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AND

THE BIBLE - BUBBLE

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HE BIBLE," says a famous Protestant divine, "is the Protestant religion" "The Bible is the Word of God—the sole rule of faith. We have the Word of God; what more need we?" In some such words the Bible refrain runs through the writings of orthodox Protestant writers ever since the days of Dr. Luther. These orthodox Protestant writers frankly defend their system in their protestation against the "errors of the Roman Catholic Church" and proclaim emphatically the Holy Scripture as their only rule of faith and practice. To them, "the Holy Scriptures of the old and new Testament are the Word of God and the only certain rule of faith and obedience." For them "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Thus declare their catechisms and works of discipline. From such professions and statements it is evident that one is taught to walk the road of salvation with the Bible as his infallible guide; that in reading Holy Writ, in explaining it, in formulating one's life

upon its instructions, the Protestant is to be guided solely by his own private judgment and his own laws of interpretation; that he is authorized to follow his own individual opinion even though in that opinion he should stand alone.

This principle of Scripture interpretation is the great foundation principle of Dr. Martin Luther. From the days of the break in Church unity, brought about by Luther's revolt in the 16th century, that principle has been the corner stone of Protestant independence. And yet at the same time it was the root of the progressive disintegration inherent in Protestantism. Luther himself had struggled in vain to hold back within his ranks the rising tide of dissension which he clearly discerned. He gave "the Bible to the people." He dethroned the Pope. He made the Bible the universal authority of the Christian world. He substituted the mute page of a book for the living voice of a constituted tribunal. He sowed the wind of dissension. In his footsteps, his followers have reaped the whirlwind of confusion.

It was all very well for Luther to proclaim that the Bible was to be interpreted according to its simplest meaning. But who was to point out just what the simplest meaning was, he never determined; nor has it ever been determined by Protestant commentators who in ever growing numbers refused to take Luther's explanation as either simple or

infallible. Progressive disintegration has been the most outstanding mark of historic Protestantism. This mark has been exemplified nowhere more emphatically than in Germany, the land of Luther, and there at the present time the principles of his revolt are being carried to their bitter end by the leaders of the pagan revival. All the leaders of Protestantism, in the wake of Luther, started from the Bible. Each was able to deduce from what he found therein something adapted to his system. Lutheranism. Methodism. Episcopalianism. Presbyterianism, and all the other isms, formal and informal, that have sprung up, all were justified by Holy Writ. Evidently the simplest meaning of the Sacred Text was not so simple to discover. There must be something radically different in each system claiming to have discovered that simplest meaning, else why all the multiplication of sects resulting from Luther's principle? Why all the pride and prejudice, the labor and expense, to propagate minor differences, if the fundamental difference between the sects is slight? Luther's principle of religion failed from the very beginning. Surely we can't picture an all-wise, an all-loving, and an eternal Father revealing His law to confuse His children. Yet out of His blessed revelation we have to-day all about us a Babel of doctrines which confuses poor man and amuses the powers of darkness.

A century after the death of Luther, a contem-

porary writer listed one hundred and eighty Protestant sects. How many could be enumerated to-day is a matter of conjecture. Sects, to-day and yesterday, are like so many particles in a storm of meteors; each burns brightly for a while and then dies out into the all-embracing darkness. Though many of these sects to-day are numerically small and of passing importance, all taken together are the source of turmoil and confusion in Christian thought. Each contributes its share to the progressive disintegration of Protestantism which has ever been the Nemesis of Luther's principle.

Among the Protestant sects, Lutheranism occupies, so one would judge, the seat of the mighty. The Lutherans glory in the name of their founder. They read his Bible. They learn his catechism. They sing his hymns. They profess his doctrines. They magnify his life and works. He did give them something to which they have clung and which the orthodox proclaim without subterfuge. Next to Jesus Christ, they acknowledge him as the father of all they hold worth while in their religious life. With Luther they stand or fall.

But to-day Luther is a legend more than an historic figure. Even in his lifetime the legend was well under way. Before his death he had become a myth unto himself. With the passing years, the legend grew and the myth took on more vivid hues. For four centuries, Luther has been covered with

such an aura of virtue and learning, of majesty and might, that his followers in Germany and their co-religionists in other lands have come to believe that he stands first in the German Hall of Immortals — the precious gift of God to the nation. The German mind has been fed and nourished, not on the real Luther, but on a Luther glossed over, varnished, toned down, and sanctified — a Luther which even Luther himself would have much ado to recognize. But the legend is now reaching the twilight zone. The myth has been catalogued and labeled. Under the cold analysis of the historical school of criticism, Luther's historical status has been properly determined, and in the light of scriptural research his vaunted prowess as a Biblical scholar has been blasted. And strange to say, this debunking of Luther has been carried on not by Catholic scholars, but by Non-Catholic German scholars, and by the Doctors of Divinity and the Doctors of Philosophy from other lands who studied the method in the German universities — Protestants, many of them, in name, and most of them of Protestant forebears. Catholic scholars, long ago evaluated Luther as a theologian and a religious leader at his face value. But by a strange trick of fate, scholars of the German tradition have now etched a clear cut picture of the "man of flesh and blood, the man of moods and impulses, of angularities and idiosyncracies which dominated his career."

He stands exposed by the scholars of critical research as a destructive genius of mighty force. That he was a tireless worker, a forceful writer, a powerful preacher, a master of the German language of his day, they do not deny. That he possessed a keen knowledge of human nature and grasped every opportunity to entrench himself by any means at hand, all grant. That he was the victim of a nature at once despotic and uncontrolled, they clearly show. But at the same time they have pointed out that the rights Luther assumed to himself in the matter of liberty of conscience, he imperiously denied to all who differed from him. His will, and his alone, he dogmatically set up as the only standard he wished to be recognized, followed, and obeyed, despite his "open Bible". Historical investigation and impartial criticism have unearthed and exposed the shortcomings and weaknesses in the character of a man who set himself up as the prophet of Protestantism. There was something titanic about him — and diabolical.

Luther has shrunk in size according to the exhaustive studies of historical investigators. His merits have shriveled up. Protestants believed that they owed to him a spirit of toleration and liberty of conscience. Not the least! They recognized in his translation of the Bible a masterpiece stamped with the impress of originality. They may be happy now if it is not plainly called a plagiarism. They

venerated him as the father of the popular school system. A plainly fictitious greatness which they have no right to claim for him. And these conclusions have been handed down by Protestant scholars. Reliable historians give book and page for them. And what is more amazing, those Protestant historians continue to speak of Luther in tones of admiration in spite of the admissions which a "love of truth" compels them to make. Looking upon the results thus gathered together one is forced to ask: What, then, remains of Luther?

Such is the tone of a lament gleaned from a Protestant writer in a Protestant Review. True indeed is it that historical research has plucked jewel after jewel from Luther's crown and has made the praises chanted to him by ranters of all times sound hollow in honest ears attuned to truth. The echo of the chants may deceive the illiterate, the prejudiced, the emotional. But the inquirer who goes to the source, who reads what Luther has to say of and for himself, smiles a wistful smile of sadness when the myth fades out in the light of unquestionable facts.

Any student of Luther's life knows that he never did find peace for his "tortured soul", either in the Word of God or out of it. To the end of his life he was a "tortured soul" hounded by the spectres of disillusionment. To his last days he was a "tortured soul" belching forth vituperation in a

torrential deluge for which "no pen much less a printing press should ever have been found". Foul-mouthed and scurrilous at the beginning of his career, foul mouthed and scurrilous he was to the end. In one of his last works, in order to ease his "tortured soul" were printed the "coarsest drawings that the history of caricature has ever produced". So inexpressibly vile were they that a common impulse of decency demanded their summary suppression by his friends. "How can you speak good things, whereas you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh," is the text of Holy Writ to which this man of "tortured soul" never gave much thought.

"Luther was not an ideal sponsor of a new religion; he was a master of billingsgate and the least saintly of men. At times in reading Luther, one is drawn to say to him what Herrick, the English poet, so frankly says of himself:

'Luther, thou art too coarse to love!'

"Had Luther been a brave soldier of fortune, his coarseness might have passed for a sign of the times; but one likes leaders of religion to be religious; and it is hard to reconcile coarseness and self-will, two leading notes of Luther's character, with even rudimentary religion. To want to be your own Pope is the sign of the heresiarch, not of the Christian." And so it is that with the passing of

the years, grinding slowly but surely the rocks of error, Luther's ultimate place will be with the great heresiarchs — not with the saints and scholars of Christian history.

Luther brought to light the Word of God, that is, the sacred Scriptures, so the myth says. Luther brought forth not the Word of God but the word of Luther. So historical research says. Luther had convinced himself that he was an inspired teacher — the prophet of a new day — that his word was law. Of himself he says:

“I have not received *my* gospel from men, but from heaven through Jesus Christ, so that I desire henceforth to be called an Evangelist Whoever teaches differently from what I have taught or who soever condemns, he condemns God and must remain a child of hell I will not have my doctrine judged by anyone, not even by angels . . . so that he who refuses *my* doctrine may not be saved I have set men's consciences at rest concerning penance, baptism, prayer, crosses, life, death, and the sacrament of the altar, and so ordered the question of marriage, of secular authority . . . that all know how to live and how to serve God according to one's state I have floored and overcome all my foes on the sure ground work of Holy Scripture . . . By His Grace, God has revealed this doctrine to me I have it by revelation, that I will not deny . . . By God's revelation I am

called to be a sort of antipope The Holy Ghost bestowed it on me I received the evangel, not from man, but from heaven . . . I have divine majesty on my side; therefore I care not in the least though a thousand Augustines and a thousand Harry-Churches (Henry VIII still Catholic) should be against me.”

Yet with all this divine help on his side, with all this spirit of infallibility to serve him, with all his acquired inspiration, the best he could do was to produce a translation of Holy Writ which is “one of the most inaccurate” ever printed, with “three thousand passages which call for revision”.

Scarcely any of the followers of Luther who have written on Luther’s method of translating the Holy Bible have gone beyond mere generalities. They are satisfied with dishing up again and again, more or less skillfully, Luther’s principles. And his principles brought about the many thousand variant readings which we meet with to-day in the German Bible and in Bindseil’s critical edition. Luther, under the delusion of his divine mission, wilfully deviates from the text of Sacred Scripture, and, out of respect for his authority and infallibility, his false renderings have been retained in the Lutheran Bible even to the present day.

German Biblical scholars, in the wake of Luther’s principles, have left nothing of the Sacred Scripture but a lifeless skeleton. Baur and Strauss, Paulus,

Bretschneider, Weiss, and Holtzman, and a host of learned scholars, who knew Luther's language, who loved Luther's Germany, and who were devotees of German Kultur have carried Luther's first principles of Biblical translation and Biblical interpretation to their logical conclusions — the destruction of the Bible as an inspired book. In their ripened scholarship they were bound by no law but their own fancies, some more, some less extravagant, but the general tone and tendency of their teachings is as follows:

That in the New Testament we shall find only the opinions of Christ and the apostles adapted to the age in which they lived, and not eternal truths; that Christ himself had neither the design nor the power of teaching any system that was to endure; that when He taught any enduring truth, as occasionally He did, it was without being aware of its nature; that the apostles understood even less of real religion; that the whole doctrine both of Christ and the apostles, as it was directed to the Jews alone, so it was gathered from no other source than Jewish philosophy; that Christ Himself erred and the apostles spread His errors and consequently not one of His doctrines is to be received with authority; that, without regard to the authority of the books of Holy Scripture and their asserted divine origin, each doctrine is to be examined according to the

principles of right reason before it is allowed to be Divine.

Such is the result of the higher criticism. To Luther, the inspired Word of God was inspired only insofar as Luther was able to square it with his distorted ideas.. My word is the Word of Christ; my mouth is the mouth of Christ, was his conviction. Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, and a host of others took to themselves the principles of Luther and each claimed for himself the same power and authority as Luther. Each became an infallible mouthpiece of the Sacred Scriptures.

And so even in the early days of the revolt "so great were the corruptions, falsifications, and scandalous contentions, which like a fearful deluge overspread Europe and afflicted, disturbed, misled, and perplexed poor, simple, common men not deeply read in Scriptures, that one was completely bewildered as to what side was right and to which side he should give his adhesion."

Let us, then, look on the Luther that is held up to our contemplation by those who cherish the Luther legend and hallow the Luther myth. Let us for the time forget his egotism. Let us overlook his vulgarity, his obscenity, his billingsgate. Let us set aside for the time being, his intolerance, his superstition, his heterodoxy. Let us leave for future consideration his irascibility, his mendacity, and his contentiousness. But let us keep in mind his

canonization as a scriptural scholar. Genius he had. The genius of turning Holy Writ into a pan of soap suds into which he dipped his bubble pipe. He blew forth shining bubbles, sparkling and iridescent for the moment. They quickly burst and he was forced again and again and ever again to blow bubbles of a different hue. Others dipped their pipes into his pan. They, too, before awestricken followers, blew bubbles beautiful but evanescent. And into the pan of private interpretation, bubble blowers are still dipping their pipes, and the bubbles come forth, shimmering, to burst and vanish into the void of measureless space. Christ did not build His Church upon a bubble pan. He built it on a Rock.

Martin Luther is the outstanding example in modern European history of the slave-mind at its worst. The slave mind is characterized by superstition, intolerance, egotism, vacillation, vituperation, bombast, and morbidity. Of such a mind is Luther, the name the Luther myth would breathe with Augustine and Chrysostom, Jerome and Basil, Gregory and Aquinas, Newman and Von Kettler — men who at the altar of Jesus Christ learned the religion of Jesus Christ — a religion in which patience and humility, urbanity and gentility, charity and peace, sanctity and scholarship are ranked as virtues.

But, one objects, look at Luther's success. Yes, look at his success. And look at the success of Arius and Nestorius and Donatus and Mrs. Eddy and Mohammed. They also succeeded in wresting Holy Scripture to their own ends, and ensnared their followers in their delusions. Look at Calvin, and Melanchthon, and Zwingli, and Rutherford. They all have succeeded in a way. All blew Bible-bubbles and lured a following in their train. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light". And finally look at modern Protestantism. What is left of the old school? Where are the creeds of yester-year? They have been revised, revamped, and re-edited. Protestant scholars in increasing numbers, in Germany, in Great Britain, and in the United States, this century back have been adjusting year by year the Protestant religion to "progressive thought" and poisoning the wells of Sacred Scripture by destructive criticism. They have substituted the service of man for the worship of God. They have sacrificed the gift of faith for the practice of good works. In emphasizing the 'here', they have lost sight of the 'hereafter'. And they labeled the result religion. Many of these scholars were churchmen; some were in positions of importance. At the turn of the century attempts were made to stay their ravages, but to no avail. To-day higher criticism of the Bible and the evolutionary school of religious history have

found their places in the curricula of institutions of higher learning, even within the Protestant fold. Many pastors in the more influential urban churches are well versed in, and open advocates of a modernism and rationalism which have reduced almighty God to a minimum, stripped Jesus Christ of divinity, robbed the Church of authority, and Holy Writ of reliability. And on all sides, the sum total of this destructive system of rationalistic-modernism is today evident. It is evident in the indifference to religious truth, in the vagueness of religious teaching, and the negation of eternal values which are characteristic of present day thought among the wise men of our generation who sit in the chairs of learning. It is evident in the youth who sit at the feet of these wise men and drink in something about everything except the one thing worth while.

Luther's greatest contribution to the modern world, we used to be told, was the mighty spirit of German Kultur. Luther's greatest crime, now we are taught, was the destruction of European unity. The armistice of not so many years ago buried the German Kultur of the golden age of the 'me and God' ideal under a blood-soaked soil. The story of the evolution of German thought from Luther through Kulture to Bismark to Kaiser to war-madness to Hitler to the return of the Nordic heathen gods is now written in large letters across

the pages of German history. He who runs may read. Luther, for the past four hundred years, has been Germany's super-man. And now, the Protestantism born of Luther, has at long last entered upon its final stage of progressive disintegration not only in Germany but in all the lands of the Protestant tradition. In academic circles it is only a pale spectre of its former self. It lies shattered as a cultural force. Twilight gently shrouds it in her falling shadows.

Luther taught his followers and imitators how to blow Bible bubbles. Some were sincere, some deluded; some learned, some ignorant; some rich, some poor; some powerful, and some weak; but all were in error, vainly seeking Truth in vanishing spectres.

Fifteen hundred years ago, Saint Augustine gave an answer to the Bible-bubble-blowers of all ages. Without qualification, he declared; "I would not believe the gospel unless moved thereto by the authority of the Catholic Church."

And that answer holds good today. Where the Rock is, there is the Church.

