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THE SATIRICAL ELEMENT in the REFORMATION WRITERS: 32
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A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the

GRADUATE SCHOOL

of the

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May, 1909.

by

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The Satirical Element in the Reformation Writers:
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The picture that meets the student of the
literary history of Germany at the opening of the
Reformation period is not an inspiring one. The
heroic grandeur of the Nibelungenlied and of Gudrun,
the courtly dignity and grace of Hartmann, Wolfram,
and Gottfried, or Walter vorder Vogelweide have
become a thing of the past. Knighthood with its
exalted ideals and its grace of manners has been re-
placed by the army of common soldiers with their
firearms and their boorish ignorance. Instead of
an emperor with strong central power preserving the
sense of national unity, enforcing law, fostering
high ideals, and encouraging art, there is the
memory of a succession of so-called emperors depending
on the favor and sanction of a foreign power for the
very right of exercising their office, bent on
selfaggrandizement, utterly unable of enforcing laws.

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and permitting all the various elements of the nation to contend among themselves and to lose sight of all ideal aims in the pettiness of mutual antagonisms, of selfpreservation or of selfaggrandizement.

There has been an extensive shifting in the relation and conditions of classes, lessening the power and influence of the upper and increasing the importance of the lower in rapid progression. In all the various spheres of life and activity there is a breaking away from the reverence for rank, authority, traditions, and institutions and an assertion of the worth and power of the individual, especially of the middle and lower classes. Though one rather pleasing result of this shifting was a forceful naturalness, naiveness and unadorned realism in thought and feeling, yet for at least this age, a far greater and farreaching result was the passing away of the courtly ideal of culture in which morality was inseparably united with pleasing forms of social conduct; the loss of the feeling for form in conduct and letters; the loss of the rich and beautiful forms of poetic expression; the loss of that fine sense of rythm and rhyme; and the appearance in place of these of a crudeness and coarseness in all poetic thought, feeling, and expression as is

found in no other period of German literature.

Even the great achievements of civilization of this time; the rise and prosperity of commerce; the triumphs of natural science; the inventions and discoveries, as of gunpowder, the compass, chronometers and the art of printing; the discovery of new continents, in their materialistic effects ministered to the decay of poetry. While humanism, though giving new impulses and ideals to the thought of the time, was detrimental at least at this period to the development of German literature by making the latin language the vogue and attracting the choicest minds of the time to latin thought, language and poetry rather than to German.

But the characteristic of this age standing out prominent above all others was the corruption in the Catholic Church, a corruption manifesting itself in its institutions, doctrines and life, and bringing about a deplorable condition of morals in all classes of men. Into the midst of this religious and moral decay came the intellectual awakening of humanism and the spiritual awakening under the leadership of Luther.

This condition is the chief cause of that outburst of satire which is the most characteristic feature of the literature of this time; a satire

not the culmination of a movement that has been developing for ages but the immediate production of an age placed in the very midst of the smallest and the greatest, the lowest and the highest, of an age placed at the end of an era that has become helpless and effete and the beginning of a new era with the loftiest ideas which for centuries to come are to form and control the thought and life of the world.

The names most prominent in this outburst of satire are Brandt, Murner, and Fischart. Before however taking more minutely the study of these three men at least two other men, less important from a satirical standpoint, deserve our attention: Ulrich von Hutten and Hans Sachs.

In the writings and utterances of Luther whose moral and religious ideas are the very center of the agitations of the times, there is properly speaking only sarcasm revealing itself in his forceful characterization of his opponents and the abuses of his times.

The *Morae Encomium* of Erasmus, in which with cutting satire he characterizes the ignorance and corruption of the clergy and credulity of the laity, and the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, the work chiefly of Johann Yaeger and of Hutten, in which the clergy, especially those opposing Reuchlin, are

characterized with a deliciously sly humour of self-portrayal and a withering satire, are in the very spirit of the satire of this period, having all its salient features; but as they are written in latin they are of minor interest to the student of German Literature.

In the character of Ulrich von Hutten we find most admirable qualities. He has not, it is true, the deep spiritual insight of Luther, nor is he free from blemishes in his personal character; but he has an intense love for the cause of truth and enlightenment and for the cause of his country and, like Luther, with all the enthusiasm and devotion of his fiery soul he stakes for these his life and possessions.

von warheit ich wil nimmer lan,
Das soll mir bitten ab kein man.
Auch schafft zu stillen mich kein wer,
Kein bann, kein acht, wie vast und seer
Man mich darmit zu schrecken meynt,
Wie wol mein fromme mutter weynt,
Do ich die sach hett gfangen an--
Goot woell sye troesten!-- es muss gan,
Und solit es brechen auch vorm end.

Wils gott, so mags nit werden gvend!

Darumb wil brauchen fuess und hend.--

Ich habs gewagt!

The greater part of Huttens German writings are glowing appeals to the German people to throw off the yoke of Rome and to come to the aid of a nobler and better order of things. His satirical writings are chiefly in latin, such as his share in the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, the dedication to Leo the tenth of his publication of Laurentius Valla's *De Donatione Constantini Magni*, and his *Bulla vel Bullicida*. In his German writings the satire of Hutten is best shown in his dialogue. *Die Anschauenden*. Sol and Phaeton as they are driving through the heavens dispel the clouds from the northern kingdom of Germany to observe the doings of this people. In the observations and remarks that follow, many of the defects of the German people are held up to ridicule in an ingenious way. But in a truly masterful way are the abuses and corruption of the clergy and the pope satirized when Cardinal Gaetani in ill humour because of the poor success of his mission to the Germans at the diet at Augsburg, presumes, by virtue of the power delegated to him by the pope haughtily to rebuke and to command

Sol himself and even to threaten him with the bann. Instead of coarseness and bitterness of spirit we find here a play of genial wit and humour, gracefulness and consistency of invention, and elegance of composition.

In Hans Sachs we have one of the most lovable characters in German literature. He has not, to be sure, like Luther and Hutten an intense and all absorbing devotion and selfsacrifice to a great cause, he does not like them have a full and large conception of the revolutionary character of the Reformation movement nor does he feel the pulse of modern life in all its fulness, he is not a creative genius moulding the times and shaping or transforming the poetic world; but he does have a sturdy goodness of character, a clear mental grasp of and a keen sympathy for the religious teachings of Luther, and a most happy literary talent. He is kind, charitable, unflinchingly gentle; he belongs to the middle class but is without the coarseness of this class; he does not belong to the learned but he accumulates a large store of knowledge; he writes only in German but he has a command of his native tongue inferior perhaps only to that of Luther.

He has keen insight into the character and motives of his fellowmen. He is quick to see their weaknesses, foibles, and sins and has the power of portraying them with realistic vividness. In his *Wittenbergisch Nachtigall* the pope is the lion, the clergy and the supporters of Rome are the wolves, poisonous serpents and other evil beasts that have ravaged the flock and the evils of the Roman church are vividly portrayed, not, however, in the spirit of bitter and morose complaint but with an exultant note of joy that the nightingall of Wittenberg is announcing the day that is to dispel all this darkness. In his *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherren und Schubmacher* we have a splendid portrayal of the ignorant clergyman vexed by the innovations advocated by the nightingall of Wittenberg and by the arguments of the cobbler which he is unable to meet. Here we have a genial and delicious humour, pleasing invention, and a satire not inferior to that of the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* and yet free from all coarseness and bitterness. The same genial satire Hans Sachs uses in his *Schwaenke, Fastnachtsspiele* and dramas, in which with calm objectivity, delicacy of shading, facility and moderation of expression, and often deliciously mischievous humour people in the most varied circumstances and stations of life, as well as social conditions, are portrayed.

The first in order of time of the writers of this period noted only or chiefly because of their satirical writings is Sebastian Brandt. He was born at Strassburg in 1475 and there received his earlier education, at seventeen he entered the university at Basel, took his bachelors degree at twenty, became a licentiate in canonical law at twenty seven, and was married at twenty eight, and received his doctorate in canonical and Roman law at thirty two. At Basel he remained as an efficient professor in the university until 1500, having there published his *Narrenschiff* in 1494. In 1500 he became the advocate and in 1503 the secretary of the council of his native city Strassburg, where he died in 1512.

Thus his famous literary work, the *Narrenschiff* as well as the greater part of his life preceded the high tide of the Reformation movement. But also with respect to his thought and feeling does he belong to the time preceding the Reformation rather than to the Reformation period itself. Though he stood in friendly relations with some of the humanists and was in sympathy with some of the milder ideas of humanism he would none of it when it came in conflict with the accepted views of scholastic philosophy and theology. His political ideal was

that of the old conception of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, in closest connection of course with the Catholic Church. He was a devoted son of the Catholic Church, criticising the faults and sins in the persons of its servants or adherents, but he never dreamed that anything could be wrong with its organization, its doctrines, and its inner life. Reverence for authority, whether political, spiritual, or intellectual, was with him a sacred duty.

Besides his Narrenschiff Brandt's literary productions are Latin and German poems, a publication, with additions, of Freidank's Bescheidendeit, a number of occasional pamphlets in Latin and German, and a manual of law. But his literary significance is limited to his Narrenschiff. One must not infer from the title, Narrenschiff, that there is in the work a consistent plan carrying out this idea; it is rather a picturesquely descriptive title the idea of which Brandt does not even take the trouble to conceive consistently, as both in his introduction and in the accompanying illustrations he presents a fleet of all kinds of craft as well as land vehicles besides the single Narrenschiff. In fact Narrenspiegel, with which term he designates especially the illustrations, could as appropriately have served for the title of the

whole work. In one hundred and twelve chapters he presents to us so many varieties of folly. Each chapter has a title naming the folly discussed and is introduced usually with three lines rhyming with each other and preceding the title, giving some striking characterization of the folly to belashed and suggesting the illustration accompanying the chapter. Then follows in couplets with four iambic measures to the line, with perhaps from sixty to one hundred and eighty lines to each chapter, the fuller characterization of the particular folly treated. The style is aphoristic with allusions to the Scriptures both canonical and apocryphal, to the church fathers, and the latin classics, and examples from history and experience.

The follies and vices rebuked are largely those weaknesses and blemishes of character common to individuals of all nations and times with those shadings and peculiarities which they received from the circumstances of the times. There are no special allusions to particular persons and hence no bitterness of personality.

There is no logically articulated and progressive order of thought, no plan of structure

having a beginning and leading with climactic relation and order to an end, but rather a collection of chapters with no dependence one upon the other; any one of which, or even parts of which, may be read without the other, without detriment to interest or understanding. A book in which one may read with interest rather than which one may read with interest. There is no story or action, hence no charm of genial invention. There is very little if any humour except in the illustrations.

There is a lack of spontaneity, ease, freshness, and movement; one receives not the impression of the free outburst of a full mind but of a laborious collection. There is no sprightly wit or grace of form but an atmosphere of homely, naive matter of fact, a tone of prosaic pious didacticism foreshadowed in the words of his introduction, which are repeated in his conclusion: Zu nutz und heilsamer ler, vermanung und ervolgung der wissheit, vernunft und guter sitten. Auch zu verachtung und straff der narrheit, blintheit irrsal und dorheit aller stant und geschlecht der menschen, mit besunderm fliss ernst und arbeit gesamlet zu Basel: durch Sebastianus Brant.

What, however, were the elements in this work that made it so famous in its time and gave to it its influence over writers of subsequent times? No doubt

a great part of its success was due to this very homely pious didacticism referred to, which appealed to a time that delighted in the practical, the bluntly homely, and even in coarseness: a time when the elegance, romance, and idealism of the thirteenth century were forgotten and the plain, unvarnished practical realism of the middle class and the common people was predominant.

Another reason for its great popularity must be sought in the sad fact that the social and moral conditions of the times were such and the evils rebuked were so prominent that they had a prominent place in the thoughts and feelings of Brant's contemporaries, and that his allusions to local and social conditions had a vividness of interest for them that they cannot have for us. Nor must it be forgotten that in a time when books for the first time became possible the illustrations, many of them ingenious, which Brant gave to the chapters of his book, contributed no small part to its popularity.

A genuine merit however, is the aphoristic and thoroughly popular nature of Brant's style. There are many short, proverbial expressions and apt, happy characterizations. There is often a delightful picturesqueness, vividness, and felicity in his

representation and ridicule of the evils and follies of his time. So that his readers had the pleasure of finding there aptly and fittingly expressed in words what they had already thought and keenly felt.

Quite in contrast with the calm steadiness of the life of Brant are the restless changes in the residence and activities of Murner. He was born in Oberehnheim in 1475. In his early childhood his parents became residents of Strassburh, where he joined the Fransiscan order at the age of fifteen. At nineteen he entered the University at Freiburg, to study theology, going later also to Paris, Krakau, Vienna, Rostock, Prague and Cologne, returning to Strassburg in 1502. For the next twenty-three years we find him with frequent returns to Strassburg, either at Esslingen, Ueberlingen or Frankfurt, preaching; at Bern in the interests of his order in the Jetzer affair; or studying and lecturing at the universities of Krakau, Freiburg or Basel. Hostilities on the part of adherents of the Reformation compel him to flee from Strassburg to Lucerne in 1525, for the same reason he leaves Lucerne for Heidelberg in 1529, and finally in 1530, he returns to Oberehnheim as parish priest. There he died in 1537.

He wielded a ready pen and was ceaselessly active with it. Aside from his satirical works his earlier writings from 1499 to 1519 dealt with a variety of subjects in which he was interested in his studies and university lectures. From 1520 to 1529 his writings are exclusively polemics against Luther and the Reformation. But Murner's power and his importance for literary history are in satire, in which branch of literature he produced the Schelmenzunft and the Narrenbeschwoerung in 1512, the Muelle von Schwyndelsheym in 1519, the Guechmat in 1518 and Von dem Grossen Lutherischen Narren in 1522.

The Schelmenzunft and the Narrenbeschwoerung are similiar in form and contents. Murner had followed the example of Geiler of Kaisersberg in the style of his preaching and now followed that of Brandt in the composition of these two productions. In the Schelmenzunft he is the secretary or clerk of a guild and in that capacity assigns to each rogue his place as he describes his qualities. In the Narrenbeschwoerung he is the great exsocist who summons the various fools and by the art of exorcism drives their folly from them. As with Brandt so here these poetical conceptions are not consistently carried out

or kept in mind, though especially in his Narren-
beschwoerung he is more mindful ^{of it} than Brant. Here again
in chapters without logical connection the various
follies and moral evils are flagellated. In the
Narrenbschwoerung some of the subjects and even some
passages of the Schelmenzunft are repeated and both
cover much the same ground as Brant's Narrenschiff,
except that Murner does not spare any on account of
rank or position and is especially severe in his
frequent scourgings of the moral delinquencies of the
clergy.

While his purpose is also to correct and
- reprove, yet his satire is more caustic and bitter
and you cannot help feeling occasionally that he
delights in his satire for its own sake. In Murner
we find no traces of careful collection from sources as
in Brant's, but rather the spontaneous and free flow
from the fulness of his own mind derived from experience
and a keen observation of life. But in his facility
there is evidence also of carelessness, while he
goes far beyond Brant in his coarseness and
vulgarity, some times verging upon the indecent. On
the whole he far surpasses Brant in the vividness and
forcefullness of his thought and style.

In the Muelle von Schwynds sheym Murner causes people who are afflicted with various kinds of dizziness, moral follies, make a pilgrimage to the Muelle Von Schwidelsheym on the anniversary of the death of Gretmuellerin, utilizing the popular ill fame associated with that name, thus giving him an opportunity of describing them. In the Guechmat he represents himself as the chancellor of the guild of fools whom he gathers together on the fool's meadow where Venus reigns and where he presents the rules governing the guild in prose, and the description of the fools in rhymed verse. Both these productions deal almost exclusively with the amorous fools. Even in his Narrenbschwoerung Murner had gone to the verge of indecency in his description of the follies of women, here he devotes his attention again and almost exclusively to this subject and goes farther still in vulgarity and obscenity, so that the frequency with which he touches upon this subject as well as the intimacy of knowledge with which he, a monk, treats it is striking and did not fail to attract to him the derision and gossip of his contemporaries, who certainly cannot be said to be squeamish on this point.

Murner had not minced matters with reference to the sins of the Catholic church and clergy. Now came Luther with his powerful arraignment and his

teachings which meant a radical change. For Luther's conception of religion and the nature of the church Murner had absolutely no understanding. He would have the abuses corrected by the proper authorities in the church, to suggest any other change or reform was for him the destruction of both religion and the church. So Murner became serious for a while and with marked moderation appeals to Luther and the nation. Luther however hardly notices Murner as one who is not even able to realize the real nature of the question. Others cannot take the author of the Guechmat very seriously and pour ridicule and abuse upon him.

From now on all the energy and passion of Murner's soul is bent upon fighting the Reformation, and in this conflict he produces one of the greatest satires in literature, his Von dem Grossen Lutherischen Narren.

Here Luther, the great Nar, with numerous smaller Narren in him represents the activities of the Reformation while his daughter represents the reformed church. Murner again adopts the role of exorcist and conjures the fools from the various parts of Luther's body. Among these the fifteen Bundesgenossen of Eberlein are prominent, as well as other authors of attacks upon Murner. All these as an army with

Luther as their leader and the banners of Evangelium, Freiheit and Wahrheit attack churches and monasteries represented as a fort in which their booty is only a pig; and finally the castle in which Murner is defending the faith. Murner is persuaded to yield by the promise of Luther's daughter as his wife, whom he however casts out with scorn having discovered her afflicted with a loathsome disease. Luther then dies refusing the sacrament and his body is cast into the privy with the accompaniment of cat music led by Murner. Then with a strange rhetorical break and inconsistency the original conception of exorcism is taken up again. Luther dies from the effects of the exorcism and is buried and Murner, as administrator, claims the fool's cap for himself.

Here also Murner lacks the finish and perfection of careful workmanship. He is gross as only Murner can be, he is caustic and bitter, he is unscrupulous in his personalities, he strives for effect at any cost. Yet we have here unity and progress of rhetorical structure and there is almost dramatic force and movement of thought. In logical connection, with vividness and force of language he deals blow upon blow against a single idea.

Parody, wit, ridicule, scorn and biting sarcasm are put to most effective use. The weaknesses of the Reformation movement are most effecticely set forth and had it been possible to make the Reformation ridiculous the work of Murner most have accomplished it.

The first outburst of the Reformation produced the greatest satire against the Reformation, the counter-Reformation produced the greatest satire against Catholicism. The author of the latter was Fischart. He was born about 1550, probably at Strassburg, his earlier education was received at Worms under Kasper Scheidt, who was acquainted with humanism and French literature, he traveled extensively and gathered as a keen observer a rich store of knowledge of men and social conditions. He began his authorship in 1570, obtained his degree of Doctor of Law in 1574 at Basel, spent the years 1576 to 1581 in extraordinary literary productiveness at Strassburg became advocate at Speyer in 1587 and amtman at Forbach 1582, was married in 1583 and died in 1590 or 1591. Though still young he had given the world an unusual abundance of literary material of unusual excellence.

Of his non-satirical writings the Philosophisch Ehezuechtbuechlein and Das Gluekhafft Schiff von Zuerich must be mentioned, the latter a poetic production of high excellence.

But Fischart was a born satirist and the greater part of his writings are satirical. Some of these are of a mere humorous nature where the satire is incidental and has no polemical aim or tendency; to these belong the Eulenspiegel, Die Floehhatz, Aller Praktik Grossmutter, Podogrammische Trostbuechlein, and Gargantua und Pantagruel. His Eulenspiegel is a poetic rendering of the well known prose work of that name, with many additions of his own. The Floehhatz is also in poetic form, in which with attractive humour and genial satire, though with much of the want of delicacy of his time, he presents the appeal of the wounded flea against women to Jupiter, their defense as chancellor by the author, and the decision of the god. The remaining three works mentioned are in prose, in which Fischart's humour finds its freest scope. The Aller Praktik Grossmutter is a witty parody on the customary weather predictions and the Podogrammische Trostbuechlein an ironical eulogy of the gout. His greatest work however of this class, and perhaps the greatest of all his works, is the Gargantua und Pantagruel. This is a translation and an enlargement of the first book of Rabelais' work of that name. Fischart succeeded in giving a version of the original which is thoroughly German and national in spirit, and though

it is imperfect in form, especially with reference to proper measure and proportion, it surpasses the original in its humour and satire. Fischart gives here a vivid picture of the public affairs and especially of the private life of his time. He shows most extended and most minute acquaintance with the events of the time, the conditions and peculiarities of the various sections and classes of the country. And this picture is painted with remarkable fullness of human understanding, a delightful keenness of wit, an inexhaustible fund of humour and a raciness of satire all his own.

By far more caustic are Fischart's satires directed against the opponents of the Reformation. As early as 1570 he wrote an invective against the Jesuit Johann Rab, which was followed immediately by *Der Barfueser Sekten - und Kутten Streit*, and in 1571 by *Sanct Dominici und Sanct Francisi artlichem Leben und grossen Greueln*, satires on the petty quarrels of the monkish orders and their beliefs and manners of life. In 1579 he translated from the Dutch the great satire of Philip Marnix against the Catholic hierarchy, with the title of *Bienen Korb des heyl roemischen Immenschwarms*. In places he enlarges upon the original, especially with humourously satirical oddities of his own.

But in 1580 he wrote the most powerful satire ever written against Catholicism, his Jesuiter Huetlein. Lucifer is represented as feeling that by the advent of Christ his power and influence had suffered and that something must be devised to retrieve it. Since his horns are abhorred and feared by men he resolves to transform them, and thus in an unrecognizable form make them the means of the reestablishment of his power. So he devises first a unicorn wherin are sewed indolence and pretention, this is the monks cowl. Next he devises the two horned bishop's cap, containing pride, lust of power and avarice. Then he invents the threefold horn of the papal tiara, containing all the vices and sins of which the Protestants accused the Pope and sent it to the Pope at Rome. Though all believe that Lucifer has now done his utmost he, with horrible contortions, announces a still more hellish invention, the four@cornered cap of the Jesuits. All the apirits of hell are put to work on it, and the most infernal wickednesses are wrought into it. Lucifer consecrates it in a horribls manner, darkness unsues while he addresses it and in the midst of the roaring of thunder this work of hell is sent among men.

In this powerful satire, Fischart is superior to Murner in inventive power, in the strictly consequent

development and progress of structure and in the artistic mastery of his material. He does not give way to angry words, or bitterness, or ferocious contortions, or revel in mere force, but in the consciousness of his power he writes with a smiling, victorious ridicule, a destructive wit, with a satire caustic and annihilating and yet self-possessed. He is not, like Brant, severely ascetic to the exclusion of wit and humour, or, like Murner, bitter and cynical to the exclusion of all hopeful or cheerful thought. Though he is a child of his time in the use of coarse expressions, and, like the polemic writers of his time, distorts and misrepresents the facts, his thoroughly sound and healthy moral nature and genuine piety give his satire, not devoid of a grateful optimism, incomparably greater effectiveness than that of Murner. Graphic, with rapid movement and never tiring power and imagery of language, it was a most formidable arraignment of the Jesuits.

Thus to Fischart, exuberant and opulent in style, virile, and sonorous in diction, abounding in knowledge, keen in his observation of life, fundamentally joyous and optimistic in nature, genial in humour and wit, with a real genius for satire, must be accorded the preeminence among the satirists of this period.