

EXTRACTS FROM THE LIFE OF LUTHER BY J. M. V. AUDIN.

Continued from No. 7.

This precipitate flight created a sensation; the professors sent to Luther some of his fellow scholars whom he particularly loved, but he refused to see them and remained concealed for a month. He wrote to inform his father of the resolution he had taken to consecrate himself to God. Hans waxed wroth, and, in a letter, threatened Luther that instead of the German Inn, which he had hitherto given him, to honor the literato, he would in future, address him with the Du, indicative of anger or contempt. The youth was unmoved; he listened as he thought, to the voice of God, and closed his ear to that of flesh and blood. Who knows what one of his temperaments might not have done, after the thunder had killed the friend whom he loved most tenderly? Perhaps he would have been driven to despair or madness, had he not had an asylum open where he might calm his terrors, and regain his lost tranquillity. It is, then probable, that Luther owed his reason and his life to the poor monks; it must be acknowledged that he soon forgot his benefactors.

The monks have been the greatest benefactors of the human race. Were we to enumerate their merits, our Catholic voice might, probably, be suspected; let us then permit Protestants to speak.

The German convents of the middle ages were the asylums of literature and the arts. In those times the monks were the only representatives of intelligence; at the cloister you would find painting, sculpture, poetry and archæology. Look at those magnificent edifices, those churches, chapels, houses of prayer, which they erected; the monasteries, the abbeys, the priories, which they founded and endowed; the bridges which they flung across the rivers; the asylums and hospitals which they opened for the sick and infirm; the gymnasias and academies which they instituted. It was there that civilization found refuge. Had it not been for the cloisters, Europe would have grown old and probably have died in barbarism. Each cenobite had his allotted labor. Some, like the Carthusians, cultivated the land, cleared the forest, fertilized the barren soil, stayed the torrent, taught their own, and transmitted to succeeding generations the principles of irrigation, of grafting, and of agriculture. Others, like the Benedictines, were employed in decyphering and transcribing ancient charters, and thus preserving the titles of our municipal liberties, or in commenting on, and translating the Greek and Latin authors; while simple scribes labored with almost an angel's patience in adorning with vermillion and azure the hymns and proses of the church. In the 16th century there were Italian cloisters which were veritable studios of painting, architecture and statuary. When prayer was over, the monks went to work; some with the chisel, others with compass or pencil. Italy is rich in the monuments of this monastic glory. At Florence, the great attraction of the Pitti gallery is the Saint Mark of Fra Bartolomeo. Fra Joconde was called into France to construct the great bridges of the capital.

A convent of the middle ages might truly be likened to a bee-hive. While some were engaged in carving the wood, which in their hands assumed all forms, and often like the sculptured marble, seemed to acquire animation, others were employed in discovering the treasures concealed in ancient manuscripts. * * Some had the starry firmament to contemplate and admire, while to other of their brethren was assigned a world still more difficult to explore, the human heart. Asia Minor was filled with monasteries, where monks were occupied day and night, in transcribing the poets and orators of ancient Greece and Italy. There were more than one hundred and fifty of these sanctuaries of science at Calabria, and the neighborhood of Naples. Look at that promontory which advances from Macedonia into the Egean sea; it is Mount Athos; and never will any human institution render to civilization the services it has received from that single house of prayer. Sixty three palaces and country villas of French kings are enumerated, in which monks were occupied in reproducing their royal charters. The church employed a numerous band of scribes, all consecrated to God, and occupied in transcribing sacred and profane manuscripts in the hall of the *Scriptorium*. It was an African monk, Eutholius, that introduced the accents; another monk invented the capital letters.

Occan, Scott, Durand, however detried by moderns, were remarkable men in their generation; they assisted in improving the human mind, and prepared the way for the great discoveries of the sixteenth century. Luther was not always unjust to the scholastics; he asserted the claims of one of them, Peter Lombard, to the esteem and gratitude of the human race.

The cloisters have other claims on our gratitude. It was in the retirement of the convent, that the quarrels so frequent in Germany, between the nobles and their vassals were often terminated: and we must do the monks the justice of saying, that the oppressed always found in them an eloquent advocate. If unfortunately their voice was not always heard, if the prince sometimes appealed to the sword, then the cell of the monk became the asylum where the vanquished party found protection, consolation and support, and where he remained until a reconciliation was effected between him and his lord. How often did the conqueror come to the cloister to expiate his triumph and his crimes in sackcloth and tears! Let us not forget that the convent was the holy ark in which, during the general shipwreck of literature, the Sacred Writings were deposited and protected from the hands of the barbarians. The first versions of the Scriptures into German, were the work of the monks. Otfried, of Witteburg, versified the New Testament and the Psalms in the tenth century:—Raban Maurus and Walfrid translated all the Scriptures into German. For the biblical translations of Ausburg, and of Nuremberg of the fifteenth century, we are indebted to those religious, to those monks whom the reformers treated so rudely, and of whom one of them said: "When we want to represent the devil, we

take a monk." And yet it was these poor devils of monks that gave to the German world Hutton, Melancthon, Luther, Erasmus, Agricola, and pleiades of literati of the sixteenth century!

Luther, then, entered the convent, with an imagination highly excited by the sudden death of his friend, and oppressed with fear, lest the earth should open beneath his feet, and he should fall, like Alexis, into the hands of God. This vision, for a long time, disturbed his slumbers, during which he appeared to hear the voice of death admonishing him to do penance.—Luther, although as yet he had not tasted of worldly pleasure, and was pure and innocent, believed himself to be a great sinner. To avert the anger of God, he fasted, and practiced the austerities of an anchorite of Thebais. Above all he feared the demon, and it was only by constant prayer that he succeeded in banishing him from his imagination. Strange thing! Luther never thought of excluding the spirit of darkness from his creed; he never, even for a moment, doubted on the subject. He looked upon him as a fallen angel, who, after his fall, is permitted by God, to tempt man, to lead him astray, and to struggle with the angel of light, until the soul should be detached from the body. Follow the drama of the Reformation personified in Doctor Martin; the first part in it is always assigned to the devil, the second to Luther, who loves to be eclipsed by Satan, and who stands in need of him, whenever he has to explain any abstruse matter. At every step of the reformer's progress you see Satan. It is Satan who moves and acts in Eck, Emser, Hochstræt—in all his adversaries. It is Satan, who inspires bishops, archbishops, and cardinals; who dictates to Leo X., his bulls—to the emperor Charles V., his edicts—to the archbishops of Mayence & Cologne their mandates,—to the Sorbonne at Paris, and the universities of Leipsic and Erfurth, their theological decisions. Satan has established his seat at Rome, the new Babylon; he governs the counsels of Duke George of Saxony, and troubles the head of Henry VII. of England. It was Satan who seized alive both on Munzer the ana-baptist, and Zwingli the sacramentarian, and who drove the peasants of Thuringia to revolt. He strangled Ocolampadius, who thought differently from Luther on the Eucharist. Satan invented the sacrament of matrimony, the morastic life, celibacy extreme-unction, the Mass. Satan is always sure to appear like the God invented by the Greeks, whenever the mystery cannot naturally be unravelled; and it is he who furnished Luther in his dreams, with the best arguments against private Masses. These apparitions will frequently occur in the reformer's life. "Sometimes," says one of his disciples, Manlius, "his head would reel after one of these diabolical visions, which flitted before him: he would faint, and the physician would be called in to restore him from these swoons, by dropping into his ears some oil of almonds." Callot might have caught inspirations from the writings of Luther, and found in them a temptation still more diabolic than that of St. Anthony.

To return to the convent, where Luther

for the first time triumphed over the assault of Satan; it was prayer that aided him to achieve the victory. His conventional life, was that of a veritable cenobite.—"If ever," said he, "an Augustinian friar went to heaven by the convent door, I, at least, deserved to enter. This is a testimony which all my brethren will confirm. I fasted, watched, mortified myself, and practiced cenobital rigours even so far as to endanger my health. Our enemies will not believe us; they speak only of the sweets of a monastic life, and know not what it is to have a strong temptation to encounter.

His novitiate was particularly severe; his superiors perceived his tendency to pride, and tested his vocations by trying humiliations. Luther was obliged to sweep the dormitories—to open and close the gates of the Church—to wind the clock—and go, with a sack over his shoulders, through the streets to beg alms. Brother Augustin, for such was his name, murmured, but the university of Wirtenberg, interfered, and put an end to these trials, which, it was feared would make him lose courage.

He made his solemn profession in 1506, and received the priesthood the same year. It was a memorable day,—an epoch in his life, which he hastened to announce to his friends. "To-day," he wrote to John Braun of Eisenach, "I will say my first mass, come to it. Poor young man! unworthy sinner! God, in the treasures of his mercy, has vouchsafed to call me to his service. I will endeavour to make myself worthy of his bounty, and—as far as is possible for dust like me—to accomplish his designs. Pray for me, my dear Braun, that my sacrifice may be agreeable in the sight of God."

The priesthood elevated the piety of Luther, all whose time was now divided between study and prayer. His cheeks began to fade; his complexion lost its wonted hue; and the youth once so fresh and florid, when he sang from door to door, now fell into a state of exhaustion, that excited the compassion of Mosellanus, who represents him worn out, dried up, and so reduced that his ribs might be counted. His superiors were, at one time, apprehensive that this feverish devotion, would weaken both his mind and body; and they accordingly endeavoured to apply a remedy. Staupitz, the vicar general of the Augustinian order, had a great friendship for him; and Luther tenderly loved him also. He said to him:—"Enough, enough, my child, you speak of sin, and you know not what sin is.—If you wish God to assist you play no longer the child." One day when he was confessing some absurd scruples with as much contrition as if they had been so many crimes, the priest stopped him, and smiling said:—"you are a fool, God does not afflict you; but you sadden him by your timidity." But Luther would not listen either to the counsels of Staupitz, or to the advice of his confessor. He might often have been seen at the foot of the altar, with clasped hands and tearful eyes asking pardon of God. Frequently at night he would kneel at his bedside and remain in prayer till the break of day.