed. At the Peace of Tilsit, in 1807, Friedrich-Wilhelm had to sign away half his kingdom and to consent to the payment of a heavy war indemnity, pending which the French troops occupied the most important fortresses in the country.

Following upon this moment of deepest national humiliation comes the period of the Ministers Stein and Hardenberg, of the enthusiastic adjurations to patriotism of Fischer and others, and of the activity of the "League of Virtue" (*Tugendbund*). It is difficult to understand the enthusiasm that could be aroused for the rehabilitation of an absolutist, bureaucratic, and militarist State, such as Prussia was—a State in which civil and political liberty was conspicuous by its absence. But the fact undoubtedly remains that the men in question did succeed in pumping up a strong patriotic feeling and desire to free the country from the yoke of the foreigner, even if that only meant increased domestic tyranny. It must be [245]admitted, however, that as a matter of fact not inconsiderable internal reforms were owing to the leading men of this time. Stein abolished serfdom, and in some respects did away with the legal distinction of classes, thereby paving the way for the rise of the middle class, which at that time meant a progressive step. He also conferred rights of self-government upon municipalities. Hardenberg inaugurated measures intended to ameliorate the condition of the peasants, while Wilhelm von Humboldt established the thorough if somewhat mechanical education system which was subsequently extended throughout Germany. He also helped to found the University of Berlin in 1809.

But at the same time the curse of Prussia—militarism—was riveted on the people through the reorganization of the Prussian army by those two able military



bureaucrats, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. In 1813 Prussia concluded at Kalisch an alliance with Russia, which Austria joined. In the war which followed Prussia was severely strained by losses in men and money. But at the Congress of Vienna the Prussian kingdom received back nearly, but not quite, all it lost in 1807. The acquirement, however, of new and valuable territories in Westphalia and along the Rhine, besides Thuringia and the province of Saxony, more than compensated for the loss of certain Slav [246]districts in the east, as thereby the way was prepared for the ultimate despotism of the Prussian King over all Germany. The success of Prussian diplomacy in enslaving these erstwhile independent German lands in 1815 was crucial for the subsequent direction of Prussian policy.

It is time now to return once more to the internal conditions in the Prussian State now dominant over a large part of Northern Germany. A Constitution had been more than once talked of, but the despotism with its bureaucratic machinery had remained. Now, after the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars and the re-drawing of the Prussian frontier lines by the peace of 1815, the matter assumed an urgency it had not had before. Following upon proclamations and promises, a patent was addressed to the new Saxon provinces granting a national *Landtag*, or Diet, for the whole country. The drawing up of the Constitution thus proclaimed in principle gave rise to heated conflicts. There was, as yet, no proletariat proper in Prussia, and for that matter hardly any in the rest of Germany. The handicraft system of production, and even the mediæval guild system, slightly modified, prevailed throughout the country. The middle class proper was small and unimportant, and hence Liberalism, the theoretical expression of that [247]class, only found articulate utterance through men of the professions.

The new Prussian territories in the west were largely tinged with progressive ideas originating in the French Revolution, while the east was dominated by reactionary feudal landowners, the notorious Junker class—a class special to East Prussian territories, including the eastern portion of the Mark of Brandenburg—whom the moderate Conservative Minister Stein himself characterized as "heartless, wooden, half-educated people, only good to turn into corporals or calculating-machines." This class then, as ever since, opposed an increase of popular control and the progress of free institutions with might and main. Friction arose between the Government and Liberal gymnastic societies and students' clubs. This culminated in the festival on the Wartburg in October 1818, when a bonfire was made of a book of police laws and Uhlan stays and a corporal's stick. It was followed the next year by the assassination of the dramatist and political spy Kotzebue by the student Sand.

Panic seized the reactionists, and the Austrian Minister Metternich, one of the chief pillars of absolutist principles in Europe, induced the King to commit himself to the Austrian system of repression. [248]In 1821 the Reactionary party succeeded in getting the projected Constitution abandoned and the bureaucratic system of provincial estates

established by royal warrant two years later (1823). The Prussian police with their spies then became omnipotent, and a remorseless persecution of all holding Liberal or democratic views ensued, the best-known writers on the popular side no less than the rank and file being arbitrarily arrested and kept in prison on any or no pretext. The amalgamation of the new districts into the Prussian bureaucratic system was not accomplished without resistance. The Rhine provinces especially, accustomed to easy-going government and light taxation under the old ecclesiastical princes, kicked vigorously against the Prussian jack-boot. The discontent was so widespread indeed that some concessions had to be made, such as the retention of the Code Napoléon. What created most resentment, however, was the enactment of 1814, which enforced compulsory universal military service throughout the monarchy. Friedrich Wilhelm also undertook to dragoon his subjects in the matter of religion, amalgamating the Lutherans with other reformed bodies, under the name of the "Evangelical Church."

In foreign politics, in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, during the Napoleonic [249]wars, Prussia, as yet hardly recovered from her defeats under Buonaparte, almost entirely followed the lead of Austria. But perhaps the most important measure of the Prussian Government at this time was the foundation of the famous Zollverein or Customs Union of various North German States in 1834. The far-reaching character of this measure was only shown later, being, in fact, the means and basis by and on which the political and military ascendancy of Prussia over all Germany was assured. Friedrich Wilhelm III, who died on June 7, 1840, was succeeded by his son, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The new reign began with an appearance of Liberalism by a general amnesty for political offences. Reaction, however, soon raised its head again, and Friedrich Wilhelm IV, in spite of his varnish of philosophical and literary tastes, was soon seen to be *au fond* as reactionary as his predecessors. The conflict between the reaction of the Government and the now widely spread Liberal and democratic aspirations of the people resulted in Prussia (as it did under similar circumstances in other countries) in the outbreak of the revolution of 1848.

It is necessary at this stage to take a brief survey of the political history of the Germanic States of Europe generally from the time of the Peace of Vienna, in 1815, onwards, in [250]order to understand fully the rôle played by the Prussian monarchy in German history since 1848; for from this time the history of Prussia becomes more and more bound up with that of the German peoples as a whole. During the Napoleonic wars Germany, as every one knows, was, generally speaking, in the grip of the French Imperial power. To follow the vicissitudes and fluctuations of fortune throughout Central Europe during these years lies outside our present purpose. We are here chiefly concerned with the political development from the Treaty of Vienna, as signed on June 9, 1815, onward. The Treaty of Vienna completed the work begun by Napoleon—represented by the extinction of the mediæval "Holy Roman Empire of

the German nation" in 1806—in making an end of the political configuration of the German peoples which had grown up during the Middle Ages and survived, in a more or less decayed condition, since the Peace of Westphalia, which concluded the Thirty Years' War. The three hundred separate States of which Germany had originally consisted were now reduced to thirty-nine, a number which, by the extinction of sundry minor governing lines, was before long further reduced to thirty-five. These States constituted themselves into a new German Confederation, with a Federal Assembly, meeting at [251]Frankfurt-on-the-Main. The new Federal Council, or Assembly, however, soon revealed itself as but the tool of the princes and a bulwark of reaction.

The revolution of 1848 was throughout Germany an expression of popular discontent and of democratic and even, to a large extent, of republican aspirations. The princely authorities endeavoured to stem the wave of popular indignation and revolutionary enthusiasm by recognizing a provisional self-constituted body, and sanctioning the election of a national representative Parliament at Frankfurt in place of the effete Federal Council. The Archduke of Austria, who was elected head of the new, hastily organized National Government, was not slow to use his newly acquired power in the interests of reaction, thereby exciting the hostility of all the progressive elements in the Parliament of Frankfurt. When after some months it became obvious that the anti-Progressive parties had gained the upper hand alike in Austria and Prussia, the friction between the Democratic and Constitutional parties became increasingly bitter.

The Prussian Government meanwhile took advantage of the state of affairs to stir up the Schleswig-Holstein question, so-called, driving the Danes out of Schleswig, an insurrectionary movement in Holstein having been [252]already suppressed by the Danish King. Prussia, alarmed by the attitude of the Powers, agreed to withdraw her troops from the occupied territories without consulting the Frankfurt Parliament, an act which involved Friedrich Wilhelm in conflict with the latter. The issues arising out of this dispute made it plain to every one that the Parliament of all Germany was impotent to enforce its decrees against one of the German Powers possessed of a preponderating military strength. By the end of 1848 the revolution in Vienna was completely crushed and a strongly reactionary Government appointed by the new Emperor. Meanwhile in Berlin the Junkers and the reactionaries generally had already again come into power, a crisis having been caused by the attempt of the democratic section of the Prussian National Assembly, convened by the King in March, to reorganize the army on a popular democratic basis. We need scarcely say the Prussian army has been the tool of Junkerdom and reaction ever since.

The last despairing attempt of the Frankfurt Parliament to give effect to the national Germanic unity, which all patriotic Germans professed to be eager for, was the offer of the Imperial crown to the King of Prussia. Against this act, however, nearly half the

members—i.e. all the advanced parties in the <sup>[253]</sup>Assembly—protested by refusing to take any part in it. They had also declined to be associated with a previous motion for the exclusion of German Austria from the new national unity, in the interest of Prussian ascendancy. Both these reactionary proposals, as we all know, at a later date became the corner-stones of the new Prusso-German unity of Bismark's creation. On this occasion, however, the Prussian King refused to accept the office at the hands of the impotent Frankfurt Assembly, which latter soon afterwards broke up and eventually "petered out." Meanwhile Prussian troops, led by the reactionary military caste, were employed in the congenial task of suppressing popular movements with the sword in Baden, Saxony, and Prussia itself.

The two rival bulwarks of reaction, Prussia and Austria, were now so alarmed at the revolutionary dangers they had passed through that, for the nonce forgetting their rivalry, they cordially joined together in reviving, in the interests of the counter-revolution, the old reactionary Federal Assembly, which had never been formally dissolved, as it ought to have been on the election of the Frankfurt Parliament. Reaction now went on apace. Liberties were curtailed and rights gained in 1848 were abolished in most of the smaller States. Henceforth the Federal Assembly became the <sup>[254]</sup>theatre of the two great rival powers of the Germanic Confederation. Both alike strove desperately for the hegemony of Germany. The strength of Prussia, of course, lay generally in the north, that of Austria in the south. Austria had the advantage of Prussia in the matter of prestige. Prussia, on the other hand, had the pull of Austria in the possession of the machinery of the Customs Union. In general, however, the dual control of the Germanic Confederation was grudgingly recognized by either party, and on occasion they acted together. This was notably the case in the Schleswig-Holstein question, which had been smouldering ever since 1848, and which came to a crisis in the Danish war of 1864, in which Austria and Prussia jointly took part.

Among the most reactionary of the Junker party in the Prussian Parliament of 1848 was one Count Otto Bismarck von Schönhausen, subsequently known to history as Prince Bismarck (1815-98). This man strenuously opposed the acceptance of the Imperial dignity by the King of Prussia at the hands of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1849, on the ground that it was unworthy of the King of Prussia to accept any office at the hands of the people rather than at those of his peers, the princes of Germany. In 1851 Count von Bismarck was appointed a Prussian <sup>[255]</sup>representative in the revived princely and aristocratic Federal Assembly. Here he energetically fought the hegemony hitherto exercised by Austria. He continued some years in this capacity, and subsequently served as Prussian Minister in St. Petersburg and again in Paris. In the autumn of 1862 the new King of Prussia, Wilhelm I, who had succeeded to the throne the previous year, called him back to take over the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and the leadership of the Cabinet. Shortly after his accession to power he arbitrarily

closed the Chambers for refusing to sanction his Army Bill. His army scheme was then forced through by the royal fiat alone. On the reopening of the Schleswig-Holstein question, owing to the death of the King of Denmark, German nationalist sentiment was aroused, which Bismarck knew how to use for the aggrandisement of Prussia. The Danish war, in which the two leading German States collaborated and which ended in their favour, had as its result a disagreement of a serious nature between these rival, though mutually victorious, Powers.

In all these events the hand of Bismarck was to be seen. He it was who dominated completely Prussian policy from 1862 onwards. Full of his schemes for the aggrandisement of Prussia at the expense of Austria, he stirred up [256] and worked this quarrel for all it was worth, the upshot being the Prusso-Austrian War (the so-called Seven Weeks' War) of the summer of 1866. The war was brought about by the arbitrary dissolution of the German Confederation—i.e. the Federal Assembly—in which, owing to the alarm created by Prussian insolence and aggression, Austria had the backing of the majority of the States. This step was followed by Bismarck's dispatching an ultimatum to Hanover, Saxony, and Hesse Cassel respectively, all of which had voted against Prussia in the Federal Assembly, followed, on its non-acceptance, by the dispatch of Prussian troops to occupy the States in question. Hard on this act of brutal violence came the declaration of war with Austria.

At Königgratz the Prussian army was victorious over the Austrians, and henceforth the hegemony of Central Europe was decided in favour of Prussia. Austria, under the Treaty of Prague (August 20, 1866), was completely excluded from the new organization of German States, in which Prussia—i.e. Bismarck—was to have a free hand. The result was the foundation of the North German Confederation, under the leadership of Prussia. It was to have a common Parliament, elected by universal suffrage and meeting in Berlin. The army, [257] the diplomatic representation, the control of the postal and telegraphic services, were to be under the sole control of the Prussian Government. The North German Confederation comprised the northern and central States of Germany. The southern States—Bavaria, Baden, Würtemberg, etc.—although not included, had been forced into a practical alliance with Prussia by treaties. The Customs Union was extended until it embraced nearly the whole of Germany. Prussian aggression in Luxemburg produced a crisis with France in 1867, though the growing tension between Prussia and France was tided over on this occasion. But Bismarck only bided his time.

The occasion was furnished him by the question of the succession to the Spanish throne, in July 1870. By means of a falsified telegram Bismarck precipitated war, in which Prussia was joined by all the States of Germany. The subsequent course of events is matter of recent history. The establishment of the new Prusso-German empire by the crowning of Wilhelm I at Versailles, with the empire made hereditary in the Hohenzollern family, completed the work of Bismarck and the setting of the

Prussian jack-boot on the necks of the German peoples. The Prussian military and bureaucratic systems were now extended to all Germany—in other [258]words, the rest of the German peoples were made virtually the vassals and slaves of the Prussian monarch. This time the King of Prussia received the Imperial crown at the hands of the kings, princes, and other hereditary rulers of the various German States. Bismarck was graciously pleased to bestow unity and internal peace—a Prussian peace—upon Germany on condition of its abasement before the Prussian corporal's stick and police-truncheon. Such was the united Germany of Bismarck. Germany meant for Bismarck and his followers Prussia, and Prussia meant their own Junker and military caste, under the titular headship of the Hohenzollern.

Yet, strange to say, the peoples of Germany willingly consented, under the influence of the intoxication of a successful war, to have their independence bartered away to Prussia by their rulers. In this united Germany of Bismarck—a Germany united under Prussian despotism—they naïvely saw the realization of the dream of their thinkers and poets since the time of the Napoleonic wars—which had become more than ever an inspiration from 1848 onwards—of an ideal unity of all German-speaking peoples as a national whole. It is unquestionable that many of these thinkers and poets would have been horrified at the Prusso-Bismarckian "unity" of "blood and [259]iron." It was not for this, they would have said, that they had laboured and suffered.

As a conclusion to the present chapter I venture to give a short summary of the internal, and especially of the economic, development of Prussia since the Franco-German War from an article which appeared in the *English Review* for December 1914, by Mr. H.M. Hyndman and the present writer:—

"From 1871 onwards Prussianized Germany, by far the best-educated, and industrially and commercially the most progressive, country in Europe, with the enormous advantage of her central position, was, consciously and unconsciously, making ready for her next advance. The policy of a good understanding with Russia, maintained for many years, to such an extent that, in foreign affairs, Berlin and St. Petersburg were almost one city, enabled Germany to feel secure against France, while she was devoting herself to the extension of her rural and urban powers of production. Never at any time did she neglect to keep her army in a posture of offence. All can now see the meaning of this.

"Militarism is in no sense necessarily economic. But the strength of Germany for war was rapidly increased by her success in peace. From the date of the great financial crisis of 1874, and the consequent [260]reorganization of her entire banking system, Germany entered upon that determined and well-thought-out attempt to attain pre-eminence in the trade and commerce of the world of which we have not yet seen the end. From 1878, when the German High Commissioner, von Rouleaux, stigmatized the exhibits of his countrymen as 'cheap and nasty,' special efforts were made to use

the excellent education and admirable powers of organization of Germany in this field. The Government rendered official and financial help in both agriculture and manufacture. Scientific training, good and cheap before, was made cheaper and better each year. Railways were used not to foster foreign competition, as in Great Britain, by excessive rates of home freight, but to give the greatest possible advantage to German industry in every department. In more than one rural district the railways were worked at an apparent loss in order to foster home production, from which the nation derived far greater advantage than such apparent sacrifice entailed. The same system of State help was extended to shipping until the great German liners, one of which, indeed, was actually subsidized by England, were more than holding their own with the oldest and most celebrated British companies.

"Protection, alike in agriculture and in [261]manufacture, bound the whole empire together in essentially Imperial bonds. Right or wrong in theory—which it is not here necessary to discuss—there can be no doubt whatever that this policy entirely changed the face of Germany, and rendered her our most formidable competitor in every market. Emigration, which had been proceeding on a vast scale, almost entirely ceased. The savings banks were overflowing with deposits. The position of the workers was greatly improved. Not only were German Colonies secured in Africa and Asia, which were more trouble than they were worth, but very profitable commerce with our own Colonies and Dependencies was growing by leaps and bounds, at the expense of the out-of-date but self-satisfied commercialists of Old England. Hence arose a trade rivalry, against which we could not hope to contend successfully in the long run, except by a complete revolution in our methods of education and business, to which neither the Government nor the dominant class would consent.

"This remarkable advance in Germany, also, was accompanied by the establishment of a system of banking, specially directed to the expansion of national industry and commerce, a system which was clever enough to use French accumulations, borrowed at a low rate of interest, through the German Jews who [262]so largely controlled French financial institutions, in order still further to extend their own trade. It was an admirably organized attempt to conquer the world-market for commodities, in which the Government, the banks, the manufacturers and the shipowners all worked for the common cause. Meanwhile, both French and English financiers carefully played the game of their business opponents, and the great English banks devoted their attention chiefly to fostering speculation on the Stock Exchange—a policy of which the Germans took advantage, just before the outbreak of war, to an extent not by any means as yet fully understood.

"Thus, at the beginning of the present year, in spite of the withdrawal, since the Agadir affair, of very large amounts of French capital from the German market, Germany had attained to such a position that only the United States stood on a higher plane in regard to its future in the world of competitive commerce. And this great and

increasing economic strength was, for war purposes, at the disposal of the Prussian militarists, if they succeeded in getting the upper hand in politics and foreign affairs."

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### FOOTNOTES:

[25] Works on the Thirty Years' War are numerous. Many scholarly and exhaustive treatises on various aspects of the subject are, as might be expected, to be found in German. For general popular reading Schiller's excellent piece of literary hack work (translated in Bonn's Library) may still be consulted, but perhaps the best short general history of the war with its entanglement of events is that by the late Professor S.R. Gardiner, of Oxford, which forms one of the volumes of Messrs. Longman, Green & Co.'s series entitled "Epochs of Modern History."

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[263]

## CHAPTER X [ToC](#)

### MODERN GERMAN CULTURE

It is important to distinguish between the meaning of the German term "Kultur" and that commonly expressed in English by the word "culture." The word "Kultur" in modern German is simply equivalent to our word "civilization," whereas the word "culture" in English has a special meaning, to wit, that of intellectual attainments. In this chapter we are chiefly concerned with the latter sense of the word.

Germany had a rich popular literature during the Middle Ages from the redaction of the *Nibelungenlied* under Charles the Great onwards. Prominent among this popular



literature were the love-songs of the Minnesingers, the epics drawn from mediæval traditionary versions of the legend of Troy, of the career of *Alexander the Great*, and, to come to more recent times, to legends of *Charles the Great and his Court*, of *Arthur and the Holy Grail*, the *Nibelungenlied* in its [264]present form, and *Gudrun*. The "beast-epic," as it was called, was also a favourite theme, especially in the form of *Reynard the Fox*. In another branch of literature we have collections of laws dating from the thirteenth century and known respectively from the country of their origin as the *Sachsenspiegel* and the *Schwabenspiegel*. Again, at a later date, followed the productions of the Meistersingers, and especially of Hans Sachs, of Nürnberg. Then, again, we have the prose literature of the mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, and their followers.

Towards the close of the mediæval period we find an immense number of national ballads, of chap-books, not to mention the Passion Plays or the polemical theological writings of the time leading up to the Reformation. Luther's works, more especially his translation of the Bible, powerfully helped to fix German as a literary language. The Reformation period, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, was rich in prose literature of every description—in fact, the output of serious German writing continued unabated until well into the seventeenth century. But the Thirty Years' War, which devastated Germany from end to end, completely swept away the earlier literary culture of the nation. In fact, the event in question forms a dividing line between the [265]earlier and the modern culture of Germany. In prose literature, the latter half of the seventeenth century, Germany has only one work to show, though that is indeed a remarkable one—namely, Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, a romantic fiction under the guise of an autobiography of wild and weird adventure for the most part concerned with the Thirty Years' War.

The rebirth of German literature in its modern form began early in the eighteenth century. Leibnitz wrote in Latin and French, and his culture was mainly French. His follower, Christian Wolf, however, first used the German language for philosophical writing. But in poetry, Klopstock and Wieland, and, in serious prose, Lessing and Herder, led the way to the great period of German literature. In this period the name of Goethe holds the field, alike in prose and poetry. Goethe was born in 1749, and hence it was the last quarter of the century which saw him reach his zenith. Next to Goethe comes his younger contemporary, Schiller. It is impossible here to go even briefly into the achievements of the bearers of these great names. They may be truly regarded in many important respects as the founders of modern German culture. Around them sprang up a whole galaxy of smaller men, and the close of the eighteenth [266]century showed a literary activity in Germany exceeding any that had gone before.

Turning to philosophy, it is enough to mention the immortal name of Immanuel Kant as the founder of modern German philosophic thought and the first of a line of eminent thinkers extending to wellnigh the middle of the nineteenth century. The

names of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer and others will at once occur to the reader.

Contemporaneously with the great rise of modern German literature there was a unique development in music, beginning with Sebastian Bach and continuing through the great classical school, the leading names in which are Glück, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, etc. The middle period of the nineteenth century showed a further development in prose literature, producing some of the greatest historians and critics the world has seen. At this time, too, Germany began to take the lead in science. The names of Virchow, Helmholtz, Häckel, out of a score of others, all of the first rank, are familiar to every person of education in the present and past generation. The same period has been signalized by the great post-classical development in music, as illustrated by the works of Schumann, Brahms, and, above all, by the towering fame of Richard Wagner.

[267] From the last quarter of the eighteenth century onwards it may truly be said of Germany that education is not only more generally diffused than in any other country of Europe, but (as a recent writer has expressed it) "is cultivated with an earnest and systematic devotion not met with to an equal extent among other nations." The present writer can well remember some years ago, when at the railway station at Breisach (Baden) waiting one evening for the last train to take him to Colmar, he seated himself at the table of the small station restaurant at which three tradesmen, "the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker" of the place were drinking their beer. Broaching to them the subject of the history of the town, he found the butcher quite prepared to discuss with the baker and the candlestick-maker the policy of Charles the Bold and Louis XI as regards the possession of the district, as though it might have been a matter of last night's debate in the House or of the latest horse-race. Where would you find this popular culture in any other country?

Germany possesses 20 universities, 16 polytechnic educational institutes, about 800 higher schools (gymnasias), and nearly 60,000 elementary schools. Every town of any importance throughout the German States is liberally provided in the matter of libraries, museums, [268] and art collections, while its special institutions, music schools, etc., are famous throughout the world. The German theatre is well known for its thoroughness. Every, even moderately sized, German town has its theatre, which includes also opera, in which a high scale of all-round artistic excellence is attained, hardly equalled in any other country. In fact, it is not too much to say that for long Germany was foremost in the vanguard of educational, intellectual, and artistic progress.

That the above is an over-coloured statement as regards the importance of Germany for wellnigh a century and a half past in the history of human culture, in the sense of intellectual progress in its widest meaning, I venture to think that no one competent to judge will allege. Is then, it may be asked, the railing of public opinion and the Press

of Great Britain and other countries outside Germany and Austria, against the Germany of the present day, and the jeers at the term "German culture" wholly unjustified and the result of national or anti-German prejudice? That there has been much foolish vituperative abuse of the whole German nation and of everything German indiscriminately in the Press of this and some other countries is undoubtedly true. But, however, our acknowledgment of this fact will not justify us in [269]refusing to recognize the truth which finds expression in what very often looks like mere foolish vilification.

The truth in question will be apparent on a consideration of the change that has come over the German people and German culture since the war of 1870 and the foundation of the modern German Empire. The material and economic side of this change has been already indicated in a short summary in the quotation which closes the last chapter. But these changes, or advances if you will, on the material side, have been accompanied by a moral and material degeneration which has been only very partially counteracted at present by a movement which, though initiated before the period named, has only attained its great development, and hence influenced the national character, since the date in question.

It is a striking fact that in the last forty-four years—the period of the new German Empire—there has been a dearth of originality in all directions. In the earlier part of the period in question the survivors from the pre-Imperial time continued their work in their several departments, but no new men of the same rank as themselves have arisen, either alongside of them or later to take their places. The one or two that might be adduced as partial exceptions to what has been above said [270]only prove the rule. We have had, it is true, a multitude of men, more or less clever *epigoni*, but little else. Again, it is, I think, impossible to deny that a mechanical hardness and brutality have come over the national character which entirely belie its former traits. It is a matter of common observation that in the last generation the German middle class has become noticeably coarsened, vulgarized, and blatant.

Again, although I am very far from wishing to attribute the crimes and horrors committed by the German army during the present war to the whole German nation, or even to the *rank and file* of those composing the army, yet there is no doubt that some blame must be apportioned at least to the latter. The contrast is striking between the conduct of the German troops during the present war and that of 1870, when they could declare that they were out "to fight French soldiers and not French citizens." Such were the military ethics of bygone generations of German soldiers. They certainly do not apply to the German army of to-day. The popularity of such writers as Von Treitschke and Bernhardi, respecting which so much has been written, is indeed significant of a vast change in German moral conceptions. The practical influence of Nietzsche, who—with his corybantic whirl of criticism on all things in heaven above [271]and on the earth beneath, a criticism not always coherent with itself—can

hardly be termed a German Chauvinist in any intelligible sense, has, I think, been much exaggerated. The importance of his theories, considered as an ingredient in modern German Chauvinism, is not so considerable, I should imagine, as is sometimes thought.

We come now to the movement already alluded to as a set-off and, within certain boundaries at least, a counteractive of the degeneracy exhibited in the German character since the foundation of the present Imperial system. The rise and rapid growth of the Social Democratic movement is perhaps the most striking fact in the recent history of Germany. The same may be said, of course, of the growth of Socialism everywhere during the same period. But in Germany it has for a generation past, or even more, occupied an exceptional position, alike as regards the rapidity of its increase, its direct influence on the masses, and its party organization. Modern Socialism, as a party doctrine, is, moreover, a product of the best period of nineteenth-century German thought and literature. Its three great theoretical protagonists, Marx, Engels, and their younger contemporary, Lassalle, all issued from the great Hegelian movement of the first half of the nineteenth century. [272] Their propagandist activity, literary and otherwise, was in the German language. The analysis of the present capitalist system, forming the foundation of the demand for the communization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, as resulting in a *human* society as opposed to a *class* society, and ultimately in the extinction of national barriers in a world-federation of socialized humanity—these principles were first appreciated, as a world-ideal, by the proletariat of Germany, and they have unquestionably raised that proletariat to an intellectual rank as yet equalled by no other working-class in the world.

It must be admitted, however, that with the colossal growth of the Social Democratic party in Germany in numbers and the introduction into it of elements from various quarters, a certain deterioration, one may hope and believe only temporary, has become apparent in its quality. This applies, at least, to certain sections of the party. A sordid practicalism has made itself felt, due to a feverish desire to play an important rôle in the detail of current politics. Personal ambition and the mechanical working of the party system have also had their evil influence in the movement in recent years. Nevertheless, we have reason to believe that the core of the party is as sound and as [273] true to principle as ever it was, and that on the restoration of international peace this will be seen to be the case. What interests us, however, specially, at the moment of writing, is the lamentable, yet undeniable, fact that German Social Democracy has, on this occasion, disastrously failed to prevent the outbreak of war, notwithstanding the vigour of its efforts to do so during the last week of July; and still more that it has failed up to date to stem the rising flood of militarism and jingoism in the German people. That before many months are over the scales will fall from the eyes of the masses of Germany I am convinced, and not less that a

revolutionary movement in Germany will be one of the signs that will herald the dawn of a better day for Germany and for Europe. But meanwhile we must hold our countenances in patience.

If we inquire the cause of the degeneracy we have been considering in the German character since the war of 1870 and the creation of the new empire—apart from those economic causes of change common to all countries in modern civilization—the answer of those who have followed the history of the period can hardly fail to be—Bismarck and Prussia. We have already seen in the short historical sketch given in the last chapter how the robber hand of Prussia, in violation of [274]all national treaty rights, had gradually succeeded in annexing wellnigh all the neighbouring German territories. But, notwithstanding this, the greater part of Germany still remained outside the Prussian monarchy. The policy of Bismarck was first of all to cripple the rival claimant for the hegemony of Central Europe, Austria. Her complete subjugation being unfeasible, she had to be shut up rigorously to her immediate dominions on the eastern side of Central Europe, in order to leave the path clear for Bismarck, by war or subterfuge, to absorb, under a system of nominally vassal States, the whole of the rest of Germany into the system of the Prussian monarchy.

Now, as we know, from its very foundation the Hohenzollern-Prussian monarchy has always been a more or less veiled despotism, based on working through a military and bureaucratic oligarchy. The army has been the dominant factor of the Prussian State from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards. Prussia has been from the beginning of its monarchy the land of the drill-sergeant and the barracks. It is this system which the Junker Bismarck has riveted on the whole German people, with what results we now see. Badenese, Würtembergers, Franconians, Hanoverians, the citizens of the former free cities no less than the already absorbed [275]Westphalians, Thuringians, Silesians, Mecklenburgers, were speedily all reduced to being the slaves of the Prussian military system and of the Prussian military caste. The naïve German peoples, as already pointed out, accepted this Prussian domination as the realization of their time-honoured patriotic ideal of German unity.

The fact of their subservience was emphasized in every way. The law of *lèse-majesté* (*majestätsbeleidigung*), by which all criticism of the despotic head of the State or his actions is made a heinous criminal offence, to which severe penalties are attached, it is not too much to say is a law which brands the ruler who accepts it as a coward and a cur, and the Legislature which passes it as a house, not of representative citizens, or even subjects for that matter, but of representative *slaves*. It must not be forgotten that the law in question strikes not only at public expressions of opinion in the press or on the platform, but at the most private criticism made in the presence of a friend in one's own room. The depths of undignified and craven meanness to which a monarch is reduced by being thus protected from criticism by the police-truncheon and the gaoler struck me especially as illustrated by the following incident which

happened some years ago: Shortly after the accession of the present Kaiser, a conjurer was [276]giving his entertainment in a Swiss town. For one of the tricks he was going to exhibit he had occasion to ask the audience to send him up the names of a few public men on folded pieces of paper. His reception of the names written down was accompanied by the "patter" proper to his profession. On coming to the name of Kaiser Wilhelm II he ventured the remark, "Ah! I'd rather it had been the poor man just dead" (meaning the Emperor Frederick), "for I'm afraid this one's not much good." Will it be believed that the whole diplomatic machinery was set on foot to induce the Swiss Government to prosecute the unfortunate entertainer, abortively of course, since it could not have been legally done? Surely the head of a State who could allow his Government to descend to such contemptible pettiness must be devoid of all sense of common self-respect, not to say personal dignity. And this is the fellow who claims to be hardly second in importance to his "dear old God"! In this connection it is only fair to recall the very different behaviour of King Edward VII when an Irish paper published not a mere criticism but an unquestionably libellous article reflecting on his private character. The police seized the copies of the paper and were prepared to take steps to prosecute, when the [277]late King interfered and stopped even the confiscation of the paper. The least monarchical of us must, I think, admit that here we have a good illustration of the distinction between a man sure of his reputation and a cur nervously alarmed for his.

This severe law of *lèse-majesté* in Bismarck's Prusso-German Empire is only an illustration of the way in which the German people have been made to grovel before the Prussian jack-boot. The Prussification of Germany in matters military and in matters bureaucratic has gone on apace since 1870. Prussia, it is not too much to say, has hitherto consisted in a nation of slaves and tyrants and nothing else. It is the Prussian governing class which has everywhere and in all departments "set the pace" since the empire was established. No man known to hold opinions divergent from those agreeable to the interests of the Prussian governing class can hope for employment, be it the most humble, in any department of the public service. This is particularly noticeable in its effects in the matter of education. The inculcation of the brutal and blatant jingoism of Von Treitschke at the universities by professors eager for approval in high places has already been sufficiently animadverted upon in more than one work on modern Germany. The [278]defeat of Prusso-German militarism will be an even greater gain to all that is best in Germany herself than it will be to Europe as a whole.

*Delenda est Prussia*, understanding thereby not, of course, the inhabitants of Prussian territory as such, but Prussia as a State-system and as an independent Power in Europe, must be the watchword in the present crisis of every well-wisher of Humanity, Germany included. A united Germany, if that be insisted upon, by all means let there be—a federation of all the German peoples with its capital, for that

matter, as of old, at Frankfurt-on-the-Main, but with no dominant State and, if possible, excluding Prussia altogether, but certainly as constituted at present. Who knows but that a united States of Germany may then prove the first step towards a united States of Europe?

But it is not alone to the political reconstruction of Germany or of Europe that those who take an optimistic view of the issue of the present European war look hopefully. The whole economic system of modern capitalism will have received a shock from which the beginnings of vast changes may date. Apart from this, however, the avowed aim of the war, the destruction of Prussian militarism and, indirectly, the weakening of military power throughout the world, should have immediate and important consequences. The brutalities [279]and crimes committed in Belgium and the North of France at the instigation of the military heads of this Prusso-German army do but indicate exaggerations of the military spirit and attitude generally. Von Hindenburg is not the first who has given utterance to the devilish excuse for military crime and brutality that it is "more humane in the end, since it shortens war." To refute this transparent fallacy is scarcely necessary, since every historical student knows that military excesses and inhumanity do not shorten but prolong war by raising indignation and inflaming passions. The longest connected war known to history—the Thirty Years' War—is generally acknowledged to have been signalized by the greatest and most continuous inhumanity of any on record. But whether military crime has the effect claimed for it or not, we may fain hope that public opinion in Europe will insist upon giving the "humane" commanders who "mercifully" endeavour to "shorten" war by drastic methods of this sort a severe lesson. A few such treated to the utmost penalties the ordinary criminal law prescribes to the crimes of arson, murder, and robbery would teach them and their like that war, if waged at all nowadays, must be waged decently and not "shortened" by such devices as those in question.

[280]If the present war with all its horrible carnage issues, even if only in the beginning of those changes which some of us believe must necessarily result from it—changes economical, political, and moral—then indeed it will not have been waged in vain. With the great intellectual powers of the Germanic people devoted, not to the organization of military power and of national domination, but to furthering the realization of a higher human society; with the determination on the part of the best elements among every European people to work together internationally with each other, and not least with the new Germany, to this end, and the great European war of 1914 will be looked back upon by future generations as the greatest world-historic example of the proverbial evil out of which good, and a lasting and inestimable good, has come for Europe and the world.

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Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 47: district replaced with district

Page 106: therin replaced with therein

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GERMAN CULTURE PAST AND PRESENT \*\*\*



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