1917-01-01

Luther's Battle Song "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott"

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LUTHER'S BATTLE SONG

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ITS HISTORY AND TRANSLATIONS

By

BERNHARD PICK

Issued for the Quadricentennial of the Reformation

1917

ERNST KAUFMANN

NEW YORK
22-24 N. William Street

CHICAGO
37 S. Wabash Avenue

PREFACE.

ON November 10th, 1883, the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth was celebrated with enthusiasm throughout Protestant Christendom by innumerable addresses and sermons setting forth his various merits "as a man and a German, as a husband and father, as a preacher, catechist, and hymnist, as a Bible translator and expositor, as a reformer and founder of a Church, as a champion of the sacred rights of conscience and originator of a mighty movement of religious and civil liberty which spread over Europe and across the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific. The story of his life was repeated in learned and popular biographies, in different tongues, and enacted on the stage in the principal cities of Germany. Not only Lutherans, but Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, united in these tributes to the Reformer. The Academy of Music in New York could not hold the thousands who crowded the building to attend the Luther-celebration arranged by the Evangelical Alliance in behalf of the leading Protestant denominations of America. Such testimony has never been borne

to a mortal man. And, indeed, Luther has exerted, and still exerts, a spiritual power inferior only to that of the sacred writers." (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* Vol. VI, p. 730 sq., New York, 1888).

The year 1917 will witness another anniversary. For on the memorable thirty-first day of October, 1517, which has ever since been celebrated in Protestant Germany as the birthday of the Reformation, at twelve o'clock Luther affixed (either himself or through another) to the doors of the Castle-Church at Wittenberg, ninety-five Latin Theses on the subject of Indulgences. These Theses mark the starting-point of Luther's career as a reformer. Wherever the Festival of the Reformation is celebrated, Luther's Battle Song, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," is sung, a hymn, than which there is no grander in the German tongue. Like all great hymns it has its own history. It was early translated into other languages, and has been known in an English translation since 1708. Like the *Dies Irae,* the famous judgment hymn of Thomas a Celano, it has challenged the skill of English translators, but the "mighty fortress" is still unshaken. Like no other hymn, it is sung in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and probably also in Australia, and this fact is sufficient to make this hymn the object of a literary inquiry.

It may surprise the reader that we devoted so much space to the time of the composition of our

hymn. But the fact that so many dates have been propounded makes that point important. From the different views which were suggested as the cause of composing that hymn, it will be seen that none really answers the purpose, whereas there is much in favor of the view according to which our hymn was an occasional hymn composed in 1521. And our song is not the only one of this kind. We know that when on July 1st, 1523, two young Augustinian monks, Heinrick Voes and Johann Esch, from Antwerp, after examination by the Cologne Inquisitor, Jacob Hoogstraten, and at the instigation of the Louvain professors, had been condemned to death and burned at the stake in Brussels, Luther's spirit was fired on receipt of the news of this first martyrdom for the Evangelical cause and he composed his "A New Song of the Two Martyrs for Christ, Burnt at Brussels by the Sophists of Louvain," beginning:

"Ein neues Lied wir heben an,"

Or, as the first stanza runs:

"A brave new song aloud we sing,
To tell the wondrous story,
What God hath done, our Lord and King,
And sound His praises and glory.
At Brussels, down in Netherlands,
The Lord of gifts and graces,
Hath well revealed His mighty hand,
By two young boys, whose faces
Now shine in heavenly places."

This song, now omitted in modern collections, because being rather a historical ballad than hymn, is usually considered as the first which Luther made; but a chronological order of his hymns is at present an impossibility.

The section which treats of the translations of our hymn must have a special interest for the reader. That there are so many English translations, will be a surprise. Still greater must be the astonishment upon reviewing the list of languages into which our hymn has been translated. Our list may not be complete—we only give what we have —yet all things taken together, show that our hymn is UNIQUE. Should there be a demand, we intend to issue a polyglot edition of the hymn.

May God's blessing accompany these pages.

B. PICK.

Newark, N. J., December, 1916.

INTRODUCTION.

OF the thousands of German hymns,[1]—of which it may safely be said that nearly one thousand of these hymns are classical and immortal — none stands out so prominent, none has become so famous, and none has done such most effective service, as "Ein feste Burg." It may indeed be called the triumphant war-cry of the Reformation, the national hymn of Protestant Germany.

The field-marshal, Leopold von Dessau, who served in the army of Frederick the Great, styled it "the march of our Lord God's dragoons," and Heinrich Heine, the poet, called it "the Marseillaise of the Reformation."[2]

This hymn, which is a strong expression of faith and reliance on God, was mighty as a flaming sword; it was, and still is, the tocsin of spiritual independence, of religious freedom, and as such it expresses the purest spirit of Protestantism. When

1 The number of German hymns cannot fall short of one hundred thousand (Schaff). Dean George Ludwig von Hardenberg of Halberstadt, in the year 1786, prepared a hymnological catalogue of the first lines of 72,733 hymns (in five volumes, preserved in the library of Halberstadt). This number was not complete at that time, and has considerably increased since. About ten thousand have become more or less popular, and passed into different hymn-books. Fischer (Kirchenlieder-Lexion, 1878), gives the first lines of about five thousand of the best, many of which were overlooked by von Hardenberg. Catholic writers like Janssen, have not a word to say about the hymnological enrichment of public worship and Christian piety by Luther and his followers.

2 "But it differs as widely from the Marseillaise as the German Reformation differs from the godless French Revolu-

this hymn was composed, is, as we still see, a matter of dispute, but certain it is, that since it was first sung, it became the national hymn of Protestant Germany, the imperishable paean of the Reformation. It was as the famous historian, Ranke, says: "The production of the moment in which Luther, engaged in a conflict with a world of foes, sought strength in the consciousness that he was defending a divine cause which could never perish." Ranke, no doubt, thinks of Luther's journey to Worms to which we owe our hymn, and Mrs. Charles is probably correct when she says: "The great battle-song of the German Church—his "Ein feste Burg,"—was said to have come into his heart on his way to the Diet at Worms. Its truths were certainly there then, whatever antiquarian research may prove about the date when they were written down.[3] Admitting this we can understand Luther's words: "I was fearless, I was afraid of nothing; God can make one so desperately bold. I know not whether I could be so cheerful now," (or, as his own words read: *"Denn ich war unerschrocken, fuerchtete mich nicht; Gott kann einen wohl so toll machen. Ich weiss nicht, ob ich jetzt auch so freudig waere.")*

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tion," (Schaff). The passage from which Heine's words are taken is interesting and runs thus: "A battle hymn was this defiant song, with which he and his comrades entered Worms, (April 16, 1521). The old cathedral trembled at these new notes, and the ravens were startled in their hidden nests in the towers. This hymn, the Marseillaise Hymn of the Reformation, has preserved its potent spell even to our days, and we may yet soon use again in similar conflicts the old mailed words," (Werke, ed. 1876, Vol. 3, p. 36).

3 "Christian Life in Song," New York, 1805, p. 222.

I

THE TEXT AND TUNE

The XLVI. Psalm: "Deus noster refugium et virtus," etc.

Ein feste burg ist unser Gott,
ein gute wehr und waffen.
Er hilft uns frei aus aller not,
die uns itzt hat betroffen.
Der alt boese feind
mit ernst ers itzt meint,
gross macht und viel list
sein grausam ruestung ist,
auf erd ist nicht seins gleichen.

Mit unser macht ist nichts gethan,
wir sind gar bald verloren:
Es streit fuer uns der rechte man
den Gott hat selbs erkoren.
Fragstu, wer der ist?
er heisst Jhesus Christ,
der HERR-Zeboath,
und ist kein ander Gott,
das feld muss er behalten.

Und wenn die welt vol Teufel wer
und wolt uns gar verschlingen,
So fuerchten wir uns nicht so sehr,
es sol uns doch gelingen.
Der Fuerst dieser welt,
wie saur er sich stelt,
thut er uns doch nicht.
das macht, er ist gericht,
ein woertlein kan in fellen.

Das wort sie soellen lassen stan
und kein dank dazu haben.
Er ist bei uns wol auf dem plan
mit seinem Geist und gaben.
Nemen sie den leib,
gut, ehr, kind und weib:
lass faren dahin,
sie habens kein gewin,
das Reich muss uns doch bleiben.

The text is the same which is found in Valentine Babst's edition published at Leipsic in 1545. This collection contains the last revision of Luther's hymns, which were published while he was yet alive, and shortly before his death. Goedeke, too, in his edition of Luther's hymns, with an introduction by Wagenmann (Leipsic, 1883), adopted the same text, and this principle is acknowledged as the correct one, *(See Theolog. Literaturblatt,* Leipzig, 1884, col. 146.)

As to the tune, it is generally agreed that Luther was its author; of late, however, it has been asserted that Johann Walther was the composer.

An attempt has been made to show that this is a patchwork of snatches from various portions of the Roman Gradual, which Luther, while a monk, must often have sung. But even if this were clearly shown, to Luther would still be due the honor of smelting these scattered fragments and producing from them a glorious melody, now all of one piece. (See the *Blaetter fuer Hymnologie,* 1884, pp. 82, 101, etc.). The question has been fully

treated by A. Koeckert, *Martinus Luther der Autor des Chorals, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,"* Zurich, 1897. The opinion that Johann Walther and not Luther, was the composer of our hymn, has been advocated by Zelle, Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, Berlin, 1895.

In a somewhat enlarged form the facsimile is given by Edersheim in an article, "Luther as hymn-writer and musical compositor," published in the *Leisure Hour,* London, 1874, p. 233. It is taken from the "Luther Codex," lately discovered, dating from the year 1530. Edersheim tells us that John Walther and his young wife, Anna, were visiting Luther on Christmas, 1530. It was arranged that after supper the company were to have some music and Germany's Christmas Hymn was for the first time sung around Luther's table. This over, Walther produced a book, splendidly bound for those times, on which were emblazoned the portraits of Luther and Melanchthon. It contained a beautiful copy not only of Luther's own hymns and compositions, but of all those which the two had in common hitherto prepared and sanctioned for use in the German churches. Among others it also had the words and music of that greatest of all uninspired compositions, if indeed we may so call what is only a New Testament paraphrase of Ps. 46,—"Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott." And now in the year 1870 has been brought to light again this

identical Christmas gift of Walther to Luther, bearing this inscription in Luther's own handwriting:

"Presented to me by my good friend,

MR. JOHANN WALTHER,

Composer of Music

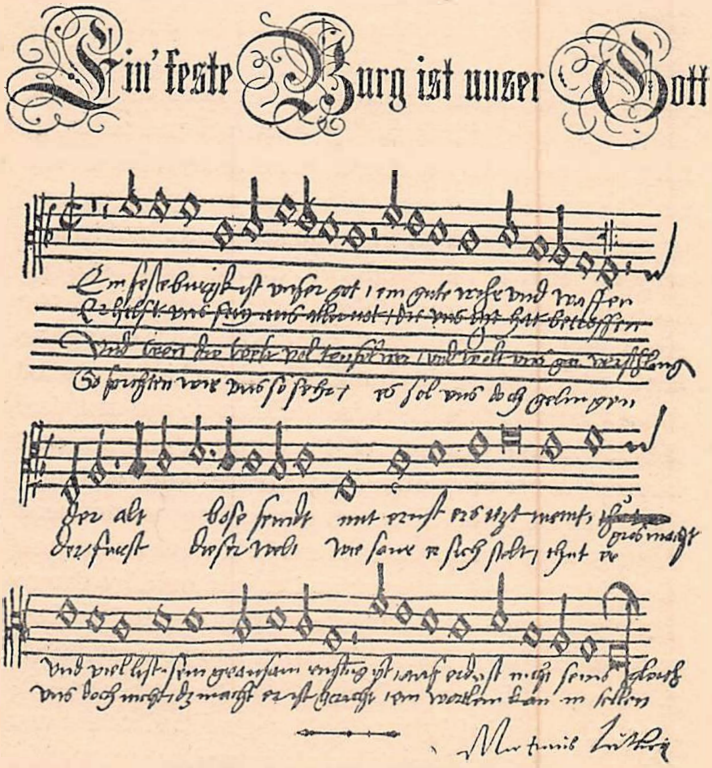
at Torgau,
1530

To whom God grant grace.

—MARTINUS LUTHER."

It consists of a manuscript volume in 271 pages, square octavo (one page being wanting), and contains 146 tunes, of which several are adapted to the same hymns. The composers are, besides Luther and Walther, those best known at the period, especially L. Senfl, whose music Luther liked so much. The score is in various handwritings, chiefly that of Walther himself. By a clerical error the little word "nicht" (not) is left out in line 3 of stanza 3 of the "Ein feste Burg." The book is in excellent preservation, though bearing marks of frequent use, and the portraits of Luther and Melanchthon on the cover are still quite distinct. The story of the manuscript is curious. Till the year 1830, it continued in the possession of Luther's family, whence it passed into that of a student of theology at Leipzig, from whose heirs it was bought

for publication by the firm of Klemm at Dresden. Its authenticity and genuineness are universally admitted. The most interesting relic in it is that grandest of all Luther's hymns, *Ein feste Burg,* of which we have reproduced a *facsimile* in Walther's handwriting, and with Luther's own signature.



FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL MUSIC SCORE.

II

ESTIMATE OF THE HYMN

HE motto of the hymn is the 46th Psalm, but the imagery throughout is entirely original. The late Joseph A. Seiss of Philadelphia, who spent at least thirty years in producing a version expressive of the original, says, "Judged by conventional rules, it may not seem very artistic. The rocky dissonance and Teutonic bluntness of its form and phrases may be repellant to a fastidious poetic taste, but it was very original when produced, and a man must go down into the depths of the mighty upheaval of the great Reformation itself, and of that evangelic faith which stood invincible amid the perils of those times, before he is in position to see and feel the power and majesty of these rough rhymes and jarring contradictions of measure and cadence. The judgment of three centuries has pronounced this hymn the greatest Psalm of Faith that has had birth in the modern ages; and this should go far to settle all questions of taste respecting it." *(Recreation Songs,* Phila., 1878, with supplement, 1887, p. 49 sq.). Thomas Carlyle, the rugged Englishman, who probably was better qualified than any other English writer to drink in and to express in another language the spirit of this hymn, says: "It

jars upon our ears; yet is there something in it like the sound of Alpine avalanches, or the first murmur of earthquakes; in the very vastness of that dissonance a higher unison is revealed to us. Luther wrote this song in a time of blackest threatenings, which, however, would in no wise become a time of despair. In those tones, rugged, broken as they are, do we not recognize the accent of that summoned man (summoned not by Charles the Fifth, but by God Almighty also,) who answered his friend's warning not to enter Worms, in this wise: 'Were there as many Devils in Worms as there are roof tiles, I would go in;'—of him who, alone in that assemblage, before all emperors, and principalities, and powers, spoke forth these final and forever memorable words, 'It is neither safe nor prudent to do aught against conscience. Here stand I, I cannot otherwise. God assist me. Amen.'" (*Frazer's Magazine,* 1831).

Another modern writer says: "This hymn is Luther in song. It is pitched in the very key of the man. Rugged and majestic, trustful in God, and confident, it was the defiant trumpet-blast of the Reformation, speaking out to the powers in the earth and under the earth, an all-conquering conviction of divine vocation and empowerment. The world has many sacred songs of exquisite tenderness and unalterable trust, and also some bold and awe-inspiring lyrics, like *Dies Irae;* but this one of Luther's is matchless for its warlike tone, its rug-

ged strength, and martial, inspiring ring." This warlike tone, probably inspired our own poet, John G. Whittier, to one of his war songs headed, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott." The first stanza of which runs thus, *(Poetical Works,* section entitled, "In War Time") :

"We wait beneath the furnace-blast
The pangs of transformation;
Not painlessly doth God recast
And mould anew the nation.
Hot burns the fire
Where wrongs expire;
Nor spares the hand
That from the land
Uproots the ancient evil."

That a hymn like this should have its own history, is but a matter of course. For, says Kuebler, (*Historical Notes to the Lyra Germanica,* London, 1865, p. 147, sq.), "Quickly as if the angels had been the carriers, the hymn spread throughout Germany and other countries." In 1532 it was sung in the Church of Schweinfurth, in Bavaria, against the will of the Romish priest, and the children sang it in the streets at night, whereupon the Reformation was soon established in that town. After Luther's death, when Wittenberg fell into the enemy's hand, in 1547, and Melanchthon, Jonas, and Creutziger, the chief Lutheran divines, had to flee sorrowfully to Weimar, they heard, as they entered the town, this hymn sung by a girl, which greatly

comforted them, and Melanchthon said to the child: "Sing, my dear daughter, sing; you know not what great people you are now comforting." When the Elector Count Frederick III, of the Palatinate was asked why he did not build fortresses in his land, he replied, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott."

The pious King Gustavus Adolphus, of Sweden, ordered this hymn to be sung by his whole army before the battle of Leipsic, September 17th, 1631, and when he had obtained the victory he fell on his knees, praising God, and exclaimed in the words of the second verse, " 'Tis He must win the battle."

It was sung before the battle of Luetzen, November 16th, 1632, in which the brave king lost his life, but his army gained the victory. At the same place it was sung on September 15th, 1882, "as by one man," by the assembled thousands on the field of Luetzen, at the service held in commemoration of the Jubilee of the Gustavus Adolphus Society, which seeks to aid Protestant Churches in Roman Catholic countries. It was sung at the unveiling of the Luther Memorial in the Market Place at Eisleben, November the 10th, 1883, and at countless other celebrations. It was even sung in November, 1887, at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Harvard University, in the presence of President Grover Cleveland and other political and literary notables.

When the Evangelical Prince Wolfgang, of Anhalt, was banished by the Emperor Charles V, and his land given to another, he mounted his horse, rode through the town of Bernburg, and sang as a farewell in the market place with a loud voice the last few lines of the fourth verse, "E'en should they take our life," etc. And when the Elector John Frederick of Saxony, in his prison at Augsburg, heard that the Evangelical ministers and divines of that town, who came to pay him a farewell visit, had been deposed and banished by the Emperor, he wept aloud, and after some time asked them: "Has the Emperor banished you from the whole empire?" "Yes," they replied. "Has he also banished you from Heaven?" "No." "Oh," he continued, "then fear nothing: God's kingdom our's abideth." And little as he himself possessed then, he gave them some money to divide among themselves for their journey.

The poor Protestant emigrants from Salzburg and other parts of Austria, in 1732, used often to sing this hymn on their way into exile, and the Huguenots did the same in France in the time of their bloody persecutions between 1560 and 1572; yea, many of them died joyfully as martyrs with this hymn on their lips. Through Meyerbeer's opera, "The Huguenots," this hymn with its tune has even been introduced on the stage. Mendelssohn used it in the fifth movement of his *Reformation Symphony,* 1830; Wagner used it as a motive

in his *Kaisermarsch,* written to commemorate the return of the Emperor William in 1871, after the Franco-German War.

It is reported that a Roman Catholic count, who in 1547 came to Germany with Charles V, heard this Lutheran hymn sung, and said: "I will help to pull down this 'stronghold,' or else I will not live." But three days after he suddenly fell ill and died.

The late Phil. Schaff, (d. 1893), concludes the 6th Vol. of his *History of the Christian Church,* (which treats of the German Reformation), with "Luther's immortal hymn, which is the best expression of his character, and reveals the secret of his strength as well as the moving power of the Reformation."

III

DATE OF COMPOSITION

THE date of composition is still a *crux hymnologorum.* As no less than seven dates have been proposed, it cannot be said that the acts are already closed. Under the circumstances it will be best to register the different dates and their advocates.

A.—Views Concerning the Date to the Year 1730.

It seems that in the year 1730, the difference of opinions as to the date of composition had become so great that it became necessary to register them, and Peter Busch, pastor of the congregation of St. Crucis in Hannover, betook himself to the task in his *Ausfuehrliche Historie und Erklaerung des Helden-Liedes Luther's Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott! Bey Gelegenheit des gefeyerten zweyten Evangelischen Jubel-Festes. Mit einer Vorrede von Luther's Heldenmuthe und seiner Liebe zur Sing-und Dicht-Kunst ans Licht gestellet,* Hannover, 1731. In the second chapter, Busch speaks *"von der Zeit wann Luther dieses Lied verfertiget hat, und der ihm dazu gegebenen Gelegenheit."* (i. e., of the time when Luther composed this hymn,

and the occasion offered to him for it). He divides the views into three classes and mentions the representatives of each. To the *first* class belong those who are of the opinion that this hymn was composed in 1521 at Oppenheim, on his way to Worms when he was advised not to go, (pp. 19-21). Busch mentions eight representatives of this view. The *second* class is represented by those who think that the hymn was composed at Coburg during the time of the diet at Augsburg in the year 1530, and Busch mentions about a dozen authors for this view, (pp. 21-25). In the *third* class he mentions those who think that this hymn was composed against the diet at Augsburg, but was composed not at Coburg, but earlier, because it is already found in the hymn-book of 1529. Busch himself is inclined to the opinion of Johann Melchior Krafft, author of Memoria Jubilaei Husumensis, Hamburg, 1723, that Luther composed the hymn in the year 1521, at Oppenheim, or between Oppenheim and Worms.

B.—Views Since 1730.

The question as to the date of composition was taken up again in the year 1886, by Dr. Johannes Linke in his *Wann wurde das Lutherlied Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott verfasst? Historisch-kritische Untersuchung,* Leipzig, 1886. Like Busch, Linke divides the representatives of the different views into *six classes.* Since Linke has a view of his own, we get *seven* classes. As it would require much

space to mention the different authors and their works representing the different classes, we can only give a general outline.

1. 1530—This date has the most advocates among older writers, but, says a modern writer: "No one can any more advocate the year 1530 as the year of composition."

2. 1529—There are several writers who are of the opinion that it was composed in 1529, at the time of the diet at Spires.

3. 1528—Some think that the forgery of Otto von Pack, which brought Germany to the brink of a civil war, induced Luther to compose the hymn. Others think that the death of Leonard Kaiser, who was beheaded for Lutheran heresy, August 18, 1527, caused the composition of the hymn.

4. 1527—This date is asserted by some who claim that the hymn was composed before the first of November, 1527, the tenth anniversary of the affixing of the Ninety-five Theses to the doors of the Castle-Church at Wittenberg in commemoration of the remarkable event.

5. 1525—This is Linke's date in his monograph mentioned before, and on more than 90 pages he endeavors to prove the correctness of his hypothesis that the hymn was written on or about October 31, 1525, whereas in a Latin monograph published by him in 1883, he stated, *"Nescimus hymni diem natalem,"* (i. e., we know not the birth-day of the hymn). Linke found no followers.

6. 1524—This date is based upon a notice found in the chronicle of Petrus Saxe, according to which a certain Hermann Tast is reported to have sung our hymn already in 1524, after a sermon which he delivered at Gardlingen.

7. 1521—This date was already advocated at a very early time, and is also favored by recent writers, e. g., Leitzmann, Martin Luther's Geistliche Lieder, Bonn, 1907; Spitta, Das deutsche Kirchenlied in seinen charakteristischen Erscheinungen. I. Mittelalter und Reformationszeit, Berlin-Leipzig, 1912. In favor of this year we have already the testimony of Paul Seidel, who in his Luther-biography, published in 1581, states that Luther composed our hymn in the night from the 15th to the 16th of April, 1521, in the inn "Zur Kanne," at Oppenheim, his last resting place on his journey to Worms. Another testimony for the year 1521 is found in the "Postilla, das ist Auslegung der Episteln und Evangelien an Sonntagen und fuernemsten Festen," of Simon Pauli in Rostook in Mecklenburg, printed at Magdeburg, 1517. In this work we read three times of "Ein feste Burg," as being composed in 1521. Twice Pauli mentions Worms as the place of composition, but once (fol. 132a), he states that it originated a few miles before Worms, which points to Oppenheim as the place.

Near or at Oppenheim, Luther became conscious of the grave situation in which he was. Not far

from that place he was met by Martin Bucer, Franz von Sickingen's chaplain, who invited him in the name of Sickingen to go to Ebernberg, the latter's fortress, and not to Worms. Luther's companions were at once moved by Bucer's representations and said: "Let us go to Ebernberg: we can rely upon Sickingen and Bucer; your life will be forfeited at Worms." But Luther never wavered a moment. Shortly afterward, another messenger greeted Luther and his company, sent from Spalatin in the name of the Elector his patron, not to come to Worms, lest he might suffer the fate of Hus. But all in vain. Where the friends feared and trembled, Luther comforted them with the words: "Though Hus was burned, the truth was not burned, and Christ still lives." And from Oppenheim he sent to Spalatin the famous words: "I shall go to Worms, though there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs."

A few days before his death at Eisleben, Luther thus described his feelings at that critical period: "I was fearless, I was afraid of nothing; God can make one so desperately bold. I know not whether I could be so cheerful now," *(denn ich war unerschrocken, fuerchtete mich nicht; Gott kann einen wohl so toll machen. Ich weiss nicht, ob ich jetzt auch so freudig waere).*

Taken all in all, the situation was such as to inspire him to compose for his own encouragement and comfort that hymn which has immortalized his

name, and which no doubt was written down at Oppenheim in the evening hours of April 15, 1521, for on the following day, Tuesday morning, April 16, at ten o'clock, shortly before early dinner, the watchman on the tower of the cathedral announced the arrival of the procession by blowing the horn, and thousands of people gathered to see the heretic.

There exists a prayer of Luther which he prayed at Worms and as he was in the habit to pray audibly, it was copied by one who heard it. Buchwald in his "Luther-Lesebuch," published it. Koestlin also regards it as genuine.[4] What makes this prayer interesting is the fact that it reminds us of phrases in "Ein feste Burg," and which may be adduced as another proof that our hymn belongs to the year 1521. Take e. g. the following sentences: ... "Stand by me in the name of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, who shall be my defence and shelter, yea, my fast tower. The world must leave my conscience unconstrained, and though it be full of devils, and my body . . . be destroyed, it is but the body. For thy Word is sure to me, and my soul is thine, to thee it belongeth, and shall abide with thee to eternity. God help me."

The reasons which are adduced against the composition of our hymn in 1521 are in the first place the fact that Luther speaks of "wife and child," since he was not yet married in 1521. But this

4 But compare Boehmer, "Luther in the Light of Recent Research," (Eng. transl. by C. F. Huth, New York, "The Christian Herald," 1916, p. 37 sq.).

reason is of no account. We can imagine that for the sake of rhyme he uses the word "weib" to make it agree with "leib:"

"Nehmen sie uns den *Leib*,
Gut, Ehre, Kind und *Weib*.

Besides, we must remember that in the last stanza, in which he gives to his feelings a more general conception, he thought not only of his own danger, but of that which threatened all his fellow-believers. And that such was the case we learn from the repeated "we" and "us" in the hymn. And whilst it is true that he had neither wife nor child, when he went to Worms, yet, there were many of his followers who had families.

Another reason is the fact that the hymn was not published in the collection of Luther's hymns in 1524, and could, therefore, not have been composed in 1521.[5] Warkernagel thinks it therefore very improbable that Luther should have kept this his most powerful production locked up in his desk. Achelis states that Luther's great modesty prevented him from publishing this hymn, although it was already made years before. But true as this may be, it is not sufficient to explain the late publication. But the difficulty is removed by admitting that our hymn was not originally intended for the congregation, but was rather an occasional hymn, giving

5 So Knaake, Luther's Lied "Ein feste Burg," im Jahre, 1527, gedichtet, p. 40. See also Hallesche Zeitung, March 21, 1904.

expression of Luther's feelings at the time when it was composed.

Besides, it must be asked under which rubric of the church-year or the Sunday-service could this hymn have been inserted. We must not forget that in 1521 the German people in its majority considered Luther's cause not yet as its own. It looked upon the bold monk, who had dared to oppose the greatest power of the middle ages, papacy, with silent astonishment which found its expression in the words of George von Frundsberg: "My poor monk, my poor monk, thou art going to make such a stand as neither I nor any of my companions in arms have ever done in our hottest battles. If thou art sure of the justice of thy cause, then forward in God's name, and be of good courage. God will not forsake thee."[6] After the Diet of Worms, however, the German people soon learned to consider Luther's cause as its own; by degrees the contents of the hymn went into the general consciousness of the larger part, yea, of the entire Evangelical people and the hymn was printed as the battle-hymn of the Reformation. And thus it is used to this day; its proper place in the divine service is almost exclusively at the festival of the Reformation.

6 Cyriacus Spangenberg, Adelsspiegel II, p. 54.

IV

TRANSLATIONS

UR hymn was first published in *Geistliche Lieder auffs neu gebessert zu Wittenberg. D. Mart. Luther,* 1529. It is possible that it was already issued in 1528. However this may be, it soon found its way into the Churches of the Reformation, and is to this day found in the hymn-books of the different Protestant denominations. Like the grand hymn of the Latin Church, *Dies Irae,*[7] it has often been translated and has challenged and defied the skill of translators and imitators. It is true that the Latin hymn has oftener been translated into English than Luther's but the latter's hymn has been translated into many more languages than Thomas a Celano's *Dies Irae,* which has mainly vexed English and German translators.

As early as 1531, our hymn was issued in the *Low Saxon* (niedersaechisch) dialect in the Rostock hymn-book, edited in 1531 by Joachim Slueter, and was reprinted in the *Hamburgischen Niedersaechsischen Gesangbuecher des 16 Jahrhunderts, kritisch bearbeitet,* etc., and edited by J. Geffken, Hamburg, 1857, where it opens thus:

7 See Pick, art. "Dies Irae," in the October number of "The Open Court," Chicago, 1911.

"En vaste Borg ys unser Godt,
ein gude wehr unnd Wapen."

In the *Low German* (niederdeutsch, platt-deutsch) dialect our hymn is found in De CL Psalmen Davids in Nederduytschen Dichte gestellt door Willem Van Haecht, Amsterdam, 1633, Den XLVI Psalm, where it opens thus:

"En vaste Borcht is onse Godt,
Een goet geweer end Wapen."

It early became known in the Churches of Sweden, Denmark, Iceland; a Latin translation commencing:

"Ark firma noster est Deus,
Et armatura fortis."

is dated 1578, and another beginning:

"Turris Deus fortissima,
Munimen expetendum."

belongs to the year 1585.

In looking over the translations of our hymn, we find that the largest number was made into *English*. At what time the hymn became known in England we know not, but we find an allusion to it in Bishop Miles Coverdale's Goostly Psalmes and Spiritualle Songes, ("Remains," published by the Parker Society, 1846), where on p. 569 we read:

"Our God is a defence and towre
A good armoure and good weapon,
He hath been our sure helpe and succure
In all the troubles that we have been in."

The rest is from Ps. 46.

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learned from an article by the late Dr. Schmucker, published in the Lutheran, (Philadelphia, Jan. 23, 1888). The first faithful and forcible version, which is still used in many collections, is Carlyle's rendering, first published in 1831, which has suffered many later revisions.

Another translation which is used in many American Hymnals is that by Fred. H. Hedge, first published in "Hymns for the Church of Christ," Boston, 1852.

We refrain from giving specimens of the different translations, many of which are only found in magazines and religious papers. In examining our collection we find the following changes which some translators have allowed themselves. In *two* instances the stanza consists of only 7 lines; in *one* case of 8; in *three* of 10 and in *one* of 12 lines.[9] Aside from such changes, we notice how much difficulty the very first line has caused the translators:

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9 For the benefit of the reader we give the first stanza in twelve lines:

"God is the city of our strength!
Our hearts, crushing cry;
He is our bulwark and defence—
Our arms for victory.
He helps our souls through earth's distress
That meets us in the wilderness.
Satan, the old malignant foe,
Now works, with purposed mind, our woe,
Perfidious cunning, fiendish might,
He bears, as weapons for the fight,
Whilst equal none on earth has he,
To struggle for the mastery."

The translator is Henrietta J. Fry, in "Hymns of the Reformation," London, 1845, p. 61,—with the remark, "Luther's Hymn of Triumph on the 46th Psalm. Composed A. D. 1520; printed A. D. 1533."

God is our refuge and strong fence.[10]
God is our Refuge in distress (3)
A safe stronghold our God is still (5)
A tower of safety is our God (2)
Our God a fortress is most strong.
A strong tower is our God's great name.
A mighty fortress is our God. (12)
A strong tower is the Lord our God.
A castle is our God, a tower.
A fortress firm and steadfast Rock.
God is our stronghold firm and sure.
A sure stronghold our God is He. (2)
A fortress firm is God our Lord.
Our God, a tower of strength is He. (2)
A fast, firm fortress is our God. (3)
A stronghold firm, a trusty shield.
A mountain fortress is our God.
God, *our own God*, is a strong tower.
A sure defence, a fort, a tower.
A mighty Bulwark is our God. (2)
God is our tower of strength and grace.
Our God, He is a fortress tower.
A fast-set bulwark is our God.
A tower of strength is God our Lord.
Our God, He is a castle strong.
God is our Refuge and our Rock.
Our God stands firm, a rock and tow'r.
The Lord our God is a strong tower.
God is our fortress, firm and sure.
A tower of strength our God is still (3)
A firm defence our God is still.
A fortress strong is God, our God.
Our God's a fortress all secure.
Our God is a stronghold, indeed.
Tower of defence is our God.
A fortress sure is God our King.
Strong tower and refuge is our God.

10 The number indicates that this line is the beginning of three translations.

A moveless Fortress is our God.
A stronghold sure our God remains.
Our God's a fortress sure indeed.
A rock-bound fortress is our God.
A tower of strength is still our God.
A mighty stronghold is our God.
A solid bulwark is our God.
A Fortress firm, a shield, a Sword.
Our God a solid rampart is.
A firm-built fortress is our God.
Our God a stronghold is indeed.
A stable fort our God abides.
God is stronghold and a tower.
A tower of refuge is our God.

From this list of the first line it will be seen that the last version of our hymn has not yet been made. Says the late B. M. Schmucker, one of the few who was well acquainted with the different English translations existing in his time, (*Lutheran,* February 23, 1888) :

"The varied efforts of so many persons of acknowledged talents and experience as translators, devoted to the rendering of this hymn, bear testimony to the great difficulty of the task. If any translation made had been approved as really satisfactory, there would not have been so many renewed struggles with the hymn. I do not know that any other hymn or poem has been so frequently assaulted, and has never yet been completely conquered.[11] It must be remembered that in the original the hymn stands out pre-eminent amid the

11 Yes, the famous judgment hymn by Thomas a Celano, known as the Dies Irae. Prof. Porter, who rendered our hymn,

hundreds of thousands which have been written in the German language, as the grandest and noblest in rugged force and fierce energy. Its measure as well as its thoughts are peculiar to itself. No other hymn has ever been written in its peculiar measure, which had any claim to merit. I am not unaware that some few rash writers have attempted to use the measure, but their utter failure only adds force to the statement. Luther was master and moulder of the German tongue, and in this Hymn all the mighty energy of the Reformer's faith and defiance forced the German language to an utterance of such strength and dignity as never was equalled before or since. The translator has to contend not only with the difficulties of reproducing the noble heroic thoughts, but at the same time he must endeavor to create anew in a foreign tongue the form which was in no small degree made possible only by the deep vowel sounds and rugged syllables of the German tongue, and at the same time Luther's music must be constantly sounding in his ear; for the thought, the language and the music are inseperably united. It is very probable that a translation which shall adequately present the grand qualities of the original in the English language is simply impossible, and that not from any lack of skill in the translator, but because the inherent qualities

as well as Stryker and Coles, have also attacked the Dies Irae. Dr. Stryker, if I am not mistaken, composed nine or ten lines, and Dr. Coles, a physician of Newark, N. J., caps the climax by his seventeen versions. The English and German translators of this Latin poem can be counted by the hundreds.

and peculiarities of the English language make it unequal to the demand. As a rule, the very noblest hymns in any language are those most difficult of translation. While therefore we recognize the skill of the translator, and are grateful for the measure of success, we cannot but regret that the nearest approaches which have yet been made to a satisfactory translation of this hymn leave much to be desired, even though we may scarcely hope ever to obtain what we wish."

Before mentioning the other languages into which our hymn has been translated, we subjoin the translations of two scholars, who deserve a place among the noted translations of "Ein feste Burg," viz.: of Joseph A. Seiss and Thomas Conrad Porter. The first attempt at translating our hymn, made by the late Dr. Seiss of Philadelphia, goes back to the year 1861. Not satisfied with his first effort, he made several other attempts, the last of which was published in his "Recreation Songs," published in 1887.

The other by Dr. Porter at Easton, Penn., after previous efforts, was finished in February, 1888, and as Schaff says, "is almost equal to that of Thomas Carlyle in its reproduction of the rugged force of the original and surpasses it in rhythm and accuracy." With Porter's version, Prof. Schaff closes the sixth volume of his "History of the Christian Church," (which treats of the German Reformation), New York, 1888.

JOS. A. SEISS.

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free through every need
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The old murd'rous foe
Now means deadly woe;
Much craft and great power,
Are his dread arms for war;
On earth is no one like him.

By our own strength we naught can do,
Full soon would come destruction;
But for us fights the Hero true,
Of God's own self's election.
Who's He, would ye wist?
He's called Jesus Christ,
Lord of Sabaoth,
The only God in truth;
The field He must hold surely.

And were the world all devils o'er,
Who'd fain devour and end us;
We're still not so o'erwhelmed with fear,
The victory must attend us.
This world's prince so fell,
May threat'n as he will,
Still full safe are we;
For judged and banned is he;
One little text can stay him.

The Word they shall let stand for aye,
Nor thanks be to them for it;
'Tis He upholds us 'mid the fray,
With his good gifts and Spirit.
If they take our life,
Goods, name, child and wife,
Let all this be done!
They yet have nothing won;
And we still have the Kingdom.

THOS. C. PORTER.

A Tower of Strength our God is still,
A good Defense and Weapon;
He helps us free from all the ill,
That us hath overtaken.
Our old, mortal Foe
Now aims his fell blow,
Great might and deep guile
His horrid coat-of-mail;
On earth is no one like him.

By might of ours can naught be done;
Our fate were soon decided—
But for us fights the Champion,
By God Himself provided.
Who is This, ask ye?
Jesus Christ! 'Tis He!
Lord of Sabaoth,
True God and Saviour both,
Omnipotent in battle.

Did devils fill the earth and air,
All eager to devour us,
Our steadfast hearts need feel no care,
Lest they should overpower us.
The grim Prince of Hell,
With rage though he swell,
Hurts us not a whit,—
Because his doom is writ;
A little word can rout him.

The Word of God will never yield
To any creature living;
He stands with us upon the field,
His grace and Spirit giving.
Take they child and wife,
Goods, name, fame and life—
Though all this be done,
Yet have they nothing won;
The Kingdom still remaineth.

Besides into *Low Saxon, Low German* and *English,* our hymn has been translated into the following languages known to us:

1—Akra or Ga.
2—Arabic.
3—Armenian (Ararat).
4—Batta (Angkola).
5—Batta (Toba).
6—Bohemian.
7—Canarese.
8—Chinese, (Hakka Colloquial).
9—Danish.
10—Dutch.
11—Esthonian (Reval).
12—Esthonian (Dorpat).
13—Ewe.
14—Finnish.
15—French.
16—Greek (Ancient).
17—Greek (Modern).
18—Greenlandish.
19—Hebrew.
20—Herero.
21—Hindi.
22—Hottentot.
23—Hungarian.
24—Icelandic.
25—Italian.
26—Kafir or Xosa.
27—Labrador.
28—Lapponese.
29—Latin.
30—Lettish.
31—Lithuanian.
32—Malayalam.
33—Moskito.
34—Mundari or Mondari.
35—Negro-English.
36—Norwegian.
37—Polish.
38—Russian.
39—Scotch-Broad.
40—Sesuto or Suto.
41—Spanish.
42—Swedish.
43—Tamil or Tamul.
44—Telugu or Telinga.
45—Tibetan.
46—Tshi or Otshi or Ashante.
47—Tulu.
48—Welsh.
49—Wendish (Upper).
50—Wendish (Lower).
51—Zulu.

We close this monograph with the Latin translation of Phil. Buttmann, the famous grammarian and philologist, published in 1830, on the occasion of the jubilee to celebrate the publication of the Augsburg Confession in 1530. This translation, which we give for the benefit of students, was reprinted by Trench in his *Sacred Latin Poetry,* London, 1864, also by March in his *Latin Hymns with English Notes,* New York, 1875.

Arx firma Deus noster est
  Is telum, quo nitamur;
Is explicat ex omnibus
  Queis malis implicamur.
    Nam cui semper mos,
    Iam ter terret nos,
    Per astum, per vim,
    Saevum levat sitim;
  Nil par in terris illi.

In nobis nihil situm est,
  Quo minus pereamus;
Quem Deus ducem posuit,
  Is facit ut vivamus.
    Sein quis hoc potest?
    Jesus Christus est,
    Qui, dux coelitum;
    Non habet aemulum;
  Is vicerit profecto.

Sit mundus plenus daemonum,
  Nos cupiant vorare,
Non timor est; victoria
  Nil potest nos frustrare.
    Hem dux saeculi!
    Invitus abi!
    In nos nil potes,
    Iam judicatus es;
  Vel vocula te sternat.

Hoc verbum non pessum dabunt,
Nec gratiam merebunt.
In nobis Christi spiritus
Et munera vigebunt:
Tollant corpus, rem,
Mundique omnem spem:
Tollant! jubilent!
Non lucrum hinc ferent;
Manebit regnum nobis.