

CHAPTER X - General Persecutions in Germany

The general persecutions in Germany were principally occasioned by the doctrines and ministry of Martin Luther. Indeed, the pope was so terrified at the success of that courageous reformer, that he determined to engage the emperor, Charles V, at any rate, in the scheme to attempt their extirpation.

To this end

- 1. He gave the emperor two hundred thousand crowns in ready money.
- 2. He promised to maintain twelve thousand foot, and five thousand horse, for the space of six months, or during a campaign.
- 3. He allowed the emperor to receive one half the revenues of the clergy of the empire during the war.
- 4. He permitted the emperor to pledge the abbey lands for five hundred thousand crowns, to assist in carrying on hostilities against the Protestants.

Thus prompted and supported, the emperor undertook the extirpation of the Protestants, against whom, indeed, he was particularly enraged himself; and, for this purpose, a formidable army was raised in Germany, Spain, and Italy.

The Protestant princes, in the meantime, formed a powerful confederacy, in order to repel the impending blow. A great army was raised, and the command given to the elector of Saxony, and the landgrave of Hesse. The imperial forces were commanded by the emperor of Germany in person, and the eyes of all Europe were turned on the event of the war.

At length the armies met, and a desperate engagement ensued, in which the Protestants were defeated, and the elector of Saxony and the landgrave of Hesse both taken prisoners. This fatal blow was succeeded by a horrid persecution, the severities of which were such that exile might be deemed a mild fate, and concealment in a dismal wood pass for happiness. In such times a cave is a palace, a rock a bed of down, and wild roots delicacies.

Those who were taken experienced the most cruel tortures that infernal imaginations could invent; and by their constancy evinced that a real Christian can surmount every difficulty, and despite every danger acquire a crown of martyrdom.

Henry Voes and John Esch, being apprehended as Protestants, were brought to examination. Voes, answering for himself and the other, gave the following answers to some questions asked by a priest, who examined them by order of the magistracy.

Priest. Were you not both, some years ago, Augustine friars?

Voes. Yes.

Priest. How came you to quit the bosom of the Church at Rome?

Voes. On account of her abominations.

Priest. In what do you believe?

Voes. In the Old and New Testaments.

Priest. Do you believe in the writings of the fathers, and the decrees of the Councils?

Voes. Yes, if they agree with Scripture.

Priest. Did not Martin Luther seduce you both?

Voes. He seduced us even in the very same manner as Christ seduced the apostles; that is, he made us sensible of the frailty of our bodies, and the value of our souls.

This examination was sufficient. They were both condemned to the flames, and soon after suffered with that manly fortitude which becomes Christians when they receive a crown of martyrdom.

Henry Sutphen, an eloquent and pious preacher, was taken out of his bed in the middle of the night, and compelled to walk barefoot a considerable way, so that his feet were terribly cut. He desired a horse, but his conductors said, in derision, "A horse for a heretic! no no, heretics may go barefoot." When he arrived at the place of his destination, he was condemned to be burnt; but, during the execution, many indignities were offered him, as those who attended not content with what he suffered in the flames, cut and slashed him in a most terrible manner.

Many were murdered at Halle; Middleburg being taken by storm all the Protestants were put to the sword, and great numbers were burned at Vienna.

An officer being sent to put a minister to death, pretended, when he came to the clergyman's house, that his intentions were only to pay him a visit. The minister, not suspecting the intended cruelty, entertained his supposed guest in a very cordial manner. As soon as dinner was over, the officer said to some of his attendants, "Take this clergyman, and hang him." The attendants themselves were so shocked after the civility they had seen, that they hesitated to perform the commands of their master; and the minister said, "Think what a sting will remain on your conscience, for thus violating the laws of hospitality." The officer, however, insisted upon being obeyed, and the attendants, with reluctance, performed the execrable office of executioners.

Peter Spengler, a pious divine, of the town of Schalet, was thrown into the river, and drowned. Before he was taken to the banks of the stream which was to become his grave, they led him to the market place that his crimes might be proclaimed; which were, not going to Mass, not making confession, and not believing in transubstantiation. After this ceremony was over, he made a most excellent discourse to the people, and concluded with a kind hymn, of a very edifying nature.

A Protestant gentleman being ordered to lose his head for not renouncing his religion, went cheerfully to the place of execution. A friar came to him, and said these words in a low tone of voice, "As you have a great reluctance publicly to abjure your faith, whisper your confession in my ear, and I will absolve your sins." To this the gentleman loudly replied, "Trouble me not, friar, I have confessed my sins to God, and obtained absolution through the merits of Jesus Christ." Then turning to the executioner, he said, "Let me not be pestered with these men, but perform your duty," on which his head was struck off at a single blow.

Wolfgang Scuch, and John Huglin, two worthy ministers, were burned, as was Leonard Keyser, a student of the University of Wertembergh; and George Carpenter, a Bavarian, was hanged for refusing to recant Protestantism.

The persecutions in Germany having subsided many years, again broke out in 1630, on account of the war between the emperor and the king of Sweden, for the latter was a Protestant prince, and consequently the Protestants of Germany espoused his cause, which greatly exasperated the emperor against them.

The imperialists having laid siege to the town of Passetwalk, (which was defended by the Swedes) took it by storm, and committed the most horrid cruelties on the occasion. They pulled down the churches, burnt the houses, pillaged the properties, massacred the ministers, put the garrison to the sword, hanged the townsmen, ravished the women, smothered the children, etc., etc.

A most bloody tragedy was transacted at Magdeburg, in the year 1631. The generals Tilly and Pappenheim, having taken that Protestant city by storm, upwards of twenty thousand persons, without distinction of rank, sex, or age, were slain during the carnage, and six thousand were drowned in attempting to escape over the river Elbe. After this fury had subsided, the remaining inhabitants were stripped naked, severely scourged, had their ears cropped, and being yoked together like oxen were turned adrift.

The town of Hoxter was taken by the popish army, and all the inhabitants as well as the garrison were put to the sword; the houses even were set on fire, the bodies being consumed in the flames.

At Griphenberg, when the imperial forces prevailed, they shut up the senators in the senate chamber, and surrounding it by lighted straw suffocated them.

Franhental surrendered upon articles of capitulation, yet the inhabitants were as cruelly used as at other places; and at Heidelberg many were shut up in prison and starved.

The cruelties used by the imperial troops, under Count Tilly in Saxony, are thus enumerated.

Half strangling, and recovering the persons again repeatedly. Rolling sharp wheels over the fingers and toes. Pinching the thumbs in a vice. Forcing the most filthy things down the throat, by which many were choked. Tying cords round the head so tightly that the blood gushed out of the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. Fastening burning matches to the fingers, toes, ears, arms, legs, and even the tongue. Putting powder in the mouth and setting fire to it, by which the head was shattered to pieces. Tying bags of powder to all parts of the body, by which the person was blown up. Drawing cords backwards and forwards through the fleshy parts. Making incisions with bodkins and knives in the skin. Running wires through the nose, ears, lips, etc. Hanging Protestants up by the legs, with their heads over a fire, by which they were smoke dried. Hanging up by one arm until it was dislocated. Hanging upon hooks by the ribs. Forcing people to drink until they burst. Baking many in hot ovens. Fixing weights to the feet, and drawing up several with pulleys. Hanging, stifling, roasting, stabbing, frying, racking, ravishing, ripping open, breaking the bones, rasping off the flesh, tearing with wild horses, drowning, strangling, burning, broiling, crucifying, immuring, poisoning, cutting off tongues, noses, ears, etc., sawing off the limbs, hacking to pieces, and drawing by the heels through the streets.

The enormous cruelties will be a perpetual stain on the memory of Count Tilly, who not only committed, but even commanded the troops to put them in practice. Wherever he came, the most horrid barbarities and cruel depredations ensued: famine and conflagration marked his progress: for he destroyed all the provisions he could not take with him, and burnt all the towns before he left them; so that the full result of his conquests were murder, poverty, and desolation.

An aged and pious divine they stripped naked, tied him on his back upon a table, and fastened a large, fierce cat upon his belly. They then pricked and tormented the cat in such a manner that the creature with rage tore his belly open, and gnawed his bowels.

Another minister and his family were seized by these inhuman monsters; they ravished his wife and daughter before his face; stuck his infant son upon the point of a lance, and then surrounding him with his whole library of books, they set fire to them, and he was consumed in the midst of the flames.

In Hesse-Cassel some of the troops entered an hospital, in which were principally mad women, when stripping all the poor wretches naked, they made them run about the streets for their diversion, and then put them all to death.

In Pomerania, some of the imperial troops entering a small town, seized upon all the young women, and girls of upwards of ten years, and then placing their parents in a circle, they ordered them to sing Psalms, while they ravished their children, or else they swore they would cut them to pieces afterward. They then took all the married women who had young children, and threatened, if they did not consent to the gratification of their lusts, to burn their children before their faces in a large fire, which they had kindled for that purpose.

A band of Count Tilly's soldiers meeting a company of merchants belonging to Basel, who were returning from the great market of Strassburg, attempted to surround them; all escaped, however, but ten, leaving their properties behind. The ten who were taken begged hard for their lives: but the soldiers murdered them saying, "You must die because you are heretics, and have got no money."

The same soldiers met with two countesses, who, together with some young ladies, the daughters of one of them, were taking an airing in a landau. The soldiers spared their lives, but treated them with the greatest indecency, and having stripped them all stark naked, bade the coachman drive on.

By means and mediation of Great Britain, peace was at length restored to Germany, and the Protestants remained unmolested for several years, until some new disturbances broke out in the Palatinate, which were thus occasioned:

The great Church of the Holy Ghost, at Heidelberg, had, for many years, been shared equally by the Protestants and Roman Catholics in this manner: the Protestants performed divine service in the nave or body of the church; and the Roman Catholics celebrated Mass in the choir. Though this had been the custom from time immemorial, the elector of the Palatinate, at length, took it into his head not to suffer it any longer, declaring, that as Heidelberg was the place of his residence, and the Church of the Holy Ghost the cathedral of his principal city, divine service ought to be performed only according to the rites of the Church of which he was a member. He then forbade the Protestants to enter the church, and put the papists in possession of the whole.

The aggrieved people applied to the Protestant powers for redress, which so much exasperated the elector, that he suppressed the Heidelberg catechism. The Protestant powers, however, unanimously agreed to demand satisfaction, as the elector, by this conduct, had broken an article of the treaty of Westphalia; and the courts of Great Britain, Prussia, Holland, etc., sent deputies to the elector, to represent the injustice of his proceedings, and to threaten, unless he changed his behavior to the Protestants in the Palatinate, that they would treat their Roman Catholic subjects with the greatest severity. Many violent disputes took place between the Protestant powers and those of the elector, and these were greatly augmented by the following incident: the coach of the Dutch minister standing before the door of the resident sent by the prince of Hesse, the host was by chance being carried to a sick person; the coachman took not the least notice, which those who attended the host observing, pulled him from his box, and compelled him to kneel; this violence to the domestic of a public minister was highly resented by all the Protestant deputies; and still more to heighten these differences, the Protestants presented to the deputies three additional articles of complaint.

- 1. That military executions were ordered against all Protestant shoemakers who should refuse to contribute to the Masses of St. Crispin.
- 2. that the Protestants were forbid to work on popish holy days, even in harvest time, under very heavy penalties, which occasioned great inconveniences, and considerably prejudiced public business.
- 3. That several Protestant ministers had been dispossessed of their churches, under pretence of their having been originally founded and built by Roman Catholics.

The Protestant deputies at length became so serious as to intimate to the elector, that force of arms should compel him to do the justice he denied to their representations. This menace brought him to reason, as he well knew the impossibility of carrying on a war against the powerful states who threatened him. He therefore agreed that the body of the Church of the Holy Ghost should be restored to the Protestants. He

restored the Heidelberg catechism, put the Protestant ministers again in possession of the churches of which they had been dispossessed, allowed the Protestants to work on popish holy days, and, ordered, that no person should be molested for not kneeling when the host passed by.

These things he did through fear; but to show his resentment to his Protestant subjects, in other circumstances where Protestant states had no right to interfere, he totally abandoned Heidelberg, removing all the courts of justice to Mannheim, which was entirely inhabited by Roman Catholics. He likewise built a new palace there, making it his place of residence; and, being followed by the Roman Catholics of Heidelberg, Mannheim became a flourishing place.

In the meantime the Protestants of Heidelberg sunk into poverty and many of them became so distressed as to quit their native country, and seek an asylum in Protestant states. A great number of these coming into England, in the time of Queen Anne, were cordially received there, and met with a most humane assistance, both by public and private donations.

In 1732, above thirty thousand Protestants were, contrary to the treaty of Westphalia, driven from the archbishopric of Salzburg. They went away in the depth of winter, with scarcely enough clothes to cover them, and without provisions, not having permission to take anything with them. The cause of these poor people not being publicly espoused by such states as could obtain them redress, they emigrated to various Protestant countries, and settled in places where they could enjoy the free exercise of their religion, without hurting their consciences, and live free from the trammels of popish superstition, and the chains of papal tyranny.