

Katharina von Bora

An Historical Picture of Her Life

D Albrecht Thoma

Translated from the German by
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(R J Tucker, 2007)

Translator's Preface

Spelling at the time of Katherina von Bora, particularly for German, was not something you could generally look up in a dictionary – one writer might use one spelling, another writer another spelling; hence Zulsdorf might be spelled Zollsdorf, Nimbschen Nimmschen or Nimetzsh and so on. As far as names are concerned I have generally tried to use the English equivalent of German names of people and towns and cities where they are most likely to found in their English form in English texts (Moritz – Maurice, Kreutziger or Kreuziger – Cruciger, Schmalkald – Smalcald, though Smalkaldic as adjective). I may also have used kaiser and emperor interchangeably and so on. Luther's name was originally Luder.

Note that a master's degree was held in greater esteem than it is today:

“The degrees of master (magister) and doctor were for some time equivalent, ‘the former being more in favour at Paris and the universities modelled after it, and the latter at Bologna and its derivative universities. At Oxford and Cambridge a distinction came to be drawn between the Faculties of Law, Medicine, and Theology and the Faculty of Arts in this respect, the title of Doctor being used for the former, and that of Master for the latter.’ Because theology was thought to be the highest of the subjects, the doctorate came to be thought of as higher than the master's.” (Wikipedia – “Postgraduate Education”) In this book “Master” as a

title equates to someone with a Master's degree at the time. Scholars also often took Latin or Greek names and you will find evidence of it in this book.

Note also that although "Elector" and "Electoral" may not grammatically require a capital first letter, I have generally given one throughout this text - I think it adds clarity.

Lene or Lena is, of course, a shortened form of Magdalena; the addition of -chen to a name in German forms the diminutive, so "Lenchen" essentially means "little Lene".

A "Land" was a division of Germany as it is today, but then more thought of as a little country in its own right. Again I may not have always been perfectly consistent in the choice of "Land" or "country".

It has been my intention to provide a good, clear fairly accurate translation of the original German text; where there is comment or opinion relating to religion, politics, race, social class or the status of the sexes in society, as much as it may link or resonate with the current era or have parallels there, it should be addressed to the era from which it originates.

Even though it has been my intention to provide a reasonably accurate translation, I would suggest that in using this book as a reference one should find confirming evidence before quoting anything as stated.

(R J Tucker, 2007)

Preface

In "Leben Luthers" (Life of Luther), the chapter "Luthers Häuslichkeit" ("Luther's Family Life") offers as a pleasant idyll a charming repose from the dramatic fights and the epic course of the reality of the Reformation. The letters to a "dear housewife" are, among the thousands of his Epistles, the most beautiful and original ones. The reason for this however lies not only in the rich mind and the spiritfull humour of the great man, but also in the personality of his lively, spirited wife. It must have been a remarkable woman that the great man raised up as his lifelong companion and who dared to become the wife of the mighty Reformer and who succeeded in sufficing him; and it had to be a likeable character to which he could unfold his good humour so well. She created a beautiful home for the doctor and an exemplary Protestant parsonage. And so Luther's Kate lives as the partner of the favourite and pride of our nation in good memory in the soul of the German people.

It is, therefore, rather striking that no real biography of the wife of Luther has appeared up to now; rather that almost more slander-seeking enemies have, like 150 years ago one Engelhard, practised their little-genuine art. Especially surprising is the fact that during the last half-century, in this so distinguished historical age - since the source-rich sketches of Beste and Hofmann appeared at the same time - no biography has been produced, not even in this quadricentennial

anniversary year of her birth.

However, the reason for this strange situation is clear. The picture of Katharina von Bora having become continually painted into even "Luthers Leben", it is difficult to bring her fully to recognition against the immense figure of her husband; so a little arduous work is necessary to sketch a full picture of her life, and no ingenuity will lay bare any astonishing discoveries here.

Yet Luther's Kate deserves - insomuch as it is possible - to be looked at individually, as her picture is so often painted beside that of the great doctor. If Frau Kate is indeed nothing without Doctor Martinus, one can also ask: What would Luther have been without Kate? If the picture of the great Reformer lacked the humanly engaging, then the comfortable relations of family life also fail, particularly for us Germans. And this is what Frau Kate created for him. It is owing to her that the world has had him so long and with such spiritual freshness and happy working zeal.

So may it be a monument and - as befitting to the modest German housewife - a humble one, that which is put here in remembrance of her birth four hundred years ago.

(Original Preface written in 1899)

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Chapter 1

Katharina's Origins and Family

At the time of the Reformation, the Land of Saxony encompassed approximately the Kingdom of today, the greater part of the Province of Saxony and the Thuringian-Saxonian states. These Saxon lands were, however, divided, since the inheritance contract of 1485 between the Ernestines and Albertines, into an Electorate and a Duchy. A strange enough division, but quite according to the way things were at that time: to the Albertine Duchy, also known as "Meissen", belonged the largest part of the Kingdom of today with the cities of Meissen, Dresden, Chemnitz; also a narrow strip from Leipzig to Langensalza. Interjacent extended

the Electorate with the capitals Wittenberg, Torgau, Weimar, Gotha and Eisenach to the west and Zwickau and Coburg to the south. The Electoral Saxons looked down with some pride on their neighbours, merely ducal citizens, probably chiming out the old mocking rhyme: "Die Meissner sind Gleisner"[†] Even if it were not true, it rhymed so well.

Katharina von Bora, Luther's wife, came from the Meissner dukedom, while Luther himself was a born Mansfelder, then a citizen of the Electoral Saxon capital, Wittenberg, and an official of the Elector. He probably complained to his wife about her sovereign, Duke George the Bearded, who, a vehement opponent of the Reformation, was in constant feud with Luther, released hateful writings against him and pursued the Lutherans throughout the land of "Meissen". Luther also teased his Kate when in Leipzig she spread stories during his life of his death: "So that's what your impudent countrymen make up."

In Meissen in the area of Freiburger Mulde, one hour's ride[‡] eastwards of the castle and small town of Nossen lay the two localities Wendisch- and Deutschenbora, one quarter of an hour's ride from each other amongst pine forests - "pine" in Slavic being "bor". Here the Bora line had its ancestral seat. From there it moved out in different branches to many places in Saxony; thus also into the areas of Bitterfeld and Borna, one five hours' ride north and the other five hours' ride south of Leipzig. In all their coats of arms was a rampant red lion with a raised dexter paw on a golden field and a peacock's tail as crest.

[†] Meissners are dissemblers

[‡] Something like 3.7 to 4.6 kilometres

However, from which of these nine or ten branches Frau Katharina, the Reformer's wife, originated is no longer to be ascertained. More than seven places, as in the case of the father of the Greek literature, Homer, argue for the honour of being her birth place: that is nearly every place, where at one time or another Bora had lived or ruled. But one can more easily prove that she does not originate from eight of these places, than that she was really born in the ninth.

Perhaps Katharina's place of birth is at the old ancestral seat of the family: in Hirschfeld, a very fertile property on the village-rich tableland, where one looks northwards to Deutsch-Bora and further to the Wendisch-Bora, where to the west, at a distance of one hour's ride, one sees the castle-crowned hilltop of Nossen.

More probably however Kate was born in Lippendorf. Westward from Borna, on the river Pleisse, within the Meissner region stretches a wide plain, the monotonousness of which is interrupted only by dark woods. Only a few hundred paces from the church village Medewitzsch stand the handful of houses that constitute the small village of Lippendorf and somewhat apart a larger estate, with a small lake behind it. It was certainly no knight's seat, but nevertheless a stately feudal tenure, which nowadays makes a wealthy farmer of its owner. Around 1482 Hans von Bora with his wife Katharina held it; around 1505 one Jan von Bora with his wife Margarete, née von Ende. Probably Hans and Jan are not father and son, but the same person and Margarete his second wife.

Here, perhaps, Katharina, at the end of the fifteenth century, 15¼ years after Martin Luther, came into the

world. On this farmlike estate she – perhaps under a stepmother – grew up. By this pond she would have played as a child and looked over to the knight’s seat Kieritzsch with the castle park and a small little church, and further over to the meadows and wood of the Nixdorf common land to the abandoned estate of Zollsdorf – where later as an honourable housewife and doctor’s wife coming from the far off Wittenberg she would reside and hold sway, just as she had learned in the yard and stable, kitchen and cellar from her diligent mother.

But this conjecture is not for sure. Katharina’s birthplace could also have been elsewhere.

One does not even know the name of her father and mother for certain. The father could well have been called Hans, every third man was at the time, equally in the Bora family. And according to another, not unbelievable report, the mother could have been a von Haubitz and, according to the story, taken the name Anna much liked at the time. Then Lippendorf would certainly not have been Kate’s home. Only her date of birth is known for sure, 29th January 1499; this date is engraved on a medallion, that still exists today.

Her close relatives are also known.

Katharina had at least three brothers. One, whose name is not to be found, married a certain Christina and died rather young, perhaps already by about 1540 – known because his son Florian, who was about the same age as Luther’s oldest, that is about fourteen years old, was adopted at about this time and in 1546 wanted to study law; by then Christina von Bora was a widow.

Another brother of Katharina’s was Hans von Bora.

In 1531 he was in the service of Duke Albert of Prussia, but returned from it in about 1534 in order to take over the small estate of Zulsdorf for himself and his brothers as an "inheritable little roof". In his adult years he was praised as "sincere, fine and faithful" by his brother-in-law Luther and Justus Jonas. "He is good and true, that I know, also skilful and industrious", Luther testifies.

That known of the third brother Klemens is less praiseworthy. He arrived with his brother Hans in Königsberg (Kalingrad), but joined company after the latter's return with a rowdy nobleman, who, intoxicated, suffocated a journeyman carpenter in his presence, bringing infamy also on himself as well as the disfavour of the duke.

Besides Katharina's brothers, an aunt Lene is also known, who later lived in Luther's house. It can only be Magdalena von Bora, her father's sister, who had already been living for a long time in the Nimbschen nunnery, when Katharina was born.

If it is true, that around 1525 a Maria von Bora of Zulsdorf married in Wittenberg, then even closer relatives must have lived on the estate in the fiftentwenties. They cannot have been rich; the entire estate was only worth 600 florins and did not support her husband, as brother Hans later found out. A further relative of Katharina's was Paul von Rachwitz, who lived in Bitterfeld, close to which other branches of the Bora family tree lived.

Katharina's family must have been quite poor; it is even said that it got into great difficulty. Florian, the son of the oldest brother, was, at all events, after his father's death, put on to a scholarship for his studies, although he probably owned the family estate. Brother

Hans was so poorly placed at the Prussian court, that Luther had to “inconvenience” Duke Albrecht by writing to him saying: “Since my Kate’s brother Hans von Bora is penniless and does not have enough food or clothing at court, would Your Princely Grace be disposed to see that he could be provided with a few extra guilders each quarter, so that he can buy cloth for his back and other necessities.”

Katharina herself it seems, did not even receive an allowance in the cloister, while other, wealthier noble women received on average three schocks annually; and at her confirmation she could only donate thirty groschen, while new nuns probably gave one hundred, or at least forty, groschen. She could bring no dowry to her marriage.

Thus Katharina von Bora – all things considered – grew up in quite difficult circumstances, and if one wants to see the young girl as a tender knight’s maiden at the castle window with an embroidery frame or as a huntress riding a proud hunter, then one would have got the picture completely wrong. Rather we have to think of her rather like a young farmer’s daughter living freely helping her mother, while as the eldest, perhaps only daughter, also unfolding a certain independence and gift for management, which she later showed to have developed as a mature woman.

Certainly we are not able to sketch a really descriptive picture of her childhood, we have no reference points of any shape or form. With Katharina we may sorely miss that certain picture of early youth into which we so gladly sink ourselves when considering someone’s life, since her whole environment, the backdrop of the landscape and even

the necessary figures of the father and mother and everything that affects a young person, including names, blur and disappear, while, for example, in the case of her husband, Doctor Luther, the parental home, father, mother, brothers and sisters, playmates, homeland and school stand out so clearly and graphically that they give a quite living, colourful picture. But then again one can easily console oneself over this lack.

For it seems both her parents died early. By the time Katharina stepped into the light of history with her marriage, even at the time of her escaping from the nunnery, every trace of them has disappeared: the parents do not appear at her wedding, like the parents of Luther; they were not asked for their consent, on which Luther otherwise puts great weight; they are not to be seen when fleeing from the nunnery she required somewhere to stay; and also during the whole time in the cloister the father and mother do not appear, as is nevertheless often the case with nuns. Perhaps the early death of her parents was the reason for Katharina to enter the cloister so young.

Whatever the case, the spiritual development of the young girl was not lacking in the parental home. But, very young, Katharina left and spent her youth far from home in the convent.

So Katharina's entrance, although she was 15 years younger, comes at approximately the same time as the Erfurt Master of Law, Martin Luther, left his studies and went into the Augustinian monastery.

Chapter 2

In the Cloister

Nowadays, if a poor girl from a good background is to find a living, who cannot count on a large dowry and therefore on marriage and thus must probably renounce the natural female occupation, the family life, she goes to an institution and studies to be a teacher or the like. In the Middle Ages such a poor lady, whose marriage portion would have curtailed the estate of the son and heir and sisters even more, would go into the care of a cloister. The old cloisters (of the Benedictines, Cistercians, St Bernards) thus became care institutes. These were noble establishments, devout institutions of the forefathers in which

“honourable” (i.e. noble) virgins should serve God and pray for the souls of the living and the dead. At that time, instead of the current “spiritual” occupation of working in the world of the living, the “ecclesiastical” occupation existed to worship God and the saints and for the eternal welfare of the souls of not only the living, but also, and in particular, of the dead relatives in purgatory. At that time, instead of today’s free if not always voluntary decision on an occupation of choice, which is taken on on conditions and for a time, then it was the “eternal” irrevocable parental vow made for one’s lifetime; instead of “emancipation” which a young woman from a family background more or less expects today, it was “enclosure”, the containment within the cloister walls in a strictly closed society, the “order”, under the strict limits of the “laws”, the cloister statutes.

Few were asked if they had any vocation or inclination towards this ecclesiastical life, and no consideration would be made of it. Also at this time, parental authority, particularly over daughters, was much too great and the sense of family much too strong in these noble houses for a member to have followed his or her own individual inclination at odds with the origins and customs of the family as if he or she had rebelled against the demands of the conditions of existence of the whole family line. According to the ecclesiastical regulations: “A man becomes a monk either through parental vow or by personal profession”, so, primarily, the decision of the parents! They considered it a fully befitting provision and “a good blessed position” as a nun from the time explains.

In any case, the daughters went into the institution

at an age when they could not have developed any volition of their own. The girls were still children. They could enter as early as their sixth year; many would enter later, when the family position changed through the increase in the number of children, the death of the mother and the like. At an even younger age, foster children were also taken in, who then often became nuns.

“It is a matter of great adversity and tyranny, that unfortunately the children, and particularly the weak women and young girls, are allowed to go, be thrown or cajoled into convents” – Luther himself remarked on the cloister in which Katharina von Bora found herself, and exclaimed with rage: “Oh, the pitiless parents and relatives who proceed so appallingly and horribly with their own!”

The daughter of the impoverished house of Bora was treated no differently. Katharina was sent to the cloister – the child was not asked, of course; it took place “without her consenting”, just as Luther talks in general about her and her cosisters, of abandonment to the cloister and of compulsion. He asks his contemporaries: “How many nuns in cloisters do you think are there, who happily and with true inclination carry out their Holy Orders and service to God? Scarcely one among a thousand. How is it that you allow such a child to waste away her life and good works?”

Katharina perhaps entered the cloister during her sixth year; because in her sixth year Jan von Bora in Lippendorf makes over all his goods there to his second wife, whom he maybe married that year. Whatever, Katharina was already a member of the

cloister in her tenth year (1509); and indeed not the youngest, but the second youngest, and remained for long years (until 1516) the last but one in line of the sisters.

There were enough cloisters at that time in the Land: in the Meissen area alone, up to 30 convents were to be found. Into which cloister Katharina should enter, that was certain from the start: it had to be the noble Cistercian cloister "Marienthron" or "Gottesthron" in Nimbschen near Borna in the Electorate of Saxony. For here there was an aunt on her father's side, maybe her father's sister Magdalene von Bora, already a nun for quite some time and invested from 1502-8 with the office of infirmarian, i.e. nuns' nurse. In addition, there were, it seems, another two relatives from the distaff side of the family, the Haubitz, there: an older Margarete and a younger Anna.

The cloister of Nimbschen was in a pretty location. One hour's ride downstream, below the confluence of both the Muldes, the Zwickauer from the south and the Freiburger from the east, into the main Mulde, the narrow river valley widens into a quarter-of-an-hour's ride wide level meadow which has the form of a long leaf, half-an-hour's ride in length. On the east bank there stretches out a precipitous porphyry rock wall to which the Mulde bed presses close; in the west a low, more softly rising, forest-covered chain of hills meets the limit of the marsh land. Over the northern point of the leaf, which is closed sharply by the converging rock walls, a castle rose and beyond the dam, not visible from the meadow, lies the town of Grimma; at the higher end of the meadow, immediately at the foot of the western forested-hill, stood the cloister. It was

therefore remote from the world, cut off by the two rows of hills, with only a view over the peaceful, quiet meadow. Over from it flowed the Mulde unseen deep within its banks, towered over by the rock wall, while on this side rose the hilly cloister wood. Northwards gleamed a quite large pond which kept the tasty Lenten fare.

From the hill next to the cloister were broken the dirty-brown porphyry stones with which the walls and cloister buildings were built; an excavation into this hill further prevented unauthorized admission.

The cloister building was very extensive, because such an old Cistercian nunnery formed a world in itself: according to an old law the cloister had to satisfy all its needs independently through its own efforts. Hence, there was beside the true "house of God", as an ecclesiastical institution was called, all kinds of farm building: stables for horses, cattle, pigs and poultry with the necessary farm-hands and farm-girls, shepherds and shepherdesses for the foals, cows, sheep (the cloister had 1800 of them!), pigs and geese; also mowers, thrashers, woodcutters and a mother responsible for the dairy. The cloister itself divided into two complexes of buildings: the provostery and the "enclosed" area. The provostery enclosed the external cloister court and included the living accommodation of the provost, a "half priest" who was addressed with "recognition" ("Your Honour"), and the dwelling of the administrator and the scribe; also the "Preacher's House", in which two "men of Pforta", i.e. monks from the monastery at Pforta, lived as father confessors, because Nimbschen was under the higher supervision of Pforta. A brewery, bakery, slaughter-house, smith's,

mill, kitchen and cellar were also to be found in which the different cloister craftsmen lived and worked; at the gate-house sat the gate-keeper Thalheym. A "Hellenheyszer" had to look after the stoves.

It was a large enterprise with many staff: 40-50 people needed to be fed daily on the cloister farm when Katharina von Bora was there; and in addition wages had to be paid, from the chief farm-hand with 4 shocks 16 groschen and the foremen with 4 shocks down to the gooseherd who only received 40 groschen.

To pay all these people and to feed them on top of the cloister women, a large income in terms of money, grain, chickens, eggs etc. from the cloister villages and farms was needed, besides the cloister estates which were administered by the cloister staff themselves. Further, farmers were required to fulfil certain services: ploughing, muck spreading, thrashing, mowing and haymaking, reaping, timber-making, hop-picking, flax and hemp gathering, rippling and retting, sheep-shearing, those related to the hunt (game driving) for which they were partly paid with food and drink and, at the hunt, money.

The nuns themselves lived in the "enclosure", a second building complex which was built as a quadrangle around a small court and consisted of the church, the refectory, the dormitory (the cells) and the convent (the meeting place). The abbey, the living quarters of the abbess, who did not belong to the cloister, was between this and the provost's court.

Here in the cloister lived some forty daughters of noble houses from different parts of Electoral and Ducal Saxony. In addition came half-a-dozen "conversi" or lay sisters, who served by God's will, i.e.

for free. Beyond that there were kitchen maids, including a cook, and the "woman's maid", i.e. the handmaid to the abbess. She also had two boys at her disposal, who, of course, lived in the outer cloister court and received 1 schock a year for clothes and shoes.

The noble cloister women formed the community, the convent and, hence, were also called conventuals. It was a small republic of female nobles which governed itself in all matters according to the "Rule", the laws to which they were sworn - all directly under the scrutiny of their ultimate visitor, the abbot of Pforta, who, however, could only direct or find fault according to the Rule. The Rule was that of the Holy Bernard, a rather strict version of that of the ordinary Benedictines.

The nuns, except for the abbess, were shut into the enclosure, which they might leave only on convent matters with special permission - seldom and in the company of a senior sister and the father confessor. Communication with the outside world or even with the people of the provostery did not take place; also in church they were removed to a special close-barred nun's choir away from the view of people from the secular world. Crossing over the organ and leaning out of the choir was expressly forbidden. If somebody from outside (religious or secular) wanted to speak with a nun, the parents and brothers and sisters who visited perhaps, they could do so only with special permission from the abbess, and only if need required it, in the visiting room across a barred windowed and in the presence of the abbess. It was impossible for anyone to put a hand or any object through the window. Similarly

the confession box was closed off and even the father confessor himself might only enter the enclosure in cases of illness. The father could not join the nuns during festivities or amusements. It was punishable for the gatekeeper to allow dogs, old wives and the like to enter. The sisters might also not sleep together with the cloister children.

In this cloister community there numerous offices for its control and administration. With quite unlimited power ruled the elected abbess: her orders and her punishments were to be followed with unquestioning, unconditional obedience; she did, however, have to listen to the council of her "advisers and senior sisters". She was assigned not only the worldly management of the community, but also the "direction of the souls and consciences". She had to strive to behave equally kindly towards all, young and old, and to be concerned for all, healthy and sick, especially in their bodily needs.

The sisters approached the abbess with reverence, she was the head, the venerable mother, and those outside at least addressed her with "My gracious lady". In 1509, that is briefly after Katharina von Bora had entered Nimbschen, the old abbess, Katharina von Schönberg died, and Katharina's relative, Margarete von Haubitz, was elected abbess and solemnly inaugurated to her office by the abbot Balthasar from Pforta.

Next in importance to the abbess was the prioress, part deputy and helper of the abbess, part representative and spokeswoman of the convent. She was followed by the cellarer, the bursar, the sacristan, the choirmistress, the infirmarian and the nun in charge

of looking after guests.

The sisterhood into which the young Katharina entered had uniform social rank: they were all from the lower nobility and often related to each other or even sisters: the two Haubitzen, the two Zeschau sisters and Margarete and Ave von Schönfeld, to which must be added a Metze (Magda(lena)) Schönfeld, who became infirmarian in 1508 and later prioress. But some were well-to-do with a decent annuity and material assets, others poor, perhaps only receiving a small gift from their relatives on entering and at confirmation. Wealth does not seem to have been without influence on official position, since it is surely not without chance that the most richly endowed, Margarete von Haubitz, was elected abbess. Also their ages were very different: there was the 70-year-old Ursula Osmund who lived to be hundred years old, and the ten-year-old Katharina von Bora and both the young Schönfelds of a similar age. For a long time no new nuns were accepted into the institution: from 1510 to 1517 Katharina and Ave remained the last ones, maybe because the total number (with the conversi) had reached over fifty and the income of the cloister could not support any more. That the women of the cloister were different in character and temperament, is to be expected; but all spiritual individuality, all "individual attributes", were extinguished by the cloister Rule and cloister discipline, as was physical difference by the same costume: the nuns' holy uniform. In addition friendship was forbidden. One got to know nothing of the individual peculiarities of any sister. Only the abbess Margarete von Haubitz is characterized later as an: "honest (distinguished), devout, sensible woman".

Whether the new nun Katharina from Bora found a confidante in one or the other relatives from her mother's side, is not to be known. However, from the start, her family relationship to the abbess was not seen as any reason for friendly treatment – a young nun who entered another cloister at the same time as Katharina said that her aunt, the abbess, treated her particularly forcefully and cruelly. Maybe Katharina found some sort of motherly friend in the other relative, the one on her father's side, the former infirmarian Magdalena von Bora, since afterwards she became very close to Katharina and her new family as "Aunt Lene".

The young girl was first introduced to the order laws and to holy service, she was familiarized with cloister behaviour and to ecclesiastical thinking and bearing and taught some basic knowledge and skills. In Nimbschen there was no special novice instructress; that was only inculcated in general terms as a new order law by the abbot on the introduction of the new abbess in 1509: "Because to make the unlearned more learned is a work of devoutness and mercy, we wish, that those among the nuns who know more to endeavour to teach and inform the others in the knowledge that they will receive a large reward for their effort, and that through this endeavour they will avoid a lot of frivolity to which youth is so inclined." Of course all the older ones should lead the younger by good example.

In the first place, above all else, the "key of the religion" – unconditional silence – had to be observed where prescribed by the order Rule, which, except for unconditional obedience to which the novice had to

inure herself, was the highest and most important factor of cloister life. Account had to be given for every pointless word not only before God, but also in the confession box to the priest. Rather the nuns were supposed, outside the usual prayer times and lessons, to talk with Christ the bridegroom in special prayers or in contemplative silence listen to what God said to them. Thus it was strictly seen to that the children and adolescent nuns did not run around and chat, but behaved demurely and quietly.

It was important, then, with clothes and posture, gesture and speech to show the correct cloister bearing. "At the place of the penitence", one had to show "the greatest simplicity in clothing, not to dress up with worldly garments, nor in the threads of the Pharisees", but in habits extending out to the shoulders. The novices learned to always bow the head. "For shame is the guardian of virginity, the delightful pearl which the holy daughters should preserve. Thus they should await with sighing and lamentation of the lost time the arrival of the heavenly bridegroom who leads his betrothed, - those, in faith and holy vow, always trusting in the Lord - rejoicing to his nuptial chamber."

"In order that they do not get soiled by the vice of property which is the worst and most damnable in the religion and a net of the devil, they should, under penalty of excommunication, not consider all gifts of friends and others on the outside theirs by right, but hand them over to the abbess and humbly request from her what they required."

The superiors ate at a special table and had better food and drink; they got real beer, while the conventuals only got thin beer. But ensuring equal

treatment of all nuns with regard to their food and drink was the duty of the abbess, and mealtimes left, according to usual cloister tradition, nothing to be desired. "Feast times and recreation" were permitted among the sisters by the abbess.

These rules, to which, in Nimbschen, was added, on the inauguration of the new abbess by the abbot-visitor, a type of pastoral letter as further elucidation and complementation of the order Rule, were read every three months chapter by chapter in the convent and explained point by point by the abbess or prioress, so that every nun - but particularly the novices - took within themselves the cloister way of life and living.

Into this strict cloister discipline the young girl was now introduced. Even if practice - as can be seen with every visitation, in particular the rule relating to idle talk - deviated from theory, a strict and serious observance of the order Rule was, nevertheless, at this time in Nimbschen, enforced. Around 1500, here as in other cloisters a "Reformation" of the ruined cloister order was attempted.

Besides this education to convent life there was also some tuition which went with life within the order. The novices had to learn to read - which was not quite so easy at that time with the curly writing and the even more contorted style. The nuns even had to be introduced to a little Latin, since the readings, prayers and especially the songs were mostly written in the language of the church - even if their understanding of the foreign language did not exactly go very deep: church choirs in village communities today still sing Latin hymns and masses. Katharina also learned to write in the cloister, if later she - like all busy women -

did not like writing and did not write much, preferring to let a student or Master put her thoughts to paper for her when addressing high-ranking people or those she did not know well. But not all cloister women were capable of this art. There was not a real school in which the little schoolmaidens could be taught, however, a few nuns were able, after their escape, to become girls' schoolmistresses, like the sisters von Staupitz and Elsa von Kanitz.

Song played a big role in the cloister: all religious practice was, for the greatest part, carried out together, so everyone had to attend choir singing. A singer or singing mistress (chapel mistress) was appointed who had to coach the singing. In the cloister was an old "song book", which was bought in 1417 for two shock groschen; the payment being made by the margravian governor at Grimma. However, foreign songs had come to the cloister and it was against the rules of the holy Bernard Fathers to sing too fast and unevenly (i.e. rhythmically), and the mischief arose of suddenly all voices singing and then few voices; hence, the abbot of Pforta ordered, that the singing had to be rounded and one syllable sung like another, together and in the same voice, not too high and too low.

In 1509, when Katharina von Bora was ten years old, she was no longer a foster child or a schoolchild, but was already considered one of the convent nuns. She was a "postulate", a candidate for admission to the holy order. As the fourteenth year was usually decision year for taking one's cloister vows, she would have begun her novitiate in her thirteenth year and a year later professed her vows. It is apparent that in Katharina's case this was postponed for two years and

even the younger Ave Schönfeld who entered the convent after her was blessed into the order with her older sister Margarete before her.

Thus in her fifteenth year Katharina von Bora was “put forward” to the abbess according to the tradition of the community and accepted by the convent. In a solemn ceremony in the church her hair was cut, she was dressed in clothes of the holy order which had been sprinkled with holy water with the aspergillum and impregnated with smoke from the censer; the white habit was pulled over her, the white veil put around her head; on top of it the bride of Christ had placed a white crown of roses and in her arms laid the Saviour on the cross as bridegroom. Through the offering of the crown she promised and swore eternal purity to Him. The postulate then fell humbly to the feet of the abbess and one by one all of the other nuns and was then raised by each of them and taken with a kiss into the community as sister.

Now Katharina came under the strict training of an older nun and during this trial period had to practise earnestly all the many things, in posture and walk, gesture and speech, that a nun had to observe wherever she went if she did not want to sin against the Rule and suffer penance for it. Thus explains a nun: “During the probationary year we had to learn the ways of the order and determine whether we were fit for the order.”

Finally, in 1515, “on the Monday following the Feast of St Francis”, i.e. on 8th October, was Katharina’s “consecration”. Here she made her profession, her final, eternally binding, vow. For her it will have been like it was for this other nun who was also consecrated

at about this time: "In the evening before my profession the abbess said to me in front of the whole assembly in the chapter: one should consider the severity of the Rule and ask oneself whether one was disposed to uphold it. However, it was not necessary, because I had pledged myself sufficiently during the robing ceremony. And even if I had nonetheless been asked, I might have said nothing; nothing would have helped me anyway." The profession went ahead and Katharina von "Bhor" was the only one blessed into the order on this day. On the occasion she made a donation to the cloister, of the little she could, 30 groschen.

Indeed, not with reluctance, but, as she later said (according to Luther), Katharina was, without "her own volition", bound as a daughter to the holy Bernard fathers. However that might be, she not only submitted to the convent Rule, but also "prayed fervently, diligently and often".

This corresponds to her general resolute nature as it showed later in maturity. She was taught, that through "good works", in particular through cloister work, one gains heavenly goods and pecuniary wealth and a high, holy seat on the Other Side; so she gathered together all her strength and all her verve in order to acquire such wealth and to earn a good place in heaven through her ecclesiastical exertions. What she later took on as a woman, this she strove for with all the power and strength of her will, and so she would have carried on in the cloister as a nun. Furthermore the younger members of cloisters, particularly female, try to be the keenest in the execution of their duties, even if they have nothing fanatical about them.

And what were the high works and holy duties the

young nun had to do?

Ecclesiastical exercises filled almost the whole of life in the cloister, her whole day was spent praying, singing, reading, listening to edifying things, "since" as is stipulated in one cloister rule, "all cloister and ecclesiastical people are conceived and made such that they serve our Lord and God and fulfil the prayers of the dead, living and sick". Besides the singing of masses and private prayers there were the seven prayer times, the canonical hours or offices: Matins, Terz, Sext, Non in the morning; Vespers and Compline in the evening with psalms, martyrology, order Rule. Also night-time services were celebrated: early morning and eves. And even during mealtimes, where silence was expected, there were readings from a devotional book. On occasions Katharina had to give these readings and then eat later.

What impression these regulations must have made on a naturally feeling and religious soul, we hear from a later report: "When Dr Martinus read the nuns' statutes which were quite strong and cold, he sighed a lot and said: 'These one had to hold up and meanwhile missed God's word! See what a prison and torment of the conscience the papacy has become, as Hugo wrote, because one is so held to the canonical hours and the precepts of man, that whoever missed out just one syllable and did not fully pray for propitiation would have to account for it in the Last Judgement.'"

Whether Katharina ever took on the robes of an office in the convention, we do not know; in any case, it could only have been a low-ranking one, possibly that of an infirmarian. Probably, however, she was still too young, with so many before her, that they should have

turned to her.

There was no "real" work in the cloister; the nuns were not allowed out of the cloister and the lay sisters and cloister maids did all the kitchen and housework. Admittedly, quite as out of work as some noble monks' orders from which the national joke derives:

Dress and undress is all
our German gentlemen do at all

- but the life of a nun was not an idle one. They engaged in female handicrafts like spinning of the yield of the big flock of sheep for woollen clothing, but especially in embroidery - altar cloths, mass garments, carpets, banners etc., in Nimbschen, probably also in Pforta, for the church of the monks there and maybe also for the bishop of Meissen under whom the cloister stood. Thus sister Katharina also produced some artistic embroidery, even if the various examples of handwork by Luther's Kate which are shown here and there today are probably not genuine.

A further employment was the inspection and maintenance of the countless relics which were stored in the Nimbschen church, and which required maintaining and decorating. To the twelve altars belonged probably 400 holy relics consisting of crosses, monstrances, capsules and tablets; of Christ's table, cross and cradle, dress and blood and sudarium, of the stone and ground on which Jesus cried in Jerusalem, prayed in the sweat of death, sat castigated, was crucified, went heavenward; of the hair, vest, skirt and grave of the Holy Virgin; of all kinds of bone of the apostles, also the blood of St Paul, of the head and attire of St John the Baptist; of many saints, known and unknown: of the 11000 virgins, the holy Elisabeth von

Thuringia, the holy Genoveva, the holy Nonnosus, the holy Libine – teeth, hands, arms, bones, veils, tapestries, also relics from the post to which Saint Christopher was tied to be executed, from the cross of the robbers among other things.

But here also, the senior sisters, Magdalena von Bora among them, were responsible for the holy relics.

Certain antiphons were sung to all these relics, which gave a certain variation to the everyday service to God.

The many feast days, pilgrimages and processions also provided a change in the everlasting monotony in the cloister and around the church.

A big event was the visitation of the cloister by the abbot of Pforta – admittedly, also a costly one: the abbot with his attendants had to be fetched and returned and be fed along the way and in the cloister, and also, conventionally, presented with tokens of gratitude. During the visitation there was an investigation into all mismanagement, questioning of all the individual sisters and, at the end, an often sharp response.

Pilgrims also came to the cloister on high feast days and their octaves, since it had acquired, from different high church dignitaries, indulgences, even if only forty-day ones, for visitors and benefactors of the cloister, for listening to sermons and genuflection during the Ave Maria.

But the main indulgence was on a special day in the year, probably that of the consecration of the church (23rd August). Then, under the name of an “indulgence”, there was a mass and a fair. On this day people came from far and wide. Whenever this yearly

“indulgence” took place in Nimbschen, three men from every cloister village were required to come, under compulsion, “to guard night and day to prevent outbreaks of violence”. Of all this life and activity, admittedly, the cloister women saw practically nothing even if they could hear the noise from outside in their “enclosure”.

To be sure, the abbess would take one or the other sister with her when she travelled outside the cloister; but, still, a rare event for the young nuns. They would go to the nearby Grimma or to the more distant Torgau, the Electoral residence on the Elbe where the great castle Hartenfels had just been built. There the cloister had many possessions in terms of fields and meadows and had to fetch the grain with its own horse and cart, while the town was required to deliver itself various brews of beer. However, with these expeditions, much of what was sold and bought in Torgau was taken and brought back. Most purchases were made from the councillor and lay judge, Leonhard Koppe: tons of herrings, large baskets of stockfish, pike, barrels of beer, axes. Such purchases took place on Saint Martin’s Day, when “My gracious Lady”, the abbess, with a dignified nun collected the rents, gave out some “gratuities” at the lodgings and made purchases at Koppe’s paying the bill in person.

These were the special events in the continuous year in year out monotony. In the whole time that Katharina von Bora was at the cloister she experienced nothing especially extraordinary. One or two of the nuns departed from the nunnery through death. In the year 1516, when Katharina von Bora and Ave von Schönfeld had long been the youngest in the cloister, nine foster

children arrived at once: three Schellenbergers, two Hawbitzes (relations on Katharina's mother's side), a Lauschkin, and a Keritzin (Kieritsch?), a Possin and a Buttichin. The next year three novices joined the cloister population and a year later again some foster children left and others arrived. 1522 saw a change of the cloister provost, since the old one, Johann Kretschmar, died. The nuns kept close to the provost, while the father confessors were hated; these, "the two men at the gate" behaved in a demanding and arrogant manner, interfered - probably out of boredom - in things which did not concern them. They tried to talk themselves into the administration, i.e. the business of the provost, provoke the nuns against each other, to such an extent that complaints arose against them and the convent even had to appeal to secular powers for help against them and their protectors, the abbots of Pforta. During these years a very welcome opportunity presented itself, to outdo the monks. On Saint Martin's Day, in 1513, the director of the hospital of the Order of the Holy Spirit from far off Pforzheim in Swabia, Matthias Heuthlin, arrived and offered the nuns a privilege. Because his establishment did not acquire enough income, he had succeeded in obtaining the favour from Pope Julius II whereby all benefactors of the hospital were free to choose their father confessor. So the abbess and the whole esteemed cloister assembly gave a contribution and received for it a piece of paper printed with the name "Nimitsch" on it and filled out and signed by the master of the hospital of Pforzheim of the Order of the Holy Spirit, according to which the cloister of Nimbschen, for its charitable gift to the brotherhood of the Order of the Holy Ghost was

received and became party to all the latter's good work and indulgences, and, in particular, was allowed both in their life and at death or as often as was seen to be necessary to be granted absolution by any father confessor, secular or monachal, for sins, transgressions and offences – even those reserved for the Apostolic Chair. The cloister continued to make itself party to these privileges by further donations in the following years (1516, 1519, 1520). Thus one of the countless back-doors was opened to the Nimbschen nuns, through which those subjugated souls in the Catholic church could escape the ecclesiastical compulsion and attain blessedness by other means.

In the cloister, Katharina also sensed the coming of the Peasant's War. The cloister villages had twelve different labour services to perform. The farmers had already wrested themselves from four of these, but were still not satisfied, so the new provost had to look around for help and advice.

There were little and petty things that formed impressions and experiences, reaching into the lives of the Nimbschen nuns and Katharina von Bora, rippling the smooth outer surface of their contemplative existence. There were the monotonous tasks with which it was difficult to overcome the slowness of time, the long days, weeks and years. Such narrow interests and views controlled the mental horizon of the youthful spirit. As convent life held back the bodily strength of a young human being, so it also weakened any ambitious will. The cloister walls limited not only the external visual field, they also made the spiritual eye short-sighted. Even if the yawning boredom did not come to the consciousness of some, who knew

nothing else, the mind, nevertheless, thirsted for things which made an impression, so that the saying which ascribes the longing of the cloister inhabitants for experience becomes comprehensible: "Curious as a nun". And the constant duty to "kill off the life within oneself", would surely, in a healthy mind, give rise to the question of what life is. If a man living in a cloister could throw himself into learning with great thirst, the peculiar source of life for a woman, her fundamental nature, here remained unsatisfied.

Indeed most of these aristocratic ladies might seem to have had a better, more comfortable, more luxurious existence in the cloister than at home in the limited household of their parents or husbands; and the respect which a consecrate young woman had in the eyes of the people and especially of the church, and not least in her own conscience, was much greater than that of a poor noblewoman outside in the world. But the whole compulsive nature of all these artificial and unnatural circumstances must have weighed, even if without full awareness, on a truthful and healthy mind.

Only one thing could raise a nun above all doubts, all the renunciation, all the torment and all the boredom of convent life: the knowledge that she was working to please God, earning a special reward from God, ensuring earthly holiness and eternal blessedness. But what when this basic condition of all nunneries, this mainstay of convent life was shaken and was undermined, even found to be rotten and decayed? Then the whole structure must collapse, then one, upright and strong-willed, must take on the consequences and reject and leave behind a life that had appeared to be a holy and blessed occupation and

had hitherto fulfilled the whole being.

And this is the case that befell Katharina. But, truly, her sober, intelligent sense will already have borne her, in an entirely closed world, from complaining unhappily even in deepest sadness and from yearning for the outside.

The possibility to escape the cloister walls and the sense of duty to do it only had to present itself; then her full strength was awoken and, with all the power of her mind and will, she put into being what was right and attainable.

Chapter 3

The Escape from the Cloister

It was scarcely a year after Sister Katharina had taken her nun's vows, when, in Wittenberg, the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, posted his 95 theses against the sale of indulgences. A year later he placed himself answerable before the envoy of the Pope in Augsburg. Another year later was the great battle of words with Eck in Leipzig. At the end of the next year Luther burned the bull of excommunication and in the spring of 1521 he stood before emperor and empire in Worms.

These events, thrilling to the church and the whole Christian world, also infiltrated into the cloister and

excited minds there too; this all the more because the originator of all these great battles was himself a cloister brother, an Augustinian, related to the order of the old Benedictines (Cistercians and St Bernards), who was therefore seen as a fighter in the vanguard of this movement against the opposing groupings of the inquisitorial Dominicans and already therefore looked upon with a certain sympathy.

But even deeper into the life and the world of thought of the cloister inhabitants penetrated the writings which the Wittenberger monk and doctor wrote during these great years. Already the "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of the Indulgences" in the form of the 95 theses was of especial concern to the nuns at Nimbschen, since a very large part of their spiritual estate rested on "the power and efficacy of the indulgences": the service on every feast day, the bending of the knee during the Ave Maria provided forty days' indulgence each time. Further writings would affect their person and their special career even more.

In 1518 appeared Luther's exposition of The Lord's Prayer for the less educated. Much in it must have attracted the attention of a cloister inhabitant. The Lord's Prayer, it says, is the noblest and best prayer – but, with the rosary the Ave Maria is said five times more often! Further: "The fewer the words, the better the prayer; the more the words, the less the prayer. There one counts away with the rosary beads and some ecclesiastical persons mouth away their canonical hours and say without shame: 'Oh now I am happy, I have paid our Lord', meaning, they have done enough for God. Now we put our confidence in a lot of noise,

shouting and song which Christ forbade, for he said: 'nobody is heard by just using a lot of words'. He does not speak: you should pray without stopping, turning pages, counting round rosaries, or using too many words. The substance of a prayer is nothing but the lifting of the mind or heart to God, otherwise it is not a prayer. The haughty saints and devil's martyrs dishonour the name of God; they are not like other people, but like the hypocrites in the Gospel. We do not pray: Let us come to Your realm, as if we should run to it; but: Your realm come to us; since God's mercy and his realm must come to us, just as Christ came to us on Earth from heaven and not we to him climbing from Earth into heaven. Our everyday bread is the word of God because the soul is fed and strengthened and becomes great and strong by it. It is a poor state of our time that the most important thing in a religious service remains in the background."

Then in 1520 came the "Sermon on Good Works". Good works related to all the activities in the cloister: praying, fasting, vigils etc. What, however, did Luther call genuine good works? "The first, highest and noblest work is faith in Christ. All works must be carried out within it and become good thereby. Prayers, fasting, religious institutions without this are nothing. If you ask some whether when they carry out handwork and perform all sorts of other labours concerned with the nourishment of the body or to the benefit of all they look upon it as good work, they say 'no!' and have such a narrow perception of good work, that they only include going to church, praying, feasting and the giving of alms. In so doing they restrict and diminish services belonging to God. A Christian

measures up to all things that have to be done, and does it all happily and freely; not to collect high rewards and works, but because he wants to do it, thus pleasing God. Parents can find blessedness through their own children; bringing them to God's service, they will surely have both hands full of good works. O what a blessed marriage and house that would be! For sure, it would be a just church, a chosen cloister, indeed, a paradise!"

And those in the cloister could find similar thoughts put forth in the doctor's marvellous little book "On the Freedom of a Christian" of the same year, 1520. There it says: "A person lives not for himself alone, but also for all people on earth; or rather only for others and not for himself. Thus, I am painfully concerned that nowadays few or no holy institutions or cloisters at all are Christian. By which I mean that I fear that in fasting and praying we seek only that which pertains to us, so that our sins are expiated and our blessedness is found."

Several scripts were however especially written for the monks and nuns regarding convent life; the little book on cloister vows from exile (i.e. Wartburg) of 1521, for example. In it Luther takes on the defeated and fearful conscience and explains according to God's word, that the vows which have come about without and against the order of God and are impossible in themselves, cannot hold the heart of a baptized person entwined and captive. Faith and the baptismal vows are above all else and without them one pledges nothing; the soul becomes sworn and engaged to Christ by baptism. Those betrothed like the inhabitants of the cloisters are freed by the Son of God who accepts them

joyfully in his mercy those who turn to him and reaffirm their first vows. "This book broke many fetters and released many imprisoned hearts", says a contemporary.

Also from Wartburg there appeared at last a German book of sermons ("Postilla") by Luther and at Michaelmas of the same year (1522) another Wartburg work - a translation of the New Testament into German. Now everyone and, above all, the holy inhabitants of the cloisters who wanted to follow the Protestant council and lead a Protestant life could find out from the source what true Christianity was as taught by Christ and the apostles and how Luther had interpreted it.

Consequently the city of Grimma, in the immediate neighbourhood of which the cloister of Nimbschen was situated, turned to Gospel, and the monks in several surrounding cloisters left their churches.

These writings and the news also arrived in the cloister of Nimbschen, since nuns' cloisters were also not so completely shut off from the world.

How and by whom did it arrive to the cloister women?

Two ways and two people are to be seen in this respect. In Grimma there was a cloister of Luther's congregation, the Augustinian Eremites. Luther had, by 1516, already held visitations there and on his return from the Leipzig Disputation (1519) he stayed there several days and probably also preached; the majority of the inhabitants of Grimma had already stood on his side for some time. The prior of the cloister, Wolfgang von Zeschau, was a friend of Luther. In 1522 he left the cloister together with half of the members of the order

and became hospital master at the Saint Georgen-Spital.

Now, Zeschau had two relatives (aunts) in the Nimbschen cloister, two consanguine sisters: Margarete and Veronika von Zeschau. For sure this Protestant-minded former monk could communicate without suspicion, at least before his escape, with his aunts and slip them Luther's writings. The keen Protestant town priest of Grimma, Gareysen, who at Easter 1523 gave Holy Communion in both forms, was also able to do so.

In addition to the small nearby town of Grimma, the more distant Torgau could also be the place from which Reformation thoughts and writings could have entered the cloister of Nimbschen. In Torgau the Reformation had been established very early and very profoundly, especially since the former cloister comrade of Luther, the passionate Master Gabriel Zwilling was active there. He, though a one-eyed, small, little man with a weak voice, had moved the townspeople through his rousing, even stormy sermons - in Wittenberg they had even deeply impassioned Melanchthon - to a rather radical end to the deplorable state of affairs led by Rome and to the enthusiastic uptaking of the Gospel. Indeed at this time - whether before or after 1523 is uncertain - a Torgau son of the middle class, soap-boiler by trade, abducted two nuns from the cloister of Riesa on the Elbe and hid them in a hollow tree. He then fetched horses, escorted them home and married one of them. And in 1523 a Torgau woman escaped from the cloister of Sitzerode.

An especially determined and enterprising follower was the former tax collector, the "wise and prudent

councillor", Leonhard Koppe, from whose shop the cloister was used to buy its goods, and who probably made deliveries himself with his cart to Nimbschen. Possibly this layman, known for his Protestant disposition, was an even more likely middleman for the Protestant writings than the suspected trespassed priests of Grimma, from whom "the two men at the gate" will have probably protected their ecclesiastical flock as if they were dangerous wolves. Koppe could easily smuggle Lutheran writings in with his goods and, also, in the opposite direction, manage to get a letter out of the cloister. Added to that Koppe was also cunning and audacious enough.

What impression Luther and his writings made on the nuns can be seen from a report which a nun, a Florentina von Eisleben, in the same circumstances at the same time allowed to be printed through Luther. "When the time of divine consolation then appeared, in which the Gospel, so long hidden, came into the light of the whole Christian community, the writings of the rightful shepherds came also to me, a languished hungry sheep long wanting of pasture. In them I discovered that my putatively ecclesiastical life was just a way straight to hell."

In Nimbschen it was the same for a large proportion of the nuns. So it happened that a number of them arranged to meet to plan an escape from the cloister.

This was a grave decision which took a lot to arrive at. A fled nun was up to now considered a matter of shame for the family. Allowed exit was only to be obtained by papal dispensation at great cost and effort and, really, only possible for members of great families. Admittedly, monks had already succeeded in leaving

cloister society in this new, deeply-excited time and had become worldly; nobody dared touch them, at least in Electorate Saxony, they even held offices and positions in city and state. However, the fleeing of nuns was almost unheard of, or at least, still very unusual. But even if the prejudice of the world and members of their own number were to be overcome, it was, nevertheless to be asked: how could the nuns make a start outside in the world; what could they do and become in order to keep themselves and survive.

If, therefore, most, but not all, nuns in Nimbschen rejected the convent life, only the most courageous ones resolved to take the step they judged right for and required of themselves – that is only those who were in a position by means of their education to make a life for themselves independently, like the nuns Staupitz and Kanitz, or who were still young enough to fit themselves into a new life, like both Schönfeld and Katharina von Bora. Nine nuns in Nimbschen were ready for the escape: Magdalena von Staupitz, Elisabeth von Kanitz, Veronika and Margarete von Zeschau, Loneta von Gohlis, Eva Große, Ave and Margarete von Schönfeld and the second-youngest of them, Katharina von Bora.

These cloister “children” (nuns) now did the most natural and most sensible thing: they asked and entreated their parents and friends (i.e. relatives) in the humblest of terms for help to get out. They made it clear that to them such a spiritual life was no longer tolerable in the sense of living for God, and undertook to suffer and do whatever devout (well-behaved) children should suffer and do.

But, really, to the parents and relatives, the requests

of their daughters and cousins was an embarrassment. Since these daughters had been placed in the cloister for the sake of sustenance, how could the impoverished families suddenly now keep them? The distribution of their inheritance was already thought out or it had already been distributed; who might give it back to these secluded, socially dead members of the family? Further such cloistered women were estranged from the world and of little use to everyday life. Even if it did not shock religious or ecclesiastical thinking, there was, nevertheless, another fear: the tenancies of most relatives of the cloister women lay in the Land of Duke George the Bearded who was a vehement enemy of the Reformation and especially of the Wittenberg doctor. There could be serious penalties for abducting the ordained cloister women or their return ordered by court officials. In short the request of the nuns to flee the cloister was not accepted.

Thus the poorest of all stood in desperation, in not inconsiderable danger that their plan would be discovered and prevented, that others involved would be severely dealt with as happened, for example, in the case of the much noted Florentina, when her plan to leave the cloister came to light. Her own aunt, the abbess, mercilessly placed her in strict imprisonment in great cold for four weeks, then locked her in her cell under banishment and penance. She had to completely prostrate herself going to church, letting the other nuns step right over her, and sit on the floor wearing a straw crown in front of the prioress when taking food. Then on a renewed attempt to turn to her relatives she was severely flogged and "received the discipline of seven Wednesdays and seven Fridays from ten people in one

go", placed in chains and locked in her cell for good – until the inattentiveness of her jailer allowed her to escape.

Such or similar did not happen to the Lutheran-minded in the cloister of Nimbschen; perhaps the larger number there provided protection from the rule of such violence. However, it was probably also the disposition of the judicious abbess that prevented such a punishment: Margarete von Haubitz later went over with the remainder of the convent to the Reformation, staying with the older women in the cloister, furnishing life there according to Protestant principles. But, no way could she or did she want, as abbess in 1523, to have any part in assisting those seeking to escape.

Now the nuns could find no support among their own people, so they had cause to search elsewhere for help and advice, such as they could get it. They felt forced and obliged to save their souls and consciences. Where else should they look for this help though than to he who had provided them with these thoughts through his Protestant writings and spiritually bold deeds? So probably, like others after them, individuals and whole groups, they wrote "to the highly learned Dr Martinus Luther of Wittenberg, a miserable script, a letter of plaint, bewailing their situation, letting him know their feelings and seeking from him consolation, advice and help".

And the bearer of this letter could have been nobody other than Leonhard Koppe of Torgau. Luther recognized that "they both could provide help and advice, and thus through the duty of Christian love it fell to them to save their souls and consciences".

"For it is a matter of great urgency", he further

explained, with reference to the Nimbschen nuns, "when one unfortunately allows children to go into the cloisters where, in reality, there is no everyday practice of the divine word and the Gospel is seldom or no longer to be heard correctly. It is alone enough that souls are robbed and torn out as is only possible, though thousands of oaths and vows are made. Because, however, God does not like any service other than that which comes willingly from the heart, it follows no vows are valid above true love and desire; otherwise dreadful dangers, temptations and sins will invade cloister life."

"But what if weak souls should become vexed by such cloister abductions?" one might argue.

Luther explained: "Vexation here, vexation there! Need breaks iron and does not know vexation. I shall spare the weak consciences, so long as it can be done without endangering my own soul; where it cannot, I will advise my soul, the whole or half of the world can vex. Here danger to the soul lies in all parts. That is why nobody should desire of us that we do not vex him, rather we should desire that they approve of our ideas and not vex themselves. That is what love requires!"

So thought Luther, and Leonhard Koppe was of the same opinion. Thus Luther made the request to him of taking over the freeing. And Koppe was, despite his sixty years, a determined man, ready for such a bold undertaking, and agreed; he did not worry that it might harm his business, still less whether it would bring him into disfavour with the court or even cost him his life – abducting nuns carried the death penalty and even Elector Frederick, the careful protector of

Luther, not only disapproved of all public acts of force, but was also inclined to punish them. But despite all these considerations Leonhard Koppe decided to carry it through, and was encouraged by the Torgau priest Doctor Zwilling, since he had also been made party to the thing.

Luther and Koppe agreed the plan between them thus. Torgau, which was situated in the middle between Nimbschen and Wittenberg, would be the base for the operation. Easter time was chosen as the time to carry it out.

However, Koppe needed helpers for the execution of his task. He chose this brother's son, a daring young man, and a townsman Wolfgang Tommitsch (or Dommitsch), whose stepdaughter, a Miss von Seidewitz, had shortly before escaped from the cloister and soon afterwards married a former Augustinian provost, Master Nikolaus Demuth, who then became the official lay judge in Torgau. Rendezvous were arranged with the nine nuns and they made themselves ready to escape.

During Holy Week the Torgau two started out from their town on one or more wagons with canvas covers, in which they had hidden worldly women's clothes. If the two helpers did not lead their own wagons, they were present on horseback as escort cover. They came via Grimma towards Nimbschen during the evening of Holy Saturday, 4th April.

Here the nuns prepared in the usual way for the Easter Vigil which was celebrated during Easter night. This exceptional time, when the usual rules and regular tasks of the nuns were put aside, must have seemed favourable to the escape plan. While both companions

stayed in the nearby wood, Koppe drove up to the cloister. His subterfuge, as is reported, was to take empty herring barrels back home to Torgau. While looking for and loading these he seems to have otherwise occupied the Thalheim gatekeeper and diverted the attention of the remaining inhabitants of the outer cloister court, particularly the two father confessors. Thus the nine consecrated nuns escaped from the cloister; the nun doorkeeper was either deceived or involved in the plan (it could well be that one of the nine was the gate-watcher at the time). One old reporter tells us, it would have been necessary to break through a daub wall; another, the nuns would have assembled in the garden and then climbed over the wall. But they could also have escaped by a door at the rear since a watch on this was lacking. Whichever, the nine escapees, were gathered up by both Koppe's companions while Koppe himself will quite probably have gone off quite innocently with his cartload of herring barrels and then collected the nuns clear of the cloister. The empty barrels - placed in the front - could serve quite well to hide the living contents of the cart from prying eyes.

By this or a similar way, anyway, "with exceptional planning and shrewdness", but also with "extreme daring" - not by force - the nine nuns were released by Koppe from Nimbschen. Luther saw it almost as a miracle.

By cover of the night and the fog, the rescuers and the rescued then drove away towards the Easter morning: it was its own Easter Vigil in the breeze of freedom blowing through the fresh spring world of God. Their journey passed through the Electoral

regions but met with no hostility from Luther's enemy Duke George. A pursuit from Nimbschen was not really to be feared; there were there no men there who would possibly have ventured a fight with the abductors. Also the wise Koppe surely covered his tracks and would have misled pursuers. The worldly clothes which the nuns had meanwhile put on in place of their ecclesiastical ones probably made the journey unobtrusive and thus the wagon train travelled unhindered through Torgau on Easter day and was received joyfully by Master Zwilling. The night was spent at Torgau and the worldly attire of the nuns hurriedly completed. Next day they went on to Wittenberg because it did not seem advisable to leave the escapees so close to the cloister and also so close to the Electoral court.

On Easter Tuesday the wagon train arrived in Wittenberg: without any display, in their borrowed and hurriedly bundled together clothes, with their shaved heads, "just some poor little people", but in their great poverty and fear quite patient and happy.

Luther received them with wistful joy. However, he proclaimed to the daring rescuers: "You have done a new work, which the Land and the people will sing and talk about, and which many will call a great mischief: but those who hold with God, will praise it for being of great faith. You have led the poor souls out of the prison of human tyranny just at the right time, at Easter, when Christ also took captive his own captives."[†] When then the liberators were about to drive home, he commended them to God and sent them off with salutations for Koppe's "answer to the

† Ephesians 4:8; 1 Peter 3:19

call" and "all friends in Christ".

Three days later Luther wrote a justification for his actions, for those of the "holy robber" Koppe and those that carried it out with him, as well as for the freed nuns as instruction for all those who wanted to follow their example in an open letter to "the wise and prudent Leonhard Koppe, citizen of Torgau, my special friend". "In that I speak for everyone, for myself, who advised and desired it, and for you and yours who accomplished it, and for the young women who needed to be set free, I would like hereby briefly before God and all the world to give answer and account". In this "Reason and answer to the question whether virgins are allowed by God to leave the convent" he openly reports the deeds and their reasons and gives the names of the liberators and liberated. He says to them:

"Be certain, that it was prescribed by God and that it is not your own work nor your council, and don't worry about the shouting of those who besmirch it as work of the worst kind. 'Shame! Shame!' they will say, 'the idiot Leonhard Koppe has let himself get caught up by the damned heretic monk, gone up to the nunnery and helped nine nuns get out, and then helped them to renounce and relinquish their vows and cloister life.' Do you think that this should all be kept secret and covered up? I'll be sold down river by the whole Nimbschen cloister now they know I'm the thief! That I proclaim it, however, and do not keep it secret, is for good honest reasons. It is no wish of mine that it should remain secret, because what we did, we did according to God and we will not shy from the light. If God wanted, I could by this or other means save all

imprisoned consciences and empty all the cloisters. I do not want to shy from admitting doing it together with all those who have helped, in the confidence that Christ, who now unveils his Gospel and destroys the realm of the Antichrist, would act as protector, even if it costs lives. I also proclaim it to uphold the honour of the poor children and their relations, so that nobody may say, they have been carried off dishonestly by foul youths and their honour put in danger. Thirdly I proclaim it, to advise the men of the nobility and all devout honest people who have children in cloisters like this to do something themselves and remove them”.

This summons and the successful escape of nine nuns encouraged, as Luther hoped, still more nuns and their parents to act similarly. In the same Easter week a further three nuns escaped from Nimbschen and joined their relatives, and at Whitsun another three were fetched out of the cloister by family members.

Finally, the abbot of Pforta, who had not expected to meet with Luther’s open letter, was forced to face the fact – Luther was a fighter to be feared. On the 9th June he wrote a complaint to the Elector about these happenings which would lead to the “rotting and destruction of the cloister”, and worried that the nuns had been helped and encouraged by subjects of His Electoral Grace. The Elector Frederick gave in his well-known diplomatic way, the elusive answer: “Since we do not know how this thing came about nor how the nuns were provoked to such action and we have until now never had to take on this matter nor one like it, we should leave justice to itself.”

But the cloister escape from Nimbschen was not the

end of it. By 1526 some twenty nuns – including Magdalena von Bora – had left, so there were now only 19 nuns left in the cloister; and these together with their abbess became Protestant, although they remained in the cloister until the convent was dissolved in 1545.

Three weeks after the escape of the nine Nimbschen nuns, on 28th April, six nuns ventured escape from Sornzig, despite this cloister lying in the Land of the enemy of the Reformation, Duke George, and despite the awful fate that had befallen someone aiding the escape of a nun at this time – he was beheaded in Dresden. Another eight fled from Peutwitz.

In the same year as Katharina's escape another sixteen nuns left Widderstetten in one go. Two years later more "wretched children" turned to Luther from the royal cloister of Freiberg in the region of his fierce enemy, Duke George. And again Luther turned to the proven nun's liberator Leonhard Koppe, whom he addressed jokingly as "Worthy Father Prior". Luther knew that this was almost too great and high an expectation – this time it could really cost him his life – and thought Koppe might maybe know someone else who could help. But the daring man could not be asked in vain to carry out such a neck-risking enterprise and – to George's greatest frustration – succeeded, just like the abduction from Nimbschen.

Chapter 4

Accustomization to Secular Life

After the freeing of Katharina and her cosisters had succeeded so well, the question was what was going to become of them?

It was a worry that Luther could not easily solve. Again he turned to the families of those who had escaped to wake their consciences and rouse their sense of duty sufficiently to take care of their compassionate daughters, sisters and cousins; this from the open letter to Koppe and another to Spalatin, wherein he writes: "Oh, the tyrants and cruel parents of Germany!"

At the same time, however, he had foreseen that the relatives, at least in part, would refuse to provide for

the nuns. Hence, he housed as many of them as he could accommodate. But he could and did not want to receive monetary support or loans from his "Capernaïtes" (the Wittenbergers)[†]; on the other hand he did receive from several sides promises of lodgings for the escapees. He also wanted, if he could, to marry some off. Amsdorf wrote jokingly to Spalatin: "They are nice and fine, and all of nobility, and no fifty-year-olds among them. The oldest among them, the sister of my master and uncle, Dr Staupitz, I have assigned to you, my dear brother, to be your conjugal spouse, so that you can boast of such a brother-in-law. If, however, you would like a younger one, you shall have the choice among the most beautiful."

Luther and Amsdorf likewise asked the court chaplain and private secretary to the Elector Frederick the Wise "to do a good work and plead at court for these respectable young ladies, and to beg some money from the rich courtiers and maybe the Elector, even to give something himself, so that the escapees could be fed now and for the next eight to fourteen days, also if they could be provided with clothing, since they had neither shoes nor clothes." At the time, things were going so badly for Luther that he himself hardly had anything to eat and owed his ecclesiastical brother, Prior Brisger, a sack of malt, so little was to be seen of the cloister income on which Luther and the last remaining monk were supposed to receive. He jokes respectfully about his mendicant order: "The begging bowl has a big hole in it." To be sure, the court of the cautious Elector did not really want, or at least not

† His congregation or followers in Wittenberg – a reference to feelings towards Luther's interpretation of the Eucharist.

openly, to provide support, so Luther had to remind his friend again: "Don't forget my collection and give the prince a reminder from me to contribute something. Oh, I'll keep it a good secret and tell nobody, that he's given something for the apostate young women - who were consecrated against their will and are now saved."

Luther's appeal to the relatives did not work. He complained: "They are poor and distressed and bereft of friendship." Luther, despite his great poverty, thus had to support the nuns at great expense to himself. But also he discovered "what they had to endure from their brothers and relatives outside" - if one possibly got home. Mostly they did not want to know them, because in Duke George's Land they must have been missing the word of God.

Magdalena Staupitz was eventually made "schoolmistress" to the girls in Grimma and was given a small house by the monastery. Elsa von Kanitz found accommodation with a relative; in 1927 Luther wanted to bring her to Wittenberg as girls' schoolmistress. He married Ave von Schönfeld to the medic Dr Basilius Axt.

Katharina's relatives could evidently not take care of their own. The parents were dead, brother Hans had to look for a position in distant Prussia, then administrative posts in Saxony. The eldest brother had married poorly and probably had no room for the sister; of the youngest, Clemens, nothing was to be expected.

Thus Miss Katharina von Bora was accommodated, after being handed over, in the house of a Wittenberger citizen who lived on the Bürgermeistergasse. He was

the honourable learned Philipp Reichenbach, who in 1525 became municipal clerk in Wittenberg, in 1529 licentiate of law, in 1530 mayor and, finally, Electoral Advisor.

In his Wittenberger house the former nun was seen as more than a kind of foster daughter and her host took on the rôle of a father figure to her. It must have been a respectable position she acquired there. She was known and referred to by name in the circle of university comrades and the Danish king, Christian II, who arrived in Wittenberg as a fugitive from his own country in October 1523 and lived with the painter Lucas Cranach, presented Katharina with a gold ring. The young scholars in Wittenberg spoke of her with respect; in their private letters they called her, probably because of her strict personal restraint, "Catherine of Sienna".

With the municipal clerk, or rather with his wife, Katharina von Bora was able to acclimatize to the new, or rather back to the old, secular, middle-class lifestyle.

It wasn't at all easy. For at least the past fourteen years, almost her whole conscious life, Katharina had lived in the cloister. All those years she had worn ecclesiastical dress, grown accustomed to the gestures and posture expected of nuns, to ecclesiastical manners and talk; she had forgotten the ways with worldly people or rather never really learned them, and similarly the ways of house and kitchen work; certainly, one understands why the practical Luther exclaimed at the sight of nine world-inexperienced nuns: "Poor little people!" As with worldly clothes, Katharina now had to get used to worldly custom and speech; as her pale face got brown in the air and the

sun, as her tender hands hardened gripping pots and brooms, so her spiritual being had to strengthen itself in the rougher but healthier demands and impositions of the world. But as her short, cut-off hair grew long to blond plaits, so worries and thoughts about small worldly duties and great worldly interests also grew.

And the young lady did not live with the Master's wife for nothing. Here she avidly gained experience she would need for her later large household with its many duties. And according to the testimony of the University of Wittenberger she "maintained herself quietly and well" while living in Reichenbach's house.

But also other thoughts and feelings awoke in her and were put to her from without. And she also had experiences and painful disappointments which made her worldly-wise and ever more careful.

Katharina was now 24 years old, a ripe, or according to the view of the time which saw a 15 to 18 year old to be of the right marriageable age, an overripe young woman. The fact that she thought of marriage is understandable; she had neither position nor property. The stay with her substitute parents could only be considered a temporary measure and not a permanently satisfactory solution. Luther, who had taken on the special care of this escaped cloister woman together with others, had in any case already had from the beginning the distinct intention to marry off those who could find no roof or maintenance with their own families. His whole perspective - one inherited from the rustic view of his father - was that family life was the one natural to mankind and that woman was made by God for marriage.

In May or June 1523, Hieronymus Baumgärtner, a

patrician's son from Nuremberg, "a young fellow taken to learning and godliness", arrived in the university town. He had earlier (1518-21) studied in Wittenberg and lived at the table of Melanchthon and now wanted to visit his old Wittenberg teachers and friends, Luther and especially Melanchthon, with whom he later built up a lively correspondence. This young man appeared to Luther to be the right man to be the husband of his ward: he was 25 years old, Kate 24, both from distinguished houses, she without property; evermore the well-to-do Nuremberger seemed in Luther's eyes to be suited to her. And he will probably have made sure that Baumgärtner got to see her and found her pleasant. Also Kate found she had a crush for the young man; he was probably the first one to have approached the former nun. Perhaps they found each other first and Luther then pursued it keen to bring the two together. At any rate, the mutual attraction became known among the circle of friends, and one felt marriage was for sure.

But Baumgärtner returned home to Nuremberg and without further word to be heard from him, even though he had promised to come back after a few weeks, to, as one believed, take Katharina home with him. The friends, especially Blickard Sydringer, teasingly reminded the patrician's son in their letters often enough of the abandoned lover. She had fallen ill as a result of his leaving and pined away longing for him. At the beginning of the next year, the Nuremberger, Ulrich Pinder conveyed "Katharina von Sienna's i.e. von Bora's" kind regards from Wittenberg to Baumgärtner. Finally, Luther wrote once again to Baumgärtner on 12th October 1524: "If you want to

hold on to your Kate von Bora, you'd better hurry up, before she is given to another who is ready to take her. She has still not overcome her love for you. And I would be very glad indeed if you two were to tie the knot."

But to Baumgärtner's parents the runaway nun was improper and, as she had no property, could not really commend her. Thus, Hieronymus did not respond to this ultimatum of Luther's match-making. When in the spring of 1525 he became a councillor in Nuremberg, he got engaged to a girl of 14 years, Sibylle Dichtel von Tutzing "who had a very rich dowry and, what was even more desirable to him, was of very respectable parents". He got married to her on 23rd January 1526 in Munich.

Now that Baumgärtner was finally nothing more to Katharina, Luther turned to another marriage candidate he had lined up for Kate. This was Dr Kaspar Glatz, to whom on 27th August 1524 the University of Wittenberg, whose rector he was at that time, gave its advowson parish Orlamünde. Luther now went about it, to marry his ward to Dr Glatz. But Kate who had got to know the man during his apprenticeship in the small city of Wittenberg did not want to take him, and her intuition proved stronger than Luther's; Glatz was, as turned out later, a self-opinionated, wilful person who got into disputes with his parishioners and had to be dismissed. Luther, however, continued to try to press Kate into the marriage. So she went to Luther's colleague, Professor Amsdorf, and complained, that Luther wanted to marry her against her will to Dr Glatz. Knowing that Amsdorf was Luther's close friend, she pleaded with him to get Luther to drop this

proposition.

It appears that Amsdorf – who took the refusal for noble arrogance – questioned whether a doctor, professor or member of the clergy was not good enough for her, when Katharina was pushed to explain: If Amsdorf or Luther desired her as a wife, she would not refuse; to Dr Glatz she would not however yield herself in marriage.

This statement, which was probably spoken without a lot of intent, had its results; indeed, not only for Amsdorf who remained unmarried all his life, but also for Luther. He had also taken Bora to be “proud and arrogant”, while she was in fact only a little reserved and showed a certain self-confidence, and had not liked her entirely. After her pronouncement on Amsdorf, however, he developed a different opinion.

Chapter 5

Katharina's Marriage

So Luther acted as match-maker to Kate von Bora as well as other nuns; he did so also, however, in his writings in which he praised matrimony highly and invited everyone to partake in it. Hence, he joked in a long letter to Spalatin: "It is surprising that I, who so often writes about marriage and is so often among women, have not become feminized or married." And more seriously: "I press others with so many reasons to marriage, that I'm almost moved in that direction myself."

When Luther so keenly advised marriage, he had in mind most of all his colleagues. Up to the Reformation

it was not only a custom, but even the law, that university teachers should not marry, so much were the schools, and also the colleges, seen as church, even ecclesiastical institutions and the “academics” as “clergy”. Only limited exceptions were gradually admitted to allow marriage for medics and lawyers; rectors could for a long time, in Wittenberg as elsewhere, only become unmarried professors. However, the scholars for their part saw marriage as a degradation of their high status. Thus Luther had only with effort managed to get the learned Melanchthon to marry.

Marriage by the real clergymen, the priests, before Luther, had been unheard of since the time of Gregory VII, that is, for five and a half centuries. It was just on this point that Luther was now gradually entering into in his many writings, putting across that in Christianity the ecclesiastical profession was nothing special, rather that, all who have undergone baptism are bishops and priests, and vice versa, the clergy nothing more than Christian people. Thus he pushed all his matchable friends into marriage, helping them with zeal; the Grand Master of Prussia and the Archbishop of Mainz among them. He wanted, so to speak, to provide examples for the his assertions to the masses relating to his view of the general priesthood and the state of holy matrimony as well as the false holiness of the celibates. Thus he reminds Spalatin (Easter 1525): “Why do you not enter into marriage? It is possible that I do so myself if enemies do not stop condemning it and the clever-dicks don’t stop smirking at it all the time.”

The thought of cloister people as marriageable was odd to Luther at the start; it was considered at the time

so sacrilegious, that secular law punished the marriages of monks and nuns with the death penalty. Luther wrote (6th August 1521) from Wartburg: "Our Wittenbergers even want to let the monks have wives? Surely they don't want to foist a woman on me" and he jokes with Melanchthon whether he wants revenge after being goaded to take a wife, but that he himself, however, will know how to take care. After a few months he was of the opinion that: "The unmarried life in cloisters is antipathetic to ecclesiastical freedom. Where you are not free and of desire unmarried and must remain so out of shame or fear or for benefit or honour, from there you should leave as soon as possible and get married." He thus supported monks and nuns who wished to marry.

As he himself came only latterly - the last of all the brothers - to give up his monastic life, in October 1524, exchanging his habit (the last one was in threads) for the priest's frock and professor's robe, so with marriage. In 1528 he said: "If somebody had said to me at the Diet of Worms, in seven years time I would be a married man with a wife and children, I would have laughed at him." Whenever his friends, male and female, like Argula von Grumbach tried to persuade him to marry or spoke of his still marrying, he called it tittle-tattle. Still on 30th November 1524 he felt that with his present and current disposition he could not and was not minded to take a woman and indeed did not feel capable of marriage. Yet again at Easter 1525 he writes that he is not thinking of marriage.

But soon after Easter his mind changed.

It was at the time of the peasant riots, when radical zealots became an extreme threat to the ideals of the

Reformation, the time when his enemies turned on him with venomous schadenfreude and his friends looked to him with anxious worry; the time when he went about trying to appease the peasant rabble and his life actually came into danger twice looking death in the face. He expounded: "Münzer and the peasants have damaged the Gospel so much in our eyes and made the papists so bold that it almost looks as if one must preach the Gospel again completely from the beginning." Therefore, he wanted to now "attest it not only with the word, but also with the deed". He wanted to underline his teaching by example because he found so many faint-hearted, and thus would also have had the timid Archbishop of Mainz trot ahead as such an example. It was his intention, before he parted from this life, to find himself in God-created matrimony and "to keep nothing of his previous popish life about himself", even if it were only a platonic marriage; on his deathbed he wanted to marry a devout maiden and give her his two silver cups as a dowry. When he heard from Dr Scharf: "If this man took a woman, the whole world and the devil himself would laugh and he would thereby destroy all he's about", he pronounced: "Given the chance, I'd marry to the spite of the devil and the angels would rejoice and the devil cry." Ultimately his father, whom he met on his travels of the time, also pushed him to fulfil his greatest dream, and Luther did not want to deny "this last act of obedience to his beloved father".

And a nun was to be just the one, "to the spite of the devil with his scales, the all-powerful, the princes and bishops, who can only see priests marrying as utterly unreasonable". And not only in spite of the all-

powerful, but also of the general rabble, who according to their superstition held the son of a monk and a nun for the Antichrist. He wanted “with the deed to attest the Gospel, to the derision of all those that crow and shout ‘yoo! hoo!’ and take a nun as a wife”. This nun, however, was to be Katharina from Bora.

She was still without means at the Reichenbachs and he could do her a great deed of mercy. She had said that she would take him if he wanted her. And he had meanwhile gained a better opinion of her.

That Kate’s extraordinary beauty set him on fire was chanted out by his opponents with hateful intent. Luther talks only once and quite later on in a letter to his wife, in a chivalrous rogue-like way of the fact that he had “at home a beautiful woman”. He asserts, however, that in the first days of his marriage he was not in love nor full of passionate fire, but that he found pleasure in his wife. She was also not particularly beautiful. Of physical beauty Luther quoted the rhyme:

If the apple is rose-coloured,
There’s a little worm inside,
If the little maiden is cleanly,
She’s probably a little obscenely.[†]

And when a friend wanting to marry once said to him, he would want a beautiful, devout (i.e. well-behaved) and rich one, Luther remarked: “Oh, yes, one should paint you one with full cheeks and white legs; the same ones are also the most devout, but they don’t cook too well and pray badly.”

† Ist der Apfel rosenrot | Ist ein Würmlein drinnen | Ist das
Maidlein säuberlich | So hat’s krause Sinnen.

And so in this sort of mood he met quietly and without passionate excitement his choice. On 16th April he joked with Spalatin that he really was a bad lover: "I have had three women at the same time and have loved them so much that I have lost two of them, taken by other fiancés, and the third scarcely on my arm will probably soon be taken from me."

He had thus considered, nevertheless, certain personalities.

Already on 4th May, after a visit to relatives in Eisleben and Mansfeld, he talks in a private letter to his brother-in-law Rühel in Mansfeld of "my Kate" whom he wants to take if he can. And like his brother-in-law, he has also initiated his parents into his plans, and his father earnestly encouraged him. In Wittenberg itself, however, he confided the information to only a few people: to the painter and councillor Lucas Cranach and his wife. To his colleagues and remaining friends, above all to Melanchthon, he said nothing about it. The intellectuals did not want for him what Luther himself wanted, a nun, and thought and talked about a marriage between a monk and nun with indifference. And, in particular, Katharina von Bora was not right to them; all his best friends shouted: "Not that one, one of the others!" And in order to prevent it, "malicious mouths" even created spiteful gossip. But this just brought Luther to put an end to the thing quickly, before he was obliged to hear the ugly voices raised against him as would have happened, and "because Satan likes to use vicious tongues to create obstacles and confusion". He "prayed earnestly to our Lord God", as he reports, and then acted without the advice or further thought of man, as Melanchthon complains,

without saying a thing to his friends.

With regard to Katharina, Luther had come to a conclusion: if he had been for weeks writing "My Kate", she had to know of his intentions.

The fact that Kate also found a purely human liking for Martin Luther goes without saying. He was to be sure already 42 years old and sixteen years older than she herself. But a contemporary testifies: "He had a fine, brave and unsullied face with sharp eyes and his well-proportioned limbs made him a handsome fellow. Both his singing voice and his speaking voice were bright, fine, and clear; he was no bawler." Also a noble, fine taste agreed to the former monk and farmer's son: he tended to keep his appearance pleasant and because of the care he took in his clothes even his adversaries called him disapprovingly a "fine courtier", wearing "shirts with little bands", a ring on his finger and yellow boots.

Luther was also taken by all kinds of beauty in art and nature, a good singer and lutenist, of cheerful mind and good humour.

But there was more of Luther's disposition that made him agreeable to the female gender; he was for all his vehemence nevertheless good-natured, for all his stubbornness as docile as a child, for all his harshness thoughtful and sensitive. Also "a devout (good) man" who could love his wife quite warmly, and under his roof, as he himself said, a woman might feel herself to be an empress.

Indeed, the outward appearance of the position which Luther's spouse took on, would have fuelled a high-striving mind. The doctorate was considered in this humanist time to be even more highly valued than

today's academic professorship, it was on a par at least with the nobility. The simplest doctor who had worked his way up from the peasant farming and craftsman's community was found desirable by noble virgins as a marriage partner, so that a large number of professor's wives in Wittenberg were of nobility. And to be wife to Luther, the most celebrated man not only in all Wittenberg but also the whole of Christendom, had to flatter a woman's ego, if on the other hand it has to be said that with the greatness of the man one also had to take into account all the hatred and abuse which his enemies aimed at him. It was also a daring enterprise to satisfy such an extraordinary man, to become an equal lifelong companion to the great man. Spinster Kate had the courage as well as the self-confidence for it.

Thus Kate did not refuse Luther's approach.

Luther's formal proposal probably took place on Tuesday 13th June - at Reichenbach's house, of course. A later report says that Kate was surprised by it and at first did not know whether Luther was being serious, then, however, agreed. In the evening of that same day the wedding ceremony or "the engagement" took place, either at the municipal clerk's or possibly at Luther's accommodation at the cloister. For the engagement supper the doctor invited the city priest Bugenhagen and the cloister provost Jonas, the lawyer Apel and the councillor and city treasurer Master Lucas Cranach and his wife; Melanchthon was not present, an absence Jonas felt was rather noticeable, but he was so anxious about this step of his great friend that he would not have fitted in. Luther's friend Dr Hieronymus Schurf could not act as his lawyer because

this teacher of civil and ecclesiastical law had all kinds of juridical doubts about the priest's marriage.

The wedding was conducted according to the usual customs: the lawyer carried out the legal formalities, the written marriage contract, he (or Bugenhagen) asked the bridegroom in the presence of the witnesses whether he took the bride to be his wife and the bride whether she took the man to be her married husband. Then the priest proclaimed them man and wife with a prayer and blessing. A small evening meal and then the consummation of the marriage followed; the bride and bridegroom were led to the bridal bed, they got into it under a cover and thus the marriage became valid.

This was Luther's "vow" as one said in the language of the Wittenbergers. At the sight of the betrothed on the bridal bed, Jonas could not stop his tears from pouring out, so much was he moved. But also the minds of the others were in turmoil, not least Luther's and Kate's.

On the following morning, Wednesday, Luther gave a small midday meal, which at that time took place at 10 o'clock, for his friends. News of the marriage having quickly got around the small town of Wittenberg, the town council sent an honorary toast of a Stübchen[†] of malmsey, a Stübchen of Rhine wine and one and a half Stübchens of Franconian wine.

"The vow", however, was after the custom of that time not the "nuptials" or public wedding; this followed later with a public church ceremony and the "hospitalities" (i.e. wedding feast) and ceremonious leading home of the "virgin bride". So fourteen days after the more private ceremony, on Tuesday 27th June,

† About three to four litres or so

this wedding breakfast and “drive home” took place also for Luther, because the young married couple and their friends wanted to not only honour the custom, but also conspicuously announce to the whole world in open ceremony their holy marriage in an honourable way. To it the doctor invited his parents and his brother-in-law Dr Rühel of Mansfeld together with another two Mansfeld councillors, Johann Dürr and Kaspar Müller, also the court chaplain Master Spalatin and the priest Link of Altenburg, the daring liberator of the nuns, Leonhard Koppe, as “worthy father prior”, the Electoral seneschal Dr Johann von Dolzig, above all, however, the minister (“bishop”) Amsdorf in Magdeburg among others.

The invitation letters laced with humour and seriousness to these guests still exist, except those to the parents. Luther writes to the three Mansfeld councillors: “I’m ready for a little celebratory rejoicing and drive home. This is something from which I have not wanted to exclude you as good friends and fellows and ask that you might add your blessing. If you wanted to and could come with my dear father and mother, you can imagine I would be a delighted.” To Link: “The Lord has delivered me suddenly, since I was not expecting it, and miraculously into the state of matrimony with the nun Kate von Bora... If you come, please do not bring so much as a cup or anything else.” To Dolzig: “It is without doubt my heart’s cry for you to come when I should become a husband. How this fact is now almost strange and I hardly believe it myself, but the witnesses are very sure, so I must believe it and serve and honour it and am resolved to seal and ratify it with mother and father present

together with other good friends next Tuesday at a collation. I'd like to ask you as a friend, if you could manage it, I'd really like to serve you up some venison, for you to be there and help impress the seal or with whatever else is involved."

The game was not absent; Wittenberg, which knew what the university and city had in Luther - he had made the small city and university great and famous - gave presents bountifully. The town council sent "Doctori Martino, for his nuptials and related social event: a barrel of Eimbeck beer and twenty guilders in Schreckenbergers"; and the honourable university presented as a wedding gift to "the honourable doctor Martin Luther and his bride Kate von Bora" a silver lidded-goblet with beautiful gilt decoration. Johann Pfister, who had given up his monkhood at Easter and travelled to Wittenberg at Whitsun to study there, took on the rôle of cupbearer at Doctor Luther's wedding. Perhaps the wedding rings which the friends were getting were now also ready. Imperial Councillor Willibald Pirckheimer had Albrecht Dürer make these rings and gave them as a present as well as a gold commemorative coin with Luther's picture on it. Luther's wedding ring was a gimmel ring with diamond and ruby, the signs of love and loyalty; under the casket at the top of the ring are the letters M.L.D. and C.V.B. and the hoop was inscribed with the words: "Whom God Has Joined Together Let No Man Put Asunder". Katharina's ring had a ruby and is adorned with a crucifix among other things and carried the inscription: "D. Martinus Lutherus, Catharina von Boren 13th June 1525".

The fact that Katharina appeared in customary

bridal jewellery is understandable, even if it was not so grand as in the popularly supposed picture of Katharina von Bora in her wedding attire.

Thus a happy wedding was celebrated among good friends. But indeed, because of the troubled times, not all invited turned up - Luther had already postulated that in his letters. Master Philipp Melanchthon was also not present, the anxious scholar who was against Luther's marriage and especially with the nun, would have been a bad wedding guest. Of Katharina's relatives, none seem to have been present. Her father and mother were probably long dead, her two brothers in distant Prussia, the oldest perhaps even further away; other relatives would have become estranged through her life in the cloister, not one of them even now had come to her. Thus she had to see friends and relatives in her foster parents and Luther's friends and parents. And if it must have been heavy on her heart, when she had, nevertheless, to return the high admiration and friendship which her husband had found among his colleagues and compatriots.

Chapter 6

The First Year of Katharina's Marriage

After the marriage ceremony Luther took the young woman to his accommodation in the Augustinian cloister. This, the Elector Johann the Constant, who in May had succeeded his brother Frederick the Wise, had made available to him under right of preemption.

The "Black Cloister" lie up above the Elster gate, immediately next to the embankment and moat, and remote from the world, separated from the street by a large courtyard. The three-storied main building overlooking the Elbe had been the dwelling of the monks and was now Luther's residence. In the western

corner looking south with a view of the yellow water of the flowing river was Luther's cell from which he "had attacked the Pope"; it remained still his study room. The married couple however set up looking towards the courtyard in what were formerly the quarters of the prior, in the spacious living room in which dining took place, visitors were received and guests entertained. Before it was a smaller reception room with wooden benches. The ceilings of the rooms and also the walls halfway up of the cosy sitting room were panelled with wood, benches stretched along the walls above which were pegs which served for hanging up utensils and clothes. Two big windows with bull's eyes looked onto the cloister court. To see more clearly, there were also small sliding windows which could be opened with a rattling noise, if there was something to observe, a visitor came or departed or the domestic staff and animal life of the house needed watching. There, in the window niche, a simple wooden seat was situated with a kind of writing desk which might serve as a sowing table. A mighty oaken table on a cross base stood in the middle and a mighty tiled stove filled one corner. This is why the residential room was also called "the general winter room". It was probably still painted from the cloister time. A picture of Maria with the sleeping Christ child was probably also here.

Behind this living room was the bedroom and another small room, from which a narrow staircase with a trapdoor into the ground floor was added later, by means of which one could reach the domestic rooms and bring food up from the kitchen within the house; the kitchen, servants room and the like being below in the former refectory.

Already that year, 1525, the town council had given various loads of lime with which the cloister house could be distempered inside and out, at least in part. Perhaps this had already been done in the time between the taking of the vows and the homecoming, in readiness for the latter, when the house would receive many festive visitors.

The furnishing of the house will have been meagre enough at the start. With his well-known generosity and liking of entertaining guests Luther could hardly exist himself on his stipend, and although the Elector increased it by two hundred florins on his marriage, making many acquisitions was not possible, particularly for a house the size of theirs. The one hundred florins, which the Elector, and the twenty florins, which the town council gave for the wedding, went on the costly banquet. The cloister contents, such as remained and had not been carried off by all manner of suspicious hands, had been given to Luther by the visitors. But it was scant: bowls and cooking spits, some other household effects and gardening tools - together hardly worth 20 florins. Their friends will therefore probably have helped with wedding presents, which normally were silver cups, directly or indirectly, to make the desolate rooms of the cloister a little more homely. At that time, one was not spoiled by manifold household items and these two former inhabitants of cloisters even less so. Thus from Toragu Dr Zwilling gave a box which was, however, soon so rickety and worm-eaten that Frau Kate could not keep any more linen in it without it becoming worm-meal. Little by little, however, all kinds of presents arrived from further afield, even elegantly made clocks. The young

married couple was kept a whole year with wine from the town cellar by the council, but amounted (in spite of many guests) to only three thalers, four groschen and six pfennigs. Also the city gave "to the married lady Frau (Dr) Katharina Martini for New Year (1526)" sixty ells of Swabian linen.

The only other occupant and, besides Luther, last monk, Prior Brisger, himself married straight after Luther and after a little moved into his own newly-built, little house, which lay next to the cloister but more forward, on the street, and then onto the parish of Altenburg. Of the old cloister inhabitants, only Luther's attendant Wolfgang Sieberger remained in the house, who, with little money or intellectual gift, had indeed started to study, but had not been able to continue and finish, and was better suited to being a servant than a scholar. He was a loyal soul who remained in the house from 1517 until Luther's death and outlived the doctor by only one year. A maid was also there and others soon followed as the household expanded.

In this house the young pair got used to marriage and each other more or less in peace. Luther wrote: "My Kate fills my life and I have become otherwise dead to the world."

It was a strange feeling for the 42-year-old scholar, celibate bachelor and former monk during the first year of matrimony when he now sat at table in the company of someone else instead of alone, or when he woke up in the morning and saw two plaits of hair lying next to each other. But also the young wife and former nun might have found her new state strange, here in the former cloister, moreover at the side of this powerful man who had turned around the world order and was

doing battle with the Pope, emperor, world and devil.

In these early times, there would sit Kate with Luther at the back in his study room, from where he stormed the Pope with the flaming sword that was his quill, seeing him surrounded by books, the table covered with letters and scripts, chatted and listened to him and also asked questions about this and that. Her questions did not always testify to worldly experience and a theological education. Thus it amused the scholar when she asked once: "Honoured doctor, is the Grand Master in Prussia the brother of the Margrave?" They were the same person. Luther soon initiated his young wife into theological questioning. When in 1527 Jonas announced his current views about Erasmus to him, he read out part of the letter to his wife. She spoke directly: "The dear man has not become a toad?" And she was glad that Jonas now had the same view of Erasmus as Luther. With time her knowledge increased. In her husband's house, where so many threads of church and world history ran together and so many important men, scholars, statesmen and princes dropped in, she learned to understand about things of the world and settled into the theological world of thought to such an extent that she took a lively interest in the table talk and with her sound common sense and her natural feel for things even embarrassed the scholars every now and then.

Frau Kate had such a fluent manner of speaking, that Luther often teased her about it, once recommending her to an Englishman as a language teacher and saying that she could never get to the amen in her sermons. He says from his experience with his wife: "Women talk about housekeeping quite as master craftsmen with

such pleasantness and charm in their voice that they excel Cicero, the best speaker of all time; and when they cannot get their way with elegance, they turn to crying. And they are born to such verbal eloquence, they are by nature much better spoken and more skilful in these disputes, while we men must try to attain it by long experience, practice and study. If they talk about something other than housekeeping, however, they are hopeless."

Occasionally the young married couple also worked in the fenced-in cloister garden at the back of the house where there was also a well. There they dug and planted all kinds of herbs, vegetables and fruit-trees, but also pretty shrubs and flowers were cultivated. By the next summer Luther could invite Spalatin: "I have planted a garden and dug a well, both with success. Come, and you will be crowned with roses and lilies." The pair used to stroll out to the "Luther well" in front of the Elster gate which the doctor had discovered in 1521. In 1526 he had it walled and a summer house built over it, in which he sat many a pleasurable time at leisure with his wife and his friends. At other times the two rested under the pear tree in the cloister courtyard, which already in Staupitz's time had heard some serious conversation.

We have a picture of the young couple from Cranach's workshop. The young woman, more tender than robust in appearance, has an oval face with fine skin colour, the eyes seem a little "slit-shaped", the cheekbones, which in another portrayal of Kate stand out very strongly, are normal. The full lower lip is distinctive. The eyebrows are thin and curve high, the not particularly thick, luxuriant, fine hair has a reddish

or blond colour and the intelligence of the matt-blue eyes can be seen. The impression of the whole face gives rise to the expectation of a sober seriousness and a certain raw energy.

The Wittenberg doctor describes this time of first love, although "not in flame with the uncontrollable fire of love", with similar words to our modern poet: "It is the highest mercy of God if in matrimony married couples love each other constantly with all their hearts. The first love is intense and fertile, we enter it blind and as if drunk; when the drunkenness has been slept off, for the God-fearing an upright love still remains, for the godless, however, there is nothing but remorse."

Truly though, the Reformer did not spend the first few days of his marriage as an idly dallying honeymoon nor as an unclouded idyll. The pressure of his immense work and the hatred of his opponents saw to that. And at least equally as much as he, his young wife had to suffer the poisonous and filthy attacks which immediately affronted the marriage of the Reformer and former monk with the former nun.

Luther's marriage to Katharina was too monstrous a deed in the eyes of his contemporaries not to arouse the most enormous furore and give rise to the most unrestrained suspicions.

Already immediately after the wedding Luther had to endure slanders and vituperations for this act. And not only from their enemies. The know-it-alls "smiled" at his marriage or condemned it: "The worldly-wise, even among us, are highly angered about it." This from not only Dr Schurf, but even his close friend Melanchthon. The former felt that the whole world, even the devil himself, would laugh at it, and Luther

would destroy all he had done. The latter did not disapprove of the deed itself, but felt that it had not been opportune and lacked foresight, so that his enemies could revel in it and desecrate it; he also thought, "Luther had let himself be caught by the nun's arts and been taken in".

Thus it had already been distressing for the married couple that the friend of the family was not at the wedding, and, indeed, could not even be invited to it. And on Luther, this behaviour of his friends had the effect, even if only temporarily, of creating an unpleasant and disheartening atmosphere. There Kate probably had a hard job trying to cheer and encourage him. Other friends, godparents to his children, Cranach, above all, helped. And, in the end, Melanchthon also assuaged his discontent; he consoled Luther and took care to lighten his sadness and bad temper with friendliness and cheerful conversation. Thus Luther's spirit returned again to its old liveliness. Three days after the wedding he writes to Spalatin about Schurf's speech already back in his old tone full of blithe and confident defiance: "I have made myself by this marriage so scorned and little valued, that the angels should laugh and the devils cry. The world with its clever-dicks do not recognize the act, that it was godly and holy: in my case they call it godless and satanic. I just find greater pleasure in the fact that their opinion will be damned by my marriage, that they who are determined to continue wantonly without knowledge of God will knock against it and vex."

Much more malicious than his friends were, of course, his opponents. Emser wrote scornful and defamatory poems, and indeed Eck published a whole

book of such songs on Luther's wedding. Duke George of Saxony, a particular enemy of Luther, delivered a letter to Luther in which he chided him in the most vehement way, and in a brief to Otto von Pack at the Diet of Speyer (15th May 1526) he vilified him with the false accusation: "It is also clear, that Martin Luther has rejected the monkhood and moved the monks out of the Wittenberg cloister so that he now has room enough to live with his little Kate where otherwise a whole convent might have lived." The theological King Heinrich VIII of England, at that time still Defender of the Faith, later Bluebeard incarnate, wrote in a letter to the Reformer: "What? You have not only slept with her, but what is still infinitely more execrable, have publicly taken her home as your wife!"

These writings - except for George's - were in Latin and belonged mostly to the world of the scholar. However, the people generally hurled dishonourable defamation against the married couple. King of the humanists, Erasmus, made fun, expressing by means of a shabby joke: if the Antichrist were the son of a monk and a nun, the world must be full of the Antichrist; but the lie he spread with spiteful intent of an early-born child in his letters to men of high rank, he later had to revoke. Luther's marriage was to the haughty humanist, nonetheless, a farce with which the learned doctor should have hung up his philosopher's coat and lowered himself to the common man.

But the invective stepped even closer to the young woman soon after her marriage. "A middle-class woman, Klara, Eberhard Lorenz Jessner's connubial wife, made pointless remarks and reviled and chided Dr Luther and his respectable wife", though she indeed

“also attacked the priest’s wife abusively” in Master Johann Lubeck’s establishment in Wittenberg.

Ultimately, two Leipzig Masters, Johann Hasenberg and Joachim von Heidten (Miricianus), wrote Latin and German letters in prose and poetry and allowed them to be printed. Hasenberg’s abusive writing was directed “to Master Luder and his unlawful wife Catharina von Bohra, that they convert like the prodigal son and return to the penance and holiness of convent life or Luther returns his nun to her bridegroom Christ and her mother church” or face eternal damnation. Heidten wrote “A letter to Kethen von Bhora, Luther’s supposed wife together with a gift, cordially prepared”. Both young people had the cheek to send these writings via their own messenger to Luther’s and his wife’s home, in the asinine hope to at least make Kate turn away from her husband and move back to the cloister.

Of course both these writings had the opposite result. Luther’s servants made their own fun of them. They sent back the “backroom illuminations (illustrations) by the coarse brats” by means of the same messenger together with a small square board on which the 5 letters A-S-I-N-I† were so distributed that one could read them forty times from the middle out. However, the chivalrous Luther took care of his wife and had printed “a new Aesop’s fable of the donkey and the lions” with a homely joke and sent it to his friend Link with the words: “The Leipzig asses have denigrated my Kate with stupid invective; they have been answered, you can see here with your own eyes.”

Actual danger accompanied the abuse. During the

† Lat. asini = asses

night before Michaelmas 1525 Luther had dared, in the region of his most vehement opponent, Duke George of Saxony-Meissen, to enable thirteen young women to escape from the cloister of Freiberg. "I have snatched this booty from the raging tyrant", he triumphantly informed his friend Stiefel. George was furious, of course, but the nobility were also angry about Luther's plundering - those related to the nuns feared loss of property as a result of their escape: even noble "friends" of the Reformation thought it amiss of Luther. There were loud threats made against him and his life stood in danger if he fell into the hands of any knights or peasants, the latter having been little favourable to him since the uprising. On 19th November Luther was invited to Spalatin's wedding in Altenburg, where the former private secretary of the late Elector was now city priest. Luther thoroughly wanted to go his friend's great day. But Kate held him back and implored him with tears in her eyes against the dangerous trip. The fact that her husband administered his Reforming liberator's office in a heroic fashion and helped other poor young women in the same way he had helped her, and "snatched away from the devil this booty of Christ", did not hinder Frau Kate, she saw to it that he did not get into danger unnecessarily. Such mortal danger she feared constantly for her husband, on whom as many various attempts were planned and tried as on a prince.

On the other hand she allowed Luther at the end of February of the next year to accompany her to Segrehna near Kemberg. At that time in this village the former Reformation enthusiast, iconoclast and peasant agitator Karlstadt was concealing himself as a farmer

and shopkeeper. Despite all the pain and worry Karlstadt caused him, Luther had taken care of his old colleague and had obtained a pardon from the Elector for him. And now Karlstadt had asked Luther's wife to be a godmother. She was ready to do this favour and not only undertook the difficult journey herself, but also let her husband travel with her.

Already by this year of their life together Luther had learned to understand his wife better, to love her more deeply and pay greater attention to her. If before the wedding he had taken her to be proud and arrogant, he now writes: "She is, thank God, acquiescent, obedient and pleasing to me, more so than I could have hoped, such that I would not like to exchange my poverty for the wealth of Croesus."

Melanchthon had said that he hoped Luther's marriage would make him take things more steadily and calm his raw impetuosity. Archbishop Albrecht probably had similar thoughts, giving via his chancellor Rühel, Luther's brother-in-law, the lady twenty golden guilders as a wedding present. Katharina accepted the gift with pleasure; Luther, however, refused it. Erasmus also soon seemed to believe to have noticed that Luther had become milder and did not rage so much anymore with his pen. He notes in his usual mocking way: "nothing is so wild that a woman cannot tame it".

This is something not generally to be denied. And indeed Luther would – by princely persuasion – hear in conciliatory tones about Duke George and Henry VIII – as long as it did not sound conciliatory towards them, of course. They exploited more his writings to make him contemptuous. But in his Reforming

occupation Kate neither could nor wanted to hinder her husband.

Not even in the first days of their marriage. Indeed, Frau Kate probably planned the freeing of the Freiberg nuns with him during the preparation for her married homecoming: Koppe's invitation to the wedding contained the request for this new, even bolder cloister abduction!

And on the New Year's Day 1526 Luther painted the papacy and its member branches yet again in a lampoon, writing: "Several feel that one should now stop mocking the papacy and the spiritual estate. I don't hold with them and must pour it out at them until there is nothing more contemptible on earth than the bloodthirsty Isabella."

Chapter 7

Katharina as Mother of Her Children and House Companions

A year after their marriage on 7th June 1526, “for that day is marked ‘Dat.’[†] in the calendar”, Kate gave her husband a little son, which was, as the parents saw with joy, perfectly formed and healthy. He came into the world at two o’clock in the afternoon and at four o’clock was already baptized according to the custom at that time by Deacon Rörer. Godfathers were Superintendent Doctor Bugenhagen, provost Justus Jonas, Luther’s good friend Lucas Cranach, the vice-chancellor Baier and, in absentia, chancellor Müller of

† Lat. = she gives

Mansfeld. One of the godmothers was the wife of the Mayor, Hohndorf. The child received the name Johannes after his grandfather.

Little Hans remained well, if the mother only stopped breast-feeding him late and the child had trouble tolerating the milk. The boy soon became strong and happy, an *homo vorax et bibax* (hearty eater and drinker) and learned to crawl along. At New Year 1527 he got his first teeth, learned to stand and walk and started to make baby babbling sounds and to scold everyone with charming affront. As a reward for all these skills Jonas sent the little Hans a "silver Johannes", a coin with the picture of the Elector.

The two-year-old was soon proud of a rattle which he received (1528) as a gift from the priest Hausmann. For years this first-born is mentioned in every letter and forever greets friends everywhere. It is a sweet picture the father tells of his little son: "If I sit and write or do something, he sings me a little song, and when he wants to get a little loud, I start back at him a little. But he continues to sing out equally loudly though he does so more furtively, with more concern and shyness. So God must want that we should be continually happy, if still with fear of and deference to God." And little Hans sat at the table and babbled about life in heaven, how it would be so great there with all the food and dancing; there above all he dreamt, the waters would flow with milk and bread buns would grow on the trees. The doctor was pleased with the blessed life of the child.

Little Hans remained the only child for one and a half years, then followed on 10th December 1527, while the plague was raging in Wittenberg and in Luther's house itself, a little sister, Elisabeth. Jonas

congratulated the doctor on the birth and joked on behalf of his son: "My son greets your daughter as his future wife." But on 3rd August of the next year during the dangerous teething stage, the tender little daughter died and was buried with great grief in the graveyard before the Elster Gate. There was placed a small (still in existence) gravestone with the Latin inscription: "Here sleeps Elisabeth, M Luther's young daughter." With difficulty the mourning parents consoled themselves with the thought: "Elisabeth is separated from us and has gone to eternal life with Christ through her death in this life."

On 4th May of the next year they received a second little daughter as a replacement for Elisabeth: Magdalena. Amsdorf, the Magdeburg Superintendent (bishop), and Frau Goritzen, wife of the Master and later municipal judge in Leipzig became the godparents. The letter inviting Amsdorf to be godfather read:

"Honourable, worthy lord! God the father of all mercies has graciously given me and my dear Kate a young daughter; thus I ask Your Worthiness if by God's will you would take on a Christian office and be a Christian father to this poor heathen and help her to Holy Christendom by way of the heavenly, honoured sacrament of baptism."

The letter to the prospective godmother reads:

"Grace and peace in Christ! Honourable virtuous lady, dear friend! I ask you by God's will; that since God has given me a young heathen, you would be so kind as to help this poor heathen to Christendom and become her godmother, so that by your help and service she also passes from the birth of Adam into the

new birth of Christ through Holy Baptism. This service I would be happy to reciprocate if you should so wish. May God commend. Amen. I may myself not go out in the air. Martinus Luther."

When Magdalena grew up, the girl looked "beyond all measure in the mouth, eyes and nose, in the whole face", like her little brother Hans and was as good-natured and well-behaved as he. These two eldest sibling were very much attached to each other. When Luther stayed in hiding in Coburg the next year during the Augsburg Diet and there as in the Wartburg grew a beard to make himself unrecognizable, Frau Kate let the little Lena do a sketch in black chalk or ink, which admittedly turned out a little dark, and sent it to him to hearten him in his "isolation", where the doctor, living in a state of loneliness and inactivity, often fell into gloomy thoughts. He must also have been worried about the way things were going in Augsburg and his father, old Hans Luther, had just died which moved him deeply, because he clung to him with childish love and reverence. When the father looked at the portrait of his little daughter first, he could not recognize her. "Oh", he said, "little Lena is black." But soon he came to like it and the more he looked at the picture the more it became Lena. The doctor hung the image on the wall opposite the table in the prince's room where he ate and the picture helped him forget much.

The girl was treated differently from the son by the father. He was brought up austerely and Luther saw to it that he was not left to be self-satisfied with anything. But with his little daughter he joked more. The mother, on the other hand, instinctively preferred the son, the first-born, and tried to soften the father's severity

towards him.

On the eve of Luther's birthday, 9th November 1531, a new son arrived in the Black Cloister of Wittenberg, who, therefore, received his father's name. As the youngest, he now became the father's darling. About which he said, "parents always favour the youngest. My little Martin is my dearest treasure, because such children need their parent's care and worry, and that they are looked after diligently. Little Hans and little Lisa can now talk and do not need so much attention."

On the name day of the following year Luther informed Martin's godfather, the strict and steadfast Johannes von Rindesel, Electoral treasurer: "Your godchild will be an active man, he catches on and likes to develop his senses."

The boy was, it seems, sickly and a little good-for-nothing, so that his father feared he might one day become a lawyer!

In contrast, little Hans was a quiet pensive fellow, so that his father opined: "He is a born theologian." The youngest son Paul, who came into the world on 28th January 1533, however, was a strong, courageous boy and seemed to be suited to becoming a Turkish warrior. Something the father was already thinking of at his birth and possibly chose for him therefore, a knight, Hans von Löser, hereditary marshal and chief treasury official, as godfather. But also Duke Johannes Ernst von Sachsen, as well as Doctor Jonas and the wife of Kaspar Lindemann became godparents to Paul.

In the letter to Löser inviting him to become godfather, which was written in the night of 28th January 1533, so that the boy did not remain a heathen for long and was already christened by vespers, it says:

“If Your Most Excellent Sir would be so humble as to honour God and appear for my young son as might be beneficial and just, so that he may come from the old way of Adam into the new birth of Christ by the holy sacrament of baptism and become a member of Christendom, that God might wish to raise him as a new enemy of the Pope or of the Turks.”

When Hans Löser arrived at the baptism, Luther received him with: “Thank God! I will not lack, to serve Your Most Honourable Sir in other matters. Today a young pope has been born; therefore please help the poor scoundrel that he is baptized.” The child was baptized in a washbasin in the great house. Afterwards Luther invited his godfather to be a guest, whereupon they held a friendly discussion. Luther said: “I have had my son called Paul, because the Holy St Paul has communicated many principles and proverbs to us. God give him the grace and gift of St Paul. I wish, if God wills, to send all my sons off: he who has an inclination to the military, I would like to send to Hans Löser; he who has a desire to study, I would like to send to Jonas and Philipp; he who has a desire to work, I would like to send to the builder[†].”

The youngest born child, born around Christmas 1534, was looked upon as a sort of afterthought and was named after Luther’s dead mother, Margareta. The father could foretell, that he would not live long enough to support her. Thus he wrote, when she was only fours year old, to her godfather, the pastor Probst in Bremen: “Greetings from my wife Frau Kate and your little godchild, my little daughter little Margaret, for whom you should be able to find a fine, devout

† or farmer

man after my death. You took her as a godchild, I also entrust her to you." Another, important godfather was Prince Joachim von Anhalt, to whom Luther had offered the "Christian office of spiritual fatherhood" and who had taken it on.

Frau Kate must have often taken the children to their father, even into his study room, where he played and billed and cooed with them and made his thoughtful remarks about children's nature and child life; such as might show us what it is like in paradise and how it should be in the realm of God. The father also watched with pleasure the way his Kate talked so warmly with her little Martin and had so much patience and compassion with all the children. Luther talked to them about the infant Jesus, watched how little Martin decorated and protected a doll as a bride, was glad if the children quarrelled and then quickly reconciled with each other as if an allegory of the remission of sins of God's children; he saw how the children sat around the table and looked in happy expectation at the peaches and pears lying on it, or at the bunch of cherries which Jonas had brought them, and said to them: "Anyone wanting to see a picture of one who revels in anticipation has here a good likeness. Oh that we could look to the Day of Judgement in such happy anticipation!" His sweet fairy tale letter from Coburg to his dear little son is the most beautiful testimony to his fondness of children. From Coburg Luther procured a large beautiful book of sugar from the beautiful (fairy-tale) garden in Nuremberg to take home. He also brought his children home things he bought at fayres during his travels. He regularly sent his little Hanse and little Lena kisses and greetings from whichever

distant place he was at.

The playmates of the little Lutherans were Melanchthon's and Jonas's children ("Lippus" and "Jost" in the fairy-tale letter). The playground was the big cloister courtyard; there they romped about with their hobbyhorses and shot with crossbows, made a din with whistle and drums, danced or jumped about throwing their clothes and headwear into the air to catch; the children might also hold a little dog. Later their father Luther also set up a bowling alley for them and the other young housemates and watched how they claimed to have hit twelve pins when only nine stood on the board, and, in the end, were satisfied when they had not missed one. He himself competed with them now and then as a master of the game, "one time he sent a pin spinning, another sideways or over the corner".

But Luther also recited the catechism daily with his son Hans and his little daughter Magdalene and the children themselves had to "pray and read out aloud at the table"; also their mother and father kept them to praying for the supporters and protectors of the Reformation, for the welfare of the church and the fatherland. Martin and Paul had inherited something of their father's musical talent and after mealtime - alone or with others - had to perform the liturgical songs appropriate to the church calendar. Little Margarete had already developed a beautiful singing voice by the age of five: "Kommt her zu mir alle"[†] and others.

In their children the parents saw their greatest joy and their most beautiful treasure. "Children bind, they are a bond of love and marriage", Luther was in the

† "Come to me all" (Matthew 11:28)

habit of saying. He found in them consolation and rest from the worries of the church and the world. "I am content; I have three children conceived under wedlock which no popish theologian has, and the three children are three kingdoms which I have gained more honestly and by clearer inheritance than Ferdinand Hungary, Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire."

In fact, what brought rest and joy for the father in his leisure hours and at the table, brought work, worry and pain for the mother. It was certainly no small thing for the extremely busy housewife to have had six small children in eight years, to care for them and to bring them up - for on her there lay the most important task of their upbringing. And her husband saw this and remarked that only God himself must put up with more from man's children than a mother.

It was therefore a great blessing that Frau Kate found in her home support in her aunt, Magdalene von Bora.

She had fled Nimbschen soon after her niece and now lived in the Black Cloister in a special little room. She was as "Aunt Lene" the good house-spirit, the true and proper child's "aunt" in the Lutheran family. As an infirmarian she had already learned to tend and care in the cloister. And so she tended and protected the little grandnephews and grandnieces, played and prayed with them; she also probably spoiled them and covered up their little pranks. She cared for them through their childhood illnesses and was also a careful nurse and teacher to Frau Kate when she was ill or on her childbed. In the fairy-tale letter to his little son Hans from Coburg, Luther wants to bring "Aunt Lene" with him into the beautiful miracle garden and sends her his

greetings and a kiss; also at other times he sends "Aunt Lene" his greetings.

Other children soon added to their own in the Lutheran house. First relatives, nephews and nieces, then, however, children of friends and acquaintances, and, finally, boarders who were strangers to the family.

The first was Cyriac Kaufmann, the son of a sister of Luther's; he came to Wittenberg as a student and matriculated on 22nd November 1529. In 1530 he accompanied his uncle to Coburg who then, in August, sent him to Augsburg so that he could take a look at a Diet in action in a large city. Having then to return to his studies in Wittenberg, he brought with him on the journey home Nuremberg Lebkuchen for his little cousin Hans Luther.

Luther's sister and brother-in-law Kaufmann died young and in the end all five orphans came to their uncle in Wittenberg, so besides Cyriac there were his younger brothers and sisters, his brothers Fabian and Andreas who were enrolled in 1533 on 8th June together with the just seven-year-old Hans Luther in Wittenberg as academic citizens, and the sisters Lene and Else. It was no little thing to be a father let alone a mother to five children without parents, especially, since they were not all well-behaved and Lene, in particular, caused concern, so that eventually Luther declared that if she did not behave, he would marry her to a black pit-worker, instead of someone devout and learned. Lastly, in addition to the two nieces there arrived a little grandniece, Anna Strauss, the granddaughter of a sister of Luther's.

With Cyriac Kaufmann another sister's son, Hans Polner, had arrived as a student in the house, who was

commended to Peter Weller. Frau Katharina was obliged to watch “that he behaved himself”, and to otherwise look after him. This Polner served as an attendant to the doctor, studied theology and preached at one time in the parish church; the doctor’s wife found she could follow him much better than Doctor Pommer who tended to deviate far from the subject matter and introduce other things into his sermon, or, as Jonas put it, talked to farmhands along the way.

One more nephew of Luther’s, son of his favourite brother Jakob, Martin, was later handed over to be brought up by the doctor’s family and in 1539 was enrolled at the university; similarly Florian von Bora, the son of Kate’s eldest brother. Martin and Florian were taught together with Luther’s children. One of the nephews was taught at school by Camerarius; later Florian went with Hans to Torgau.

In the end, the Lutheran household was entrusted with all kinds of school pupils and prospective students who lived, ate and were taught in the cloister.

For the children, theirs and the others, all kinds of preceptors and discipline-keepers were needed, by the otherwise engaged Luther: older students, young Masters, also people of a more mature age who once again re-entered the university to extend their knowledge or to study the new Protestant theology. They were, in Luther’s family, housemates and table companions, who also supported Luther to some extent in his work, and (Neuheller, for example) helped Frau Kate with the housekeeping and supervision of the servants.

Together or one after the other in the house as “schoolmasters” or Luther’s helpers were the

Nuremberger Veit Dietrich (1529-34) and Besold (1537-42), Cordatus (1528-31), the Freiburger Hieronymus and Peter Kelter (1530), Johann Schlaginhaufen (1531-32), Jodocus Neuheller (Neobulus) (1537-38) from Lauterburg, Jakobus Lauterbach (1536-39), Schiefer (1539-41), a Franciscan and finally Rutfeld (1546). These preceptors often had their own children which lived and ate with them in the Black Cloister or just had lessons there. The lessons often began when they were very young: young Hans Luther already had to start learning hard at the age of four, in particular to speak Latin - as the French do today.

In addition to the Masters, Luther had famuli, not only his life-long servant Wolf, but also others like the "devoted colleague" who had "served truly, diligently and modestly for several years and did and endured everything" and moved on in 1532. The famulus served at the table, poured, attended to garden matters, did errands and also wrote letters for Frau Kate.

Even a female teacher was appointed to the Black Cloister at Wittenberg: in 1527 Luther also invited a cosister of Frau Kate, the former nun and Nimbschen escapee, the "honourable, virtuous young lady Else von Kanitz" to come to Wittenberg for a while. "For I was thinking I would need you, to teach the young maidens and through your work to set an example for others to follow. With me you will have a home and somewhere to eat and drink with no danger and no worry. So I beg you, please don't turn this down." But Else von Kanitz did not come. Instead a Miss Margarete von Mochau, probably the sister of Karlstadt's wife, appeared at the cloister house and

took her place.

Of course, the big household did not lack other servants and there were, like everywhere else good and bad, thankful and thankless, faithful and disloyal servants. However, everyone was considered "family" and took part in the family prayers. And the absent father of the house did not fail in his letters to send greetings to all the servants. But he also made it clear that he would not tolerate any nonsense in the house. Often he jokes in his letters about the snug idleness of his servants: if he could order hand tools from Nuremberg which worked by themselves for when Wolf is sleeping or is careless, or a chandelier that cleans itself, so that it is not broken or damaged by an angry or sleepy maid.

Of course, there were all kinds of guests who visited the Black Cloister or stayed there for shorter or longer periods, often months, even years: expelled or jobless preachers, fleeing foreigners, escaped monks and nuns, visitors and those staying for some festival or other, poor "lost" servants and aristocratic ladies.

Thus in 1525, Luther's House accommodated several aristocratic nuns; for some months in 1528 even Duchess Ursula von Münsterberg, Duke George's own cousin, who had escaped with two other faithful cloister women from the convent in Freiberg; and at Whitsun 1529 again three aristocrats from the same convent. Various monks also came, even from France, to Wittenberg to Luther's House, as the general shelter for all religiously harassed. Duke George's rage is therefore understandable, if based on false assertions, when he thus accuses Luther: "You have furnished an asylum at Wittenberg where all monks and nuns who

rob our cloisters by taking and stealing may have keep and shelter with you as if Wittenberg were, to put it politely, a right of inheritance of all apostates of the Land.”

The female Wittenberger friends of the house, the wife of Bugenhagen and the wife of Dr A Schurf had their children or stayed while they were ill at the Black Cloister.

But also aristocratic guests visited the warm and welcoming house of the married couple.

The Electress Elisabeth von Brandenburg had turned, much as a result of the influence of her Protestant minded personal physician Ratzeberger, towards the Reformation, while her religiously-traditional husband Joachim I staunchly saw to it that the Lutheran poison did not come over the Saxon border. It must have been to his horror when he found out from his 14-year-old daughter Elisabeth that his own wife had received Communion of Bread and Wine secretly at Berlin Castle. He locked up the Electress; the rumour went out, he wanted to have her walled up alive. She escaped with the help of her royal brother Christiern, who at that time wandered around Germany fleeing from one state to another, together with Dr Ratzeberger (March 1528) and fled to her uncle, Elector Johann in Saxony. She held residence at Castle Lichtenberg, but often stayed in Wittenberg and visited Luther and Frau Kate in the cloister house; she also stood as godparent to one of the children.

Prince George von Anhalt also wanted to stay in the Black Cloister to enjoy better contact and closeness of mind with Luther. But the Vice Chancellor had to advise him against it because the house was too full.

So “the house of the Herr Doctor Luther was inhabited by a colourful, mixed crowd of studying infants, girls, old widows and well-behaved children. It gave rise to much ferment.”

One understands that, when young Hans was to start doing some serious learning, he, in need of somewhere quieter, was required to leave the house – perhaps going to Torgau. At New Year 1537 the 11-year-old son was at school somewhere or other with his father finding his progress in his studies and his Latin letters home a joy. The father allowed him to come home, on the particular request of Aunt Lene, to mother, aunt, sisters and brothers for the pre-Lent festival holidays.

Joining all the house and table companions, acquaintances, friends, relatives, colleagues and fellow citizens arrived at the cloister as daily visitors or guests: from some way away the ecclesiastical Amsdorf and Spalatin, Hausmann and Link, lords of the manor and knights Taubenheim and Löser, Brother Jakob or brother-in-law Rühel von Mansfeld, Kate’s brother Hans, envoys from all four corners of the earth, statesmen and church officials from England and France, from Scandinavia and Bohemia, Hungary and Venice; councillors and citizens from all Saxon and German cities, itinerant Masters and travelling students. From Wittenberg itself, Master Philipp (Melanchthon) and his wife visited the most often as dear and frequent guests; the gardens of the two houses were not far apart – as the story goes today – a little gate between the two allowed the two families to communicate easily. Friends of the family they liked seeing were also the Provost Jonas and his wife;

beyond them all other godparents, the Superintendent Bugenhagen, Master Cruciger, Master Rörer, the book-printer Hans Lufft, Master Lucas Cranach with his wife and the old Master Claus Bildenhauer or "Bildenhain", as Sophiele Jonas was in the habit of calling him, a worthy artist, was also sometimes at the table there; Luther later bought a garden from him. Luther and he, who had already "eaten too many Easter eggs", often recalled the good old times together.

That is the scene then, up in the family room round the big oak table or below outdoors in the court under the shady pear tree or even outside the Elster Gate by the murmuring Luther spring, meals and social gatherings took place where Frau Kate was the hostess, handing out her exquisite home-brews and adding her small contributions to the conversation.

Chapter 8

Katharina's Household Management and Industry

With so many house and table companions, it was necessary to set up and furnish a lot of rooms; the kitchen and cellar had to be maintained to a high standard; the stables and garden had to be maintained; it was necessary to understand markets and purchasing, accounting and property administration; and, finally, to control such an extensive house with its so many and various members, housemates and supervisors, children and servants, a broad outlook was necessary together with a talent for strict leadership.

All this fell on the housewife. It would have been impossible that Luther in addition to the immense work his occupation involved as a preacher, minister, professor, counsellor for individuals as well as whole countries and cities, as a Reformer not only in Germany but of half of Christendom, also looked after the housekeeping, particularly such an extensive one which already required a whole labour force. Then, however, it was the doctor's view that the running of the house was the wife's responsibility: "The wife must take control of the house, unhindered by the ways and rights of the husband; for that she is created. For it is true, that a woman is much better skilled and informed in domestic things that concern the running of the house than we." "I am very clumsy and careless in matters of the house. I cannot concentrate on that required in housekeeping. I am totally crushed by it." He had already feared as much as a bachelor. In 1523 he said: "If you take a wife, the first thing is: how will you support yourself, your wife and child? And this during your whole life; with the first child the parents think of building a house, of acquiring property and of supplying the progeny." For her part, however, Frau Kate was also inclined and determined in such a way that she took control with pleasure and wanted to keep away from her husband anything that could hinder or interfere with his activities. And Luther was much pleased by this. "My wife can persuade me to whatever she wishes, because she has everything in hand and I leave the whole housekeeping in her hands with pleasure."

So Katharina prepared and furnished the house, and the Elector and the City of Wittenberg, the friends of

the house and the parents of the boarders also donated various pieces of equipment and building supplies.

The Black Cloister had been built in 1502 by von Staupitz with the support of the Elector, but only one-third of it had been completed. Construction of the church was only just started; the farm buildings barely available. Only the so-called dormitory, the former living rooms of the monks were finished, which were for forty people. But the cells – mostly on the third floor – were numerous, but small, so probably walls had to be knocked down and others built. On the garden side was a largish hall (now the assembly hall) and a smaller one, which were both used by Luther for discourses and house prayers. A next room had, or had put in, a door to Luther's studyroom. On the top floor, the rooms were made into guestrooms for the various house friends.

The ground floor rooms Frau Kate equipped for the various utilities required and a staircase allowed lighter traffic to a room next to the bedchamber.

In the year from 1539 through to 1540 Frau Kate delighted her husband with a thoughtful present: from Pirna she arranged the delivery – through the priest there, Lauterbach – of a beautifully-worked gate of white sandstone, a pointed arch with pretty columns; on one side Luther's half-length portrait, on the other his coat of arms, the white rose with the red heart and black cross in it, encircled by the golden ring of eternity, and the Latin inscription: "In silence and hope rests my strength". Two seats were placed on both sides of the gate to relax at the end of the working day.

The cloister court was enclosed against the street by a fence; later two sentry boxes were placed at the gate,

to guard the property in the dangerous and turbulent time of the building of the fortifications, where the city walls by the Elster Gate were torn down and the city was opened to all the rabble.

On the west side of the courtyard agricultural buildings of all kinds were erected.

A brewing room already existed in the cloister; since the Elector had granted it the right to twelve "brews"; this was passed on to the new owner and exercised by Frau Kate herself. It was a big advantage for the heavy household, since beer was markedly expensive in Wittenberg - it cost three pfennigs a jar. But the construction and installation of the brewery and its equipment cost 150 florins. Next she built a bathroom with a tub and stand; Dr Lauterbach had to procure the building materials for her. She had all kinds of livestock housing built which held horses, cows and, in particular, pigs to provide motive power, milk and meat for the domestic requirements. Already by 1527 there was a sty full of pigs, more than five of them; by 1542 there were ten plus three piglets, so that a pigherd now had to be maintained; further Kate had several horses, five cows, nine calves and a nanny goat with two kids. A chicken run delivered the necessary eggs. Finally, some cellars were restored and some newly created, so that there was the wine cellar, the new cellar and the big cellar. The inspection of the latter almost cost the married couple their lives; the vault collapsed just behind them when they had gone to check it and had just come out.

In the course of time various repairs on the half-finished house were needed as well as new buildings. Thus Johann Crafft and Master Plato got their rooms,

also their son, Hans, as he got bigger; Aunt Lene had her parlour with bedchamber and chimney – each cost 5 florins to set up properly. However, the upper room and chamber came to 100 florins and the lower to 40 florins. In addition to the big cellar, which (with the damage of the collapse) came to 130 florins, the new cellar was built for 50 florins and the wine cellar was constructed for 10 florins. Finally a “new house” was built costing 400 florins. The staircase had to be built twice and the roof often repaired.

For this was needed some thousands of roofing tiles and bricks as well as more than a few tonnes and wagonloads of lime, especially during the construction years 1535-39: 280 wagons of lime and 12,500 masonry bricks and 1,300 roofing tiles and another combined lot of 2,600. Admittedly, a thousand roofing tiles only cost 40 groschen, masonry bricks 57 groschen and a wagon of chalk only 4 to 5 groschen. This, the city delivered from its own kilns. Luther paid for them by means of his services (free sermons and spiritual welfare among other things) and by cession of ground at the cloister. In 1542 Luther had spent 1155 florins on building works.

Later there was much exasperation in the Luther House about the new fortress construction. The ordnance master, Friedrich von der Grüne (Frederick of the Green), was apparently not green towards the Luthers. He buried not only, with Luther’s approval, the lower room but also without necessity or approval the middle, ruined the brewery door, threatened the garden wall and the earth wall at the rear of the new house. And like the lord, so did the labourers; the earthwork labourers broke windows and committed all other kinds of devilry. Luther even feared for his

beloved study room, in which he spent so many important hours studying and suffering his "Anfechtungen",[†] "from which he stormed the Pope" and sent his miraculous written works and epistles into the world. So the doctor had to send an angry letter to the ordnance master, where it probably did not miss its mark.

In the courtyard, the former hospital churchyard, the foundations of the church were laid, but only up to earth level. In the middle of these foundations stood an old chapel "built from wood and coated with daub; this was very ramshackle and supported on all sides. It was thirty feet long and twenty feet wide and had a small old dilapidated front part on which scarcely twenty people could stand. On the wall towards the south there was a pulpit of old boards, which worked round made a smaller pulpit, about 1½ ells above the earth, from which Luther had thenceforth preached. Altogether it looked just like the stable at Bethlehem in which Christ was born as pictured by painters". Only in 1542 did it fall victim to the fortifications; Luther "grumbled more badly about it than Jonah of the gourd".

The courtyard was separated from the street with a board partition and like the churchyard was planted with trees. Within it ran chickens, geese, ducks, pigeons; songbirds nested in the bushes, sparrows flew in and were frightened away by a little dog.

It also served as the children's playground, as a playing-field and as the bowling alley.

To set up the big household much had to be supplied and given.

[†] religious crises or states of despair that gripped him

Some things still remained from when it was a functioning monastery: pewter vessels and kitchen and gardening tools like bowls, spits, shovels – admittedly much used and defective, not worth 20 florins. These had to be replaced and complemented. So too the worm-eaten box from Doctor Zwilling in Torgau. A replacement was offered; Frau Kate was surprised at the high price requested – 4 florins. Enquiries were made as to whether it was “clean” with a nested box “in which to lay the linen items, where no iron parts would mark the linen”; otherwise she wanted to have one made in Wittenberg. The married couple already had a “treasure box”, except it was “well a thousand times too big” for their treasure; in 1532 they had but one single cup. However, the chest filled bit by bit with silver cups, rings, medals and other treasures. Also they had inherited an almost too exquisite goblet which the Augsburg citizen Hans Honold had left the great doctor. From Nuremberg, the Protestant abbot, Friedrich, gave an ornate clock which the Lutheran married couple fully admired; in 1529 there came a second (from Link) and in 1542 a third. In 1536 the eldest of the Moravian Brothers sent a dozen Bohemian knives.

The constant hand outs provided for linen, beds, feathers and lamps in the bedrooms; for pewter pots, bowls, plates, washbasins, kettles and frying pans in the kitchen; for plain shovels, pointed shovels, spades, forks, troughs and wheelbarrows in the garden; for barrels, tubs and buckets in the cellar and washhouse; for tack and wagons for the horses.

The cloister house was up to now, indeed, in the actual possession of Luther; but he did not have any

formal written document - only by a verbal arrangement were the building and what belonged to it made over to him by the Elector. He had made it available to Luther, the last monk of the Wittenberg Augustinian Monastery, as the first heir. Now, however, before his death, the well-inclined Elector Johann enacted the formal writing over of the property to the Luther family except for the right of purchase by the city or state. The document goes:

“By God’s grace I, Johann Duke of Saxony, make publicly known to all:

Our reverend and very-learned dearly devout Doctor M Luther by the particular grace and providence of God has, almost from the beginning of our university at Wittenberg, exerted himself with reading of the holy scriptures, preaching, spreading and making known of the holy gospels etc, such that I, in consideration of all this and by our own unsought inclination, have written over to the above mentioned Doctor M Luther, Katharin his conjugal wife and both their legitimate heirs, the new dwelling in our city of Wittenberg which has heretofore been known as the “Black Cloister”, wherein Doctor Martinus has abided, with all that constitutes it and its surroundings together with the garden and courtyard as a hereditary freehold and it will therefore be considered and blessed as their own personal property ... I also give the renowned doctor and his conjugal wife by particular grace these freedoms, that for as long as they both shall live they shall both be free of all burdens and impositions as citizens, so that they shall need to pay no imposts nor carry out duties as guards or the like and may nonetheless brew, malt, serve alcoholic

beverages, keep livestock and carry out other business as carried out by other citizens.

...As witness...

Torgau, 4th Feb 1532"

Wittenberg was up to then a poor, unsightly city with small, old, ugly, low, wooden houses, more like an old village than a city. But at this time people started to come from all over the world wanting to see and hear and a few to study. Now there was building and improvement. But in this small town with its few thousand inhabitants and equal number of students, everyday necessities were not easily available. Melancthon already complained on moving to Wittenberg that one could not really get anything there. At the same time it was expensive enough. And Frau Luther had to order not only a box or a fur coat for the little Margarete according to measurements from further afield, but all kinds of requirements: seeds, cuttings, even Borsdorfer apples, indeed butter and cheese she had to have delivered from Pirna through the priest there, Lauterbach, or from Erfurt and Nuremberg.

When Kate was making wedding preparations for Luther's grandniece (January 1542), her husband had to write to the court in Dessau for game. "Here there is very little available, because the general population and even more so those with official offices and court positions have eaten almost everything; there is no chicken or other tripe and I must replace it with sausages and tripe." Of course, she also had to buy flour whenever country parsons had it for sale, but Frau Kate got very annoyed, when someone like her, the Doctor's wife, had to pay nine-and-a-half groschen

for a bushel, i.e. more than the farmers. And also she found it wrong that the Wittenbergers wanted three pfennigs for a tankard of beer.

Like all townspeople of the Middle Ages, including the professors, Jonas, Melanchthon among others, Frau Katharina sought ground suitable for cultivation. She, besides, as a former unmarried noblewoman and nun, had a particular inclination to the land and Luther also found joy at least in nature and agriculture. "To leave land and property behind" was considered the surest arrangement and a matter of real inheritance; Frau Kate also "hoped to God, that he would let her children live devoutly and honourably and inherit richly". Truly the ground on the right bank of the Elbe, where Wittenberg stands, is for three miles around, as Luther complained, sandy, stony moor, so that in windy weather, as according to the local witticism, ninety-nine percent of estates fly in the air. In low German he put forth:

Patch of land, patch of land,
you are a sand patch!
When I work you,
you are light;
When I harrow you,
you are simple;
When I mow you,
I find nothing.

Of this Wittenberger district he noted in comparison to his home area: "In this area of ours, which is sandy, the earth yields on average seven to eight bushels for one sowing, in Thuringia mostly twelve and more." But the Luthers soon acquired several properties, two

areas of land and two other gardens.

Already in 1531 Kate bought a garden, as Luther said "not for me, but against me". It is probably the same whose purchase she undertook "with tears in her eyes", resulting in his being unable to buy the house of his friend and former cobrother Brisger off him, nor lend him any money. This garden, situated on the Zahnischen Strasse, was, it seems, later sold on. A larger garden and orchard with all kinds of structures on it and a painted fence was acquired (in around 1536) from Claus Bildenhauer for 900 florins. One of these gardens lay next to the sow market, so Luther addressed letters to the "sow-market woman", "to be found on the sow market". Here the Rische brook flowed and fed the "fish ponds" which Frau Kate stocked with all kinds of fish, including trout. Again in the same year, 1536, a garden was planted with trees costing 400 florins. A little garden was bought for around 20 florins for the attendant Wolf, where he probably set up his bird's lure about which Luther teased him several times. A few further areas of land were bought in the "Eichenpfuhl".

Finally, two years before Luther's death, a hop garden was added to Frau Kate's agricultural empire for around 375 florins, which was situated on oak woodland, called "an der Specke", in the close-lying district of the village of Lopez, where the students often liked to take recreational walks and get up to any which nonsense. From this garden the doctor's wife grew the hops she needed for her cloister brewery.

Thus Frau Kate switched between and prevailed in the house and in her gardens and land plots as a "chef", "farmer and gardener", put in hard labour,

created fields, bought cattle, put animals out to pasture and so on. In particular, she and her husband devoted themselves to fruit cultivation: cherries, peaches, nuts, apple, pears were all harvested by the wife of the doctor. She also engaged in viticulture, and her factotum, Priest Lauterbach, had to procure the posts, ten schocks - 600, for her from Pirna; however wine was not made from the grapes, but were present as dessert at the table. She even tried figs and mulberries. And as regards vegetables, she planted not only the local varieties: greens, peas and beans, but also cucumbers, pumpkins and melons for which Link sent the seeds from Nuremberg. Luther wanted not only to astound his friends with gigantic Erfurt radishes, but also to have pulled them himself. Frau Kate was very unhappy if pests damaged the vegetables: "caterpillars in the cabbage and flies in the soup - a very nourishing and palatable meat!", she would quip ironically. It was even worse to her when students, sparrows and jackdaws invaded the gardens, and her spouse would have gladly issued an edict "against the menacing sparrows and crows, ravens and woodpeckers which ruined everything".

In one of the gardens were beehives where the museful doctor eavesdropped on the miraculous activity of the diligent little creatures. The practical housewife, however, saw their sweet yield as the necessary ingredients for mead, sweet wine and honey cake. In the big garden outside the city, Frau Kate had her little fishpond in which she bread pike and stone-loach, ruffe and carp, even trout. She served these on occasion "at the table boiled and ate with great desire and relish and expression of thanks" and had "greater

joy over the few fish than some nobleman who fished several big fishponds and lakes and caught a few hundred shocks of fish”.

However, these gardens were not the end of the acquisitions of land by the Luther family. First there was an unwelcome acquisition which Luther took on as a favour. It was the small house “Bruno”, a “shack” without a garden or a right to one, immediately next to the cloister, to the front on Kollegiengasse. This Luther’s last cloister brother, Brisger, had had built for himself. Then, however, when he moved he had left the priest Bruno Brauer to look after it and also often offered it to Luther. Luther, however, could not buy it because of other purchases and Brisger, who was disinherited by his Catholic-remaining mother and, it seems, in monetary distress was asking too high a price (440 florins). Finally, Luther bought it as a tied tenancy for his servant Wolf Sieberger or, if it should be the case, a dower for his wife, but still, however, had to pay the full price. The possession of this house was unwelcome because it had to be rented out again and brought more worries than profit; it cost 250 florins and needed repairs coming in at around 70 florins.

Frau Kate was much more inclined to agricultural possessions because these corresponded more to her productive undertakings. She wanted a large leasehold farm from which to procure her great domestic needs; she did not want to be dependent on the expensive suppliers and stubborn farmers, who sometimes sought artificial price rises. She therefore had already in 1536 asked her godfather, Hans von Taubenheim, chief treasury official, to make available to her a favourably situated property, Booss; but her request was not

successful. Three years later she tried to restart negotiations with Taubenheim. Her letter written in the German of the time reads:

“To begin, grace and peace through Jesus Christ, strong, earnest, dear godfather. You will well know, that I have put to Your Grace for about three years, that I would like to take on the Booss property with what belongs to it at the usual rate which would apply to anyone else for the use of my daily household, as my dear husband suggested to Doctor Brug at that time; it has remained unresolved that I might take it on, perhaps because you have not been able to obtain it from its holder, who wants to keep it for the rent he is getting on it. I am informed that the innkeeper of Brato[†] who currently holds it, would gladly hand it over. If this is the case, it is my friendly request to you, my dear godfather, that you would favour me with this property at the same rent as anyone else would pay. If there is another, I would gladly with all my heart take it on and pay over to you the daily rent on both places. I ask in all friendliness, if Your Grace would write back to me and advise me to the best in this case and point out anywhere herein that I have requested anything injurious and would not like to give rise to the suspicion that I should request any hereditary right on this property for myself or my children, a thought that would never enter my heart. I hope to God, that he will let my children live devoutly and honourably and inherit richly, but ask only, that it can be let to me for a year or two at a reasonably bearable rent, so that I can provide for my household and livestock, because here I

† or someone called Kruger von Brato or someone called Kruger from Brato

have to buy everything at extortionate prices and such a property, which is close by, would be very useful. I didn't want to worry my dear husband, who has much else to do, to write to you about this matter, it is also not necessary that Your Grace should pass this petition of mine on to anyone else or to My Most Gracious Lord, but, if you recognize my request as equitable, if you would arrange it with the Elector's official at Seyda, that this said property can be made available to me at a proper rent as would be paid by anyone else. May God commend. Wittenberg, Monday after Jubilate 1539.

Catherina Luther."

Again she had no success. Then, in the following year, a farm unexpectedly came the way of Frau Kate that even belonged to her by right of inheritance and which must have been much more valuable to her, since it was the last remains of the Bora ancestral estate of which the family had apparently otherwise been relieved.

It was the little property Zulsdorf which her brother Hans had taken over seven years ago but which, in spite of the dowry of the widow Apollonia von Seidewitz whom he had married, he was unable to hold on to or was too small to meet his needs. It had lain, admittedly, some way away from Wittenberg, perhaps two-days journey; but it attracted her, nevertheless - her supposed former native country region and her future widow's seat. Thus Frau Kate became the neighbour of Amsdorf, the bishop of Naumburg, whom she now offered her greetings as "gracious neighbour and godfather". Her spouse did everything "to install the new queen solemnly in her

empire" and addressed her henceforth as the "lady villager of Zulsdorf", "the gracious lady Zulsdorf", or "Your Gracious lady von Bora und Zulsdorf".

Here, in her special additional property, her "new kingdom", her ready, enterprising mind was free to decide and act as she felt fit, to plough and create afresh. For the little property was in a run-down condition; the land like "wasteland", the buildings ramshackle. She tore down, built, improved, worked like a slave and, as usual, claimed the help of the friends of her house: Herr von Ende delivered her oats and seed grain, von Einsiedel provided carts and wagons, Spalatin provided accommodation for her wagoners. She put a lot of money into it, the Elector gave her oak beams, other wood and 600 florins. But this, to Kate's distress, did not meet the repair and maintenance costs of this neglected property, so that in the first year Luther wrote: "This year she lost there all that was won."

The doctor's wife had all kinds of vexations and bad luck. The oak trunks, which the Elector had allocated her from the Altenburger forest and which Luther himself had selected, she had felled to be sawn into planks for a little barn. However, when she came to fetch the trees with her cart, they had been sold or embezzled by the official in charge. So one had to complain, petition and negotiate from anew until wood was again made available and Kate could load up her wagons. The lady landowner experienced further unpleasantness with the owners of abutting properties to Zulsdorf, the farmers of Kieritzsch, who threatened her rights to pasture. She spent months in 1541 putting her case to the official Heinrich von Einsiedel at Borna

against that of the Kieritzsch farmers. The judgement of the Elector fell favourably to the Lutherans; they “would have amicably created much more in the way of peace and good neighbourliness”.

All this nonetheless, did not spoil the enjoyment of the property for the doctor’s wife. Frau Kate stayed for weeks at a time on her new possession, particularly when her husband was away travelling, so that he had to write some Epistles to her there. In autumn (13th September) 1541, when she was perhaps gathering fruit there with some children, he writes: “For the attention of my dear wife Kate Luther von Bora.

Grace and peace! Dear Kate! I send Urban to you herewith, that you should not be scared, should you hear the cries of the Turks[†]. And I’m surprised that you have not written or sent any word to me here, you know that we aren’t without concern for you because Mainz, Heinz and a lot of the nobility in Meissen are very hostile towards us. Sell and send what you can and come home. It looks to me as if heaven wants to wreak vengeance and God will set about our sins possessed by his anger. May God commend, Amen.

Sunday after St Lambert 1541

M. Luther”

Even in Wittenberg Kate was often in her thoughts away on her favoured property, so that her husband addressed her as: “The rich woman of Zulsdorf, Frau Doctor Katharina Luther, physically resident in Wittenberg, spiritually wandering Zulsdorf, my beloved”. Also Luther sometimes stayed at the quiet little place to rest and sent letters and greetings from

† The Archbishop of Mainz and Duke Heinrich von Braunschweig

there "from my Kate and lord of Zulsdorf".

Probably because Zulsdorf was too far away and did not pay well not enough, in later years Frau Katharina turned her eyes towards the property Wachsdorf nearer to Wittenberg, one hour from it, situated beyond the Elbe on fertile ground, surrounded by timber forest - although a little marshy. It belonged to the deceased Dr Sebald Münsterer's children and was for sale so that the inheritance could be split between them. But it came to nothing; in particular the chancellor, Brück, prevented the acquisition.

Also the doctor was not in full agreement with this big expansion of this enterprising side of their life, although he well knew the house inscription: "There's nothing like home-made and home-grown" and acknowledged it and said, all that's good in marriage is the pure blessing of God which nobody will know "who simply fears God and buys everything at the market." He could not contend with the housekeeping; he thought that the worry and the hustle and bustle of the large household would take her away from living in a quiet, comfortable, spiritual way herself, from him and from their children. Also he complained from time to time about the many domestic servants that were necessary in the great house; there were already several maids by 1527, in 1534 a coachman and later even a pigherd. He said: "I have too many servants." More domestics than nowadays were usual in those times and possibly Frau Kate had a few more than usual being used to the numerous servants that existed in convent life.

But, nevertheless, it is understandable that the doctor's wife was anxious to extend her industry. It

was not only the enterprising spirit of this energetic woman that wanted to do new things and take control of ever more, it was also the concern for the needs of the large household itself, but in particular it was the striving to secure the economic future of the not small family in old age, or, more particularly, in the case of widowhood or orphanhood of her five children, that caused her to exchange the, in Luther's hands, endangered liquid cash into fixed property.

In the end the Lutheran family estate consisted of the big and the little house, the garden of the monastery, the "orchard" at the sow's market, the hop garden "an der Specke" and two land plots. That was quite a large amount of property which on top of the large and extensive amount of housekeeping was a lot of worry and cost a lot of time and work. One can hardly see how Frau Kate found the time to sort everything out and look after it all. And we understand, that sometimes it became too much for her and she could not keep up with the hot-tempered, impatient man quickly enough, so that he complained: "I was born under an unhappy star, perhaps Saturn; there's no end to what I need done and made for me; tailors, shoemakers, bookbinders, my wife all cause me the greatest of distraction." But at the same time he still had to excuse the much harassed woman when she fed one child at the breast and another in her womb: "It is hard to feed two guests, one in the house and the other at the door." And he also recognized her stresses and worries: "Wolf has it easier than my Kate or I."

The doctor's wife was also a very diligent woman. She created and accomplished in her realm as greatly and untiringly as the doctor in his.

She got up at 4 o'clock in the morning in summer and at 5 o'clock in winter, often earlier still, so that her husband and fellow citizens said: "Kate von Bora is the morning star of Wittenberg." And she worked until 9 o'clock in the evening, when the doctor insisted relentlessly that she go to bed to get some sleep. She had a strong, efficient body and, in contrast to her rather sickly husband, kept so well, that complaint of an illness almost never occurred. Only once is it said that one evening she became weak and had a fever, so that her husband became fearful and said: "Dear Kate, don't die on me." Another time, when Dr M Luther was talking with a few people at the table, she went to the bedroom and fell unconscious. But this was all passing indisposition. She had only one illness which was a result of a premature birth; otherwise she seems to have been healthy until late in her life.

However, Kate's virtue was not only her untiring industry, she also understood how to lead the house regime in the kitchen and the cellar, in the brewery and the bake house, in the garden and the field, in the nursery and the servants' room, as a mother and a wife, as a landlady and a mistress, as "preacher, brewer, gardener and all the rest she could do". With reference to her, the house mistress and head of the kitchen, wrote to Luther on the edge of his house book:

"The lady's eyes probably cook more than maid, farm-hand or coal and fire."

Truly Luther himself was not less hard-working, even with manual labour; particular in the early years: he gardened gladly and often he dug, sowed, and grafted; he also owned and used his own lathe. Frau Kate was pleased to see both, not only because it saved

someone else the work and the payment he would have required, but because it was also good for Luther's health. She viewed less favourably his inclination carried on from his bachelor days to mend his own clothes. The doctor prided himself too much at this skill and thought himself even better at it, like the German tailors who could not make good-fitting trousers. One day Frau Kate, to her not-so-little amazement and frustration, found a pair of her boy's trousers with a piece cut out of them. When she asked, she found that her dear husband had used the patch to mend his own trousers!

It was a hard-working house, the former site of meditation. Up in the study room, the great doctor, with industrious conscientiousness and the hereditary diligence of a farmer's son spent his time on the spiritual standing of the church; and below the industrious housewife who devoted herself in true German diligence and honesty to her house, to her husband and their children, their servants and their friends, and whose fame and pride it was to be able to do and to do everything.

Thus Frau Kate prevailed in her "economy".

Chapter 9

“The Wondrous Account of Doctor Martin and Kate”

Property, as the Lutheran married couple had to show in the end, could not be described as inconsiderable. From where and how had this property come together?

Neither Katharina nor Luther had brought anything into their marriage. They were completely unpropertied at the beginning of their taking up house together and for some time to come; only after his parents died (1530-31) did Luther inherit a small amount of money, 250 florins or so. In 1527 he was still totally without any possession, he was poor and a

beggar, he had neither house, field, land, money nor property to leave wife and child if he died. The cloister property was not yet property he could consider his own. "Poverty is my mistake and my heresy", he said still in 1530; and two years later he had but one cup in the treasure chest. In 1534 he had to decline to buy the little house Bruno for a few hundred guilders; he did not want to let his poverty show, though he thought it impossible for him to get together even half that amount.

Lacking a dowry, the married couple depended on the salary of the paterfamilias, and on what the materfamilias obtained from her boarders and the cultivation of the land.

The officials' salaries at that time were not pure fixed incomes, but at least in part made up of all kinds of honorary payments, mostly payments in kind, which were given to the employees on special occasions and for special services, such as travelling, certificates, reports, scripts among other things, from the princes and city authorities.

Since his marriage Luthers salary had been raised from 100 to 200 guilders. From 1532, under Elector Johann Friedrich, there was in addition each year 100 bushels of grain, 100 bushels of malt for two "brews" of beer, 60 (later 100) cords of wood and two cartloads of hay. Sometimes, however, the deliveries did not arrive because of "disinclination" of the officials. The Electoral cellar at Wittenberg was always open to the distinguished professors. Besides this, all kinds of victuals arrived from the court: wine, must, vinegar, fruit, fish, game, medicines, as well as clothes and cloth. In 1543 the Elector sent "two barrels, one with

old wine, the other with must from this year's harvest, Suptezer, so well almighty God has provided us this year; please accept them and enjoy them". The Danish king Christian III also sent Luther in his final years (1543) butter and herrings, changed to a gift of 50 florins when the "food for the kitchen was apt to be mishandled" in transit. This amount was also received by the other Wittenberg theologians Bugenhagen and Jonas: it was an honorarium made by the prince to the Saxon university for the education of his theologians.

When the Elector Johann, on the closure of the monastery, left the household effects to the value of 20 florins and the kitchen equipment, which was sold for around 50 florins, to Luther, it was restitution for the fact that Luther had not received victuals due to him as payment in kind or only in part. For the household effects he had "served the church and university with sermons, readings, writing etc according to God's will for long years free of charge; and for the kitchen utensils he had clothed and fed nuns and monks (thieves and rogues among them) and provided them with such needs as required, to which end I've also used to a great extent my own money and the 100 florins which your gracious Lord Duke Hans gave me for housekeeping".

Similarly the gifts of the city of Wittenberg were only considerations given in return. The town council also gave, not counting building materials such as brick and lime from its own kilns, an annual amount or special sign of appreciation; when Luther had preached every day at Easter time he received half a salmon and in 1529 in the absence of her husband the doctor's wife had received 10 thaler "otherwise one would not have

paid him an honorarium that year". Equally Luther had been the city preacher without salary for thirty years; he had also represented Bugenhagen for longer and shorter periods of time, once when he was away doing his part to bring about the Reformation for two years (1535-37). Also Luther had to provide servants from his own funds "for the service and benefit of their church", without the "common chest" contributing a thing. Further Luther provided a big space in front of the cloister court free of charge to the city. He also authorized that his whole property after his death and adjacent buildings also during his lifetime be placed under civil control, where before it was completely unregulated. Also, when the Elector proclaimed a Turk tax in 1542, Luther wanted, although he was free of property tax, to set an example and pay the tax.

In spite of such services in return which, directly or indirectly, resulted in "gifts", Luther did not provide them without due consideration and choice. He rejected not only the wedding present of the archbishop of Mainz; he also declined a gift from the Elector because he thought "that the lord might give too much that the purse might be rent asunder with too many demands upon it". "Please, if Your Electoral Grace would wait, until I myself complain and beg, that of such a kindness of Your Grace I should not be shy to ask for others who are much worthier of such gifts."

And further: "I would like to most humbly ask Your Electoral Grace not to believe those, who would describe me as if I were in need; I have alas more, especially from Your Electoral Grace, than my conscience can bear."

He also upbraided his friends that they gave him too many gifts.

If during the summer he was invited by a vicar or village mayor to a village as a guest, he went gladly with a table companion and gave a sermon. But he always brought food and drink with him for himself and his companions, which Frau Kate had prepared for him at home and had packed onto the wagon.

He would gladly give ten guilders if he had them to a famulus who was moving on; but he asked his wife not to give him less than five guilders, only anything over that that she could – thus he demanded of his wife that she divest herself of all but the last guilder, but, at the same time, asked her to buy a small present for the children because he himself could not find anything particular in Torgau.

For his lectures to the students, Luther took no money from the college. He also accepted no royalty for his writings: he declined 400 florins, which a printer offered him yearly for the publication of his work, and also the 1000 florins, which Melanchthon promised him for the translation of Aesop's fables. He turned down an interest in the silver mine in the Schneeberg mountain which the Elector offered him for his translation of the Bible in 1529; he did not want the secular world to pay for his spiritual work and like St Paul did not want to trade with the word of God.

With such a disposition and way of going about things, it is quite understandable that the practical Frau Kate sighed over her doctor and his contempt of money. When the equally little housekeeping adept Master Philipp Melanchthon dined once with Luther and spoke in conversation about life in the world of a

Master, who, given to parsimony, could make clear judgments on good and bad money, the doctor's wife opined: "If my husband had such sense, he would be rich." About which Melanchthon felt: "That could not be, because those who use their brains to work for the common good cannot devote themselves to private matters."

Against Luther's not particularly great income stood immense outgoings. First for the vast household, then for other purposes and acquisitions. The Luther's records in his housekeeping book give an interesting insight into these things. There there is a

Wondrous Account held jointly by Doctor Martin and Kate:

1535	
Anno ---- 1536	
two half-years.	
90 florins for grain	
90 florins for the hooves	
20 florins for linen	
30 florins for pigs	
28 florins Aunt Lene known as Borna(u)	
29 florins for oxen	
10 florins Valt. Mollerstet	paid
10 florins escort-bodyguard	"
8 thalers Master Philipp	"
40 florins for Gregor Tischer	"
26 florins University	"

Additionally 389 florins	"
besides other victuals.	

These “other victuals” were vegetables, meat, fish and poultry, fruit and groceries, grain and hops, bread and bread rolls, oil and suet, butter and honey, wine and beer.

Then it read: “Give money for hemp and flax, thread and wax, nails and hooks, all kinds of dishes and equipment in parlour, kitchen, cellar, garden; for wagons, harnesses etc.”

“Give money” was also required for 29 craftsmen, as well as the bookseller, doctor, chemist and preceptor, farmhands, maids, shepherds, girls and lads, brides and godparents, also beggars and - thieves.

Then there was money needed for christening presents, weddings and hosting guests, New Year presents, the annual fair and Christmas. Finally, came “Important: arrange marriage for son, daughter, friend; the shopkeeper for silk, velvet and exotic spices”.

Altogether there were 135 things for which Frau Kate had to stretch out her hand and say “money please”.

Under these expenditures the heaviest entries were for honorary gifts and good deeds; to Luther they belonged with the especially “important”. Besides the hosting of guests belong here the christening presents and weddings; Luther and Frau Kate stood countless times as godparents, because in Wittenberg it was usual for every child to have many godparents, and each gave a silver cup or a large coin. The weddings and wedding presents were a heavy burden. Thus Luther (1543) himself complains at the end: “Here the weddings every day exhaust me.” Luther’s beneficence knew no borders. He gave as his principle: “He who likes to give, also receives; that is something to which

this house holds, therefore, dear Kate, when we have no more money, the goblets must go." And that is how he went on. Like many other theologians and other good-natured people (including Melanchthon), he gave beyond need and his own capacity to the pleading and destitute and even often to the unworthy, to "make light of the bad rogues". He confessed later (1532) to his wife: "Think how many times we have given to scoundrels and unthankful pupils and it has all gone to waste." How far his good-heartedness went can be shown from just two examples among many. Because there was no money in the house, the doctor gave a poor student a silver honorary cup and when he saw Frau Kate's look of disapproval, he quickly crushed it and sent the young man with it to the goldsmith; what he could get for it, he should keep, he needed no silver goblet. And then when his wife was on her childbed, he went to the christening presents of his youngest child so that a needy person in difficulty did not go away empty-handed, and felt: "God is rich, he will give others."

Luther's whole, non-calculating behaviour can be explained partly by his nature being disinclined to any selfishness and his great trust in God, partly also, however, from his lack of ability to keep count, something which still stuck to the monk, estranged from the world, from his time in the cloister. However, in a "worldly" household this could naturally only lead to the incoming and outgoing not remaining in the right proportion to each other. In the second year of their marriage the young pair were in debt by more than one hundred guilders, so that Luther could no longer hand over eight guilders to his friend and

former cloister companion Brisger. "Where can I find it?" he asked. "With my heavy household and my carelessness it has become thus. Three goblets are pledged for 50 florins. On top of that neither Lucas (Cranach) nor Christian (Aurifaber, goldsmith) will honour me anymore, because they find that by doing so they are nowhere or I am half swindled. Now I have also given them the fourth cup, which they have lent the fat H." On top of it all, it did not enter his mind just where he was miscalculating. He complains: "How do I become so exhausted of funds? No, not only exhausted of funds, but also drawn into debt?" In 1543 he complained to the rather acquisitive Jonas who was expecting a rather "fat wedding present" from him for his second marriage: "You know my impecuniosity and my debts."

Once he started to reckon things up, the little things - he didn't get to the big things. He worked out that he needed 31 groschen 4 pfennigs per year for bread rolls, 4 pfennigs a day for drink and the rest - the amount was too great for him and he ended saying: "I don't want to work things out again, it gets me too cross. I would not have thought that one person would need so much."

In 1536 he made a calculation for the "most important items" and found he needed 389 florins there alone for two half-years, without victuals etc. He closed his calculations with a sigh: "Tell me, where am I going to get the money from? Doesn't it stink and make one feel guilty?"

"And when, in 1542, making his will, Luther put together his expenses against his income, he concluded: "I have a wondrous housekeeping account, I use more

than I receive; I need 500 guilders a year housekeeping for the kitchen, which is to say nothing for clothes, other finery and alms, while my annual salary only amounts to 200 guilders." He wrote in the housekeeping book amongst other serious and humorous rhymes a sigh of lament:

"Ich armer Mann! So halt ich Haus;
Wo ich mein Geld soll geben aus,
Bedürft ich's wohl an sieben Ort
Und fehlt mir allweg hier und dort"[†]

It is understandable, that sometimes the butchers and fishmongers of Wittenberg became a little blunt and gave his wife strong verbal warnings about the debts. Then the doctor's wife would find help herself, "borrowing 20 thalers from Philipp Melanchthon for housekeeping". And then maybe the Elector stepped in when he found out through chancellor Brück.

This "wondrous housekeeping" of Luther's was controlled in a very natural and appropriate way by the housewife. The "wondrous accounts kept by Doctor Martin and Kate", with its constant deficit, was brought into order by this strict accountant and frugal and industrious housekeeper. Frau Kate created a balance between debit and credit: she decreased outgoings and increased income, she paid off the debts and made a profit.

One of the first events in the new household is an amusing family scene which shows the good-natured wastefulness of the married man and the crafty thrift of the wife. The married couple had received a piece of pretty glassware with pewter decoration from

† I poor man! So I keep house; | Giving out my money, | I need it
in seven places, | But I fail all along here and there

Hausmann as a gift; this Frau Kate would have liked to keep, but Luther, however, wanted to give it to Doctor Agrikola, at that time still a dear friend of his, who also had a liking for it. Luther had noticed how her eye lingered on it and wanted to dispatch it quickly. He had already written the letter, but when he went to put it in with the present, he found the present had gone. Frau Kate had stolen off with it; the friends of the family Doctor Bugenhagen and Doctor Röhrer having helped and conspired with her in the deed. Thus Luther had to apologize in a postscript that he could not send the glass. Against his cunning Kate he was powerless; he thought, however, that he might lay his hands on the glass again. However, Kate held on to it like a vicious guard dog. She introduced a little more strict order into the society of the young students and into their housekeeping calculations, so that Master Veit Dietrich protested to her and his compatriot and successor in the house and at the table described Frau Kate as tight and stingy, "not letting anything go to waste and demanding necessary payment from the table companions". Also Chancellor Brück accused her in a hostile way of stinginess in the housekeeping. On the other hand from Luther and others we hear no complaints in this respect; and that the eagerness of both young and old to eat at her table was great and insatiable is the best proof of the exaggeration of those reproaches. But her husband knew well to recognize her creditable thrift and frugality in the housekeeping. He said: "A woman can make a man rich, but not a man a woman. For the saved pfennig is better than the acquired one. That is, frugality is the best source of income." And in his housekeeping book Luther wrote

the epigram:

Much belongs in a house.

If you want to work it all out,

Still more has to go out.

As an example take my house.

Thus he stopped doing the calculations and handed it over to his frugal and economically-minded housewife, and if he himself did not know where to take things from, he wrote to his Kate: "See where you are getting things from."

And Kate did see where she was getting things from. She was not so awkward as Luther at accepting admiration. While she relieved friend Link of a wedding cup, she kept hold of the 20 gold guilders Luther had rejected from the archbishop of Mainz behind his back. With better conscience she received the barrel of cheese from the Duchess Elisabeth von Braunschweig and also a cheese present from Mykonius, the city priest in Gotha. In emergencies Frau Kate also turned occasionally to the Electoral chamberlain, as during Luther's stay in Coburg for 12 bushels of rye. Kate generally took hold of his salary and worked things out, so that it was not the case as in Luther's bachelor household (1523): "We live from one day to another". She did not shy from warning the dilatory meal-takers of their duties or return obligations. It is said that later she allowed friends and meal-takers who came to the house to make purchases for which she forgot to make payment because they had been paid for by the services of her husband. In any case, she did also take the services of others in return for favours provided by her husband: if Luther wrote a preface to a book for his friend, the priest

Spalatin, then Spalatin had to receive her carters and workers in Altenburg which she sent to Zulsdorf; and Lauterbach, who, as meal-taker and transcriber of Luther's table-talk at the house, enjoyed all kinds of privileges and kindnesses, had to remunerate the doctor's wife with all kinds of services.

But the hardest, Frau Kate did nonetheless herself: she bred and fattened animals, milked and slaughtered, produced butter, cheese and honey, acquired eggs; she planted fruit trees and bushes, vegetables and herbs; she grew grain, baked bread and brewed the beer for the big household, such that their small little son, when Luther once asked him how much board he would have to pay, replied: "Oh father, food and drink are free; only apples and pears", he felt, "cost a lot of money." At that time Frau Kate could not grow fruit, which is why she finally pursued the purchase of Bildenhauer's orchard. She strove to acquire the hides of land and the hop garden, so that after the big purchases of 1536 the heavy budgetary expenses became lower and the posts of "money out" fewer and fewer. If Luther had pushed a sigh at the beginning of his marriage: "The man who punishes my carelessness will release me" - from my debts, so he wrote at the end of his so-called "will" (1542): "I have, with my income and the gifts I have received, created so much, bought so much and supported such a large and heavy household that I must recognize next to another factor as a special, wondrous blessing that I have been able to do so". The "other factor" besides the divine blessing was the housekeeping talent of his wife; she had released him from his debts, indeed the woman had made him "rich" as he would say. And so he says of

her in "his own hand" in the housekeeping book: "What she has now, she acquired herself in addition to me".

To acquire wealth or even to become rich was something Luther did not think of; he did not want it. "It is not necessary for me as a preacher to have more than enough, I also do not desire it", he explained. To him it seemed, "that the best life was a middling household, a life in peace and unity with a devout, willing, dutiful woman and to content oneself with little".

Not once did he think of acquiring wealth for his children. He once blessed one of his little children, that an aunt was carrying on her arm and said: "Go forth and be good. I will not leave you money, but I will leave you a rich God. He will, on my account, not neglect his duty to you. Just be good! Then God will help you." And when someone warned him that he might get together a little wealth at least for the sake of his family, he replied "That I will not do, otherwise they will not rely on God and their own hands, but on money." This probably much too theological, monastic point of view complemented the practical, sober sense of Katharina who was all out to acquire an inheritance for their five children still without means; she realized better than Luther that after his death the generosity of the princes and friends would probably decline with the ceasing of the great advantages the living Reformer provided for his country, his city and his friends. Thus she started to bring it about that there was a decent family property left for the children.

"The praise of a good woman"[†] - Luther had not

† Proverbs 31:10-31

only translated it in the Bible, but also stated it at the table and cited it often elsewhere and in relation to his Kate, so that it - expanded with addenda - stood at table conversations as a praise of his wife: "The man counts on her and entrusts her with everything. Then there will be no lack of food. She works and likes creating with her hands, she brings children to the house and is like a merchant ship which brings great quantities of produce and treasures from distant lands. She gets up early, feeds the servants and provides the maids with their lot. She sets sights on a field, buys it and lives on the fruit of her labours. She protects from harm and sees what good brings. Her jewellery is that she is clean and diligent."

Chapter 10

Domestic Suffering and Joy

It was a difficult household which Frau Kate had to lead if one thinks just in terms of the running of the house and grounds, the kitchen and cellar, the garden and the agricultural land. But even more admirable does her capability appear, when one considers all the people who as children and servants, as table and house companions made claims every day and every hour on her care for accommodation and clothes, food and drink, education and upbringing - completely apart from the guests and friends who came and went to and from the Black Cloister. Such an exceedingly large family caused not only a lot of trouble and work,

but also brought about quite diverse changes of joy and grief in the house. Thus Frau Kate experienced within a few decades illnesses and celebrations, weddings and deaths; one after the other, and often at the same time.

Just in the second year of her marriage the doctor's wife had to go through difficult times.

Frau Kate was frightened by a severe attack of illness suffered by her husband. It was of a severity which she had not seen him suffer before, where he had several spells of dizziness. Terrible fear and feeling of oppression preceded the attack. During the morning of Saturday 6th August, he sensed a strong whistling and singing in the left ear and cheek, like a hurricane and waves breaking, so awful and unbearable that he could ascribe it only to the workings of the devil. It passed quickly, thank God. But he feared that it might be the herald of an even heavier, more deadly attack, so at 8 o'clock he sent his servant, Wolf, to his father confessor Bugenhagen, that he might come quickly. Bugenhagen hurried alarmed to the cloister, but found the doctor his "usual self" standing with his wife. Why had he called for him? "Nothing too evil", answered Luther, went aside with him, confessed and looked forward to going to Communion the next day.

Meanwhile it had become almost time for the midday meal (i.e. 10 o'clock). And because Luther and Bugenhagen had been invited as guests by some aristocrats: Max von Wallefels, Hans von Löser among others, Bugenhagen suggested he come along, in the hope that the diversion would do him good; being among other people would be better than sitting alone at home. But Luther would not agree. So Bugenhagen put it to Frau Kate and she got Luther round to going

to the inn of Paul Schultheiss. There he ate and drank, but only very little, and chatted with the guests cheerfully enough. At twelve o'clock he got up and went into the little garden of Doctor Jonas behind the house and talked for two hours there with the provost. On leaving he invited Jonas and his wife to eat with him in the evening.

Luther arrived back in the cloister feeling quite unwell and lay down in bed to recover. When at 5 o'clock the Jonases arrived, he was still in bed and the doctor's wife asked the guests if they could hold on; if it persisted, it was due to his weakness.

After a while the doctor came down to hold Communion together with the others. He complained again about a great unpleasant singing and ringing in his left ear. It got worse sitting at the table, he had to get up and withdraw, accompanied by Jonas, back to his bedchamber; the doctor's wife followed, but had to give orders to the maids at the bottom of the stairs. Then when Luther was just stepping over the threshold of the bedchamber, he suddenly fainted: "Oh Doctor Jona", shouted the sick man, "I don't feel well; water or whatever you have, or I'm lost." He sank lifelessly. Jonas startled, quickly grabbed a pot of cold water and poured it over the head and back of the unconscious man. The latter came to again and began to pray.

Just then the doctor's wife got there; seeing that he was so frail and almost dead, she was seized with horror and shouted loudly to the maids. Then she sent word to the family physician, Dr Augustin Schurf, and to Bugenhagen, the family friend. In the meantime they took off the sick man's clothes and laid him on his back. He was very pale and terribly weak. Frau Kate

and Jonas rubbed and cooled him, comforted him and did what they could for him until the physician arrived.

Because the Doctor was so ice-cold and lifeless, Schurf ordered the ill man warm cloths, clothes and cushions, which were always to be found warming over the coal fire, to lay on his chest and feet. He also had his body rubbed, and comforted him and offered him hope; this time, God willing, it would not be necessary. Then at 6 o'clock Dr Pommer came again, and the friends urged the patient to pray with them that he might remain alive, to their relief and that of many others. To which he answered: "Indeed, for me personally, death would be a good thing; but my continuing in the flesh may be necessary for the sake of many. Dear God, Thy will be done."

"Because, however, he was losing consciousness again, he prayed again for mercy. Then he said to his wife: "My dearest Kate, I ask you, if God should want to take me unto Himself now, that you give yourself to His merciful will. You are my true wife, you must hold that to be the truth and have no doubt about it. Let the blind, ungodly world say what it will; direct yourself towards God's word and hold fast to it, then you will have true constant comfort against the devil and all his scandalmongers."

Then he asked for his little son: "Where is my dearest Hänsichen then?" When the child was brought, it smiled at its father. Then he spoke: "Oh, you good poor little child! Now I entrust my dearest Kate and you my poor little orphan to my beloved, true and loyal God. You have nothing, God who is a father to the orphans and judge of the widows will surely

nourish and supply you.”

He went on to talk further to his wife about the silver cups: “You know that except for those we have nothing.” The doctor’s wife was distressed and took fright at this and other talk of her husband. However, she did not let anyone see just how great her grief was seeing her dear husband lying there before her eyes in such a wretched state, but she mustered hope and spoke: “My dearest doctor! If it is God’s will, I want to know you are with our dear God rather than with me. But it is not only to do with me and my dear child, but with many devout Christian people who still need you. You do not need to be concerned, my dearest husband; I entrust you to his divine will, I hope and trust in God, that he will receive you mercifully.”

Soon the ill man felt an improvement in his condition, the weakness subsided and the doctor said that if the patient could only sweat, there should, by God’s mercy, be no more need of him this time.

Then the three men went, to allow him rest, down into the hall at Communion time and tried to still the women. The patient did break into a sweat. The physician looked again at the patient later and declared the danger past. Then the friends also went to see him, greeted the convalescent, wished him a “restful night” and went home.

In fact the noise in his ear continued on Sunday; but in the evening the doctor could get up and hold Communion with the friends. The physical suffering was soon lifted; but the “spiritual struggle”, as Luther put it, threw him about in “death and hell” for a whole week, so that he, shattered, quivered in all his limbs.

This fright was hardly over, when a new and much

longer trial approached; the plague, which at that time was spreading throughout Germany, arrived in Wittenberg. Everyone that could, fled the city; the university was moved to Jena; however, Luther stayed behind as a man, minister and teacher and his loyal wife with him. He was always of the belief that fear was the worst contagion; half of the people would die of fear of the plague rather than the plague itself. He thought it a "spectre of the devil" he had to oppose, when evil, which he did not hate for no good reason, rejoiced in frightening the people so and dispersing the university. He remained on account of the immense fear of the people. He went without reserve to the people who had caught plague - the wife of the mayor Thilo Dene died almost in his arms, and he took other suspected plague sufferers to his house. On the other hand, it seems that out of fear of the plague, Elsa von Kanitz, who was to have become the girls' teacher in Wittenberg living with Luther, did not set out; in her stead the young Magdalene von Machau then lived in the cloister house.

The epidemic broke out in remote corners, but soon arrived, however, in the Elstergate quarter where the plague churchyard lay; first the surrounding area were infected, and thus the house of the nearest neighbour, Dr Schurf, and, finally, also the Black Cloister. That now became a hospital, Luther bringing in the sick wife of Dr Schurf, Hanna. The young von Mochau caught the plague. The wife of the chaplain (Deakonus) Röhrer, one of Luther's highly-prized colleagues, died (on Nov 2) of it during her confinement together with the child. And Bugenhagen fled with his family from the parsonage to the Black Cloister. Two foster

daughters of Kate fell ill and also little Hans had so much trouble teething that he ate nothing for several weeks taking only fluid nourishment and only very slowly regaining his strength. In addition Luther himself was still tormented for a long time (from July to November) by his troubles, especially with cerebral hyperaemia and resulting melancholy, or as he said, attacked by Satan and much weakened. In the end, the illness reached the animals and five pigs fell to it. The farmers brought no supplies to the city, so that prices inflated and a bushel of flour cost 5 groschen, a goose 2 groschen.

Only Kate kept her head in this state of need, "courageous in belief and healthy in body", and yet she was getting close to giving birth. She looked after man and child, nieces and guests. Kate took in Deacon Röhrer with his little boy Paul who was still crying for his mother, and Luther also invited Jonas to visit as soon as things were a little better. The young von Mochau was confined to the common winter room (sitting room), Frau Hanna was in Katharina's (heated) sitting room, little Hans in the study room while the doctor and the doctor's wife lived in the big front hall. In the end, von Mochau's boil was cut open, and after the poison was allowed out she got better. Finally, in the middle of November, the illness gave way. The married couple were glad that the malevolence of the plague had only got as far as the sows and were otherwise personally let off at that. Little Hans was bright and high-spirited again, Hanna recovered and von Mochau escaped, with some effort, death; also Luther's mood and condition got better, notably when the university returned little by little and he could

begin his usual teaching again.

At this time (on 10th December) Kate, after painful weeks, delivered her little daughter Elisabeth, just as her spouse returned home from a lecture. Nevertheless, the preceding strain had left its marks, and the mother was completely drained. But at Christmas an engagement was to be celebrated in the Luther house; Hanna von Sala became engaged to Petrus Eisenberg, a good man from good family, plebanus in Halle; the wedding was on New Year's Day, and the housewife, hardly off her childbed, had to go through this happy leisureless exercise once more.

The new year (1528) was healthy and, on the whole, happy; Luther and Kate lived freshly revived again. On 15th May they saw another engagement, that between the widowed chaplain Dr Georg Röhrer and her foster daughter Magdalene von Mochau. The wedding was happily celebrated the day after Saint Lawrence's Day (11th August). But there came grief with the joy; on 3rd August little Elizabeth died and so of the dear little daughter, the arrival of whom the happy parents had informed friends in numerous letters, they now had to announce, deflated and heavy-hearted, her departure to the land of the eternal. "It was a great loss; since a part of the father and a part of the mother's body had died."

The holes torn by the deaths and marriages in the house society were soon well filled. In May of the following year little Lenchen appeared in the Black Cloister. In a quite miraculous way the Duchess Ursula von Münsterberg, the cousin of Duke George, had escaped from the Freiburg cloister with two other nuns of middle-class origin, one of whom had left wealth

behind to follow in the poverty of Christ. The three fled to Wittenberg, to the sanctuary of the Luther house; they didn't bring a penny with them, rather though the hatred of the duke and embarrassment for Luther's sovereign.

That was in autumn 1528. At Easter 1529 Frau Kate had another marriage to see through; that of the priest Bruno Brauer at Dobin, whose bride had also stayed a couple of days in the house beforehand of course. Amsdorf was invited to it and asked not to buckle up with his swords and daggers, but with gold and silver and other trappings, because he would not get away without bringing a present. In summer the married couple saw the engagement of the professor of medicine, Milich, with Susanna von Muschwitz, the sister of the wife of Dr Schurf.

During this time the head of the house was often absent making visitations throughout the region – something Luther together with the city administrator Herr Metsch, the noble Hans von Taubenheim and the lawyer Benedikt Pauli, had to carry out. In addition there was the journey to Marburg (in 1529) to talk to Zwingli about religious matters.

From Marburg also comes the first letter of the doctor to his wife which has been preserved. It reads:

“Grace and peace in Christ!

Dear Lord Kate!

I can tell you that our friendly conversations in Marburg have come to an end, and we are agreed in almost all things, except the opposition just want to keep the bread and wine in the Communion as mere unspiritual objects and acknowledge Christ by their existence. Today the landgrave considers whether we

can become united or, if we remain unagreed, whether we can still consider ourselves brothers and members of the same Christian community. On this the landgrave is working very hard. But we do not want anything of brothers and members; peace and goodness is what we truly want ...

Tell Herr Pommer, that the best argument of Zwingli is that: *corpus non potest esse sine loco, ergo Christi corpus non est in pane;*[†] of Oecolampadius: *sacramentum est Signum corporis of Christ.*[‡] I fancy God has blinded them and that they have nothing to propose.

I have a lot to do and the messenger is in a hurry. Say good night to everyone and pray for us. We are all so sound and healthy and live like princes. Give little Magdalena and little Hans a kiss for me.

Your willing servant

Martin Luther."

The next year (1530), during the time of the Augsburg Diet, was Luther's half-year stay (April to October) in Coburg. He left with the Elector Johann and Chancellor Brück and the Wittenberger theologians, Melancthon and Jonas and took his servant Veit Dietrich with him. Kate could not see her husband depart to the Diet without worrying because at his departure it was thought that Luther might go himself to Augsburg, that is, into the midst of his enemies. Soon she received the news that her husband, in order not to provoke his opponents, least of all the kaiser, to whom he was an outlaw, was staying in the

† Lat. = a body cannot be without location, therefore the body of Christ cannot be within the bread

‡ Lat. = the sacrament is a sign of the body of Christ

most southerly city of the Electorate, in the castle of Coburg, and somewhat in seclusion, as in Wartburg. He was brought there in the morning before daybreak together with his servant Veit Dietrich; he let his beard grow and a friend, Abbot Friedrich of Nuremberg, sent him a sword. So Frau Kate had to send all sorts of things, books and papers of all kinds of writing to the "Wasteland Gruboc" (Gruboc = Coburg backwards) and warned her spouse to watch out for the lady of the castle. The recluse was excellently catered for on his Sinai; it was the beginning of spring with flocks of jackdaws and cuckoos and nightingales singing cheerfully; Veit Dietrich made sure that Luther made no mistakes relating to the Diet and got him crossbow shooting at bats. He was also not short of visits, so that in the end he complained: "The pilgrimage here is becoming too great." But with the unusual leisure, Luther, nevertheless, suffered again from his old complaints: fluid in the leg, head pains and dizziness, which led to his having his satanic "Anfechtungen", so that he already sought out a little place for a grave for himself thinking he might well lie under the cross in the chapel. Not one word of this did the doctor relate to his worried better half; rather, he wrote to her teasingly: "In Augsburg they want to have all the monks and nuns back in the cloisters." But, nevertheless, she anticipated it, or found out circuitously from friends to whom he had been complaining of his suffering or from the messengers who came. That is why she sent him not only Lenchen's picture, but also his nephew Cyriac in person with his preceptor. Messengers with letters and orders went diligently to and fro; thus Frau Kate

ordered through Luther bitter oranges from Link in Nuremberg because there were none in Wittenberg, and she found out quickly and in detail how it was going on in Coburg and in Augsburg, where the kaiser was behaving harshly and was wary of Melanchthon. However, if on Sundays in Wittenberg one prayed for the absent theologians and for a happy outcome to the Augsburg Diet, Frau Luther was probably the most pious of all the church-goers; and at midday at the table with her table companions and little children and in the evening in her little room alone she had prayed for her dear husband so far away from home as he had asked her to in all his letters.

Some of the letters sent by Luther from Coburg to his wife have remained preserved, and one sent at Whitsun reads thus:

“Grace and peace in Christ.

Dear Kate! I have received, I believe, all your letters. This letter to you is the fourth letter I have written today, the day He left Johann. Lenchen’s picture was also in the box. I didn’t recognize H---- at first, so dark it seemed to me. I think, if you want to wean her, the best is bit by bit, that is, stop her once the first day, twice the next day until it all stops cleanly. George von Grumbach’s mother, Frau Argula, has found me. She has been here and eaten with me. Also Hans Reinicke von Mansfeld and George Römer; we should go somewhere else, it’s becoming a general pilgrimage here.

Tell Master Christannus that in all my life I have not seen more shameful glasses than those that came with his letter. I cannot see a thing with them. For that reason I have not done the letter to the father Kunzen.

Also I have not been into Coburg (that is, I do not wish to be found there); but if there is anything else I can do, I shall not neglect to do it. You should, however, let your letters be delivered to the castle administrator; he will certainly let me have them.

In Nuremberg and Augsburg they are starting to doubt whether anything will come out of the diet. The kaiser is still lingering in Innsbruck. The priests are planning something and go about somewhat mystically. Please God, that the devil ... them. Amen.

Let Herr Doctor Pommer read the letter to Doctor Wencels.

Hurrying. The messenger does not want to wait. Greetings, kisses, hugs and messages of friendship to everybody as appropriate.

Whit Sunday, early, 1530.

Martin Luther.

By hand to my heart's love housewife Katharin Luther at Wittenberg."

In Wittenberg at that time, the fortress construction was causing the inhabitants, in particular the Jonas family, a lot of vexation and upset; the cloister however still remained spared.

During Luther's absence Hieronymus Weller stayed at the cloister as preceptor to the little Hans. However, Hieronymus was a man afflicted by melancholy, and it was therefore greeted as being somewhat fortuitous when his brother, Peter, the preceptor to Luther's Polner nephews, moved into the house. Also the worthy Doctor Pommer (Bugenhagen) came now and again to the Black Cloister to provide Frau Kate with information, and Frau Jonas, the ever cheerful, happy wife of the provost away at Augsburg, who had

nonetheless lost her second son at that time soon after his birth. Luther's writings were received with great interest and read out with much joy in the circle of friends left behind. An amusing letter of Luther's of the "Diet of the jackdaws and crows", an allegory of the Augsburg Diet, caused much cheering among the table companions. There, the arrival and departure of the "malt Turks", their bowing and kowtowing and tournaments, their cheeky ways and war councils over corn and wheat is very amusingly described. And what a joy it was for the table companions when early golden apples arrived from Nuremberg with the Augsburg messengers. How the eyes of the little one and his playmates lit up with Luther's charming fairy-tale letters to his "dear little son Johannes" from the beautiful paradise garden. How joyful it made the mother and Aunt Lene and Jonas's Jost and Melanchthon's Lips who were also to be found in the garden, and how little Hans would have showered Aunt Lene with greetings and kisses. Little Hans was a well-behaved boy and praised by his preceptor for his diligence and zeal.

But also serious letters arrived from Coburg which interested Frau Kate and the theologians and were read in the Luther House together or circulated among the friends. Indeed, Luther did not write about his greatest worries and pains in them but about all types of concern for the followers and his book printer Schirlenz, Weiss and Rau. So two epistles came on the 14th and 15th August by messenger to his "heart-loved housewife".

"Grace and peace in Christ.

My dear Kate! This messenger ran hurriedly past so

I could not write anymore, but I did not want him to go without some word. Tell Johann Pommer and everyone else that I shall write more soon. We still have nothing from Augsburg, wait, however, all hours for news or script. From loose talk we understand that our opponents answer will be delivered in public, but do not wish to give our people a transcript to which they might reply. Don't know if it's true. Where they avoid the light in such a way our people will not dally. I've been really well since St Lawrence's Day and have had no rushing noises in my head; that has made me quite keen to write, while before the noise had plagued me to death.

Greetings to all and sundry, once more. God be with you. Amen. And pray safely in the knowledge: everything is well arranged, and God will help.

Sunday after St Lawrence, 1530."

The letter had scarcely been written, when further news arrived from Augsburg. Luther, therefore, kept the messenger with him overnight and added the following the next day:

"Grace and Peace in Christ.

My dear Kate! When I had closed the letter, these letters came to me from Augsburg, so I held the messenger back so that he could take them with him. You will probably be able to see how things stand at Augsburg relative to our position; almost as I wrote in the other letter. Let Peter Weilern or Herr Johann Pommer read them. May God help us further as he helped us at the start, Amen.

Now I cannot write any more because the messenger is sitting there so ready to go and scarcely wants to

wait. Bless our dear bag[†].

I have read your letter to the castellan's wife and she thanks you very much. I have commended Hans Polner to Peter Weller; see that he behaves himself. Greetings to Hans Luther and his schoolmaster; I want to write to him soon too. Greetings to Aunt Lene and all. We are eating ripe grapes here, since it has been very wet outside. God be with you all, Amen.

From the wilderness, Maria Ascension Day 1530.

Mart. Luther.

It is annoying me that the printers are taking so shamefully long with the manuscripts. I send them copy to get done as soon as possible – and they dally about with it. If I wanted them lying about, I would know to keep them here with me. I wrote to you that if the sermon has not been started, you should take it from Schirlenz and give it to Georgen Rau. I can easily believe that Schirlenz has scarcely got anywhere getting the large manuscript printed to paper. If he has not, see to it that he soon does and that the sermon is finished as soon as possible.”

The absence of the doctor drew out even longer; summer came and then autumn and the doctor was still not back. He was awaited with longing and it was full of longing that he wrote home. Thus he wrote around the day of the Birth of the Holy Virgin Mary (8th September):

“Grace and Peace in Christ.

My dear Kate! This messenger ran hurriedly past so I could not write much more. Hope, however, we shall be able to come home ourselves, since this messenger brings us letters from Augsburg saying that things

† Sack – their “diplomatic bag” or else the messenger’s name

relating to us have come to an end and one only waits that the emperor will close and decide. One expects that everything will be postponed until a future gathering; the Bishop of Mainz and Augsburg are holding fast and the count palatine, Trier and Cologne do not want to get involved with discord or war. The others just wanted to rage away and make the mistake that the kaiser will be swayed by their fervour. God's will will prevail; just that this Diet comes to an end! We have done and offered enough; the papists do not want to give a hair's breadth; someday someone should come and teach them to cede a point and give way a little.

I wonder why Hans Weiss has not taken on the psalm. I would not have thought him so aversive; it is a delightful manuscript. I'm sending it complete and entire herewith; Georgen Rau will well accept it. If Herr Johann Pommer and Cruciger like the manuscript, do have it printed. It's really nothing to celebrate the devil.

I wonder much who has said to you that I am ill; you see well the books before your eyes that I write. I've finished all the prophets, except for Ezekiel, which I'm now doing and the Sermon of the Sacrament, on top of which there's the writing of letters and whatever else. I cannot write any more now because of the hurry. Greetings to everyone and everything.

I have a large beautiful book of sugar for Hans Luther, that Cryriakus of Nuremberg has brought from the beautiful garden. God be with you and pray.

Regarding Polner, follow the advice of Pommer and Keller.

From the wilderness, 8th September 1530.

When the men finally returned home, together with

Veit Dietrich, Peter Weller and the young Cyriac who had also been allowed to visit the spectacle of the Diet in Augsburg and the famous city of Nuremberg with his teacher, there was much telling of tales at the oaken table in the sitting room and below in the court under the pear tree, while the studious four-year-old Hans delighted in his Nuremberg book of sugar.

The following years went more quietly. Admittedly, the doctor had more of his frightening dizzy spells, such that in autumn 1532 he took a vacation trip to godfather Hans Löser at Pretzsch castle, that the motion might free him of the noise in his head. There he went for a lot of walks; he also went hunting.

The grandparents also came over a few times to Wittenberg from Mansfeld, although it was no small trip; on such occasions the town council would send "Doktoris Martini father" an honorary drink. Then great joy held sway in the cloister and the doctor could make a comparison between his hard youth and the tenderness of the old people towards the grandchildren and come to the conclusion that grandparents are much more loving to their children's children than to their own children. When at the beginning of 1530 his brother Jakob von Mansfeld wrote that their father was "dangerously ill", Luther would have greatly liked to go; but he did not dare to because of the peasants and the nobility. But it would be a great joy to him, he wrote, if his father might move together with his mother to Wittenberg; something which "Kate also wished with tears in her eyes" in the hope that she might look after them the best she could. Additionally Cyriac was dispatched to his hometown to see whether this was possible. But the old people, understandably,

could not decide to do this. And not long after, while Luther was at Coburg castle, his father died. In summer of the next year the grandmother fell ill. This caused great grief in the family and Luther wrote a letter of comfort in the midst of all the children. In it he describes quite clearly the really childish ways of both his own children and of the other grandchildren who lived in the cloister house: "They are all praying for you, all your (grand-)children; some cry, some eat and say: Grandmother is very ill." On 30th June she also departed this life.

Of the grandchildren the grandparents had seen at most the three eldest: Hans, Elisabeth and Lenchen. It was only after her death that the fourth came into the world on the eve of Luther's birthday and was therefore given the name Martin. It was just at the time when the farmers, as one says, brought about an artificial price rise. A year and a quarter later (on 28th January 1533) Paul arrived and finally at the end of the following year the youngest, Margarete. Already in 1533 the seven-year-old first-born had been matriculated at the university together with his cousins Fabian and Andreas Kaufmann – although indeed only, like other professor's sons, in an honorary way.

In this year, 1533, Luther was again ill a whole month suffering with his head.

In February 1534 his sister came to Wittenberg to visit. Frau Kate served up tasty offerings for her sister-in-law and had pike delivered from the Electoral lakes.

Since Johann Friedrich had become Elector, Luther was quite often invited to go the new head of state whom he had already well befriended, alone or with other theologians, to Torgau, where he preached,

discussed and took part in serious and lighter conversation at the table. From there the doctor once also sent a cheerful letter to "his dear friendly lord, Frau Katharina von Bora, the Doctor's wife at Wittenberg":

"Grace and peace in Christ.

Dear Lord Kate! I know of nothing to write to you because Master Philipps together with the others are coming themselves. I must stay here longer, since the good prince so desires. You may be wondering, how long I will be staying here or how you might get me away. I expect, Master Francis will relieve me as I relieved him, however not too soon.

Yesterday I took some bad drink and I started to sing. I can't take too much drink, I'm a bit sorry about that and do like one, and have been thinking what good wine and beer I have at home, as well as a beautiful wife or (should I say) master. And you might well send me over the whole cellar full of my wine and a bottle of your beer as often as you can. But I shall not be returning before the new beer. God be with you and our young ones and servants, Amen.

Wednesday after Saint James the Greater, 1534.

Your darling

Mart. Luth^eR, Doctor"

In the year 1535 the papal nuncio, Cardinal Vergerius, came through Wittenberg; with resplendent entourage, twenty horses and a donkey he moved into the castle and had Luther invited there. The latter adorned himself nicely, hung a gold chain on himself and travelled with Bugenhagen, as the German pope, and Cardinal Pomeranus to the castle where he, towards the legates, played his true self as he had

determined to do. There he also told the high dignitary of the Church, in order to annoy him, about his wife, the honourable nun, and his five children, of whom the eldest would hopefully become a great Protestant theologian.

During this time there were various changes in the circle of Luther's house companions. Of course the younger meal-takers around the table changed from year to year as they left or arrived for school. But once a pupil also died – a certain Hans Zink from Nuremberg, at Easter 1531. He was a dear lad to everyone, particularly to the paterfamilias, in that he sang the descant in the evening music-making; but also because he was quiet and modest and particularly diligent in his studies, so that all suffered by his passing. Frau Kate spared nothing in diligence, worry and medicine to try in whatever way possible to save and support the dear child. But the illness was still stronger than the care and the boy was dearer to God than to the Luthers, who would have dearly liked to have kept him with them. Luther sent the news to the saddened distant parents in a letter with his condolences. There were later still further such deaths; at Easter 1544 when the measles had been rife in Wittenberg and Luther's children were also laid up with it, two pupils, a gifted boy from Luneburg and one from Strasbourg died suddenly. It was no light responsibility that Luther, and particularly Kate, had to bear. The youngest, little Margarethe, had after-pains in the form of a high fever for ten weeks and was still fighting for her health and life at Christmas.

The servant, Johannes Nischmann, who had served the family faithfully and “diligently, conducted himself

modestly according to the Gospel and done and suffered everything" left the Black Cloister at Candlemas 1534 with 5 florins wages and a good reference. Angry shouting went about with regard to another, that he had let himself be enticed by a girl of little repute.

However, pain and frustration was also caused the Luther married couple at this time by her relatives.

First Katharina's brothers. Hans had returned home from Prussia to take over the Zulusdorf property. He had married a widow, von Seidewitz, born Marshal, who already had one or more children. However, he could not live off the little property properly and could not hold his office at the Prussian court anymore - and his marriage could also not have been happy. Hence, Kate had to concern her husband with begging letters for him. Also her brother Clemens became a worry who, also in Prussia, lost his place at court as a result of participation in a fight. He was not to be seen in his previous position again, in spite of the pleading of the Protestant bishops of Samland and Pomesan to the duke to extend mercy and take him back, "so that Doctor Martin and his beloved wife would not bear any affliction with added insult and mockery and so that he could move out into the country now and again and in the end completely". The duke "wanted to dispatch him, nevertheless, with a nag and living expenses and a favourable reference to the Elector of Saxony".

Closer still to the married couple were the experiences they had with the children in the house, with their own, but even more with the others.

With the number of the children, so the experience

of the young married couple in their rearing and education also grew. At first, when one of the young little children would shout and cry, such that nobody could calm it, Kate as well as Luther was sad and afflicted for a whole hour. Later they thought as the father said: "When young children shout so, they probably grow; since in yelling the limbs and blood vessels stretch apart while otherwise they have no other means of exercise."

As the children grew bigger, there were of course all kinds of bad behaviour and transgressions, and as much among their own as among the orphans they took in. Swapping (later called "fuggering" after the Augsburg traders famous at that time) was, of course, usual among the Luther children. Even stealing (also called "shooting" after the "Schützen" i.e. the young itinerant scholars, like the tirones or skirmishers in the Roman army ranking). Now these were both considered highly unacceptable in the Luther house, though with food, in particular fruit, like cherries, apples, pears and nuts, the penalty was a little lighter. But if once something else was taken, things got a bit tougher. The severe father of the house could get quite angry in the case of disobedience; like other pedagogues he held obedience as the first virtue of children. This is why once he did not let his eldest come before his face for three days and Frau Kate had to use all her powers of persuasion and gain the help of friends to bring the angry father round.

In 1536, Luther had already sent the eldest out of the house to a good schoolmaster. The tumult in the cloister was getting to be too much. Later - in 1542 - he went on to the famous preceptor, Crodel, in Torgau.

Luther and Kate also experienced some vexation with the children that came to them, in particular with the nephews.

There is nothing really to fuss about when Luther said: "If I had not beaten my Enders (i.e. Andreas Kaufmann), said about his bad ways at the table and given him sugar and almonds instead, I would have made him worse." But of Martin (his brother's son), Luther said: "This one once so angered and mortified me that my bodily powers completely left me." When in 1542 Fabian von Bora went with Hans Luther to Torgau, he was tempted during the journey to take a knife from the little Paul Luther and then to lie to schoolmaster Crodel that his uncle had given it to him, although he had never done such a thing before. Luther got incredibly angry about it and dictated floggings for three consecutive days for the poor sinner.

Understandably the mother and housewife concealed a good deal of what went on among the children and servants in the big household from the stormy man, so that he did not flare up in an overflowing rage: "If they sin and behave like rascals, I do not get to know about it; no-one points it out to me, rather they keep it secret from me."

But it was not only for fear of the doctor's rage, but also out of consideration for the very busy and much vexed man that moved his wife to shield him from domestic strife wherever possible. Above all he should take pleasure in the children; since this joy in the children was to Luther the greatest and most agreeable and he was somewhat jealous of "Aunt Lene" for taking it away from him, because the children hung on her and were around her so much (although she

“forestalled” it to some extent). Luther did not want to have his children educated as harshly as he was. But for malice, rascality and damage they would be punished and it not overlooked. This was certainly also Frau Kate’s view and she concurred with her husband’s opinion – a religious man’s children had to be particularly well brought up, so that other people could be edified by it and a good example set; ill-behaved preachers’ children would give others “an itch and licence to sin”. The same also counted for the servants. And Luther said, “the devil keeps a sharp eye on me, so that he can make my teachings suspicious or even hang a stain on them.” Thus it caused some agitation when a girl misbehaved badly in Luther’s house.

After Aunt Lene’s departure (1537) the Luther married couple let a dangerous person into the house. She came to Luther calling herself Rosine von Truchses and made out that she was a poor nun of high birth. But when Luther questioned her more closely, she confessed that she was the daughter of a middle-class family from Münnerstadt in Franconia; her father had been decapitated in the farm turmoil; she had wandered around as an orphan child and pleaded by God’s will for forgiveness and mercy. The goodhearted man granted it her. The young spinster attested to being civil and decent, knew how to gain favour and worm trust from all in the house and in particular how to get on with the children. But it was a bad example of a woman that had worked her way into the house. In the cellar, kitchen and rooms, all sorts of thing were going missing; nobody knew who the thief was. Further she attracted all kinds of young people to her,

whom, one might suppose, she misled with her supposedly high parentage, and behaved lewdly. Finally, Frau Kate caught up with her and quietly removed her, while Luther was away, from the house. Luther was glad that he had not needed to know anything about it and that she was now gone. But the fraud moved around all the parsonages, made famous her acquaintance with the great doctor and his house, lied, deceived and stole yet more. She was always reappearing from anew, the last time after several years in Leipzig, so that Luther had to write to judge Göritz there, his godfather, to have an end put to her nonsense. Luther suffered endlessly from this disgrace that befell his house, and thought the papists had arranged to put this devil of a person round his neck. But Frau Kate must also have found it hard to bear and with it into the bargain the reproaches of her husband who was angry that this example of a woman had been allowed to get away with it and not drowned straightaway in the Elbe. He thought to have learned from the experience, but, nonetheless, before his end received yet "another Rosine" into the house who helped to spoil life in Wittenberg for him.

Another incident further importuned Frau Kate in 1538 badly. A day-labourer often worked for her, a diligent and well-behaved person, sober and gentle as a lamb, but tending to brawl when drunk. On one Sunday he ran around the whole city and boasted that he was Luther's servant and in the excitement he struck someone to death. Then he sobered up, took with tears his departure from Frau Luther and became a fugitive. The wife and three children he left behind in great misery fell naturally as a burden on Frau Kate.

Chapter 11

Weddings and Illness, Plague and Death

Special patience and love, care and wisdom was needed by the married couple in the treatment of the children entrusted to them.

The orphan foster daughter, Lenchen Kaufmann, "Aunt Lene the Younger", started a flirtation with Master Veit Dietrich who lived with his six students in the Black Cloister at a rather young age. Now, indeed, Luther was in agreement with the saying: "Get up early and marry young", so that he supported young marriageable people who suited each other and were in love with each other in obtaining their parent's consent and brought them together and protected them against

stubbornness and selfishness on the part of the fathers and mothers. Thus in 1523 he had already taken into his care a girl from Torgau to whom the Electoral barber had promised marriage and had given a ring as a pledge and also let keep hold of a medallion.

But he also knew that it could be too early and clumsy. This he felt towards Melanchthon's little daughter who had also fallen in love when she was scarcely a 14-year-old child with a gifted, but precipitous young poet, and, because her parents yielded without much thought, had experienced an unhappy marriage. Luther opined, "it isn't advisable, that young people marry rashly in the first rush of passion; they will pay for their forwardness, they will regret it soon afterwards and no enduring marriage will remain; the little dog remorse comes along who bites many." Luther was encouraged in this view by his wife, who was not quite eye-to-eye with Veit Dietrich. The young Lene did not want to hear the voice of reason, of course, and became somewhat refractory, so that at one point Luther felt, "one should take a good stick to her so that her ideas about taking a man pass".

Master Veit moved from the house and directed his rage, above all, at Frau Kate, whom he accused of imperiousness and avarice (1534).

But when little cousin Lene had become of age (1538) and came upon the right man, who courted her also with the prior knowledge of the foster parents, there they gave there glad approval. It was Master Ambrosius Berndt from Jüterbog, a sedate, "rather devout (upright) man, who loved Christ", a childless widower for half a year since his young wife had died in her first childbed together with the little boy,

professor of philosophy and lay judge in Wittenberg, a colleague and good friend and godparent to the Luther family. Much is reported to us about this engagement and wedding in the table conversations.

St Martin's Day 1538 Luther celebrated his birthday. For it Frau Kate had, as usual, created a spread and invited many friends: Jonas, Cruciger, Melanchthon, as well as relative strangers Camerarius and Bucer who were in Wittenberg at the time. Also Lenchen Kaufmann and her suitor were to be there. Before the food - it was a supper - Master Ambrosius now in front of Luther "publicly sued for the doctor's 'Aunt' Magdalene, that he would give her to be his married wife, as he had promised him before". At this Doctor Martinus took the young woman by the hand and said: "My dear judge and godfather! I have here the young woman, as God blessed and bestowed her to me; I place her in His hands. May God give His blessing and approval, that they live holy and well together."

The guests all gave their good wishes and everyone sat down to the meal and were happy and in good spirits. Luther spoke of courtship and the freedoms of a new bridegroom, of war service and all other obligations and burdens.

When the bridal pair so lustily and secretly spoke with each other and forgot the society around them, the doctor smiled and said: "It surprises me that a bridegroom has so much to talk about with the bride. Can they not get tired? But one must not vex them, since they have licence above all powers and customs."

Next the couple turned their attention to the arrangements for the wedding and the invitations. There the doctor said: "Don't worry, that's something

you do not need to concern yourself with. We need to be cautious about such coincidental things that do not belong to the main substance of matrimony.”

Luther wrote to the Prince von Anhalt about the game-roast for the feast. “I ask in all modesty, knowing Your Princely Grace must deal with so many other things, if you could let me have a shoat or pig’s head; but I have to keep an orphan, my sister’s daughter, until Wednesday.” The game-roast, of course, took place with Frau Kate preparing it, also the town council sent a Stübchen of Franconian wine and four quarts of Jüterbog wine (i.e. from the bridegroom’s native area) to the wedding banquet.

Thus the foster parents sorted things out for their niece’s wedding and saw to it that everything went happily along and that the relatives from Mansfeld and Eisleben were invited. Luther’s favourite brother Jakob came over and even two of his father’s brothers. The schoolmaster together with the singers were booked, and while Frau Kate baked, roasted and cooked, the doctor checked out the wines in the cellar. He felt: “One should give a good drink to the guests to make them happy, for as the saying goes: bread makes man’s heart strong, but wine makes him happy.” A wedding should generally carry on in Christian cheerfulness, according to the principle: “In the wedding one should prettify the bride, one should eat, drink, and dance nicely together and have no conscience about it, because faith and love cannot be outdanced or outsat, so you can but remain virtuous and moderate.” For the wedding feast itself Luther provided lighthearted entertainment and all kinds of riddles. He asked the “black Englishman” (probably Robert Barnes who had

been studying in Wittenebrg since 1533 and was invited to the wedding): "How would you store wine in a cellar without bottling it?" The Englishman did not know, so Luther said: "One brings in the must, wine is soon made from that; it is natural magic and a great feat." He asked further, what the broadest waters of the country were? Answer: "The snow, rain and dew".

Luther, however, confided to the newly married couple the maxim handed down through generations to the bride: "Dear daughter, keep yourself to your husband so that he is happy when on his way home he sees the top of the house." And to the bridegroom: "A man should live with his wife so that she is not glad to see him move away and is happy when he arrives home".

Hard years preceded and followed these happy days.

In 1535 the plague had already called again in Wittenberg. Although the Elector strongly urged Luther to get away from the danger, he did not feel there was anything in it, he did not believe it and mocked about it in a letter to the Elector: his "certain weathercock", the provincial governor Hans Metzsch, would have scented the pestilence with his nose. Luther felt, the students liked to hear the shout of the plague; they got boils from their schoolbags, colic from their books, scab from their pens, and aching limbs from their paper; the ink became a source of trouble for many, or they got homesick reading their mothers' letters. There the parents and authorities would have to prescribe a strong medication against such countrywide death. The devil seemed to keep Shrove Tuesday for such frights or to celebrate Kermesse in

hell with such larvae. The thing soon passed.

However, in 1537 it was more serious. At Candlemas of this year Luther had to go to the convent at Smalcald. He went in his own wagon with Kate's horses. Kate saw her husband depart not without some trepidation; he was not quite well, the weather was inhospitable, the roads bad; strange beds and different meals and the different lifestyle were not good for him as she already knew from earlier trips. He felt nowhere so well as at home with his usual food and drink and work. Luther then also caught a cold at Smalcald in his uncomfortable accommodation in the damp "Hessian beds" and ruined his stomach on the strong, heavy court bread. His trouble with gallstones came on with unprecedented intensity; it lasted more than fourteen days and caused the most tormenting pain, so that he wished himself dead and those around him foresaw his death. The prince's personal physicians did not know how to help him and tortured him with drastic cures. Luther would rather die at home, have his wife take care of him until he was either dead or well again, and so on 26th February he left Smalcald in an Electoral carriage to go back to Wittenberg.

Here, at the beginning, Jonas had received several letters from Luther at Smalcald. In the first, he announced that he had passed a stone immediately after his arrival, otherwise he wrote buoyantly, and five days later that St Valentine's Day had brought about his convalescence. Four letters to Kate, however, did not reach her: probably they had been held back precautionary-wise by fearing friends. But she had nonetheless heard rumours and did not rest until Jonas with Luther's niece brought the sick man to her. Frau

Kate only later received, when he was better again, the following letter from her husband in Gotha:

“Grace and peace in Christ!

In the meantime, dear Kate, you might want to rent other horses for your needs, since my gracious lord will look after your horses and send them home with Master Philipp. Yesterday I left Smalcald travelling in my gracious lord’s own carriage. The trouble is I have not been well for over three days here, and up to this night from the first Sunday have not passed a single drop of water, nor rested properly nor slept, nor have I been able to keep any food or drink down. In all, I have been dead, and have commended you with the little children to God and my good lord as if I might never see you again; I felt sorry for your sake but had resigned myself to the grave. Now people have prayed so hard to God for me, such that many have shed tears, and God has helped me tonight and I feel as if I have been born anew.

Therefore thank God, and let the dear children thank the true Father with Aunt Lenen, since they would have certainly lost this father. The devout prince has sent people out fetching, running and on horseback and tries his best with all resources, if it might be of help to me; but it does not seem to want to be. Your art has not helped with the dung[†] they gave me. God has done a miracle for me tonight and does it still with the help of good devout people.

I write to you about it because I believe that my most gracious master has ordered the provincial governor to send you in my direction, that if I might die on the way

† Horse dung (sometimes with garlic) was used as a remedy at the time

you might be able to talk to me or see me beforehand. That is now not necessary and you might probably well remain at home because God has so richly helped me that I expect to arrive happily with you. Today we are in Gotha. I have written to you four times besides this, and I wonder that nothing has arrived with you.

Tuesday after Reminiscere. 1537.

Martinus Luther."

How the poor woman must have had a fright over this unhappy news! And how she would have worried if she had known that on the following day the deadly attack recurred, until he passed six stones. Kate travelled towards her husband to Altenburg where their friend Spalatin lived as a priest. Here she prepared to accommodate him while Jonas and Aunt Lenchen came with the sick man from Weimar. In the hospitable Altenburg parsonage Kate nursed the exhausted man for some days and then travelled with him, in the middle of March, slowly past the cloister at Nimbschen, with a stay in Grimma, home to Wittenberg, where they arrived on 14th March.

Only slowly did Luther recover; as if broken to the bone, he could hardly stay on his legs, he was so exhausted. He learned to eat again and drink; with rest and Kate's careful nursing he gradually regained his strength. Eight days on he could seize the rested pen again and write his letter of thanks to Spalatin. Frau Kate, who in the turmoil had not brought Spalatin's daughters anything, wanted to have a few books bound and send them as a memento. Over Easter Luther preached again diligently. But whenever he might perhaps have gone again to the convent in the Hessian town, Kate held her husband back and he

himself warned friends about the "Hessian beds".

In this year also Aunt Lene went home and with her a good spirit in the house, a support for the housewife, a beloved friend and protector of the children. The replacement, for which Frau Kate searched and found in "Aunt Lene the younger", her lighthearted niece, even when later coming in from her marital home, was a very doubtful one.

In this year, 1537, Frau Kate had yet another case of heavy nursing in her house - namely the Electress Elisabeth von Brandenburg.

The poor woman had been sickly since 1534; she got better, then worse again. At that time she was in Wittenberg. Luther, however, also used to have to travel to her to Lichtenberg Castle. In the year of the death of her husband, 1537, however, when her condition had developed into a mental disorder, she stayed to be cared for in Luther's house, probably at the request of the Elector of Saxony. After a long feverish dream she awoke in September, but was so stupid and childish that she understood little. Frau Kate sat by her on the bed and quietened her. Her daughter, Princess Margarete von Anhalt, then wanted to come with entourage to visit her ill mother and, of course, if possible to stay at Luther's house. But she could not be accommodated; the big house was full enough; also in the city, so closely built as a fortress and now so visited by students, every house was full to bursting. Thus one had to say the visit was not possible, but make assurances that everything would be done to accelerate the recovery of the Electress. The other daughter of the Electress, Duchess Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Calenberg, who once betrayed her mother to her father

for taking Protestant Communion and an unfavourable statement by Luther about Duke George to the latter, often came to visit her sick mother in Luther's House. This contact brought about that she herself became Protestant and after the death of her husband introduced the Reformation into Braunschweig as regent of the Land. She became good friends with Luther and Kate and once sent her a consignment of cheese and received in return mulberry and fig saplings.

But the state of the poor "marchioness" was not good and Kate still had to nurse her for months. Irritating incidents of all kinds occurred, in particular those resulting from the invasiveness of unbidden people; thus a shabby Bohemian pressed into the house, into the room and to the side of the princess, and sought to gain favour for herself and disfavour for others. For a while it went well; as the sick woman received money disbursed to her, she lavished it out on everyone without distinction; she also wanted to give the Luther couple two Sturzbechers[†] with 100 golden guilders in them. She was always making travel plans and wrote secretly everywhere and wanted to get out of Wittenberg.

Luther and Kate would have gladly said goodbye to the restive patient over whom they did not have complete control and who was so demanding, but had to wait until the court was set up again in Lichtenberg.

The elderly Electress became well again and outlived Luther.

After 1538 had been a similarly "perilous hard year" with the various illnesses, in late autumn 1539 the

† Drinking cup with no foot (so must be stored upside down)

plague again haunted the land. The people became very fearful, brother forsook brother, sons forsook their parents; if a house became infected, it was torn down. No farmer wanted to deliver wood, eggs, butter, cheese or grain into the infested city. The Wittenbergers had to suffer two plagues in one: pestilence and hunger and frost. In the end the farmers unloaded their products outside the gate and the town-dwellers had to pick them up.

Luther sure enough took “the little plague” lightly as only an epidemic. He got angry and mocked at the fear of the plague: “I hold, the devil has possessed the people with the true pestilence that they frighten so disgracefully.” He defied the illness to scorn death and the devil. When he once visited a person with the plague, he touched without shying his boils. And he was so carefree that when he came home, even with unwashed hands, he would stroke his little daughter Margarete thoughtlessly around the mouth - nothing, admittedly, happened as a result. When the wife of the cosmographer Dr Sebald Münster died of the disease and he himself was suffering with seven boils, Luther, to the alarm of the Wittenbergers, took the four Sebald children with him from the infested house. And great God! What a cry arose through the whole town against Luther! He wanted to provide the merciless and timorous with an example.

The one who turned least against this strong-willed bravery of Luther’s was his wife; and it was on her that fell the worry and care for these children that were taken in and she was, like ten years ago, nearing the end of a pregnancy. And she had to pay for it. She had an unfavourable delivery and for a long time hung

between life and death. She fell from one state of unconsciousness into another. In vain all restorative remedies were tried to lift the weakness. She lay there like a breathing corpse, her face distorted, her figure going to ruin. Doubtless she was nursed by the most faithful hands and every breath, every movement observed.

Luther would not leave his beloved wife and called off his trip to the Smalcald convention. He prayed Kate back to life again, as he would for his friend Melanchthon in Weimar. Then miraculously Kate's strong nature won through. She recovered, began to eat and to drink with appetite, got up again and hobbled about, holding onto tables and benches as she went. And gradually she improved until in April she was completely recovered.

The friends saw in her, the miraculously recovered wife of the Reformer, the woman of the book of Revelation (Chapter 12): a symbol of the sick church recovering by a miracle of God.

In summer 1540 Luther travelled with Melanchthon to Eisenach to be closer to the Diet in Hagenau, like ten years ago to Coburg for the Augsburg Diet. Melanchthon was to go to Hagenau, but he became seriously ill on the way in Weimar; Luther prayed heartily to God for him. In Eisenach Luther lived in the parsonage of Menius who also travelled to Hagenau. His little wife looked after the Wittenberg doctor in an amiable and caring way, so that Frau Kate did not have to be concerned. And the child-friendly Luther compensated for the separation from his little ones by teaching the pastor's boy Timotheus a game with nuts. From here Luther wrote letters home assiduously,

although did not receive one back from Frau Kate buried in her work. The children and house friends had to write instead, to whom then a "little Maria" also belonged.

The first three letters have been lost, the fourth one, however, reads:

"For the attention of the love of my heart Kate, Doctor Kathrin and woman of the new sow's market.

Grace and peace, dear young Kate, gracious lady of Zulsdorf and however else Your Graciousness is called! I humbly request You, Your Grace, to know, that things are going well for me here: "I eat like a Bohemian and drink like a German" - thanks to God, Amen. The reason is: Master Philipps having been deathly ill has surely risen from the dead like Lazarus. God the dear Father hears our prayers, we see it and experience it, but we still do not believe it; let nobody say Amen to our shameful unbelief.

I have written to the pastor Doctor Pommer telling him that the Count of Schwarzburg is looking for a pastor for Greussen. You might, as a clever woman and doctor's wife, help Master Georg Röhrer and Master Ambrosio Berndt decide which one of the three I have informed Pommer about should be considered. It is not a bad parish; however, you are clever and can make it better.

I have received the children's letters, also from the baccalaureus student (Hans) - who is no child, little Maria also not - but from Your Graciousness I have received nothing. I'm now writing my fourth to you; if you might, God willing, answer with Your gracious hand.

I send this by Master Paul with the silver apple

which your gracious hand gave me. You can divide it, as I said before, between the children and ask, how many cherries and apples they would take in preference; count the parts out in front of them and keep the stalk yourself.

Give my heartiest best wishes to those staying with us, especially Doctor Severo or Schiefer, that they might help in anything to do with church, school, the house or wherever the need may be. Also to Master Georg Major and Master Ambrosio that they might cheer and comfort you at home. God willing, we want to ready ourselves to move from Weimar to Eisenach on Sunday, and Philipps with us. May God commend. Tell Lycaoni nostro[†] (the servant Wolfgang) not to forget the mulberries; he might sleep away and forget them, that he must not do – he will see to it – and he should now also rack off the wine. Be happy everyone and pray. Amen.

Weimar, day of the Visitation (2nd July) 1540.

Martinus Luther,
Your sweetheart.”

With the following letter to “Frau Katherin Luderin of Wittenberg, my dear wife” Luther sends “dear maiden Kate” 42 thalers pay and 40 florins by the carter Wolf. These “you may need, until we come, and get change at Taubenheim’s house in Torgau; since at court we do not have a single pfennig in small change. Master Philipps has come to life again from the grave, still looks ill but has some colour, jokes and laughs again with us, eats and drinks like before at the table. God be praised! And you also thank the dear Father in heaven.... What happens, however (at Hagenau), we do

† Lat. = Our Lycaon

not know, only that we must watch out for their “do this, do that or we will eat you”. For they have something base in mind. Also tell Doctor Schiefer, that there’s nothing more to be expected of Ferdinando; he’s coming to nothing there. But I have worries, as I have often predicted, the Pope would like to lead the Turks over us... Since the Pope is already singing: *flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.*[†] If he cannot drive the kaiser over us, he will try with the Turks; he will not yield to Christ. Christ will then strike Turk, Pope and devil and prove that he is the right man sitting at the right-hand side of His Father. Amen! – Amsdorf is still here with us. May God commend. Amen.

Saturday after Saint Kilian’s Day (10th July).

Mart. Luther.”

Six days later another letter arrived.

“Grace and peace. My dear maiden and Frau Kate! Your Grace should know that we are, thank God, bright and healthy; “eat like Bohemians” – but not overly – “drink like Germans” – but not too much – and are happy. For our gracious lord from Magdeburg, Bishop Amsdorf, is our table companion. We do not have any more news since Doctor Kaspar Mekum and Menius set out on foot from Hagenau to Strasbourg, to honour and serve Hans von Jenen. Master Philipps is quite well again, thank God. Tell dear Doctor More, that his King Ferdinand wants to start a hue and cry as if he would like to ask the Turks to be godfathers over the Protestant princes; I hope that it is not true, it would be too crass. Also write to me to tell me if you

† Lat. = If I cannot bend the Higher Powers, I will move the Infernal Regions (lit. = I will stir up Acheron (river of woe) – one of the rivers of Hades)

have received everything that I sent you, recently 90 florins with Wolf Fuhrmann etc. May God commend. Amen. And let the children pray. It is so hot and dry here, it is unspeakable and intolerable day and night. Come, dear Day of Judgement, Amen.

Friday after St Margaret's Day, 1540. The bishop of Magdeburg sends friendly greetings.

Your dearest

Martin Luther."

And, finally, when making the journey home, Luther sends Kate news of his return and orders himself a welcome drink.

"For the attention of the rich woman of Zulsdorf, Frau Doctor Katherin Luther, bodily resident at Wittenberg and spiritually wandering in Zulsdorf, my sweetheart. - To be opened and read in the absence of Doctor Pomeran, the pastor.

...(Your Grace) ... will want to see that we find a good drink when we reach you. If God wills, tomorrow, Tuesday we want to be off towards Wittenberg. The Diet at Hagenow is a mess, it is lost trouble and work and expense in vain. However, if we achieved nothing else, we got Master Philippus back from hell and will happily be bringing him home, back out of the grave, God willing and with His grace., Amen.

Out here the devil himself is possessed of new, evil demons, burning and doing damage that is terrifying. In the Thuringian forest of my gracious lord more than a thousand acres of timber have been burned and are still burning. Today comes further news that the wood near Werda has started to go up and many other places; there's no means of extinguishing them. This

will make wood expensive. Pray and have people pray against the wretched Satan who seeks not only our bodies and souls, but also with all might our property and honour. Christ, our Lord, could well come down from Heaven and blow up a little fire for the devil and his helpers that he cannot extinguish, Amen.

I have not been certain whether you would find these letters at Wittenberg or Zulusdorf; otherwise I would have written about more things. May God commend, Amen. Greetings to our children, boarders and all. Monday after St James' Day (26th July) 1540.

Your dearest

M. Luther, Dr"

At this time began a new worry for Kate. Her brother Hans was not having any luck at all with Zulusdorf. Thus she bought Zulusdorf from him. But she also had to pull on her husband's multiple relations with the courts of the princes to get him back into court service again, be it Prussia or Saxony. Luther was able to do this with good conscience, since Hans von Bora was not one of the loudmouthed "court louts" as had arisen greatly at this time. Perhaps even it was because of his meekness that he had misfortune. An opponent of Luther's ousted him from his provost's office in the New Cloister in Leipzig until he finally took on a part of the cloister property in Crimmitschau.

In the autumn of this year (1540) the city of Wittenberg was struck by a fever which seldom ended in death but was caught by more or less all the inhabitants. Bugenhagen was so ill that Luther had to look after his parish for him. In his own house there were ten critically ill and he himself felt "old and weak". Kate turned again to her caring and nursing.

At Easter the following year (1541), the area around Wellenberg was terrorized by arson and all kinds of poisoning; the food, wine and milk were mixed with poison and plaster. All kinds of people were arrested and tortured; also in Wittenberg two people were roasted – the reason and the originators were never discovered. Luther did not feel at all well this year, such that the Elector at one time even sent two doctors to see him and at Epiphany the next year (1542) he made his will.

However, the married couple experienced a further joy at this time: the granddaughter of Luther's brother-in-law, Hanna Strauss, who was brought up by the family, became engaged to Master Heinrich von Kölleda in December 1541, after the foster parents had rejected the engagement to Dr Jakob Schenck ("the little Jakob" as Luther later referred to him as his opponent). For the engagement, a wild boar arrived directly from the purveyors of the brother princes, when Luther had just asked if it were possible and appropriate for him to "negotiate for some wild-game, because I have to help to honour a young lady in the house, my friend (a relative), in the holy state of matrimony". On 30th January 1542 the marriage took place, the last at Luther's house. Amsdorf and others sent wedding presents, and further game from Anhalt will also not have failed.

But at this same time (1541) after only four years of marriage, Dr Ambrosio Berndt, the husband of Magdalene Kaufmann, Aunt Lene the younger, died. The young widow then, much to the displeasure of the Lutheran family, started with a very young medic, Ernst Reichet (Reuchlin), who still had some studying

to do. She married him after Luther's death, so she lived a life in distress until her husband acquired an honourable position.

Also Lene's brother, Cyriac, caused Luther great annoyance, in that following the example of Melanchthon's and Dr Beier's sons he entered an engagement secretly which the Wittenberger lawyers considered valid.

On 26th August 1542, the oldest son, Hans Luther, now sixteen and already a baccalaureate for three years, was sent to Torgau to Markus Crodel who kept an excellent boys' school there, highly respected by Luther, so that he could be trained in grammar and music, also in morals and etiquette. The small city swarming with students and Luther's overfull house was not the place for this; Luther knew how to educate theologians, but was no grammarian or musician. He also wanted to send Crodel, if he were still alive, the two younger sons later on. For the company and stimulation, Kate's brother's son, Florian von Bora, was also sent along. Hans was a good lad, while Florian already needed a harder hand. The mother found the separation painful, but the eldest sister Lenchen, who hung with particular tenderness on him, felt it even more. But Hans liked it a lot at the preceptor's boarding house, he praised him and his wife; he even felt that he found it better there than at home.

Hardly, however, had the brother departed, when Lenchen became gravely ill.

She was a wholly dear, devout girl who had never angered her parents in her life. On her deathbed she asked dolefully with all her heart to see her brother Hans again; she felt she would then become well again.

Kate got her wagon hitched and the coachman Wolf drove the Luther carriage to Torgau. He brought a letter from the father to the preceptor which read:

“Grace and peace, my dear Markus Krodel. I ask you, not to tell my son Hans what I write to you. My little daughter Magdalena is near the end and will soon return home to her true father in heaven, if God does not favour otherwise. But she longs so much to see her brother that I have had to send the carriage; they love one other so very very much – maybe his arrival could give her new strength. I do what I can, that later my conscience is not weighed down. So say to him – but without telling him why – that he is to come home quickly with this carriage, to return soon when Lenchen passes away to the Lord or is again well. God be with you. You must tell him, there is a secret task waiting for him. Otherwise all is well. 6th September 1542.”

Hans arrived back home and in time. The poor girl had to suffer another fourteen days and then take on death; apparently this reunion with her brother caused her spirit to flame up again. These were truly sad weeks in the Luther house. Indeed, the devout girl would have gladly died; to have remained with her earthly father or to have returned home to the one in heaven. “Yes, dear father”, she said, “as God wills!” But the departure of the dear girl came very hard to the parents, particularly Luther, who loved her so very much, because fathers incline more to their daughters, while Frau Kate felt a greater affection towards her Hans.

In the night before Lenchen’s death, the mother had a marvellous dream; two smart, young men appeared

to her and wanted to take her Lenchen off to a wedding. In the morning Melanchthon came over to the cloister and asked how Lenchen was doing. Frau Kate said about her dream. Master Philipp, who among others was reputed to know something of divination and the meaning of dreams and was doing well at it, made a startled face. And to others, he interpreted the dream: "The young men are angels; they will come and take this young woman to a wedding in the kingdom of heaven." Melanchthon had prophesied correctly on this occasion.

On the 26th September around the ninth hour the end came. The father held the child in his arms, the mother stood close by. The doctor cried, prayed and comforted alternately the child, himself and the bystanders - Frau Kate, Melanchthon and Dr Röhrer. The mother was deeply affected; when it was all at an end, she cried out in her distress, so that Luther had to calm her: "Dear Kate, but just think where she has gone; she will be fine."

The sad events took their course. The coffin came; but when the little girl was to be laid in it, death had stretched her and her little bed had become too small for her. People came and gave their condolences to the parents according to custom: "they were sorry for their loss". The schoolchildren's choir sang the song: "Lord, remember not against us former iniquities."[†] She was carried out to the cemetery at the Elster Gate and buried. "It is the resurrection of the flesh", said Luther who accompanied every word and every act with apt words of comfort. Then the sad train went home and the doctor said to Kate: "Now we have sent our

† Psalm 79:8

daughter forth, her body and soul cared for as parents should do especially for poor little girls." The doctor wrote his little daughter a Latin epitaph which (in simple English) reads:

Here sleep I Lenchen, Dr Luther's little daughter,
Resting with all the saints in my little bed.

But still for months Luther spoke and wrote of his grief, was angry about death and assuaged his pain with tears for his beloved daughter. Kate's eyes were also full of tears and she sobbed aloud with the thought of the "good, well-behaved, little daughter".

Understandably, Frau Kate let the eldest son go off away again with a heavy heart. "If you don't feel good, just come home", the mother had said to Hans in a mood of grief and weakness. Hans did not feel too bad at Crodel's house, but his homesickness for Lenchen and his longing for his father's house overpowered him - it was approaching Christmas. He wrote a doleful letter appealing to what his mother had said, that he should return home if he felt bad. So Luther wrote two missives on the second day of Christmas to the preceptor and his son warning that Hans should take manly self-control over the female weaknesses. The letter to the son read:

"Grace and peace in the Lord.

My dear son Hans. I and your mother and the whole house are well. Try to take manly control over your tears and still do not create further pain and worry for your mother, who is so inclined to worry and vexation. Obey God who has ordered you through us to work there; in that way you will easily forget this weakness. Your mother cannot write and has not seen it necessary; but she says, everything that she has already

said to you - namely you should return home when you feel bad - she means if you are ill; if it should occur, let us know immediately. Otherwise she wishes that you leave this grief behind and to study happily and quietly. May you stay well with the Lord.

Your father Martin Luther."

The final pain and loss which Frau Kate felt in this fateful year was the death of her best friend, Frau Provost Katharina Jonas. She died on Christmas Day 1542, a cheerful friendly child soul; so she also went during the Christian festival to the heavenly hall of joy, to everlasting Christmas.

But to Frau Kate it was as if a part of her soul had died.

Chapter 12

Table Companions and Table Talk

“**O**ur Lady Kate, archcook”, so called Luther his wife in a jocular invitation letter to friend Jonas.

And that she was; she liked cooking and could cook well and she brewed the drinks to go with it. However, no woman had the opportunities in multifaceted hosting that Frau Kate had.

Foremost were the various weddings of relatives and friends, the providing of which was a joy to the heart for the doctor. In them, however, “Lord Kate” played an especially pre-eminent and warm-hearted rôle.

And what such a wedding in Wittenberg was like, one can scarcely imagine. To it had to be invited a “whole pile of people”; to an “academic” wedding, “the university with all kith and kin” and beyond them others which on Luther’s account “could not really be left out; so neither nine nor twelve tables were enough, 120 guests without servants etc.” was the norm for an academic wedding. “At a doctor’s feast the men alone took up seven to eight tables; what would it be if the women, children and yet servants were to be fed and supplied with drink?” Also the weddings lasted several days. At his wedding, Luther had been content with only one day “with the usual guests”. And that with only the poor market supply in Wittenberg! The good Kate had no difficulty feeding such a number decently; a blot on the fame of her husband or those celebrating would not do – nor, of course, would one on her fame. Neither Luther nor Kate wanted to bring dishonour on the other.

But in any case Frau Kate liked arranging festivals and banquets: the doctor’s feasts, birthday meals and other social events without special occasion. Wilhelm Rink, Dr Eisleben (Agricola), Alexander Drachstett and Wolf Heinzen made such a visit to the Black Cloister; and because the priest Michael Stiefel in Lochau did not come very often, he too appears and takes part in the happy days together. One or perhaps two of the friends – Röhrer or Jakob Schenk, Hieronymus Heller, Nikolaus Medler, “the marchioness’s chaplain” (i.e. the court priest of the Electress Elisabeth von Brandenburg) – is promoted to doctor and Lord Kate roasts and brews for the usual feast. She gave her own doctor a festive Communion on 19th October, the

anniversary of his doctorate. On the eve of St Martin's Day, the birthday of her Dr Martinus and later also that of the little Martin was celebrated festively together with the holy Martin. The tenth anniversary of the posting of the theses ("the down-trodden indulgences"), All Saints' Day 1527, was also feasted. Also to comfort him over the death of his dear friend Hausmann, who was extremely close to Luther, Frau Kate invited a circle of friends; Jonas, Melanchthon, Camerarius, Cokritz. The christening feasts for her newborn the puerpera had to arrange some time in advance, overseeing them from her bed. However, even without there being a special festive occasion the good friends and colleagues appeared at the sociable table in smaller numbers; Jonas, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, often sent game or a consignment of fish to the house, or a tub of beer or a barrel of wine - sometimes with the express instructions, "Herr Philipp, Dr Pommer and other good friends should enjoy it with the doctor." Frau Kate would then prepare and serve the food. Sometimes she also had to ask at court for game for the feast roast when none was otherwise received; or she ordered from a good friend "birds, poultry, fowl and whatever else flies about in the air for a thaler, above that what he could buy or otherwise obtain in the form of a hare and other delicacies." Or Frau Kate had to clear out her own fish ponds, where, besides pikes and carps, loaches and perches, even trout swam. Presents as rich as once from the Elector: "a cartload of Supstitzer, half a cartload of Goreberger, four pails of Jenisch wine, in addition a shock of carp and a hundredweight of pike, very nice fish" did not arrive so often - coming all at once it was too much,

even for a large number of friends.

There were passing travellers and visits of princes as well as itinerant students, foreign envoys and positionless Masters, poor widows and expelled priests, Englishmen and Frenchmen, Bohemians and Hungarians, even once a Moor; they remained as guests a day, maybe a week or even a year at Kate's big table. When Hartmut von Cronbergs widowed sister, abducted by a Jew, came to Wittenberg and stayed there secretly, Luther, with his bad experiences of noble and ecclesiastical swindlers, apologized that he could not help her - i.e. take her into the house; however, he later stood as godfather to her child.

There came brother and sister, brother-in-law and "friends" from Mansfeld. Or the Strasbourg theologians dined in the Black Cloister. The fine Strassburger Capito, who together with Butzer negotiated the "Concordia" in Wittenberg, made a thoroughly good impression on Frau Kate, and it was a great calamity to her when, through a mishap, the golden ring with which he honoured her and which she saw as a symbol of the unity of the Saxon and Oberland church got lost.

Even for the Elector, Frau Kate had to dish up a collation behind the ramparts (8th-14th March 1534). Later, still all kinds of other princes were, at least transitory, table companions of Kate, the young Saxon Johann Ernst and Duke Franz von Lüneburg.

Constant table companions were the preceptors living in the Black Cloister, famuli and scholars.

One of oldest and first of these table companions at the Luther House was Konrad Cordatus.

He was born seven years before Luther, of Hussite

farmers, in Weissenkirchen in Austria He studied theology in Vienna and lived some years in Rome; obtained a vary good position in Ofen (Buda) in 1510, immediately joined the Reformation in 1517, was removed from office, arrived impecunious in Wittenberg in 1524 and studied under Luther, who took care of him. He returned home and preached the Gospel, was held prisoner for thirty-eight weeks deep in a dungeon in darkness with "snakes and asps", escaped with the help of a compassionate guard and fled back to his sympathetic teacher Dr Luther. There he lived for some time in this young household in 1526 and again while jobless at the invitation of Luther from 1528 to 1529, after two years at the vicarage in Zwickau; 1531-32, yet again for almost one year until he became a priest in Niemegek close to Wittenberg. He was one of the best preachers of the Reformation time. He had a defiant nature, like Luther; only much more quick-tempered, more brusque and not very amicable. He could not readily fit in with Frau Kate's ways and reproached Luther that he let himself be dictated to by his wife. So it was that he made biting remarks a few times about the doctor's wife during the table conversations, intimating that she was domineering and arrogant and generally talked with a certain harshness about her. When Luther could not support him or his friend Hausmann with money as he would have liked, Cordatus opined that Luther should not have allowed his wife to buy a garden. Also he could scarcely tolerate it that she continually interrupted Luther's "best speeches", because he zealously wrote down all Luther's words.

During Epiphany 1528 Luther's old friend, Michael

Stiefel, came likewise expelled from Austria, who had, from 1525, been the chaplain to the noble family of Jörger von Tollet, a "devout, polite and diligent person". He had known Frau Kate before her marriage, who, at the time of his departure from Wittenberg on 3rd June 1525, was probably already, among Luther's intentions, set aside for marriage. From Austria he had written a lovely letter to Frau Katharina and she returned his greetings. Stiefel stayed in Luther's house up to Michaelmas 1528, but felt depressed because of this claim on his hospitality. He therefore took over the parish and pastor's widow von Lochau with two children. The Luther couple procured his move. The communication with the Lochau parsonage continued. Luther wrote and received many letters and also Kate got a friendly epistle from the head of the parish; the pastor's wife sent a present to the doctor. Soon Stiefel is invited among good company at the Black Cloister; soon Luther and his whole band of cronies say they are going to the cherry harvest in Lochau. In the end, Stiefel, to Luther's frustration, went to ruin speculating about the Day of Judgement. The population of the whole area as far as Silesia streamed towards the prophet and awaited the end of the world with him on 19th October 1533 at 8 o'clock in the evening. When this did not arrive, the false prophet was arrested by the sovereign and punished for the nonsense he had created, but also protected from the agitated people and brought to Wittenberg where he rued his mistake.

Also an Austrian, Kummer (Kommer) came in 1529 to Wittenberg. Also he had had to flee, disguised in women's clothes, persecuted because of his teaching of the Gospel and, of course, took refuge with Luther. He

also seems to have been the house and table companion of the latter. Kummer was a friend and study companion of Lauterbach.

In the same year, 1529, this certain Anton Lauterbach, born in 1500 as a son of the mayor of Stolpe, came to Wittenberg, where he became a Master and was by 1531 at least, a companion and meal-taker in Luther's house and became deacon of the parish. A gangly person, in contrast to his comrade Cordatus a good-natured companion. Tuesday, 28th January 1533, he served at table for the christening feast of the little Paul. In this year he married an Augustinian nun, when, of course, Frau Kate again saw to the wedding. Then he became deacon in Leisnig, then 1537-39 he came again to the university town as deacon. When the Duchy of Saxony was to be Reformed, he was appointed superintendent in Pirna, but did not want to leave "holy Wittenberg". However, he gave in to the reminders from Luther and the other fathers to serve his native country and to take over the unwieldy office. On Wednesday 25th July 1539 the councillors of Pirna appeared in Wittenberg with two carriages and fetched their first Protestant parish minister. He departed from the Luther family with tears. On the next Friday, St James' Day, he arrived in Pirna, received ceremoniously with a welcome drink, and the Reformation "started German and goodly Lutheran with the christening of triplets". But from the distance Lauterbach continued lively and friendly communication with Luther and Frau Kate, to whom he made available various provisions.

Without office, but waiting to take up one, the Oberpfalzer Johann Schlaginhausen - called Turbicida

in Latin or Ochlopectes in Greek - moved in November 1531 to Wittenberg to the Black Cloister where he had studied a decade before. He was prone to melancholy and tormented himself with the doubt of whether he also belonged to the chosen; Luther often had to cheer him out of his gloom when he sat there dolefully and apathetically among the guests and table companions. Nevertheless, or because he was as he was, he was held high in favour by Frau Kate and when her husband had a fainting fit on 1st May 1532 during the rectorate election, she sent first for Schlaginhausen in the assembly meeting and only then did she call for Melanchthon and Jonas. "Master Hans" was willing to help in every way; he took care of the garden and especially of Frau Kate's apiary. He later became priest in nearby Zahna and then an expert bee keeper in Köthen.

From 1527 there was the sober, serious thirty-year-old Hieronymus Weller from Freiberg at the Black Cloister. While Luther was secreted in Coburg he was private tutor to young Hans. His brother Peter, a young Master and law student who later taught, also moved into the cloister in 1530; both as male "protectors" of the family orphaned by Luther and his famulus, Veit Dietrich. The brothers were very musical; a third, called Matthias, was even cathedral organist and composer in his hometown. Peter and Hieronymus pleased the family with their pretty singing. But it was good that the cheerful brother Peter came to the cloister, because the highly gifted Hieronymus was so inclined - like Matthias - to melancholy. And the much-concerned housewife will have been persuaded that the gloomy one would like to have taken on a position in Dresden;

but he stayed until 1535 and was thus eight years in her house. So during this time both the other Wellers quite often stayed as guests in the cloister. On 24th September 1533 the two or even three Wellers were there and sang with Luther. Again in 1534. The next year Hieronymus became Doctor of Theology and Frau Kate had to arrange the new doctor's celebratory dinner. Luther used to discuss much with the lawyer, Peter.

At this time a noble Bohemian, Hennick, a Waldensian, also belonged to the table companions who later moved with Peter Weller to the Holy Land where both died and are buried.

A foreign house and table companion, the "black Englishman", Doctor of Theology Antonius (Robert Barnes), also lived in the Luther House. In jest Luther wanted to make Kate his German teacher. He was also a guest at the frequent weddings at the Black Cloister. He had fled his native country in 1529 because of his beliefs, then used by Henry VIII as a negotiator for his new marriage and "religion", but then, nevertheless, on his return "was taken out to Smithfield with two companions and burnt at the stake by King Henry because of his Protestant faith". On the martyrdom "of our good table and house companion" Luther published a script.

Yet still among Kate's table companions was the Hungarian Matthias von Vai, a courageous man, for whom things went a little better at home than they did for Robert Barnes. When he got into a quarrel with his popish colleague, the latter prosecuted him through the voyevoda brother, the monk George, at that time governor in Ofen (Buda). He wanted to find out

quickly who was right, placed two barrels of powder in the market and said: "He who believes his teaching divine, sits himself on it - I light it and whoever survives, his teaching is right." Whereupon Vai jumped swiftly on the barrel, but the priest did not follow and George punished the priest and his supporters with a 4000 guilders fine but allowed Vai to preach publicly. Luther enjoyed telling these delivering, courageous deeds to his table companions.

For a long time (1529-1534) Master Veit Dietrich also lived in the Luther House. He was a Nuremberger (born 1506) who had come to Wittenberg to study medicine, but like a number of others was won over by Luther to theology (1527) and soon helped him as a trusted famulus. He accompanied Luther to Coburg. Dietrich had his own pupils; from Coburg he sent them "arguments" which they had to learn by heart, while Luther pleased the pupils with his letter of the Jackdaw Diet. When Luther had returned from the Diet, he wrote to Dietrich who had remained in Nuremberg about the state of the things in Wittenberg, also sending greetings from all the table companions and Frau Kate, who ordered that it be made clear, "Dietrich mustn't think that she was angry with him". Dietrich did not get on particularly well with Frau Kate. He felt of himself, that although he could keep his hair straight and tidy the same was not the case of his mind. Thus Luther advised him to take a wife, that way it would soon pass. Dietrich also wanted this. But until he arrived there, he, in the meantime, it seems, created some friction with Frau Kate. When she prohibited the affair with Aunt Lene (the younger), he moved out of the house in autumn 1534 with his six scholars and

spread the word that the doctor's wife was haughty and calculating towards the pupils. For the landlady with her own five small children and the large household this move was really a relief.

Now there was of course tension between Dietrich and the Lutheran house. However, this passed. When in the next year Dietrich was called to his hometown of Nuremberg and got married, not only Luther wrote a friendly letter to him, but also Kate sent him greetings and congratulations on his marriage and obtaining of the position. Correspondence continued between the two men until their deaths; Kate's greetings also did not go missing.

A compatriot of Veit Dietrich, Hieronymus Besold, arrived in the Luther House some years after Dietrich had left. Dietrich had persuaded him against the landlady, so that in the beginning he feared her as a domineering and acquisitive woman. But he came, nonetheless, to her table and stayed and lost his bad opinion of her even when he was also kept busy in Nuremberg with orders from Frau Kate and did not once venture to remind her of his expenditure.

At this time (in 1537-1542) Master Johann (Sachse of) Holstein was also a table companion in the cloister house, about whose red hair the "shameful bad poet" Simon Lemnius (1538) made his corny jokes. He was "of a respectable, devout mind, a quiet being and a fine Master". He had studied for seventeen years, had been a Master (private lecturer) for more than ten years and was unsurpassed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Still he had not become a full professor, so Luther enquired with the head of the "liberal arts faculty", Master Melanchthon, what sort of resentment or jealousy lay

behind it. Frau Kate also took to his side and put in a good word with Master Philipp but he was unable to help. So Holstein still had to live with boys and in the end became a lawyer.

In 1539 an "Austrian" lived taking his meals with Luther, Hutten's friend Wolfgang Angst or Schiefer (Severus), born in Austrian Alsace in Kaisersberg near Colmar. Previously he had been private tutor to the sons of King Ferdinand, later Kaiser Ferdinand I, brother of Charles V. He had, however, to flee because of his Lutheranism and took refuge in Wittenberg. He was a very fine man, still without a wife; Luther recommended him to the Elector as a tutor and hoped he would "like him well". But nothing came of it, and so Schiefer lived the next year as a dear friend of Luther's in the house. Schiefer often took part in the table conversations; Frau Kate had to tell him all the news about "his King Ferdinand" including that from Luther in Weimar.

An equally serious man came at this time as a guest to the Luther House in Wittenberg, Matthesius, the 36-year-old schoolmaster from Joachimsthal, who wanted to study theology more, in order to take over the parish back home. From 1540-42 he was a companion at Kate's meal table. He spoke with great admiration of her.

And, finally, there was also Goldschmidt (Aurifaber) staying at the house. He was from Mansfeld. He studied theology from 1537 until 1540; then became tutor to the young Count Mansfeld and then field preacher, came again to Wittenberg in 1545 and was with Luther until Luther's death. At the same time Rutfeld was there as a famulus and preceptor for Luther's boys.

In this last stage of Luther's life another Austrian sat at Kate's table, Ferdinand a Mangis, also a Master Plato and other meal-takers.

This was Luther's or rather Frau Kate's "table college", to take part in it was considered also by the oldest, most honoured and most educated to be very fortunate and a great honour. And when everyone round the table was to have a drink from the glass of the holy Elisabeth von Thüringen which Luther owned, it was thought an especially celebratory time.

Besides these adult meal-takers, of, in some cases, very sedate age, also belonged to Luther's "table college" numerous outside children who lived as boarders in the Black Cloister - some paying some not. Kate set a limit to the number of these meal-takers which she quite rightly did not wish to be exceeded. Hence, when in January 1536 Chancellor Müller of Mansfeld asked whether a certain parentless child might be accommodated at Kate's table, the landlord had to write to him: "I would have much liked to have taken the child in as a meal-taker for all the good reasons there are, but because people are returning from Jena (where the students had moved because of the plague), the table is full and I cannot throw out the old companions. When there is a free place (which may happen after Easter), I will gladly do what I can if Lord Kate is in gracious agreement."

Frau Kate, therefore, ruled over the food table. And this was just as well, since the good-natured doctor took in every poor scoundrel who could not find accommodation or otherwise provided for him through bursaries. Pupils and students streamed to Wittenberg from all cities and from all four corners of the world,

even from the countries of the Moors - "and we are so terribly overloaded here and are requested for help beyond what our impoverished state allows by many exiled but otherwise good people who so want to study". Thus, for example, in 1533, the doctor's wife had to urge her husband to write to the aldermen of Rothenberg an der Tauber that they would take into care one of their city children, a George Schnell "who was poor and had nothing" except a good head and a devout mind who was a house and table fellow every day at the Black Cloister. Another small boy from England who was foisted on them in 1541 by a Nuremberg priest had to be shifted to a foundlings house (orphanage) in Nuremberg. Luther, acting on Kate's inspiration, had to turn to the "cautious and honourable" councillor Hieronymus Baumgärtner, a "dear man and good friend" to both of them. "I send you with the good trust I have in you a boy from England who has been dropped on me by some roguish deception. You know what a beggar's city our city is and the lad probably needs a maid to do his washing, delousing and so on. My income, however, cannot meet it and so it is my friendly request, if the gentlemen of Nuremberg would be of such goodwill, that he could be moved into a foundlings house. Otherwise here, we are, and I particularly, well enough weighed down and put beyond our capabilities. God protect me that I am not so cheated any more." But also the other not quite so poor meal-takers failed to pay punctually and felt Kate, the housekeeper, hard when she "pressed for proper payment", being spoiled by and used to other ways with Luther.

Occasion not only to board the young people but to

also nurse them in illness occurred often enough for Frau Kate. A young aristocrat, the son of one of the many Lutheran godfathers' people, was at the house in 1534 and kept himself fine. He went through the measles and was "diligently attended to" by Kate according to the advice of Dr Augustin's (Schurff), the family physician and neighbour. He got well again. But some of these illnesses also ended in death and this caused the foster parents, in particular Frau Kate, great worry.

Just as Frau Kate provided food for the body at mealtimes, so the talkative, entertaining doctor provided the spiritual food, the "table spice".

Luther was by nature "a thoroughly happy fellow", bubbling over with humour when he was feeling good, but also when he was meeting with trouble - to spite the vexation and frustration. In his confession before his first attack of illness (1527) he said to Bugenhagen: "Many think that because I sometimes behave outwardly happy, my life is a bed of roses; but God knows how my life really is. I have often thought I wanted to serve the world showing a rather more serious and holy manner (I don't know quite what to call it); but God has not granted it me." And Bugenhagen testified: "If he acts too light-heartedly at the table, he himself finds no pleasure in it and no godly person can find bad in it, much less annoyance, since he is an affable person and he loathes all dissembling and hypocrisy."

Luther talked well and with pleasure and much. He especially liked sayings, talk rich in meaning and pretty rhymes, proverbs and anecdotes. He knew a lot of them and he uttered them at the table as well as in

the pulpit. At and after table there was also singing between conversations and those who had a good voice, guests as well, had to take part; Luther who was a good lutenist accompanied the singing.

Thus originated the famous table conversations which turned on the deepest and highest, the greatest and smallest things, divine and human, heavenly and secular; at one time in the most edifying seriousness, then in utter light-heartedness; at one time in gentle reflectiveness, then in outright candour. The first and main publisher of the table conversations, however, the former field preacher Aurifaber, later priest in Erfurt, made out too much of the plain-speaking, made it sound coarse and filled it out with his not quite so salubrious memories and expressions from his memories of life with the military.

These conversations were written down and transcribed by Luther's followers, like the speeches and conversations of Jesus and Socrates; at the beginning from memory, later directly at the time they were made.

Cordatus was the first one who ventured, seated behind the table or standing in front of it, to take down the spirited speeches of the master in his notebook – including, as Melanchthon warningly pointed out, some words less suited to perpetuity. Other table companions and guests like H Weller, Veit Dietrich, Lauterbach, Besold, Schlaginhaufen, Matthesius, Ferdinand a Mangis and Goldschmidt followed his example. Also the deacon Röhler, the famous Protestant stenographer and notarius (scrivener) at the diets and religious discourses, recorded “many a delectable piece”. And among the countless number

(3000) of Luther's talks a few authentic words of the doctor's wife are to be found.

How things went at these table conversations, Matthesius explains to us. Well-behaved and humble, the people sat there and looked up to "His Nobleness, the Lord Doctor". If he wanted to get us talking, he would begin: "Anyone heard anything new?" We let this first exhortation go. If he began again, however: "You prelates, anything new?" then the elders began to speak. Doctor Wolf Severus, who had been preceptor to His Majesty of the Holy Roman Empire, sat at the head, and, if there were no strangers present, would, as a skilled courtier, set things rolling. When the keen chatter had thus started, indeed with proper dignity, so the others joined in.

Every incident and every conceivable thing gave occasion to a shorter or a longer speech, at one time the news of the day, then a guest, then the children with their games or bad behaviour and then Peter Weller's dog, who was keener for his food in the morning than any man for his prayers. Everything had to serve as a point for discovering or as a symbolic representation of a higher truth. And not infrequently Frau Kate gave occasion to thoughtful observations through some words or just through her sheer presence.

The table conversations were held mostly in Latin, like Luther's letters to the "learned" - academically-educated men were written to in Latin. With everyday matters where the German expression was more familiar it went colourfully from Latin into German. If unlearned friends or female friends were present, or wife and children were to follow the conversation, German was spoken; however, a little Latin would then

still be interspersed. This alternation between Latin and German is most truly preserved in Lauterbach's diary.

So well, however, did the female house companions understand, partly from coming from cloisters, partly from continually hearing Latin, that they could join in, often even themselves using Latin phrases. Thus Aunt Lene, to the question whether she wanted to return to the cloister, answered Non! Non!. Especially, however, the Doctorissa, as she was deferentially called and addressed by the young people.

Luther once spoke about parental love thus: "Dear God, what heart-throbbing must have arisen, when Abraham had to kill his dearest and only son Isaac! How painful the path up Mount Moria must have been to him. He will not have said anything of it to Sarah." At which his wife started and said: "I cannot let it enter my head that God should desire such a cruel thing from anyone, to strangle his own child." Luther disproved this natural understandable objection with theological reference to God who let his own son be crucified. But the doctor's wife could not be completely persuaded by it.

Frau Kate also knew myths and legends. Thus she told about a mermaid, who sat in the water in a hole in the river Mulde which was like a beautiful room and the water did not harm her; a midwife was sent to her by a "spirit", to look after her.

Another time it was told at the table that someone in the city had broken their marriage. Frau Kate had been horrified and asked the Doctor: "Dear Lord, how can the people be so wicked and besmirch themselves with such sins?!" To which he answered: "Yes, dear Kate, the people will not pray, so the devil is at their hand."

Once the doctor started a debate with his Kate about her holiness. She turned out to be a competent theologian skilled in Lutheran lines of thought, but was, nevertheless, disproved and denied the power of victory. He asked her whether she believed that she was holy? She thought long, then replied: "How can I be holy, when I am such a big sinner! So much has the Pope corrupted our whole being, his teachings so reached us to the core that we do not with willing ears recognize Christ as our saviour, as our justice and sanctity and, christened, indeed miraculously believe ourselves to be Christians but nevertheless do not believe ourselves to be holy. In christening our sins are dispelled and we receive Christ's justice but we, nevertheless, do not believe ourselves to have become holy. In so much as we are people, we are sinners, but because we are baptized and believe, we are holy through Christ."

Luther replied: "Yes, the whole Christian is holy; if the devil leads astray the sinner where does Christ remain? Hence, the differentiation of my wife is not valid. He who believes firmly in his baptism, he is quite holy (as David himself is called holy). The papists who do not understand the act of the forgiveness of sins cannot believe in this holiness nor understand it just become angry when they hear of it from us."

The knights of the mind were particularly fond of the fight at that time and the feuds of the word would find no end. In particular, however, the knowledge hungry masters at Luther's were very keen on these interesting, very private discourses and, above all, looked to the diary writers, who sought to catch every

word from the mouth of the spiritually empowered man to send in print to the world to extend these conversations. Of course, Frau Kate found much less pleasure in these theological tournaments; her lively mind, like that of Jonas, did not take to following long arguments. Hence, she even often interrupted the learned conversations by throwing plain cudgels in among the swords of the ecclesiastical fencers, above all, to her husband who could not stop easily once he got going.

When the talk at the table had become too much and the food cold and the drink warm, Frau Kate broke loose over the conversation with a reprimand: "What's this then, you talk without stopping and don't eat?" The table conversation writer Cordatus was outraged by this disturbance. He had just secretly written down a nice discussion by Luther about the Lord's Prayer, the "servant of Heaven Gabriel and Raphael the Heavenly travelling companion" which he made "with a full glowing heart". But Luther turned the thing into a joke and said: "If only you women, before you start a sermon, could also pray (i.e. collect yourselves and consider things); you should say a Paternoster first!"

But also Frau Kate stood her ground against her husband in conversation. Luther often teased her about this feminine holding forth. He asked her laughingly: whether she wanted to preach and start her sermon with so many words of prayer (as introduction)? Or he teased her: women might not preach because they would not pray before the sermon; or: God does not allow them, wearied by their long prayer, to come to their sermon. Once a learned Englishman sat at the table who did not know a word of German; so Luther

said to him: "I would like to put forward my wife as a German teacher, she is quite loquacious. She is so capable she quite overpowers me." Admittedly he added: "Eloquent talk is not to be praised in women; it is rather more becoming that they only lisp and stammer. That suits them better." And of the difference between female and male oratory he says in another table conversation: "Women are well-spoken by nature and know rhetoric, the art of conversation, well; something men only learn and acquire with great diligence. But the truth is: in domestic things, the running of the house, women are the more skilful and eloquent; but in worldly, political government and commerce they are of no use. Men are created and ordered by God to it but women are not. For inasmuch as they know enough talk, they are failing and deficient in substance since they lack understanding; they thus talk foolishly, disorderly and desolately beyond all measure. So it would seem that woman was created for keeping house; man, however for the administration and running of political affairs, world government, war and justice."

Thus Frau Kate probably tended to make fewer comments during the men's conversations than she might; and notably less is to be found of what she said. It is a pity that the table talks report so little about the Doctorissa. But the diary writers were most interested in theological arguments - therefore, the only longer speech of Kate which they considered worth recording is a theological one; otherwise they just wanted to get down the doctor's talk - only the outpourings of his extraordinary mind seemed to them worthy of future generations.

Chapter 13

House Friends

The humanist era had a pronounced need for friendship which only plays on the side in the befriending mood of our[†] classical literature period of the past century. This active feeling of friendship expressed itself in one way by the numerous journeys visiting befriended humanists, which at that time must have been twice as notable because of the burdensome means of travel, and in another in the today wholly incomprehensibly-rich exchange of correspondence which the scholars at that time conducted with one another. One corresponded about everything possible,

† i.e. the German

even the most intimate personal experiences and feelings; and if one had nothing at all to write, then one also wrote that. "I write to you to tell you that I have nothing to write", was no unusual content of a letter at the time, even with Luther.

As one might expect, the Luther couple had the largest imaginable circle of friends. Not Luther alone, but also Frau Kate. Many young people fed and cared for by her, the various masters who lived in the Black Cloister as preceptors of hers and other boys, many colleagues and pupils of her husband, the countless guests which found friendly accommodation at her table; they all knew and respected, next to the almighty doctor, the lady of his friendship and hospitality, Frau Kate. Pupils became colleagues, table companions friends - an ever increasing number. And Luther's old friends, whom Frau Kate only got to know through letters or visits, also became with time her friends, particularly if they kept the friendship warm with greetings, good wishes and presents.

This extensive network of friends was also actively maintained. There is scarcely a letter written or received by Luther in which greetings were not expressed either for or on behalf of Frau Kate, or wishes of good luck or expressions of sympathy received and sent in regard to all sorts of family events.

Very often a simple word of greeting did not suffice Frau Kate, she also added, in her practical way, good advice, a reminder or a recipe, a medicine, a herb good for gallstones and the sort.

Still more often, however, Frau Kate had to write her thanks for all kinds of presents. And to no little extent the business-like housewife exploited the network of

friends for all kinds of housekeeping related commissions. This went on to such an extent with Lauterbach that Luther himself once felt regarding such a request that she should take their friend over completely into service.

As one would expect, the friends of the family in such an exclusively theological house were also almost all pure theologians. Only the relatives were secular: brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, some distinguished godparents, like the chancellors Müller and Rühel in Mansfeld, the Goritzes in Leipzig, Hans von Riedtesel and Hans von Taubenheim, the chief treasury official in Torgau, to whom Frau Kate, across the distance, sent friendly and deferential greetings, felicitations or invitations and even once put together a letter herself – a business letter, of course. Also the Strasbourger syndic Gerbel sent a thousand greetings to Frau Kate. The municipal clerk, Roth von Zwickau, had a copy of his book of sermons bound for the doctor's wife and sent a glass which arrived "whole and good". Finally there was a kind family of nobility in Austria, Jörger von Tollet, a mother with several sons for whom Luther had procured a Protestant house chaplain (1525) and provided them with all kinds of religious advice. They now showed their thankfulness with numerous and expensive gifts: "Hungarian guilders", "quince wine" and other "generous and expensive presents"; she also sent a scholarship of 500 golden guilders for the poor who studied the holy scriptures. Later a grandson of the Jörger lady also studied in Wittenberg. Numerous friendly letters were exchanged with this "honourable, noble Frau Dorothea Jörger, as an especially good friend", wherein Luther's

“woman of the house Kate” was also mentioned in greetings.

Frau Kate exchange deferential greetings with the Protestant Bishop of Naumburg, Nikolaus von Amsdorf, especially after she became a neighbour of the bishop at Zulsdorf (1542); she even “threatened” a visit the “coming summer”. Otherwise, admittedly, one had a scarcely close relationship with the unmarried and high-ranking man. However, he also once procured butter and stockfish for the Luther household.

The Luther family communicated frequently with the little Master Johann Agrikola, the priest from Eisleben, and his Elsa from the beginning. “They liked him a lot.” He had already, in 1523, belonged to the circle of the young Nurembergers, who had expressed their opinions about Baumgarten’s engagement to Kate and now continued active correspondence with Wittenberg. In this correspondence there are greetings to the wife and children in both directions; a fur coat was also procured through him which Frau Kate thought too expensive; chequer trees and young medlars were also ordered for which Frau Kate had a craving. In 1529 Agrikola was invited to Wittenberg. In 1530 he sent, from the Augsburg Diet via Coburg, a playful letter to Frau Kate about her provisions, about which Luther wrote to him: “I can easily guess what she will have written to you in answer. When she reads the letter, she will laugh and say: Oh, what a great rogue Master Eisleben is!” Luther took care of Agrikola when the nimble and ambitious man did not like it any more in Eisleben. And when in 1536 he gave up his position and did not immediately find comfortable

accommodation in Wittenberg, the cloister house was open to him and Agrikola moved in with his wife and child. When Luther went to Smalcald at the beginning of 1537, he entrusted Agrikola with not only “teaching, pulpit and church”, but also “wife, children, house and confidentiality”. But when Agrikola became an “Antinomist” (disputer of the validity of the law for Christians), then Luther’s rage flared up against him and he withdrew from him the previously granted permission to hold lectures in Wittenberg. Agrikola’s wife, towards whom Luther had been quite fatherly and with whom he spoke quite personally and informally, prostrated herself to the doctor and he accepted her husband back into his favour (1538). But Agrikola held back from Luther’s sphere of influence and went to Berlin. The friendship with “Master Grickel” of course stopped, including that with Frau Kate, without ever starting up again. When Agrikola came again later (1545) to Wittenberg with his wife and daughter, both the women were allowed into the cloister house; but the Luthers found the little daughter conceited and cheeky like her father.

The priest Jakob Probst in Bremen, a former cloister colleague of Luther’s, also a godfather, was also in contact with the Luther family from early on. Family news was communicated extensively; Kate as well as the little Margarete regularly sent greetings to the distant godfather and thanks for guilders and other presents. The parents commended their eldest to his care, for they had particularly chosen the little Probst as godfather. And “Lord Kate” ordered her husband to ask jokingly whether the North Sea had dried up since the Gospel permitted the eating of flesh. For there had

never been less sea fish in Wittenberg and one was forced by hunger to eat meat; possibly the fish and the sea feared the Pope's rage, when one despised him so much on land. On 14th June 1542, Probst, now an old man, came to Wittenberg to see Father Doctor Martinus once again. This was an unexpected pleasure and Frau Kate will have made the stay very enjoyable for him and the little Margaret will have greeted her godfather happily and sung something to him with her pretty voice.

They kept in contact to a lesser extent with the former prior of the Black Cloister, Eberhard Brisger, Pastor in Altenburg; nonetheless greetings relating to Kate were present there too.

The former cloister brother (canon of the "Brethren of the Common Life") Gerhard Viscampius in Herford was also an especially good friend of the Luther family and Melanchthon, and they took a warm interest in him. In 1528 he sent the Lutheran couple cloth and two lamps which the married pair used every night. In return he regularly received Luther's writings.

The old "instigator and zealot" Doctor Gabriel Zwilling, Luther's cloister colleague, who gave him such a hard time in Wartburg with his iconoclasm, became, after his radicalism had vented itself, a quiet pastor in Torgau. He had helped the freeing of the nuns from Nimbschen and came several times to Wittenberg. He might also have been a bit of a difficult case for Kate in relation to the matter of the linen box.

The Reformer and city preacher of Gotha, Mykonius, who also stayed in the Luther House at the time of the "Wittenberg Concordia" received greetings, felicitations, a "thank you" for a "cheese present" and

also rules of conduct towards his wife and support during his chest illness from Kate.

A special admirer of the doctor's wife was the fine Strasbourger Capito (Köpflin) who achieved the "Concordia" of the Saxon and Oberland church in 1536 with Butzer (Bucer) in Wittenberg and stayed in the Luther House. He sent greetings to the "exquisite Frau Katharina von Bora, his landlady" and, after his return home, a golden ring as a sign of his feelings towards her, "who is rightly so highly esteemed because she practises the care of our teacher with mother of the house gentleness and assiduity". And also Frau Kate valued the Strasbourg guest. Repeatedly he sent his greetings and promised her a letter from the Frankfurt fair of 1537. Capito also asked the remaining Strasbourg friends, Gerbel, Butzer etc. to help educate their son Hans.

In Nuremberg, Luther, and so also Kate, had all kinds of good friends, especially his brothers in the order, Wenceslaus Link and abbot Friedrich (Becker, Pistorius) who provided him with some nice presents and various devices - watches, wood turner's tools, wood-engravings and copper plates, fine fruit, seeds - from the wealthy Free City. They also sent greetings to Kate.

However, her "old flame", as Luther wrote, also lived in the Free City, the councillor Hieronymus Baumgärtner. Her old love for him had developed into a deep friendship. It is a great sign of a natural and healthy understanding of each other that Luther and Frau Kate could talk to each other in a quite open and impartial way about this loving admiration for the former lover and otherwise about their common friend:

"Your old flame, who grasps with new love your virtue and merits, sends his reverential greetings and wishes you well with all his heart." On 1st October 1531 Luther wrote to Baumgärtner: "I send greetings in the name of my lady lord, your old hearthrob; I will tell her when I get home. I'll also take care to tease her in your name." When in 1543 Luther received a letter through his table companion, Besold, he praised the letterwriter's moral purity, devoutness and virtue. Luther's wife asked "as was her custom" who the writer of the letter could be. Luther answered: "tuus ignis Amynthus: Your old flame." The tone towards this friend is a quite heartfelt one, particularly in the letter of consolation letter sent by Luther to Baumgärtner and his wife when the Nuremberg merchant was taken prisoner by Knight Albrecht von Rosenberg (near Mergentheim) and incarcerated for a long time, so that Frau Sibylle was left sitting with her five uneducated children for more than a year fearing the fate of her husband. The Wittenberger friends prayed in church publicly for his release and went to the landgrave of Hesse about it.

Also Veit Dietrich remained, in spite of his spat with Kate, not only Luther's friend after his move to Nuremberg where he became a priest in the Sebalduskirche, but also soon again instigated a friendly relationship with Frau Kate. She repeatedly sent greetings to him.

The Freiburger "Weller siblings", the youngest Peter, the composer Matthias and especially the theologian Hieronymus, but also the sister Barbara Lischner, stood in amicable relations with the Luther married couple. One had to be lifted from his melancholy, the other

provided for, the sister taught about personal receipt of the Holy Communion. Luther thanked, with Frau Kate, the composer Matthias for his “willingly heart, shown by the song and the Borsdorfer apples.” The men would sing the song at the table, as well as they could. “If we do make a few mistakes, it is, admittedly, not your fault, but our artistic ability. When all composers write well, we apply ourselves in earnest to their work and can sing it roughly enough. All the powers of the whole world follow us; they let God and reason of old create and compose great things, but they also sing that they have the worth of a market of pork sausages or the clappers on the field bells[†]. Therefore you composers should not hold us up to shame if we make mistakes in the songs. We would much rather get it right than wrong. Such joking, my dear Kate asks that you take well and sends friendly greetings. May God commend 1535. Saint Prisca’s Day.”

At this time Dr Hieronymus Weller married a Freiburger girl, the daughter am Steige. Of course, Frau Kate was to see to the wedding arrangements in Wittenberg. But Frau Kate was not in agreement with it. She knew all the trouble and expense it could cost a doctor in a university town; and here the bridegroom like the wedding provider would be a doctor and many people would have to be invited. Weller had to take a look at the list and mark off the crowd which was to be invited (if indeed a few could be deleted) – one thinks of needing to honour the bridegroom and his relatives, as well as honourably entertaining the respected friends. This would be very difficult. It would also cost more than 100 florins. Hence, the married couple

† worth hanging

advised Weller to hold the real wedding somewhere else and to go about it like Master Cruciger and Dr Brück, with few people coming to the university town, to a morning or evening meal with two or three tables. Hopefully Dr Hieronymus and his bride were sensible enough to decide on this. While the bachelor doctor had lived with the Luthers he moved with his young wife into their own house in the neighbourhood. Not long thereafter Weller became priest in his hometown, Freiberg, where Duke George's brother Heinrich resided and favoured the Protestants. He remained in active communication with the Luther House.

In 1538, Master Nikolaus Hausmann was also called to Freiberg as city priest. He was one of the oldest and best friends of the Lutheran house - a gentle, kind man and a bachelor. After his first position in Zwickau (up to 1532), he became a court preacher with the three Anhalt princes in Dessau (1532-38). Kate's acquaintance with him was through an elegant and painstakingly woven basket and the beautiful glass vessel which Hausmann had painted himself and sent as a memento to the young household and which Kate much liked. From then on Frau Kate always sent cordial greetings to the Zwickau city priest and received return greetings in the countless letters which passed almost every week back and forth between the Wittenberger cloister and the Zwickau parsonage. She commended herself to his prayers in difficult times or gave her thanks for Chemnitz linen sent to her, for which he received a mass of Lutheran writings in return via the parcel bearer. Also "living letters"[†] went to and fro; all kinds of friends and acquaintances, especially since Cordatus

† people as messengers

had also moved to Zwickau at the beginning of 1529. Hausmann was invited several times; his Stubella (little room) would be provided and everything would be prepared – even if Frau Kate was expecting a new arrival into the world. A few times Hausmann did actually make the rather long journey to Wittenberg.

In August 1531 Hausmann left difficult Zwickau and stayed also in Wittenberg. From nearby Dessau even greater communication was possible. The first sign was a wild boar, which came from the royal residence and was feasted by the friends of the Luther House on St. Martin's Day. When he was ill, "Lord Kate" became concerned, "nobly and continually thinking about their friend". He was so often ill that Luther wanted to bring him right in, so that he could enjoy rest and quiet. Then in 1538 Nikolaus Hausmann arrived as Superintendent in Freiberg, where his brother Valentin lived. He died on the 3rd November in the pulpit making his inaugural sermon. Friends and housewife concealed from Luther the death of his dear comrade and told him the news only bit by bit – however, he still sat a whole day crying and Frau Kate will also have wept some tears for the faithful friend.

The former table companion Schlaginhausen had, in 1532, been made pastor to Zahna, only two hours from Wittenberg and remained in good communication with the Luther House and, for example, once sent medlars so loved by Luther. But he could only bear the miserable place, little conducive to the health of a weak-chested man, for a year. Then he became a pastor in Köthen and Reformed this little area. Frau Kate also sent her greetings there. He travelled with Luther to Smalcald, accompanied the ill Luther back to Tambach,

then ran up with the news of his improvement to Smalcald and shouted up to the windows of the lodgings of the legates: Lutherus vivit! Lutherus vivit! (Luther lives! Luther lives!).

Luther and his Kate stood in active communication with the parsonage of Leisnig. They sent greetings to their former table companion Master Lauterbach in numerous letters and his Hagnes or Nise (Agnese) and Elslein; they gave him all sorts of things to do - Frau Kate sent a catechism for a poor former nun, Christina von Honsberg, now the wife of Georg Schmid. The bishop of Meissen got ruffled with Lauterbach because he would not be consecrated; about which Lauterbach said to the episcopal clerk: "I am consecrated enough through my wife (since she was a nun) and man and wife are one body". Because the other priest in Leisnig did not get on with Lauterbach, the latter moved to Wittenberg as deacon, living there from 1536 to 1539, before becoming Superintendent in Pirna in the Dukedom of Saxony which had become Protestant. He came often to Wittenberg to the cloister house as a colleague of Luther's; his wife was also often there and once gave a fine answer to a theological question. The same question was directed to her, as to Frau Kate - whether she was holy. She replied, she believed she was holy; but a sinner insofar as she was human. In Pirna, Lauterbach procured the stonemason work for the house door for Frau Kate, also vine-props, fur coats for the daughters on several occasions, also butter and apples, Borsdorfer and others, "red ones", from which Frau Kate also cultivated scions for grafting.

George Spalatin left court service soon after Luther's marriage, had got married himself and had become,

next to Master Eberhard Brisger, head pastor of Altenburg. Because this city was quite a distance away, the old friend of Luther's only came on special occasions of an official kind to Wittenberg; and Luther, as much as he longed for contact with his friend, could hardly get to Altenburg, not even to Spalatin's wedding, because he had just organized the escape of the thirteen nuns from Freiberg. To make up for it the friends sent each other letters and messengers more frequently and confided domestic incidents to each other - Frau Kate, pressing her husband to write. "My rib" or "my Lord Kate" sends Spalatin and "his rib" or "Kette" (she was also called Katharina), his "hind" and her little ones greetings and felicitations, she also wished him a little "Spalatin, who would teach him what she prided herself on having learned from her little Hans, namely the fruit and joy of marriage, which was not worth the Pope and all his world". Frau Kate had the severely ill Luther in Smalcald taken to the Altenburg parsonage and stayed there several days. She was full of gratitude and recognition for the "friendly kindness and kind friendliness" which she with her husband experienced in the house of the fine man. She was sorry that in the turmoil she had brought nothing with her for Spalatin's daughters and sent them beautifully bound little books, their usual present. Again she takes advantage of the kindness of the Altenburger pastor in seeing through her work at Zulsdorf. When Spalatin came at this time to Wittenberg, she gave him all kinds of orders because Zulsdorf was so far from Wittenberg and close to Altenburg and she, with it being winter-time, could not get there. There he, the former courtier, should see to it

with the lay judge that she received oak timbers and thick sticks for the buildings in her new empire. There she commended her carters and craftsmen to the care of Spalatin. And he was so interested in her Zulsdorf enterprises that Luther had to write to him in detail about all the bad luck which his wife encountered with the Saxon "harpies" who ran off with her timber. In return, the doctor's wife, with her knowledge of medication, sent a herbal remedy for stones to the head pastor, which in Luther's case had shown to be very effective.

A friend of the Luther family was also her godfather, Hans von Taubenheim. Kate turned to him in confidence about economic matters. But she sympathized with his fate, when in 1539, it appears he fell from favour. Luther had to write to him: "My Kate sends warmest greetings and cries bitterly about your misfortune and says: if God did not love you so much, or you were a papist, he would not allow such misfortune to befall you."

All these friends lived away from the Luther House and only came to Wittenberg temporarily or for visits. The befriended families in the city itself were Luther's colleagues: the professors Cruciger, Jonas and Melanchthon and the priests Bugenhagen and Röhrer; of lesser importance the other castle preacher Doctor Georg Major, the professor of Hebrew - Matthew Aurogallu (Golden Cock), Melanchthon's bosom friend Paul Eber, Doctor Hieronymus Schurf and finally, his brother, the family physician and neighbour, Professor Augustin Schurf, whose wife, Hanna, Frau Kate took in and nursed during the time of the plague. They were all often guests in Luther's house, particularly during

the translation of the Bible. In their company Luther let himself go more round the table of the table companions, with a "happy mood and witty words".

Cruciger, doctor of the holy scripts, Luther's loyal friend and "academic treasure" whom he had (since 1528) chosen to be his "Elisha", his successor in theology, who also signed Luther's will was - exceptionally - a well-to-do theologian. Frau Kate executed various commissions for him and his wife Elisabeth, a former nun from Pomerania, brought her a gold mass present - whereupon Luther sent her a similar one. This, Elisabeth von Meseritz, was the poet of a song which Luther had included in his hymnal. It begins:

Christ, the only son of God
The Father in Eternity,
Who sprang from His heart
As it is written.
He is the morning star;
He gave His light out afar,
Brighter than all other stars.

Elisabeth died early, so that Cruciger married again (in 1530). He did not, however, want to worry Frau Kate with the wedding and so held it at Eilenberg castle, which the Elector, on Luther's request, put at his disposal. Against that he was invited to Luther's birthday feast.

Bughenhagen or Doctor Pommer, the stately and worthy provost, professor and city priest and born General-Superintendent (1536), was, with his Pomeranian calmness, a soothing element in the

Lutheran house, for which he was father confessor. Thus he also stayed calmly by Luther during the time of the plague. Nevertheless, in spite of his dignified manner he was "in the general way of life, liberal, happy and ready-minded". He took to Frau Kate's side from the start. He helped her - together with the chaplain Röhrer - save the good glass from Luther's overgenerous gift giving. He stayed a lot at the cloister; indeed he even lived there during Luther's "Anfechtungen". Luther's letters often greeted in one breath: Dr Pommer and my Kate or my Kate and Dr Pommer. Once he even wrote a letter to Spalatin from the house in Luther's name, in which "Dominus mea" ("my lord", Kate) sent greetings. The priest Dr Pommer was even to open a letter from Luther to Frau Kate in her absence. But on the other hand Frau Kate also saw to all kinds of things for Dr Pommer, even all kinds of theological matters in Latin of Zwingli's arguments in Marburg and the church politics in Augsburg. "Tell Dr Pommer", it used to go in Luther's letters to his wife. The cosy Pomeranian also amused the friends a lot with his sayings, in particular in broad low German; but he also laughed, when the "Swabian" Palatine Melanchthon also wanted to try in Plattdeutsch. In December 1527, the provost waited in the Luther House for his wife gave birth. She and Frau Katharina lay on the childbed almost at the same time: Frau Pommer with a little boy, Frau Kate with her little daughter Elsbeth. Soon afterwards her two sons died. In 1528 on Bugenhagen's making a trip to Brunswick a going-away meal was held by Luther's "Eve" in the cloister; however, he was also "lent" to Hamburg, then to Lübeck, Pomerania and Denmark. Back home he

related, when asked about the style of living in the countries for the enlightenment of those round the table, that the people there drank “oil” and ate “fat” (i.e. beer and butter). Bugenhagen was, therefore, away from Wittenberg a lot, much to Luther’s consternation, who then also had to take over his work load as city priest and professor. Thus Frau Kate quite often had to look after the “Pomeranian Rome” and its little citizens of the world in the minister’s room on the church square.

Justus Jonas, “licentiate in canon and civil law and Erfurt canon” later (1521) professor, doctor of theology and provost of the Allerheiligenstift, assumed a similar rôle in the Luther House to Bugenhagen. Only he did not have within him the stoic, healthy calmness of Doctor Pommer. He was more sickly and somewhat more on edge, a lively speaker, “our Demosthenes”, who preferred talking to writing, since he only “threatened” to write letters but did not write them, as Luther joked. The family lived in the fishing suburb and also had a garden and vineyard. During the plague in 1527 and again in 1535 Jonas moved with his wife and children to his hometown of Nordhausen or Jena. Being at the negotiations in Augsburg, Marburg, Frankfurt, Smalcald and so on he was much absent from Wittenberg, so that Luther had to write many and frequent letters to him in which Frau Kate’s greetings, orders and reminders and such were to be found. Jonas in return also sent greetings to the doctor’s wife, Aunt Lene, little Hanse, Lenchen – and sent his godchild a silver Johannes, i.e. a Joachimsthaler (guilder) with a portrait of the Elector Johann. Jonas had already married in 1522 to Katharina von Falk. She had a large

clutch of children (5 sons already by 1530) but many died young; those known are Jost, Christoph, "Sophiela", "Elisabethula". Also a grandmother lived in the house and received greetings from Luther. Frau Kate Jonas was a bright, cheerful woman. Of her the Wittenberger municipal clerk Baldunai announced in the summer of 1529: "I've seen Melanchthon dancing with the provost's wife! It looked quite wonderful." Also Luther now and then addressed a playful letter to her as the "honourable, virtuous Frau Kathrin of little doctor Jonas, provost's wife of Wittenberg, my precious friend and dear godparent" and closed: "my Kate and lord of Zulsdorf sends friendliest greetings."

The Luthers were close friends of the family of "little Jonas", in particular the two Kates were on fully intimate terms with each other, they remained always as one heart and one soul; the vivacious, enterprising lady of Luther was apparently strongly drawn to the happy nature of the provost's lady. But the doctor's wife would also suffer with pleasure the voluble provost. To Augsburg she sent a note in with a letter to her Herr Martinus reporting the birth of little Jonas's fifth son. When the provost's family stayed during the plague together with the university in Jena, the "archcook" ordered all kinds of fowl and game for one of the doctor's feast from Jonas for a thaler and tried to lure him to Wittenberg with a good brew of her healthy, wholesome beer. She warned him not to fall for the "goodness of the wine" at Spalatin's which caused the body to become so rough and sharp from stones, like the wine casks when they were drunk empty. Frau Jonas was not so well up on beer-making as Frau Luther; some that she sent to Luther once was

spoilt. More pleasant than this present were the wine, the quinces and the apples among other things which Jonas sent from his trips or from Halle. When Frau Kate was badly ill at the beginning of 1540, Jonas wrote many a distressed letter, full of sincere worry and concern. "If my letter is so gloomy, it is because of my grief for the highly-respected woman, lying there so ill." And he was very happy "when hae gynae[†] of Dr M. Luther regained her health through the wonder of God." In the spring of 1541 Jonas moved to Halle to carry the Reformation through there "with the people and council" despite the bishop. Since this stay, as it began to appear, would drag on for a long time, the provost's wife followed her husband there in the autumn, while the son became a table companion in the Luther House. She left so eagerly and quickly that she even forgot to take letters from Luther with her and so he together with his wife teased her for her love-sickness. Unfortunately, they would not see their friend again. Not long after the death of her dear little daughter Lenchen, Frau Kate also lost her best friend. She died in Halle around Christmas 1542 "testifying to her belief with devout and holy words." Frau Kate was quite lost at the sad news.

The relationship with the Melanchthon family appears to have been a little less warm. The two families were almost garden neighbours, and, like the men, the women will have also met each other often at the garden fence and in their gardens and houses. The children played with each other as is evident from the fairy tale letter of Luther's and Luther wrote in exact detail to the worried master about all incidents

† Greek = the woman/wife

involving the children during his absence. But it is, nevertheless, conspicuous that in none of the many (3000) letters from Luther was the wife of his colleague ever mentioned expressly. Frau Kate Melanchthon was not so congenial to either the ebullient doctor's wife or the doctor as Frau Kate Jonas. She felt her husband and herself pushed to the back and left in the shade after the epigrams of Lemnius, and also Cruciger's intimations, by Luther and his wife. However, the well-to-do mayor's daughter and the poor unmarried noblewoman were probably against each other from the start, but even more so when the foreign nun got the almighty doctor, the first man of the city, even the world, as a husband. To understand the mood of Melanchthon's wife, one must probably look at the existing clothes order which will have been similar to that of 1572. According to this, the doctor's wives might wear a golden, unlined coif and an old dress that had become too short lengthened with velvet and silk trimming - but not the master's wives and Frau Melanchthon was just a master's wife. Further doctors might have eight tables at weddings, masters only six; coats or birettas of velvet or silk were also forbidden the latter.

Luther's ill-humour also once presented itself against Melanchthon, which of course spread to the women on both sides.

Melanchthon's son-in-law Sabinus, a humanist and poet, celebrated Luther's old opponent, cardinal-archbishop Albrecht, who liked to be seen as a Maecenas, as his patron. At his wedding with Melanchthon's little daughter (1536), the archiepiscopal chancellor Türk was a guest and indeed Sabinus lived a

good while at Albrecht's court. At this time other high dignitaries of the Roman Church also attempted to bring Melanchthon over to their side. Luther was angry about the "Erasmus mediator" even if he did not believe Melanchthon would become a second Erasmus. Luther's followers, Cordatus and Schenk, went more sharply against Melanchthon, who in his anxious way shied away from an open confrontation with Luther. Kate would have liked to have seen an amicable discussion between the two old friends; the doctor's wife deplored the fissure and said as much to Cruciger and other friends, in the hope of bringing about a discussion. But the "woman's tyranny" of Frau Melanchthon turned against him.

Then something else came on the scene. In 1537 a certain Master Simon Lemchen (Leminus) arrived in Wittenberg who was of like-mind to and a friend of Sabinus, urbane, but also as characterless as the latter. For this aesthete, Melanchthon approached the council of Augsburg regarding a scholarship because he was educated partly in Augsburg and held this worthy city for his fatherland. He actually got support to the amount of 20 florins. At this time, Sabinus also came to Wittenberg and socialized a lot with his friend.

At Whitsun 1538, Lemnius "the dishonourable rogue had sent out several epigrams and even allowed their sale at church doors; a truly affronting, archtrash book of lies against many honest men and women of renown to this city and its churches." Of course, the little book in the little city created the most embarrassing stir and excited ugly gossip. Melanchthon, as rector, had to act as censor to all university members' literary publications. Hence, the suspicion arose against him

that he allowed the printing of the malicious scripts on purpose. But Luther soon convinced himself that it had gone out "without the knowledge and will of those entrusted to make judgement". And so the doctor's wife also soon calmed down again. The "poetaster and scandalizer of the people" Lemnius fled and was expelled, but took revenge by means of a scurrilous, abusive poem on Luther's and Kate's marriage and other professors' families in Wittenberg. The good relationship between the two families soon re-established itself. Frau Kate, now after as before, let her respectful greetings be sent to the absent Master Philipp, and he, in turn, did not fail, now after as before, "to greet Luther's dear wife and sweet children". Indeed, the relationship with him showed itself to be much friendlier after this incident. She thanked the master quite emphatically for not taking her doctor with him to Smalcald - a notion which brought back bad memories. She assured him of her particularly warm love and affection. She tells Melanchthon to be "happy" and courageous when he is laid low, deathly-shocked by the Hesse marriage scandal, and, with her husband, assures him of her sincere love and promises to pray hard and keenly for him. She had him told when he was in Worms that she was making up some Wittenberg beer for him with which to receive him and his comrades. And Master Philipp also had himself solicitously informed of her well-being and would be very disturbed if he heard things were going badly for the doctor's wife. On the day of Luther's death he sent according to her request news and medicaments to Eisleben.

A certain, even more quickly passing, disharmony in

1544 resulted from a reproach made by Frau Kate Melancthon and which the sensitive Master Philipp probably took too seriously. She said one might believe he preferred his Swabian compatriots to the Saxons. But this could not have been so seriously meant nor so seriously taken, even when he accused the despoina[†] of the matter in a letter to his friend Jonas.

The type of communication maintained between this friend of the family and Frau Kate is characterized by a letter written by him from Augsburg in 1530 to the doctor's wife; it has the tone of respectful friendliness with a touch of Lutheran humour. At the same time it is a proof of how commercially competent Frau Kate was, in that Melancthon even gave her economic assignments instead of his own wife, whom he probably also considered less ready to write, than the lady of the Luther household. The letter together with the salutation reads thus:

“the worthy virtuous Frau Katharina Luther, doctor's wife, my especially generous friend.

God's mercy and all the best!

Worthy, virtuous wife of the doctor!

I wish you to know that we now, with God's grace, are coming towards Augsburg and have left the Doctor at Coburg, as he has no doubt written telling you. I hope, however, to be with him soon. I would like to ask you, if you would like to write to me with how things are going and how the official has shown himself regarding the grain. If there is anything I can do for you, I should wish to do it with all the diligence I can muster.

Both chancellors send greetings to you and wish you

† Greek = despot

all the best. God preserve you!

Date Augsburg, Wednesday after Saint Walpurga's Day. Philippus.

Tomorrow Duke George of Saxony should come. The emperor is further away, but is still coming.

Dear godchildren! I also wish you, little Hans Luther and little Magdalena and Aunt Lene much bliss. Send me your kisses my dearest boys.

J. Jonas.

I, Johann Agricola, Eisleben, with the best intentions, my dear doctor's lady."

As here in the letter, the theological friends around Kate's table competed in a verbal competition for the prize of the shortest grace. There showed itself Luther's intensity, Bugenhagen's prosaic pleasure and Melanchthon's elegant refinement - Luther: Dominus Jesus sit potus et esus (the Lord Jesus is food and drink); Pommer: "This and that, dry and wet, bless us God"; and Melanchthon: Benedictus benedicat (bless the blessed).

Besides the two wives of the colleagues Jonas and Melanchthon, Katharina will have been on excellent terms with Frau Barbara Cranach and Mayor Reichenbach's wife who had looked after her when she fled the convent, both older matronly women, and the family of the book-printer Hans Lufft. Of course, the doctor's wife belonged to the most distinguished circles, indeed she was by far the most respectable woman of Wittenberg and it is corresponding to her position that Master Lucas painted her on the altarpiece of the city church with her child in the foremost row. She also wore a gold-shimmering fur around her shoulders or in strips in her dress which

distinguished the patrician. She also allowed a certain self-assurance to shine through from time to time. Thus she had a friend of her husband "warned on no account to marry any crude peasant girl; since they are coarse and proud, are no good for their men and can neither cook nor tread grapes". In addition she went with other women (in the way of our women's associations today) to women who were ill or in childbirth with help and advice.

But one can understand that a woman with the predisposition and the temperament and education of Katharina preferred contact with men and that this contact, for which she had so much occasion and opportunity, made her little inclined to move about a lot in female society.

To have friends around him was a need Luther had. He hated loneliness for fear of his "Anfechtungen" - though he had to put up with enough talk with the devil during the night hours. "I'd rather go to my pigherd Johannes and to the pigs, than stay alone", he said as explanation of what it meant to be affected by "Anfechtungen". Thus he was always in company when he went for a walk.

During the translation of the Bible (1525-34) and the Bible revision (1539-42), Luther's assistants - Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Cruciger, Aurogallus and the stenographer and proofreader Röhrer - met at the Protestant "Sanhedrin" and they often stayed for the dinner table, to argue further or for recreation in the form of cheerful conversation and song.

Thus the guest table was never vacant in Kate's house - Luther saw to that.

But she also dedicated her life to him personally and

particularly as a true German woman.

Chapter 14

Kate and Luther

“It is a well-blessed man that has a good marriage, for there is no more delightful, more pleasant or lovelier relationship, partnership or union than a good marriage, when married couples live together in peace and unity. The greatest grace of God is to have a pleasant, devout, God-fearing partner with whom you can live peacefully, to whom you can entrust all that you own, even your own body and life.” Thus Luther praises marriage and in particular his marriage and his wife who brought before his own eyes and realized for him all that made up a marriage and what an ideal marriage was. She saw to it that he had a beautiful

home, a happy household, she waited on him and nursed him faithfully and served him "like a wife, even like a maid".

Kate cared, above all, for the doctor's bodily welfare during all his days of health and sickness.

The "archcook" knew how to do justice to the bodily needs of her husband; she knew what met his taste and what was good for his health. Luther also appreciated this and that "it was a tortured man, whose wife and maid were useless in the kitchen; it was the first misfortune, from which much calamity followed." But even the servants' abilities fell short; as Luther wrote in his house book: "It's the lady's eyes that cook."

Luther loved, as a true farm child blessed with a healthy appetite, real, unrefined, plain fare. He had problems with fancy food. To him there was nothing like good, pure, common homely food; fried herring and peas was one of his favourite dishes. But his wife soon realized that, because of the doctor's sedentary lifestyle and his strenuous, spiritual vocation and even more because he had ruined his constitution during the days of his unnatural lifestyle in the cloister and as a bachelor and suffered bad dizzy spells resulting from indigestion, this everyday food was not sufficiently wholesome for him and that it had to be supplemented with other vegetable foodstuffs, particularly fruit. She was on the whole also anxious to give him a variety of different foods. So she kept ready in her pantry, in the cellar and store not only peas and millets, groats, pearl barley and rice, but also greens, cabbage, carrots, turnips and fruit. Luther loved the local medlars more than all the imported figs and he valued the peaches especially highly, almost as highly as grapes. Not only

were oxen and pigs slaughtered at the cloister but also geese and ducks, chickens, pigeons and fieldfares; fresh and dried fish and crabs arrived as delicacies on the table. Game was eaten at wedding feasts; however, Luther found it, with its dark-red meat, too “melancholy”. Indeed, Kate herself kept cattle and chickens, planted all kinds of fruit and vegetables, picked the fruit, baked the daily bread and brewed the beer; but a lot had to be bought on top of that or one received it as a present – in particular the court provided game and friends good fruit: Borsdorfer apples, Golden apples and Blutäpfel[†]. Frau Kate spiced the dishes with salt, pepper, saffron, with poppy, “Zippel” (onion), parsley, caraway and chervil, cooked with butter and sweetened with honey and sugar. There was always fruit for dessert: apples, pears, peaches and nuts; in cherry season a cherry branch also hung over the table.

Thus nothing tasted better to the doctor than his home-made food and drink and there was nowhere finer to him than at home at his well-served table. More preferable to him than the pressed cheeses which Lauterbach sent from far off Pirna were “our cheeses of simple basic ingredients from simple moulds”. He found the beer given to him by Jonas bad, while he praised the beer of his Kate as a tried and tested remedy for his kidney-stone problem; he called it the “queen of all beers”. At court he thought of how his “dear friendly Lord” Kate had wine and beer at home; there he had to consume rough drink and eat thick, heavy bread that gave him problems.

And how Luther always longed during the

† Purpurroter Cousinot apples

discomfort of the trip and strange accommodation for his comfortable home and his cosy warm bed!

Kate kept to the old rule which Luther so liked to inculcate in young wives: "Keep yourself to your husband so that he is happy when on his way home he sees the top of the house."

Truly, Frau Kate also had to fight with regard to feeding her stubborn husband. The doctor would often go several days at a time without partaking of anything at all, or he ate only some fried fish and a piece of bread; if he wanted to study totally undisturbed he took a chunk of bread and withdrew into his study room, his old monk's cell, and did not come out to eat or even sleep. He thus shut himself up once to elucidate on the 22nd psalm with just bread and salt and did not reappear again for three days. Frau Kate's concern at this was such that she knocked and shouted on the door. Since she got no answer, she had the locksmith fetched to break open the door. Upon which he shouted indignantly: "What do you want? Do you think I am planning something bad? Do not know that I must work, so long as it is day; since when night comes, nobody can work!" Another time (1541) she had problems with her hardheaded patient when he could not sleep with his "Anfechtung" for fourteen days and did not want to eat or drink anything.

On the other hand, at other times Luther was quite disposed towards a festive meal or small banquet with the circle of friends, for he thought: "If the Lord God provides us with great pikes and Rhine wine, so may I eat and drink of them; it is right by God if one is happy or laughs from the heart once in a while." From this Frau Kate knew to celebrate festively annually her

husband's birthday, the day he obtained his doctorate, and the day he nailed up his theses. "The Kingdom" was celebrated on the 3rd May with a meal, "there psalms were sung, Gospels were spoken, the catechism, prayers, as one was supposed to; this was something for which the servants were responsible." At Saint Nicholas the children were given presents; at New Year also the servants. Christmas, however, was especially festively celebrated and the children looked forward to it and the parents too. Frau Kate saw to it that all kinds of good and beautiful things were brought into the room and put on the table.

Frau Kate proved herself an excellent nurse of the sick. In this rôle all her experience, skill and energy showed. And with such a large family one can only guess at the range of illnesses that occurred. There were not only the children and pupils who went through all kinds of childhood illnesses, some of them deadly; Luther also brought all ill friends, male and female, into the Black Cloister, so that it often appeared like a hospital.

The most chronic and most difficult patient was admittedly the doctor himself. He was in fact ill from the beginning and new illnesses kept adding to the old ones: dysentery, fever, painful skin rashes and ulcers, rheumatism, hip and chest pains. A particularly bad thorn in the flesh above all others - stones which tormented him like "the punches of Satan"; then his indigestion caused him distress, he had blood-rushes to the head, headaches, noise in his ears and dizziness, cramps and bouts of unconsciousness - attacks which he greatly feared as "challenges of the devil" and which often filled him with a deep melancholy. Here

one needed to be a patient and cheerful nurse. And Frau Kate knew how to handle her patient, better than the great doctors, the doctors of repute; she knew how one had to treat the sick man with food and medicaments; she kept him away from wine and brewed him up some body-cleansing beer; she rubbed his leg with healing ointment and solutions of alcohol and warmed his body up with warm blankets; she refreshed him with little sweet spiced cakes and all kinds of juices; she knew a root effective against the stones and numerous home remedies; she scraped him the amber from an old rosary and dissolved the little shavings, which the Duke of Prussia sent as a remedy for the stones. According to her son, the later famous Doctor Paul Luther, she was half a doctor. He said in his inaugural speech to his professorship in Jena: "My mother has helped many through advice and healing; not only women with their illnesses, she has also often relieved men of pains in their sides." Hence, Luther trusted her above all "our Lord's patchers", the doctors and the pharmacists. When Luther fell deathly ill in Smalcald and the doctors gave him medicaments "as if he were a great ox" and the Swabian Carnifex (flayer, torturer) said: "Oh, my dear doctor, you have a good, strong body, you've still to pay; you need to suffer for God when one sets about you" - he thought of his wife and her curing remedies and longed for, despite all the frights of such a journey, nothing so much as home.

Luther's principle was: "I will eat what I like the taste of and suffer what I must afterwards. I ask the medics for nothing; if they say I have only one year to live, I will not want to make my life sour but to eat and drink in God's name what suits my palette." Thus

reported the Doctor Ratzeberger, personal physician to the Electress Elisabeth von Brandenburg who fled with her to Wittenberg, then of the Count von Mansfeld and finally the Elector of Saxony – also at times Luther’s own doctor:

“When Luther was ill for the first time with a calculus (stone), he had no appetite and also shied common medicaments from the apothecary. In addition he had great physical pain and could not rest. When he could neither eat nor drink and pushed away everything that his wife had most diligently and to the best of her ability prepared for him, she asked him most conscientiously if he would like to choose himself something that he would like to eat. “Well”, he said, “do me a meal of grilled herring with cold peas and mustard since you desire that I should eat, but prepare it quickly before I lose my desire; if you take too long, I may not want it anymore.” The woman made what her husband requested and prepared the food as quickly as she could and put it in front of him. When he was then eating it with relish, the doctors arrived to visit him – his medics were Augustin Schurf and Licentiate Melchior Fend – as was their custom and wanted to see how the illness was developing. When they saw him eating, they had been horrified of the food which they deemed harmful and unhealthy for him. “Oh, just what are you doing doctor?”, Licentiate Fend asked. “You want to make yourself sicker!” Doctor Luther remained quite silent and continued eating away and felt sorrow for the physician who showed so much concern for him. Soon after they had left him and started thinking that he would bring on some kind of deadly illness, he passed a large stone, which they were not used to

seeing in his case, and Luther was well again. The next morning they visited him expecting to find him ill in bed; but instead, they found him in his study pouring over his books, which caused them great amazement."

But Frau Kate knew how to revive her husband, not only with food and medicaments, but also by lifting his spirits and comforting him.

If he was disgruntled or had his "Anfechtungen", the clever, sensible woman secretly invited Dr Jonas to the table that he might cheer him up with joyful discourse - she knew that nobody understood better how to make him feel brighter with conversation; or she even had Bugenhagen live in the cloister, bringing with him his wife who was due to give birth.

Not only with the brewery and farming in mind, Frau Kate kept a carriage to which she would have her horses hitched and take her husband with his friends at a walk into woods and fields for the pleasure of it, whereupon he became happy and even began to sing songs - or he went about the country and villages giving to the poor.

This job of the doctor's wife, to provide life and health and cheerfulness of mind for the great Reformer, to the blessing of the church, was especially recognized by the fine Capito who put it in words to Luther: "I love her from the heart as the one who was born to look after your health so that you can serve the church born under you longer, that you can serve the welfare of all believers in Christ."

But Frau Kate served her husband not only as an exquisite cook and excellent nurse as he desired of her as his wife, "that she should help her husband suffer accident, illness and misfortune"; she was also "a

pleasant, sweet and amusing life's companion" to him; in this sense he called her "honour of the house" in that she was the honour, decoration and adornment of the house.

Of the way of conduct with a wife Luther spoke in terms of an exegesis of Genesis 26:8 where Isaac and Rebecca canoodle. "It is an honest affair quite befitting a devout woman. If the man of the house wanted to play about with his sister or servants in such a way, that would not really be befitting to him, since it is fitting that one should tell her what she should and should not do, and there should be gravity present even when one comforts her. But with her whom God has given to me I want to joke, play and talk in a friendly manner, so that I may live in reason and humility with her."

So Katharina knew how to amuse her husband, to make a joke and even more how to stand up against the joking and banter of her husband. And she also knew how to meet the friends and guests. She had the Bremen priest Probst asked whether the North Sea had dried up such that there was no fish. When Doctor Speratus sent a quantity of fish by the grown-up Cario, she said to Luther: "A great bishop has sent me a great barrel." "And indeed by a great man, our Charon", Luther added. "Yes, everything is great today!" she opined.

She knew how, in Luther's own thoughtful way, to take on her spouse with striking effect. He had once gone away in a fit of melancholy, despairing of God and the world. When he returned home, Frau Kate stepped towards him in mourning dress with the veil deep over her face. Startled he shouted: "In God's

name, Kate, what has happened?" "Oh, great doctor, a great misfortune", she answered; "just think, our dear Lord God has died, that is why I am so sad." Whereupon Luther fell around his wife's neck and cried: "Yes, dear Kate, I'm acting as though there were no God in heaven anymore!" And thus he won new courage so that he overcame his sadness.

Frau Kate knew not only how to cheer Luther up when he was disgruntled or struck by his "Anfechtungen", but also to break the immense will of the, despite all his good nature, obstinate and headstrong man, particularly when it was a matter of getting him to rest and recover for his own good. "My head is self-willed as you say", he once wrote to Melancthon, "but to me it is so entirely self-willed because Satan forces me to idle so much against my will and waste time." However, the clever woman knew how to talk him round, even according to his own admission, as often as she wanted to.

On the other hand, Luther sought to protect himself from any suspicion that he allowed himself to be persuaded in theological and ecclesiastical matters by his wife. But this was believed by some to be the case and she was thought a bad influence towards certain people. So wrote, for example, Cruciger wrote to Veit Dietrich who was not too fond of Frau Kate: "You know that he (Luther) has a torch in the house which inflames him to much." The Wittenbergers believed to sense that the personal aversion of his wife towards certain personages lay behind his quarrel with the lawyers.

In such a small city and with the often petty frictions among the scholars and their wives, such chit-chat is

understandable, no matter how groundless it might be. We have a very animated and clear portrayal by an eyewitness on the subject. On Estomihi Sunday (24th February) 1544 Luther was at a rich gathering with the usual feast. Besides Bugenhagen, Melanchthon, Röhrer and Major among others, the school master Crodel from Torgau had also been invited to his great joy and gratification. He, with some Wittenbergers making way for it, brought the conversation onto the "libellous rumour" that the doctor "preached from the inspiration and stimulation of his wife". With great seriousness and warmth Luther rejected this suspicion and said among other things: "Such words, as I put forth in relation to this matter (the quarrel with the lawyers), never - inasmuch as I have not written any rules for the Holy Ghost - occurred to any woman. I allow myself to be led by wife to some extent in the matter of the household and table, but in matters of the conscience and writing I recognize no other teacher and doctor than the Holy Spirit." A little later, after a passionate speech, his wife came and asked what was being discussed with such great passion. He closed with these words to Crodel: "Tell the lawyers that I am not led in this matter by my wife; I consider the subject in its own right and the core of the matter without reference to any one person." This conversation was so important to Crodel that he informed his friend Ratzeberger of it word-for-word in writing, and it was enough in itself; one could scarcely know Luther if one wished to believe such clap-trap.

It also seems that Luther read his letters out to Kate and that he wrote them in her presence, when she would give him instructions. She also encouraged him

to write to friends if he became dilatory in that respect; though the couple seldom got any hours of quiet rest in the later years of heavy work demands as they had done in the first years of their marriage. But Frau Kate never kept herself to her economic activities, the care of the running of the house and the work in the garden and field, to the exclusion of all else. She was to her husband in his office and occupation, as much as was possible and necessary, however, his life's helper. Not only in the sense that she relieved him of all the worries regarding family and property, she also shared in his work, in the momentous questions of the time.

"Do you teach the catechism and the faith?" the doctor wrote to his "careful" wife from Eisleben. Thus it can be said that Frau Kate - at least when the doctor was away - held up the catechism to the children and servants as Luther with his "Small Catechism" expected of all Christian parents.

Luther also gave his housewife instructions regarding the printing of his writings; indeed she would talk over with him and help him decide what he should print. From Marburg he wrote about his theological conversation with Zwingli on the Communion even using Latin catchwords.

The letters, that he wrote to her when he had time during Diets give, above all, testimony to her participation in her husband's work and worries, as in the great questions of the time and goings-on in the world. So the ones from Coburg and especially the last on the 24th September: "Frau Kathrin D. Luther at Wittenberg, by hand.

Mercy and peace in Christ!

My dear Kate! Yesterday I wrote to you and sent

with it a letter to our gracious lord, from which you can understand what our people want to get at Augsburg. Beyond that I hope that, with God's mercy, we shall be back home with you in fourteen days. And at the same time I realize our cause will not go completely undamned. There's no hope of it. However, Rietesel has been writing here; he hopes Augsburg will end with peace in all camps. If God should so dispose, it would be a great mercy. It is something we probably all need with the Turks wanting to be so on upon us. You will probably hear more from Hornung. May God be with you all.

Saturday after St. Matthew's Day, 1530. Martinus LuthE.R."

Ten years later, when the Diet and convention was taking place in Hagenau, Luther wrote from Eisenach on the 10th July 1540 to his "dear wife, Frau Kathrin Luderin of Wittenberg" and others: "... Pray with diligence, with all you have within you, for our Lord Christ, for all of us who believe in him, against the devil's throng who now so rage at Hagenau against the Lord and his Anointed."

Luther also talked in a similar manner with his wife during his last years about the political position, in particular the underhand policy of Duke Maurice. "Dear Kate", he expounded, "your compatriots have made with my most gracious lord's councillors a dog tether and would rather not slacken it, they have betrayed him."

It is natural and comprehensible that we have so little direct evidence of Frau Katharina's conduct, influence or intention. For she herself did not write so very much and her letters have nearly all got lost, while

she herself kept the doctor's letters carefully. Further his contemporaries and the house companions were, as one might expect, mostly interested in the great man who had moved the world. His figure shone completely above his housewife. Only by looking at the reverse image of Luther's letters and table conversations, or more rarely the remarks of his admirers, do we find the traits which portray her character.

That Frau Katharina maintained an independent position and standing next to the Reformer is proved by the fact that friends and Luther referred to her not only deferentially as "Domina" and the doctor's wife in Latin and Greek, but also by their still using the name "Katharina von Bora" when she was a married woman.

So what did Luther now think of his wife?

There are three important testimonies Luther made regarding his wife, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of his marriage, which are not off-hand statements made in some good or bad mood but which show well thought through and solemn recognition of her excellence as a housewife and a married woman.

In the second year of his matrimony (1526) he wrote to Stiefel: "She is obliging to me, dutiful and pleasing in all things, much more so than I had dared to hope (thank God!), so that I would not exchange my poverty for the treasures of Croesus."

Eleven years later, during his deadly illness on the journey from Smalcald, Luther dictated his will in Gotha in which it says: "Comfort my Kate that she bears this knowing that she lived happily with me for twelve years. She has served me not only as a wife, but also as a handmaiden. May God reward her for it! You

should provide for her and her children as is befitting." And then he said: "I love my Kate, indeed I like her more than I like myself, that is for sure; I would rather die, than that she or the little children should die."

Luther wrote in his final, definitive will in 1542. "I Martin Doctor Luther avow with this my own handwriting that I give my dear and loyal wife as dower land, house and treasures. I do that insomuch as she has taken me always lovingly, worthily and becomingly as a devout, true, marriageable husband."

And this which Luther testified in these solemn hours, he had repeatedly made known before his table companion and friends. His house companion of many years, Hieronymus Weller, wrote in his recollections: "I recall how the reverend man often said he considered himself lucky that God had given him such an obedient, modest and clever wife, who could care for and support his health so well and followed him and knew how to adapt cleverly to his ways and to bear his mistakes and worse moments with so quiet a mind; he himself could not always, with all his work, rôles and challenges, realize what was best for his well-being."

The relationship between Kate and Luther was that of respectful admiration; this corresponded to the mores of the Middle Ages of the dominance of the man over the woman; it was also due to the fact that the woman, fifteen years the younger, looked up to the older, through learning and respect, honourable man with a certain piety. Hence, he always addressed her in a familiar form, while she addressed him more formally and called him "doctor". This Luther also found quite natural. When once talking about a man who had sold his freedom to a rich woman, he said: "I

like it when my Kate butts in – only I don't let her win anything other than a rebuttal." And another time: "All control is in her hands. I gladly leave the running of the house to her; but I wish to retain my rights without exception and government by women has never brought about any good." Luther was throughout his whole being, from general outlook and biblical principles, not the man to allow any curtailment of his marital rights; he pointed out rebukingly to a friend who complained of the tyranny of his wife, that a man's status was not to be allowed to be trampled underfoot. Accordingly at Hans Lufft's daughter's wedding he led the bride to the bridal chamber and said to the bridegroom (the medic Master Andreas Aurifaber) that he should go with the general flow and be man of the house (if the woman was not at home, he added jokingly). And he took off one of his shoes and laid it on the four-poster bed as a sign that he should be lord and master.

But, admittedly, Kate's resolute way, the dominion she held over the house and which the man of the house gave over to her completely, led him to jokingly call her his "Lord". Thus he wrote to her from the Electoral court in Torgau: "Yesterday I thought how I have a beautiful woman at home, or should I say "Lord"?"

And over this resolute nature of her ways he teased her well enough. And just like other strong-minded if good-natured married men, he liked to play the humorous rôle of the obedient, oppressed husband in front of his friends. Thus he once said to a guest: "Be content with a good host since he owes his obedience to the women" To her, Luther spoke in ever new turns

of phrase of this supposed marital domination and characterized the imperious ways of Frau Kate. He already called her "my lady lord" in the first week of their marriage. "My Kate" (Meus Ketha) later became her regular name in personal letters or more jocularly "My Lord Kate" or "Dr Kethus", also once "my lord and my Moses" and "my mistress" or "empress".

But, otherwise, he used more affectionate terms like "my Katie" as well as my "vine", or in more distant letters deferentially as "my wife of the house", "my honour of the house".

Luther also generally took on that teasing tone towards his wife which was in part affectionate disposition and in part respectful recognition.

Already in the first preserved letter we have and onwards he addresses her: "Dear Lord Kate". Then he addresses her - according to the custom of the time - "For the attention of My dear Lord, Frau Kathrin Luther at Wittenberg", or "My friendly dear Lord, Frau Katherin von Bora, wife of Dr Luther, Wittenberg" or even more long-windedly, humorously elevated: "To my friendly dear Lord, Frau Katherina Luther, Doctor's wife, lady preacher of Wittenbergh". Or: "My gracious young lady Katherin Luther von Bora and Zulsdorf near Wittenberg, my sweetheart". "My heart's love, lady of the house Katherin, wife of Dr Luther, inhabitant of Zulsdorf, lady of the sow market and whatever else she might be referred to as." "My friendly dear lady of the house Katherinen Luther of Bora, lady preacher, brewer, gardener and whatever else she might be." In the address it was warmly and tenderly "My love" or "heart's love" or "My friendly dear Kate Luther" and in the salutation: "Dear young

lady Kate” and in the close: “Your old sweetheart” or “Your dear man”. Even in his daily family prayers he prayed for “my dear wife”.

The doctor’s wife also served to exemplify his theological views, or views gained from experience, on women; sometimes in a joking type of way, sometimes more seriously. He, in regard to the matter, would not accept their having any wisdom or managerial potential and joked about their loquacity. He remarked several times that women in general and Kate in particular would forget the Lord’s Prayer if they started preaching.

The doctor laughed about Kate when she wanted to be clever; expounding that “God had given man broad shoulders as a seat for wisdom; woman, however, wide hips and strong thighs so she might remain sitting quietly at home, keeping house and bearing and rearing children. A woman’s rule in the house or state was of no value. The man has the rule of the house. The law takes over wisdom and power from women.” It was his general opinion: “There is no skirt or dress less befitting a woman, married or unmarried, than the one she wears when she wants to be clever.” Luther even put forth once at a table conversation: “Women lack strength and power of body and intellect. One should tolerate their lack of bodily strength since men should support them. We should desire their lack of intellect; their customs and ways we should bear and manage with understanding, taking them for good.”

But he recognized the virtues and designation of the female gender with praise: “A woman is a loving, pleasant and stimulating life’s companion. Women carry children and bring them up, manage the house

and distribute sensibly what a man acquires and brings in so that it is used economically and not squandered uselessly and each receives what is due to him or her. Hence, they are, by the Holy Ghost, the honour of the house; the decoration, honour and adornment of the house. They incline to mercy, because they are exquisitely created by God to have children and be the desire and joy of men and to be merciful." "A woman is a poor thing. The greatest honour that she has is that we one and all entered the world born of women. In the scriptures a woman is called "the desire and joy of the eyes" (Sirach 26, 2). A devout woman should therefore be honoured and loved; firstly because she is a gift freely given by God, also because a woman is endowed by God with marvellous great virtues which excel other defects and afflictions by far, particularly where they possess breeding, loyalty and faith." "When women accept the teachings of the Gospel, they are much stronger and more fervent in their faith and keep to it much more strongly and rigidly than men, as one sees in dear Anastasia and other martyrs; also Magdalene had greater heart than Peter."

Once he complained: "When I was still needing to marry, I would have carved myself an obedient woman out of a stone; so much I despaired of obedience in all women." But it was probably not such a terribly serious problem for him. He would know: "There is no greater plague or cross on earth than a malicious, argumentative woman". With him it was not the case or he would run off, he said. In his case he knew to praise his wife's willing and eagerness in many places and in various way. Thus he also quoted with pleasure the word of his lady to Eisenach: "There is no greater

thing on Earth than the love of a woman to whom she can give it." And from his own experience he expounds: "A devout wife is a companion through life, a man's comfort."

Little conjugal feuds Luther took as natural things to be taken lightheartedly into the bargain. When he once had a little tiff with his wife, he explained to Veit Dietrich: "He could stand her rage; he could endure even more." He felt of married couples: "If they cuss and grumble occasionally at the same time, that's no bad thing; a marriage is not all plain sailing, it's a matter of ups and downs, one has to give oneself to it. Adam and Eva will have scolded each other thoroughly to pieces for nine hundred years and Eve will have said to Adam: 'You ate the apple.' To which Adam will have answered: 'Why did you give it to me?'" The state of marriage is not damaged by such quarrels. "Since, although women generally know all the arts and ways with which they can catch their man with tears, lies and persuasive talk, can turn a thing on its head and know all the finest words, when just these three things remain in a marriage, namely, faithfulness and belief, babies and children and sacrament, that one holds it to be a holy thing and a divine state, it is a blessed state and it is a blessed man who has a good wife."

Once he complained: "I must have patience with the Pope, I must have patience with the multitudes, I must have patience with the crowds, I must have patience with the servants, I must have patience with Kate von Bora, in fact I must have so much patience that my life tends to nothing but patience." The prophet Isaiah (30, 15) said: "In quietness and confidence is your

strength." - How little, though, Kate took amiss of this, is shown by the fact that in the stone doorway to the house which she ordered for Luther from Pirna she had just this saying of the prophet engraved. However, Luther also avowed: "Whoever receives a good woman receives a good dowry. And because a woman can be a little bitter, one should have patience with her. For she belongs in the house and it is sometimes necessary to be hard with the servants and give them a good talking to." "Domestic temper as father and mother, man and woman in the house does not do great harm. Domestic temper is like the children playing with dolls."

The high esteem of family life, the praise which Luther sang of marriage in all different tones, is truly proof of the happy marriage that Luther had with his Kate. The chapter on matrimony from his table conversations is the longest. He started praising matrimony at the engagement of his niece (1538), in that it was right according to God and the very best and holiest state, and could not stop. "Therefore one should start it with the most marvellous ceremonies (festivities). God has made a cross (i.e. a blessing) over marriage and holds it there."

In marriage there must be pure love and desire, more exactly "there must be a devout man and a devout woman who love spouse and children with all their hearts. A devout married woman is a life's companion, a man's comforter, as is written (Proverbs 31:11): "The heart of her husband trusts in her. Woman is credited with pleasingness and delightful charm." The sweetest life seemed to him: "to live with a devout, willing, obedient woman in peace and unity."

Luther had found in his wife and his home what he

searched for in the correct marriage and expected from the right married woman. He testifies: "I have, thanks to God, done well, because I have a good, faithful woman on whom a man's soul may depend, as Solomon says (Proverbs 31:11): "She does not let me go lacking."

Martinus speaking of his wife said: "he valued her more than the Kingdom of France or the rulers of Venice. For a good woman had been given him as a gift by God. Further, he heard about many more problems and failures abounding among married people than were actually discovered. Thirdly: it should be superfluous to say that she should be kept in a loving and valued way so that she can conduct herself with belief and honour as is appropriate for a devout, virtuous woman. All of this a man should easily accomplish if he gives it consideration and triumphs over quarrels and disunity such as Satan disposes himself to create among married people." "Marriage is not a matter of nature, but God's gift, the sweetest, loveliest and most virtuous life. Oh how much I longed for my dearest when I lay critically ill in Smalcald. I thought I would not see my wife or children again; how painful being cut off and separated in such a way was to me. I now strongly believe that the natural inclination and love such as a married man has for his wife is greatest in dying people. Now that I have got well again by God's grace, so much more do I love my wife and little children. No-one is so divine that they do not feel this inclination and love. It is a great thing of the tie and intercourse between man and woman."

Luther also knew that he could find no other woman in the world more suitable for him than Katharina von

Bora. He warned the priest about the practice of a second marriage and added surveying his circle of friends: "I, if I were young yet knew the malice of the world, would rather die, even if a queen were offered me, than marry again after my Kate." And he prized marriage so highly that he held it for the most beautiful state accorded by religion, for the highest state on Earth.

Luther knew nothing dearer than his Kate. He averred he loved her more than himself. He bewailed it as a human weakness that he would rather have his Kate than our Lord God. His favourite Epistle, the Epistle to the Galatians, he called "his Kate in the New Testament". "The Epistle to the Galatians is my favourite Epistle, to which I have entrusted myself; it is my Kate von Bora." And his highest trump was: "I give my Kate as security!"

Kate was no intellectual woman, caught high up in thought; bright witticisms were not part of her. She was a down-to-earth, though not overly pedestrian, competent German woman.

It is not appropriate to ask whether Frau Kate was an educated woman. An erudite woman like Argula Grumbach she was happily enough not; Luther, as his statements point, was not spiritually elevated by such a woman and had it been the case would not have chosen Katharina. Next to Luther she did not need to be a spirited woman like the "mother of the church" Katharina Schützin in Strasbourg, who sent out missives to Christian women. But as educated as any woman of her standing she was.

Frau Kate, it is testified, read the Bible keenly with pleasure and indeed not just because of the fifty florins

promised by Luther. Once the doctor admonished his wife that she should read and listen to God's word diligently and in particular studiously read the Psalms. But she said that she already had and read a lot every day and could well converse on it, if God so wanted. Indeed, the doctor felt such vaunting must be the prelude to future weariness. But truly the busy woman could not deal constantly with ecclesiastical matters like her theological spouse. And at some other time it struck her that she did not pray the Gospel so fervently and assiduously as she did under the papacy. Ecclesiastically minded she could be nevertheless. Of his sermons on John 14-16 Luther said to his wife: "This is best of all the books that I have ever written; therefore dear Kate, let me entrust it to you to keep it as my testament."

And from Eisleben he wrote: "Read, dear Kate, John and the Small Catechism, of which you said at the time: "Everything in the book was said by me." She not only read books on the Scriptures and religion but also applied what she read to herself.

Evidence of her keen scouring of the written word is provided by the fact that her children had an open book placed in her hands on her gravestone.

Kate could also write, and her letters, insofar as they are dictated and not stylized by others, show a clear, distinct and rational way of thinking and expressing herself. And if Luther once pulled his wife up for the fact that she had written "Kattegissimum" instead of "Katechismum", this can be attributed much less than today to lack of education in spelling, in a time when not only laymen, but also scholars, who wrote Latin reasonably orthographically, wrote German in

the most irregular way, just as it came to them, with all the errors of the inarticulate, corrupted spoken enunciation.

Of just as little relevance is the question of whether Frau Katharina was equal to her spouse. A comparison with Luther's spiritual being, with his genius and character, effect and importance to world history is naturally not to be considered. But that she was to him as his married partner, housewife and mother of his children what he needed and wanted in her, that she was the right woman for Luther and therefore his equal, that he had recognized and had said over and over again.

But it must also be remembered that Frau Katharina exhibited a lively interest in the work of her husband and for the church and the Reformation. Frau Kate heard and read much of the letters which came and went. She pressed her husband to write. She put a word in when he was sending out a letter. She would also give her advice, as a doctor's wife, on the filling of church positions and concerned herself with positions for the young masters. She understood the importance of her husband to Christendom; she knew to appreciate his personality and his work. She prayed and cared for the welfare of Christendom and the success of the Gospel until she was on her deathbed. And Luther also expected such interest from her.

And if we consider the rôle which Katharina played compared with the other professors' and Reformers' wives, for example Melancthon's wife, in the verbal and written exchange of ideas of contemporaries, when we see how she was honoured, greeted and regarded, worried for during illness by all around and not only

for her husband's sake, then it is without doubt: Kate was of worth and value to the great doctor. And it is noteworthy that the friends compared Luther's wife to the woman of the revelation, the symbol of the Christian church.

There is a picture of Frau Katharina in her later years; the face has gone a little brown, the eyes look bleary, almost pained and tired as Luther described them at the time "inclined to mistrust and worry"; again the strong lower lip shows sturdy self-confidence, the folded hands indicating quiet calmness - but it is the picture of a spiritually not unimportant woman. The serious, strict expression of the face portrays a great destiny which approaches her or which she has already experienced.

Chapter 15

Luther's Death

The last years of the marriage were quite difficult and dismal. This was due on the one hand to worsening relations on almost all sides; on the other to Luther's condition which was becoming ever sicker, ever frailer and with it more miserable and ill-tempered. One can easily imagine what Kate had to suffer with his temperament inclined to the melancholy and the angry irritability of her husband under these conditions.

The world situation, which the Reformer pursued understandably with a somewhat attentive eye, was strange and to Luther's mind almost terrifying. The

continual advance of the Turks, which was a hard blow to his Christian-German heart, the joining of the Christian powers, like France and, at least indirectly, Venice and the Pope with the hereditary enemies of Christendom seemed like menacing portents of the Day of Judgement. In addition the behaviour of the emperor and his brother, King Ferdinand, that was intent on holding off the Protestants, to feed them, like once the Hussites, with a crumb of concession but given a free hand would have pounced with force, joined, as Luther feared, with the Pope and devil, Turk and hell. It all filled him with anxious worry. He prophesied correctly on his last birthday: "During my life there will be, God so wishing, no great adversity and remain a good peace in Germania; but when I am dead, it will be very necessary to pray. Our children will yet have to take up the pikes since things will turn bad in Germany. The Council of Trento is very angry and feels very nastily towards us. Therefore pray diligently to God."

Still more irksome and worrying, however, for Luther were the disputes in his own ranks, about which he said to his friends at his last birthday party: "I am not afraid of the papists, they for the most part are coarse asses; but our brothers who originated with us but are not of us will do damage to the Gospel." The Elector and the Duke of Saxony stood hostile to each other regarding government rights of jointly owned country in the Wurzen Feud. Duke Maurice, whom Luther believed treacherous, withdrew from the Protestant Smalcald League. True, with the exception of the "ecclesiastical Turk", the archbishop of Mainz, Luther's old enemies - Duke George and Elector Joachim I - were dead and the Duchy of Saxony and

Electoral Brandenburg had gone over to Protestantism and additionally even the diocese of Cologne was ready to. But in Berlin "Grickel and the Jäckel"† (Agricola and Schenk) stepped out with their antinomianist teachings and in Cologne they wanted to introduce the Swiss ideas of the sacraments distasteful to Luther. The great mediator Butzer and the mild Melanchthon, who had taken over this Cologne Reformation, became extremely suspicious to Luther and the whole enterprise vexing - it failed anyhow through the intervention of the emperor. Within Luther's ambit, after the old co-workers of the Reformation had gone, grew a new breed in its place that with its with epigone zealously sharpened differences or blew up out of proportion all kinds of little things and surface appearances like the ceremonies, the interpretation of the Revelation to John, the ban of old Easter customs and brought up other pernicky matters that they wished to pursue in order to make themselves important; also the old quarrel with the Swiss flamed up again.

Indeed, even towards Melanchthon, his old friend and co-worker, Luther also became distrustful because of all kinds of divergences from "true" Lutheranism and a dangerous tension grew between both men and their families, until the discord was finally brought to an end by Luther himself so that the Reformer got on with him as his truest friend until the end of his life. Luther got into a hot dispute with his colleagues in the law faculty, in particular with his old friend Hieronymus Schurf because of the *matrimonia clandestina*, which the "loathsome lawyers" declared,

† the little Jakob

with reversion to canon law, valid; but which Luther rejected. He had seen the danger of it with Melanchthon's son, who had got himself - still underage - caught up with a girl, and, without the knowledge and consent of his parents, promised to marry her, which would have completely destroyed Master Philipp and his wife had Luther not prevented it. And he himself must have found it in his own family, in that his sister's son got engaged defiantly without the advice of family friends. He thus remonstrated that the "women folk of Wittenberg" had become too bold and that parents should bring their sons back from university because there they would be plagued with females.

The old house companions and friends were scattered all around the world; but with their challenges, annoyances and doubts they turned to their "holy father Luther". Thus he had to mediate, to advise and to comfort - and that heartened him. But he also had some vexation and pain. He was tormented by Master Stiefel with his thoughts on the Day of Judgement, by the city administrator Metsch with his inconvenient changes, his thoughtless pulling down of many dwelling houses for the fortress construction as a result of which the small, populous city became even more constricted and the poor students had to live even more wretchedly. One after the other of his contemporaries left this life. Already in 1538 the loyal Hausmann. Then Luther's last cloister colleague Brisger and, finally, also Spalatin (1545). Already (1542) his and Kate's kind, cheerful friend, Kate Jonas, had passed away, whose appearance had been always gratifying and joyful to him; above all, however, the

sunshine of the house, the good little Magdalena. His son and a nephew had for a long time been away in Torgau. At this time the husband of his niece Lene, born Kaufmann, also died; and she caused him great frustration with her second marriage to the youthful doctor Ernst Reuchlin (end of 1545).

1544 was again a year of illness in Wittenberg and in the Luther House. At Easter all the children were down with measles and the little Margarete got a heavy fever from it, with which she lay life-threateningly ill for ten weeks and did not recover from it until into December. What worry and pain for Kate!

But the father of the house himself was now always ill; first one thing went wrong, then another. All his health problems impacted greatly on his exhausted body and his tired spirit of life was no longer properly capable of withstanding the many attacks on his various organs. The family doctors and the Elector's personal physicians practised on him; the court sent medicaments; the Countess of Mansfeld wanted to help him. It was an old (yet still existent) belief that medicaments, given and applied by great princes and lords themselves, were strong and healing, but that nothing worked when it was given by a medic. Frau Kate, to be sure, did the most and the best.

In 1541 Luther was so weak for a long time that he could not concentrate for more than an hour at a time to read and speak; he had to remain at home and hold his religious services there. Once he also wrote to the medicament expert, widowed Countess Dorothea von Mansfeld, who would also have longed to help the "dear doctor". His pains were awful, such that he cried: "I want to die, these tortures are atrocious." The next

year he made his will, "tired of this life, or to put it more accurately, of this harsh death". "I have lived and worked to exhaustion. My head is no more use. I am tired and exhausted, I am nothing anymore." In April 1543 he moaned: "How often have I already died this year! And yet still I live, a useless burden on the earth." On 13th and 14th July 1543 he was repeatedly so unconscious that he thought he was dying and wanted to have Hans fetched from Torgau. But Frau Kate had learned to encourage him and talked him out of his thoughts of death. At the beginning of 1515 he had an attack of illness which had similar symptoms to that which brought his death a year later; cold as a corpse and frightening tightness of the chest. For a long time he had been unable to give sermons or lectures and had to be driven to church in a little cart to listen to the sermon. "I believe my real illness is more my age than my work and strenuous intellectual effort, but especially, though, the blows of Satan." "That I am unfit of mind is no great wonder, old age has arrived, the jug collects water until it breaks." "I am slow, tired and cold - that is, old and useless; I have completed my life's course and there is nothing left but that the Lord takes me to my fathers." With the terrible pain he wished to die, if not gently, then courageously.

But with all this suffering and torture, the old man still had to do the work of three, he was tormented by princes and town councils, by friends and colleagues and penitents with letter writing, book writing, lectures, sermons and consultations, "deliberations", writings of condolence; so that he complained: "There I sit, an old, decrepit, decayed, tired, frosty, and on top of that, one-eyed man and write. I hoped, however,

that one would allow me now, died off, the rest which I believe I have earned. But as if I had never done, written, spoken or explained anything, I must speak, do and explain so much that I just don't know anymore. I am so fully occupied that I seldom have any spare time to read or to pray by myself, which is hard to bear for me.

Admittedly, Luther's innate humour often broke through and his joyous trust in God remained the root of his being. But with his temperament inclined to the melancholy and his state of health, the ageing man saw mainly the darker side of all goings on and only seldom could he say to himself: "I leave behind the countenance of our parishes not full of grief but blossoming with the pure and holy teaching with many excellent and pure priests, growing day by day.

So time and the world had become dreary to him. "The world is the world, was the world and will always be the world." And he wanted to get away from it. He hoped and wished that the end of the world was at hand or at least the end of his life. "Come, dear Day of Judgement!" he sighed at the end of a letter to Kate, and to Frau Jörger he closed (1544) a letter: "It should now be the time of my journey home and rest; pray for me a blessed little hour."

Because he, however, could not leave the world and could not bring on the holiday rest of the Day of Judgement himself, he wanted to separate himself from his world and from his occupation. So is the frame of mind and wish of old and ill people; because they cannot leave this life, they try to change where they live and want to get away from it no matter how much difficulty might be connected with such a journey and

change. Thus Luther said of his surroundings for the whole of his last year, "he longed to move somewhere else". And the friends also found it strange, that in this year before his death he was more often away than for many years; and they looked on it as a "prophecy that his final journey would be to a better life". So it was in 1544 when he threatened a move from Wittenberg but was dissuaded by friends and officials at Wittenberg. The next year (1545) after he had been almost killed on Johannistag[†] by his "torturer", the stones, and thereby got into an irritated mood, he effected this decision.

There was really nothing special to provoke this step. But various people had spoiled his stay for him in Wittenberg in the time running up to it. The quarrel with the lawyers, the vexing episode in the house with "another Rosina and swindler", above all, however, the life and thrust of citizens and students in Wittenberg had angered him greatly. The great rush of students to Wittenberg brought, understandably, not just good, devout and conventional elements, and, with 2000 students, there were, of course, even more to reprimand and to punish, than with the former 200. And among these thousands were people from many different ethnic groups; not only those of German origin, but also foreigners: "Russians and Prussians, Dutch and English, Danes and Swedes, Bohemians, Poles, Hungarians, Sorbs, Welsh and French, Spanish and Greeks." The people exploited the students. Female rabble drifted in, as Luther felt, encouraged by adversaries, and it gave rise to some pleasure-seeking students who would rather wander around the flesh pots than learn God's word, virtue and propriety at

† St John the Baptist's Day, Midsummer's Day

school. Against this disorder Luther stood as a true old preacher with fatherly admonition. He asked his "brother students to conduct themselves quietly, modestly and honestly, to keep in mind why they had been sent there and at such great expense, that they learn art and virtue while they had been given the time and while they had such good lecturers." He urged the council to punish vice and to tax the citizens ambitions. But the citizens of the small university town were mostly keen to profit from their advantage, the council was afraid and not keen to act, as Luther often complained, making comparisons with the good order in an imperial city like Nuremberg. He showed his grey head in vain to the students; they failed to hear his pained and heart-felt reminders: "Oh my brother students, spare me and don't let it come to it that I must proclaim myself like Saint Polycarp. Oh God, why have you made me live through this? I have done nothing to deserve it, rather there is to hand mine and your teachers of true work, who serve you best in this and the next life."

Next to and together with this disorderly state, the exuberance in the city with the doctors' feasts got out of control especially at weddings and the christening of children to such an extent that some men (for example, Georg Major in obtaining his doctorate and christening nine children) got into debt. Indeed the new fashion was to make a tear in the clothing "to denude the virgins front and back", and nobody was there "to punish or prevent it". It seemed, as Luther feared, to begin to be "that Wittenberg and its authorities no longer wanted the dance on Saint Vitus's or Midsummer's Day but the beggar's and Beelzebub's

dance". Hence, Luther exclaimed: "Just away from this Sodom!"

On this he now seemed to act in earnest. In July 1545 together with his oldest son Hans, Doctor Cruciger and a table companion Ferdinand von Maugen he undertook a vacation trip on Frau Kate's wagon to Leipzig and Zeitz to friend Amsdorf, the bishop. On the way he heard that things in Wittenberg were even more in the grip of the cries of the crowd than he thought. He did not want to go back to the disorderly city. On 28th July he wrote the following letter to his wife from Zeitz:

"G(race) and P(eace)!"

Dear Kate! How our trip has gone, Hans will probably tell you everything - inasmuch as I know whether he will remain with me - otherwise Doctor Caspar Cruciger and Ferdinandus will doubtless tell you. Ernst von Schönfeld looked after us nicely at Lobnitz. Even more nicely Heinz Scherle in Leipzig.

I want to go on such that I do not need to return to Wittenberg. My heart has hardened against being there; I would like that you sold the garden and land, house and courtyard. Thus I would like to return the house to M(y) G(racious) L(ord) again. And it would be best for you, if you went to Zulsdorf while I am still alive. I could probably help you to improve the little property with my pay, for I hope, M.G.L. will continue with my pay for at least one year of my remaining life. After my death the four faculties at Wittenberg will probably not support you; so it is better to do during my life what will be needed to do then.

I have heard more in the country than I get to know in Wittenberg; I am therefore tired of the city and do

not want to return, when God so helps me.

The day after tomorrow I will go to Merseburg because Prince George has had me so much bid to do so.

I would rather wander around and feed myself from begging than martyr my poor old last days in the disordered ways of Wittenberg and worry myself with the loss of my hard and precious work. You can let Doctor Pommer and Master Philipps know of this as you like and ask if Dr Pommer will say goodbye to Wittenberg on my behalf. For I can suffer the anger and disaffection no longer.

May God commend, Amen.

Martinus Luther."

Frau Kate did, of course, show this ominous letter to both friends; Melanchthon, going to Dr Brück at midday and eating with him, for his part, told the chancellor of Luther's intentions. It had the desired effect. For what was Wittenberg without Luther? Also Melanchthon declared that he could then no longer stay and would need to creep away somewhere from the scandalous goings on.

At this, terror shook the very limbs of the Wittenbergers - the university, the council and the citizens. The senate and the city council gathered and consulted on measures to retain Luther. A delegation was sent with a duplicate of Luther's letter to the Elector, so that his influence could be brought on the angry man, "that he should change his mind". A delegation from the university and the city council: Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Major, the mayor and the municipal judge Hans Lufft were sent to Luther and also an appeasing letter from the court as well as the

kind personal physician Ratzeberger, whom Luther could suffer well, arrived in Merseburg. The doctor vented himself well enough to the Wittenberger envoys over the "lax moral situation". Now the city and government promised serious intervention against the squanderous ways at weddings and christenings, against frivolous activities at dances, against the unseemly shouting on the streets and so on.

At this Luther calmed down but still called in on the court to stress his demands; then went slowly home. The relaxation and the stay in fresher air had done him good and the comfort of his nice home and the care of his loyal housewife let him forget all thoughts of moving until the final journey to the world on the other side relieved him of all repugnance and calamity, all suffering and torturous pains of illness.

He had to act as arbiter in the complicated quarrel of his sovereign, the Count of Mansfeld, regarding mining rights and made three related journeys to his homeland the following winter. The Elector would have rather seen Luther "spared as a tired old man in relation to these things"; and this was also Frau Kate's opinion, who saw to it that Melanchthon, who was younger and healthier, did not need to go to Regensburg. But Luther himself felt: "It must be, in that I have much to do, that for a week I do not have any problems, so that I can rest happily in my coffin having reconciled my dear sovereigns and seen them of friendly, consenting heart." Besides, it was satisfying to him to show what the good Christ could do in a dispute as opposed to the "the silver and gold lawyers who consider the matter in terms of advantage and greed rather than justice and move on."

Kate looked on these trips ever more gloomily, particularly the last at the worst time of year. It was at the end of January and inclement, cold weather. She knew from much experience what a cold could mean for the thoroughly sick man. She had also heard that Luther had closed his lecture on Genesis in November (1545) with the parting words: "I cannot go on; I am weak; if God asks for me, I hope he provides me with a good, blessed end." Finally, an incident that filled the whole house with frightened notions. Shortly before, the student table and house companions had a chiming clock replaced in the house where they slept. There it came to pass once at midnight that a great crash was heard from this clock, as if the whole case with its weights had fallen down. But the next morning everything was found totally in tact. When Luther was told this, he said to the table companions: "You dear quirites, do not be frightened by it, but this crash means that I will soon die. When I come back from Eisleben I want to lie down in my coffin. I am so tired of the world and will depart like a ready guest from common lodgings." Frau Katharina nonetheless did not want to hinder her husband with the peace work in Mansfeld and after he had twice happily endured the trip, she hoped for a happy outcome of the third and last. She gave him not only his famulus Ambrosius Rutfeld but also her three sons. In Halle Doctor Jonas should also join them. Besold, Plato and others stayed behind as table companions in the cloister.

The travellers set off on Saturday 23rd January from Wittenberg. After a sharp frost during the first night, a thaw set in with ice drifts and flooding, so that the travellers arriving in Halle on Sunday morning could

not cross the Saale and had to linger three days in the city. However, friend Jonas, who had been priest in Halle for four years, made the Wittenberger guests welcome in his house. Frau Kate received a humorous letter from her husband in which he declared being in a good mood. It was addressed "For the attention of my dear, friendly Kate, wife of Luther at Wittenberg".

"Grace and peace in the Lord!

Dear Kate!

We arrived in Halle today at eight o'clock but have not travelled to Eisleben, for we were met by a huge anabaptist with waves of water and ice floes covering the land who threatened us with anabaptism. We could also not come back again because of the Mulda so we have had to stay put in Halle between the two rivers. Not that we have thirsted to drink but have had some good Torgau beer and good Rhenish wine. We have revived and consoled ourselves with it while we wait to see if the Saale calms down; the people and wagon owners as well as we ourselves were feeling cautious and we did not want to go into the water and try God. The devil lives in the water and has a grudge against us; one is better safe than sorry and it is not necessary that we should provide foolish pleasure for the Pope with all his scales[†]. I would not have thought that the Saale could swell up so much that it should flow over stoned roadways and everything.

No more now; pray for us and be good. I believe that if you were here, you would have advised us to do as much and we would have followed your advice.

May God commend! Amen.

Halle, Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (25th

† Luther saw the Pope as the devil incarnate

January) 1546.

Martinus Luther Dr"

It all sounded thoroughly cheerful and buoyant when this jovial letter was read in the cloister and Frau Kate could for the time being relax. But it was a week until another letter came. This must have been of no little concern to the anxious woman and she sent letter after letter which was not exactly the wont of the otherwise very busy woman. Finally, after Candlemas, a second letter arrived from Luther. It was written, admittedly, again in the same playful tone as the previous one and most of the doctor's epistles to his wife. But there was, however, something in it which gave rise to concern.

"My heart's dearest wife of Doctor Luther, lady of Zulsdorf and the sow's market and whoever else she may be.

Grace and peace in Christ and with my old, poor and, as I only know, strengthless love.

Dear Kate! I became weak on the way just before Eisleben; it was my fault. But if you had been there, you would have said, it would have been the fault of the Jews[†] or of their God. For we had to go through a village just before Eisleben in which many Jews lived; perhaps they caused me some commotion. There are here in the city of Eisleben currently more than fifty Jews living (in one house). And it is true, that when I came near the village, such a cold wind entered through the back of the wagon through my hat to my head as if it would turn my brain to ice. Such might have sent me spinning without help; but now, thanks to God, I am well disposed, except that the female

† Luther turned against the Jews when they rejected his teaching

beauties fight so hard for me.

I drink Naumburg beer, it has almost the taste of the Mansfeld of which you spoke highly. I really like it.

Your little sons went to Mansfeld the day before yesterday; boredom drove them. I don't know what they are doing there. If it's cold they might be freezing. Now it's warm, they can probably find something else to do or suffer as they please.

May God be with you and everyone at the house, and greetings to all table companions. Vigilia Purificationis[†] 1546.

M.L., Your old love."

So the doctor had got himself really cold and indeed through his own fault; he had got down from the wagon for a while, had got himself into a sweat with the remarkably warm winter weather, then had sat thoughtlessly in the wagon again through the last village, Nissdorf, just before Eisleben, and had caught cold from the sharp draught passing through the cart. Frau Kate knew what this would mean and became thoroughly worried despite the happy tone of the letter. She had, it seems, heard of the matter from elsewhere before Luther's own announcement arrived; also that the wound on his leg generally left open, which, a kind of "little spring" that saw that the bad juices drained, had, as one might expect, healed up. So she wrote one letter after the other and on one day (Friday, 5th February) even more. She sent out from Wittenberg the usual house remedies: strong aliments, all kinds of fortified water, rose vinegar and aqua vita and had Jonas, the famulus and her sons sleep in the

† 1st February, Eve of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Candlemas Eve

room the doctor was using with him. He wrote again on 6th February in a quite carefree tone, only a little worried because of the difficult disputes he had to settle:

“To the deeply-learned Frau Katharin Luther, my gracious wife at Wittenberg.

Grace and peace.

Dear Kate! We sit here and allow ourselves to be tortured and would be quite happy about it; but we will not be able to get done in a week as I had hoped. You can tell Master Philippus to correct his book of sermons, for he has not understood why the Lord calls wealth thorns in the gospel. The school where one learns that is here. But I fear that in the holy writing, fire is always threatening the thorns; thus I take ever greater pains that I might with God’s help arrive at a good result. Your sons are still at Mansfeld. Otherwise we have enough to eat and drink and would be appreciating good days if it weren’t for the irksome business. I think the devil makes fun of us; God will make fun of him, Amen.

Pray for us. The messenger is in a great hurry.

Saint Dorothy’s Day, 1546.”

However, despite these letters, Frau Kate was so full of worry about her distant husband that she could not sleep and wrote vexed epistles to Eisleben so that the devout doctor wrote her a long sermon on God’s trust in two successive letters on the 7th and 10th February:

“To my dear wife Katherin Luther, doctor’s wife, self-martyr of Wittenberg, to the hands and feet of my dear love.

Grace and peace in the Lord.

Read, dear Kate, John and the Small Catechism, of

which you once said: it is all said by me in my book. You seem to want to care for your God, as if he were not omnipotent, when he could make ten Doctor Martins if the old one were to drown in the Saale or be overcome in the oven's fire or Wolf's birdcatcher. Leave me in peace with your worries; I have a better carer than you and all the angels. He lies in a manger and hangs on to a virgin's breast, but at the same time sits at the right-hand of God, the Almighty Father. Therefore be in peace, Amen.

Pray, pray, pray and help us to get things right. Today I had in my mind to grease the carriage[†] in my rage; but I was overtaken by the distress of my native country and held back. Now I have also become a lawyer. But it will be of no use to them. It would be better, if they left me a theologian. If I became one of them, if I should live, I might become a Poltergeist that would restrain their pride through God's grace. They think themselves God, they should withdraw fully and without ado before their divinity becomes hell and they are like Lucifer who could not stay in heaven for pride. Well, whatever God wills.

You should let Master Philippus read this letter, for I did not have time to write to him, but you can console yourself that I would love to be with you if I could be, as you know, and he will know as a married man and will fully understand everything.

We live well here and the council gives me half a "Stübchen" of Rheinfall at every meal, which is very good. Now and again I drink it with my companions. The table wine here is good and Naumburg beer very good, except that it seems to me to fill my chest with

† In readiness to leave?

phlegm with its pitch. The devil has ruined the beer all over the world with pitch and the wine in your area with sulphur. But here the wine is pure and not treated the way wine is usually treated in the area.

And know that all the letters that you wrote have got here and today the ones you wrote the following Friday have come with Master Philippus's letters, so you do not need to get vexed.

Sunday after St. Dorothy's Day (7th February) 1546.

* * * * *

Your dear Herr. M. Luther."

"To the holy, cautious woman, Katherin Luther, Doctor Zulsdorfer at Wittenberg, my dear gracious wife.

Grace and peace in Christ.

Most Holy Frau Doctor! We send friendliest thanks for your great worrying for which you cannot sleep. Since the time that you have been worrying for us, fire has tried to consume us in our lodgings from outside the door of my room; and yesterday, without doubt because of the strength of your worry, a stone almost fell on our heads and squashed us like a mice in a trap. He had in mind to thank you for your holy worrying where the dear holy angels might not have given protection. I worry that if you do not stop worrying the Earth may swallow us up with all the elements following. Do you teach the catechism and the faith? Pray and let God worry, because it says: 'Cast all your cares to the Lord, for He cares for you' (1 Peter 5, 7).

We are, praise God, fresh and healthy, except the matters take the edge off things and Doctor Jonas had to get himself a bad thigh catching it on a chest; there is so much envy in the people that he would not let me

have a bad thigh by myself.

May God commend. Now we want to be off and away and travel home, God willing, Amen, Amen, Amen.

Your holy, willing servant Martinus Luther.

Saint Scholastica's Day (10th February) 1546."

But the doctor knew only too well what little trust in God Frau Kate showed. She knew and heard that although he allowed himself to be plied with warm cloths every evening, his old zeal to preach even in the foreign city made him active in the cold church; he ordained two priests and preached four sermons, the last on Sunday 14th February. In the evening he wrote another letter to his wife, but mentioned nothing, however, of the fact that he had had to break off from his sermon in the morning because of weakness; he did, however, ask his wife for medicaments.

The letter strikes a cheerful and hopeful tone again; the prospect of returning to the beloved home lightening the gloomy mood:

"For the attention of my friendly, dear housewife, Katherin Luther von Bora at Wittenberg.

Grace and peace in the Lord.

Dear Kate! We hope to come home again this week, if God wills. God has shown great grace here, since the lords through their councillors have agreed on almost everything. Two or three articles still remain unagreed; among them is that the two brothers Count Gebhardt and Count Albrecht become brothers again, which I should deal with today inviting them as guests so that they also talk with one other. They have acted dumb towards each other so far and severely embittered each other writing. Otherwise the young men (the sons of

the hostile counts) are happy and go about together on sleds with bells and the ladies also and play masquerades with each other and are in high spirits, also Count Gebhardt's son. So it must be that God hears one's prayers.

I send you the trout, those that Countess Albrecht gave me; she is glad to the heart for the unity. Your sons are still in Mansfeld. Jakob Luther will look after them. We eat and drink here like the lords and we are attended to extremely well, too well, that we might easily forget you at Wittenberg. The stones have also not been worrying me. But Doctor Jonas's leg would have been sheer bliss if it had been making holes in his shin bones; but God will help.

You may show all this to Master Philippus, Doctor Pommer and Doctor Cruciger. A rumour has arrived here that Doctor Martinus might be taken off is the talk in Leipzig and Magdeburg. It is nothing but the nonsense of meddlers, your compatriots. Some say the emperor is thirty miles away from here at Soest in Westphalen; several that the Frenchman is taking on men, the landgrave also. Anyway let them all shout and sing: we will wait and see what God does. May God commend.

Eisleben, Sunday, St. Valentines 1546.

M Luther, Doctor."

It was the last letter to his wife and the last letter to anyone that Luther ever wrote. This cheerful epistle arrived in Kate's hands on Thursday and excited great pleasure among the cloister dwellers. In Eisleben, however, its writer already lay on his deathbed. The great man had passed away quietly and peacefully at three o'clock early the same day among his circle of

friends, Dr Jonas and Master Aurifaber with the doctor, the city priest of Eisleben and Count and Countess Albrecht. In Wittenberg no-one as much as thought it might have happened. Melanchthon, to whom Luther had written with the same messenger (saying among other things that Pope Paul had died), wrote one more letter to his friend with which Frau Kate sent some more ointment to restore the "little spring" in his left thigh. But at 6 o'clock early Friday an Electoral messenger arrived on horseback from Torgau in front of Chancellor Brück's house. He first let Doctors Bugenhagen and Cruciger and Master Philipp come to themselves, but they already knew what the Electoral note would have to say before he gave it them to read, because a quarter of an hour earlier a messenger had also reached them from Eisleben with a letter from Jonas. As requested by Brück the three men betook themselves without delay with the Elector's and Jonas's letters to the doctor's wife and told her with the best of care of her husband's departure. "There was the poor woman, as one might easily expect, deeply shocked and overcome with great grief." But again she did not think mostly of herself, but of her children, especially how her three sons far from home would take to their father's death.

Katharina's anxious thoughts had come true; her worry about her sickly distant husband had not been without reason. The saddest moment had come; the great man, the powerful Reformer, the clever teacher and preacher, the loving father, the loyal husband was no more! If not entirely unexpected, he had passed away too early for the world and for the family nonetheless to where he had so often yearned to be;

from the world which he so often reproached and which he nevertheless embraced with so much understanding and joy; from the office in which he worked so exhausted and in which he, nevertheless, achieved so much; from the family which indeed brought him worry but still much more joy and success and which he held to himself with so much faith and love; from the wife, whom he so often teased and sometimes reproached but whom he had, however, prized and loved above all women.

“It was a hard wound that she received with the death of her marital spouse. And in addition she had to bear the fact that he had died away from her where she had not been able to show the sick man her loyalty and provide her final services of love.”†

Yes, he had died away from home, to Katharina’s anguish, when she had lived “in peace and joy” with him for twenty years; had cared for him in sickness and in health and yet in the last hours of his life could not be beside him, look into his dear face and close his loyal eyes. It was scarcely any consolation that he had passed away in his circle of friends, that Count Albrecht had himself scraped unicorn for him and his wife plied him with fortified water which the doctor’s wife had sent or that he had breathed his last breath in her son Paul’s arms or that the loyal Aurifaber had closed his eyes.

And now she could not even avail herself of the solace of diverting her thoughts from the painful loss through arranging the funeral of the beloved dead man.

The Electoral missive stated that Luther’s body

† Quote from notice of death of Katharina

should be buried in the Castle Church at Wittenberg with the princes and princesses of which there were twenty there. Thus at least her dear husband would be close to her in her city and she, with other friends, could make visits "to her saint there after his death", as Bugenhagen put it. Though the counts of Mansfeld would have liked to have "kept control over the corpse of the invaluable man endowed by God with inexpressible gifts" they carried out the request of the Elector compliantly with humble obedience. So the doctor's widow, her little daughter and the whole cloister only had to prepare funereal garments for the funeral.

But also the whole city and university prepared itself to receive its greatest citizen with ceremonious pomp. Melanchthon had informed the students immediately after the arrival of the news of the death early Friday by means of a poster that the Christian Elijah had been taken from his disciples. The rector of the academy, Dr Aug. Schurf, ordered on Sunday morning in a notice that "all students, in the afternoon, as soon as the signal is given with the small bell, should assemble in the market area and wait for the venerable priest (Dr Pommer) at the church, to follow him immediately and to receive the corpse which had been and would be a receptacle of the Holy Ghost." The delegates of the Elector: Erasmus Spiegel, the administrator of Wittenberg, Gangolf von Heilingen zu Düben and Dietrich von Taubenheim zu Brehne with retinue rode from Wittenberg towards the funeral cortège, to receive him on the Mansfeld boundary and to escort him with the greatest respect.

But the corpse did not arrive on Sunday; in every

city people wanted to receive him, hold him back, and go with him; and thus the arrival of the train was delayed and finally stopped for rest at Kemberg. And Melanchthon had to announce on the notice board on the notice given by the rector that the arrival of the corpse and the funeral would take place the next day at about 9 o'clock.

During the course of Sunday, a letter of condolence came from the Elector:

“To Catharina, widow of the late Doctoris Martini at Wittenberg.

Duke Johanns Friedrich, Elector.

Dear distinguished lady!

We do not doubt that you will have by now found out that the venerable and highly-scholarly, our dear pious late Doctor Martin Luther, your devoted husband, concluded his life in this vale of tears at Eisleben between two and three o'clock last Thursday like a Christian and with words from the Holy Scriptures and is departed from here, which We, however, can only accept with sadness and anxiousness of mind. The Almighty God wished to be compassionate and merciful towards his soul and We are no-one to doubt him! And at the same time We can well imagine that as great as you find the pain and anxiety of your husband's departure in death, you can accept it graciously and as a Christian as the gracious will of God the Almighty and not fight against it but accept it as ordered by God. Then you will be so much less afflicted by it and his Christian departure will tend to comfort you. We are graciously inclined to maintain you and your children on behalf of your late husband, to whom We had been especially well and graciously

inclined, in good order and not to leave you abandoned. We did not wish to hold back Our merciful intent on this matter.

Date: Torgau, Saturday after St. Valentine's 1546."

Early Monday there gathered at the Elster Gate rector, masters and doctors and all worthy members of the university, also the council paying its respects together with all the municipality and citizens, as well as the priests and scholars. Also Frau Kate came along with her little daughter Margarete and some women and started crying on the way, her dead husband waiting.

Finally, at 9 o'clock, the column with the revered body arrived, escorted by the Electoral representatives and both the young Mansfeld counts, Hans and Hoyer, and a great troop of horses. The Mansfeld relatives also came along, Luther's favourite brother Jakob, and his sister's sons Jörg and Cyriac Kaufmann and others among the friends. Above all, however, the three sons Hans, Martin and Paul. It was a painful reunion that Frau Katharina experienced here. Admittedly, she could hold her sons sobbing in her arms, but she could no longer see the face of her dearly-loved husband; he lay enclosed in the coffin of tin, borne on the carriage, hung over with black velvet.

The funeral train formed about it; in front the clergy and the scholars with the customary songs and ceremonies, then the "riders" on about sixty-five horses. Immediately behind the hearse drawn by four horses came "Frau Katharina Luther" with the elderly women in a low carriage as was the custom. Her three sons, her brother, her nephews and other relatives followed her. Then in full vestments "the president of

the university with several young princes, counts and barons who were at the university doing studies". Behind came another part of the procession: Chancellor Brück, Melanchthon, Jonas, Bugenhagen, Cruciger, Hieronymus Schurf and the other oldest doctors; then the remaining doctors, masters, the honourable council, Mayor Cranach with other members of the council, then all the students in splendid number; followed by the citizens, including many women, older married women, younger women, yet unmarried women, many respectful children, young and old; all crying and lamenting. "In all the streets and alleyways as on the market the crowd was so large with so many people, that it was easy to become injured in the press and many said how they had not seen the like of it in Wittenberg before."

Thus it passed with singing and the ringing of all the bells, as an immense train, from the Elster gate the whole length of the city past the cloister, which now stood there orphaned from its father and lord, down Kollegienstrasse (College Street) to the Castle Church. There the coffin was placed in front of the pulpit. Funereal songs sounded forth until Bugenhagen mounted the pulpit and in front of all the great number of listeners who stood in and in front of the church gave a "fully festive and cheering sermon". Then Melanchthon "with particular compassion to comfort the church" gave a speech in Latin which could hardly be heard for all the crying and sobbing. His lament: "We are like poor orphans who have had an excellent man as a father and have lost him" set the tone for all that was spoken, that which was said from the heart particularly by those closest to the dear deceased and

mourning closest to the coffin - the grieving wife, the crying children.

“After the funeral speeches, several masters carried the coffin to the tomb and laid the great tool of the Holy Spirit, the body of the venerable Dr Martini now at rest, not far from the pulpit, from where he had given during his life many great sermons.” The Elector had had a brass plaque placed on the tomb the day before, as is still to be seen today.

The extraordinary, truly princely pomp really showed what a man, indeed, as the rector said, what a “prince of God”, the departed soul had been, what love and admiration he enjoyed with both high and low and the participation of everyone showed what the world had lost with his death and must mourn - and that for those remaining is always a consolation for their pain. But this funeral service showed also what his close relatives had held in him and for which they must shed their tears.

What Katharina’s frame of mind and thoughts were during these painful days she made known in a letter which she sent to her sister-in-law Christina, the widowed wife of one of her brothers and mother of the Florian who was a house companion in Wittenberg. In it she writes:

“For the attention of the honourable and virtuous Frau Christina von Bora, my dear sister.

Grace and peace of God, the Father of our dear Lord Jesus Christ!

Dearest sister!

I am sure that you have a heart-felt compassion for me and my poor children. Since who could not be saddened and troubled by such a dear man as my

beloved husband who not only greatly served a town or even a country but the whole world. I am truly so very saddened by it that I can hardly express the greatness of my grief to anyone and just do not know what I think or feel. I cannot eat or drink and nor can I sleep. And even if I had owned a principality or an Empire, I should not feel so sad if I had lost it as now that our dear Lord God has taken not only from me but from the whole world that dear and beloved man. When I try to think about it, I can, as God well knows, neither talk nor write for grief and crying.

Katharina, widow of Doctor Martinus Luther.”

Chapter 16

Luther's Will

“I still often think”, said the loyal Hieronymus Weller after Luther’s death, “how the man of God, Doctor Martin Luther, had his spouse learn the 31st psalm by heart when she was still young and fresh and happy and could not know then how endearing and comforting this psalm is. Her husband had not done it without reason. He probably felt that after his death she would be a sad, doleful woman and that she would have great need of the consolation contained in the that psalm.” And the doctor had also expressed as much in his will as he had in his letter during his trip.

Luther knew the world and his and his family’s

position; he knew of the people's ingratitude, the princes' unreliability and their employee's infidelity, the colleagues' petty-mindedness, the enemies' hate which had already existed during his lifetime as incredible terms of abuse directed at his wife and which would show itself to be even more uninhibited if the feared warrior did not protect her with his shield anymore. He knew that he was an ill man, that he would die before his children were fully educated and provided for; he knew the sad position of a widow of his day who had no claim to a widow's salary - even, according to the custom, no claim on her husband's estate. Therefore, he worried for his loyal wife; he had however, insofar as he was in a position to do so, seen to making provision for her, to protect her from the worst.

Luther had put down these thoughts in his "second" and "last" "will" which he had written four years before his death on 6th January 1542. In it he sets out a dower for his "dear and loyal wife" wanting to protect her against "good-for-nothing, evil and envious mouths" which might bear down on his "dear Kate" or defame her or provoke the children. "For the devil, not being able to get anywhere near me, may well plague my Kate in all kinds of way, if only because she has been the honest wife of Doctor Martin and, thank God, still is."

So Frau Katharina must have soon felt what a difference there was between being the wife of the great doctor - who, according to one of the important princes, next after the emperor, ruled the world - with the honour and respect he received also passing on to the lady of the house, and being Luther's desolate

widow, in whose property matters and family relations, household economy and education of the children many felt called to meddle and take control, partly out of good will and admiration for the departed friend and Reformer, while up to then Frau Katharina herself had decided – if with the council and approval of her husband – these things completely autonomously. The fact that she, a vigorous woman, who was well aware of her own ability in the management of the household and in whose hands Luther had so willingly left the running of the house, found this meddling and ordering about hard to take, is quite understandable. It must have also hurt her and her self-esteem more than a little, that she, up to now the first woman of the city, of the Protestant world, had to step back quietly. It will also have come as hard to her that she would now have to limit the way the house went on with its renowned hospitality.

True, what Luther had feared, that “the four elements (i.e. the four faculties of the university) would not suffer her”, was not the case. Also there was none of what Luther wrote about in his will thus: “I ask all my good friends, that they be good witness to my dear Kate and help defend her from the mouths of a few good-for-nothings who might want to make life difficult for her or defame her saying she had some money hidden away that she had stolen from or kept back from the children. I avow that there is no money, only the goblets and valuables mentioned above for personal use; rather 450 florins or more of debts.”

Luther had also foreseen something else of which his wife might be accused – bad financial management. It states further in his will: “The accounts can be made

public to anyone because one knows what my income has been from my austere lord apart from what was handed to me in the form of a gift, what there is in terms of valuables, also to some extent what is still owed and to be found. And I have built, bought and conducted such a large and heavy household economy with said income and gifts that I must consider it a special, wonderful blessing among others that I have managed to do it and it is no wonder that there is no money left, rather that the debts are not larger."

Most dissatisfied with Katharina's whole economy was Chancellor Brück, who had acted as a godfather for Luther. When in 1536 Katharina had wanted to lease the Booss property, Brück had not allowed it because he suspected that she wanted to make this manorial property inheritable by her and her children, "a thought that never entered her heart". She had also approached the chief treasury official Taubenheim later in 1539 about this, when the property was up for lease again, so that her application would not reach anyone else, not even the Elector (who would have asked Brück for advice) and the property would come to her quietly which was what then happened. Brück also made very disparaging comments on Kate's enterprises at her favourite property Zulsdorf and held costly improvements there for bad wastefulness. Finally, he opposed the acquisition of Wachsdorf. Thus, it is understandable that Katharina also spoke badly of him and generally of the princely clerks who saw askance at the privileges she received from the court and even encroached on them. When Luther wanted to move away from Wittenberg a year before his death and his wife sought to dispose of his possessions in the city,

Melanchthon gave notice to Brück that really it was Katharina's instigation and not what Luther had in mind. The Chancellor reported this to the Elector and added with a certain malicious pleasure: there are, thank God, no buyers for such precious houses and goods.

When then the Electoral ordinance regarding "weddings and child baptisms" was sent to Luther, Melanchthon and Bugenhagen went to Brück and informed him that Luther wanted to neither see it nor here it. At court one only made a farce out of it. Brück concluded that the doctor was carried along by his wife.

There was therefore a disagreement between the Black Cloister and the court, or rather between Dr Luther and Chancellor Brück who represented the "court", so that Brück did not negotiate at all, directly or personally, with Luther anymore; but both theologians sent messages, sometimes through a third party. This disagreement had further repercussions.

In December 1545 Brück sent a mediator to the Black Cloister "to His Reverence" to persuade Luther to leave out a politically delicate part of a text requested by the court. Frau Kate was also present and also had her word to say about it in the form of: "Oh yes, dear man, they don't read anything at court; that's what it's about, they really only know your side of the matter." And Luther became angry with this imposition of the chancellor and curious and said, to put it shortly, that he did not want to do it. These words of Kate were, of course, reported back to the chancellor, who reported them immediately with the preceding observations to the Elector adding: "I worry, that because Doctor

Martinus has shown himself agitated against the court in more than one way, the little Wachs Dorf property must lie behind it again and the good, devout man is spurred on by his 'rib'."

All this happened shortly before Luther's death; it is understandable that Brück's ill feeling was still now fresh and strong. Also Melanchthon and Bugenhagen seem to have taken against the doctor's widow, if one were to believe the reports of Brück. But it turns out that except for Brück's reports there is no evidence of any hostility from Melanchthon or Bugenhagen towards Frau Kate; the care of both, in particular from Melanchthon, and Katharina's trust tend to prove the opposite. At the same time, according to Brück, a passing animosity was already possessed by the two old friends towards her.

At first, it is true, the love and admiration enjoyed by the powerful and highly good-natured man passed also to his family, particularly to the grieving widow.

The Elector had promised nine years ago in Smalcald on Luther's imagined deathbed this: "Your wife shall be my wife and your children shall be my children." Of that he also thought now after Luther's actual departure and sent the "lady of the doctor, Luther's beloved wife" that kind letter of consolation in which he assured her and her children of merciful support. To this promise the prince stayed faithful so long as he was able and at liberty to do so.

Chancellor Brück had noted in a postscript to a letter of his to the Elector of 19th: "Philippus has said to me, that he has already had to lend the doctor's widow twenty thaler fourteen days ago for housekeeping. Your Electoral Grace might wish to allocate fourteen

thalers for the housekeeping and for whatever else this case requires. The Almighty will richly reward Your Electoral Grace!" Whereupon the Elector sent immediately the following day one hundred gulden with a note to Melanchthon in which it said: "In that We have noted that when the blessed wife and widow of Doctor Martin gave notice of pecuniary need, how provision was made to her by you on account of his death, We send you with this messenger one hundred gulden. You should take from it the money that you lent her and give the rest to the widow."

And perhaps again just two days after the funeral the Elector had assured Luther's widow of his special mercy and care. He also offered to take her oldest son into court, into the Electoral chancellery.

Also the friends of the house still took care of the widow. Melanchthon also gave a token of recognition: when on 11th March he received a hare and a fur from Jonas, he thought of the law of Moses, according to which the skin of the sacrificial animal should belong to the priests who carried the burden of the church government on their shoulders, and so to Luther, who for long years had carried such a load on his shoulders, and sent the fur and hare to Luther's widow.

Jonas reported Luther's death to King Christian III of Denmark on 15th April and added the request: "I humbly request you Royal Majesty to be a merciful lord to the widow of the Doctor of the Lord Martin, his three sons Martin, Paul and Johannes and his little daughter Margrete."

Even the Duke of Prussia wrote a "plea" to the Elector of Saxony for Doctor Luther's blessed widow, to which the Elector promised to be genially disposed:

“In that We were favourably inclined to the doctor during his life, so We also consider ourselves responsible, to see that the children he has left behind enjoy the fruits of his true, diligent, Christian service, as We also have in mind to maintain them together with the widow.”

The Counts of Mansfeld had promised Luther and his family 2000 florins for his mediation and made them over on 8th May 1546 to “Doctor Luther’s widow and children”, in “gratitude of such Christian love of the said Doctor Martin Luther and his so manifestly coming of goodwill to Eisleben and acting with true-mindedness and so bringing about a conclusion in a Christian and agreeable manner.”

Finally, there was a further legacy of the Elector Johann Friedrich of 1000 florins, which were set aside for Luther’s children and from which the rents were currently paid, as a form of allowance for the orphans.

The widow was not considered in this decree. But Luther had already set out an endowment four years before his death.

Luther, in known disregard of lawyers and legalese, had intentionally drawn up this document himself and only had it witnessed by his theological friends Melanchthon, Cruciger and Bugenhagen, in the belief, that “so many in the world held him for a teacher of the truth” despite his excommunication by the Pope and the anger of emperors, kings, princes, priests and indeed all manner of devil’s allies, that they should believe him and his hand in this trifling matter. He wrote in it: “Lastly I ask everyone that though in this bequeathal or endowment I have not used legal form and words (for which I have reasons), they will take me

as the person I truly am, that is, one who is openly known in Heaven, on Earth and in Hell and whom one can trust and believe more than any notary."

This created friction with Brück in particular who would have to be heard in the matter. But those studied in law could also contest this testament and seem to have done so, not least because Luther had by-passed the hated lawyers so wilfully. If the lawyers were still questioning the legal validity of the marriage of priests not to mention that between monks and nuns, Luther must have feared that they would not think of "passing his honour and meagre possessions on to his children". There only the particular decision of the head of state could help the widow to her rights, as Luther had foreseen in his will: "And I ask His Electoral Highness most humbly, if he would safeguard and handle such a bequeathal or endowment."

This so-called "will" of Luther's was a bequeathal to his wife, an endowment, for which husbands usually take care to make provision sooner or later. It was of ever greater importance when for the wives of officials and professors there was no widow's allowance and the right of inheritance was unfavourable to women in Saxony.

Therefore, all Protestant priests of the Reformation time whose salary was very uncertain, often only an allowance, strove to obtain for their wives, as Luther put it, "an inheritable roof with a little hearth", i.e. property; and every husband in Saxony took care to provide a dower for his wife. "How few one finds", said Luther's long-standing house companion Hieronymus Weller when he was a priest in Freiberg and had got a wife and child, "how few one finds, who

care about the widows and orphans of servants of the church who have passed way! For this I follow Luther's example and buy a house for the shelter of mine in the future." Luther agreed with him. He expressed great dissatisfaction over the law in Saxony because of its treatment of female claims. "The law in Saxony", he said, "is too harsh and hard, since it sees to it that one gives a woman after her husband's death only a loom and distaff". Luther clarified thus: "Loom, that is house and grounds; distaff, that is food, by which they can keep themselves in old age; one has to provide a salary even for servants and give them their pay each year, indeed one gives a beggar more."

Accordingly Luther acted and wrote - at Epiphany 1542 - his "will", i.e. the "dower" for his wife.

"I, Doctor Martin Luther declare with this of my own handwriting that I have given to my dear and loyal housewife Katherin as dower (or whatever one can call it) for all her life, with which she may do as she sees best and as she pleases, by the power of this letter of the present and current day:

The little property of Zeilsdorff, in the manner in which I have held it up to now.

Secondly the house Bruno to live in, which I bought under Wolf's name.

Thirdly the cups and valuables, rings, chains, gift groschen[†], gulden and silver which altogether should be worth about 1000 florins.

This I do because,

Firstly, she, as a devout, true, married wife, has kept me throughout, lovingly, worthily and well and borne for me, by God's great blessing, five living children

† especially ornate coins

(those still existing, may God let them live long) and raised them.

Secondly so that she can take on the debt which I still have (should I not settle them alive) and pay it off, which should amount to, as far as I know, about 450 florins but possibly more.

Thirdly, and most importantly, because I don't want to see her dependent on the children but the children dependent on her, that they honour her and are subject to her, as ordered by God. For I have well seen and experienced how the devil stirs up and provokes against this command, even when they are devout, with evil and jealous mouths, especially when the mothers are widows and the sons find wives and the daughters husbands and so mother-in-law daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law mother-in-law. For I hold that the mother will be the best guardian of her own children and use such property and dower not to the detriment or disadvantage of the children but for need and improvement, since they are her flesh and blood and she has carried them under her heart.

And if after my death she is in need or otherwise determines (for I cannot suppose to determine the ultimate goal of God's works and wills) to marry again; I trust, and wish hereby to pronounce such trust, that she will remain motherly towards our children and share everything truly, whether it is dower or something else, as is right with them.

I ask all my good friends, that they be good witness to my dear Kate and help defend her from the mouths of a few good-for-nothings who might want to make life difficult for her or defame her saying she had some money hidden away that she had stolen from or kept

back from the children. I avow that there is no money, only the goblets and valuables mentioned above.

And certainly the accounts can be made public to everyone, because one knows what my income has been from my austere lord and that I have not otherwise received a farthing or grain of corn from anyone apart from what was handed to me in the form of a gift, what there is in terms of valuables as stated above which is in part still owed as debt and to be found. This I ask because, the devil, insofar as he cannot get close to me, would most probably seek all ways to get to my Kate, just because she has been and, praise be to God, still is the married wife of the man, Doctor Martin."

Besides this widow's property, the Lutheran wealth consisted of the following: the cloister house, afterwards sold for 3700 florins, both gardens - 500 florins, household effects and library - 1000 florins; altogether 5200 florins. The dower of the mother amounted to a market value of 2300 florins, namely the Zulsdorf property - 956 florins, the "Bruno" house - 343 florins, up to then let "at a peppercorn rent", additionally the 1000 florins worth of silverware; from that had to be taken the 450 florins of debts if they still stood at Luther's death. These debts caused many problems; cash, as also witnessed by Dr Brücks, did not exist. Admittedly, Luther had put this wealth much higher; in his estimate of 1542 he calculated it at 9000 florins. His income from all sources he put at scarcely 100 florins. In addition there had been for some time 50 florins annual interest from the Electoral legacy of 1000 florins and finally the 2000 florins from the Count of Mansfeld.

This was indeed a great, considerable wealth; but he made little with it; all in all he made a profit of 250 florins. Could a larger family live on it without being too restricted? The children were still all under age and not provided for. The eldest, the son Hans, was twenty years old, the youngest, the little daughter Margarete, just eleven; Martin was fourteen and Paul fifteen. Hans, according to his mother, should follow law, Martin wanted to become a theologian, Paul had already chosen, with his father's approval, medicine. The old lame famulus Wolf was also still with them, who had to be taken care of like a traditional heirloom; he had in fact received a stipend of forty florins after Luther had made a request to the Elector, but this was just put into the Lutheran housekeeping. One could not expect Luther's widow, who was used to a large and hospitable household, to leave the dear old house and to withdraw in such a lowly way to the Bruno "shack" or Zulsdorf and let the children stay with strangers. Brück, for sure, was of this opinion. Frau Katharina, of course, wanted to keep all the children with her, which was probably also the least expensive solution; she also wanted to stay in the cloister house and take in boarders on a greater scale than before; finally she wanted to acquire not only "die Böse" (the Booss property) which she had kept for several years renting it at a peppercorn rate and still further acquire another farm property to increase her income. This all for the care of herself and her children; but also, as Chancellor Dr Brück fully understood "so that she had enough at her disposal to do and to create as she wanted and to consequently lose none of her previous reputation". The new estate was particularly important to her; she

indeed had a particular inclination out of economic interest, but also probably because of her sense of nobility. Already several years earlier the large property of Wachsdorf had been offered to her husband for purchase, which was one hour from Wittenberg on the other side of the Elbe, so much more favourable situated than the far off Zulsdorf, also more fertile and giving greater return, but admittedly more expensive than the latter. It was now offered her afresh.

The widow asked Melanchthon for advice. He thought it a good idea; one should request the purchase of Wachsdorf according to the Elector's advice and where he advised it ask for his gracious help. However, that was something she absolutely did not want - if only because she knew only too well that the Electoral advice would be that of Dr. Brücks, to whom the matter would be handed for appraisal and who was entirely against any of Katharina's plans. So she drafted a request to the Elector thinking that in buying the Wachsdorf property, His Electoral Grace would want to give his gracious help and he would provide her with guardianship so that she and her children might be given their keep, while there was no money, servants or stores, since the property was not yet set up.

Frau Katharina gave this petition to Melanchthon for consideration. He took it on the evening of Tuesday 9th March to the meeting which he, Bugenhagen and Cruciger together with Brück held at the religious conference at Regensburg with the chancellor and gave it to - Brück. And the Chancellor then read it out "publicly".

When Bugenhagen heard Katharina's plan regarding

Wachsdorf, he shouted: "There one hears who has been all the time after the Wachsdorf property. Before if one had offered it to the doctor he would not have been at all interested in it; but now one sees who is behind it."

Then there was all sorts of talk between the four men and they all felt "almost unanimously": If she got the property, she would start to develop it in a way which would be to no advantage to her or her children as she had done with Zulsdorf, which had cost her more than 1600(!) guilders, and were not inclined to let her have the 600 guilders. Further it was thought: If she wanted to build and live away at Wachsdorf, she would take her sons away from their studies so that they resulted in living on the land and catching birds. Further the Elbe flooded and covered the property with water; one could not build a cellar, all in all it was "a wasting little property".

But Melanchthon, who probably saw the unseemliness of his step pleaded that they should not themselves deliberate over the petition, but present it as it was to the Elector; "the woman will not take any advice, rather her thoughts and opinions are those always to be acted upon".

Brück said: "If she is asking for support then she will have to take and proceed with the advice given. And I would think that Cruciger and Master Melanchthon among others would be her best protectors; they know what the Lord provides; the children should keep to them also for the sake of their studies."

"But they both immediately declined the guardianship flatly, giving as reason that "the woman would not listen and they would keep having to take tiresome talk from her".

Further Melanchthon let it be understood that they did not want anything to do with the children, rather that they should be maintained with her at Wittenberg. And although the older son Hans would not have been disinclined towards a gracious offer of the Elector to go into court into the Electoral chancellery, she would have turned him against it. One had heard from others to the effect that she was of the opinion that: he would be a stupid lad; in the chancellery they would only mock him and make a fool out of him. In Melanchthon's opinion he was not at all suited to study, because he would be too big and he lacked the basics. In the end the chancellor was of the opinion that the cloister property, the spacious dwelling should be sold or let. But Melanchthon explained that she was not disposed to do that, but that she thought to keep it and in the same way the Zulsdorf property too, even if she acquired Wachsdorf as well.

So was - according to Brück's report - the discussion of the four friends and godparents for Luther about his widow.

Melanchthon had thus reported against the will of the doctor's widow her petition to the chancellor, whose intrusion into her affairs, she - and with good reason - particularly wished to avoid; and he had also given other verbal information out which would not serve to improve the disposition of the friends towards the widow.

Without knowing anything of this treatment of her confidential communication, Frau Katharina now let her petition be put to the court at Torgau castle through the friend of the family, Ratzeberger, the Electoral physician. This was on Wednesday and already on

Thursday 11th March the Elector requested an appraisal by chancellor Brück in Wittenberg of Katharina's petition, which he enclosed with his request.

The chancellor's appraisal turned out to be a particularly hateful piece of writing. Brück reported to the Elector first therein the private consultation of the three theologians with all the, for Katharina, unfavourable remarks and indeed, it appears, spiced up. If Melanchthon had thought that might happen, he would probably have omitted to have ask Brück "for his thoughts about the woman". Further the chancellor mentions in his written statement all kinds of abusive and even dishonest gossip "of others". "A lot of people are inclined to believe, that it is not at all unlikely that she will remarry" - so Brück ventured to write to the forty-seven-year-old woman three weeks after the death of her husband and this although he was aware and expressly told that "discussions of whether the lady would remarry or not" were to be avoided. Further he reported to the Elector: "I am told each boy has his own preceptor and famulus" - it subsequently turned out that there was just one, Rutland, a learned and true companion. It was just as exaggerated when he declared as "quite apparent" what there was "of other servants" - how she was overcrowded "with so many people" (servants). Finally the chancellor gave his disinclination towards the doctor's widow particularly clear expression. He called her request "blunt and abrupt"; he again pointed out to the Elector that he had already given her 600 florins for the development of the Zulsdorf property and 100 florins on top of that for wood; he voiced the suspicion which

also struck at Dr Luther: "The poor, lame Wolf is also still there; if she wanted to keep him with her and he to remain with her, she would have to divide the forty guilders with him, as has been the case up to now, with the poor fellow getting little to enjoy of it - I fear" he added a little doubtfully. Brück maligned the Wachsdorf property as much as he could and was of the opinion that it could not produce a hundred guilders of net profit, not even the interest on the capital. He suspected the doctor's widow further, "it is of no use for her children" and her only interest is to have a share in the property. And his whole effort was directed at seeing that the children and only the children came off well out of it and that the widow was excluded from possession and enjoyment of it. It was further Brück's council and intention, "to break her impressive -- another time referred to as: 'large and wasteful' - housekeeping". Finally, he went about taking the children away from the mother with all his might. While Luther in his will had confidence giving inheritance to his wife, "the mother will be the best guardian for her own children", expounded Brück, as it seems with direct reference to this opinion of Luther's: "According to Saxon law she cannot be the guardian, while she herself in widowhood is also in need of protection; thus it would also be sensible, if the woman were to marry again." Most critically he stepped too near to the widow when he discovered that the boys would live with her on the land and go out for walks and be taken away from their studies. They should be "put with learned people, for whom they had fear and respect, where they also had sensible food" - as if the children with her - the "archcook" - would even miss

out on bodily sustenance. The only possible reason of any substance for any mistrust in Katharina's ability to educate could only be the little advance made by the little-gifted first-born in his studies.

It looks almost more like bad conscience than timidity towards Katharina's strong will when the chancellor wrote to the Elector: "I would have been humbly willing on Your Electoral Grace's order to talk to the woman herself or to Philipp on the matter; but decided not to when I came to understand from Philipp, that it is not her intention to sell or let the house, but to keep it as well as Zulsdorf and Wachsdorf; the sale of the house against her is not to be considered."

The chancellor then made the following functional suggestions to the Elector:

1. So that the lady does not have cause to feel harshness in relation to His Electoral Grace, the Elector might add an additional 1000 florins to the 1000 florins already assigned - but only for the children - and pay an interest on them together of 100 florins; the quarter (500 florins) belonging to the girl (Margarete) to be invested until her marrying.

2. The Elector should provide special guardianship for the mother and her children. This double guardianship should then clearly divide the property of the widow and the property of the orphans.

3. Thereafter both guardians must discuss bilaterally how, to what end and in what form the children are to be maintained. There will then be heated arguments between the woman and the mutual guardianship. The children's guardian will say: there is no better solution than that Hans, the eldest son, is sent to the court of

Your Electoral Grace; in that way it is possible that with time he will come to something while he might otherwise fail. If Your Electoral Grace provided him with a stipend and he did not want to use it to continue his studies, it would be difficult to terminate it. Further they will say that there would be nothing better than that the other lads should be separated and not left with their mother. In which case the Elector could provide them with a further stipend.

4. The little daughter can be left with the mother and provided with interest from the 500 florins of 30 florins and if that is not enough 40 florins. From it the mother could keep a little maid to serve her and provide her with clothing from the Mansfeld money or interest.

5. In this way the woman would be separated from her large and wasteful household and that the children became countrymen or yokels prevented.

6. The woman would then say to our guardians: "How will the children be maintained?", to which the guardians could reply: She and her daughter would not need a large household budget, nor many servants, would have the accommodation free of charge, could take in boarders, let the properties in part, brew, have the use of the garden, courtyards and Zulsdorf and part of the interest on capital from Mansfeld. Also the Elector could give her and her daughter two wispels[†] of grain a year and perhaps a few cords of wood.

7. "When the lady realizes, that Your Electoral Grace wishes to provide for the children, buy Wachsdorf and additionally provide 2000 florins, she will soon forget the property and not want to bother herself with the exertion and building, so she will not be entitled to

† about 48 bushels

even half of it." There is scarcely 100 florins a year net proceeds and in addition there is also the obligation to pay scutage of half a horse. However, the administrator of Wittenberg, Asmus Spiegel, should find out if the property brought in more than the capital.

The Elector was more careful than his chancellor. He seemed to have notice his aversion and made clear in a written communication to Brück and Melanchthon that guardians should be found for the widow and the orphans and made over a further 1000 florins for the children; over the purchase of Wachsdorf, the guardians should decide.

Of course, Brück offered "to go (to the doctor's widow) and inform her; Philippus, however, felt it was unnecessary, he would see to it on both their behalves." So Melanchthon went early on Friday with the Electoral fiat to the doctor's widow.

She thanked him and the Elector for the merciful additional sum for the benefit of the children and then put forth the following:

1. She wished as guardians to her the current administrator of Wittenberg and her brother Hans von Bora; and for the children the doctor's blessed brother Jakob, the current mayor Reuter von Wittenberg and Melanchthon - Dr Major she declined; she also seems to have determined against Cruciger because he called Kate a "Hausfackel"[†] in a private correspondence with Veit Dietrich. However, she was in agreement with the guardianship of the Elector's personal physician, Dr. Ratzeberger, who was through his wife himself of the circle of friends."

2. She was in agreement that the 1500 florins from

[†] Lit: house torch (or flame); "shrewish wit" in English perhaps

the Elector would be put into Wachs Dorf for her sons. The Chancellor had therefore judge her wrongly when he thought that the lady only wanted Wachs Dorf and to run it for herself rather than her sons.

The chancellor now suggested to the Elector "not to burden Melanchthon with the guardianship since he was quiet and gentle and it would not help if the woman put up opposition to the idea." One should only make the two theologians, Melanchthon and Cruciger, co-guardians with respect to the education of the children, that the sons should be drawn to "the fear of God, teaching, education and virtuousness".

This was accepted by the Elector and guardians were appointed, for the children Cruciger stood in for Ratzeberger who could only get away for the most important discussions.

Also Luther's will was "since our dear, special Katharina, the widow of the reverend and learned, of our dear, devout, honourable Martin Luther has presented and requested recognition of, of the doctor's own pious hand, her husband's last will and testament" by the judgement of the Elector "graciously accepted and confirmed though it was lacking the fineness and solemnity called for by law."

There then followed long laborious negotiations between the Chancellor and Elector on the one hand and between the guardians and the doctor's widow on the other regarding the acquisition of the Wachs Dorf property and the education of the children.

The Chancellor advised forcefully against the purchase of the property, but Frau Katharina "worked" even more stubbornly for it, taking the burden of the matter upon herself for the good of her children; since

she hoped to gain great usufruct from it and promised “not to undertake any further construction there”. This, the guardians “did not want to dispute any more strongly with her and their antagonism take on the appearance in her eyes as wanting to hinder well-being and to forget the good work of her now deceased husband”. “So the virtuous doctor’s widow with the guardians beside her took it on.” The property cost however 2200 florins. Because the Mansfeld capital only became liquid in two years, the guardians pointed out to the Elector “that something was required to carry out the wishes of the worthy doctor regarding his widow; that she was truly in a cleft stick.” The Elector therefore handed over the 2000 florins including the 500 florins for Margarete which had to be placed, however, until her marrying, as mortgage on Wachsdorf bearing 30 florins interest. Of the 200 florins still short Melanchthon and a friend gave half, for the other half he approached the wealthy Amsdorf. On Whit Monday (14th June 1546) Chancellor Brück paid the 2000 florins to the guardians Ratzeberger, Reuter and Jakob Luther, and Frau Kate, who “utterly determined, would convert the notified provision into property”, confirmed, “that she would maintain such properties diligently and conscientiously for the benefit of the children”. For the management of the property she would gladly have had a part of the Mansfeld capital and went to the Count about it, with, it seems, part success.

The education of the children went in a similar way. The Chancellor pressed for Johann to go to the Electoral Chancellery and for the other two, Paul and Martin, with the mother’s consent, to be sent away to a

master with accommodation, food and tuition, that is, to live with strangers. The Elector approved of this.

The widow also had to be content with it and "in a position to accept it and to be able to level with the guardians on it." So at least Brück reported to the Elector. The Elector then on the report of the Chancellor instructed that the guardians should summon the eldest son and hear from him whether he was determined to continue his studies, and, if he were now sufficiently adept that there was hope of something coming from his studying, one should see how he went on for a further six months; should he be neither sufficiently adept nor inclined, the Elector then wanted him taken into the chancellery. The two younger sons, however, should "leave the mother and be sent to a suitable master or preceptor with whom they would mainly reside and who would keep them fed for a small sum or otherwise allow them to the table. They should also be a little timid and fearful of him and thus be best brought up with discipline and teaching and persist in it." With this separation of the children from the house the housekeeping of the widow should then be dissolved.

That these impositions caused Katharina much strife, can be easily understood. If she had at first acceded to these plans under the enthusiasm of friends and well-wishers, now that they were actually going to come into effect, the mother held back with all her might. The fight lasted four weeks - and Katharina came out victorious.

The guardians Cruciger, Melanchthon and Reuter on the Elector's orders first summoned the eldest, Johann. They explained to him that His Electoral Grace was

inclined towards his entering the chancellery. "While he is at such an age that he can think properly about what he finally wants to do; whether he wants to stay with his studies or not, though, with the guardians considering him strongly for the chancellery, they might like to advise him towards that; at any event that he is in a creditable and useful position, whereby he can serve to God's pleasure and for the common well-being and be comforting to his dear mother, sister and brothers. He should therefore accept thankfully the Elector's offer and not dismiss this opportunity."

A long back and forth dialogue followed with a written answer from Hans saying: "Dear, venerable gentlemen! I have listened to the Serene Elector's direction concerning my person humbly and thankfully. I understand well that the position in the chancellery is a very honourable employment; however, I know that before, my dear father had not agreed that I should leave school. I would therefore like to continue my studies. I wish also through God's grace to humbly and obediently keep at all times to God, His Electoral Grace and my dear mother. And ask His Electoral Grace to graciously allow me to study arts for another year, to improve my ability in Latin. And should I become sufficiently competent in a faculty, I would prefer to continue to study. If His Electoral Grace should so seem fit, I will humbly put this same to His Electoral Grace. Johannes Lutherus."

The guardians further summoned the preceptor of the two younger lads, Ambros Rutfield and inquired about the two youngsters. They looked at the writing of one, Martin, and found him well studied; Paul who had been ill for several weeks, turned out to be skilful at

music, but not so able at grammar.

The guardians then informed the mother of His Electoral Grace's "gracious disposition that they be allowed to continue their studies conscientiously and diligently and placed for accommodation and teaching with a master in the town."

The mother gave the following answer: "She did not doubt that His Electoral Grace meant this quite graciously and thanked him most humbly. But she asked for consideration of the fact that the youngest was often sick and could not be better off anywhere else than beside his mother. Besides, all the Masters here were so overcrowded in their own accommodation that the children could not really be placed there without danger to their health. Also among unknown, different, young people they could easily fall into bad company, while with her, they were not allowed out of the house without permission."

The guardians recognized these reasons; and because now the sons would not be separated from the mother, but continue to remain with her, there were no longer grounds, in respect to the children and the widow, for the household economy to be stopped and unnecessary expenses to be curtailed. The guardians did not therefore effect the further Electoral order, "that unnecessary servants would have to be dismissed and that the housekeeping necessary to keep the widow and children comfortably come from the yearly income and not to incur debts beyond it." Rather the guardians explained to the Elector, that the boys were now placed with a learned, trustworthy fellow and that they also wished to look over Martin's studies themselves and had already arranged the necessary.

And they took on the purchase of the Wachsdorf property more enthusiastically. Accordingly the Elector decided with Ratzeberger's approval: he wanted to leave the decision with Hans. He was also in agreement that he and his brothers remain with the mother, however it was to be seen that all three of the blessed doctor's sons were kept by the house tutor and under the supervision of the guardians diligently to discipline, virtue and teaching, and they would also not be granted much time-wasting strolling about. "For We know, that the doctor's mind was directed with the highest desire towards his sons' studying." Of a restriction or extinguishing of the housekeeping there was no longer any more talk.

Thus Frau Katharina had finally got her way - the old, now well-loved, with its many great memories, hallowed cloister house remained her property and her home. The children she could still have with her and Wachsdorf would become inheritable by her sons in a lordly way; and with it she had the satisfaction that her children again owned a nobleman's inheritable property, even when the property of her own noble family was completely dispersed.

The family thus remained in the cloister house together. Hans went to lectures and the two boys learned with their preceptor Rutfield. The little daughter was educated by her mother.

At the beginning of the time of mourning the doctor's widow could not continue with the large household and food table with the many unfamiliar table companions. Thus some had departed. Master Besold, for example, asked Melanchthon to take him in. Frau Katharina also probably did not get around to

restarting the food table again so soon in the old way because of the uncertain future of her position.

The lame old Wolf, the doctor's famulus, was also still there. The guardians had to hear whether he wanted to remain with the woman any longer and whether she wanted to keep him or not. Probably he, who had grown so much together with the cloister house, remained, although he had once answered evasively to an earlier similar enquiry by Luther as to whether he wished to stay with his wife: if Luther dies, he would prefer to be also buried himself. Frau Katharina would also have kept him; apart from the 40 guilders pension which she, as chancellor Brück put it, might "share out", he was too embedded in the ways of the house and Frau Kate would not let him go, even if he were not only lame but according to Luther also remiss, lazy and thoughtless and preferred to sit by the birdcatcher.

The number of remaining servants will have probably been limited as the Chancellor and the Elector had stressed several times, for hospitality in the cloister house on the old scale was no longer necessary; the visits, parties, table get-togethers of the numerous friends and acquaintances, of the refugees and supplicants, of the legations and students decreased or stopped completely. But new problems and work arose for the doctor's widow from the new property, particularly as now the haymaking and fruit harvest approached. However, such work was for the active Domina a desire and joy. Besides the agriculture, Frau Kate now pursued her service providing meals further. Unfortunately, soon, on 30th May, a young table companion, Weidhofer from Austria, died.

The just widowed woman had also to provide for another orphan, her nephew Florian. His mother had suggested to her that she might help the young student, particularly with books; thinking – wrongly – that these might come from Luther’s library or from a parting table companion or one dropping out as happened. Frau Kate wrote back to her sister-in-law:

“With regard to your son, my dear nephew, I will gladly do all I can, the situation deserving. I fully envisage that he will follow his studies with all diligence and not spend his wonderful, noble youth in vain without use. If he, however, advances in his studies some more and then needs more books, particularly so that he can study law, you can understand, dear sister, yourself, that I will not be able to give him such books that he will need in addition. And he will rather need to have a greater enthusiasm to be able to do all the things that will be necessary. It would be considerably better if your son, my dear nephew, received, as you have written to me, an annual amount as a stipend. Thus he could better remain at his studies and find things easier. – Of what I will be able to do for him, I will send further notice and information through my brother Hans von Bora, as soon as he has come to me here.”

Florian received his scholarship with Katharina’s help.

At Easter, brother Hans came to visit his widowed sister from Crimmitschau, where the Elector gave over the Kartause[†] as a gentleman’s seat for him at a moderate purchase price. Hans von Bora could not really help, of course, at least with tangible support,

† Probably a cloister converted to a manor

since he himself had food worries and had to fight for existence.

For their part, the friends of the Luther family, especially Bugenhagen, the Reformer of the north, turned again to the old patron of Dr Luther's, King Christian III of Denmark. When at Whitsun, Jonas's letter had still received no answer, Dr Pommer wrote on 5th June clearly and distinctly: "Herr. Philippus and I request if His Majesty would pay our salary (100 thalers) and 50 thalers which belong for this year to our dear father Doctor Martin (which Christ gloriously took from this vale of woe to himself three months ago) to Herr Christophero, a knight, to bring to us; the fifty thalers for Doctor Martin's widow and children."

Soon thereafter came the royal reply to Dr Jonas's letter: "We would like to be graciously commended to the widow and children of the blessed and beloved man of God" But the due pay did not come, so that again in the autumn (on 15th November) Bugenhagen sent a clear reminder to the king: "Your Royal Majesty, I wrote diligently at Whitsun through our Honourable Christoffer, knight of Sweden, about our pay that our Honourable Christoffer might bring it to us. I also asked that the widow left by Doctor Martin might receive the fifty thalers from Your Gracious Majesty. However, the Honourable Christoffer has not come and has not written to me."

So Frau Katharina waited in vain for this sum which she could so well have done with. In the meantime great trouble had broken in upon Wittenberg and the cloister house.

Chapter 17

War and Flight

The widow could hardly settle into her new state before the misfortune already approached which Luther had foreseen and of which he had foretold; the Smalcald War arrived and with it devastation, looting, flight and misery for Frau Katharina.

Events quickly unfurled in the spring and summer: the Protestants reject the Trident Council; the Regensburg Colloquy runs without result; the Protestant Archbishop Hermann von Wied of Cologne is excommunicated and deposed. Duke Maurice forms an alliance with the emperor; Protestant Upper Germany takes to arms, then also Electoral Saxony and

Hesse; both princes are outlawed, war is declared and the Pope prays for the eradication of heretics. Already ten days before, on the third Sunday after Whitsun Frau Katharina heard the Protestant war prayer in church at Wittenberg and begged with special fervour for help in the violent fight which would break out against the work of her blessed husband. "You see the great need of our rulers, of us all - man, woman and child - and that our enemies seek destruction of the correct teachings and to set up and establish their shameful idolatry; thus we ask You, that You would grant us the honour and graciously protect and preserve our rulers, our churches, us, our children and little homes as you saved and protected the people of Israel in the Red Sea and that you would destroy the might of the enemy and not allow foreign nations to practise their crudity and barbarity on our women and children." And Melanchthon gave again the "warning of Dr Martini Luther to his dear Germans" in danger of war.

Apprehension and fear spread in Wittenberg, as the main fortress of Electoral Saxony and the main spiritual bulwark of Protestantism, and particularly in the Black Cloister, from which the assault on the papacy had begun.

In summer many good mercenaries came under captain von Mila to the city; also much in the way of provisions, crates and powder. Some were quite decent and well-behaved, others lived dissolutely and feasted. The citizens mounted the guard with the mercenaries, took up pikes, halberds and arquebuses and Hans Lufft, the printer with his journeymen, moved into the fortification, a great mound, where the "Singerin", a

large cannon, was set up. A later report says that Hans Luther was also enlisted as an officer cadet in the emperor's Battle on the Elbe.

Everything was in a commotion, in particular as Duke Maurice of Saxony, whom Luther had already thought capable of betraying the Protestant cause, fought on the side of the emperor and invaded Electoral Saxony accompanied by foreigners and hussars of King Ferdinand.

The university started to scatter for fear of siege. War approached. On 6th November Zwickau was surrounded and hence the college was dissolved. On the sixth came the information that Zwickau had been handed over to Maurice and the hostile warriors were approaching Wittenberg. Now everyone who could fled the fortified city: old men, women, children, in all directions, in countless wagons, while the falling winter snow covered the people, animals and carriages. Of the officials, only priests and schoolmasters remained behind.

Frau Kate had already hitched her wagon fourteen days ago and loaded it up with her most valuable items, excluding her children, of property and belongings. Also her nephew Fabian Kaufmann and probably still other relatives and table companions were in the sad trek; however, the famulus, Wolf, stayed behind to take care of the house. They fled through Dessau and Zerbst to fortified Magdeburg to which most professors repaired; only Melanchthon remained with his family in Zerbst where he collected together a small circle of pupils, but came over on occasion to Magdeburg. Fabian was later sent back to Wittenberg, where, besides Cruciger and Bugenhagen,

Paul Eber had also remained, who could take care of the young person. Probably Fabian together with Wolf Sieberger was to take care of the Black Cloister and the Lutheran possessions in the city.

Soon came the sad news of Wittenberg: "The suburbs with all gardens and summer houses had been burned (16th November), the fields laid to waste and damage costing perhaps 100,000 thalers and much misery had befallen the people." Then came Maurice with his Meissners and with King Ferdinand's hussars and they reconnoitred up to the walls of the city and shouted into it. Duke Maurice, the "devil's knight and soldier", charged the city on 18th November. A song goes:

In Wittenberg on the high rampart
You can hear the muskets firing.

The offensive was beaten off, but the hussars looted and raped in the surroundings.

This time the siege of Wittenberg passed quickly since Maurice was driven back around Christmas by the Elector who had rushed up from southern Germany. However, the war in Saxony continued and a return home to Wittenberg was not to be contemplated; only Melanchthon returned once in the middle of January 1547.

The stay in Magdeburg was nothing if not "cosy": lodging was very difficult to find; the mass of schoolchildren caused problems for the town council. The neighbourhood, especially the Halloren (saltworkers) rose up against them and threatened them. Hence the professors searched for other places, in particular Major with the numerous members of his family.

At this time of need came some help of which one had almost given up hope. The 50 thalers about which Bugenhagen had written for Luther's widow to the Danish king at Whitsun and then again after the flight of the widow had still up to now not arrived. Now, however, on 10th January 1547, the promised 150 "Joachims" (Joachimsthaler) were sent via the mediacy of the Hamburger, Müller, to professor Veit Winsheimer, who lived with the respectable Herr Emeran Tucher in Magdeburg, so that, gladdened, Frau Katharina received her part of it. And not long after that a messenger came with 50 thalers and a gracious letter addressed to "Doctor Luther's widow":

"Firstly Our most gracious greetings.

Honourable and most virtuous, dearest, most special!

After We obtained reports that you in the current dangerous times among others retreated from Wittenberg to Magdeburg, We did not want to omit to write to you, to inform you of Our most gracious wishes and inclination towards you. And since you have your housekeeping to maintain and you are in places away from home, about which we sense a special compassion, We send you with this messenger, the old Silesian, fifty thalers for your housekeeping; if you would like to accept them and note Our most gracious inclination towards you. We would also like at all times to be your merciful lord and render Ourselves to your service. We did not want to keep as much from you and incline with grace and all goodness towards you."

Frau Katharina wrote her letter of thanks:

“Grace and peace of God the Father through his only begotten son Jesus Christ.

Serene Almighty King, gracious Lord!

Your Royal Majesty, to begin, may I at all times diligently offer my most devout prayer to God the Lord for Your Royal Majesty and all responsible for Your welfare and blissful rule. Most gracious Lord! Since this year I have had many great and difficult troubles and much heart-ache, firstly my and my children’s distress with the death (though blessed and happy journey home to our Saviour Jesus Christ) of my dear husband, the anniversary of his death approaching on 18th February, and then this dangerous war and the devastation of these lands of our fatherland with no end to the misery and woe to be seen, it has been a great and deep solace that Your Royal Majesty has provided me both with the most gracious writing and the sending of the fifty thalers for the more comfortable support of myself and my children, also of Your Royal Majesty’s most gracious offering to show Your most merciful inclination towards me, a poor and desolate widow, and my poor orphans. For these and also many other kindnesses previously showing the greatest grace I most humbly thank You; hoping, God the Lord, who calls himself the father of widows and orphans, as I pray to him daily, will richly reward such acts of Your Royal Majesty, in whose most gracious shelter and protection I hereby commend for all time with all diligence Your Royal Majesty and Your wife, my most gracious Lady Queen, and all Their children together with Their lands and people.

Magdeburg, 9th February A.D. XLVII.

Your Royal Majesty’s

most obedient
Katharina Luther
widow of late Doctor
Martin Luther.”

However, this thus made happy woman thought also about others in need, of her husband’s colleague, Doctor G Major, who, with his large number of children, looked in vain for a position in these terrible times. Frau Katharina included with this letter of thanks one additional plea:

“Gracious Lord! Since I know what most gracious and Christian inclination you have for the theologians of the University of Wittenberg and Doctor George Major whom my dear late husband loved and always thought of as his son for twenty years, who at this time is living in misery with me together with his ten surviving children; wish beseechingly to most humbly commend to Your Royal Majesty said doctor, that Your Royal Majesty might not consider such a person ungraciously. For theologians with women and children, particularly in these miserable times, must beg, as I have got to know well myself, since they will not receive rescue and support from princes and lords.”

So at Easter Doctor Major also received “50 thalers, graciously delivered by the Silesian, on the direction and request of the blessed and praiseworthy Frau Katharina, widow of the blessed, dearly departed Doctor Martin Luther”.

Since nothing came of the taking of Wittenberg by Maurice, the courageous Frau Katharina had in the meantime returned to Wittenberg, but her stay there was short-lived. The emperor Charles and his brother

Ferdinand came from southern Germany and Bohemia with their Spaniards and Italians, Bohemians and Hungarians to the assistance of their ally, Maurice, and a new siege of Wittenberg approached, which this time would be serious and dangerous. And now Frau Katharina really had to flee, because everywhere there spread reports of the incredible cruelty of the foreign people and the atrocities they committed, even against innocent children: "they robbed, murdered, looted, violated wives and younger women and threw children over fences into the lanes". In particular, however, the Spaniards and Italians raged at the Protestant priests and their families. They kidnapped two daughters from a priest in Altenberg, then murdered them in Kemberg near Wittenberg. It went about that: "The Hungarian robbers, usually called hussars, are a murderous and unmerciful people; in Eger they chopped off the hands and feet of children and put them as plumes in their hats". Thus it was said and Melanchthon wrote: "Their leader Lodran (Lateranus) said that after conquest of our city they will dig out Luther's body and throw it to the dogs; and spoke particularly of cutting me into pieces." Or even: "Luther's bones will be dug up and burned, the site where he rests will be destroyed and the city razed to the ground, Melanchthon strangled and Doctor Pommer cut to pieces which can be thrown about." Therefore, Melanchthon, who at the beginning of 1547 was again dwelling in Wittenberg, wrote a petition for the priests' wives there to the emperor.

Frau Katharina endured in Wittenberg as long as possible. There came, however, in the morning of Easter day the awful news that on Easter Saturday 24th

April the Elector Johann Friedrich had been struck down by the superior strength of the emperor on Lochau heath and had been taken prisoner and the hostile army was marching on Wittenberg. Now Luther's widow fell head over heels in misery again.

Thus she went quickly back to Magdeburg and asked the friends in tears, especially Melanchthon as guardian of her children, to find them a nest. She would have preferred to have gone to Denmark, to the only prince who had promised to take her in, since there was nothing more to be expected from the unfortunate Elector. She asked at first for them to be taken to Brunswick. The theologians did not seem, after they saw the remains of the electoral army pass through Magdeburg, to feel safe in Magdeburg anymore. Melanchthon and Major moved with their families together with the Lutherans through Helmstädt to Brunswick. In Helmstädt they were lavishly entertained by the town council. In Brunswick Melanchthon put both other families with the Protestant abbot, while he had to go about looking for modest accommodation for himself for some time. He was invited, as a popular professor, by most of the different princes; but of Luther's widow nobody troubled – she could in this time of Catholic reaction only be an embarrassment. Therefore she pressed to go to Denmark. But when the refugees had scarcely gone some miles north of Brunswick to Gifhorn, all the roads in the Dukedom of Lüneburg were full of soldiers and Duke Franz made difficulties; so they had to return again to Braunschweig. There Katharina now remained with her children, while Melanchthon moved on Ascension Day to Nordhausen where his friend, the

mayor, Meienburg, invited him; and Major followed wishing to proceed to his hometown of Nuremberg.

On 23rd May, the Monday before Whitsun, Wittenberg was taken by the imperial army; on Wednesday the emperor and King Ferdinand rode into the city in front of the castle church and was shown by the student Johann Burges from Quedlinburg to Luther's burial site. He did not, however, allow its desecration, as fiercely out for Luther as the Spaniards were. On 6th June, Wittenberg had to honour the new Elector Maurice who received the Electoral Crown and the Electoral domain as a reward for his betrayal of the Protestant cause. Two days later the rector invited the university to return to Wittenberg. Kate was also bidden at the end of June to return by Doctor Pommer and Mayor Reuter: everything is safe and house and court are unruined. Thus she return, even if only at the end of July, from Brunswick, home to dear Wittenberg.

Chapter 18

Widowhood

It was a sad homecoming, when Frau Katharina with her children and the rest of her saved belongings on her cart drove up through the Coswig Gate, Schlosstrasse and Kollegiengasse and stopped outside the cloister house. Chests and cases had become lighter – gilt and silver goblets to the value of 600 florins had been pawned – but the heart was heavy with sorrow. And, nevertheless, there was a feeling of peace and security to be back home again after the long flight away into a life of misery. And courageously Frau Kate set about creating a life from anew.

The house was still in the same old state and the

household effects were undamaged. The city had indeed withstood a siege and an assault by Maurice, but after the Battle of Mühlberg it had been peaceably handed over to the new regent and no Spaniards were allowed to live in it; only German people were admitted. The cloister house had remained during the flight in the care of the old loyal Wolf. However, he was not to be found when the Doctor's widow returned home with her children; some weeks before, on 14th June, he had passed on as one did not seem to need him any longer.

If, however, the house and court stood there unscathed, the situation with the more distant properties was not so good. The suburbs had been burned down at the beginning of the first siege and thus the buildings in the gardens had also become victim to the flames. Then the hussars had plundered the surroundings of Wittenberg. Also, further, in Grimma, not far from Nimbschen and Zulsdorf, the rearguard had (already since 1546) behaved badly – stolen chickens, geese and sheep, used unthreshed grain as litter for the horses. Worse, in the following year the Spaniards had ruled with murder and burning, looting and driving out; where there was nothing to loot, they burned everything in the fields to stubble.

Thus Luther's widow had suffered great damage during the war. If Jonas estimated the cost to him of the two flights at 400 florins, then Katharina's, with her more extensive property, must have been far more. Her gardens and properties: the orchard with its buildings, the Wachsdorf property and the Zulsdorf steadings had been laid to waste, so she knew that for years to

come she would have to put a lot into them, as Bugenhagen complained in a letter to the Danish king.

And if they could just have left the much-afflicted widow in peace so that she could have quietly taken care of her properties so laid to waste. But she was still tormented by angry neighbours and tough officials. An argumentative person started a quarrel with her over an easement (maybe the neighbour of Zulsdorf near Kieritzsch). Melanchthon was ready to come to an agreement, but the man demanded an immoderate sum and also brother Hans advised against the agreement. Thus it went to law and Dr Stromberg in Leipzig and also Camerarius, friends of Melanchthon, took care of the poor woman (1548). This legal process however lasted for years and again in 1550 Frau Katharina with Melanchthon had to appear for a hearing before the city administrator in Leipzig.

It was not a time to give up hope, but one to start work with new vigour in order to bring herself and her children through honourably. The food table was furnished again but none too easily in these chaotic times where the university had dispersed and regathered itself again only with effort – particularly since the new Electoral Saxony now had two colleges, Leipzig and Wittenberg, and the sons of the captured Elector strove to establish their own in Jena and to draw the real Lutherans from among the professors and students of Wittenberg into it. Only in August was the Wittenberg collegial house cleaned of the dirt of the soldiers' quartering and freshly repainted. But there was nothing to be thought of in terms of a great income if two schoolchildren only paid 14 groschen to be kept and fed by rector Crodel in Torgau all week with two

pots of beer at midday and in the evening, and Matthesius in Wittenberg, before he came to Frau Luther, had very good food for 5 silver groschen with Wolf Jan von Rochlitz together with old learned, respectable, good eating companions. Named among such table companions was Johann Stromer, who lived and ate with the widow for five years. Perhaps at that time there was also among Kate's table companions the Prussian, George von Kunheim, who became a student in Wittenberg on 15th August 1550 and thus known to the Lutheran family and later related.

Besides the rooms, the halls were also let for lectures by the academics. Thus in summer 1551, in Luther's great hall, where the great doctor had once brought forth on biblical books, Bartholomäus Lasan read Herodot.

In spite of everything and besides the pledge on the goblets Frau Katharina had to take out a loan of 400 florins on the Zulsdorf property from Dr Franz Kram and beyond that she had to resolve to write herself to the king of Denmark, as the "only king on earth to whom we poor Christians may take flight and from whom alone could be expected that the poor Christian preachers and their poor widows and orphans would be shown kindness." She was forced to this letter after those of the friends Bugenhagen and Melanchthon came to nothing. So on 6th October 1550 "Dr M Luther's widow, since she and her children now had little help and the unrest of the times had caused so many difficulties" asked His Royal Majesty if he might graciously grant her further such help. She prayed truly and sincerely, that God might reward the good deeds of His Royal Majesty which he showed towards

the Protestant clergy and their families and bestow him with special gifts and blessings. "The Almighty God graciously protect Your Royal Majesty and Her Royal Majesty the Queen and their children."

Also this writing of the widow herself was, it seems, unsuccessful, even though she could remind the king of her "dear lord's great burden and work", which His Royal Majesty, without doubt, had not forgotten.

The times were very sad. Cruciger died in 1548 and his wife could scarcely carry on; also Veit Dietrich in Nuremberg passed on soon thereafter. Other friends moved away or also died. In addition the church was in trouble, which was something that came close enough to Luther's widow; "the Interim" with the "rogue behind it" worried the Protestants the most. The new sovereign Maurice, on sight of whom the Spaniards and Italians shouted: "Scoundrel! Scoundrel!" and whom the Protestants called "Judas", was not warm-hearted, neither towards the Protestant cause, nor its principal representatives, the University of Wittenberg and its members. These were murky days in the old city on the Elbe.

Katharina's four children were with her and probably also some other young relatives. Luther's nephew, Fabian Kaufmann, now with the Latinized scholar's name Mercator, was recommended by Jonas in 1548 for a position at court with the princes of Anhalt.

Johannes studied further as an eager law student in Wittenberg. Possibly he had, until the time and opportunity to study had re-established itself after the upheaval of the war, "pursued a life on the paternal properties", that is, helped his mother in her

agricultural endeavours, as was once reported. After Easter 1549, Melanchthon's son-in-law Sabinus, rector of the Königsberg college, came to Wittenberg. He told a lot of the Prussian duke's goodwill towards the Luther family. So Melanchthon advised to send the young man to Königsberg, so that he could complete his studies there under the favour of the king. And thus Frau Kate wrote a letter to Duke Albrecht.

"Firstly Grace and Peace in Christ together with my humble prayer to God for Your Princely Grace.

Most serene and high born prince and lord!

Since Your Princely Grace has always shown particular grace towards my dear husband the God-blessed Doctor Martin, so I have no doubt, Your Princely Grace would also, as our dear God has bestowed Your Princely Grace with his divine word, to love, to protect and to administer, and also according to the will of my dear husband as a true prophet of these latest dangerous and troubled times, take me and my dear children as remaining widow and orphans into your merciful protection and allow them to be commended to you.

There is no necessity to remind Your Princely Grace, in what great need my housekeeping is now after the past carrying on of the war, and how miserably I have up to now had to nourish and maintain myself and my children from my poor properties which were ravaged and laid to waste. I have been told by Herr Philippi and informed by Dr Sabini, how inclined Your Princely Grace is towards my children, how Your Princely Grace has dealt with my eldest son and how Your Princely Grace has graciously offered to maintain him during his studies, and would be most humbly

thankful to Your Princely Grace for the same gracious support and compassion for my remaining, poor children.

Also this is my son's first departure from home and I have done what I can to get him ready for it, so that besides his studies he learns to know how to behave with people, so it is my humble request to Your Princely Grace, that Your Princely Grace might take my son according to the God-blessed will of my dear lord into his grace and protection and if he does not at first appear to know how to present himself to Your Princely Grace, to graciously attribute this in a good way to his inexperience and his being away from home for the first time and to have patience with him. I do not doubt he will know how to behave with humble obedience to Your Princely Grace and with necessary obedience towards his preceptor, to execute his studies and whatever other obligations are incumbent upon him diligently and to know to show respect and the greatest humbleness towards Your Princely Grace.

That our dear God might richly reward Your Princely Grace for this furtherance and humbly but constantly and earnestly wishing from God a long reign and lasting well-being for Your Princely Grace.

Date: Wittenberg, 29th May 1549.

Your Electoral Grace

Your meek and humble Catharina, the blessed Doctor Martin Luther's remaining widow."

Melanchthon wrote a letter of recommendation to the duke for the young man in which he praises him as "virtuous in being, respectable, modest, sincere, pure, of good disposition and eloquence; he was of nimble and capable body and if he trained at the court, his

enthusiasm could become of great use to the state." Also Jonas recommended in a written communication to the duke his "dear friend, the son of the divine prophet, already recommendable on account of his father" and offered "His Highness the prayer of the dear wife and widow of the reverend Doctor Luther". To several recommendations Jonas added a story of the war and a handwritten document of Luther's, "the prophet of Germany", in which he had prophesied the war.

Thus Johannes departed at the end of May with Dr Sabinus, who also took with him the little daughter that Melanchthon had brought up much to the deep regret of the grandfather. Also Jonas's son, Dr Christoph and Johann Camerar, the son of Melanchthon's bosom friend probably travelled with Hans Luther to Königsberg.

Melanchthon received a letter from Hans in which he described a part of the journey. The other part he left undescribed. Melanchthon also had to write and tell him, that his mother, sister and brothers were waiting with longing for a letter in which he might report everything to them; at the Leipzig Christmas fair there should have been sufficient opportunity to send letters.

For a long time nothing more was heard from Hans Luther. At home, however, the bad times continued, since the disquiet and upset resulting from the Interim, which the emperor had forced upon the Lutherans, did not cease; rather the bitterness between the former and current Electoral houses was increasing, particularly since the captured Elector had still not been released, but dragged around in an unworthy manner by the emperor. The siege of Magdeburg, which was banned

because of non-acceptance of the Interim and was attacked by Maurice, brought about all kinds of country-damaging troop movement, and the university could not easily arrive at peace and fruition. Katharina also had to contend with the continued legal challenges of “the angry neighbours”. The income in these troubled times only just sufficed for the housekeeping and the education of the children; Frau Katharina “suffered from poverty”, so that the 15 Rosenobels (50 thaler) allowance from the Danish king Christian III, for which the friends applied regularly and Katharina herself wrote, were for “the poor woman, the widow of our dear father Doctor Martin with her children” a wholly desired “merciful help”. The “mercies” which the Lutheran family was otherwise used to receiving from their sovereigns were not forthcoming because the old Elector sat as a prisoner and the new one with his great plans and continuous warring had nothing left for them. Hence, Frau Katharina could bemoan “that there were few people who thought to return the great kindnesses of my dear lord in providing help for the poor orphans”.

The various strokes of fate struck the poor widow so hard that she, who was always healthy, now became sickly and complained of weakness.

In these difficult times, “when it was not within her power to help her and her dear lord’s children according to need”, it was a consolation for Frau Katharina, that the Prussian duke would “now himself act as father”. Taking strength from this, she turned to His Princely Grace on St George’s Day (23rd April) 1551 thanking him for the gracious acceptance and maintenance of her son adding the request that he

might further provide for his maintenance in France or Italy for the completion of the studies he had started, so that he might serve the duke more usefully. Before, however, the duke might allow her son a short time to come to her, so that she, in her weakness, could talk to him about a few practical matters of concern to him and his brothers and sister; then he could go back to Königsberg or to Italy and France as His Princely Grace determined. Probably Hans himself had put forward this scheme to his mother.

What pain the mother must have experienced over her favourite son, however, when the following answer arrived from Duke Albrecht:

“We find that Our gracious desires for him have not, as We had really hoped, shown fruition. For it is reported to Us that he should not expect his studies to be supported. We also know that he participates in a few noble disputes he might well leave alone. One can realize that it truly comes as somewhat hard to Us that Our gracious benevolence has been so little appreciated by him.” Thus, the duke killed off any ideas of letting Hans travel; if he wanted to continue for the best at Königsberg, the duke would be inclined to provide him with maintenance for the sake of his father.

This was quite a blow to the heart for Katharina’s motherly feelings! Her dear son was neither diligent nor orderly and he owed both not only to the duke but also his father and mother. And if she might also say to herself, the duke was strict towards his wards – as once towards her brother Clemens, so now towards her son Hans – and if she could probably also assert with equal right that the young, otherwise good-natured and willing person had been led astray by bad company,

the fact remained that she credited her son with too much and gave him too much and the guardians were indeed correct with their assertion that Hans did not have what it took to study – he was also already 25 years old! The good report could not cover up the fact that the University of Königsberg made out Luther's son only too favourably.

And when Hans now gave up completely the scholarship and study at Königsberg and slowly made the long journey home, the evidence was plain that he was good for nothing better than the ducal chancellery. Thus he went to Weimar.

The sons Martin and Paul prospered much better, one studying theology and the other medicine; Margarete grew up to become a blossoming young woman.

The Smalkaldic War was practically at an end, except in Saxony; there all kinds of unrest and rumours of war started up, new worries and fears. Saxony was swarming with soldiers, Wittenberg was heavily billeted. And although these were not enemies, all kinds of acts of violence were committed by the raw rabble of soldiers. In the fortified city the citizens were not sure of the people staying in their own quarters, no-one ventured to go out beyond the city walls since outside it there was murder and killing; high-spirited, the mercenaries exacted the unbelievable.

And how it looked again now outside on the courtyards and gardens where the damage of the Smalkaldic War had been painstakingly put back in order! Devastation and contribution to the troops had befallen the estates. "It is clear", bemoaned Bugenhagen, "that she has suffered great damage to

her estates this year (1551).” “She will have to go to law in the Electoral court against Jan Löser.” Frau Katharina had to sue Jan Löser, – son of the old Hans Löser (died 1541), son of her godfather and godfather to Luther. This was for sure a bitter process.

And did she obtain her rights?

The Elector Maurice was preparing the final strike against the old emperor. Thus he probably had no time or desire to listen to a plaintive widow.

So Frau Katharina had to bite her pride again and turn to the Danish king, to whom she wrote on 8th January 1552 saying among other things:

“Your Royal Majesty will remember, how Your Royal Majesty allowed my dear late husband together with Herr Philippo and Dr Pomerano a yearly honorarium, which they might use to maintain their household and little children and which Your Royal Majesty has until now handed over to the aforesaid gentlemen. Since my dear late husband always admired Your Royal Majesty with love and considered him the most Christian king and also Your Royal Majesty behaved with such grace towards my dear late husband, I am brought by urgent need to beseech Your Royal Majesty most humbly in my distress, in the hope, that Your Royal Majesty take well from me, a poor widow now abandoned by everyone, my unworthy writing and mercifully allow such money to be passed to me. For Your Royal Majesty knows without doubt, how things stand now after the loss of my departed husband, how misery presses on one, how it has made widows and orphans of us, how all is now pitiable; and yes indeed how more damage has been done to me by friends than by foes; which is all too long to tell Your

Royal Majesty here. For these and other reasons I was moved to humbly beseech Your Royal Majesty since everyone seems so alien to me and no-one will help me."

Bugenhagen supported this request of the widow of "Patris Lutheri" with an enclosure "which almost complained (strongly)". And with success; on 22nd March the money arrived in his hand and he wrote that His Majesty had "very generously" relieved the widow.

In February 1552, when the mercenaries were living in the crudest manner in Wittenberg, the souls of the inhabitants were further alarmed in the middle of the winter by heavy storms with thunder and lightning. But soon after the military departed.

Now there came news that Maurice with his Saxons, the Brandenburgers and Hessians had forced the emperor to flee and nearly caught him (May 1552). The captured princes (Elector Johann Friedrich and Landgrave Philipp von Hessen) were released and also granted religious toleration in the "Treaty of Passau" (August 1552).

In the meantime it had become spring and then summer. Frau Kate could sow and harvest and be glad of the peace which had now finally entered after six years of war, flight and devastation; peace also in the matter of the Protestant faith, for which her "dear husband" had started the fire in German lands, the flames of which she most of all must have felt.

Now, when the poor widow could at last have given a long sigh of relief from the long years of misery she met the final deadly strike against her.

Chapter 19

Katharina's Death

The military had departed from Wittenberg, but they left behind a bad memory; a contagious epidemic, the "pestilence", which again quickly spread out in the marsh-surrounded, compact fortress and intensified with the summer heat. On 1st June evacuation of the university to somewhere else was discussed; on 10th Torgau offered it accommodation. But it stayed in Wittenberg until 6th July. Then the college also moved to the neighbouring town and was accommodated in the small, poky rooms of the Barefoot (Discalced) cloister which Leonhard Koppe had at one time stormed one Shrove Tuesday and now

stood empty.

However, Frau Katharina remained in Wittenberg, probably because of the property which she had to see to; her student sons and table companions still probably continued to have lectures from one or another master who lived in the Black Cloister. In the big, healthily-situated house it was still possible to hold out for the time being. But in the autumn, the cloister house was also struck by the epidemic. And in order to tear her children away from the danger, the concerned mother again took on the arduous task of moving away. So she had the horses hitched, the carriage loaded with things most needed and travelled off with the children who were still with her – Paul and Margarete, since Martin it seems had already gone with the university and Hans was working in the chancellery in Weimar – out through the Elster Gate, to Torgau.

Then the accident happened; the horses shied and went all over the place with the wagon. The startled woman tried to save the life of her children and stop the unmanageable horses; she jumped from the wagon but fell badly so that her body struck the ground hard and then went into a ditch with cold water in it. The panic, the fall, the cold and probably also an internal injury resulted in a heavy illness.

Thus the Luther family arrived in Torgau. Here she lived in the next street to the cloister, which lead to the castle; her lodging a corner house near the cloister church. Here Frau Katharina now lay in great pain slowly wasting away, cared for by her landlady and her daughter Margarete who was now 18 years old.

Luther's widow then enjoyed one more piece of

good news in these days of suffering. Their eldest son Paul, who had trained to become a competent medic, got engaged at this time to Anna von Warbeck, the daughter of the late Herr Veit von Warbeck, a former canon of Altenburg and Privy Councillor in the Electoral Court and Vice Chancellor at Torgau, a nobleman from Swabia. Her mother, Anna von Hack – also born a Swabian – still lived and had her own house in Torgau in the Fischergasse.

Miss Anna was a determined woman. She wore a damask skirt with a velvet train which resulted in her coming into legal conflict with the town council in relation to the Electoral dress-code law. She defended herself against it and appealed to the Elector, so that a respectable town councillor had to send a messenger with a report on the supplicant Anna Warbeck to Dresden with wages and a tip. His Electoral Grace then replied, with reference to this, to the respectable council of Torgau with the following decree:

“Dear faithful! The humble complaint of the respectable and dear special young lady Anne von Warbeck has been reported to Us, in that she is to refrain from wearing her damask skirt with velvet train and that additionally a fine of some gulden has been imposed on her as a penalty. Mindful as We are of what We decided regarding the policing of attire, We note, nevertheless, that the father of the young lady in question was of nobility and a Prince-Electoral Councillor, also that the damask, from which the skirt was made, was a present of the court and that the skirts were made before the passing of the above mentioned policing order. Therefore We will allow that she may honourably wear such skirts. We also wish that you

will authorize as much and spare her the imposed fine; also that you in future behave and render yourselves such that she has no troubles of the kind to complain about. This is Our full authentic opinion. Datum Dresden, 30th Jan. Anno LII”.

This noble lady became the daughter-in-law of Frau Katharina and the latter will have liked the determined nature of the future wife of her son. But the joy of a wedding was something Frau Katharina could not take part in anymore.

The ill health of the sick woman continued for three months. With Christian patience she endured the suffering and the worry for her children. “Throughout her illness she consoled herself and held herself up with God’s word. In fervent prayers she begged for a peaceful departure from this wearisome life. Often she also commended the church and her children to God and prayed that the purity of the teaching, which God, through the work of her husband, had brought back to those time, would pass on to successive generations.” She herself, however, wanted “to stick to Christ, like a burr to a dress”, words which a singer later repeated in a song.

On the 20th December 1552 her soul finally expired.

The vice-rector of the university, Paul Eber, made this known to the students in a Latin “funeral notice” written by Melancthon in which he briefly described her life and suffering. In particular, the recollection of the past six years of suffering drifted before the eyes of the loyal friend of the house and, it seems, the wrong which she suffered from Chancellor Brück and others. “With her orphan children she, already heavily taxed, had to wander about under the greatest dangers like an

outlaw; she met with great ingratitude from many; and by those from whom she might have hoped to find kindness because of the great service of her husband to the church, she was often ignominiously deceived." Instead of the crude German expression with which Luther aired his fears over the handling of his widow in his house book: "People are coarse, the world is thankless", the learned friend chose a Greek epigram from Euripides for the funeral notice (Orest. 1-3) which fits well the time of great suffering of Luther's widow: "There is no agony, no fate, no affliction imposed by God that can be described in words that man does not have to experience, nothing so terrible that man might escape it."

As opposed to that expounded by the pagan poet, the notice directed to the consolation and hope of Christendom in which the late woman had also found consolation following the deep wound caused by the death of her husband and during her flight with the orphan children at the time of war, the many-sided woes of widowhood and the ingratitude of many people towards the widow of the reverend and holy man, Doctor Luther. The university then invited all its students to the funeral "to show their last respects to the honoured woman and to thus testify that they held high the devoutness of the widow, which shone so delightfully in her her whole life long; that they took to heart the deep grief of the orphans and that they would not forget the works of their father, which were so great that no words can praise them enough; that they finally, together bid God in prayer to keep the light of the Gospel pure and to protect its preachers and teachers and to reign so as to protect the states and

grant proper shelter for churches and schools”.

The following day, in the afternoon at three o'clock, the funeral procession of the “noble spouse of the holy Doctor Luther” took place. From her dwelling place as a guest, down the Schloßgasse, past the newly-built great Electoral residence, Hartenfels, went the immense train of citizens, professors and students, through the Wintergrüne to the town church Saint Marien. Here under the boy's choir with its beautiful inscription: “*Laudate dominum pueri!*” the tired pilgrim was laid to rest with the usual festivities and the boys also will also have sung her a song of departure.

By the grave of their mother mourned her daughter and three sons.

Hans was councillor to the ducal Saxon chancellery; the next year he married Elisabeth, the daughter of the professor and provost at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Doctor Cruciger, whom his father had selected to be his successor, but died soon after the great doctor. Later Hans Luther went to serve his old patron Duke Albert of Prussia and died not long after him in 1575.

Martin, whom his father had feared would become a lawyer, studied theology; however, he had to live as a private scholar because of persistent illness and died young, in his thirty-fourth year, after he had lived some time in a childless marriage with Mayor Heilinger's daughter in Wittenberg.

Paul, the eldest, became a respectable medic, doctor and professor at Jena and personal physician to the duke, then councillor and personal physician to the Brandenburg Elector and later to the Saxon Elector. He married soon after his mother's death to his fiancée

Anna von Warbeck and descendants of his in the female line still persist today.

Margarete got married in 1555 "in the presence of many counts and lords" to George von Kunheim, hereditary lord of Knauten near Königsberg, who had studied in Wittenberg and had maybe lived and dined with Frau Katharina. She lived with her husband, the ducal Prussian district judge to Tapiau, in the happiest of marriages and died the mother of nine children in 1570.

Nowadays of the many lineages descending from Luther and the great-grandmother of Katharina, few descendants remain. Of the cloister of Nimbschen where the young Katharina lived for 15 years only three walls grey with age remain, entangled with wild vines. Zulsdorf has been ploughed over since 1801 and only a monument designates the place where she had held sway with so much pleasure. Her gardens in Wittenberg in which she worked and harvested are partly built over with new terraced houses. Only the cloister house still stands, where she lived for twenty years with the great doctor, even if only the main residential living room is still somewhat as it was.

However, in the town church at Torgau, a monument in grey sandstone was erected to Frau Katharina - probably by her children; no particular piece of art, made after the model of the gypsum relief by a realistic artist that hung in Zulsdorf, and is to be seen even today in the church at Kieritzsch. On her monument Frau Katharina is carved en bas relief as an older woman in a long coat with a white headscarf. She looks straight out with a cheerful face, like a mother on Sunday looking back on a good day's work; in her

hands she holds an open book as a sign of her devoutness and her zeal in the reading of the Bible; the diligent Martha portrayed as a pious Maria. Above her are the coats of arms of Luther and von Bora. Around the edge stands the inscription: "Blessedly passed on 20th December 1552 to God from all those here in Torgau, the blessed remaining widow of Doctor Martin Luther, Katharina von Bora."[†]

Master Lucas Cranach created an artist's idealistic picture of Katharina besides the various realistic portraits of her on the altar sheet at Wittenberg. In it Frau Katharina sits with her little child in the foremost row in front of the rest of the congregation as a pious listener of her husband preaching - similarly as a thoughtful Maria.

The crowned poet laureate Balthasar Menciüs dedicated a poetic monument in candid, homely rhyming couplets to Luther's wife at the first Reformation Jubilee of 1617:

Cathrin von Bora bin ich gnant
I am called Cathrin von Bora
geboren in dem Meissner Landt
born in the land of Meissner
aus einem alten Edlen Stamm
of an old, noble family
wie solchs mein Anherrn zeigen an
such as is shown by my ancestors
die Gott und dem Römischen Reich
who served God and Holy Roman Empire
mit Ehr und Ruhm gedienet gleich.

† Anno 1552 den 20. December Ist in Gott Selig entscha | ffen
alhier in Torgau Herrn | D. Martini Luthers seligen
Hinderlassene wittbe Katharina | von Borau

with honour and fame equally.
 Als ich erwuchs, zu Jahren kam,
As I grew up and was of age,
 der Tugendt mich thät nehmen an
virtue I was to take on
 und jedermann bethöret war
and everyone was overawed
 vom Pabst und seiner Münche Lahr,
by the Pope and the teaching of his monks
 und hoch erhaben der Nonnen-Stand,
and highly exalted the position of the nun,
 ward ich ins Kloster Nimetzsch gesand;
so I was sent to the Nimbschen cloister;
 mein Ehr und Amt hatt ich in acht
with heed to my honour and position
 rief zu Gott, bethet Tag und Nacht
I called to God, prayed day and night
 für die Wohlfarth der Christenheit.
for the welfare of Christendom.
 Gott mich erhört und auch erfreut;
God heard me and was pleased;
 Doctor Luther den kühnen Held
Doctor Luther, the bold hero,
 mir zu einm Ehmänn außerswehlt,
selected to be a husband for me,
 dem ich im keuschen Ehstandt mein
whom I, in my chaste marriage,
 gebahr drei Söhn und Töchterlein.
bore three sons and daughters.
 Im Witwenstand lebt sieben Jahr
I lived in widowhood for seven years
 nachdem mein Herr gestorben war.
after my lord had died.
 Zu Torgau in der schönen Stadt

In the beautiful city of Torgau
 man meinen Leib begraben hat;
my body is buried;
 biß Gottes Posaun thut ergehn
until God's trumpet sounds
 und alle Menschen heißt aufstehn;
and all men must stand;
 alsdann will ich mit meinem Herrn
then do I wish with my lord
 Gott ewig lobn, rühmen, ehrn
to eternally praise, glorify and honour God
 und mit der Außerwählten Schaar
and with the Holy Throng
 in Freuden leben immerdar.
live forever in happiness.

Less friendly monuments to the wife of Luther were erected by Catholic authors who regarded the marriage of the monk and the nun as a sacrilege and scandal and in their way exploited it, as Luther himself had already foreseen before his death and had forecast in his will. From the Protestant side only written defences against this defamation have been issued or learned material collections and short national writings.

And, nevertheless, Katharina lives in the memory of the German Protestant people, a clear and friendly recollection of her as a German Protestant priest's wife, that of the mighty doctor, who with her husband created the mentally-appealing model of a Protestant parsonage.

And rightly. She was a capable and dutiful woman, as was expressed during her time: a "devout woman", a real German housewife. She had the courage to choose Martinus Luther, "the daring hero", to be her

marriage partner, she dared to live with the great spiritual power, the emperor-born regent of the church, to be enough for him, to satisfy him. And she carried out what she undertook. The great doctor respected her, loved her and praised her. "That is real praise, to be praised by those who are praised."

