THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. XXI. OCTOBER, 1917. No. 4.

ERASMUS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE REFORMATION.

The universality of the famous Humanist still compels our admiration. Nowhere is it more distinctly revealed than in his correspondence. It is this (now most available in the huge folios of the Leyden edition, 1703) which presents the generation of 1517 as it speaks to us nowhere else. With scholars, statesmen, churchmen (such as cardinals, archbishops, bishops), with authors, his relations were fairly all-extending. Among his correspondents were the archbishops of Canterbury and of York, Wolsey, Thomas More, John Colet, dean of St. Paul's, Budaeus (Budé) of Paris, the foremost classicist of France, with whom he sometimes even exchanged Greek epistles, Wilibald Pirckheimer of Nuremberg, Henry VIII of England, Spalatin and Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Melanchthon, Justus Jonas, Cardinal Campeggio, the bishops of Basle, Breslau, and Olmuetz, and many others, — mainly the great ones of the world. Many of the letters are really essays and disquisitions, and the purity and elegance of their Latinity still makes the classicist marvel.

But in this year of 1917 and in this epoch we must rigidly limit ourselves to the concerns of our great anniversary. And so I shall make certain selections from the original text of certain of his missives, avoiding, in the main, influences and generalizations which the readers of these documentary data can very easily make for themselves.

LUTHER AND ZWINGLI.

A Parallel and a Contrast.

13.

"Any person desiring to be received into our order, no matter who he is, shall not be accepted at once, but you shall prove his spirit whether it is of God," — thus ran an ordinance which Staupitz had issued in 1504 to the convents under his

jurisdiction. Accordingly, when the gate of the Augustinian convent had closed behind Luther on the memorable 17th day of July, 1505, Luther was received as a guest by Father Winand von Diedenhofen, the prior. No fault was found with his action; on the contrary, the brotherhood was inclined to pride itself on this latest acquisition; for it was a rare occurrence that a promising young student from the University applied for admission into their order. From the Catholic view-point it was an easy thing to magnify the spiritual quality of Luther's act: his mere coming was an honor and a welcome advertisement of the principles of monasticism in general and of the Augustinian fraternity in particular. To prevent a possible relapse, Luther was carefully guarded against approaches from his former friends. But there was no need of this, as Luther was determined to test to the end the new mode of life which he had chosen. And when the plague broke out in Erfurt in August, and the professors and students of the University scattered in all directions, the visits of Luther's friends at the cloister-gate ceased.

There was another reason why Luther was not at once received into the novitiate of his order: he had not yet obtained his father's consent to become a monk. The obstacle would not have proven insurmountable in the long run, but a decent effort must be made to make the stubborn Hans Luther yield to what he considered a reckless vagary of his Martin. The first request met with a peremptory refusal, which almost crushed Luther. "When I became a monk," Luther relates, "my father began to rave. He was ill pleased, and would not give me his consent, while I wanted to carry out my plan with his knowledge and approval. When I wrote him, he sent me a reply in which he addressed me 'thou,' while formerly he had addressed me 'you,' because I was a Magister, and he refused me any favor and affection which I could expect of him as a father. Then came the plague; two of his sons died, and a report reached him that I, too, had died (though by the grace of God I am still living). Now people began to urge and

importune my father to make some respectable sacrifice for a holy purpose, and to consent to my entering holy orders and becoming a monk. My father hesitated long until they had talked him into giving an unwilling and sad consent. He said: He may go; God grant that this thing turn out well! But it was not with a free and glad heart that he gave his consent; he yielded in a half-hearted way."

About two months must have been consumed with these negotiations for the paternal approval. Luther's state of mind during this time can be imagined: he started his holy enterprise with an act of impiety, but he had become so confused in his mind that he did not recognize the glaring self-contradiction in which his act had involved him. Sixteen years later Luther publicly asked his father's forgiveness and expressed the wish that his father might have remained unyielding and insisted that his son must obey him. By that time Luther had learned to know the fell power of an erring conscience and the awful perversion which Rome can work in simple and confiding hearts. We see now that this bitter experience was a necessary training for the future Reformer. Zwingli's life presents no such ordeal.

14.

Luther's novitiate commenced about the middle of September, 1505. The regulations of the Augustinian order have been minutely studied by historians, and it is possible to reproduce with fair accuracy the scenes accompanying Luther's admission to the novitiate, and estimate the impressions made on him at the time.

The act began with a general confession of the candidate to the Prior. The object was that the Prior "might learn the visage of the beast which was to be incorporated in his sheepfold." After the confession all the brethren assembled in the chapter-hall or nave of the church. The Prior took his seat on the altar platform near the ascent; the candidate prostrated himself before him and was asked, "What do you wish?" He answered, "God's mercy and yours." He was now told to rise

and tell whether he was married, whether he was a serf, whether he was in duress in any manner, whether he was infected with a secret disease. The answers being satisfactory, the Prior now delivered an address to the candidate in which he explained the rigor of the life of a monk, his renunciation of his own will in all things, his frugal board and mean garments, his nightly vigils and daily tasks, the mortification of his flesh, the disgrace of poverty, the shame of beggary, the weariness induced by fasts, the lonesome feeling caused by the secluded life, etc. The candidate expressing willingness to make a trial of this mode of living, as far as human frailty will permit him, he was now told: "We will receive you on probation for one year. May God, who has begun a good work in you, perform it!" "Amen!" responded the assembled brethren and intoned the hymn: "Augustine, our mighty father," during which the candidate received the tonsure and had his garments changed. The novice received the same garb as the professing brethren, with the exception that his garments were not consecrated. While he was putting on his new garments, the Prior said: "May God put on you the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness! Amen." When the hymn was ended, the candidate once more prostrated himself before the Prior, who now intoned the versicle, and began to recite the prescribed prayers. In the first prayer, with which the blessing of the candidate was connected, he said: "Hear, O Lord, our prayer, and make this servant of Thine, to whom we have in Thy name given the spiritual garments, worthy of Thy blessing, to the end that he may with Thy help abide in Thy Church and merit to obtain eternal life through Christ, our Lord." In the other prayers the gracious assistance of God was invoked for the candidate, who "had been converted from the vanity of the world," for a conduct worthy of his holy order in soberness, simplicity, and quiet, and particularly, that by the sanctity poured into him from above he might be preserved from carnal-mindedness and the impurities of worldly actions. The prayers ended, all marched in procession into the choir, chanting the hymn "Come, Holy Spirit." The novice

prostrated himself in the form of a cross before the high altar, and again versicles and prayers were recited. The Prior said: "God, who by the illumination of Thy Holy Spirit hast instructed the hearts of Thy believers, grant unto this Thy servant that in that same Spirit he may think the things that are right, and enjoy His consolations. Merciful God, come to the aid of our frail being, that we who are cherishing the memory of the holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, may rise from our weaknesses by her intercession. Hear our prayer, almighty God, and as Thou hast implanted in us confidence and hope in piety, grant us by the intercession of Thy glorious confessor, the holy Bishop Augustine, a successful issue of Thy wonted mercy through Christ, our Lord." The novice was now conducted to the chapter-hall, and received the kiss of peace from all the brethren, also from the Prior, before whom he knelt, and who dismissed him with the words: "Not he who has begun, but he who perseveres unto the end, will be saved."

Deeply moved by these solemn exercises, Luther, garbed in a black cowl with the white scapular thrown over it, returned to the cell of his instructor, the "Master of Novices," who directed him to memorize the Rule of the Order, the so-called Constitutions, in the form in which Staupitz had elaborated them, the choir service, the hymns, the monastic etiquette, various signs, etc. These tedious tasks Luther probably performed under the supervision of Johann Grefenstein, of whom he has told us that he was his "Institutor," and whom on a later occasion he has called a "true Christian."

Luther entered with zest upon his new duties. Under his conscientious and painstaking instructor none of the rigors of the novitiate were mitigated for Brother Martin. The jealousy of the brethren he began to feel soon. He relates: "My brethren in the cloister were offended because I had been a student and was still studying. They said to me: Turn and turn about is fair play; put the wallet on your back! (*Sic tibi, sic mihi! Saccum per naccum!*) They would permit no exception in my case [of the rule that he must go begging]. A dunce and a doctor were esteemed alike by them. They did not consider

whether a person was able or not, whether he was weak or strong. They sternly insisted that the Rule must be complied with." This does not mean that Luther felt disposed to shirk his monkish duties and inclined to seek his ease. He averred in his apology to his father that he had not entered the cloister for carnal reasons (um des Bauches willen). Like all novices he had been given a Bible; for one of Staupitz's rules reads: "Novices must eagerly read, reverently hear, and zealously learn the Holy Scriptures." Nobody needed to urge Luther to the study of the Bible, bound in red leather, which was handed him, least of all his instructor Grefenstein, to whom Luther professes himself greatly indebted for the incentives to theological studies which he received from this "excellent man." [1] But Luther may have taken just this part of his daily routine in the cloister more seriously than the other monks. Hence their indignation. But they were not the only ones who kept their eye on Luther. The university was displeased to see a former member go begging in the streets, and Staupitz seems to have early seen promising qualities in the studious monk Luther. By their joint intercession with the Prior Luther was soon excused from the more dishonorable service in the cloister and outside. The only books besides the Bible which we have reason to believe that he studied at this time were Vergil and Plautus. These books he had taken with him when he left his friends, and there is no record that they were taken away from him.

15.

Luther's novitiate ended in September, 1506. Conducted by his monkish "preceptor," or "pedagog," he came into the assembly of the brethren. His instructor testified that he had conducted himself in conformity with the prescribed rules, and recommended his reception into the order. The Prior now addressed the novice who was kneeling before him: "Dear

1) At one time Luther received from Grefenstein the book of Vigilius of Thapsus: *Dialogi* III, 5: Altercationes ab Athanasio contra Arium, Sabellium et Photinum coram Probo judice habitae.

brother, the time of your probation is ended. You have experienced the rigor of our order; for, excepting the right of suffrage, you have been among us in all respects as one of us. You must now choose one of two things, either separate from us, or renounce the world and dedicate and offer yourself up entirely, first, to God, and then to our order. However, having once taken upon you the yoke of obedience, you will no longer be free, no matter for what reason, to withdraw your neck, and to cast off the yoke which you have taken upon you after serious reflection and from your free choice, when you were still at liberty to decline." Luther gave the answer that bound him to monasticism, and now the consecrated garment which he was to wear henceforth was put on him. Again he knelt before the Prior, who had the Rule of Augustine lying open on his knees, folded his hands upon the book, and said: "I, Brother Martin, profess obedience to Almighty God and the Virgin Mary and to thee, Brother Winand, Prior of this convent, acting in the name and place of the General Prior of the Eremite Brothers of the holy Bishop Augustine and his lawful successors, and promise to live without owning personal property, in chastity according to the rule of the same St. Augustine until death." The candidate prostrated himself in the form of a cross, was sprinkled with holy water, and then conducted in solemn procession before the high altar, where he prostrated himself once more, while abundant prayers were spoken for him, beseeching God to grant this servant of the Lord, who had bowed his neck under the divine yoke, at the Last Judgment the joy of knowing that he had fulfilled all that he had vowed. After the Prior had bestowed on Luther the kiss of peace, the brethren crowded around him and congratulated him. He was told that he was now like an innocent babe that has just been baptized.

Through the little window of his $10 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ cell, which was now assigned him for his private use, Luther could look out upon the graveyard of the cloister, around which led an arched walk. Here he spent most of his time until his removal to Wittenberg. His superiors had determined to advance him to the

higher grades of the priesthood, through the subdiaconate, diaconate, and presbyterate. The mendicant orders had been accorded the privilege to confer these offices on their brethren even at the age of twenty-two, while the canonical age was twenty-five. The only restriction imposed was that they must not be conferred all on one day, but at decent intervals. As a rule, the ordinations to such offices took place on the Saturday after Ember Days. It is likely, therefore, that Luther was made a sub-deacon September 19, 1506, a deacon on December 19th of the same year, and a priest on February 27, 1507. The sacrament of ordination was administered by Bishop Johann von Lasphe. Luther was given permission to choose the day when he would read his first mass. He chose Cantate Sunday, May 2, 1507, because this day was convenient for his father, whom he had invited to attend this important event. Hans Luther had not overcome his former doubts regarding the correctness of his son's step; he bowed to the inevitable and promised to come. Accompanied by nineteen citizens of Mansfeld, all on horseback, the sturdy miner rode into the cloister-yard, and gave his Martin a present of twenty gulden. It is not necessary to imagine any other motive for this action of Hans Luther than that of self-esteem, a proper regard for his station as one of the city-fathers of Mansfeld. The friars were to be impressed with his importance. If Luther was inclined to interpret his father's acts as signs of a change of heart, he was to be undeceived that same day.

Luther had also invited his friend, the Vicar Braun, and his relative, the verger Konrad, both of Eisenach, to attend his first mass. We obtain a glimpse of his state of mind when reading his letter to Braun: God, who is most glorious and holy in all His works, he says, has from pure mercy wonderfully exalted him, the miserable wretch, who is in every respect an unworthy sinner, and has deigned to call him to His sublime service. With elation Luther must have entered upon the solemn functions of the day. But when he stood before the altar and was about to recite the prescribed formula of the sacrifice of

the mass, he was seized with a sudden terror, because he must now address God in His majesty. At the same time a feeling of diffidence came upon him: he was afraid that he might omit a word in the ritual, or carry out the prescribed ceremonies in a wrong manner. Every movement of the officiating priest, how he must extend and bring together again his arms, how he must lift up and cast down his eyes, make the sign of the cross, or the genuflection, how he must kiss the altar, etc., was minutely prescribed, and any *faux pas* during the service of the mass was declared a grievous sin. When he reached the words in the service: "Thee, then, most gracious Father, we beseech," he began to tremble visibly, and at the words: "We offer to Thee, the living, true, and eternal God," he nearly swooned and was about to quit the altar, when his instructor checked him by signs and whispered admonitions. At the banquet, which followed after the mass, and was attended by quite a gathering of Doctors of Divinity and Magisters, Luther thought he could now obtain from his father a formal approval of his chosen profession. He addressed him: "Dear father, why did you oppose me and grow so angry at me when I wanted to become monk, and why do you, perhaps, even now not like to see me a monk? Is it not a fine quiet and divine life?" Unabashed by the presence of so many learned men, Hans Luther said: "Ye doctors, have you not read in the Holy Scriptures that a child should honor his father and mother?" Luther was smitten with compunction, and could not make reply. Others began to speak for him: had not Luther received a summons from heaven to become a monk? Old Hans replied: "Would to God that it was not a diabolical spook!" This remark cut Luther to the quick; he never forgot it. — That was Luther's experience on the first day of his public activity as an ordained priest.

16.

The theological studies of Luther during his monastic period led him into paths which Zwingli is not known to have traveled as extensively at this period. True, both men had been

attracted to the Bible and were studying it, but Zwingli's interest in the Scriptures was, at least in part, the professional interest of a clergyman. Moreover, humanistic studies which he pursued at the same time kept Zwingli from giving himself in a whole-hearted manner to the study of the Bible. The personal admonition of Staupitz to make himself accurately acquainted with the Bible was not needed by Luther. With the exception of his friend Lang there was no one in the convent who devoted so much time to Bible-reading as Luther. Lang engaged in learned Bible-study; Luther simply read his Bible, read it through many times, until he was able to tell exactly on which page in his Bible a certain passage was found. He has expressed regret later that he could not keep his copy of the Bible.

After his ordination Luther was urged by his superiors to enter upon the learned study of theology, which means, the writings of the scholastic theologians. It was the intention of Staupitz that this young monk, who had entered the cloister as a Magister, and whose excellent qualities he beheld with greater clearness at every meeting with him, should be developed into an accomplished teacher of theology, who could hold his ground against any of the professors at the University. He was to attend the course in theology at the University, and at the same time take part in the *studium generale* at the convent, which was conducted by Dr. Johann Genser von Paltz, the most popular Augustinian preacher of Erfurt, and by Brother Nathin. In the course of these studies he was to be made a *baccalaureus biblicus,* next, a *sententiarius,* lastly, a doctor of theology.

Luther was not informed of the high aims which had been fixed for him; he was simply told to study, and he exercised the obedience which was part of his vow in carrying out the orders of his superiors, but he also inclined personally toward these studies, though they did not yield him the results which he had hoped to attain through them. Theological studies in those days were pursued on the basis of that scholastic philosophical training which Luther had received at the University.

Occam and Gabriel Biel, the last important representatives of decadent scholasticism, occupied considerable space in Luther's early theological labors. Next to these he studied Pierre d'Ailli, who voiced an occasional dissent from the accepted tenets of the scholastics, but rested his teachings, in the main, on the theological principles and the dialectic method of Gerson. Also Gerson, in whom there was a tendency to mysticism, was read by Luther. Both d'Ailli and Gerson defended the rights of the Church universal against the papal claims of supremacy, but Luther seems not to have become acquainted with these antipapal utterances. From a remark in his Table Talk it is gathered that Luther read the mystic Bonaventura in the cloister to inform himself on the union of the soul with God.

17.

Luther's theological studies were pursued with the sole aim that he might become godly, righteous, pious by them. Unquestioning submission to his ecclesiastical authorities was a principle that dominated all his studies. The way of godliness which the Church propounded must be the way, he thought, in which he would ultimately obtain his heart's desire: the assurance that he was in a right relation with God, and that all would be well with him here and hereafter. This distinctly personal interest which Luther had in his theological studies was most grievously betrayed by his chosen masters. The scholastics maintained that despite original sin there remained in fallen man a considerable natural ability for achieving moral goodness. This remnant of natural ability man must employ in order to become a partaker of the grace of God and eternal salvation. Scholasticism proclaimed not only man's obligation to fulfil the Law of God, but also his ability to do so, yea, even to love God above all things. True, the scholastic theologians said the intention of God in issuing His Law is not merely to have it obeyed in a formal and mechanical manner, but He wants man, in all his works done under the Law, to be guided by a higher, supernatural principle of spirituality, and this

principle man can obtain only by divine grace which must be infused in him. This supernatural principle had been conferred on Adam at his creation as a wonderful gift and special distinction. It was lost through the fall and must be restored to man. But man must by his own efforts render himself worthy to receive the lost gift again. By his own strength he must perform good deeds. These deeds lack the quality of genuine merits, but owing to the kindness and equity of God they are viewed as meritorious. In view of the fact that man has done what it was in his power to do, God permits grace to flow into man. By means of this infused grace man is enabled to render acceptable service, to perform works which by their inherent virtue are meritorious in the sight of God, and ultimately earn his own salvation.

This thought of human capacity for good and human merit pervades the entire theology of scholasticism, and was the determining and regulative factor in the practical godliness of the members of the Church in that age. Luther strove, in conformity with these ideas, not to achieve special glory and approval from God and men, but simply to become pious, godly, and assured of his final salvation.

The Christian who has been born again in Baptism and is in a state of grace still needs the forgiveness of sins because of the sins which he commits after being baptized. The remission of sins to be conveyed by priestly absolution was by the scholastics conditioned on the sinner's repentance. The sinner must excite in himself the feeling of remorse and sorrow over his wrong-doing; he must at least wish that he could produce this feeling in himself. He must also be willing to render satisfaction, to go through the penances prescribed for him. In other words, also the forgiveness of sin must be purchased by the sinner. Therefore indulgences proved such a fine spiritual commodity to the sinner.

By his endeavors to reduce this teaching to practise and thus test its validity, Luther gathered the experience which fitted him for the real struggle against Rome. D.