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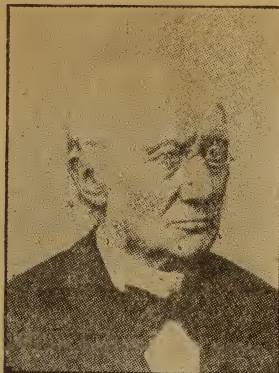
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LUDWIG WINDTHORST

LEADER OF GERMAN CATHOLICS



LUDWIG WINDTHORST

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Born in Kyllburg, Rhine-Province, Germany, Jan. 15, 1869. In this country since 1895.

Dr. Swickerath is rightly regarded as a leading educator of the United States. To have attended his lectures on Pedagogy before the teachers of the Archdiocese of Boston was a liberal education upon the subject. For there into small compass, and in a most sprightly manner was brought the vast knowledge and deep insight into the science and art of teaching which are set down profoundly in two of Father Swickerath's foremost books, namely:

"Jesuit Education, Its History and Principles In the Light of Modern Educational Problems."

"Character and Character Formation."

No other country has so powerful and well organized a Catholic party as Germany. Under the leadership of the great Windthorst it had become the dominant party in the Empire. What is of special interest is the fact that the Center Party not only defended the oppressed and persecuted Catholics, but devoted itself with equal zeal to the welfare of the people at large, especially the laboring classes. It was mainly through the activity of the Center Party that a sound social policy was begun in the Empire, and many excellent laws were passed for the protection of labor, the insurance of workers, etc. For this reason an account of the history of this party and its activity, and of Catholic organization in Germany in general, is instructive not only from the religious but also from the social point of view.

LUDWIG WINDTHORST, ORGANIZER OF CENTRE PARTY.

The leader was Ludwig Windthorst, one of the greatest Catholics of the nineteenth century. Some of you, probably, have heard little of this man, although he deserves to be known by Catholics all over the world. A few years ago an able Irish writer published a work on "Great Catholic Laymen of the Nineteenth Century." He devotes special chapters to Andreas Hofer, the hero of Tyrol; Garcia Moreno, the martyr president of Ecuador; Frederick Ozanam, the founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; Montalembert, the Peer of France; Louis Pasteur, the Prince of Science; Daniel O'Connell, the Great Liberator; and Ludwig Windthorst, whom he styles the "German Liberator." At the end of this interesting book the author compares the great men whose life and work he

has described and compares them with him whom he considers the greatest of all, namely O'Connell, and he confesses, "Windthorst is O'Connell's only rival." This alone may suffice to show that we all might profitably acquaint ourselves with the life and work of this great man. But there is a special reason why American Catholics, why the members of the Catholic Federation, should know something about Windthorst, because the very idea and plan of this Federation is largely derived from the last creation of Windthorst, namely the German Catholic "People's Union" (Volksverein.)

If we want to understand the life work of Windthorst, we must first cast a glance at the condition of the Catholics in Germany during the period preceding his activity. It is to Prussia in particular that we must turn. After the downfall of Napoleon, Prussia obtained at the Congress of Vienna large provinces, especially the ecclesiastical territories of the Electorates of Treves and Cologne, with a population almost exclusively Catholic.

THE TREACHERY OF PRUSSIA.

The Catholics were solemnly promised the preservation of their religious rights. But the Prussian government, all through history, had shown an absolutistic and highly bureaucratic spirit, a firm belief in the omnipotence of the state, and a pronounced jealousy of the spiritual power. Almost immediately after the acquisition of those large and flourishing Catholic provinces the government made frequent attempts to loosen the ties which bound the Catholics to the Holy See, to create a national Church, and to make it a mere tool of the state, a useful ally against rebellious factions, good enough to do police duties for the state, but without any rights of its own.

The same spirit prevailed to some extent in other German states, even in the Catholic Kingdom of Bavaria, where the leaven of Gallicanism, Febronianism and Josephism, or by whatever name the

assumptions of the state against religion may be designated, had led the rulers constantly to meddle in ecclesiastical affairs.

There was, and is at present, a close union between Church and State in Germany; the bishops and priests receive their salaries from the government, Catholic schools, elementary and secondary, are supported by public funds, etc. There are advantages, but also serious dangers in this system. The governments, especially that of Prussia, continually interfered in ecclesiastical matters as in the election of bishops, the administration of seminaries, the examination of candidates for the priesthood, and the very exercise of priestly functions.

BISHOPS' RIGHTS REFUSED.

The bishops had hardly any influence in the appointment of professors in seminaries; men were appointed by the government whose orthodoxy was rightly suspected; a strict supervision and censorship was exercised over Catholic books; catechisms could be introduced into Catholic schools only with the permission of government officials. A royal "Placet" or sanction, was required before any ecclesiastical decree, of the Pope or the bishops, could be published. In some parts Protestant officials decreed how many candles were to be used in Catholic services! In regard to mixed marriages it was law that the children invariably should follow the religion of the father; as in Prussia mixed marriages were usually contracted between a Protestant man and a Catholic woman, especially by Protestant officials who were sent from the East to the Catholic provinces in the West, Rhineland and Westphalia, it is evident what the object of the law was. Catholic priests were forbidden to exact any promise of Catholic education. Many other facts could be quoted to prove that the Church was held in iron chains, in a condition of unworthy and intolerable bondage. It was a slow and silent, but most insidious persecution all along.

At last the Catholics were roused to resent the indignities inflicted on their Church. In 1837 the Archbishop of Cologne, a dauntless

and zealous prelate, fearlessly insisted on the laws of the Church concerning mixed marriages. The result was that he was imprisoned; but this outrage on the part of a heartless bureaucracy led to a revival of Catholic life in Germany. The great Goerres, in a fiery pamphlet called the Archbishop a new Athanasius, and stirred up Catholic feeling and enthusiasm everywhere.

VICTORY OF CATHOLICS' PATIENCE.

This was the Easter day of the Church in Germany, when it rose as it were, from the grave. The patience of the Catholics had been tried long enough. They tell the story of a German nobleman who travelled through the Bohemian forests in the beginning of last century, with Michael, his German coachman. Suddenly two robbers approach the carriage; the nobleman bravely defends himself, but finally is overpowered and robbed of all. And in the meantime, Michael, a big, strong fellow, was sitting quietly on the box and smoking his pipe. The nobleman, full of indignation, cries out to the highwaymen: "You have my money and all, do me one favor; give that lazy fellow a sound thrashing." The robbers thought this a good idea, pulled down Michael and hammered lustily on him. Michael endured it for a little while. But suddenly he rose, and higher he rose; a blow to the right, a blow to the left, and before him lay the robbers. The nobleman stood aghast for a moment, then exclaimed, "But why on earth did you not do that before?" Michael had recovered his composure and calmly replied: "Sir, I must warm up first."

THE CATHOLIC AWAKENING.

This Michael is in some way representative of the German Catholics of those early days. They had patiently, too patiently, tolerated the encroachments of the government on their rights. They had,

indeed, become warm, had been beaten warm, but from now on they were thoroughly roused to action. Indifference and apathy were shaken off and the period of their organization began.

In 1848, the first congress of representatives of Catholic societies met. Those annual congresses of the Catholics have been styled by Windthorst the "Autumn Manoeuvres of the Catholic Army." They bring together every year Catholics from all parts of the country, from all classes, members of all Catholic societies. In the year 1909 over a hundred thousand people flocked to the city of Dusseldorf and 60,000 delegates of workingmen's societies paraded on one day. These assemblies are not mere shows, not mere pageants; nor is their object only to rouse the enthusiasm of Catholics by stirring appeals. Their object is a far more important one: Careful and detailed plans are laid for Catholic activity during the coming year. The work is divided into different departments: the liberties of the Church, the missions (foreign and domestic), the labor question, charity, school and education. Their various departments are looked after by permanent committees, and their reports are the basis of detailed directions; new fields are assigned, fresh lines of development of Catholic activity are pointed out in these great congresses.

One of the men who were chiefly instrumental in founding this effective institution was a German prelate, later bishop of Mainz, Monsignor Ketteler. It has well been said that he sounded the call to arms to the Catholic army in Germany. It was Bishop Ketteler, too, who roused the interest of the German Catholics for organized social effort, and became the *founder of the Catholic Social movement*.

Pope Leo XIII has rightly been called "the workingmen's Pope," because in his splendid Encyclicals he explained so lucidly the

principles which alone can satisfactorily settle the pressing social question, the relation between employer and employee, between capital and labor. But Pope Leo himself acknowledged his indebtedness to the great Bishop of Mainz, when he declared: "Ketteler was my great precursor."

The next step of prime importance in the field of Catholic activity was the foundation of the Center Party, the greatest Catholic political party in any country, whose battles and victories have called forth the admiration of the whole world. This party was founded in 1870 by prominent Catholic leaders of Rhineland and Westphalia. It was intended to fight for the independence of the Catholic Church, for her guaranteed rights, for the denominational character of the schools, and for the legitimate and effective influence of the Church on education.

It is well to remember that the activity of the Center Party was not confined to these spheres. It was not merely an opposition party with destructive aims; its objects were eminently constructive; it became the most vigorous *defender of the rights of the laborers*, and took an active and prominent part in all important movements. Its motto was: 'Truth, Liberty, Justice,' and the Party has conscientiously and nobly lived up to its motto.

Soon after its formation the party gained a member, who was to become its brilliant leader, namely Windthorst. Windthorst was born in the kingdom of Hanover. When we hear of a great man we usually picture him to ourselves as great and imposing in physical appearance. The very contrary was true of Windthorst. He was unusually diminutive in size. Nor was there anything pre-possessing in his appearance. On an insignificant body was seen an unusually large head with a large mouth. He was a useful subject for the caricature of comic papers and, unlike most little people, who resent any allusion to their smallness and other physical defects, he thoroughly enjoyed caricatures of himself. Nor did he resent any jest about his appearance. On the contrary, he himself made many a joke on it. One time he met with an accident in Berlin. He wrote to his wife, telling her that no serious harm had been done. 'For the rest, don't be alarmed, dear, my beauty has not been spoiled.'

After the completion of his law studies he became a judge, and later minister of justice in the kingdom of Hanover. After the downfall of this kingdom, Windthorst remained most loyal to the dethroned Guelf family; but he was now a Prussian subject and was elected for the Prussian Diet as representative of Meppen.

WINDTHORST JOINS CENTER PARTY.

At first he was a sort of political free lance, joining no party, and as even then his striking political abilities made themselves known, he was called the 'One-Man-Party' or the 'Party Meppen.' Soon after the formation of the Center Party he joined it. It was well that the Catholics had gained a political party to represent them, and a leader who was to organize their forces, and lead them to battle and to victory. For the German Catholics were on the eve of oppression more brutal, and a persecution more violent, than they had suffered before.

Anti-Catholic feeling had been revived everywhere, fostered by certain Protestant societies. The anti-Catholic party, too, had found a leader in the person of Bismarck. We cannot deny that this man, the "Iron Chancellor," as he was called, possessed great qualities of mind. He was one of the most cunning diplomats, a man full of energy, which however degenerated into brutality; he shrank from no means for obtaining the realization of his ambitious schemes: European supremacy and absolute power at home.

After he had defeated the Catholic states of Germany and Austria, had humiliated France and founded the new German Empire, he tried his strength against the Catholic Church, blinded with success, like the first Napoleon. Filled with the principles of Prussian absolutism and brought up in the traditional Protestant misconceptions regarding the Catholic Church, he saw in her the enemy of national development. He wanted to enslave the Church. As Windthorst once said: "You want to make of the Church a police department." In his war against the Church he could count on all parties, the small band of Catholics excepted. For Liberals and Conservatives, divided on all other issues, made common cause against the Catholics. "Herod and Pilate once more have become friends," as one exclaimed at the time.

BEGINNING OF KULTURKAMPF.

Then began what is called the "Kulturkampf," that is the struggle for culture. It was such indeed, but in a sense different from that which was implied by its originators. It was a struggle between two cultures, not, as they said, between German and Latin, but between Catholic and anti-Catholic; nay more, as the very Protestants later realized, a struggle between Christian and anti-

Christian culture, the world-old struggle between religion and infidelity.

The famous laws were enacted which go by the name of May laws because passed in the month of May of successive years. First the Jesuits, and the orders allied with them, as the law said, among them the Redemptorists, were banished from Germany, later the other religious orders. Finally, violent attacks were made on the rights of the bishops and secular clergy. All ecclesiastical penalties were forbidden, the education of the clergy and the appointment to ecclesiastical positions were to be controlled by the government; priests were allowed to appeal from the regulations of the bishops to a special government court, whose decision should be final.

These were flagrant violations of the sacred liberties of the Church for which a Thomas a Becket had died a martyr, for which a Gregory VII had gone into exile. And the German Bishops were worthy successors of those martyr bishops of old. They all strenuously resisted the intolerable arrogance of the government. Catholics, sneeringly, but justly, said that Bismarck wanted to play the pope and that he wanted Catholics to learn their theology from his professors. Several bishops were sent to prison, the archbishop of Cologne for six months. The venerable bishop of the diocese of Treves was imprisoned three months and died soon after his release.

Most touching scenes were witnessed on the occasion of the imprisonment of these prelates. When the bishop of Treves was arrested and led to the prison, thousands of people assembled before the prison gate. When the bishop was just about to enter the prison, he turned around, and gave his episcopal blessing to the multitude, men and women weeping as they knelt. That moment a photograph was taken of the scene and the picture was hung in almost every Catholic home in the diocese, where it wonderfully

strengthens even to this day the love for the Church and the attachment to the spiritual shepherd.

But did not the Catholics resist the imprisonment of their prelates? Not in one instance. These German Catholics were a law-abiding people; there was no resistance to police force, no riot, no tumult. Yet they were not indifferent. The men went away from such heart-rending scenes, more determined than ever to fight for their right, but to fight with lawful weapons. They went to the ballot box and voted for the most loyal Catholics, and election after election the number of Catholic representatives in parliament increased, until at the end of the struggle their number exceeded one hundred. The Center Party became the dominant party; it had to be reckoned with, it could compel the government to abolish the iniquitous laws.

The attitude of the secular clergy was as heroic as that of their bishops. Those who refused to obey the government regulations, or who carried out the ordinances of their bishops, were deprived of their salary. And yet, of over 4,000 priests, not more than 30 accepted the government salary; these men, called the "state pastors," were shunned and ostracized by the people, who would rather walk many miles on Sunday than to hear Mass of one of those cowardly priests. The prisons were soon filled with priestly confessors of the faith; hundreds were driven into exile. Others again came, at dead of night, to their parishes to say Mass in the early morning. They were hunted by the police, warned by boy spies, hidden in barns and cellars by the people. Scenes were enacted which remind one of those witnessed in Ireland under the penal laws.

There was no bloody persecution; the times were over for such, though the spirit of the persecutors was the same. Yet these men would have laid down their lives as heroically as did the martyrs in former times. It was a memorable spectacle and one of the most remarkable struggles in the history of the Church.

The Catholic laity too, had to suffer. The loyal nobility and wealthier people were blacklisted and ostracized socially; Catholic business men who voted for the Center Party were boycotted; the sons of faithful Catholics could not expect promotion in the army or in government positions; Catholic officials were annoyed in the meanest manner and forced out of their positions. But it was all in vain.

We have still to witness another scene, equally remarkable, that enacted in Parliament. There the champion of the Catholic cause fought for years a mighty duel with the man who had at his command all the resources of the empire, all the determination of a brutal and unscrupulous diplomacy, and all the applause of the non-Catholic world. A memorable battle, indeed, between the giant Bismarck, towering in size above every one, and the little man who appeared to be almost a dwarf. But it was not a test of physical strength, but of mind, and of principle, and there the little man had the ascendancy over the giant. It was a repetition of David encountering Goliath. Bismarck used all the invectives so common in attacking the Catholic Church: Misrepresentation, slander, the bugbear of "Vaticanism," which he represented as the incubus on German national life. Windthorst met him with keen logic, with sharp irony, and with an earnestness which only a defender of right and justice can have.

BISMARCK FEARED WINDTHORST.

Bismarck admitted that he feared no one but Windthorst, and he was frequently seen in Parliament, now trembling with excitement, then shaking with rage, while Windthorst never lost self-control. Endowed with an almost Celtic wit, he frequently turned the arguments of his adversaries into ridicule. One day an opponent said that they all admitted that the Church in the past had done great things, that she had been a mother to the nations; but that was, he added superciliously, when the nations were in their infancy. When children grow up they can no longer follow their mother; they even bury their mother. Windthorst exclaimed: "Do you bury your mother before she is dead? We don't; the Catholic Church is not dead, not will she ever die."

In his struggles he was loyally supported by his party, by the people and by the Catholic nobility. He often spoke in an almost prophetic manner, predicting that the powerful chancellor would have to come to terms. They laughed at him, and yet it came sooner than anyone had expected. Bismarck became convinced that his warfare against the Church was a failure. He noticed with dismay the increase of socialism, which spread in a disquieting manner in Protestant districts. Finally, after the death of Pope Pius IX he began negotiations with Leo XIII, and gradually, one piece after the other of the iniquitous legislation was broken away. Bismarck, in the height of the struggle had proudly and defiantly declared: "We shall not go to Canossa," as Henry IV. had done to seek reconciliation with the Pope. But he went to Canossa. He had tried to crush the Church, and had failed like many another

giant before him. His raving against the Rock of Peter had been fruitless. Goliath had met David, and was defeated. The final outcome was: Bismarck was dismissed by the Emperor and retired to his lonely home in the Saxon forests, and Windthorst was the most prominent figure in the German parliament. For him, too, the time came for retiring, but not into solitude, but to his reward. The Center Party, when he assumed its leadership, had been the smallest of all parties and despised by all; now it was the dominant political body.

Windthorst had consummated his work; he could leave it to others to build on the foundations which he had laid, and to battle in the spirit which he had infused into the German Catholics.

The Center Party now has about 100 members, and has still to fight for the rights of Catholics; for the spirit of bureaucracy and anti-Catholic feeling have not died out in Germany. But the Center Party and the Catholics of Germany in general still find inspiration in the noble work of their great leader, whose memory is cherished by all, and is deeply imbedded in the hearts of the simplest Catholic peasant in the empire.

I can say only a few words about the last days of Windthorst. When he was taken ill in Parliament there was general sympathy expressed everywhere. At midnight of the same day the Emperor sent his military aid to inquire about the sick man. Next morning the Emperor called in person, and the Empress sent flowers. Daily bulletins had to be forwarded to the royal palace. As the champion of Catholicism was sinking, he saw himself still engaged in the struggle for the great cause; in his delirium he made a speech for

the recall of the religious orders; the ruling passion of his life was strong in death. He died with the words: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

The Protestant president of Parliament declared that his death was the greatest loss this body had ever suffered. The journals of the whole empire, of whatever creed or political conviction, paid a glowing tribute to the ability and character of the man with whose principles many had no sympathy. They called him a genius, a statesman of the first rank, the most upright of men. His funeral was such as seldom has been witnessed in modern times. Representatives of every prince of the empire were present to do homage to the leader of the Catholics. He was buried in the Church of St. Mary in Hanover, which had been erected through his efforts, and for which he had spent every penny that was given him by Catholics on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

WINDTHORST'S SELF-SACRIFICE.

He died a very poor man, although he had many an opportunity to enrich himself. A few weeks before his death he uttered to a prominent ecclesiastic words which should be deeply engraven in the hearts of Catholics. I have it from the lips of this ecclesiastic that at the railroad station in Berlin, Windthorst held his hand for a long time, saying with great emotion: "Father, I shall never see you again in this life. I want to tell you one thing. From the day I have belonged to the Center Party I have never sought my own interest."

Nor was this a mere boast on his part. Many remarkable occurrences prove the truth of his statement. Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria had offered Windthorst a position with a salary of 100,000 marks, about \$25,000—and if we take into consideration the greater value of money in Germany, we might say, almost \$50,000. Windthorst was poor; he had nothing to leave to his wife and daughter. What a temptation in such an offer! Yet it was no serious temptation to a man like Windthorst. He asked a Bishop, a personal friend of his, whether it was not rather his duty to remain at his post as leader of the Catholic party, and when the prelate answered in the affirmative, he declined the flattering and enticing offer without hesitation. What a glorious example of unselfishness, of self-sacrificing spirit, of noble devotion to a great cause! Surely, “the age of chivalry is not gone.” Only after his death it became known how poor he really was. It was found that in order to support his family properly he had to do private work, solving difficult cases for lawyers; and as during the last four or five years of his life he was almost totally blind, his only child, his daughter Marie, read the cases to him and then took down his dictation. She had remained single to stay with her father. She was a heroine, and a worthy daughter of such a father.

LESSON FOR AMERICAN CATHOLICS.

There are several important lessons for us, for American Catholics, contained in the life and work of the Catholic Liberator of Germany. The first is the necessity of loyalty to the great Catholic cause, loyalty to the leaders in the struggle for the rights of Catholics.

It is a truth, however sad it may be, that Catholics invariably have to fight for their rights. If I use the word "fight," I wish it to be understood that we are not, as some think, pugnacious and bellicose, ever spoiling for a fight. We are peaceful people, and do not want to fight. But often we have to say with Windthorst: "If you want war, well you may have it."

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