

CHAPTER XIV.

REUCHLIN, PFEFFERKORN, AND THE TALMUD IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES.

Joseph or John Pfefferkorn was a German Jew, who lived in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He was ignorant of worldly knowledge, and had but a very limited acquaintance with Jewish literature. He became a Roman Catholic to escape the penalty for a theft. The Dominican monks of Cologne, [subordinate](#) to Hochsträter, the judge of the Inquisition, received him into their community with great honor. Hochsträter was a great fanatic and the enemy of every one who bore the name of Jew. His colleagues were Arnold Tangersky and Arthurin Gracia. This latter had committed to a Jewish apostate, Victor Karbensky (1504 A.C.), the task of writing a pamphlet against Judaism. In this pamphlet the author brings various accusations against the Jewish people, the responsibility for which he places on the Talmud. He recounts fabulous

p. 77

charges of Jewish persecution of apostates, and complains that even the poorest and most criminal and hardened Jews subject themselves to all manner of hardships rather than embrace Christianity. The pamphlet concludes with these words: "All this is due to the Talmud, which is the source of all evil, and which the Jews hold in greater reverence than the ten commandments of God." The Dominican monks found that this pamphlet failed of due effect, and asked Pfefferkorn if he could write a better one. He wrote the "Warnungsspiegel" (The Mirror of Warning), wherein he pretended to be a friend of the Jewish people, and, for their own good, desired to introduce Christianity among them. He urged them to convince the Christian world that the Jews do not need Christian blood for their religious rites. He also tried to induce his Christian brethren not to persecute the Jews unto destruction; for, he said, the Jews are also, in a way, human beings. Along with these pretences of friendliness he evinces in the pamphlet the desire (and in this he was seconded by the Dominican monks) to take the Talmud by force from the Jews. "The causes which hinder the Jews from becoming Christians," said Pfefferkorn, "are three: first, usury; second, because they are not compelled to attend Christian churches to hear the sermons; and third, because they honor the Talmud." Therefore he appealed to his co-religionists and the rulers to remove the first two causes; as to the third, he advised the government to take the Talmud from the Jews and burn it. But even this pamphlet was not wholly successful, because the rulers and the people understood that depriving the Jews of the Talmud would inure to the benefit, financially, of the Dominicans; for these latter, being the judges of the Inquisition, possessed the power of declaring the books harmless and of returning them to the Jews for a consideration. Therefore Pfefferkorn hastened to issue another pamphlet, in which he used harsher expressions, and tried to convince the people that the hatred of the Jews for Christianity was due solely to their religious books. He issued also a third pamphlet, on Jewish history, in which he contradicted what he had written in his first pamphlet. He said plainly that every Jew considers it a good deed to kill, or at least to mock, a Christian; therefore he deemed it the duty of all true Christians to expel the Jews from all Christian lands;

p. 78

even if the law should forbid such a deed, they need not heed or obey it in this respect. "It is the duty of the people," he said, "to ask permission of the rulers to take from the Jews all their books except the Bible," as well as all the pledges of Christians to be found in Jewish hands; also, that Jewish children should be taken away from their parents and educated in the Catholic religion. He concluded his work thus: "Who afflicts the Jews is doing the will of God, and who seeks their benefit will incur damnation."

Although the religious hatred of the times of the Crusades was then far from extinguished, Pfefferkorn's books did not find favor with the rulers, as the Jews were their chief treasurers, from whom they at all times exacted enormous taxes. Therefore they did not desire to drive them from their territories; and to compel them to embrace Christianity did not suit them either, as most of the Christians disliked Jewish apostates and looked upon them disdainfully since they well knew that in most instances they did not accept Christianity through belief in the religion, but from more worldly reasons. In addition to this, all the Jews of Germany, as also the physicians of the rulers, who were for the greater part Jews, did all in their power to prevent Pfefferkorn's advice from being carried into execution. Many Christians, too, asserted that they were convinced that Pfefferkorn was bad at heart, a flatterer, and that his sole object was to enrich himself at the expense of the Jews. Therefore Pfefferkorn wrote a fourth pamphlet, in which he reiterated all he had written previously, and declared that the only way to be rid of the Jews was either to expel or enslave them; the first thing to be done was to collect all the copies of the Talmud found among the Jews and to burn them. Arthurin Gracia, who was the Censor of Art, revised and corrected Pfefferkorn's works and rendered them into Latin and German, and sent them to all the rulers of the period. Besides this, the Dominicans addressed themselves to the sister of the Emperor Maximilian, Princess Kunigunde, who was a nun in a Dominican convent at Munich. They begged her to intercede with the Emperor in behalf of Pfefferkorn. They eulogized Pfefferkorn, telling her of his knowledge of Jewish life and of his good character, and urged her to confide in him. Finally they persuaded her to give a

p. 79

copy of his pamphlet to the emperor, who was then at war in Italy with the Venetians. As a result of all this, Pfefferkorn at once set out for Italy, and succeeded in obtaining from the emperor a decree that all the Jews of Germany should yield up their books to him (Pfefferkorn), to be revised by him; if he should find in them anything relating to Christianity, it should be destroyed. In this task he was granted the power to call to his assistance, in each city, a priest and two of the civic rulers. The Jews were warned under severe penalty not to resist the royal command.

Pfefferkorn and his party of inquisitors first visited Magdeburg, for in that city dwelt rabbis who were renowned throughout the Jewish world; and although they resorted to every device to prevent the surrender of their literary treasures--even the Bible, the removal of which was not included in the royal mandate, was also taken away--every Jew was compelled to surrender his entire store of religious books.

But many Gentile scholars, to whom Pfefferkorn's conduct did not appeal, assisted the Jews by testifying before the emperor that Pfefferkorn was ignorant on many subjects, and that he wrongfully deprived the Jews of books containing no allusions to Christianity; besides, they referred, in their request to the emperor, to the privileges accorded to the Jews, by previous

emperors and popes, of worshiping in their own way. The Elector of Mayence, Archbishop Uriel, enraged at Pfefferkorn's action (we cannot learn why), summoned him to the city of Aschaffenburg, and informed him that the emperor's decree was in opposition to the law of the land, as it made him prosecutor, witness, judge, and executor in one; therefore, the Jews or the people, in disregarding the decree, would be guilty of no crime against the law. He counselled him, in fine, to ask the emperor to alter the mandate to conform with law. Pfefferkorn agreed to do so, and the Dominicans of Cologne advised him to find a prominent Gentile who would actively interest himself in the matter. This man they found in Reuchlin, at that time very popular and respected all over the world. The Dominicans told Pfefferkorn to get a letter from Reuchlin to the emperor, before going again to see the latter.

John Reuchlin, of Paszheim (1455-1522), had a great

p. 80

reputation as a scholar; in addition he had a benevolent heart. He devoted himself especially to the study of Hebrew, in which his interest was enhanced by Count Pick de Marsundella, who opened up to him the study of Kabbala, *i.e.*, Jewish mysticism. Even this did not satisfy his desire to be master of Hebrew. He formed the acquaintance of Jacob Laanson, a Jewish physician at the Court of Frederick III., from whom he acquired a further knowledge of the language; at this court he came in contact with many Jewish scholars, and attained to such skill in the study that he afterwards wrote a book wherein he praised Hebrew as the best of all languages. He claimed in this work that the dogmas and rites of false religions were due to the ignorance of Hebrew, and to the misconception of the meaning of significant Hebrew terms. As for the Kabbala, he ranked this study with any other branch of learning, and stated that he himself was far from understanding thoroughly its sublime mysteries, for a complete knowledge of which even a lifetime would scarce suffice. Afterwards, when he became the Ambassador of the Elector Palatine to the Court of Pope Alexander VI., he became acquainted with the physician Obadiah Eipminah, the renowned commentator on the Mishna; and it was interesting to see the celebrated German scholar, whose discourses in Italian were greatly admired by the Italians themselves, stooping to ask a Jew to be his teacher of Hebrew literature. It was always his habit, when he came in contact with learned Jews, to obtain some useful knowledge from them.

Nevertheless, Reuchlin was not entirely free from prejudice against those of the Jewish faith. In a letter to a knight who desired to convert the Jews of his dominions to Christianity, he wrote that the whole trouble with the Jews was they were disbelievers, who did not care for Christ and his apostles, and that they held in general contempt all Christians; although it is true that later he repented of having written this letter, as will be seen further on.

The Dominicans relied on Reuchlin, knowing that the words of one so [thoroughly](#) acquainted with Hebrew literature would be respected by all the rulers of Germany. But Reuchlin declined to take an active part in the matter, although he commended the project of destroying all books written against Christianity. He also called Pfefferkorn's attention to the

p. 81

injustice of the emperor's decree, and told him it was doubtful whether it could be executed.

Despite his not securing the wished-for testimony, Pfefferkorn succeeded in persuading the emperor to ignore the petitions of the Jews and their defenders, and to give him the power to deprive the Jews of their books, in a new decree, while harshly reproving them for failing to strictly obey the first. This time the emperor commissioned Archbishop Uriel to carry out the decree. He also ordered him to seek, and to follow the advice of the German universities of Cologne, Mayence, Erfurt and Heidelberg, and also to take counsel with Reuchlin, Victor Karbensky and Hochsträter (although the latter was totally ignorant of Hebrew). Uriel commanded the director of the University of Mayence, Herman Hess, to visit all the cities of Germany, and to remove all the Jewish books. Hess did so. He travelled through Germany accompanied by Pfefferkorn; and in Frankfort alone fifteen hundred manuscripts were taken away (printed books were as yet rare). They did the same in Worms, Lorch, Birgin, Lamuven, Mayence and Dertz. Pfefferkorn said that the Jews, to save their literary treasures, offered to enrich him, but he claimed he did not care to sell his soul and therefore did his duty.

The Jews on the other hand, did not cease in their efforts to prevent their despoliation. They secured testimonials from the more prominent among the Gentiles, and sent a committee to the emperor to petition him to prevent these attacks on their religion. They adduced proofs to show that their books contained nothing against Christian communities. They brought forward the privileges granted to them by former emperors and popes, enabling them to worship their God without the interference of the Church or State. These facts so favorably impressed the emperor that he commanded that all the books should be returned to their owners. The joy of the Jews on learning of this decree cannot be described, since thereby not only were they granted possession of their books, but a peaceful residence in Catholic countries was accorded them.

This joy, however, was only momentary, as both the Dominicans and Pfefferkorn still continued their malevolent activity. To add to the misfortune of the Jews, an event befell

p. 82

which the Dominicans were not slow to utilize as a weapon in their warfare against the faithful, with the aid of which they hoped finally to bring about the latter's destruction. Sacred vessels were stolen from a Christian church by a Gentile, who was arrested and who thereupon confessed that he had sold them to the Jews. As a result, all Jews were severely persecuted by the Bishop of Brandenburg. At the same time, or somewhat later, the Jews were accused of having killed a Christian child in the performance of their religious rites, and at the command of the same bishop the accused Jews were removed to Berlin, and thirty-eight of them were burned at the stake after suffering tortures on the rack.

These events the Dominicans made use of to arouse the fanaticism of the people of Germany. They addressed themselves to the emperor's sister, Kunigunde, to whom they painted these occurrences in the blackest colors, at the same time extolling Pfefferkorn as a converted Jew conversant with Jewish customs and manners. They stated that the Talmud contains the evil teachings which had become rooted in the hearts of the Jews. They represented to her the danger to Catholicism in the latest command of the emperor, and placed all their hopes in her keeping, as she was the only one who could save Catholicism from injury. At the same time they strove to find favor in the eyes of the people who protested against this persecution. A new pamphlet was prepared, in Pfefferkorn's name, which was dedicated to the Emperor Maximilian, praising him for his zeal for the Catholic religion. This pamphlet, after complaining that the Christians do

not give full weight to the activity of the Jews against Catholicism, and charging that the whole fault lay with the Talmud, since its teachings prevented the Jews from embracing Christianity and permitted usury, affirmed that the one thing necessary was that the emperor should deprive the Jews of his books, and that it was the duty of all good Christians to help him in this matter, furthermore, that this cause met the approval of the emperor's sister, the nun Kunigunde. It further stated that all Christians who defended Jews should be treated as heretics, and Jewish apostates who did the same should be presumed to have taken up Christianity, not from belief in the Holy Trinity, but for baser reasons. The Princess Kunigunde actually interceded

p. 83

for them, and, presenting herself before the emperor, she begged him on her knees to grant the request of the Dominicans. The emperor again ordered Archbishop Uriel to hasten to seek the advice of the above-mentioned German universities, and especially to get the opinion of Reuchlin, Karbensky and Hochsträter, and transmit the same to him (the emperor), so that he might be prepared to judge whether or not the Talmud should be destroyed.

Reuchlin did not hasten to give his answer, and when, after three months his answer was composed, and delivered to the emperor, it was found to be unfavorable to Pfefferkorn. In this answer he divided Jewish literature into six classes, exclusive of the Bible, as follows: (1) poetry, fable and satire; (2) commentaries; (3) sermons, songs and prayers; (4) philosophy and science; (5) the Talmud, and (6) Kabbala. "In the first class," said Reuchlin, "are to be found books which deny or criticize the Christian religion;" but he could name but two of them of his own knowledge, and these were the pamphlet of Lipman (of the existence of which we have no records) and the life of Jesus. He declared, however, that the Rabbis themselves prohibit the possession of them by Jews and threaten severe [penalties](#) upon any one venturing to read them. "It is self-evident," he stated, "that this class of books must be destroyed without scruple."

With regard to the second class, he affirmed that they not only contain nothing harmful to Christianity, but, on the contrary, they are of great value in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many Gentile scholars, could not, in many cases, fathom the depths of meaning of the Bible, because of insufficient knowledge of Hebrew. "It is true," he said, "that scholars had been heard to declare, we do not care for the Jewish commentaries, as we have a sufficient number by Christians." He compared these same to a person wearing a light garment in cold weather, since the basis for right understanding of the Scriptures is the knowledge of the original language wherein they were written.

"As for books of the third class, it would be an injustice to deprive the Jews of them, because they had received from emperors and popes the privilege of unmolested worship.

"Regarding the fourth class," he said, "they stand on an

p. 84

equal footing with books of the same class in Latin, Greek or German. But of the Talmud I must own that it is to me a sealed book, and it is evident that those who pass judgment upon it have as little knowledge of it as I. They have no idea of its nature; or of its, history; nevertheless they talk as if they knew and understood clearly all that it contains. I can only compare such people

to those who would venture to criticise algebra while they are totally ignorant of the rudiments of arithmetic. The fear is expressed that the Talmud might injure Christianity; this is absurd for nothing can withstand the proofs in its favor that are found in the Bible. If the Talmud really were as bad as they affirm, then our ancestors, who were much more religious than we, would long ago have put an end to its existence." He declared that the testimony of Pfefferkorn and Schwartz, against it, being inspired by unworthy motives, should not be given consideration. "Moreover, if we would but study the Talmud we would not destroy it, but rather encourage the Jews to hold it in still greater reverence and study it the more assiduously, for as a consequence there would be copies not alone in Germany, but also in Italy and Turkey, where many colleges for its study exist. To what purpose is the burning of a few copies of the Talmud, if you are unable to annihilate it entirely? Besides, by such action we should commit a breach of faith for we would thus abrogate the privileges granted to them by former emperors and popes."

Regarding the sixth class, he praised the Kabbala in the highest terms, and cited Count Picko de Mirandella, who, he says, induced Pope Sixtus VI. to study it; the latter discovered in it so much in support of Christianity that he translated Kabbalistic books into Latin. Reuchlin concluded that to deprive the Israelites of their books could only be likened to a duke challenging a knight to combat and then taking away his weapons. He advised the German rulers who were desirous of having the Jews embrace Christianity, to establish in all the German universities for a period of ten years, chairs for the study of the Hebrew language; then the students having a thorough knowledge of the language, could convince the Jews, by proofs from their own Bible, of the truths of Christianity. Returning again to the apostates (he plainly referred to Pfefferkorn, though he did not name him), he said: "Of what value

p. 85

is advice given by people who abandon Judaism through jealousy, animosity, fear of persecution, penury, revenge, ambition, love of pleasure, or even through mere recklessness? Such individuals bear the name of Christians, but in heart they are not Christians. I know of some whose faith in both religions, Christianity and Judaism, is weak, and who, if their schemes were brought to naught, would become disciples of Mohammedanism. The Jews have been citizens of Germany for three centuries and should be protected by the law, It would be ridiculous to adjudge them heretics, for they were not born Christians, but have been Jews from a time antecedent to the birth of Christianity.

However, the answer of the German universities was different. The theological faculty of Mayence replied that not only were the Talmud and all rabbinical books full of falsehoods and heresies, as Christian scholars testify (the faculty themselves confessed that they were ignorant of the Talmud and Hebrew), but that the Hebrew Bible also was not altogether free from error on points of Christian doctrine. The faculty deemed it advisable, therefore, that the books be revised by Christian scholars, and if anything be found contrary to Christian belief it should be burned.

The University of Erfurt counselled in like manner, but the Faculty of Heidelberg advised the emperor to select a committee from the faculties of all the universities of Germany to judge the Talmud and all Jewish literature, and let their decision be final.

Reuchlin sent his answer under seal to Archbishop Uriel, but by some means not recorded its contents became known to Pfefferkorn before it reached the emperor. When he and the

Dominicans had perused it they were greatly perturbed. They were aware of the esteem in which Reuchlin was held by the emperor, and the weight his answer would be given to by the latter, and resolved to do something to weaken the effect of this answer on the emperor and the public. (In their haste to forestall Reuchlin they did not consider the risk to themselves in making public his answer before it reached the emperor.) A pamphlet was issued under the title of "Handspiegel," in Pfefferkorn's name, couched in flowing sentences, giving prominence to all the weak points in Reuchlin's answer, charging

p. 86

him with ignorance, abusing him and ridiculing his theory and misrepresenting it to the common people. The pamphlet stated that Reuchlin himself understood nothing of the Hebrew language, and that his book on Hebrew grammar was written by other hands; therefore, they asked, how can such a man counsel the emperor in matters of which he himself is ignorant? It stated, further, that Reuchlin's declaration that the Jews must be protected by the law proves the utter absurdity of his whole answer, and that it may be justly suspected he did not do this for nothing. To add force to their contention, they published a letter which Reuchlin himself had written to a knight five years before, and called upon Reuchlin to deny his statement in this letter that the Jews slander Christianity; his refusal to do so would indicate a desire to wantonly mislead the emperor and all good Christians. It said, moreover, that the fact of Reuchlin's renown among the Jews alone showed that he had fallen a victim to their wiles. At the end of the pamphlet, Pfefferkorn charged Reuchlin with having accepted money from the Jews, and blamed him for defending them, since it was his duty to regard them only as heretics. He also charged Reuchlin with countenancing usury (nothing about this was mentioned in Reuchlin's answer).

As Reuchlin was well known and much respected in Germany, this pamphlet made a commotion, and the people evinced a desire to read it, to learn of what Reuchlin was accused, As it was written in the popular jargon, many went on fair days to Frankfort-on-the-Main to purchase the pamphlet from Pfefferkorn. Reuchlin himself was astonished at Pfefferkorn's impertinence, and annoyed at the imputation on his honor; he therefore complained to the emperor. The latter, angry at the action of Pfefferkorn, promised Reuchlin that he would entrust the task of the revision of the Jewish books to the Bishop of Augsburg; but the emperor being at that time deeply occupied with matters of state, this affair was for the moment forgotten. Meanwhile a second fair was held at Frankfort, and Pfefferkorn hoped to distribute the remaining pamphlets among the people. As soon as this point in the contest was reached, Reuchlin resolved, since the quarrel had from a religious become a personal one, to uphold his wounded honor. He wrote a work entitled "Augenspiegel," in

p. 87

which he complained that a Jewish apostate should endeavor to destroy the Talmud. He told the public how Pfefferkorn had come to him, asking his co-operation, and how by despicable means he became aware of the contents of his answer to the emperor, so as to be able to heap more calumnies upon him. He charged that there were thirty-four lies in Pfefferkorn's pamphlet. He said, further, that he had not lost hope of facing Pfefferkorn in court, and that the latter had merited the sentence of death for inciting the people against the Jews. He declared the charge that he had received money from the Jews, a false one, adducing many proofs to show that the Dominicans and Pfefferkorn merely intended to stain his name. He further proved that he himself had written the Hebrew grammar. To the main accusation, that he had learned Hebrew

from a Jew, he replied that Christianity did not forbid Christians from having dealings with, or learning from, Jews, especially as this was often productive of good in the conversion of the Jews.

Now, instead of Pfefferkorn's pamphlet, Reuchlin's was distributed at the fair, and was sold in large quantities to the people. The Jews it is fair to believe, greedily bought the work and did their utmost to spread it among the people. A preacher named Peter Mayer, of Frankfort-on-the-Main, while reading Reuchlin's pamphlet in the presence of Pfefferkorn, exclaimed that it ought to be burned at the stake; and, with the sanction of the Archbishop of Mayence, he prohibited its sale. But the priests of Mayence, all friendly to Reuchlin, at their convocation begged the archbishop to recall the prohibition and he consented. In a short time all Germany was in possession of copies of the work, and Reuchlin received many congratulatory letters. However, the strife was not yet over. His enemies did everything they could to overthrow Reuchlin. Paul Mayer, after his attempt to suppress the sale had proved futile, announced that Pfefferkorn would lecture on Reuchlin's books in the Catholic Church during the coming holidays. As Pfefferkorn was a married man, and not a priest, and therefore unable to preach from the pulpit, he lectured in the hall of the church in the popular jargon, holding a cross in his hand. The burden of his lecture was that the Jews should be persecuted unless they accepted Christianity. It was the first time in the

p. 88

history of the church that a Jew had stood in the corridor of a church with a cross in his hand and preached against the Jews.

The monks meanwhile gave Reuchlin's work to Arnold Tangersky for revision, and he naturally, being himself a Dominican, denounced it as heretical. The Dominican, Ulrich of Sternheim, wrote a letter to Reuchlin, in which, speaking as a friend, he says: "The scholars of Cologne are not yet united in their opinion as to what should be done with your work. Some of them maintain that it should be burned; others say the author should be punished; and still others are stronger in condemnation of it." This letter did not fail of its purpose. Reuchlin understood full well that if the Dominicans openly declared against him, he would be in great peril, since at that time their power was supreme and they were feared even by the emperor himself. The Pope, Alexander VI., himself exercising a power to which kings themselves were subject, declared he would offend a rule sooner than the humblest Dominican. Reuchlin hastened, therefore, to indite, in Latin, a letter to Tangersky, the reviser of the book, in which he modified his previous statements. He said he judged the Talmud, not as a theologian, but as a layman, and he could not know, when writing his book, that the scholars of Cologne, would disagree with him. He also stated that he had not intended to cast blame on any one in his pamphlet, and besought Tangersky to show him his errors in the "Augenspiegel" and not condemn him before doing so. He wrote a letter of a different tenor to his teacher, Koln. In this he ventured to blame the head of the Dominicans, Hochsträter, whom he charged with having written the pamphlet under Pfefferkorn's name, and he begged him to explain his words to the faculty, so that they would see the truth and not blame him (Reuchlin) unjustly. The response to this letter to Koln was not sent to Reuchlin for a long time. The Dominicans obviously sought, by delaying it, to furnish him a pretext for committing an overt act. He finally received together two letters, one from the Cologne students and the other from Koln. The faculty scolded him for interfering in a quarrel which did not concern him, and at the same time preventing the emperor from performing a meritorious act in suppressing the Jewish books. This fact, they claimed and his writing the

"Augenspiegel," went far to confirm the

p. 89

suspicion that he inclined to Judaism, and therefore it was their duty to punish him severely. They could not, however, refuse the request of Arnold Tangersky and of Koln to defer punishment until he was given opportunity to write a second pamphlet, retracting all his words in defence of the Talmud and in blame of Pfefferkorn.

Koln wrote him that he should feel grateful to him for inducing the faculty to withhold his sentence and for pacifying the Dominicans. At the same time, he reminded him of the danger which hovered over him, and advised him to hasten and repair his error by another pamphlet, contradicting all his previous statements. As to Reuchlin's accusation that the pamphlet "Handspiegel" was from the pen of Hochsträter he maintained complete silence.

Reuchlin at once answered his enemies in two letters. He thanked them for their intercession in his behalf, but claimed that as a married man (even twice married) he could not be longer counted among theologians, and therefore knew very little of the teachings of faith. He also cited proofs showing that he was not a friend of Judaism or the Jews. Nevertheless he refused to contradict the statements contained in his first pamphlet; on the contrary, he reiterated them, but asserted his willingness to write a commentary on his "Augenspiegel," explaining any ambiguous passages therein. He again urged them to point to him the passages because of which they accused him of heresy, saying that only then could he either defend his assertions or confess that he was in error and revoke them. The Dominicans, seeing that correspondence was of no avail, commanded him, first, to stop the circulation of his pamphlet; secondly, to contradict all he had previously said; thirdly, to restore the lustre of his name by showing himself a good Christian and a persecutor of the Jews and their literature. If he should refuse to do this, he must stand trial before the judges of the Inquisition. Koln also wrote him again, saying that but for this (Koln's) pleading, Reuchlin's pamphlet would long before have been burned and himself brought before the Inquisition; therefore he again urged him to respect the command of the faculty, as, should he fail to accede to their order, he could do nothing more for him.

Reuchlin, seeing that further argument was useless resolved

p. 90

firmly to take up the gage of battle, happen what may. First of all, he replied that he could not stop the circulation of his work, since it was no longer his, but was the property of the publisher. He could only write a commentary as an explanation of doubtful passages. To his supposed friend Koln, he wrote that if the latter had indeed prevented his work from being burned, the faculty should feel grateful to him (Koln) for restraining them from doing wrong, but that he himself entertained no feelings of gratitude for it. He told him he did not fear a contest with the Dominicans, as he had many defenders, men of prominence and power in Germany, and if the matter were attended with any danger it was to his enemies. It was easy, he said, to begin a fight, but much more difficult to gain a victory. He could not understand why his enemies failed to consider how the people would judge them if they took the part of a Jewish apostate against a born Christian and a firm believer in Christianity. He was certain that Pfefferkorn, if thereby he could derive any benefit, would become an apostate even to Mohammedanism or any other

religion. To think that Pfefferkorn should preach against the law of the land and [calumniate](#) him! The Dominicans, he continued, to seek to accuse him of trivialities, and close their eyes to the many great sins of the apostate. He also said that *poets* and writers of history would stamp with shame the entire faculty, and would make of him (Reuchlin) a martyr for the truth.

Reuchlin kept his promise of writing a commentary to his "Augenspiegel," but it had the effect of adding fuel to the fire. The Dominicans were more than ever enraged, and Tangersky wrote a pamphlet which he dedicated to the emperor, and which contained the following concerning Reuchlin's interference in religious matters which are above his understanding:

In his pamphlet one can see that he favors the Jews, and in keeping with this he has written sentences which border closely on heresies. "The work concludes by saying that it is undoubtedly necessary to put the Talmud to the stake. This pamphlet effected what the author had intended. The emperor, who had hitherto defended Reuchlin, now turned against him, and on his [arrival](#) at Cologne he commanded that Reuchlin's pamphlet and commentary should not be circulated. The

p. 91

Elector of Mayence, acting in conjunction with the Archbishop of Cologne, displayed this order on the churches, and threatened the public with excommunication if they did not return Reuchlin's pamphlet to the churches, But even this failed of the desired effect, for Reuchlin's friends were too numerous, greater even in number than those of the Dominicans; the people had but small liking for the latter, and they especially despised the head of the order, Hochsträter. Therefore Pfefferkorn issued a new pamphlet, entitled "Brandspiegel," wherein Reuchlin was accused and debased. Therein he was styled a man who had forsaken the church, and whose hands were sullied with Jewish bribes. As for the Jews Pfefferkorn stated that they ought to be persecuted without pity, and incited the people to plunder them and devote the spoils to convents and hospitals. This was Pfefferkorn's last pamphlet, from this time he ceased to take part in the fight. Reuchlin, under a pseudonym, wrote another pamphlet, "The Defender." In this he says: "If any one asserts that Reuchlin did not, in the Jewish controversy, conduct himself as a true and upright Christian, he utters a [falsehood](#)." He attacks all the Cologne scholars, especially Arthur Gracia and Jacob Hochsträter. "Why," he asks, "do they make such an uproar and hold themselves up as greater authorities than other scholars of German universities?" And to the emperor he says: "Permit, your majesty, the Dominicans to judge the Jews by the Inquisition, that will fill their pockets with the gold and silver of the Jews. That is what they want; obtaining it, they will then leave me unmolested." To Arnold Tangersky, who accused him of protecting the Jews, he says: "It is true I am the protector of the Jews. I protect them against false accusations. I know that my assertion that they are citizens of Germany and entitled to the protection of the law, as other citizens are, will excite their enemies; but I say and repeat again, the Jews are our brothers--brothers to Arnold, brothers to the Dominicans, brothers to all the theologians, and the fathers of the Church long ago made alike declaration." To the assertion of the Dominicans that he contradicts what he had written in his former letter, he replies that it is true he had been prejudiced against the Jews until he was convinced of his error. The calumny that Jewish prayers MAINTAIN that all Catholic rulers should be put to death he

p. 92

refutes by quoting a Mishna: "Thou shalt pray for the peace of the kingdom wherever thou abidest."

This pamphlet was sent to the emperor, who received it favorably, and, owing to the complex questions involved, his mind wavered in the course he should pursue. First he assured Reuchlin of protection against the attacks of the Dominicans. Then his father-confessor, an enemy to Reuchlin, spoke in favor of the Dominicans, and the emperor again prohibited the circulation of Reuchlin's work. Finally he commanded both parties to cease their strife. Even this command failed of its purpose. The imperial decree was unheeded by the Dominicans, and the head of the Inquisition, Hochsträter, summoned Reuchlin to appear within six days before the judges of Mayence to defend himself against the charges of heresy and of defending the Jews. This summons was couched in language unprecedented in its insolence. Reuchlin did not appear at the trial, but sent a deputy. Hochsträter opened the court. He was both prosecutor and judge, and was certain that the trial would result in the success of his scheme against Reuchlin, and would cover the latter with ignominy, more especially as he had received favorable opinions from the German universities that had been ordered to afford counsel. The University of Loewen had replied that the pamphlet should be burned, that of Cologne, that besides its misleading nature, it showed decided leanings to heresy; the University of Erfurt gave answer of like import. Those of Heidelberg and Mayence alone did not respond. Hochsträter therefore felt sufficiently supported and certain of winning the trial. He recited a long list of grave accusations against Reuchlin, and gave it to his colleagues of the court, calling upon them to adjudge the defendant guilty and order his pamphlet to be burned. Reuchlin's deputy protested that Hochsträter had no right to be persecutor and judge in one; the less so as he was known to be Reuchlin's bitterest enemy. Seeing, however, that protest was of no avail, he left the court, Hochsträter, hesitating to sentence, contrary to public opinion, one who was not present, posted notices on church doors, requiring Reuchlin's deputy and all who had an interest in him, to appear before the court. He also ordered the public, on the pain of excommunication, to return the copies of the "Augenspiegel" to the judges of the

p. 93

Inquisition. The Dominicans triumphed that day and Reuchlin's defeat was seemingly close at hand. But this triumph was only of brief duration. The people of the better class of the city openly murmured against Hochsträter's proclamation and even the archbishop's colleagues advised that the trial be delayed for a short period, since Reuchlin or his deputies had not undergone examination.

The trial was therefore postponed for two weeks, Hochsträter thinking that Reuchlin would be ashamed to appear in person as a defendant, and feeling certain that at the expiration of two weeks he could be adjudged guilty by default. But Reuchlin did appear in person with the counsellor of the Duke of Würtemberg, and that of the Duke of Mayence. The "Kapital" endeavored to make peace between the two parties, but in vain. The inquisitor Hochsträter refused to listen to overtures of peace, and ordered the judges to do their duty. They obeyed and began to write down their judgment, when suddenly a rider appeared with a letter in his hand from Archbishop Uriel. He passed through the crowd and straight to the judges, who were much astonished and anxious to know the contents of the letter. It was read aloud to the assembled people, and was to the effect that Archbishop Uriel commanded the postponement of the trial for one month, and if this command were disobeyed he would declare it a mistrial and dissolve the court. The Dominicans, defeated, left the court amidst the laughter of the people. There was

much rejoicing among the Jews, as upon this trial depended their fate; but Reuchlin was not content with the mere postponement of the trial, knowing that the Dominicans would persecute him until they conquered. He determined, therefore, to leave his fate to the decision of Pope Leo X. But, learning that the Dominicans would bribe the advisers of the pope and persuade him to order the trial to be held in Cologne, he wrote a letter in Hebrew to the pope's physician, Bangett Delakes, beseeching his influence to prevent this. Leo, involved just then in grave secular matters--religious questions, for the time being, having no place in his councils--and seeing his quarrel likely to spread over Europe, directed the bishops of Speyer and Worms to end the contest by issuing a decision which should be respected by both parties. These bishops

p. 94

appointed a committee to investigate and report on the matter. The committee, though in awe of the Dominicans, conducted their investigation deliberately, and at the end of a year pronounced the pamphlet "Augenspiegel" free from any heresy, and Reuchlin to have no leanings towards Judaism or the Jews. They therefore permitted its circulation and ordered Hochsträter, on the pain of confinement in a monastery, to pay to Reuchlin 300 gulden as the costs of the trial, and threatened him with excommunication if he disobeyed the order.

Hochsträter then appealed to the pope for an impartial trial, hoping that by a liberal use of the wealth of the Dominicans, since Reuchlin was poor, the latter would suffer defeat. He also sent Reuchlin's "Augenspiegel" to the University of Paris, esteemed the greatest university of the time, urging it to condemn the pamphlet. He appealed also to all of Reuchlin's opponents and all who were zealous for the welfare of the Catholic Church to unite against him. Reuchlin's friends were not idle. Realizing the evil exerted by the Dominicans throughout the world, they, together with a body of Catholics called "Humanists" who sought the reformation of the Church, united under Reuchlin's flag and termed themselves "Reuchlinists." The opposing party adopted the name "Arnoldists." These were the two parties that occupied the public mind before Luther began the Reformation.

Many scholars of young Germany went over to Reuchlin's side, particularly Hermann von Busche, Croates Rinbianes, and the young and sagacious Ulrich von Hutten; also many of the rulers, among whom were Duke Ulrich of Württemberg and all his family, Count Halfenstein of Augsburg, Count von Guernor of Patriz, Welsen, Pirkameier, Neitiger, as well as many Italian priests, notably the General of the Augustinians, Eggodia de Viterba, who loved the Hebrew literature and was at that time engaged in translating the "Zohar." Viterba said in his letter to Reuchlin: "You have saved the books which have spread light all over the world for centuries, and if they were lost, darkness would ensue. And in supporting you, we shield not you but religion; and not the Talmud, but the community of Christ."

The strife spread all over Germany, and there was scarcely a city in which were not to be found either Reuchlinists or

p. 95

Arnoldists--the former, for the preservation of the "Augenspiegel" and the Talmud; the latter, for the destruction of both. The contest became each day more intense, and although the victory was with Reuchlin, he was still anxious as to Hochsträter's appeal to Rome, since the latter had great influence there. His friends therefore advised him to publish all the letters he had received from

all parts of Germany and Italy, to convince the pope of the character of the man the Dominicans were persecuting. Among these letters was one from the Emperor Frederick praising Reuchlin in glowing terms and testifying that he was held in honor and [respect](#) by the father of the pope, Lorenzo de Medici.

These efforts of Reuchlin and his friends brought about the appointment by the people of Cardinal Gremama, a lover of rabbinical literature and Kabbala, as investigator and judge of the quarrel. The Cardinal summoned Reuchlin and Hochsträter to appear in Rome, and as Reuchlin was very old, he was allowed to send a deputy. Hochsträter, however, appeared in person with all his wealth. This did not, however, disturb Reuchlin, as he had many friends at Rome. Even the Emperor Maximilian interceded for him with the pope. Among his other defenders was the emperor's secretary, Wurke, Duke Ulrich of Württemberg and the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise (later the chief supporter of Luther). Many bishops also defended him, notably those of Strassburg, of Constanz, of Speyer, and numerous other churchmen. Hochsträter spent large sums of money to procure the appointment of Cardinal Bemardine de Santa as assistant to the judge, but, through the influence of the Reuchlinists, Cardinal Pietro Ankenotini de Sant' Isembliia was selected by the pope for this office. The pope's committee forbade any discussion of the matter until the sentence of the judges of Rome was announced. But the Dominicans heeded neither this command nor public opinion, and, in order to influence the pope, they even threatened, should Reuchlin be victor at the trial, to secede from the church and unite with the Hussites of Bohemia. They also, in defiance of the prohibition of discussion, placed hope in the University of Paris, for at that period France and Germany were in conflict in secular matters, it naturally befell that on religious questions also their views were diametrically opposed.

p. 96

[[paragraph continues](#)] So the University of Paris, though in heart and conscience in full accord with Reuchlin, nevertheless, for purely worldly reasons, felt compelled to render an unfavorable opinion of him and of his works, stating that the "Augenspiegel" contained heresy and should be burned, and that its author should be compelled to make full retraction. The Dominicans hastened to published this reply from Paris in a pamphlet entitled "Glocke" (bell), in the name of Pfefferkorn, although for this action Hochsträter was indicted by the Fiscal of the Emperor. The emperor's sister, Kunigunde, again kept Hochsträter from imprisonment. The Dominicans employed every means to delay the trial, so as to increase Reuchlin's expenses, thinking that, since he could not afford the necessary expense attached to it, he would forego trial. Reuchlin's friends represented to the public Hochsträter's evil designs, and at the same time appeared a collection of letters "From the Benighted People." The first volume, written in a satirical style, professed to be from the pen of Krate Rubian of Leipzig, and contained confessions by Dominican monks of their evil deeds since the existence of the Order. These letters were quickly spread throughout the entire west of Europe despite the protests of the Dominicans, which protests, indeed, only furthered their circulation. Hochsträter, fearing lest the trial would end in Reuchlin's favor, demanded that it be given to an international council, since the matter concerned the entire Catholic Church. The pope, who was, as it were, placed between two fires, the German Emperor and rulers, on the one hand, and the King of France and the heir-apparent of Germany (who sided with the Dominicans), on the other, resolved to place it before the Council of the Lateran and all Europe.

Two years passed; the strife had not yet ended, and Reuchlin became sad at heart. He feared that his friends would fall away from him, seeing no immediate prospects of the close of the quarrel;

he also feared, as he was advanced in years, lest he should die before its settlement, and the Dominicans win the battle, while his name would become a reproach. These fears were unfounded, as his friends did not weaken in their support of his cause. Finally, on the 2d of July, 1516, the result of the trial was announced at a session of the council, signed by Bishop Gregory Bengiani, as follows: The pamphlet,

p. 97

"Augenspiegel," contained no heresy. The error, in such an assumption, rested with the Paris University, and the other faculties in agreement with it. The Bishop of Malta added that the judge of the [Inquisition](#), Hochsträter, who considered himself one of the main pillars of religion, ought to be indicted. Under Bengiani's signature were written those of the other cardinals, except that of the Dominican Cardinal, Sylvester Priervis. As the pope himself had not yet acknowledged or sanctioned the sentence, Hochsträter did not despair, and, with the aid of his friends, he begged the pope to delay the execution of the sentence for an indefinite period, hoping to bring, at a future time, the trial before another council and obtain a decision in his favor. The pope commanded the parties to terminate their quarrelings and cease all discussion of the matter, under the impression that a command from him would put an end to it. He was mistaken; the strife grew in intensity and spread over Germany. Both factions were more than ever determined to continue.

When Hochsträter returned from Rome his life was in danger from the Reuchlinists, and only by the efforts of Reuchlin himself was bloodshed prevented. The Dominicans lost all favor with the public. This did not, however, prevent the Dominican, Peter Mayer, from lecturing in all the great churches against Reuchlin and his party, and abusing him in the vilest language. Finally, roused to violence by his words, the Dominicans slew some of the Reuchlinists. This resulted in a rupture between the pope and the Dominicans. But when the second volume of "The Benighted" letters appeared, wherein the Dominicans were painted in the blackest colors, they begged the pope to shield them from the wrath of the people. This time he listened to them, and prohibited the circulation of the pamphlet. This command was unheeded, as the light of knowledge was beginning to spread over the world, and the satire was read by many priests and monks of other orders than the Dominicans; and, at the same time, the Humanists distributed pamphlets and circulars against the Dominicans.

After no long interval, a second edition of "The Benighted" letters appeared, to the joy of the Reuchlinists. The Dominican leaders saw now that there was a rupture in the Catholic

p. 98

Church, and announced to the pope that the people ridiculed their teachings and would not obey the doctrines of Catholicism. This time they told the truth. Hitherto, sufficient credit had not been accorded public opinion by the rulers, although the influence wielded by Luther was almost wholly due to it, and he acknowledged that the controversy between these two great parties had paved the way for the Reformation. After Maximilian's death, the strife became still more intense, and the topics most often heard were those of the Talmud, Reuchlin, Luther, and the Reformation. At the meeting of the electors of Germany, to choose an emperor, they all sanctioned Reuchlin's actions. Ulrich von Hutten persuaded the knight, Franz von Eickingen, to separate himself from the Catholic Church and join Reuchlin and Luther. This knight and his companion, Dalkery, with many other friends of Reuchlin, demanded that Hochsträter pay the

sum of 111 gulden to Reuchlin to defray the costs of the trial at Speyer, and also give bonds not to further molest Reuchlin. The Dominicans were fully aware that this command must be obeyed, unlike that of the emperor or the pope, which they would have unhesitatingly disobeyed. They were compelled to pay the above sum, but as the treasury of the government was empty, the sum did not go to Reuchlin, but to the government. Hochsträter was deposed from his post of judge of the Inquisition, and a committee of monks requested the pope to do all in his power to end the strife, and allow Reuchlin to live in peace, since he was a great scholar and a firm believer in Christianity. The Talmud attained new prestige, since henceforth the pope looked upon it with favor, and even persuaded Daniel Bamberg, of Antwerp, a famous printer, to issue a complete edition for the first time in its history. And, so, in the year 1520, the Babylonian Talmud appeared, with all the commentaries, in twelve volumes, and from this all later editions have been copied. Reuchlin in his last years was compelled, like Luther, to leave his home and seek an abiding place where he could live in peace. Later, when Luther sent delegates to the prominent rulers of Germany, the pope was forced to adopt the suggestion of the Dominicans and excommunicate Luther, and at the same time prohibit Reuchlin's works. But both the excommunication and prohibition were publicly burned by Luther

p. 99

on the 10th of December, 1520. From this time on, Luther threw off the chains of the pope, and inaugurated the Reformation. Again, and for the last time, Pfefferkorn appeared with a new pamphlet against Reuchlin, but it received no countenance; on the contrary, he was abused by all factions; and his suggestion to expel the Jews from Frankfort was denounced by all alike. After this event, nothing more was heard of him. As soon as the Reformation was established, Reuchlin was called to take the chair of Hebrew in the University of Tübingen, where he taught many students. He died in 1522, to the great grief of his admirers. Reuchlin was generally credited by the Reformers with being one of the initiators of the Reformation.

[Next: Chapter XV. Polemics with Muslims and Frankists](#)