

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. ii. 1.

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LUTHER'S CONFESSION BEFORE THE DIET OF WORMS.

It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that Dr. Martin Luther, an Augustine monk and professor of Divinity at Wittenberg, having inveighed against the malpractices which were resorted to in the sale of indulgences, embroiled himself by this means in a violent controversy, during which his bold assertions were productive of results which were not only far from being contemplated at its commencement, but excited so much alarm on the part of the Roman conclave, that he was summoned to appear before it. His sovereign Frederic, the Wise, found means, however, to elude this proceeding, and convert the hazard of a personal investigation before the conclave, into discussions before a native tribunal, where Luther underwent interrogatories and examinations, conducted by papal representatives. These failed of their object; and the accused party seeking to have his errors laid open, his priestly adversaries, instead of breaking ground in such a field, insisted that he should retract his words, or at least, abstain from all further controversy.

The struggle soon assumed a more ominous aspect; Luther urged his attack upon the groundless dogmas and pretensions of the Church with still greater effect, particularly in his treatise "On the liberty of a Christian;" and the apprehensions of his opponents at Rome now impelled them to obtain a bull of excommunication against him. This is the document which he had the courage publicly to commit to the flames, at Witteuberg, on the 10th of December, 1520: thus affording a precedent for that re-assertion of undivided allegiance to the Roman See, which afterwards shook its authority to its foundations.

The dispute had lasted above three years: a host of publications had been exchanged between the combatants, and great interest was excited as to the issue throughout Christendom, as well as Germany itself. As far back as the year 1518, Miltitz, the pope's chamberlain, whilst travelling through Germany, had had the mortification to observe, that there existed, in almost every quarter, three advocates of the new order of things for one who was attached to the cause of his master. If it be asked, why the Court of Rome did not adopt more efficacious measures to crush this inroad in its earliest stage, it may be answered, that its arm was arrested by the political state of Europe. The emperor Maximilian had just quitted the stage, and the election of his successor engaged the attention of every cabinet. So important an event as this, drew the squabble with an isolated monk into the back-ground; all parties courted the powerful influence of Frederic, the Wise: and there was no other temporal sword which could be unsheathed with effect.

Such was the state of things when Maximilian's grandson, Charles, the youthful sovereign of Spain and the Netherlands, was raised to the imperial dignity. Upon him, and upon the first proceedings of his court, rested the attention of Europe. It was a matter of doubt with many, whether he would be induced to oppose or to embrace the cause of the Reformation, and, on his account deep importance was attached to the first diet, which the new Emperor had summoned to meet at Worms, on the 6th of January, 1521.

* The original of the above translation is one of a host of publications and tracts which have issued from the German press, on occasion of the general celebration of the Third Centenary of the Confession of Augsburg, to which are alluded to in our last number.—*Christian Remembrancer* for Oct. 1830.

The assemblage on this occasion was extremely numerous. It was attended in person by sixty-six sovereign princes, both temporal and spiritual, for few of them chose to appear in proxy;—by nearly one hundred counts, and sixty deputies from the free towns. Deans of chapters, many of whom were of princely extraction, prelates, barons, knights, and foreign envoys swelled the meeting. To these must be added, a number of the most eminent doctors of divinity and canon law, who had arrived either in the suit of princes, or had come under an expectation that something beyond the common routine of business would be transacted. It was remarkable also for the appearance of the first native of America who had been seen on European soil; he was attired in the dress of his own country, and had been sent by Cortez from three empoalla in Mexico, to do homage to his sovereign.

The town and its environs were full of life; merchants and traders of all kinds flocked to the spot from the furthest corners of Spain, Italy, France and Germany; and if every diet resembled a fair, this presented a far more animated scene than any of its predecessors. The throng of nobles and their knightly retinues came forth in their most splendid array, and endeavored to outvie one another in the magnificence of their habiliments and the beauty of their chargers. Among the most youthful and the gayest of the crowd was Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, who drew every eye after him; and the Emperor himself, who was but little his superior in years, though of a more sedate turn than is common to his age, lent himself to the general impulse, and repeated his equestrian prowess on the tilting course, as he had done shortly before at the tournament held in Valladolid.

One festival followed upon the heels of another; for the investiture of such princes as had not done homage at Aix-la-Chapelle, was always succeeded by rejoicings; and the wild extent to which they were carried may be inferred from a picture of their results, as drawn by an eye witness:—"Scarcely a night passes here, at Worms, without the assassination of three or four individuals. The Emperor has a provost (profos) who has already drowned, hung, or made away with more than one hundred persons. The thefts and murders here are as bad as at Rome."

Amidst all these carousals and atrocities, more serious matters were not lost sight of; and independently of regulations affecting the empire, the matter of the Lutheran controversy, as was expected, came under discussion. So far as we are informed of the propositions brought forward by Glapion, the Emperor's confessor, Fabri, the prior of the Dominicans, and others, it would appear that several of the clergy recommended lenient measures, with a view to divert the storm; inasmuch as they expressed a desire that the decision should be intrusted to chosen arbitrators. Others insisted upon the necessity of a council, for the purpose of purifying Christianity of its glaring corruptions: whilst some on the contrary, supported the papal legate, Alexander, who laid the bull of excommunication before the great assembly of the states of the empire, on the 18th of February, and accompanied its presentation with an appeal to this effect:—That it appeared to him, it was the wish of many to institute an inquiry into the affair with Luther; but he begged it might be borne in mind, that there was nothing left to investigate; inasmuch as the Pope had already decided, in the matter, of which the bull itself was the most undeniable evidence: that Luther had given currency to such errors, as rendered a hundred thousand heretics deserving of the stake; for he had injured the dignity of the saints in heaven, had even thrown doubts on purgatory, and explained the Scripture in a different sense to

* Dietrich Butzbach's Letters.