

Luther's Psalm.

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NONE of our Church historians has stated the real issue of Luther's appearance before the Diet of Worms with an insight at all approaching that of Carlyle. He sets it before us in a few graphic sentences that, once read, can hardly ever be forgotten. "The Diet of Worms, Luther's appearance there on the 17th of April 1521, may be considered as the greatest scene in modern European history; the point, indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilisation takes its rise. . . . 'Confute me,' he concluded, 'by proofs of Scripture, or else by plain arguments; I cannot recant otherwise. For it is neither safe nor prudent to do aught against conscience. Here stand I: I can do no other: God assist me!'" It is, as we say, the greatest moment in the modern history of men. English Protestantism, England and its Parliaments, Americas, and vast work there two centuries, French Revolution, Europe and its work everywhere at present; the germ of all lay there: had Luther in that moment done other, it had all been otherwise!"¹

With such convictions in his heart, Carlyle could hardly help pondering much the noble hymn that Luther composed, probably at Oppenheim, just two days before he entered Worms. The Reformer was at that time greatly harassed by messages and adjurations from his friends as to the danger to life that lay before him in appearing at the Imperial Council. To brace his faith, he seems to have been rehearsing to himself the Psalm that expresses so grandly the confidence a righteous man may put in the divine power to save and bless in the midst of trial:—

"God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

God is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved.
God shall help her, and that right early.
The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved:
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.
The Lord of Hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge." (Ps. xlvi.)

While he muses on these words, the fire burns: a holy flame of thought is kindled in his

¹ *Lectures on Heroes* ("The Hero as Priest"), Pop. Ed. pp. 124, 125.

own soul, and he himself speaks with his tongue:—

"*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,
Ein gutes Wehr und Waffen;
Er hilft uns frey aus aller Noth,
Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.
Der alte böse Feind
Mit Ernst ers jetzt meint;
Gross Macht und viel List
Sein grausam' Rüstzeuch ist,
Auf Erd'n ist nicht seins Gleichen.*

"*Mit unsrer macht ist Nichts gethan,
Wir sind gar bald verloren:
Es streit' für uns der rechte Mann,
Den Gott selbst hat erkoren.
Fragst du wer er ist?
Er heisst Jesus Christ,
Der Herre Zebaoth,
Und ist kein ander Gott,
Das Feld muss er behalten."*

It is little to be wondered at that when this hymn got abroad it was at once caught up by Luther's friends as the best and bravest utterance of faith and hope he had yet given. Speedily it flew from heart to heart and from lip to lip over all Germany as the battle-song of Protestantism. Heine, and after him Victor Hugo, have well called it "the Marseillaise of the Reformation:" for it thrilled the heart of the people like a trumpet-blast, and summoned them to fight the battles of the Lord against the hosts of superstition and error.

Carlyle's English version of this hymn is admitted on all hands to be one of the finest that have ever been made.² It is certainly up to this day the most widely used. Luther's hymn still finds a place in all the modern manuals of praise in the Fatherland; and when it is chosen for our English Hymnals, Carlyle's translation is generally adopted. The Chelsea seer, indeed, had much in common with the German reformer: he was moved by the same burning hatred of despotism, by the same unquenchable desire for spiritual progress, by the same strong confidence that, albeit through much tribulation, the right would triumph in the long-

² *Miscellaneous Essays* ("Luther's Psalm"), vol. iii. pp. 61-64.

run. It was doubtless this deep moral affinity with Luther that enabled him to interpret so well the thoughts that filled his soul in this crisis of his career. An old teacher of mine used to say of Luther's German translation of the Bible that, even where, for instance, he did not give the exact sense of the Hebrew words of a prophet, he yet wrote nothing but what a prophet might have said. In like manner, Carlyle here may not in every line give Luther's actual meaning, but he enters so thoroughly into his feelings that he says nothing but what Luther would have approved of, alike in style and substance.

How essential such sympathy with a singer in a foreign tongue is, for anything like an accurate rendering of his words, may be seen by setting Carlyle's translation of the two stanzas quoted above alongside another by a poet otherwise so tender and true as Dr. Macdonald.¹

Carlyle translates :—

“ A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon ;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The ancient Prince of Hell
Hath risen with purpose fell ;
Strong mail of Craft and Power
He weareth in this hour,
On earth is not his fellow.”

Dr. Macdonald puts it :—

“ Our God He is a castle strong,
A good mail-coat and weapon ;
He sets us free from every wrong
That wickedness would heap on.
The ancient wicked foe,
He means earnest now ;
Force and cunning sly,
His horrid policy,—
On earth there's nothing like him.”

Here is a sharp enough contrast. The second stanza presents another hardly less to the disadvantage of the poet.

Carlyle writes :—

“ With force of arms we nothing can,
Full soon were we down-riden ;
But for us fights the proper Man,
Whom God Himself hath bidden.
Ask ye, Who is the same ?
Christ Jesus is His name,
The Lord Zebaoth's Son,
He and no other one
Shall conquer in the battle.”

Says Dr. Macdonald :—

“ 'Tis all in vain, do what we can,
Our strength is soon dejected.
But He fights for us, the right man,
By God Himself elected.
Ask'st thou who is this ?
Jesus Christ it is,
Lord of Hosts alone,
And God but Him is none,
So He must win the battle.”

In subjoining his translation to the original, Carlyle modestly says that the only merit it can pretend to is that of “literal adherence to the sense.” This claim is for the most part justified. Yet, as we have hinted, the version as a literal translation is not without its blemishes. Several of these will strike any German scholar—as, for example, the rendering of “Der Herre Zebaoth,” “the Lord Zebaoth's Son,” while it is manifestly Luther's intention to identify the man Christ Jesus with Jehovah, Lord of Hosts Himself, as the Divine Champion of His people. The most glaring departure, however, is in the first four lines of the last stanza. The original runs :—

“ *Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn,
Und keinen Dank dazu haben ;
Er ist bey uns wohl auf dem Plan
Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.*”

Here Carlyle apparently quite failed to apprehend the exact point of Luther's meaning ; for he renders :—

“ God's Word for all their craft and force
One moment will not linger,
But, spite of Hell, shall have its course,
'Tis written by His finger.”

Dr. Macdonald is much more accurate, though again he fails in dignity :—

“ The Word they shall allow to stand,
Nor any thanks have for it ;
His Spirit is at our right hand
To front the tyrant horrid.”

After such remarks as I have made, it is somewhat difficult for me to offer any other version of this grand chorale. I can only say that the following, while doubtless open to criticism in many respects, has appeared to some friends to catch something of the spirit and tread of the original, and at least to present accurately the meaning of the last stanza at the point where Carlyle's fails. I offer it to my fellow-students of the *Expository Times Guild* in the hope that, in view of the conflicts for “the whole truth” of God's holy Word

¹ *Sunday Magazine*, 1867, p. 450.

that lie before us, we may all go forward with the courage Luther has so nobly expressed in these winged words :—

A stable fort our God abides,
A buckler stout and weapon ;
He helps us through whate'er betides,
Or can us now mishappen.
Our old Satanic foe
Now aims a deadly blow ;
Deep craft and dreadful might
Have mailed him for the fight :
On Earth he still is matchless.

With our frail force, undone's the plan,
Soon would our hopes be blighted ;
But for us fights the true-born Man,
Whom God Himself invited.
Ask ye, Who hath sufficed ?
His name is Jesus Christ,
Jehovah, Lord of Hosts :

No other God man boasts
Is sure to win the battle.

And were the World with devils sown,
And would they quick us swallow,
We ne'er with sore affright should groan,
No good speed would them follow.
The Prince of Earth's domain,
Howe'er he wrath may feign,
Can nought 'gainst us achieve,
His might wins no reprieve :
A single word can fell him.

The Word leave they to stand its ground,
For which no thanks they merit :
Our Cause to help He's ever bound
With all His gifts and Spirit.
Yea, let them take our life :
Goods, honour, children, wife,
They far away may drive :
With no gain shall they thrive ;
God's Kingdom still is with us.

Ⓐ Mock Sacrament.

“ And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”—JOHN xiii. 26.

BY THE REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

It is often asked, Was Judas Iscariot at the Holy Supper? The sacred narrative shuts us up to the conclusion that he was. He shared in the sacred feast. But the sacrament of which the traitor partook was very different from the sacrament of which the true disciples partook. Jesus gave to Judas at the commencement of the supper a sop from the dish, and he went out immediately and left his Master, and separated from Him for ever. Jesus gave to the rest of the disciples at the close of the supper the bread and wine which were the symbols of His own broken body and shed blood, and which pledged them to remain with Him always as His servants and friends. Thus the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at its first institution had two sides; a side to the traitor, and a side to the true followers of Jesus. It was like the pillar of cloud that was darkness to the Egyptians and light to the Israelites; like the ark which struck the irreverent Uzzah dead, and was a blessing to the house of pious Obed-Edom. It was like the magnet that has a positive and a negative pole, a point that attracts and a point that repels; like the air that quickens the living and decomposes the dead. We are accustomed to

think and speak of the sacrament of the faithful; it may be well to say a few solemn words regarding the sacrament of the unfaithful.

At Eastern meals it is a customary thing for the head of the household, when he wishes to show special attention to any one, to dip a piece of bread in the common dish and take up with it a portion of the solid or liquid food, and then hand it to the guest. This was what Jesus did on this occasion. He and Judas were eating out of the same dish; and Jesus gave him a piece of bread which He had dipped in the contents of the dish, and said to him: “That thou doest, do quickly.” Here we have all the elements of a sacrament, the bread given by Christ's hand as a symbol of the relation in which Judas stood to Him, and a pledge confirming his intention and leading to a practical result. But it is a perverted sacrament; a sacrament turned from a holy to an evil use, a privilege converted into a curse. The true disciples partook of bread and wine received from Jesus' own hand in felt and loving communion with Him, and they heard the gracious words: “This is my body, which is broken for you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”