Charles V
H E Marshall *The History of Germany* (1913)

[The Emperor Charles V ]...had sworn to crush Luther and his heresy, and had by no means given up the idea. But for the time being his hands were full. Almost at once, after the Diet of Worms [at which Luther had been condemned as a heretic], he had left Germany, and he did not return for nine years. During a great part of that time he was fighting Francis I of France in Italy, in the hope of once more gaining that country for the Empire.

At length, in 1529, the Peace of Cambray was signed, and the following year Charles was crowned Emperor by the Pope at Bologna. Frederick III, you remember, was the last Emperor to be crowned at Rome. Charles V was the last Emperor of Germany ever to be crowned by the Pope at all.

Charles had now time to think a little about Germany and German heresy. In 1529, the Diet, or Parliament, met at Spires, and there a decree was passed forbidding any more changes of religion, and commanding that Mass should be said in all churches. The nobles and people who had followed Luther protested against this, and from that all those who broke away from the Church of Rome have received the name of Protestants.

The following year, after nine years' absence, Charles returned to Germany. He called together the Diet at Augsburg,[1] and hoped very quickly to make short work of the Protestants. But he was mistaken. Luther was still under the ban of the Empire, and was forbidden to come to Augsburg, so Melanchthon, another but much milder reformer, appeared as leader of the Protestants. They drew up a statement of their beliefs, which was read before the Diet. This was afterwards called the Augsburg Confession, and was accepted as a Confession of Faith by all the Lutheran Churches.

The Catholics too drew up a statement, and there was a great deal of argument on both sides. Neither side would give way. So Charles forbade further talk. He ordered all Protestants to return to the old religion, and threatened all those who disobeyed with the ban of the Empire.

The Protestant nobles then banded together in what is known as the Schmalkald League, so called from the town of Schmalkald, and made ready to fight for freedom of conscience. [You can see the document with all their seals attached above.]

Charles was eager enough to fight these insolent Protestants. But another enemy, too, appeared. The Turks for a long time had been a danger to the Empire. Now the proud Sultan Solyman made ready to invade Germany with a mighty army. He came in pride and insolence, regarding the Emperor as a mere upstart, and refusing him any title but King of Spain. Himself he called “the Sultan of sultans, the King of kings, the Dispenser of Crowns to the monarchs on the face of the globe, the Shadow of God upon the earth.”

“Be it known to you,”he wrote, “that by the grace of God, and of the Prophet, I have set forth with

1 See the lesson for 8th April.

all my nobles, slaves, and with a numberless host to seek the King of Spain. By the grace of God, I march against him. If he be of a high courage let him await me on the field of battle, and that which shall be, shall be. If he will not so await me, let him pay tribute to my majesty."

So he set forth, swearing never to return to Constantinople till he had laid waste the whole of Germany with fire and sword, and till he had conquered Italy. "Night and day," he said, "we are girt with our sword; our horse is ready saddled."

And now Charles V looked this way and that in vain for help against this mighty foe, Both England and France were in league with the Protestant princes against him. For Francis I, in spite of his treaties and his signed peace, was ever an enemy, and jealous of the Imperial crown, which he had hoped to win for himself. Secretly he was indeed in league with the Turks. Henry of England too was an enemy, and at this very time he was treating the Emperor's aunt, Catherine of Aragon, very cruelly, and seeking to divorce her. From abroad then there was little hope of help. At home there was as little. And Charles begged in vain for men and money to check the advance of the terrible Turks. The Protestant princes would grant him nothing until the Decree of Augsburg was recalled.

So at length Charles yielded, and the first religious truce, known as the Peace of Nuremburg, was signed in 1582. By this, Protestants were granted full freedom to worship God as they would, until a General Council should be called to discuss and settle these matters.

The Protestant nobles then gave the help which the Emperor asked, and a great army marched against the Turks. The Turks were defeated, and Solyman and his followers quickly marched back to their own land. And with that Charles was content. He let the Sultan go, making no effort to pursue him, greatly to the disgust of his army. "We fight," said a great general who lived in those days, "as this Emperor has always fought, like so many oxen in a rich meadow. When he has had enough, he lies down and chews the cud; so soon as hunger pricks him, he sets off again in search of fresh pasture."

Satisfied with what he had done against the Turks, Charles once more left Germany, and was soon again fighting with Francis I of France. But it would be impossible in this book to follow all the journeys and the wars of Charles. For the history of Charles is almost the history of Europe, and many of his wars and expeditions had to do with other of his many possessions, and not with the Empire.

As long as Charles wanted help for his wars, he kept the truce with the Protestants. So they were left in peace to grow strong and prosperous. The new religion spread rapidly until the whole of North Germany and a large part of South Germany had become Protestant. But Charles never lost the desire of crushing them one day, when it should be convenient to himself.

At length it seemed to him the time had come, and in 1545 a General Council was called by the Pope and met at Trent. But the Protestants refused to recognise this Council, and both sides made ready to fight. Before the war began, Luther died. He had done his best to keep the peace, but at the end his power had been but small.

At first the Emperor had only a small army, while that of the Schmalkaldic League was large. Had they attacked at once, all might have been well with them. But they hesitated, they were not united, orders were given and recalled, the troops marched now here, now there, without accomplishing anything.

Charles, on the other hand, fought with skill. One by one the cities fell away from the League. One by one the princes yielded. The last battle of the war was fought at Mühlberg in Saxony. Yet it could

hardly be called a battle, it was rather a headlong flight and pursuit.

“I came, I saw, and God conquered,” said Charles proudly.

The Emperor lost scarcely fifty men, the Protestants nearly three thousand, besides banners and baggage waggons, cannon and ammunition. The Elector of Saxony also was among the prisoners.

Battle-stained and dusty, the blood trickling down his face from a wound in the head, the Elector was led before Charles. Humbled, with bare head, he bowed before his master begging forgiveness. “Most gracious Emperor,” he began. But Charles interrupted him. “Hah,” he cried, “so I am now a gracious Emperor. Had you not fared better by finding that out sooner?”

John Frederick of Saxony was, however, as proud as the Emperor. He would not endure insults.

Quickly he drew himself up. He crammed his hat again upon his head, “I am your prisoner,” he cried. “Do with me as you will.”

“Be assured,” answered Charles, “we shall treat you as you deserve.”

The Elector was condemned to death, but the sentence was not carried out. He was, however, obliged to give up his title, and nearly all his land, and remain a prisoner at the court of Charles.

Charles was now at the height of his power. The German Protestants were crushed, he had made a long truce with the Turks, and last but not least, his two great rivals, Henry of England, and Francis of France, were dead. With no one left who dared defy him, his pride knew no bounds.

Charles now held a Diet at Augsburg. At this Diet he brought forward what is known as the Interim. This was a plan drawn up to settle all religious differences. It really took from the Protestants almost everything for which they had fought. After twenty-five years of freedom they were to be once more bound to the Romish Church. But although the princes and the cities were forced to seem to accept the Interim, it never was really accepted. The people laughed it to scorn.

Soon once more war broke out. Charles had made Duke Maurice Elector of Saxony, in place of the imprisoned John Frederick. For a time Duke Maurice seemed to be the Emperor's friend. Then he rebelled against him. He found an ally in Henry II of France, who hated the Emperor with a deep and bitter hatred.

And now there began a more dreadful war than had ever before been fought on German soil. Not even in the terrible Peasants' War had there been such bloodshed and cruelty. And yet the war was fought in the name of German liberty, and for the love of "the pure Word of God." Germans fought against Germans, Catholic against Protestant, with a cruelty more horrible than even the Turks had used. They destroyed churches and monasteries, in the name of Christ, more wantonly than any Saracen host had ever done.

Henry II of France, who persecuted the Protestants in his own land, now entered Germany to fight for German Protestants. At the same time Duke Maurice marched southward to attack Charles in Innsbruck.

The Emperor was quite unprepared. Broken down and ill, he fled from the city, and was carried in a litter across the mountains, to the town of Villach in Carinthia.

The Catholics were in despair, the Protestants triumphant. Three days after Duke Maurice entered

Innsbruck, a truce was signed, and this was followed by the Treaty of Passau. By this Treaty Charles gave the Protestants full freedom to follow their own religion until a Diet should be called to settle the matter. He promised, too, that if the Diet failed to find a way of agreement between the two parties, that the Protestants should be left in peace. But this promise was wrung from him with difficulty, for he hoped still to crush out the heresy.

Peace having at length been restored, Charles turned to fight "that Protector of German liberties" Henry II. But for months his cannon thundered in vain against the walls of Metz, which was held against him by the Duke of Guise. At length, sick at heart, Charles turned away from the hopeless struggle. “Fortune is but a fickle jade,” he said, “I well see, she prefers a young king to an old Emperor.” He had fought his last battle. Never again did he mount his war-horse or lay his lance in rest.

In 1555 the promised Diet was called to settle the question of religion. And after much talk, the so-called Religious Peace of Augsburg was signed. It did not give freedom of conscience to every man. The princes, so it was decreed, might be of what religion they chose, and the people must obey their prince. If he chose he could leave them free; if he chose he could force them to follow his religion. “To whom the land belongs, to him belongs the religion of the land,” was the groundwork of the law. It put an end to all real freedom of conscience, and it was the cause of terrible misery for Germany in days to come.

But now the Emperor was spent and old. He longed for peace. Of late all his plans had failed, he was ill and weary of the weight of his many crowns, so one day he laid them down. To his son Philip he gave the Netherlands and Spain with solemn ceremony. He tried also, as he had tried many times before, to have him chosen King of the Romans and Emperor. But he tried in vain. So at length he yielded the rule of Germany to his brother Ferdinand. Then he said farewell to royal state, and went away to spend his last days in the monastery of San Yuste in Spain. There he gave himself up to working with mechanical things, making models and mechanical toys, digging in the garden, and other simple pleasures. He spent much time, it is said, trying to make two clocks keep time with each other, and could not do it. At length, in despair, he cried out, “I cannot even make two clocks keep time together, and yet I set myself to force a million souls to conform to one belief.”

Charles was a strange mixture and full of contradictions. He was timid and he was brave, he would tremble at a mouse and walk unmoved amid the roar and crash of cannon. At times he was painfully irresolute, at others obstinate as a mule. And he knew it.

“I am by nature obstinate,” he said once to a cardinal. “To cling to good opinions, Sire,” replied the cardinal, “is not to be obstinate, but to be firm.”

“Ah, but,” answered Charles, “sometimes I cling to bad ones.”

Charles was the greatest ruler of his century, half the known world was under his sway. He died in 1558.