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DID LUTHER COMMIT SUICIDE?*

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ON the 18th of February, 1546, Dr. Martin Luther breathed his last in the town of Eisleben, where he had been born on the 10th of November, 1483, and all that was mortal of the man who had shaken the church and the world was a lifeless corpse. The immediate cause of his death was apoplexy of the heart, but he had been a sufferer from bodily infirmities for several years. It is a wonder that he did not collapse sooner under the burden of his herculean conflict with the most powerful system of spiritual despotism that had for centuries controlled the consciences of Christian Europe. It might have been better for his fame if he had died sixteen years earlier in the Coburg during the Diet of Augsburg, when he stood at the height of his power and usefulness.

During the last spring and summer a lively controversy has been carried on in Germany between Romanists and Protestants about Luther's death. It was begun by Paul Majunke, who seriously revived the long exploded myth of Luther's suicide. Majunke is a Roman Catholic priest, and was once a deputy to the Prussian Chambers, and editor of the "Germania," the chief organ of Ultramontaniam in Berlin, where, according to the prophecy of Cardinal Wiseman,

the war between Romanism and Protestantism is to be fought out. His pamphlet soon passed through four editions (which means a great deal, since pamphlets seldom pay the expense of printing). It was followed by a reply to his opponents, and by another, which he calls *A Last Word to the Luther-Poets* (meaning the Protestant biographers of Luther). His story is that Luther, after a hearty supper, in which he, as usual, freely indulged in wine, died suddenly, unexpectedly, and miserably by his own hand. His chief authority is an unknown servant of Luther, who, many years after his death, is reported to have stated that he found his master on the morning of February 18th, 1546, "*juxta lectum suum pensilem et misere strangulatum*" (p. 27). All his other authorities are rabid Romanists—Cochläus, Cornelius a Lapide, Sedulius, Bozius, Helmesius, Hosius—and merely repeat, with various modifications and partial contradictions, the rumor of a sudden and violent death of Luther, inflicted on him either by his own hand, or by the devil.

Majunke's cause was supported by a certain Dr. Martin Honef, in a pamphlet of 92 pages, in which he repeats over and over again, without a shadow of proof except vague rumor, that Luther hung himself by his handkerchief on the bedpost! I have never read a more worthless tract, but it deserves to be mentioned as an illustration of the silly superstition and low vulgarity of which a certain class of ignorant or malignant Romanists are capable.* Fortunately,

* *Luthers Lebensende. Eine historische Untersuchung von PAUL MAJUNKE.* Vierte vermehrte Auflage. Mainz, 1890 (pp. 108). *Die historische Kritik über Luthers Lebensende, von PAUL MAJUNKE.* Mainz, 1890 (pp. 106).—*Luthers Selbstmord. Eine geschichtliche P. Majunke's beleuchtet von Dr. Th. Kolde, ord. Prof. der hist. Theologie in Erlangen.* Dritte verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage. Erlangen und Leipzig, 1890 (pp. 46). *Noch einmal Luthers Selbstmord. Erweiterung auf Majunke's neueste Schrift von Dr. Th. Kolde, ordentlicher Prof. in Erlangen.* Erlangen und Leipzig, 1890 (pp. 28).—*Kolde und die Schrift Majunke's über Luther's Tod, in the "Historisch-Politische Blätter" (Rom. Cath.), Bd. 106, No. 1 München, 1890.*—*Luthers Lebensende in neuester ultramontaner Bedeutung von Dr. GUSTAV KAWERAU, Prof. der Theologie in Kiel.* Barmen, 1890 (pp. 40).—*Ein letztes Wort an die Luther-Dichter von PAUL MAJUNKE.* Mainz, 1890 (pp. 52). With a picture of the house in Eisleben where Luther died.—*Der Selbstmord Luthers, geschichtlich erweisen von Dr. MARTIN HONEF.* München, 1890 (pp. 92). Several newspaper articles on this controversy are noticed by Majunke in his second pamphlet, pp. 8-26.

* The following extract may serve as a fair specimen (pp. 59 sqq.): "*Schrecklich und geheimnisvoll ist die Art, wie Luther von dieser Welt geschieden, schrecklich und geheimnisvoll sind die Umstände, unter denen er begraben wurde. Ueber alles interessant ist der Bericht des Helmesius über die Raben, welche Luther's Leiche folgten. Als die Leiche Luthers auf dem Wege von Eisleben nach Wittenberg die Stadt Halle erreichte, so erzählt er, und mit größtem Pompe in die Kirche der Jungfrau Maria gebracht wurde, war die Menge der Raben,*

there are other Catholics, even of the extreme Ultramontane school, who are fair-minded, honest, and scholarly enough to repudiate these productions and to give credit to the truth of history. Even Janssen, the champion of the literary revival of German Ultramontaniam, who was first reported to agree with Majunke, wrote to him (as he has the manliness to inform the public in his *Last Word*, p. 51) that the assertion of Luther's suicide did not seem to him to have sufficient foundation.

Majunke was answered by two eminent Luther-scholars, Professor Dr. Kolde, of Erlangen, and Professor Dr. Kawerau, of Kiel. They have successfully vindicated the truth of history against the falsehood of slander for all those who have not closed their ears against the clear and strong testimonies of honest and reliable witnesses.

The controversy forms a characteristic episode in the great literary war between Romanism and Protestantism, which has been revived and stimulated by the *Culturkampf* and the conflict between Prince Bismarck and the Pope about the anti-papal May-laws of Prussia. It is, therefore, worthy of serious discussion.

A false story of Luther's death was started a year before it actually occurred by an anonymous Italian writer in a small pamphlet, which is embodied in Luther's works.* According to this premature report, Luther, on his sick bed, demanded and received the holy sacrament of the body of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and died forthwith. Before his death he had ordered that his body be put on the altar and worshipped as a god (*come Dio fosse adorato*), but at his burial a terrible voice and commotion, like a tempest from hell, was heard, and scared the bystanders. When they looked up to heaven, they saw the most holy sacrament in the air. On the next day, in opening the grave, neither flesh nor bone nor clothing was seen, but a vile sulphur stench arose and sickened all who were present. By this occurrence many were converted to the holy Church, which is the pillar of the truth.

Luther republished this Italian pamphlet with a German translation and some notes, in which he says: "I, Martinus Lutherus D., confess and bear witness with this writing that I received this wrathful fiction of my death on the 21st of March, and have read it with great pleasure, except the blasphemy. . . . May God convert the pope and the papists from the devil."

Majunke has the audacity to assert that this story was manufactured by Luther himself to counteract the Council at Trent, which assembled in the same year. But Luther knew little or no Italian, and the pamphlet was sent to him by Philip of Hesse with a letter dated March 12th, 1545, which is printed in Rommel's *Philipp von Hessen III.*, 108, and in Kolde's reply to Majunke, p. 22. The Landgraf informed Luther that he had received the pamphlet from an honest man at Augsburg, that he had it translated by one of his courtiers who knew Italian, and that he wished it to be returned to him. He wrote on the same day to the Elector of Saxony, asking him to forward the tract to Luther, and inclosing the writing of his Augsburg correspondent, who said that the libel had been printed in Naples and many other places (Seckendorf, *Hist. Lutheranismi*, III., 580). We have also the reply of the Elector that he had forwarded the libel (Seckendorf, *l. c.*), and Luther's reply of March 21st, in which he says: "I shall have the tract printed in Italian and German, as it is not worthy of another answer. I will only show that I have read it" (Seidemann's supplement to De Wette's ed. of Luther's *Briefwechsel*, VI., 373).

After Luther's death, the imagination of his enemies invented all sorts of rumors—that he committed suicide, or that the Devil made away with him; that a cloud of black ravens followed his corpse; that the coffin was found empty, but filled with an intolerable, infernal stench.

We need not wonder at these and similar rumors. It seemed impossible to super-

welche mit der Leiche gekommen und am anderen Tage mit ihr weiter zog, so gross, dass kein Menschenalter sich erinnern kann, je eine grössere Menge Raben gesehen zu haben. Ja, die Menge der Raben, welche mit dem Kadaver Luthers angekommen, war so gross, dass die Dächer der Häuser und die Zweige der Bäume kaum hinreichten, um jeden Raben ein Hätzchen zu gewähren. Die Lutheraner, welche bei der Leiche die Wache hielten, sangen die ganze Nacht hindurch ihre lutheranischen Kirchengesänge. Nicht minder schrien die auf den Dächern und Bäumen sitzenden Raben die ganze Nacht hindurch ohne Unterlass. Beide, Lutheraner und Raben, erfüllten die Nacht mit ihrem Geschrei, so dass man zuweilen nicht unterscheiden konnte, ob das Geschrei der Lutheraner die Raben oder das Geschrei der Raben die Lutheraner überlörte. So wie diese zahllosen Raben mit der Leiche Luthers gekommen, verliessen sie auch mit der Leiche Luthers am frühen Morgen wiederum die Stadt. Unzählige Raben folgten so der Leiche Luthers.

"Helmstus selber kam kurz darauf nach Halle, wo ihm diese merkwürdige Thatsache erzählt wurde und alle Welt davon sprach. Eine merkwürdigere Begleitung hat gewiss noch kein Sterblicher nach seinem Tode gehabt, so lange die Welt steht. Es wird schwer halten, diese sonderbare Thatsache auf eine ganz natürliche Weise zu erklären.

"Man spricht viel von einem pestilenzialischen Gestank, welchen trotz der eisten Kälte von der Leiche Luthers ausgegangen, so dass es Menschen unmöglich gewesen, die Leiche vom Stadthore Willenbergs in die Schlosskirche zu tragen und man hierzu Pferde verwenden musste. Ist nun dieser pestilenzialische Gestank auch noch so gross gewesen, so kann er doch nicht ein hinreichender Erklärungsgrund für diese aussergewöhnliche Versammlung von Raben abgeben, welche der Leiche Luthers gefolgt sind.

"Das Auge, das seinen Vater verachtet und schief auf seine Mutter blickt, sollen die Raben aushacken, so spricht der hl. Geist."

* *Welsche Lügenschrist von D. Martin Luthers Tod zu Rom ausgegangen. Anno 1545.* First printed under this title at Wittenberg, 1545. In Walch's ed. of Luther's *Werke*, vol. XXI., second part, 252-257; Erlangen ed., vol. XXXII., 425-430.

stitions Papists that such an arch-heretic as Luther should be permitted to depart in peace. The belief that there is an intimate connection between sin and punishment, which is true in general, but not in all particular cases, was entertained and falsely applied by the enemies of Job, and was rebuked by our Lord in the case of the man born blind (John ix. 3). Lactantius wrote a book (*De Mortibus Persecutorum*) to trace in the terrible deaths of the persecuting emperors the punitive justice of God, but forgot that Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, who persecuted the Church (ignorantly, like Saul), were among the best emperors, and died a natural death. The sudden death of Arius in the water-closet was construed by the friends of Athanasius into a signal judgment and warning against heresy. After the death of Ecolampadius the Romanists started the rumor that he had committed suicide, and even Luther was inclined to believe it; for he never entirely overcame the intolerance of the mediæval church in which he was brought up, and he believed in the power of the devil to kill people. He also regarded the tragical death of Zwingli at Cappel as a divine judgment for his heresy on the doctrine of the real presence, and doubted whether he was saved. In our day, after the death of Dr. Dollinger, which occurred January 10th, 1890, two false reports were circulated in Catholic newspapers, one that he died like Arius, the other that he had recanted his Old Catholicism and returned to the Roman Church. The first report was instantly refuted by the testimony of his physician, the second by the posthumous publication of his Letters, in which he declines all invitations to return. (*Briefe und Erklärungen von J. von Dollinger über die Vaticanischen Decrete*, edited by his friend, Dr. Reusch, of Bonn, München, 1890. Compare an article in this MAGAZINE, Vol. III., 132 sqq.) It is well known that the story is industriously circulated and actually believed by thousands of ignorant Catholics that the poor pope since 1870 is literally a prisoner in the Vatican, and obliged to sleep on bare straw, although the Vatican has 11,000 rooms, with plenty of good beds, and is surrounded by one of the largest and finest of gardens.

Let us now review the authentic facts of Luther's death.

1. From the last few weeks of Luther's life we have his own letters to his wife and to Melancthon.* In these he gives an account of the incidents which occurred on his jour-

ney from Wittenberg to Eisleben from January 25th till February 14th, 1546—that is, till four days before his death. He complains of his ill health and the infirmities of old age, and has some hard words to say about the fifty Jews at Eisleben and the lawyers whom he disliked; but upon the whole he was in good spirits, and indulged in his usual quaint humor. He addresses his wife: "*Meiner lieben Hausfrauen Katharin Lutherin Doctorin Zulsdorferin, Saumärkterin und was sie mehr sein kann,*" also "*Der tiefgelehrten Frauen Katharin Lutherin, meiner gnädigen Hausfrauen zu Wittenberg.*" He informs her that he liked the "Naumburgisch Bier" and the Rhine-wine to which he was liberally treated at Eisleben by the Counts of Mansfeld. He allays her fears concerning his health by directing her to the Gospel of John and to his little Catechism, and reminds her that God Almighty could make ten Doctor Luthers without any trouble.* In the last two letters to Melancthon and to his *Käthe* (both written February 14th) he informs them that the business which had called him to Eisleben was satisfactorily adjusted, and that he expected to return within a week to Wittenberg. There is not a word nor a hint in all these last utterances of Luther that he was in the least shaken in his faith or clouded in his mind, or contemplated doing any violence to himself. They prove just the reverse.

2. Luther's last manuscript. On the 16th of February, two days before his death, he wrote the following sentences on a piece of paper, which was found on his desk after his death:

"Virgil in his *Bucolicis* no one can understand, unless he has been a shepherd five years;

"Virgil in his *Georgicis* no one can understand, unless he has been a farmer five years;

"Cicero in his *Epistles* no one can understand, unless he has moved in a great commonwealth twenty-five years;

"The Holy Scriptures no one should pretend to have sufficiently tasted, unless he has ruled congregations for the space of a hundred years, with prophets like Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ and the Apostles.

* "*Du willst sorgen,*" he writes, Feb. 7 (*De Wette*, v., 787), "*für deinen Gott, gerade als wäre er nicht allmächtig, der da könnte zehn Doctor Martinus schaffen, wo der einige alle erschafft in der Saal oder im Ofenloch oder auf Wolfes Vogelheerd. Lass mich in Frieden mit deiner Sorge, ich hab einen besseren Sorger, denn du und alle Engel sind. Der liegt in der Krippen und häuget an einer Jungfrauen Sitzten; aber sitzet gleichwohl zur rechten Hand Gottes des allmächtigen Vaters. Darumb sei in Frieden. Amen.*"

* In *De Wette's* edition of *Luther's Briefe, Sendschreiben und Bedenken*, vol. v., 780-792.

“ *Ilanc tu ne divinam Æneida tenta,
Sed vestigia pronus adora.*”*

“ We are beggars. This is true.† 16 February, anno 1546.”

These are the last words from the pen of the Reformer. They are thoroughly characteristic, and bear testimony to his humility and deep sense of the inexhaustible riches of the Word of God. No one would infer from this document, which Majunke ignores, that the dying author was on the eve of committing suicide.

3. A full account of Luther's last journey, sickness, and death was prepared by three friends and eye-witnesses, Dr. JUSTUS JONAS, of Halle, Magister MICHAEL CÆLIUS, court-chaplain at Eisleben, and AURIFABER, Luther's secretary and editor of his table talk, at the request of the Elector of Saxony. They state at the close that they were present at the happy end of Father Luther till his last breath, and that they have reported nothing but what they had heard and seen, together with princes, counts, lords and others who were present. The document was printed at Wittenberg and Frankfurt, in 1546, in pamphlet form, and is incorporated in the larger editions of Luther's works.‡

The following are the principal facts according to these three witnesses :

On the 23d day of January, 1546, Luther left Wittenberg reluctantly in obedience to an invitation of the Counts of Mansfeld, who desired him to settle a controversy between them. He ventured on the perilous winter journey in the hope of making peace. The first night he stopped at Bitterfeld. On the 24th, at 11 A. M., he reached Halle, and spent three days with his friend and former colleague, Dr. Jonas. He was detained by sickness (the stone from which he suffered much); nevertheless he preached on the conversion of Paul in the Church of Our Dear Lady.

On the 28th of January he set out for Eisleben, accompanied by his three sons and Dr. Jonas. In crossing the river Saale by a boat he said, jestingly, to Jonas: “ Dear Doctor Jonas, would it not be a great pleasure to the devil if I, Doctor Martinus, with three sons and with you were to drown?” At

the frontier of the territory of the Counts of Mansfeld he was received by one hundred and thirteen horsemen. He felt very weak in the wagon and fainted, but recovered after being rubbed with warm cloths. He remained at Eisleben from January 20th till February 17th, attended to the business of the Counts of Mansfeld, preached four sermons, communed twice, and ordained two ministers “ after the apostolic manner.” He also confessed and received absolution after the Catholic fashion to which he adhered.*

On the evening before his death he spoke much of death and eternity. After supper he retired to his chamber, followed by his sons Martin and Paul, and by Master Cælius, and prayed as usual before the window. He complained of pain in the chest. After taking some medicine he slept till ten o'clock. When he awoke he made the odd remark to Dr. Jonas (who had been called to the sick-room) and to Master Cælius: “ Pray for our Lord God and his Gospel, that it may go well with him; for the Council of Trent and the sorry Pope are very angry with him.”†

Jonas, Cælius, the two sons of Luther, his servant Ambrosius and other servants remained with him during the night. He awoke at one o'clock and said to Jonas: “ Oh God, I feel so ill. I believe I shall remain here in Eisleben where I was born and baptized.” He repeated in Latin the words of Psalm 31 : 5 : “ Into thine hand I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth.” He again complained of distress in the chest. Two doctors, Count Albrecht and the countess, and other persons were called to his bedside, and administered medicine. He prayed: “ Oh my heavenly Father, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, thou God of all comfort, I thank Thee that Thou didst reveal thy dear Son Jesus Christ, in whom I believe, whom I have preached and confessed, whom I have loved and praised, whom the Pope and godless people persecute and blaspheme. I pray thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, take care of my poor soul. Heavenly Father, although I must leave this body, I know surely that I shall abide with Thee forever, and that no one can pluck me out of Thy hands.” He also repeated in Latin John 3 : 16 : “ God so loved the world,” etc.

* Loosely quoted from Statius, *Thebaid.*, Lib. XII. v. 816 sq.

“ *Nec tu divinam Æneida tenta,
Sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.*”

† “ *Wir sind Bettler. Das ist wahr.*” I remember that Dr. Neander was deeply impressed with these words, and wrote them in my album with the addition: “ *Theologia crucis, non gloriæ.*”

‡ Walch, Vol. XXI. (Theil II., *Nachlese*, pp. 290-296). Majunke reprinted the report as an alleged fiction in his first brochure, and thereby furnished the best refutation of his slander to unprejudiced readers.

* The Lutheran Church retained at first, besides Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as a third of the seven Catholic sacraments, Confession and Absolution. Luther used to confess to Dr. Bugenhagen, his pastor.

† “ *Belei für unsern Herrn Gott und sein Evangelium, das es ihm wohlgehe. Denn das Concilium zu Trent und der leidige Papst zürnen hart mit ihm.*” It should be remembered that the Council of Trent was in session at the time, and ended with an anathema on all the distinctive Protestant doctrines.

(which was one of his favorite passages), and Ps. 68 : 20 : "God is unto us a God of salvation, and unto Jehovah the Lord belong the issues from death."*

Cœlius asked him : "Reverend father, will you steadfastly die believing in Christ and the doctrine which you have preached?" Luther replied with an audible "Yea." Then, turning to the right side, he fell asleep never more to awake. He departed peacefully and gently in the Lord, like Simeon.

At four o'clock in the morning the Prince of Anhalt, the Counts of Mansfeld, and other noblemen appeared. A large number of friends and citizens came during the day and shed tears over the body.†

On the 19th of February, at two in the afternoon, the body was carried to the Church of St. Andrew with great solemnity. Dr. Jonas preached the funeral sermon on 1 Thess. 4 : 13-18, speaking first of the person and gifts of Dr. Luther, secondly of the resurrection and eternal life.‡ The corpse was left in the church during the night and watched by ten citizens. Two painters made a copy of the dead face.

On the following day, at noon, after another funeral sermon by Cœlius, the remains were removed in the presence of a great crowd, which accompanied them to the outer gate with many tears and cries. The bells were rung in all the villages through which the funeral procession passed. It arrived in Halle at 8 o'clock, and was received by the pastors, the magistrates, the teachers, schoolchildren, and a crowd of men and women.

On Sunday, the 21st, the procession proceeded to Bitterfeld, and on Monday to Wittenberg. The rector, professors and students of the University, teachers, and magistrates were in waiting to accompany the remains to the castle-church (so famous for the Ninety-Nine Theses which twenty-nine years before had opened the drama of the Reformation). Dr. Pomeranus, his pastor, preached a German funeral sermon before some thousand people, and Melancthon a Latin oration.§

This document bears in every sentence the mark of honesty and accuracy. It proceeds from three respectable scholars, who were

personal witnesses. It is throughout consistent with the character of Luther. It is confirmed by all we otherwise know of his last days. It has been accepted by his Protestant biographers, and not been disputed by Catholic writers of note, including Döllinger and Janssen.

To get rid of these witnesses Majunke deliberately declares that they manufactured this report in order to deceive the public and to stop the rumor of Luther's suicide!

4. The funeral sermon of Cœlius, preached at Eisleben on the morning of the 20th of February, 1546, in view of the coffin which contained the remains of Luther, confirms the report of the three witnesses in every essential fact.*

According to Majunke, Cœlius must be a double liar. He finds a straw of support in a passage where Cœlius speaks of men who will spread the rumor that Luther was found dead in his bed.† Such an apprehension was quite natural, considering the fact that a rumor of that kind had already been propagated before Luther's death. And we learn from a letter of Jonas to Dietrich, dated Halle, March 9th, 1546, that the monks and papists spread the rumor that the coffin of Luther was found empty—that is, that the devil had stolen his corpse.‡

5. In addition to these eye-witnesses of well-known reputation we may mention about a dozen less known persons who were present either before or immediately after Luther's death—namely, his two sons, Paul and Martin, his servant Ambrosius, whom he had brought with him from Wittenberg, his host, Hans Albrecht, the town-clerk, two physicians of Eisleben, Count Albrecht of Mansfeld and lady, Count Schwarzburg and lady, three Counts (Philipp, Hans Georg, and Volrath) von Mansfeld. In less than two hours after Luther's death, Justus Jonas sent a report of Luther's death to the Elector of Saxony.§ and the same courier carried two letters of Count Albrecht of Mansfeld and Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt to the Elector.|| Count Hans Georg von Mansfeld informed Duke Moritz of Saxony on the same day that Dr. Luther, after effecting a peaceable settlement between him and his brothers, died a happy Christian death at two

* In Walch's edition, vol. xxi. (II. *Nachlese*), 303-329.

† "Es finden sich wie mir fürkommt schon jetzt Leute die durch den bösen Geist getrieben, ausbringen sollen, als habe man ihn im Bette todt gefunden. Nun trage ich nicht Zweifel, der so von Anfang ein Lügner ist, wird noch mancherlei mehr und geschwinder Lügen erdenken."

‡ Kawerau, *Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas*, II. 186 : "Monachi et papiste insinuerunt in feretro Lutheri evanuisse corpus, vacuum huc nos adrexisse feretrum." Kolde directed Majunke's attention to this letter.

§ In Kawerau's *Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas*, II., 177 sq.

|| Krumhaar, *Grafenschaft Mansfeld*, Eisleben, 1855, p. 278.

‡ Kolde, *l. c.* 10.

* In an autograph kept at Rudolstadt, Paul Luther makes special mention of the fact that his father repeated the passage John 3 : 16 three times on his death-bed in his and his brother Martin's presence. See Köstlin, *Martin Luther*, II., 688 (2d edition, 1893).

† "Da haben ihn in dem Sarg liegen sehen viel vom Adel, die ihn mehrtheils gekannt, Mann und Weib, ellihe hundert, und ein sehr gross Anzahl Volke."

‡ The sermon is printed in Walch, *l. c.* 363-386.

§ Both are printed in Walch's edition, *l. c.* 329 sqq. and 343 sqq.

o'clock in the night.* There is also extant a private letter of John Aurifaber to Michael Gutt at Halle, written on the 18th of February, to the effect that Luther died between two and three in the preceding night like a good Christian, after having in the evening partaken of a hearty meal in cheerful spirits.†

If we consider this array of testimonies, we may well say that there are few men in history about whose last days and departure we have such full and reliable information as about Luther.

All these witnesses are either ignored by Majunke or turned into liars and conspirators, who deliberately concealed the truth and deceived the public!

And what are the witnesses he is able to quote against those liars and conspirators? Only a few malignant papal polemics who wrote thirty or forty years after Luther's death, and who themselves made their assertions merely on vague rumors without a shadow of proof. Such witnesses would be ruled out of any court of justice without a moment's controversy.

Majunke, in the first edition, mentioned as his oldest witness a certain Christophorus Longolius of Cologne, "a theologian held in special estimation by Erasmus," who "in the year of Luther's death" spoke in his *Oratio ad Lutheranos* of a man who perished miserably of a nasty disease contracted by licentiousness.‡ Kolde (pp. 24 sqq.) proved that this Longolius died September 11th, 1522—twenty-four years before Luther—and alluded to Ulrich von Hutten, who was infected by that disease! Majunke ignores this correction and repeats the passage of Longolius (in the fourth edition, pp. 15), remarking, by way of excuse, that he did not understand him to charge Luther with licentiousness, but only with intemperance in eating and drinking!

The rumor of Luther's suicide by hanging did not take printed shape and form till 1593, when Thomas Bozius, in a large polemical work, *De Signis Ecclesie*, published at Cologne, stated it on the authority of an unnamed servant of Luther, who was at that time a boy and bound by an oath not to divulge the secret, but did divulge it after his return to the Catholic Church.† Of

such a boy-servant of Luther and his subsequent return to the Catholic Church history knows nothing. Why did Bozius not mention his name? His object was to show that all heretics from Simon Magus down to his own time died a miserable and unnatural death, and after speaking of Luther, he goes on to assert with equal confidence and equal falsification of history that Æcolampadius was strangled, that Calvin died of a complication of horrible diseases, that Bucer was fetched by a fierce demon, who visibly appeared to the terror of the bystanders, slew him, and scattered his entrails in the bedroom! These additions destroy the credit of what he reports of Luther, and are prudently omitted by Majunke.

Nevertheless the story was readily believed and repeated with various amplifications by such Catholic writers as Cornelius a Lapide (1600), who added that Luther was moved to his act by desperation and the fury of a demon, and Cardinal Bellarmine, who knew that the devil distorted the face of Luther.

At last Henricus Sedulius, a Franciscan monk, in a fiercely polemical work against heresies, published at Antwerp, 1606, revealed the true story of Luther's suicide by hanging himself at the bedpost on the ground of a written declaration of a chamber servant of Luther (*cubicularius quidam Martini Lutheri*) to the effect that he carried Luther to his bed in a state of intoxication (*plane obrutus potu*), and found him the next morning strangled at the bedpost; that he was bound by an oath to keep the secret and to spread the report that Luther died suddenly, but that he could no longer resist the power of truth and the voice of conscience.‡ Then Sedulius tells the ridiculous story of the ravens which were summoned by the chief of devils and followed Luther's corpse all the way from Eisleben to Halle and Wittenberg.

But Sedulius never saw that confession, nor does he give the name of the "worthy man" (*dignus vir*) who told him of it while he was at Freiburg in the Breisgau, nor the name of the servant of Luther who made the

serciebat et superioribus annis ad nostros se recepit, Lutherum sibi meli ipsi laqueo necem miserissimam attulisse; sed datum ipse cunctis domesticis rei consensu divulgatum, ne factum divulgarent, ob honorem adjectere Evangelii." Lib. XXIII., c. 3, quoted by Majunke, p. 26, and more fully by Kolde, p. 26 sq.

* "Bucero dicitur animam pene agentis astitisse demones horrendum, qui cunctos astantes timore exanimavit, a quo ut animam arreheret secum, fuerit percussus; nam lecto delirabat effusus per cubiculum pariter huc illuc rinceribus multique cruciatibus exanimatus exspiravit."
† *Præscriptiones adversus Hæreticos*, Ch. XVIII., 25-27. Majunke, p. 95 sq. The book teems with reports of the horrible deaths of heretics. Among other fictions, Sedulius asserts that Æcolampadius was so grieved at Zwingle's death, "ut paulo post a femina, quam incestis poluit nuptiis, in lecto extinctus reperitus fuerit."

* Kawerau, l. c. II., 180: "... ist er [Luther] dieselbige nacht umd zwo uhr christlich, seliglich und wol verschieden und hat also sein leben beschlossen."

† See the letter in Kolde, *Analecta Lutherana*, p. 427, and in his book against Majunke, p. 11.

‡ "Noctis hominum altero crure claudum . . . morbo qui libidinem ejus obscenitate pustula indicet, foede misereque confectum." The book of Longolius appeared at Cologne, 1545.

† "Lutherus cum vespere laute cenasset, ac lectus homo se dedisset, ea nocte suffocatus interit. Audiri haud ita pridem compertum testimonio sui familiaris, qui tum puer illi

confession, nor the time when he made it. Such a testimony is absolutely worthless, and with it stands or falls the whole fable of Luther's suicide at the bedpost. No respectable Catholic historian has dared to give it credit.

By unearthing this myth of popish ignorance and malice Majunke has elicited a confirmation and propagation of the historical truth concerning the pious departure of the great German Reformer, and unwittingly done good service to the cause of Protestantism.

FOR THE MAGAZINE OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.

IS INFANT BAPTISM DECLINING ?

BY REV. G. S. BAILEY, D.D., EDITOR OF THE
California Baptist.

THE MAGAZINE OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE for last October quotes an article on this subject from the *Independent* of New York, August 28th, in which it states, "The *Examiner* and other Baptist papers have frequently said that infant baptism was decaying. It would not at all trouble us if the assertion were true; but we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that it is not true."

The *Independent* then gives reports of the Congregationalists since 1880, in which it says there has been a steady increase, the ratio being now, among Congregationalists, one infant baptism to 55 members annually. Having occasionally given some attention to this subject for forty years past, will you allow me to state a few facts?

The Episcopal Church, from 1841 to 1856, reported one infant baptism for every seven communicants. The Congregationalists now average one to 55 members, or about one eighth as many. Do the other seven eighths of the infants of Congregationalists go unbaptized? It may be remembered that there was a time in colonial days when Massachusetts parents who neglected to have their infants baptized were arraigned before the court and punished (see Backus's "Church History," p. 95). Infant baptism was then the universal custom of Congregationalists and of all other pedobaptist churches. From statistics gathered forty years ago, I see that the Congregationalists then reported one infant baptism for 47 members. From 1859 to 1865 the average was one to 66, and in 1870 it was one to 72. The *Independent* says the average is now one to 55, while forty years ago it was one to 47. How much increase of ratio in forty years? But the *Independent*

says that at present, in Rhode Island and Connecticut, the ratio is about one to 60; in Massachusetts, one to 74; in Vermont, one to 119; in New Hampshire, one to 132; and in Maine, one to 199! Yet New England Congregationalists are supposed to occupy the front rank in biblical scholarship and general intelligence. And here is shown a marvellous decline of infant baptism among them.

The *Independent* gives statistics of other denominations also as to infant baptism. It says the Evangelical Association (German Methodists) report one infant baptism to fourteen and six-tenths, and the Reformed German Church one to thirteen and nine-tenths. This is about half as many as the Episcopalians averaged in 1849.

Twenty years ago four German Methodist conferences reported one infant baptism to eight communicants, or nearly twice as large a ratio as they report now, while five New England Methodist conferences, twenty years ago, reported but one infant baptism to 177 members, or only a twentieth part as large a proportion as the German conferences. Which are the more intelligent biblical scholars, the New England Methodists or the German converts?

The *Independent* says, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the average is one infant baptism to thirty-three and nine-tenths, and in the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, it is one to thirty and two-tenths. But twenty years ago it was one to 27.

The Old School Presbyterian Church, previous to its union with the New School, reported one infant baptism to 19 members. Now the Presbyterian Church, North, reports less than one to 31; and the Presbyterian Church, South, less than one to 30.

The *New York Recorder* (the predecessor of the *Examiner*) of March 28th, 1849, contains lengthy extracts from an article in the *Churchman* on the decline of infant baptism among the Presbyterians, the writer having been a Presbyterian minister, educated at Princeton, but, because of their neglect of infant baptism, had joined the Episcopalians. He said that, in the leading Presbyteries of Albany, New York, New Brunswick, Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Charleston, the ratio of infant baptisms to membership was one to 25, while in the Episcopal Church the ratio was a little more than one to 5. That Episcopal writer, in 1849, commented on the decline of infant baptism among Presbyterians thus:

"So few already are the infants baptized in the Presbyterian denomination in this