

**ULRICH VON HUTTEN,  
"A KNIGHT OF THE  
ORDER OF POETS"**

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Ulrich Von Hutten, "A Knight of the Order of Poets" by David Starr Jordan

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**DAVID STARR JORDAN**

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# ULRICH VON HUTTEN

"A KNIGHT OF  
THE ORDER OF POETS"



By David Starr Jordan



"Die Lust der  
Freiheit weht"

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### PREFATORY NOTE

For many of the details of the life of Hutten, and for most of the quotations from Hutten's writings given in this book, the writer is indebted to the excellent memoir by David Friedrich Strauss, entitled "Ulrich von Hutten." (Fourth Edition: Bonn, 1878.) No attempt has been made to give here an account of Hutten's writings, only a few of the more noteworthy being mentioned.

## ULRICH VON HUTTON

Four centuries ago began the great modern struggle for freedom of thought which has made our modern civilization possible. I wish here to give something of the story of a man who in his day was not the least in this conflict—a man who dared to think and act for himself when thought and act were costly—Ulrich von Hutten.

Near Frankfort-on-the-Main, on a sharp pinnacle of rock above the little railway station of Vollmerz, may still be found the scanty ruins of an old castle which played a brave part in German history before it was destroyed in the Thirty Years War.

In this castle of Steckelberg, in the year 1488, was born Ulrich von Hutten. He was the last of a long line of Huttens of Steckelberg, strong men who knew not fear, who had fought for the Emperor in all lands whither the imperial eagle had flown, and who, when the empire was



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at peace, had fought right merrily with their neighbors on all sides. Robber-knights they were, no doubt, some or all of them; but in those days all was fair in love and in war. And this line of warriors centered in Ulrich von Hutten, and with him it ended. "The wild kindred has gone out with this its greatest."

Ulrich was the eldest son, and bore his father's name. But he was not the son for which his father had hoped. Slender of figure, short of stature, and weak of limb, Ulrich seemed unworthy of his burly ancestry. The horse, the sword, and the lute were not for him. He tried hard to master them, and to succeed in all things worthy of a knight. But he was strong only with his books. At last to his books his father consigned him, and, sorely disappointed, he sent Ulrich to the monastery of Fulda to be made a priest.

A wise man, Eitelwolf von Stein, became his friend, and disclosed to him a life braver than that of a priest, nobler than that of a knight,—the life of a scholar. To Hutten's father Eitelwolf

wrote: "Would you bury a genius like that in the cloister? He must be a man of letters." But the father had decided once for all. Ulrich must be a priest, else he must never return to Steckelberg. And the son took his fate in his own hands. He renounced the priesthood as he had been forced to renounce knight-hood. He fled from Fulda, to make his way as a scholar in the world—a world in which, in those days as in most others, scholarship received scanty recognition.

At the same time, another young man whose history was to be interwoven with his own, Martin Luther, fled from the turbulence and deceit of this same world to the solitude of the monastery of Erfurth. By very different paths they came at last to work in the same cause, and their methods of action were not less different.

To the University of Cologne Hutten went, and with the students of that day he was trained in the mysteries of scholasticism, and in the Latin of the schoolmen and the priests. Wonderful prob-

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lems they pondered over, and they used to write long arguments in Latin for or against propositions which came nowhere within the domain of fact. That scholarship stood related to reality, and that it must find its end and justification in action, was no part of the philosophy of those times.

But Hutten and his friends cared little for scholastic puzzles, and they gave themselves to the study of the beauties of Latin poetry and to the newly opened mine of the literature of Greece. They delighted in Virgil and Lucian and still more in Homer and Aeschylus.

The Turks had conquered Constantinople, and the fall of the Greek Empire had driven many learned Greeks to the west of Europe. There some of the scholars received them with open arms, and eagerly learned from them to read Homer and Aristotle in the original tongue, and the New Testament also. Those who followed these studies came to be known as Humanists. But most of the universities and the monasteries in