

“All Lutherans shall be rooted out of the land; and wherever they are found, either by clergymen or laymen, they may be seized and burned.” These two decrees appeared only to inflame the courage of those whom they so terribly menaced. The heresy, over which the naked sword was now suspended, spread all the faster. Young men began to resort to Wittenberg, and returned thence in a few years to preach the Gospel in their native land. Meanwhile the king and the priests, who had bent the bow and were about to let fly the arrow, found other matters to occupy them than the execution of Lutherans. **It was the Turk who suddenly stepped forward to save Protestantism in Hungary, though he was all unaware of the service which he performed. Soliman the Magnificent, setting out from Constantinople on the 23rd of April, 1526, at the head of a mighty army, which, receiving accessions as it marched onward, was swollen at last to 300,000 Turks, was coming nearer and nearer Hungary, like the “wasting levin.”**

The land now shook with terror. King Louis was without money and without soldiers. The nobility were divided into factions; the priests thought only of pursuing the Protestants; and the common people, deprived of their laws and their liberty, were without spirit and without patriotism. Zapolya, the lord of seventy-two castles, and by far the most powerful grandee in the country, sat still, expecting if the king were overthrown to be called to mount the vacant throne. Meanwhile the terrible Turk was approaching, and demanding of Louis that he should pay him tribute, under the threat of planting the Crescent on all the churches of Hungary, and slaughtering him and his grandees like “fat oxen.” The edict of death passed against the Protestants still remained in force, and the monks, in the face of the black tempest that was rising in the east, were stirring up the people to have the Lutherans put to death. The powerful and patriotic Count Pemflinger had received a message from the king, commanding him to put in execution his cruel edicts against the heretics, threatening him with his severest displeasure if he should refuse, and promising him great rewards if he obeyed. The count shuddered to execute these horrible commands, nor could he stand silently by and see others execute them. He set out to tell the king that if, instead of permitting his Protestant subjects to defend their country on the battlefield, he should drag them to the stake and burn them, he would bring down the wrath of Heaven upon himself and his kingdom. On the road to Buda, where the king resided, Pemflinger was met by terrible news. While the count was exerting himself to shield the Protestants, King Louis had set out to stop the advance of the powerful Soliman. On the 29th of August his little army of 27,000 met the multitudinous hordes of Turkey at Mohacz, on the Danube. **Soliman’s force was fifteen times greater than that of the king. Louis gave the command of his army to the Archbishop of Cologne** — an ex-Franciscan monk, more familiar with the sword than the chaplet, and who had won some glory in the art of war. When the king put on his armor: on the morning of the battle he was observed to be deadly pale. All foresaw the issue. “Here go twenty-seven thousand Hungarians,” exclaimed Bishop Perenyi, as the host defiled past him, “into the kingdom of heaven, as martyrs for the faith.” He consoled himself with the hope that the chancellor would survive to see to their canonization by the Pope. The issue was even more terrible than the worst anticipations of it. By evening the plain of Mohacz was covered with the Hungarian dead, piled up in gory heaps. Twenty-eight princes, five hundred nobles, seven bishops, and **twenty thousand warriors lay cold in death.** Escaping from the scene of carnage, the king and the Papal legate sought safety in flight. Louis had to cross a black pool which lay in his course; his horse bore him through it, but in climbing the opposite bank the steed fell backward, crushing the monarch, and giving him burial in the marsh. The Papal nuncio, like the ancient seer from the mountains of Aram, was taken and slain. **Having trampled down the king and his army, the victorious Soliman held on his way into Hungary, and slaughtered 200,000 of its inhabitants. This calamity, which thrilled all Europe, brought rest to the Protestants.** Two candidates now contested the scepter of Hungary — John Zapolya, the unpatriotic grandee who saw his king march to death, but sat still in his castle, and the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. Both caused themselves to be crowned, and hence arose a civil war, which, complicated with occasional appearances of Soliman upon the scene, occupied the two rivals for years, and left them no leisure to carry out the persecuting edicts. **In the midst of these troubles Protestantism made rapid progress.** Peter Perenyi, a powerful noble, embraced the Gospel, with his two sons. Many other magnates followed his example, and settled Protestant ministers upon their domains, built churches,

planted schools, and sent their sons to study at Wittenberg. The greater number of the towns of Hungary embraced the Reformation.

At this time (1531) a remarkable man returned from Wittenberg, where he had enjoyed the intimacy, as well as the public instructions, of Luther and Melancthon. Matthias Devay was the descendant of an ancient Hungarian family, and having attained at Wittenberg to a remarkably clear and comprehensive knowledge of the Gospel, he began to preach it to his countrymen. He commenced his ministry at Buda, which, connected by a bridge with Pesth, gave him access to the population of both cities. Only the year before (1530) the Augsburg Confession had been read by the Lutheran princes in presence of Ferdinand of Austria, and many Hungarian nobles; and Devay began his ministry at a favorable moment. Other preachers, trained like Devay at Wittenberg, were laboring in the surrounding districts, and nobles and whole villages were embracing the Gospel. Many of the priests were separating themselves from Rome. The Bishops of Neutra and Wesprim laid aside rochet and miter to preach the Gospel.⁶ Those who had bowed before the idol, rose up to cast it down. Devay, anxious to diffuse the light in other parts, removed to Upper Hungary; but soon his eloquence and success drew upon him the wrath of the priests. He was thrown into prison at Vienna, and ultimately was brought before Dr. Faber, then bishop of that city, but he pleaded his cause in a manner so admirable that the court dared not condemn him. On his release he returned to Buda, and again commenced preaching. The commotion in the capital of Hungary was renewed, and the wrath of the priests grew hotter than ever. They accused him to John Zapolya, whose sway was owned in this part of the kingdom, and the Reformer was thrown into prison. It happened that in the same prison was a blacksmith, who in the shoeing had lamed the king's favorite horse, and the passionate Zapolya had sworn that if the horse died the blacksmith should pay the forfeit of his life. Trembling from fear of death, the evangelist had pity upon him, and explained to him the way of salvation. As the Philippian gaoler at the hearing of Paul, so the blacksmith in the prison of Buda.....

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The widow, not less ambitious than her deceased husband, caused her son to be proclaimed King of Hungary. **Feeling herself unable to contend in arms with Ferdinand I, she placed the young prince under the protection of Soliman, whose aid she craved.** This led to the reappearance of the Turkish army in Hungary. The country endured, in consequence, manifold calamities; many of the Protestant pastors fled, and the evangelization was stopped. But these disorders lasted only for a little while. **The Turks were wholly indifferent to the doctrinal controversies between the Protestants and the Papists.** In truth, had they been disposed to draw the sword of persecution, it would have been against the Romanists, whose temples, filled with idols, were specially abhorrent to them. The consequence was that the evangelizing agencies were speedily resumed. The pastors returned, the Hungarian New Testament of Sylvester was being circulated through the land, the progress of Protestantism in Hungary became greater, at least more obvious, than ever, and under the reign of Islam the Gospel had greater quietness in Hungary, and flourished more than perhaps would have been the case had the kingdom been governed solely by the House of Austria.

A more disturbing conflict arose in the Protestant Church of Hungary itself. A visit which Devay, its chief Reformer, made at this time to Switzerland, led him to change his views on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. On his return he let his change of opinion, which was in the direction of Zwingli, or rather of Calvin, be known, to the scandal of some of his brethren, who having drawn their theology from Wittenberg, were naturally of Luther's opinions. A flame was being kindled. No greater calamity befell the Reformation than this division of its disciples into Reformed and Lutheran. There was enough of unity in essential truth on the question of the Eucharist to keep them separate from Rome, and enough, we submit, to prevent them remaining separate from one another. Both repudiated the idea that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was a sacrifice, or that the elements were transubstantiated, or that they were to be adored; and both held that the benefit came through the working of the Spirit, and the faith of the recipient. The great essentials of the Sacrament were here, and it was not in the least necessary to salvation that one...

There came a momentary turning of the tide. In 1557 the reforming Count Petrovich was obliged to give way to Stephen Losonczy. The latter, a mere man of war, and knowing only enough of the Gospel to fear it as a cause of disturbance, drove away all its preachers. Not only was the eloquent and energetic Szegedin sent into exile, but all his colleagues were banished from the country along with him. The sequel was not a little remarkable. **Scarcely had the ministers quitted the soil of Transylvania, when the Turks burst across its frontier.** They marched on Temeswar, besieged and took the fortress, and slaughtered all the occupants, including the unhappy Losonczy himself. The ministers would probably have perished with the rest, had not the governor, with the intent of ruining them, forced them beforehand into a place of safety. **Again the Protestants found the scepter of the Turks lighter than the rod of the Papists. The pashas were besieged by solicitations and bribes to put the preachers to death, or at least to banish them; but their Turkish rulers, more just than their Christian opponents, refused to condemn till first they had made inquiry; and a short interrogation commonly sufficed to make patent the fact that, while the Romanists worshipped by images, the Protestants bowed to God alone. This was enough for the Mussulman governor. Without seeking to go deeper into the points of difference, he straightway gave orders that no hindrance should be offered to the preaching of that Gospel which the great Mufti [“interpreter or expounder of religious law”] of Wittenberg had discovered; and thus, in all the Transylvanian towns and plains under the Moslem, the Protestant faith continued to spread.**

Scarcely less gratifying was the progress of the truth in those portions of Hungary which were under the sway of Ferdinand I. In Komorn, on the angle formed by the Wang with the Danube, we find Michael Szataray and Anthony Plattner preaching the Gospel with diligence, and laying the foundation of what was afterwards the great and flourishing Church of the Helvetian Confession. In the free city of Tynau, to the north of Komorn, where Simon Grynaeus and the Reformer Devay had scattered the seed, the writings of the Reformers were employed to water it, and the majority of the citizens embraced the Protestant faith in its Lutheran form. In the mining towns of the mountainous districts the Gospel flourished greatly. These towns were held as the private property of the Protestant Queen Mary, the widow of Louis II, who had perished at the battle of Mohacz, and while under her rule the Gospel and its preachers enjoyed perfect security. But the queen transferred the cities to her brother Ferdinand, and the priests thought that they now saw how they could reach their heretical inhabitants. Repairing to Ferdinand, they represented these towns as hotbeds of sectarianism and sedition, which he would do well to suppress. The accusation kindled the zeal of the Protestants; they sent as their defense, to the monarch, a copy of their Confession (Pentapolitana), of which we have spoken above. Ferdinand found it the echo of that to which he had listened with so much interest at Augsburg twenty years before, and he commanded that those whose faith this Confession expressed should not be molested. Everywhere we find the greatest ferment and activity prevailing. We see town councils inviting preachers to come and labor in the cities under their jurisdiction, and opening the churches for their use. Schoolhouses are rising, and wealthy burgomasters are giving their gardens in free grant for sites. We see monks throwing off the cloak and betaking themselves, some to the pulpit, others to the school, and others to handicrafts. We find archbishops launching fulminatory letters, which meet with no response, save in their own idle reverberations. The images are vanishing from the churches; the tapers are being extinguished at the altar; the priest departs, for there is no flock; processions cease from the streets and highways; the begging friar forgets to make his round; the pilgrim comes no more to his favorite shrine; relics have lost their power; and the evening air is no longer vexed by the clang of convent bells, thickly planted all over the land. “Alas! alas!” cry monk and nun, their occupation being gone, “the glory is departed.”

“Only three families of the magnates adhered still to the Pope. The nobility were nearly all Reformed, and the people were, nearly thirty to one, attached to the new doctrine.”