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PRINTING AND THE GROWTH OF A PROTESTANT MOVEMENT IN GERMANY FROM 1517 TO 1524

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The Reformation was the first religious movement which had the aid of the printing press. It was the first intellectual movement in which the printing press had a popular effect. The importance of printing for the spread of the Reformation has long been recognized but there has been little detailed investigation of the interaction of the two great revolutionary developments.¹

The advantage which a reformer is able to derive from the press is at once evident. The failure of the Hussite reform, in contrast to the effectiveness of the Lutheran, was due in part to the limited means available for spreading the ideas of Hus. It is known that Hus impressed the German people greatly. People hailed him with the expectation that his brave stand would bring the defeat of Rome, a hope which already animated many. On his way to Constance the Nuremberg burghers lined the road along which the Bohemian reformer passed. Even the clergy applauded when he openly defended his theses. But though Hus made a great personal impression on the people of his time, there was no external means of spreading his ideas. Thus the Church was able to nip in the bud the nascent revolt.

In contrast, Luther and his adversaries could support their spoken arguments with extensive printed material. Moreover, its convenient form and inexpensive price facilitated the rapid and wide distribution of this material throughout the country. The religious issues could be read of and pondered over in the quietness of the home or in the company of friends. For those who could not read, there was the possibility of hearing the arguments read by others or even of guessing at the contents of a work from the illustrative material included,

¹ For detailed studies of the history of the booktrade and of printing see Kapp, F., *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels* (Leipzig, 1907), I; Bogeng, G. A. E., *Geschichte der Buchdruckerkunst* (Dresden, 1936, 2 vols.).

usually in the form of woodcuts. For the first time, a religious and intellectual movement was not restricted to learned groups but had an immediate impact upon the people at large. This situation, an outgrowth of the development of the printing press, was one of the major factors in transforming a complicated theological debate into a great popular movement. The Reformation might have been stifled and suppressed had it not been for its powerful ally, the German pamphlet. Conversely, the influence of Luther was decisive in transforming printing from an art into an instrument for moulding public thinking.

When Luther made his first public appearance in 1517, the art of book printing had been in existence for over half a century. Mainz, the birthplace of printing, was the first centre for printers and booksellers. Book printing spread from there in the last third of the fifteenth century to Bamberg, Strassburg, Cologne, Basle, Zurich, Augsburg, Ulm, Nuremberg, Leipzig, Vienna, Magdeburg, and Tübingen. In addition to these main centres, smaller printing presses were founded in Speyer, Esslingen, Prague, Erfurt, Passau, Memingen, Munich, Reutlingen, Heidelberg, Münster, Regensburg, Ingolstadt, Hagenau, Hamburg, and others. Six of the larger centres, Leipzig, Cologne, Basle, Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Strassburg, three of them university towns, produced nearly two-thirds of the output of the German presses up to the end of the fifteenth century. This development provided both well established centres and a network of presses, particularly in the western and southern parts of the country.²

By the sixteenth century, printing had become one of the most important of the arts. Under the stimulus provided by capitalistic entrepreneurs who were also educated men and artists, it was developing into an industry with a basis of differentiated function and a secured labor supply.³ The printer had drawn into his work representatives of the special arts

² In 1480 there were about thirty printing-shops in Germany while by 1500 these had expanded to about 200; see Bogeng, A., *Buchdruckerkunst*, I: *Der Frühdruck*, 273-77.

³ See Sombart, W., *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, (Leipzig, 1921, 4th edition), II, 719, 759; and Hase, O., *Die Koberger* (2nd edition, Leipzig, 1885). For the economic and intellectual conditions in Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries see Below, G., *Probleme der Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (2nd edition, Tübingen, 1926); Bezold, F. v., *Aus Mittelalter und Renaissance* (Berlin, 1918) 242-44; Bezold, F. v., *Geschichte der deutschen Reformation* (Berlin, 1890); Ranke, L. v., *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Leipzig, 1867, 4th edition), II.

of medieval craftsmanship such as copyists, book binders, goldsmiths, rubricators, illuminators, and miniature painters. The mechanical processes of printing were becoming differentiated and standardized as printing began to reach beyond the small scale reproduction of the form achieved by the medieval manuscript. The profits which were beginning to accrue from use of the reproductive potentialities of the printing press attracted both labor and capital and facilitated the spread of presses in the urban centres which provided both demand for the product and capital resources. By the sixteenth century, the functions of publisher, printer, and bookseller, originally combined, had become separated in many cases. The publisher sometimes controlled a number of presses and attempted to create as well as meet demand. Wholesale booksellers (or as they were pointedly called in German, *Buchführer*) appeared toward the end of the fifteenth century and developed fixed centres of distribution in places where demand was considerable, and hawkers and peddlars took smaller and more popular works to fairs, markets, and church festivals and carried them through country districts.

The humanistic movement made use of the printing press. The Brethren of the Common Life, in many respects the forerunners and founders of the new intellectual movement, could take much credit to themselves for the spread of book printing. The leading publishers of the age had a well-rounded education and were able to understand and evaluate the literary treasures of the past. Men like Johannes Frobenius and Aldus Manutius became the allies of Erasmus, Johann Reuchlin, and others in their efforts for the renascence of the classics. The literary struggle against "the obscure men" (*Reuchlinstreit*) made particular use of the publicists' weapons (Boecking mentions forty-four writings printed between 1515 and 1521 in this controversy), and its effect spread beyond the scholastic world. However, none of the writings of the humanist groups had a decisive or even kindling effect on the people in general. The chief reason was that these writers wrote only for scholars and thus used the Latin language almost exclusively. Some of their writings were translated into German and in this form were read by larger groups. But their dignified scepticism and constantly critical tone did not kindle enthusiasm, while their rough satire awoke only a temporary exhilaration. A move-

ment whose best literary results were clothed in Latin and were almost entirely analytical effected only a clarification of issues, not a change in the public mind.

Two things were necessary before printing could be an effective agent in moulding public opinion. The first was that technical facilities should be available for large scale publication. This had been secured. The rapid expansion of publishing in the early years of the Reformation which increased the quantity of printing ninefold in little over eight years, was only possible because of the foundation which had already been laid.⁴ The second was to develop a form, style, and content which would attract a wide group of readers. This was to be one of Luther's great contributions.

Up to the Reformation the church was the printer's best customer. The finest types were cut for use in mass-books, psalters, breviaries, rituals, missals, etc. In addition to these, medieval classics, texts of Roman law, and scientific works were printed. These were produced in lavish style, each a work of art. The cost of most of them was prohibitive except for the very wealthy. Moreover the almost exclusive use of Latin restricted them to educated groups. Thus the church, schools, and scholars absorbed practically the whole output of the book trade. In turn they demanded the standard achieved in the medieval manuscript of a well designed and finely executed work of art.

By attracting a great new group of customers Luther caused a fundamental change in the primary purpose of printing. For mass sale, quality had to be sacrificed to quantity. Printing changed from an art satisfying in itself to a vehicle to convey ideas and material.

The transformation in the aim of the printers due to the change in market was caused by three great contributions made by Luther, a new language, a new form and a new content. The three together created works which could be understood by the great mass of people, could be conveniently handled,

⁴ See Panzer, G. W., *Annalen der älteren deutschen Literatur* (2 vols., Nürnberg, 1788, 1805); Kuczinski, A., *Verzeichnis einer Sammlung von 3000 Flugschriften Luthers und seiner Zeitgenossen* (Leipzig, 1870/71); Weller, E., *Repertorium typographicum. Die deutsche Literatur im ersten Viertel des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Nördlingen, 1864). These three together with the recently published bibliography by Schottenloher, K., *Bibliographie zur Deutschen Glaubensspaltung*, (Leipzig, 1933-39) provide the main printed sources of information concerning the German publications of that period.

and most significant of all, were in constant demand because they answered a deeply felt need.

Luther's use of the vernacular and his creative ability to mould it into a superb instrument for the transmission of ideas are so well known as to need only statement. It should be emphasized, however, that he is the founder of literary German, his language being as effective in writing as in speaking.

Luther's second great contribution was to popularize a new form for serious works. Up to the Reformation, printing was customarily in folio size. Luther was the pioneer of the pamphlet made up of a few quarto or octavo sheets, devoted to a serious purpose. In using this easily handled publication Luther was building on a type introduced in the last quarter of the fifteenth century for popular use. This was a one-page leaflet or broadside which had a striking picture and often a short readable text on one of a variety of subjects ranging from reports on exciting phenomena like tempests to official edicts, letters of indulgence, advertisements, and even invitations to riflemen's associations. They were usually anonymous. The first writer of reputation to use these popular leaflets successfully was Sebastian Brant, the author of the *Ship of Fools*. Parallel with the adoption of this form by some distinguished authors was their decoration by artists of rank like Hans Burgkmair and Albrecht Dürer. Out of the broadside grew the pamphlet, still rare before the Reformation, an inexpensive form, small (rarely more than three or four printed sheets), and designed for quick sale.

Luther's innovation was to use the pamphlet form extensively and for serious works such as sermons and homilies. In so doing he was breaking sharply with convention. He defends himself against the criticism he incurred over the form of his "*Sexternlein*," a six page pamphlet, in his dedication of the *Sermon on Good Works* to Duke Johann of Saxony on March 29, 1520. There he maintains that he, too, could publish big and learned books but that it is more important to write for the common layman.⁵

5 " . . . Ob grosz und viel bucher machen kunst sey und besserlich der Christenheit, lass ich andere richten. Ich acht aber, szo ich lust het, yhrer kunst nach grosz bucher zu machen, es solt vielleicht mit gotlicher huff mir schleuniger folgen, dan yhnen nach meyner art eynen kleynen sermon zu machen . . ." *W. A.*, VI, 203, 10.

The response justified his use of the pamphlet form, for it had a sudden and overwhelming popularity. It was cheap (one or two groschen), written in German, decorated with a woodcut which indicated the character of the contents, and carried a simple and direct message. It became the most common and influential vehicle for the spread of Luther's ideas.

Important as were the language and the pamphlet form, they were but technical aids in reaching the people. The main reason for the appeal and success of Luther's writings was their new message. The hierarchy of the church was a religious institution that could be fought successfully only on religious grounds. This could only be done by showing that the road to God did not lead through the absolute authority of the clergy. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith challenged the old church tenets. It was a plain doctrine at once profound and simple, and thus could be understood by both the learned and the uneducated. For Luther, religion was a living whole, which evolved out of a few simple, but inexhaustibly deep fundamental thoughts. Consequently he was able to present the same basic thoughts over and over again with a moving seriousness and a warm fervor, with a directness and practicality that obviated monotony and made a lasting impression.⁶

In comparison with the religious writings of the Middle Ages those of Luther are simple, without allegories, legends, and anecdotes. His writings are not abstract nor are they mere compilations. He writes about religious matters as one to whom religion has become an immediate experience. It is not without reason that Luther has been called not only a "prophet" but also the first great "journalist." He was well aware that writing demanded a different technique from speaking. He chided printers for taking a sermon to be published before he had had time to revise it. There is a great difference, he said, between bringing a message directly with "a lively voice" or giving it in "dead writing." His ability to present material in writing so as to carry the same effect as would the spoken word had great influence not only in spreading his ideas but also in popularizing publications. When it was

⁶ See Holl, K., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, (Tübingen, 1921), 340-43; Dannenbauer, H., *Luther als religiöser Volksschriftsteller, 1517-1520*, (Tübingen, 1930).

combined with a message for which people were longing, the effect was irresistible.

Already in the years from 1517-1520, Luther was the most widely read and most influential writer on religious subjects in Germany. Leaving aside the scientific and purely theological writings which he published in that period, Luther produced in these four years about thirty different popular writings of a devotional and instructive character for the common man. These included a popular short explanation of penance, indulgence, and grace, several short and illuminating interpretations of the Ten Commandments, of Faith, and of the Lord's Prayer, a guide to atonement, a preparation for receiving the sacraments, considerations about Christ's passion, about preparation for death, about the three sacraments of the Holy Supper, baptism, and penance, exegeses of some psalms, and also some sermons.

In attempting to measure the response to Luther's message, calculations must be somewhat rough because of the lack of accurate statistical material. All indications are, however, that there was an amazing circulation of Luther's works.

As soon as Luther published a writing in Wittenberg, which became the dominant printing center during the Reformation period, other places like Leipzig, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Strassburg, and Basle printed and reprinted it, usually at two, three, or four printing presses in the city at once. The average number of editions of the popular works published up to 1520 was twelve, some having fewer but others as many as twenty-four. Of the thirty writings which Luther published between March, 1517, and the summer of 1520, about 370 editions had already been printed by the latter year.

In estimating the size of an edition, there are certain earlier examples from which deductions can be drawn. In 1498 it had been agreed in Lübeck that an edition should include one thousand copies. In 1511 the first Latin grammar of Cochlaeus had a thousand copies in the first edition in Nuremberg, the third edition in Strassburg in 1515 being of the same size. The theologies used in universities had 1000 copies in an edition at the beginning of sixteenth century. If, as these examples indicate, 1000 copies was the average size of an edition of Luther's writings, then one-third of a million copies

of his works were spread throughout Germany between 1517 and 1520.⁷

In 1520, when Luther published his three most famous Reformation writings, printing increased still more. Four thousand copies of Luther's *Appeal to the German Nobility* were printed in August, 1520, by Melchior Lotther in Wittenberg. In a letter of August 18, 1520, Luther was asked by his friend Johann Lang to hold back this "wild pamphlet." His answer was that the publication could not be withdrawn since the whole edition had already been distributed in all directions and the printer and publisher would suffer great loss if asked to withdraw the copies. Within a week of the publication of the first edition, Luther was preparing a second one. Including plagiarisms and pirated editions, the work ran through fifteen editions. The tract on *Christian Freedom* went through eighteen editions and gave the basis for dozens of other pamphlets written by different authors.

In the fall of 1522, Luther's translation of the New Testament appeared. The first edition included 3000 copies and a second edition followed in December. The translation of the Bible sold even more widely than any of Luther's other writings.

A few other illustrations of the popularity of Luther's writings may be given. His sermon given in Erfurt on his way to the Diet of Worms and printed by his friends went through nine editions. The speech of defense at Worms on April 18, 1521, generally attributed to Luther, was published in Latin in four editions. The German translation of the speech went through five editions. There were two derivative editions in the form of pamphlets which gave short reports of the memorable days at Worms.

Besides the editions printed from the manuscript, the rapid and far spread distribution of Luther's writings was furthered by constant reprinting from printed copies. With the exception of a few localized printing privileges, there was nothing comparable to a modern copyright. For the printers

7 For the size and number of editions see Dannenbauer, H., *Luther*, 30, note 65, and 31, note 66; Kawerau, G., *Luthers Schriften* (2nd edition, Leipzig, 1929; *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte*, Nr. 147); *Luthers Werke, Gesamtausgabe*, Weimarer Ausgabe; Clemen, O. "Buchdruck der deutschen Reformation" in: Bogeng, *Buchdruckerkunst*, II, 38-40; Schottenloher, K., *Flugblatt und Zeitung* (Berlin, 1922).

and booksellers the reprint was an important source of income. In general, Luther never complained about the reprinting of his writings, being aware doubtless of its value in spreading his teaching. The *Sermon of Indulgence and Grace*, the summary in German of Luther's Ninety-five Theses of October 31, 1517, in which he explained them to the laymen in simple understandable words, had many reprints and a correspondingly great effect.⁸ Thirteen reprints in High German and one in Low German appeared in 1518 in Wittenberg, Leipzig, Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Basle, in 1519 there were five more in Leipzig, Basle, and Breslau, in 1520 four in Wittenberg, Leipzig, Nuremberg, and Augsburg, and there is in addition, one without date.

In 1541, Luther wrote in *Wider Hans Worst* that his theses had run through Germany in two weeks. How quickly the reprinters got hold of manuscripts is shown also by the fact that Adam Petri in Basle published a reprint of the September edition of Luther's New Testament before the end of 1522. In this case, however, Luther protested since it damaged the printer in Wittenberg if reprints appeared at other places before the original first edition had been sold. Even more serious was a case in 1525 in which a manuscript which was still under the press and not yet finished was stolen and appeared in print in Nuremberg. On the whole, however, Luther objected to reprinting only in the case of the larger and more expensive works or when it endangered the profits of the original printer and publisher. He did not try to prevent it for pamphlets whose effect was meant to be immediate and as widespread as possible.⁹

Luther's message and the success of his medium introduced a vogue of pamphlets written in German which were produced and distributed throughout the country. The pamphlets are the "shock troops" of the Reformation. Their extraordinary richness and effectiveness demand separate and

⁸ *Luthers Briefe* ed. by de Wette und Seidermann, I, 72, 95; also *Luthers Werke, Erlanger Ausgabe*, 26, 68 ff. and *W.A.* 1, 311; Luther, Joh., *Vorbereitung und Verbreitung von Martin Luthers 95 Thesen* (Berlin, 1933).

⁹ For Luther's attitude towards reprinting and pirating see his letters to the Magistrate in Nuremberg on September 26, 1525 and to the Elector John Frederick on July 8, 1539, printed in *The Letters of Martin Luther*, sel. and trans. by M. A. Currie (London, 1908), 144-45; see also Kunze, H., "Ueber den Nachdruck im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert" in *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* (1938), 135-43.

extended consideration. It is only possible here to indicate a few of their general characteristics.¹⁰

These pamphlets contained popular writing, addressed to the uneducated groups, but they were written by educated men who had experience in the craftsmanship of printing. They do not come from the common people although they often purposely attempt to give this appearance. Thus a large number of the pamphlets are anonymous and often intentionally hide or are misleading as to the place of printing. This is partly to escape the censorship or personal attacks but also partly in order to give the impression that the writings were the expression of public thought.

Apart from those pamphlet writers who signed their names, like Ulrich von Hutten, Eberlin von Günzberg, Heinrich von Kettenbach, Balthasar Stanberger, Michael Stifel, Utz Eskstein, Johann Brenz, Nikolaus Hermann, Johann Lachmann, Andreas Osiander, Hans Sachs, Ulrich Bossler, Matthias Zell, Matthias Bynwalth, Aegidius Mechler, Nikolaus Hausmann, Gretzinger, Kellner and others, it has been possible to identify many of the authors. The writers were often of good educational and high social standing like the Würzburger choir-master, Dr. Friedrich Fischer, Joachim von Watt, Wilibald Pirckheimer, Lazarus Spengler, Sebastian von Rotenhan, and Hermann von dem Busche, evangelical theologians who had humanistic training like Nikolaus von Amsdorf, Justus Jonas, Johann Lang, Urbanus Rhegius, Oekolampad, Martin Butzer, Paul Phrygio, Wenzelaus Linck, and Johannes Römer, evangelical preachers like Christoph Schappeler, Sebastian Meyer, and Berchtold Haller, or literary laymen like Knight Hartmut von Cronberg, Gengenbach at Basle, Niklaus Manuel at Bern. There are also the bell-founder Hans Füessli, the weaver Ulrich Richsen, the furrier Sebastian Lotzer, the baker Hans Stayg-

10 On the pamphlet literature see particularly Blochwitz, G., "Die antirömischen deutschen Flugschriften der frühen Reformationszeit (bis 1522) in ihrer religiös-sittlichen Eigenart," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Vol. 27, 145-254; for collections of pamphlet literature see Berger, A., *Die Sturmtruppen der Reformation* (Leipzig, 1931); Clemen, O., *Flugschriften aus der Reformationszeit in Facsimiledrucken*. Neue Folge der Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation (Leipzig, 1921); Clemen, O., *Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation* (4 vols., Leipzig, 1907-1911); Enders, L., ed. *Johann Eberlin von Günzburg* (3 vols., Neudrucke deutscher Literaturwerke des 16. and 17. Jahrhunderts. *Flugschriften aus der Reformationszeit XI, XV, XVIII*, Halle, 1826-1902); Schade, O., *Satiren und Pasquillen aus der Reformationszeit* (3 vols., Hannover, 1856, 1858).

mayer, the gunsmith Georg Motschidler, and the woman Argula von Stauff (von Grumbach).

To give a general indication of the great increase in writing during the Reformation, it may be noted that while in 1518 there were 150 works published in German, the number increased to 260 in 1519, 570 in 1520, 620 in 1521, 680 in 1522, 935 in 1523 and 990 in 1524. After 1524 the output of the presses began to ebb, a clear indication of the break between the religious reformers and the common man. The Protestant churches in Germany were henceforth built up by the princes and theologians and popular response was no longer the determining factor.

Of about fifty cities in Germany which were publishing books during the Reformation, Wittenberg, previously an unimportant place, was the foremost with the remarkable record of 600 different works printed during the years from 1518 to 1523.

This vast output was almost exclusively Lutheran literature. Scholars complained that the whole book market was devoted to books by Luther and his followers and that nobody wished to print anything for the pope or any material which would offend Luther. Erasmus wrote in 1523 to King Henry VIII of England, "Here in Basle who would dare to let even one little word be printed against Luther, while one is allowed to write against the Pope what one likes," and on the 21st of June, 1524, he wrote further, "Among the Germans it is hardly possible to sell anything except Luther's writings and those of his adversaries." Catholic polemics and authors had a difficult time finding printers and publishers for their manuscripts. Hieronymus Emser noted in 1521 that he had to print his writings against Luther at his own cost. Georg Witzel from Mainz, a Catholic convert from Lutheranism, complained that the printer had kept his manuscript for a whole year with promises. "If I would write as a Lutheran," he said, "there would be no difficulty, but as a Catholic I am writing in vain."¹¹

It is clear that the market for printed works had changed. No longer was it the church, the school, and the scholars who

¹¹ "Johann Coehlaeus, 27 Briefe," ed. by Friedensburg, W., in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 1897/98, XVIII; see also Herte, A., *Die Lutherkommentare des Joh. Cochlaeus* (Münster, 1935), 24.

absorbed the output. On the contrary, church and scholars could hardly get their works printed. The vastly increased output went to new groups and far wider ones, which were interested in a simple, direct message in the Lutheran line.

A forceful illustration of the change is given by the experience of two well established printers of the pre-Reformation time who failed to respond to the changing conditions. Anton Koberger, who is said to have had twenty-four printing presses and 100 journeymen at the peak of his success, lost his printing business and kept only the publishing.¹² A similar experience was suffered by Johann Froben of Basle who also kept to the old tradition of printing books in large folios and found no market for them. The old aristocratic business had changed into a more plebeian and popular industry.

It may be asked why the printers shifted so quickly from the Catholic works to the Lutheran. Were they merely following the demand? Were they directed by the desire for profit? Most of the evidence points in this direction. In the *Table Talks* Luther quoted his printer, Grunenberg, as saying that M. Lotther made 100 and 200 per cent profit on Luther's writings. Eberlin von Günzburg complained about the profit-making attitude of the printers. He wrote a very entertaining pamphlet *Mich Wundert, dass Kein Geld im Lande ist*, which was printed twice in 1524.¹³ It contained a trenchant criticism of existing conditions, supposedly by three journeymen. They maintain that the book printers are influenced only by the economic laws of supply and demand. They print everything good or evil. Now they print Luther's writings and the Bible but only to make profits. "So God's words must also serve the idolatrous greed of the printers," they say. "But God will not laugh long at that. He will not spare the profit-making printer." Luther himself complained several times about the "greed" of the printers. "I shall forward no more material," he wrote from the Wartburg in August 15, 1521 to Georg Spalatin at Altenberg, "until I learn that these sordid mercenaries care less for their profits than for the public. Such printers seem to think: It is enough for me to get the money,

12 "Johann Neudörffer," ed. by Loshner, G. W. K., (Wien, 1875, *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte*, X); and *Nachrichten von den vornehmsten Künstlern*, ed. by Campe, F., (Nürnberg, 1928). Neudörffer was a younger contemporary of A. Koberger.

13 Enders, L., *von Günzburg*, III, 147-184.

let the reader look out for the matter."¹⁴ On the other hand, it is also likely that the printers themselves had Lutheran sympathies and preferred to print Lutheran material. They were from the burgher class which provided the leading Lutherans. This view is borne out by a letter of Johann Cochlaeus written on September 27, 1521 to the papal Nuncio Hieronymus Aleander, in which he complains, "Nearly all printers are secret Lutherans, they do not print anything for us without pay and nothing reliable unless we stand beside them and look over their shoulders." Aleander wrote in the margin: "*Nihil novi adfers.*"

The attempt was made to suppress the Lutheran literature. The Edict of Worms in 1521 ordered that Lutheran books should be burned and that no other books should be printed without the permission of the authorities. But before 1524 two factors operated to make the decree ineffective. The first was that the local officials in states and cities who would have had to enforce the edict were on the whole reluctant to do so, partly because of their own sympathies and partly because it would have run counter to the powerful economic interests of the printers. The second was that the rapid production and widespread distribution of material created a situation for which the authorities were unprepared. Even after the officials were forced to attempt to carry out the censorship edict, it was made ineffective in general by illicit printing and the secret trade in forbidden prints by the hawkers. Printing had become an economic interest of such importance that every effort was made by the interested parties to prevent its ruin and an already affected public opinion tried to restrain its limitation.

The response to the new literature has already been indicated by reference to the sales and to the opposition to censorship. The effect of a message upon a people can never be measured in exact terms. Nor even if we could count the number of professed Lutherans would we be closer to an exact determination of the reason for this change. Certain general aspects of the effect of printing on the spread of the Reformation may, however, profitably be considered.

The first of these points is concerned with those who read the Lutheran writings. It is important to note that there was a broader education among the people than is usually

¹⁴ Reprinted in Smith, P., *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, (New York, 1911) 124.

suggested. The "Brethren of the Common Life" had founded teaching and educational institutions. In addition there was the teaching of other humanists, while monastery and cathedral schools as well as city institutions existed throughout practically all of Germany. From 1456 to 1506 nine new universities had been founded in Germany. Besides there were people who taught only reading and writing. In addition, for those who could not read, there were those who read to the people—the predicants, the scribes, and the reading women. Thus it can be said that a large percentage of the German burghers could read before the Reformation and that there were readers to supply the wants of the unlettered.

Contemporary evidence indicates that the burghers bought many books and read them. Cochlaeus wrote that the whole world read the Lutheran New Testament. A large group knew it by heart after repeated readings. Even the shoemakers and women talked about the gospel and carried the translation about with them. In 1522 the magistrate and the burghers of Bremen sent a bookseller to Wittenberg in order to buy Luther's writings. The burghers of Speyer liked to read Luther's books during supper time and copied them at night. The Nuremberg people listened to the reading of Luther's writings on the open market.

It might be argued that at the beginning a part of this success was due to curiosity and desire for sensation; that people read merely because they wished to know more of the monk who made a stand against indulgences and was being prosecuted for heresy by the papal court. If so, this stimulus would not have lasted long, for the greater part of Luther's writings would quickly have disappointed the curious, because they had no sensational tenor. The best evidence that desire for sensation was not the motive animating most of those who read or heard Luther's works is that the demand continually increased.

It is clear that the message of the Reformation was spread chiefly by two means, by preaching and by printing. That little has been said of the former is only because this paper is principally concerned with the interaction of printing and the Reformation. Preaching was a vitally important, and some have held, the most important instrument for the spread of Lutheran

ideas. Luther's contributions to it of simplicity and effectiveness are not less significant than to writing.

The general movement among the clergy was led by the monks of Luther's order, the Augustines, such as John Lang of Erfurt, Kaspar Güttel of Mainz, and the Netherland Augustine monks who died as martyrs for their convictions, and included also Franciscan friars like Heinrich of Kettenbach and Eberlin of Günzburg, Dominicans like Martin Butzer, and from the order of Premonstratensians, Johann Bugenhagen, the apostle of Pomerania. It was seconded by all ranks of the secular priesthood who were joined by the patrician provosts of the great towns. There were also many evangelists and upholders from the laity, particularly from the sedentary crafts like the weavers, furriers, and shoemakers. There were even a very few preachers from the peasant class. But in contrast to earlier religious movements in which preaching could be supported only by manuscripts, laboriously copied, the Reformation preachers had the aid of the printers in supplementing their words with printed matter. The literature prepared the way for the work, followed it up, and gave to the preachers themselves a steady stream of fresh ideas and arguments.¹⁵

Luther signaled the contribution of printing, when he spoke of it as "an unquenchable flame" and "the last and highest gift of God for the Gospel." In a sermon of March 10, 1522, he declared, "I have only put in motion God's word through preaching and writing. The word has done everything and carried everything before it." One may even quote his rather proud though justified comment, "Look at my work: have I not alone broken off more from the pope, bishops, priests, and monks, with my words, than up to now all emperors, kings, and princes could do with all their forces."

The two great forces for the spread of the new doctrine were preaching and the press. Only the latter could win for a new idea thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of people at the same moment. It is the great contribution of printing that it made the Reformation a sacred cause of the whole people.

¹⁵ An interesting light is thrown upon this by the pamphlet *Klage der sieben frommen Pfaffen*, by Johann Eberlin von Günzburg, ed. by Enders, L., von Günzburg, II, 57-93.