

LUTHER, MARTIN (1483-1546). "Here I stand; I can do no other; God help me! Amen!" These are the words which tradition puts into the mouth of the monk Luther in the year 1521, in the memorable scene in the bishop's palace of the quaint old German city of Worms, on the river Rhine, when he was called to account for his religious teachings. Though it is highly probable that he did not use these words, they, nevertheless, sum up fairly well the spirit of the long and elaborate reply which, after some preliminary hesitation, he made to the assembly.

The young emperor, Charles V, had just come into his German dominions from Spain, and was holding an assembly or "diet" to regulate the affairs of Germany. Among other weighty topics was the question what to do with Luther, professor in the Elector of Saxony's University of Wittenberg, whose religious teachings, although formally condemned by the Pope's bull in 1520, still continued to set Germany aflame. Even the Pope's representative, Alexander, who was there to demand that Luther's books be burned and their author sent to Rome for punishment, recognized that there were difficulties. "All Germany is in commotion," he wrote his master. "Nine out of every ten cry 'Luther,' and the tenth, if he does not care for what Luther says, at least cries, 'Death to the court of Rome!'" When faint-hearted friends had counselled Luther to distrust the emperor's safe-conduct to Worms he had replied, "Though there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the roofs, I will go there."

The refusal which Luther gave to the demand that he recant his books was followed by the Edict of Worms, issued by the Emperor May 25, 1521. It condemned Luther and called upon all persons to seize him and give him up to a heretic's death; and his books also were to be committed to the flames.

Martin Luther, whose teachings thus convulsed Germany, was born of sturdy peasant stock in the little village of Eisleben, Saxony. His boyhood was spent in poverty, and he sang in the streets for bread, as was the custom of poor students. Later his hard-working father was able to send him to the University of Erfurt to prepare for the study of law.

But as the result of an inner religious conflict, Luther entered the Augustinian convent of monks at Erfurt in 1505. After three years of strict monastic discipline and theological studies, he became a professor in the new University of Wittenberg, and a few years later was in Rome on business for his order.

Luther's career as a reformer may be said to begin with the nailing of his famous Ninety-five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Such disputations as the one contemplated were common in university life. Luther's theses were an attack on the prevailing system of indulgences, as preached by Tetzel.

When published in pamphlet form, they attracted much attention, and controversy followed. Cardinal Cajetan was sent as the Pope's legate to Luther, but could not induce him to retract his utterances. The disputation at Leipzig with John Eck (1519) merely widened the breach. In his pamphlets, "Address to the German Nobility" and "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther broke with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1520 he burned the Pope's bull condemning his publicly expressed opinions, and about the same time he also destroyed a copy of the canon or Church law.

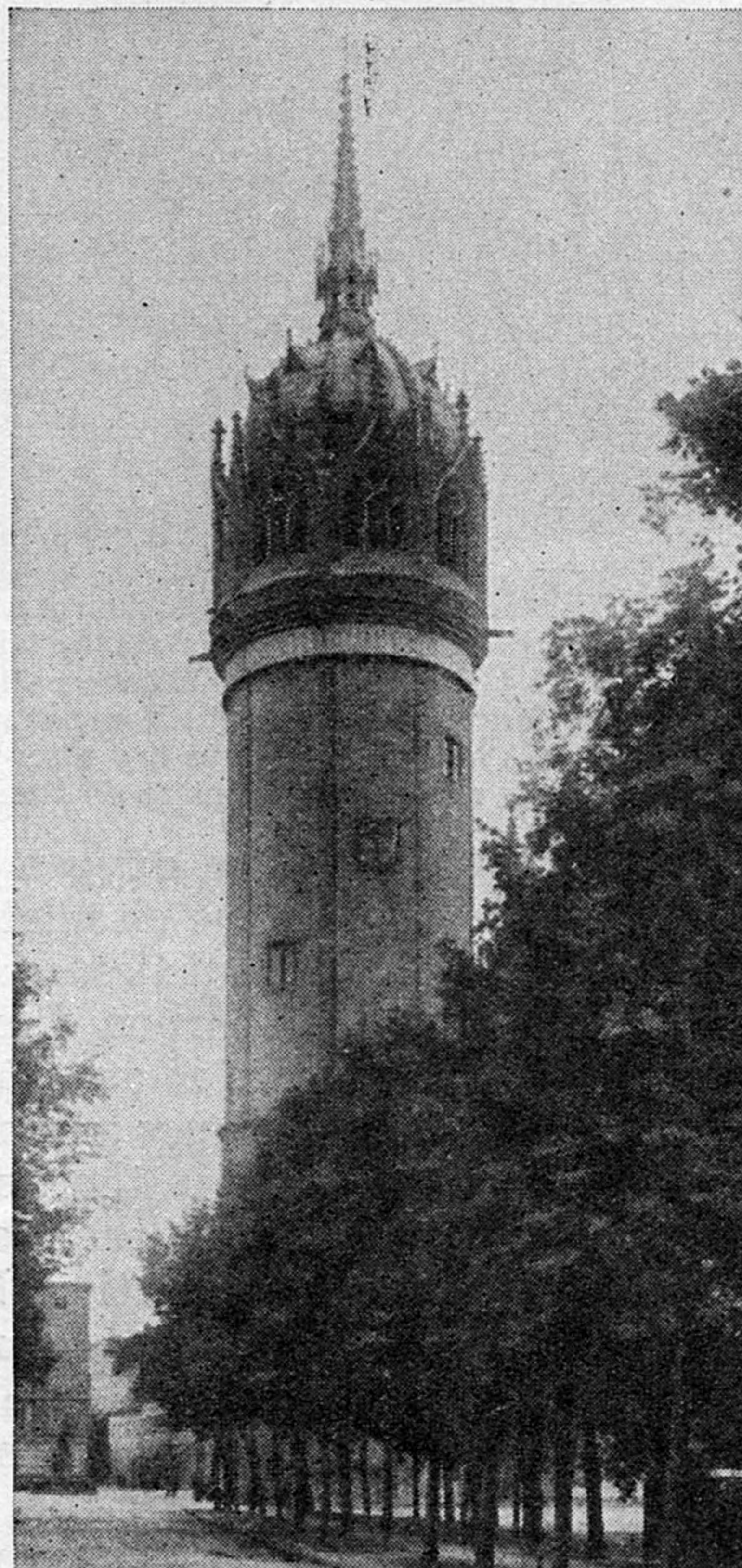
While returning from the Diet of Worms, Luther was seized by the connivance of his friend the Elector of Saxony and safely hidden in the picturesque old castle of the Wartburg near Eisenach. There he remained in disguise, concealed even from most

MARTIN LUTHER



The great leader of the Protestant Reformation. He died at the moment when the war to put down his teachings was about to break out.

THE CASTLE CHURCH



This is the tower of the church in Wittenberg to which Martin Luther nailed his famous Ninety-five Theses.