

A SERMON OR DISCOURSE OF MARTIN LUTHER¹

THAT CHILDREN BE KEPT AT SCHOOL.²

AFTER the introductory epistle to Spengler, and a genial preface to his fellow-preachers whose zeal in the same cause he would inspire, Luther begins :

Beloved Friends:—Because I see that the common man is indifferent to the maintenance of schools, and wholly withholds his children from instruction, and gives himself solely to food and belly-care, and besides will not or cannot consider what an abominable, un-Christian thing he purposes in this, and what a great, murderous damage he is doing in all the world for the Devil's service, I have determined to put out this admonition to you, if perchance there still be a few people who believe yet in any measure that there is a God in heaven and a hell ready for unbelievers (for all the world acts as if there were neither a God in heaven nor a devil in hell), and who will heed this admonition, and so I shall tell you what use and harm there is in this matter.

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Civil authority is a glorious, divine institution and a fine gift of God, who indeed founded and instituted it and wishes it maintained, as being by all means indispensable ; and were it not, no man could stand before another, but one must needs devour the other as do the unreasoning beasts. Hence, just as the preach-

¹ Translated by W. H. Carruth.

² On this subject Luther had already published in 1524 his Address to the Councillors of all German Cities, that they should establish Christian schools; as well as remarks on the subject in the address *An den Adel*, and elsewhere. In the *Kirchenordnung* (parish organisation) for Leisnig, Wittenberg and other places, he always made provision for free schools, for girls as well as boys. The present pamphlet, dedicated to Lazarus Spengler, syndic of Nuremberg, differs from the address to the councillors in appealing to the parents and guardians. It contains the substance of sermons addressed "more than once" to the Wittenbergers, and finished perhaps at Coburg, in 1530.

er's office and honor is to make of sinners naught but saints, of devils' children children of God, so it is the work and honor of the civil authorities to make human beings of wild beasts, and to uphold men so that they may not become beasts. The authorities defend every one's body, so that not every comer may throttle it ; they guard every man's wife, so that not every comer may take and abuse her ; they guard everybody's child, daughter and son, so that no one may steal them away ; they protect everybody's house and home so that no one may break in and do violence ; they preserve for everybody his fields, cattle, and goods, so that no one may attack, steal, rob, and harm them.

There is naught of such protection among beasts, and would be none among men were there no civil authority, but men would become for sure mere wild beasts. Thinkest thou not, if birds and beasts could speak, they would say : "O dear men, ye are not men but very gods beside us. How safely ye sit, live and hold all things, while we have nothing safe one from another a single hour, neither life, nor house, nor food. Woe to your ingratitude, that ye see not what a glorious life our Lord God has given you above us beasts !"

Now then, because this is certain, that civil government is a divine creation and ordinance, and besides a necessary office and institution for us men in this life, . . . it is easy to reckon that God did not order and found it that it should go down, but he wishes it maintained. Now who will maintain it if not we men to whom God commended it and who in truth need it? Wild beasts will not do it, nor wood and stone. But what sort of men can uphold it? Forsooth, not only those who would rule with the fist, as many now dream. For where the fist alone tries to rule, the end for sure is savagery, so that whoever overweighs the other may bag him ; as indeed we have examples enough before our eyes of what good the fist can do without wisdom or reason. . . .

Accordingly, since our government in German lands must and does follow Roman imperial law, which is thus the wisdom and reason of our government, given of God, it follows that said government cannot be upheld, but must go down, if the said law is not maintained. Well, who shall maintain it? Fist and armor cannot do it ; heads and books must do it ; it must be taught and remembered what the law and wisdom of our temporal realm is. Although it is fine when an emperor, prince, or lord is himself by nature so wise and prudent that he can hit the right by heart as Duke Frederick (the Wise) of Saxony, and Fabian von Feilitz

could (and I have experienced ; the living I will not name), yet since such birds are rare, and the example bad on account of the others who are not so gifted by nature, therefore it is better in the long run in ruling to keep the common book-law ; it has thus more authority and respect, and needs no miracle or exception.

Now the jurists and scholars are the people in this world who uphold this law, and thereby the civil empire ; and just as in Christ's kingdom a pious theologian and upright preacher is called God's angel, a redeemer, prophet, priest, tutor, and teacher, so in the temporal realm one might call a pious jurist and faithful scholar the emperor's prophet, priest, angel, and redeemer. On the other hand, as a heretic or false preacher in Christ's kingdom is a devil, thief, murderer, and blasphemer, so is a false and unfaithful jurist in the emperor's house or realm a thief and knave, a traitor, scoundrel, and devil of all the realm.

But when I speak of jurists I mean not only the doctors of law but the whole trade : chancellors, clerks, judges, advocates, notaries, and whatever has to do with the law of the state, and even the great jacks which are called councillors at court, for they too practise the work of law, or the office of jurist. And as the word councillor, or man of reason (Rath) is not far from the word treason (Verrath), so are many of these councillors at court not far from the latter, and at times give their masters reasons such that no treason could betray them as surely.

Now thou seest of what use a pious lawyer or jurist may be ; yea, who will or can tell it all ? For God's work and ordinances bring ever so many and great fruits that they are neither to be told nor comprehended. Firstly, he upholds and helps forward with his book, through divine ordinance, the whole civil government, emperor, princes, lords, cities, land, and people, as above said ; for such must all be upheld by wisdom and law. And who will sufficiently praise this work alone ? Thence hast thou a guard and shield for thy life and limb against neighbors, foes, murderers, and thereafter protection and peace for wife, daughter, son, hearth, home, servants, money, goods, fields and whatever is there ; for all this is shrined in the law, walled and well hedged. What all this means no man could ever in any books write out, for who will say how unspeakable a blessing is peace ? how much it both gives and saves in a year ?

Such great works may thy son do, and become such a useful person if thou hold him to it and have him learn, and thou thyself mayest become a sharer in them and thus lay out thy money so

preciously. Shall it not be to thee a gentle joy and a great honor when thou seest thy son an angel in the kingdom and an apostle of the emperor, and besides a corner-and-foundation-stone of temporal peace on earth? And know for certain that God himself holds these things thus, and that it is even so. For although by such works one is not made acceptable or saved in the eyes of God, yet this is a joyous comfort that such works please God so well, and still more where such a man is a believer and in the kingdom of Christ; for thereby we thank him for his benefits and offer the fairest thank offering, the loftiest service of praise.

Yea, thou must needs be a rude, ungrateful clod, and fit to be driven of men among beasts, if, seeing that thy son might become a man who might help the emperor uphold realm, sword, and crown, and the prince rule his land, aid and counsel cities and lands, help so many men protect life, wife, children, goods, and honor,—if, knowing this, thou wouldst not risk on it enough that he might learn and come to it: Tell me, what of these things do all the convents and monasteries. I would take the work of one faithful and pious jurist and notary for the holiness of all the priests, monks, and nuns alive, where they are at their best. And if such great and good works move thee not, yet should God's honor and approval alone move thee, since thou knowest that thou thereby dost thank God so gloriously and do Him so great a service, as has been said.

It is, indeed, a shameful contempt of God that we do not grant such glorious, divine works to our children, but rather thrust them into the service of greed and the belly alone, and let them learn nothing but seeking food, like a swine, ever rooting with its nose in the mire, instead of rearing them for such a worthy work and station. Surely either we are out of our wits or we do not really love our children.

Now if thou hast a child that is fit to learn, and canst hold him to it, but dost not, and goest thy way and askest not what shall become of the civil kingdom, its law and peace, thou doest all in thy might against civil authority, like the Turk, yea, like the Devil himself. For thou withdrawest from the kingdom, principality, land, and city, a saviour, comfort, corner-stone, helper, and rescuer, and on thy account the emperor loses sword and crown, the land loses protection and peace, and thou art the man by whose fault, as far as in thee is, no man may hold secure his life, wife, child, house, home and goods; but thou dost offer them all freely in the shambles, and givest cause that all men become mere beasts,

and one at last eat the other. All this thou dost surely do, especially when thou dost knowingly keep thy son from such a helpful station for the belly's sake.

Now art thou not a fine, useful man in the world? who dost use daily the empire and its peace, and in return for thanks dost rob it of thy son, and thrust him into greed, and strive with all energy to the end that there may be no one who shall help uphold empire, law, and peace, but that all shall go down together, whereas thou thyself hast and holdest life and limb, goods, and honor, through such government.

I will say nothing here of what a fine delight it is that a man be learned, though he never have an office, so that he may read all sorts of things at home by himself, talk and mingle with learned people, travel and do business in strange lands. For such delights move, perchance, few people. But since once for all thou seekest Mammon and food so sharply, look hither how many and great goods God hath founded on schools and scholars, that thou mayest not despise learning and knowledge because of poverty. Behold, emperors and kings must have chancellors and clerks, councillors, jurists, and scholars; no prince but must have chancellors, jurists, councillors, scholars, and clerks; so, too, all counts, lords, cities, and castles, must have syndics, town clerks, and other scholars; there is no nobleman but must have a clerk. And if I may speak of common scholars, where are the miners and merchants and traders? Reckon up how many kings there are, princes, counts, lords, cities, and villages. Where will they find learned people three years hence, when already the want is beginning here and there? I hold in truth kings must become jurists, princes must become chancellors, counts and lords must become clerks, burgomasters become town clerks.

If indeed we do not take hold of this matter betimes we must become Tartars and Turks, and an unlearned common-school teacher or vagrant student become doctor and councillor at court. Therefore I hold that there has never been a better time than now to study, not alone because knowledge is so abundant and so cheap, but that great wealth and honor must follow, and those who study at this time will be precious people such that for one scholar two princes and three cities will contend; for thou hast but to look above thee or about thee to find that numberless offices will wait upon scholars ere yet ten years are past, and yet there be few that are trained for the same.

And not alone is such great reward set by God for such schools

and scholars; it is besides an honorable and divine reward; for it is earned by a divine and honorable office with many noble, good and useful works which please God and are called his service. The greedy-gut, on the contrary, acquires his property with contemptible and aggressive works, (even if they are not godless and sinful works,) and can have no joyous conscience about it, nor can he say that it is the service of God. Now I had liefer earn ten gulden at a work that might claim to be God's service than a thousand gulden at a work that was not God's service but only my own use and profit.

And beyond such honorable earnings they have also honor. For chancellors, city clerks, jurists, and the people that serve in these offices must sit near the head of the table and help counsel and rule, as said above; and they are indeed the lords of earth, though they be not so in person or through birth and position. For Daniel says he was obliged to do the king's work. And it is true, a chancellor must do imperial, royal or princely works or business; a city clerk must do the work of council and city, and all this with God and with honor whereto God gives blessing, fortune, and prosperity.

And what is an emperor, king, or prince, when they are not at war, but ruling with the law, save mere clerks or jurists, if one speaks with an eye to the work? For they have to do with the law, which is a juristic and clerkly work. And who rules land and people when there is peace and not war? Is it the mounted men and the generals? I think, indeed, it is the pen. What, meantime, is the greedy-gut doing with his mammon, who comes to no such honors, and at the same time smutches himself with his filthy lucre?

Thus the Emperor Justinian himself declares: "It behooves imperial majesty not simply to be decked with arms, but to be armed with laws." See there how strangely this emperor reverses his words, calling laws his harness and weapons, and weapons he calls his ornaments and decorations; would even make his clerks cuirassiers and warriors. And, forsooth, it is well said; for laws are indeed the right harness and weapons which uphold and guard land and people, yea the empire and civil government, as is above sufficiently told, that wisdom is better than power. And pious jurists are indeed the real cuirassiers who defend emperor and princes. And many such sayings could be cited from the poets and histories, but it grows too long. Solomon himself mentions that a poor man by his wisdom saved a city against a mighty king.

Not that by this I would have warriors, troopers and what pertains to battle belittled, despised, or abolished; they too, if they are obedient, help with the fist guard peace and all else; every one has his honor from God, as well as his office and his work.

But I must praise my own trade a bit because my neighbors have turned out so ill, and it is in danger of being despised; just as St. Paul continually praises his office, so that some think he does it too much and is conceited. He who would praise and honor the fist and warriors will find enough for which they are to be praised; so I myself have done (I believe) in other pamphlets honestly and heartily. For the jurists and clerklings please me not who praise themselves in such wise as to despise and ridicule other stations as though they were the only people, and no one else in the world were fit for aught, as the shavelings (priests) have done hitherto and the whole papacy. One should praise as high as ever one can all stations and works of God, and despise no one for the sake of another.

Again, there are certain dirt-diggers¹ who have a conceit that the name of clerk, or writer, is scarcely worthy to be named or heard by them. Well, pay no heed to that, but think thus: The good fellows must have some sort of pastime and pleasure. So leave them the pleasure; but remain thou none the less a writer before God and the world; if they dig long thou shalt see after all that they honor the quill most highly, for they place it on hat and helmet, as though they would confess by this act that the quill is the topmost thing in the world, without which they are not prepared for battle, nor can march along in peace, still less dig so securely; for they too must use the peace which the emperor's preachers and teachers (the jurists) teach and uphold. Therefore thou seest that they place our tool, the quill, at the top, as is fitting, while their tool, the sword, they gird about their loins: there indeed it hangs fair and fit for their work; on the head it would not be becoming,—there the quill, or plume, must float.

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Some, indeed, think that the writer's is a slight and easy office, but to ride in armor and endure heat, frost, dust, thirst, and other discomfort,—that is labor. Yea, that is the common old daily song, that no one sees where the shoe pinches another; every one feels only his own discomfort, and envies the other's easy time. True it is, it would be hard for me to ride in armor; but then, I would like

¹ *Scharhansen*, trooper-jacks, but playing on *scharren*, to dig.

to see the trooper who could sit still with me a whole day and look into a book, even though he had not to pay heed, compose, think, or read. Ask a chancery-clerk, a preacher, or an orator what sort of work writing and speaking is; ask a schoolmaster what sort of work teaching and rearing of boys is.

Light is the quill, 'tis true, and no tool in all the trades easier to obtain than that of a writer, for it needs but a goose's wing, which are to be had anywhere in plenty for nothing; but yet there must go with it and do the work the best portion (the head), and the noblest member (the tongue), and the highest function (speech), that are in the human body, whereas in other offices either the fist, the foot, the back, or such members alone do the work, while the man can think, sing merrily, and jest freely, none of which a writer can do. Three fingers do it, they say of a writer, but the whole body and soul must take part.

I have heard it told of the dear and admirable Emperor Maximilian, when the great jacks murmured at his using so many clerks on embassies and otherwise, that he said: "How shall I manage? They will not let themselves be used, so I have to use clerks." And again he said: "Knights I can make, but doctors I cannot make." And I have heard of a fine nobleman who said: "I will have my son study; it is no great art to swing two legs over a horse and become a trooper; that he will learn soon, and will be well-mannered and well-spoken also."

Again I say, I wish to say this not out of contempt for the trooper's station, nor any other station, but as against the irresponsible dirt-diggers who despise all learning and knowledge, and have no other thought than that they wear armor and swing two legs across a horse, although they seldom have to do it, and to offset this have comfort, pleasure, joy, honor, and reward the whole year. It is indeed true, as they say, knowledge is easy to carry, and armor hard to carry; but on the other hand, bearing armor is soon learnt, but knowledge is not soon learnt, and not easy to use and apply.

They say, and it is the truth, the pope too was a pupil; therefore despise me not the fellows who say *Panem propter Deum* (bread, for God's sake!) before the doors and sing the bread-song; thou hearest, as the one hundred and thirteenth Psalm says, great princes and lords sing. I too was once such a crumb-steed (starveling), and received bread before the houses, especially at Eisenach, my dear city. Although afterwards my dear father kept me with all love and fidelity in the university at Erfurt, and by his sour

sweat and labor helped me to the point where I am, yet I have been a crumb-steed, and, in accordance with this psalm, have come so far by the aid of the pen that I would not now trade with the Turkish emperor, to have his possessions and be without my learning. Yea, I would not take for it the goods of the world many times heaped up; and yet I would not have come to this if I had not gotten into school and the writer's trade.

Therefore let thy son study with good heart, though he should go about for bread the while, and thou shalt give our Lord God a fine piece of wood, out of which he can carve thee a lord. The fact remains that thy son and mine, that is, common people's children, will have to rule the world, both in spiritual and temporal stations, as this psalm says. For the rich greedy-guts cannot and will not do it; they are mammon's hermits and monks, and must attend it day and night. And the born princes and lords are not equal to it alone, and especially are they wholly unable to understand the spiritual office. Therefore government of both sorts on earth must remain with the poor, middle-class common people, and their children.

And pay no heed if the common greedy-gut despises knowledge so mightily and says: Ha! if my son can write his mother tongue, read and reckon, he knows enough, I will put him with a merchant. They shall soon become so tame that they would gladly dig a scholar out of the earth ten yards deep with their fingers. For the merchant shall not be a merchant long if preaching and law fail. This I know forsooth: we theologians and jurists must remain, or we shall all go down together—that will not fail. When the theologians cease then God's word ceases, and there remain only heathen, yea, mere devils. When the jurists cease then law ceases together with peace, and there remains only plunder, murder, license, and force, yea, mere wild beasts. But what the merchant will earn and gain when peace ceases, his ledger will tell him when the time comes; and how much use all his goods will be when preaching fails, his conscience perchance shall say.

Here I ought to tell how many scholars we must have in medicine and other free arts; of which two points one might write a great book and preach on them half a year. Where should preachers and jurists and physicians come from if there were no grammar and other rhetorical studies? From this source they must needs all flow. But it grows too long and too large for me. I say this in brief: A diligent, pious schoolmaster, or magister, or whatever he is, who faithfully trains and teaches boys, can never be rewarded

fittingly, and is not paid with any amount of money,—as even the heathen Aristotle says. But as yet the work is so shamefully despised among us as though it were nothing at all. And yet we claim to be Christians!

And I, if I could resign the preacher's office and other things, or had to, would prefer no office to being a schoolmaster or teacher of boys. For I know that this work, next to the preacher's office, is the most useful, the greatest and the best, and really do not know yet which of the two is best. For it is hard to make old dogs obedient and old rogues pious, whereat the preacher's office labors, and must labor much in vain. But young trees one can bend and train better, although some break in the doing of it. Beloved, count it to be one of the highest virtues on earth to train faithfully the children of other people, which so very few, yea almost no one, does for his own.