THE INDULGENCES AND THESES (1517–1518)

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Chapter 1

Procession

A great agitation prevailed at that time among the German people. The Church had opened a vast market upon earth. From the crowds of purchasers, and the shouts and jokes of the sellers, it might have been called a fair, but a fair conducted by monks. The merchandise that they were extolling, and which they offered at a reduced price, was, said they, the salvation of souls!

These dealers traversed the country in a handsome carriage, accompanied by three horsemen, living in great state, and spending freely. One might have thought it some archbishop on a progress through his diocese, with his retinue and officers, and not a common chapman or a begging monk.

When the procession approached a town, a deputy waited on the magistrate, and said, “The Grace of God and of the Holy Father is at your

gates.” Instantly everything was in motion in the place. The clergy, the priests and nuns, the council, the schoolmasters and their pupils, the trades with their banners, men and women, young and old, went out to meet these merchants, bearing lighted tapers in their hands, and advancing to the sound of music and of all the bells, “so that they could not have received God himself with greater honor,” says an historian. The salutations being exchanged, the procession moved towards the church.

The pontiff’s bull of grace was carried in front on a velvet cushion, or on cloth of gold. The chief of the indulgence-merchants came next, holding a large red wooden cross in his hand. All the procession thus moved along amidst singing, prayers, and the smoke of incense. The sound of the organ, and loud music welcomed the merchant-monk and his attendants into the temple. The cross that he had carried was placed in front of the altar: on it were suspended the arms of the pope, and so long as it remained there, the clergy of the place, the penitentiaries, and the under-commissaries with white wands, came daily after vespers, or before

the salutation, to render it homage. This great affair excited a lively sensation in the quiet cities of Germany.

One person in particular attracted the attention of the spectators at these sales. It was he who carried the red cross, and who played the chief part.

He was robed in the Dominican dress, and moved with an air of arrogance.

His voice was sonorous, and seemed in its full strength, although he had already attained his sixty-third year. This man, the son of a Leipsic goldsmith name Diez, was known as John Diezel, or Tetzel. He had studied in his native city, had taken the degree of bachelor in 1487, and two years after had entered the Dominican order. Numerous honors had been heaped upon his head. Bachelor of divinity, prior of the Dominicans, apostolic commissary, inquisitor (haereticae pravitatis inquisitor), he had from the year 1502 uninterruptedly filled the office of dealer in indulgences. The skill that he had acquired as

subordinate had soon procured him the nomination as chief commissary. He received eighty florins amonth; all his expenses were paid; a carriage and three horses were at his disposal; but his subsidiary profits, as may be easily imagined, far exceeded his stipend. In 1507 he gained at Friburg two thousand florins in two days. If he had the office of a mountebank, he possessed the manners also. Convicted at Inspruck of adultery and infamous conduct, his vices had nearly caused his death. The Emperor Maximilian had ordered him to be put into a sack and thrown into the river. The Elector Frederick of Saxony interfered and obtained his pardon. But the lesson that he had received had not taught him modesty. He led two of his children about with him. Miltitz, the pope’s legate, mentions this fact in one of his letters. It would have been difficult to find in all the convents of Germany a man better qualified than Tetzel for the business with which he was charged. To the theology of a monk, to the zeal and spirit of an inquisitor, he united the greatest effrontery; and the circumstance that most especially facilitated his task, was his skill in inventing those extravagant

stories by which the people's minds are captivated. To him all means were good that filled his chest. Raising his voice and displaying the eloquence of a mountebank, he offered his indulgences to all comers, and knew better than any tradesman how to extol his wares. When the cross had been erected, and the arms of the pope suspended from it, Tetzel went into the pulpit, and with a tone of assurance began to extol the value of indulgences, in the presence of a crowd whom the ceremony had attracted to the holy place. The people listened and stared as they heard of the admirable virtues that he announced. A Jesuit historian, speaking of the Dominican monks whom Tetzel had taken with him, says: "Some of these preachers failed not, as usual, to go beyond the matter they were treating of, and so far to exaggerate the worth of indulgences, that they gave the people cause to believe that they were assured of their salvation, and of the deliverance of souls from purgatory, so soon as they had given their money." If such were the disciples, we may easily imagine what the master must have been. Let us listen to one of the harangues he delivered after the elevation of the

cross.

“Indulgences (said he) are the most precious and the most noble of God’s gifts.

“This cross (pointing to the red cross) has as much efficacy as the very cross of Jesus Christ. “Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned.

“I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons.

“There is no sin so great, that an indulgence cannot remit; and even if any one (which is doubtless impossible) had offered violence to the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of God, let him pay — only let him pay well, and all will be forgiven him. “Reflect then, that for every mortal sin you must, after confession and contrition, do penance for seven years, either in this life or in purgatory: now, how many mortal sins are there not

committed in a day, how many in a week, how many in a month, how many in a year, how many in a whole life! .... Alas! these sins are almost infinite, and they entail an infinite penalty in the fires of purgatory.

And now, by means of these letters of indulgence, you can once in your life, in every case except four, which are reserved for the apostolic see, and afterwards in the article of death, obtain a plenary remission of all your penalties and all your sins!" Tetzel even entered into financial calculations. "Do you not know," said he, "that if any one desires to visit Rome, or any country where travelers incur danger, he sends his money to the bank, and for every hundred florins that he wishes to have, he gives five or six or ten more, that by means of the letters of this bank he may be safely repaid his money at Rome or elsewhere.....And you, for a quarter of a florin, will not receive these letters of indulgence, by means of which you may introduce into paradise, not a vile metal, but a divine and immortal soul, without its running any risk." Tetzel then passed to

another subject.

“But more than this,” said he: “indulgences avail not only for the living, but for the dead.

“For that, repentance is not even necessary.

“Priest! noble! merchant! wife! youth! maiden! do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the abyss: We are suffering horrible torments! a trifling alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not!” All shuddered at these words uttered by the thundering voice of the impostor-monk.

“At the very instant,” continued Tetzel, “that the money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies liberated to heaven. “O stupid and brutish people, who do not understand the grace so richly offered! Now heaven is everywhere opened! .....Do you refuse to enter now? When, then will you enter?.....Now you can ransom so many souls!.....Stiffnecked and thoughtless man! with twelve groats you can

deliver your father from purgatory, and you are ungrateful enough not to save him! I shall be justified in the day of judgment; but you, — you will be punished so much the more severely for having neglected so great salvation. — I declare to you, though you should have but a single coat, you ought to strip it off and sell it, in order to obtain this grace.....The Lord our God no longer reigns. He has resigned all power to the pope." Then seeking to make use of other arms besides, he added: "Do you know why our most Holy Lord distributes so rich a grace? It is to restore the ruined Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, so that it may not have its equal in the world. This Church contains the bodies of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and those of a multitude of martyrs. These saintly bodies, through the present state of the building, are now, alas!.....beaten upon, inundated, polluted, dishonored, reduced to rottenness, by the rain and the hail.....Alas! shall these sacred ashes remain longer in the mire and in degradation?" This description failed not to produce an impression on many, who burned with a desire to come to the aid of poor Leo X, who had not the

means of sheltering the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul from the weather.

The orator next turned against the cavillers and traitors who opposed his work: “I declare them excommunicated!” exclaimed he.

Then addressing the docile souls, and making an impious application of scripture, he exclaimed: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them!” And in conclusion, pointing to the strong box in which the money was received, he generally finished his pathetic discourse by three appeals to his auditory: “Bring — bring — bring!” — “He used to shout these words with such a horrible bellowing,” wrote Luther, “that one would have said it was a mad bull rushing on the people and goring them with his horns.” When his speech was ended, he left the pulpit, ran towards the money-box, and in sight of all the people flung into it a piece of money, taking

care that it should rattle loudly. Such were the discourses that Germany listened to with astonishment in the days when God was preparing Luther.

The speech being concluded, the indulgence was considered as “having established its throne in the place with due solemnity.” Confessionals decorated with the pope’s arms were ranged about: the undercommissaries and the confessors whom they selected were considered the representatives of the apostolic penitentiaries of Rome at the time of a great jubilee; and on each of their confessionals were posted in large characters, their names, surnames, and titles. Then thronged the crowd around the confessors. Each came with a piece of money in his hand. Men, women, and children, the poor, and even those who lived on alms — all found money. The penitentiaries, after having explained anew to each individual privately the greatness of the indulgence, addressed this question to the penitents: “How much money can you conscientiously spare to obtain so complete a remission?” The demand, said the Instructions of

the Archbishop of Mentz to the Commissaries, should be made at this moment, in order that the penitents might be better disposed to contribute.

Four precious graces were promised to those who should aid in building the basilic of St. Peter. “The first grace that we announce to you,” said the commissaries, in accordance with the letter of their instructions, “is the full pardon of every sin.” Next followed three other graces: first, the right of choosing a confessor, who, whenever the hour of death appeared at hand, should give absolution from all sin, and even from the greatest crimes reserved for the apostolic see: secondly, a participation in all the blessings, works, and merits of the Catholic Church, prayers, fasts, alms, and pilgrimages; thirdly, redemption of the souls that are in purgatory.

To obtain the first of these graces, it was requisite to have contrition of heart and confession of mouth, or at least an intention of confessing. But as for the three others, they might be obtained without contrition, without confession, simply by

paying. Christopher Columbus, extolling the value of gold, had said ere this with great seriousness: “Whoever possesses it can introduce souls into paradise.” Such was the doctrine taught by the Archbishop of Mentz and by the papal commissaries.

“As for those,” said they, “who wish to deliver souls from purgatory and procure the pardon of all their offenses, let them put money into the chest; contrition of heart or confession of mouth is not necessary. Let them only hasten to bring their money; for thus will they perform a work most useful to the souls of the dead, and to the building of the Church of St. Peter.” Greater blessings could not be offered at a lower rate.

The confession over, and that was soon done, the faithful hastened to the vendor. One alone was charged with the sale. His stall was near the cross.

He cast inquiring looks on those who approached him. He examined their manner, their gait, their dress, and he required a sum

proportionate to the appearance of the individual who presented himself.

Kings, queens, princes, archbishops, bishops, were, according to the scale, to pay twentyfive ducats for an ordinary indulgence. Abbots, counts, and barons, ten.

The other nobles, the rectors, and all those who possessed an income of five hundred florins, paid six. Those who had two hundred florins a-year paid one; and others, only a half. Moreover, of this tariff could not be carried out to the letter, full powers were given the apostolical commissionary; and all was to be arranged according to the data of “sound reason,” and the generosity of the donor. For particular sins, Tetzel had a particular tax. For polygamy it was six ducats; for sacrilege and perjury, nine ducats; for murder, eight ducats; for witchcraft, two ducats. Samson, who exercised the same trade in Switzerland as Tetzel in Germany, had a somewhat different scale. For infanticide he required four livres tournois; and for parricide or fratricide, one ducat. The apostolical commissaries

sometimes met with difficulties in their trade. It frequently happened, both in towns and villages, that the men were opposed to this traffic, and forbade their wives to give anything to these merchants. What could their pious spouses do? “Have you not your dowry, or other property, at your own disposal?” asked the vendors. “In that case you can dispose of it for so holy a work, against the will of your husbands.” The hand that had given the indulgence could not receive the money; this was forbidden under the severest penalties: there were good reasons to fear lest that hand should prove unfaithful. The penitent was himself to drop the price of his pardon into the chest. They showed an angry countenance against all who daringly kept their purses closed. If among the crowd of those who thronged the confessionals there should be found a man whose crime had been public, though it was one that the civil laws could not reach, he was to begin by doing public penance. They first led him into a chapel or the vestry; there they stripped off his garments, took off his shoes, and left him nothing but his shirt. They crossed his arms over his bosom: placed a

taper in one hand, and a rod in the other. The penitent then walked at the head of a procession to the red cross. Here he remained kneeling until the chants and the offertory were over. After this the commissary struck up the psalm, Miserere Mei! The confessors immediately drew near the penitent, and conducted him through the station towards the commissary, who, taking the rod and striking him thrice gently on the back, said to him: “God have pity on thee, and pardon thy sin!” He then began to sing the Kyrie Eleison: the penitent was led to the front of the cross, where the confessor gave him the apostolical absolution, and declared him reinstated in the communion of the faithful. Sad mummery, concluded by the words of Holy Scripture, that, in such a moment, were mere profanity!

We give one of these letters of absolution. It is worth while learning the contents of these diplomas which led to the Reformation of the Church.

“May our Lord Jesus Christ have pity on thee, N.N., and absolve thee by the merits of his most

holy passion! And I, in virtue of the apostolical power that has been confided to me, absolve thee from all ecclesiastical censures, judgments, and penalties, which thou mayst have incurred; moreover, from all excesses, sins, and crimes that thou mayst have committed, however great and enormous they may be, and from whatsoever cause, were they even reserved for our most holy father the pope and for the apostolic see. I blot out all the stains of inability and all marks of infamy that thou mayst have drawn upon thyself on this occasion. I remit the penalties that thou shouldst have endured in purgatory. I restore thee anew to participation in the sacraments of the Church. I incorporate thee afresh in the communion of saints, and re-establish thee in the purity and innocence which thou hadst at thy baptism. So that in the hour of death, the gate by which sinners enter the place of torments and punishment shall be closed against thee, and, on the contrary, the gate leading to the paradise of joy shall be open. And if thou shouldst not die for long years, this grace will remain unalterable until thy last hour shall arrive.

“In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

“Friar John Tetzel, commissary, has signed this with his own hand.” With what skill are presumptuous and lying words here foisted in between holy and christian expressions!

All the believers were required to confess in the place where the red cross was set up. None were excepted but the sick and aged, and pregnant women. If, however, there chanced to be in the neighborhood some noble in his castle, some great personage in his palace, there was also an exemption for him, as he would not like to be mixed up with this crowd, and his money was well worth the pains of fetching from his mansion.

Was there any convent whose chiefs, opposed to Tetzel’s commerce, forbade their monks to visit the places where the Indulgence had set up its throne, they found means of remedying the evil by sending them confessors, who were empowered to absolve them contrary to the rules of their order

and the will of their superiors. There was no vein in the gold mine that they did not find the means of working.

Then came what was the end and aim of the whole business: the reckoning of the money. For greater security, the chest had three keys: one was in Tetzel's keeping; the second in that of a treasurer delegated by the house of Fugger of Augsburg, to whom this vast enterprise has been consigned; the third was confided to the civil authority. When the time was come, the money-boxes were opened before a public notary, and the contents were duly counted and registered. Must not Christ arise and drive out these profane money changers from the sanctuary?

When the mission was over, the dealers relaxed from their toils. The instructions of the commissarygeneral forbade them, it is true, to frequent taverns and places of bad repute; but they cared little for this prohibition. Sin could have but few terrors for those who made so easy a traffic in it. "The collectors led a disorderly life," says a

Romanist historian; “they squandered in taverns, gamblinghouses, and places of illfame, all that the people had saved from their necessities.” It has even been asserted, that when they were in the taverns they would often stake the salvation of souls on a throw of the dice.

Chapter 2

The Franciscan Confessor

But now let us turn to the scenes which this sale of the pardon of sins at that time gave rise to in Germany. There are characteristics which, of themselves alone, depict the times. We prefer using the language of the men whose history we are narrating.

At Magdeburg, Tetzel refused to absolve a rich lady, unless (as he declared to her) she would pay one hundred florins in advance. She requested the advice of her usual confessor, who was a Franciscan: “God grants the remission of sins gratuitously,” replied the monk, “he does not sell it.” He begged her, however, not to communicate to Tetzel the counsel she had received from him. But this merchant having notwithstanding heard a report of this opinion so contrary to his interests, exclaimed: “Such a counsellor deserves to be banished or to be burnt.” Tetzel rarely found men enlightened enough, and still more rarely men who

were bold enough, to resist him. In general he easily managed the superstitious crowd. He had set up the red cross of the indulgences at Zwickau, and the worthy parishioners had hastened to drop into his strong-box the money that would deliver them. He was about to leave with a well-stored purse, when, on the eve of his departure, the chaplains and their acolytes asked him for a farewell supper. The request was just. But how contrive it? the money was already counted and sealed up. On the morrow he caused the great bell to be tolled. The crowd rushed into the church; each one imagined something extraordinary had happened, seeing that the business was over. “I had resolved,” said he, “to depart this morning; but last night I was awakened by groans. I listened attentively.....they came from the cemetery.....Alas! it was some poor soul calling upon me and earnestly entreating me to deliver it from the torments by which it is consumed! I shall stay, therefore, one day longer, in order to move the compassion of all christian hearts in favor of this unhappy soul.

I myself will be the first to give, and he that

does not follow my example will merit condemnation.” What heart would not have replied to this appeal? Who knows, besides, what soul it is thus crying from the cemetery? The offerings were abundant, and Tetzel entertained the chaplains and their acolytes with a joyous repast, the expense of which was defrayed by the offerings given in behalf of the soul of Zwickau. The indulgence-merchants had visited Hagenau in 1517. The wife of a shoemaker, taking advantage of the authorization given in the commissarygeneral’s instructions, had procured a letter of indulgence, contrary to her husband’s will, and had paid a gold florin. She died shortly after. As the husband had not caused a mass to be said for the repose of her soul, the priest charged him with contempt of religion, and the magistrate of Hagenau summoned him to appear in court. The shoemaker put his wife’s indulgence in his pocket, and went to answer the accusation. — “Is your wife dead?” asked the magistrate. — “Yes,” replied he. — “What have you done for her?” — “I have buried her body, and commended her soul to God.” — “But have you had a mass said for the repose of her

soul?” — “I have not: it was of no use; she entered heaven at the moment of her death.” — “How do you know that?” — “Here is the proof.” As he said these words, he drew the indulgence from his pocket, and the magistrate, in presence of the priest, read in so many words, that, at the moment of her death, the woman who had received it would not go into purgatory, but would at once enter into heaven. “If the reverend gentleman maintains that a mass is still necessary,” added the widower, “my wife has been deceived by our most holy father the pope; if she has not been, it is the priest who deceives me.” There was no reply to this, and the shoemaker was acquitted. Thus did the plain sense of the people condemn these pious frauds. One day as Tetzel was preaching at Leipsic, and mingling with his sermon some of these stories of which we have given a specimen, two students quitted the church in indignation, exclaiming: “It is impossible for us to listen any longer to this monk’s jokes and puerilities.” One of them, we are informed, was the youthful Camerarius, who afterwards became Melancthon’s intimate friend and biographer.

But of all the young men of the age, the one on whom Tetzel made the deepest impression was doubtless Myconius, afterwards celebrated as a reformer and historian of the Reformation. He had received a christian education. “My son,” his father, a pious Franconian, would often say to him, “pray frequently; for all things are given to us gratuitously from God alone. The blood of Christ,” added he, “is the only ransom for the sins of the whole world. O my son, though three men only should be saved by Christ’s blood, believe, and believe with assurance, that thou art one of those three men. It is an insult to the Savior’s blood to doubt that he can save.” And then, cautioning his son against the traffic that was now beginning to be established in Germany: “Roman indulgences,” said he again, “are nets to catch silver, and which serve to deceive the simpleminded.

Remission of sins and eternal life are not to be purchased with money.” At the age of thirteen Frederick was sent to the school at Annaberg to finish his studies. Tetzel arrived in this city shortly after and remained there two years. The people

flocked in crowds to hear his sermons. “There is no other means of obtaining eternal life,” cried Tetzel in a voice of thunder, “than the satisfaction of works. But this satisfaction is impossible for man. He can therefore only purchase it from the Roman pontiff.” When Tetzel was about to quit Annaberg, his sermons became more earnest. “Soon,” cried he in threatening accents, “I shall take down the cross, shut the gates of heaven, and extinguish the brightness of the sun of grace that beams before your eyes.” And then assuming a tender tone of exhortation: “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Again raising his voice, the priestly Stentor, who was addressing the inhabitants of a country whose wealth consisted in its mines, shouted out: “Bring your money, citizens of Annaberg! contribute bounteously in favor of indulgences, and your mines and your mountains shall be filled with pure silver!” Finally, at Whitsuntide, he declared that he would distribute his letters to the poor gratuitously, and for the love of God.

The youthful Myconius was one of Tetzel’s

hearers. He felt an ardent desire to take advantage of this offer. “I am a poor sinner,” said he to the commissaries in Latin, “and I have need of a gratuitous pardon.” — “those alone,” replied the merchants, “can have part in Christ’s merits who lend a helping hand to the Church, that is to say, who give money.” — “What is the meaning, then,” asked Myconius, “of those promises of a free gift posted on the gates and walls of the churches?” — “Give at least a groat,” said Tetzel’s people, after having vainly interceded with their master in favor of the young man. “I cannot.” — “Only six deniers.” — “I am not worth so many.” The Dominicans begin to fear that he came on purpose to entrap them. “Listen,” said they, “we will make you a present of the six deniers.” The young man replied indignantly: “I will have no bought indulgences. If I desired to buy them, I should only have to sell one of my schoolbooks. I desire a gratuitous pardon, and for the love of God alone.

You will render an account to God for having allowed a soul to be lost for six deniers.” — “Who sent you to entrap us?” exclaimed the vendors. —

“Nothing but the desire of receiving God’s pardon could have made me appear before such great gentlemen,” replied the young man, as he withdrew.

“I was very sad at being thus sent away unpitied. But I felt, however, a comforter within me, who said that there was a God in heaven who pardons repentant souls without money and without price, for the love of his Son Jesus Christ. As I took leave of these folks, the Holy Spirit touched my heart. I burst into tears, and prayed to the Lord with anguish: O God! cried I, since these men have refused to remit my sins, because I wanted money to pay them, do thou, Lord, have pity on me, and pardon them of thy pure grace. I repaired to my chamber, I prayed to my crucifix which was lying on my desk; I put it on a chair, and fell down before it. I cannot describe to you what I experienced. I begged God to be a father to me, and to do with me whatever he pleased. I felt my nature changed, converted, transformed. What had delighted me before, now became an object of disgust. To live with God and to please him was

my earnest, my sole desire.” Thus did Tetzel himself prepare the Reformation. By flagrant abuses, he cleared the way for a purer doctrine; and the indignation he aroused in a generous youth was one day to burst forth with power. We may form some idea of this by the following anecdote.

A Saxon nobleman, who had heard Tetzel at Leipsic, was much displeased by his falsehoods. Approaching the monk, he asked him if he had the power of pardoning sins that men have an intention of committing. “Most assuredly,” replied Tetzel, “I have received full powers from his holiness for that purpose.” — “Well, then,” answered the knight, “I am desirous of taking a slight revenge on one of my enemies, without endangering his life.

I will give you ten crowns if you will give me a letter of indulgence that shall fully justify me.” Tetzel made some objections; they came however to an arrangement by the aid of thirty crowns. The monk quitted Leipsic shortly after. The nobleman and his attendants lay in wait for him in a wood between

Juterbock and Treblin; they fell upon him, gave him a slight beating, and took away the well-stored indulgence-chest the inquisitor was carrying with him. Tetzel made a violent outcry, and carried his complaint before the courts. But the nobleman showed the letter which Tetzel had signed himself, and which exempted him beforehand from every penalty.

Duke George, whom this action had at first exceedingly exasperated, no sooner read the document than he ordered the accused to be acquitted. This traffic everywhere occupied men’s thoughts, and was everywhere talked of. It was the topic of conversation in castles, in academies, and in the burghers’ houses, as well as in taverns, inns, and all places of public resort. Opinions were divided; some believed, others felt indignant. As for the sensible part of the nation, they rejected with disgust the system of indulgences. This doctrine was so opposed to the Holy Scriptures and to morality, that every man who had any knowledge of the Bible or any natural light,

internally condemned it, and only waited for a signal to oppose it. On the other hand, the scoffers found ample food for raillery.

The people, whom the dissolute lives of the priests, had irritated for many years, and whom the fear of punishment still kept within certain bounds, gave vent to all their hatred. Complaints and sarcasms might everywhere be heard on the love of money that devoured the clergy.

They did not stop there. They attacked the power of the keys and the authority of the sovereign pontiff. “Why,” said they, “does not the pope deliver at once all the souls from purgatory by a holy charity and on account of their great wretchedness, since he delivers so many for love of perishable money and of the cathedral of St. Peter? Why are they always celebrating festivals and anniversaries for the dead? Why does not the pope restore or permit the resumption of the benefices and prebends founded in favor of the dead, since it is now useless and even reprehensible to pray for those whom the indulgences have delivered for

ever? What means this new holiness of God and of the pope, that for love of money they grant to an impious man, and an enemy of God, to deliver from purgatory a pious soul, the beloved of the Lord, rather than deliver it themselves gratuitously through love, and because of its great misery?" Stories were told of the gross and immoral conduct of the traffickers in indulgences. To pay their bills to the carriers who transported them and their merchandise, the innkeepers with whom they lodged, or whoever had done them any service, they gave a letter of indulgence for four souls, for five, or for any number according to circumstances. Thus these certificates of salvation circulated in the inns and markets like band notes or other paper money. "Pay! pay!" said the people, "that is the head, belly, tail, and all the contents of their sermons." A miner of Schneeberg met a seller of indulgences. "Must we credit," asked he, "what you have so often told us of the power of indulgences and of the papal authority, and believe that we can, by throwing a penny into a chest, ransom a soul from purgatory?" The merchant affirmed it was so. "Ah!" resumed the miner,

“what a merciless man, then, the pope must be, since for want of a wretched penny he leaves a poor soul crying in the flames so long! If he has no ready money, let him store up some hundred thousand crowns, and deliver all these souls at once. We poor people would very readily repay him both interest and capital.” The Germans were wearied with this scandalous traffic that was carried on in the midst of them. They could not longer endure the impositions of these master-cheats of Rome, as Luther called them. No bishop, no theologian, however, dared oppose their quackery and their frauds. All minds were in suspense. Men asked one another if God would not raise up some mighty man for the work that was to be done: but nowhere did he appear.

Chapter 3

Leo X

The pope who then sat in St. Peter’s chair was not a Borgia, but Leo X of the illustrious family of the Medici. He was clever, sincere, full of gentleness and meekness. His manners were affable, his liberality unbounded, his morals superior to those of his court; Cardinal Pallavicini however acknowledges that they were not beyond reproach. To this amiable character he united many of the qualities of a great prince. He was a friend to the arts and sciences. In his presence were represented the first Italian comedies; and there were few of his time that he had not seen performed. He was passionately fond of music; every day his palace reechoed with the sound of instruments, and he was frequently heard humming the airs that had been executed before him. He loved magnificence, he spared no expense in festivals, sports, theatres, presents, or rewards. No court surpassed in splendor and in luxury that of the sovereign pontiff. Hence, when it was known

that Julian Medici thought of taking up his abode at Rome with his young wife: “Thank God!” exclaimed Cardinal Bibliena, the most influential of Leo’s councillors; “for nothing was wanting but a court of ladies.” A court of ladies was the necessary complement of the court of the pope. But to religious feelings Leo was quite a stranger. “He possessed such charming manners,” said Sarpi, “that he would have been a perfect man, if he had had some knowledge of religion and greater inclination to piety, about which he never troubled himself much.” Leo required large sums of money. He had to provide for his great expenses, find means for his extensive liberality, fill the purse of gold which he flung daily among the people, keep up the licentious shows of the Vatican, satisfy the numerous calls of his relatives and of his courtiers, who were addicted to pleasures, endow his sister who had married Prince Cibo, natural son of Pope Innocent VIII, and defray the cost of his taste for literature, the arts, and luxury. His cousin, Cardinal Pucci, who was as skillful in the science of amassing as Leo in that of squandering money, advised him to have recourse to indulgences. The

pope, therefore, published a bull, announcing a general indulgence, the produce of which should be applied (said he) to the building of St. Peter's, that monument of sacerdotal magnificence. In a letter given at Rome, under the seal of the Fisherman, in November 1517, Leo requires of his commissary of indulgences 147 gold ducats, to purchase a manuscript of the thirty-third book of Livy. Of all the uses to which he applied the money of the Germans, this was undoubtedly the best. Yet it was a strange thing to deliver souls from purgatory to procure the means of purchasing a manuscript of the history of the Roman wars.

There was at that time in Germany a youthful prince who in many respects was the very image of Leo X: this was Albert, younger brother of the Elector Joachim of Brandenburg. This young man at the age of twentyfour years had been created archbishop and elector of Mentz and of Magdeburg; two years later he was made cardinal. Albert had neither the virtues nor the vices that are often met with in the superior dignitaries of the church. Young, frivolous, and worldly, but not

without generous sentiments, he saw clearly many of the abuses of Romanism, and cared little for the fanatical monks who surrounded him. His equity inclined him to acknowledge, in part at least, the justice of the demands of the friends of the Gospel. At the bottom of his heart he was not violently opposed to Luther. Capito, one of the most distinguished reformers, was long his chaplain, his counsellor, and his intimate confidant. Albert regularly attended at his sermons. “He did not despise the Gospel,” said Capito; “on the contrary he highly esteemed it, and for a long time prevented the monks from attacking Luther.” But he would have desired the latter not to compromise him, and that, while pointing out doctrinal errors and the vices of the inferior clergy, he should beware of exposing the failings of bishops and of princes. Above all, he feared to see his name mixed up in the matter.

“Consider,” said the confiding Capito to Luther, deceiving himself as many have done in similar circumstances, “consider the example of Jesus Christ and of the apostles: they blamed the

Pharisees and the incestuous Corinthians; but they never named the offenders. You do not know what is passing in the hearts of the bishops. There is much more good in them than perhaps you imagine." But Albert's profane and frivolous disposition, much more than the susceptibilities and fears of his self-love, was destined to alienate him from the Reformation. Affable, witty, handsome, sumptuous, extravagant, delighting in the luxuries of the table, in costly equipages, in society of literary men, this young archbishop-elector was in Germany what Leo X was in Rome. His court was one of the most magnificent in the empire. He was ready to sacrifice to pleasure and to greatness all the presentiments of truth that might have stolen into his heart. Nevertheless, even to the last, he evinced a certain resistance and better convictions; more than once he gave proofs of his moderation and of his equity.

Albert, like Leo, had need of money. Some rich merchants of Augsburg, named Fugger, had made him advances. He was called upon to pay his debts. Besides, although he had monopolized two

archbishoprics and one bishopric, he had not the means of paying for his pallium. This ornament, made of white wool, besprinkled with black crosses, and blessed by the pope, who sent it to the archbishops as an emblem of their dignity, cost them 26,000, or, according to some accounts, 30,000 florins. Albert very naturally formed the project of resorting to the same means as the pontiff to obtain money. He solicited the general farming of indulgences, or, “of the sins of the Germans,” as they said at Rome.

Sometimes the popes themselves worked them; at other times they farmed them, as some governments still farm gambling-houses. Albert proposed sharing the profits of this business with Leo. The pope, in accepting the terms, exacted immediate payment of the price of the pallium. Albert, who was reckoning on the indulgences to meet this demand, again applied to the Fuggers, who thinking it a safe speculation made the required advance on certain conditions, and were named treasurers of this undertaking. They were the royal banders of this epoch: they were

afterwards created counts for the services they had rendered.

The pope and the archbishop having thus divided beforehand the spoils of the good souls of Germany, it was next a question who should be commissioned to realize the investment. It was at first offered to the Franciscans, and their superior was associated with Albert. But these monks wished to have no share in it, for it was already in bad odor among all good people. The Augustines, who were more enlightened than the other religious orders, cared still less about it. The Franciscans, however, feared to displease the pope, who had just sent a cardinal's hat to their general Forli, — a hat that had cost this poor mendicant order 30,000 florins. The superior judged it more prudent not to refuse openly; but he made all kinds of objections to Albert. They could never come to an understanding; and accordingly the elector joyfully accepted the proposition to take the whole matter to himself. The Dominicans, on their part, coveted a share in the general enterprise about to be set on foot.

Tetzel, who had already acquired great reputation in this trade, hastened to Mentz, and offered his services to the elector. They called to mind the ability he had shown in publishing the indulgences for the knights of the Teutonic order of Prussia and Livonia; his proposals were accepted, and thus the whole traffic passed into the hands of his order.

Chapter 4

Tetzel approaches

Luther, as far as we are acquainted, heard of Tetzel for the first time at Grimma in 1516, just as he was commencing his visitation of the churches.

It was reported to Staupitz, who was still with Luther, that there was a seller of indulgences at Wurzen named Tetzel, who was making a great noise. Some of his extravagant expressions were quoted, and Luther exclaimed with indignation: “If God permit, I will make a hole in his drum.” Tetzel was returning from Berlin, where he had met with the most friendly reception from the Elector Joachim, the farmer-general’s brother, when he took his station at Juterbock. Staupitz, taking advantage of the confidence the Elector Frederick placed in him, had often called his attention to the abuses of the indulgences and the scandalous lives of the vendors. The princes of Saxony, indignant at this disgraceful traffic, had forbidden the merchant to enter their provinces. He was therefore

compelled to remain in the territories of his patron the Archbishop of Magdeburg; but he approached Saxony as near as he could. Juterbock was only four miles from Wittenberg. “This great purse-thresher,” said Luther, “began to thresh bravely throughout the country, so that the money began to leap and fall tinkling into the box.” The people flocked in crowds from Wittenberg to the indulgence-market of Juterbock.

At this period Luther was still full of respect for the Church and the pope.

“It was at that time,” said he, “a monk, and a most furious papist, so intoxicated, nay, so drowned in the Roman doctrines, that I would have willingly aided, if I could, in killing any one who should have had the audacity to refuse the slightest obedience to the pope. I was a very Saul, and there are many still.” But at the same time his heart was ready to catch fire for everything that he recognized as truth, and against everything he believed to be error. “I was a young doctor fresh from the forge, ardent and rejoicing in the Word of

the Lord.” Luther was one day seated in the confessional at Wittenberg. Many of the townspeople came successively, and confessed themselves guilty of great excesses. Adultery, licentiousness, usury, ill-gotten gains, — such are the crimes acknowledged to the minister of the Word by those souls of which he will have to one day give an account. He reprimands, corrects, instructs.

But what is his astonishment when these individuals reply that they will not abandon their sins?.....Greatly shocked, the pious monk declares that since they will not promise to change their lives, he cannot absolve them. The unhappy creatures then appeal to their letter of indulgence; they show them, and maintain their virtue. But Luther replies that he has nothing to do with these papers, and adds: Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. They cry out and protest; but the doctor is immovable.

They must cease to do evil, and learn to do well, or else there is no absolution. “Have a care,”

added he, “how you listen to the clamors of these indulgence-merchants: you have better things to do than buy these licenses that they sell at so vile a price.” The inhabitants of Wittenberg, in great alarm, hastily returned to Tetzel: they told him that an Augustine monk had treated his letters with contempt. The Dominican at this intelligence bellowed with anger. He stormed from the pulpit, employing insults and curses; and to strike the people with greater terror, he had a fire lighted several times in the market-place, declaring that he had received an order from the pope to burn all heretics who presumed to oppose his most holy indulgences.

Such is the fact that was, not the cause, but the first occasion of the Reformation. A pastor, seeing the sheep of his fold in a course in which they must perish, seeks to withdraw them from it. As yet he has no thought of reforming the church and the world. He has seen Rome and her corruptions; but still he does not rise up against her. He has a presentiment of some of the abuses under which Christendom groans; but he does not think of

correcting them. He does not desire to become a reformer. He has no more plans for the reformation of the Church than he had had for the reformation of himself. God wills a reform, and elects Luther to be its instrument. The same remedy which had been so efficacious in healing his own wounds, the hand of God will apply by him to the sores of Christendom. He remains tranquil in the sphere that is assigned to him. He walks simply wherever his Master calls him. He fulfills at Wittenberg the duties of professor, preacher, and pastor. He is seated in the temple where the members of his church come and open their hearts to him. It is there — on that field — that the evil attacks him, and error seeks him out. They would prevent him from executing his office. His conscience, bound to the Word of God, revolts. Is it not God who calls him? To resist is a duty: it is therefore a right. He must speak. Thus, says Mathesius, were the events ordained by that God who desired to restore Christendom by means of the forgemaster's son, and to pass through his furnaces the impure doctrine of the Church, in order to purify it. It is not requisite, after this statement, to refute a lying

imputation, invented by some of Luther's enemies, but not till after his death. It has been said, that the jealousy peculiar to religious orders, — that vexation at seeing a disgraceful and reprobated traffic confided to the Dominicans rather than to the Augustines, who had hitherto possessed it, — led the Wittenberg professor to attack Tetzel and his doctrines. The wellestablished fact, that this speculation had been first offered to the Franciscans, who would have nothing to do with it, is sufficient to refute this fable repeated by writers who have copied one another. Cardinal Pallavicini himself affirms that the Augustines had never held this commission. Besides, we have witnessed the travail of Luther's soul.

His conduct needs no other interpretation. It was necessary for him to confess aloud the doctrine to which he owed his happiness. In Christianity, when a man has found a treasure for himself, he desires to impart it to others. In our days we should give up these puerile and unworthy explanations of the great revolution of the 16th century. It requires a more powerful lever to raise the world. The

Reformation was not in Luther only; his age must have given it birth.

Luther, who was impelled equally by obedience to the Word of God and charity towards men, ascended the pulpit. He forearmed his hearers, but with gentleness, as he says himself. His prince had obtained from the pope special indulgences for the castle-chapel at Wittenberg. Some of the blows that he was aiming at the inquisitor's indulgences might fall on those of the elector. It matters not! he will hazard disgrace. If he sought to please men, he would not be Christ's servant.

"No one can prove by Scripture, that the righteousness of God requires a penalty or satisfaction from the sinner," said the faithful minister of the Word to the people of Wittenberg. "The only duty it imposes is a true repentance, a sincere conversion, a resolution to bear the cross of Christ, and to perform good works. It is a great error to pretend of oneself to make satisfaction for our sins to God's righteousness; God pardons them gratuitously by his inestimable grace.

“The Christian Church, it is true, requires something of the sinner, and which consequently can be remitted. But that is all.....Yet farther these indulgences of the Church are tolerated only because of the idle and imperfect Christians who will not zealously perform good works; for they move no one to sanctification, but leave each man in his imperfection.” Next attacking the pretences under which indulgences are published, he continued: “They would do much better to contribute for love of God to the building of St. Peter’s, than to buy indulgences with this intention.....But, say you, shall we then never purchase any?....I have already told you, and I repeat it, my advice is that no one should buy them. Leave them for drowsy Christians: But you should walk apart and for yourselves. We must turn the faithful aside from indulgences and exhort them to the works which they neglect.” Finally, glancing at his adversaries, Luther concluded in these words: “And should any cry out that I am a heretic (for the truth I preach is very prejudicial to their strong box), I care but little for their clamors. They are

gloomy and sick brains, men who have never tasted the Bible, never read the christian doctrine, never comprehended their own doctors, and who lie rotting in the rags and tatters of their own vain opinions... May God grant both them and us a sound understanding! Amen.” After these words the doctor quitted the pulpit, leaving his hearers in great emotion at such daring language.

This sermon was printed, and made a profound impression on all who read it. Tetzel replied to it, and Luther answered again; but these discussions did not take place till the year 1518.

The festival of All-Saints was approaching. The chronicles of the time relate a circumstance which although of little importance to the history of this period, may still serve to characterize it. It is a dream of the elector’s, the essence of which is no doubt true, although some circumstances may have been added by those who related it. A respectable writer observes, that the fear of giving his adversaries an opportunity of saying that Luther’s doctrine was founded on dreams, has no doubt

hindered many historians from mentioning it. The Elector Frederick of Saxony, say the chronicles of the time, was at his palace of Schweinitz, six leagues from Wittenberg, when, on the 31st October, early in the morning, being with his brother Duke John, who was then co-regent, and who reigned alone after his death, and with his chancellor, the elector said — “I must tell you of a dream, brother, which I had last night, and of which I should like to know the meaning. It is so firmly graven in my memory that I should never forget it, even were I to live a thousand years; for it came three times, and always with new circumstances.” Duke John. — “Was it a good or a bad dream?” The Elector. — “I cannot tell: God knows.” Duke John. — “Do not be uneasy about it: let me hear it.” The Elector. — “Having gone to bed last night, tired and dispirited, I soon fell asleep after saying my prayers, and slept calmly for about two hours and a half. I then awoke, and all kinds of thoughts occupied me till midnight. I reflected how I should keep the festival of All-Saints; I prayed for the wretched souls in purgatory, and begged that God would direct me,

my councils, and my people, according to the truth. I then fell asleep again, and dreamt that the Almighty sent me a monk, who was a true son of Paul the Apostle. He was accompanied by all the saints, in obedience to God's command, to bear him testimony, and to assure me that he did not come with any fraudulent design, but that all he should do was conformable to the will of God. They asked my gracious permission to let him write something on the doors of the palacechapel at Wittenberg, which I conceded through my chancellor. Upon this, the monk repaired thither and began to write; so large were the characters that I could read from Schweinitz what he was writing. The pen he used was so long that its extremity reached as far as Rome, where it pierced the ears of a lion which lay there, and shook the triple crown on the pope's head. All the cardinals and princes ran up hastily and endeavored to support it. You and I both tendered our assistance: I stretched out my arm.....that moment I awoke with my arm extended, in great alarm and very angry with this monk, who could not guide his pen better. I recovered myself a little.....it was only a

dream.

“I was still half asleep, and once more closed my eyes. The dream came again. The lion, still disturbed by the pen, began to roar with all his might, until the whole city of Rome, and all the states of the Holy Empire, ran up to know what was the matter. The pope called upon us to oppose this monk, and addressed himself particularly to me, because the friar was living in my dominions. I again awoke, repeated the Lord’s prayer, entreated God to preserve his holiness, and fell asleep.....

“I then dreamt that all the princes of the empire, and we along with them hastened to Rome, and endeavored one after another to break this pen; but the greater our exertions, the stronger it became: it crackled as if it had been made of iron: we gave it up as hopeless. I then asked the monk (for I was now at Rome, now at Wittenberg) where he had got that pen, and how it came to be so strong. ‘This pen,’ replied he, ‘belonged to a Bohemian goose a hundred years old. I had it from one of my old schoolmasters. It is so strong,

because no one can take the pith out of it, and I am myself quite astonished at it.’ On a sudden I heard a loud cry: from the monk’s long pen had issued a host of other pens.....I awoke a third time: it was daylight.” Duke John. — “What is your opinion, Mr. Chancellor? Would that we had here a Joseph, or a Daniel, taught of God!” The Chancellor. — “Your highnesses know the vulgar proverb, that the dreams of young women, wise men, and great lords, have generally some hidden meaning. But we shall not learn the signification of this for some time, until the events have come to pass to which it relates. For this reason, confide its accomplishment to God, and commit all things into his hands.” Duke John. — “My opinion is the same as yours, Mr.

Chancellor; it is not proper for us to rack our brains to discover the interpretation of this dream: God will direct everything to his own glory.” The Elector. — “May our faithful God do even so! Still I shall never forget this dream. I have thought of one interpretation.....but I shall keep it to myself. Time will show, perhaps, whether I have

conjectured rightly." Thus, according to the Weimar manuscript, passed the morning of the 31st October at Schweinitz; let us see how the evening was spent at Wittenberg. We are now returning entirely to the domain of history.

Chapter 5

Festival of All-Saints

Luther’s words had produced little effect. Tetzel continued his traffic and his impious discourses without disturbing himself. Will Luther resign himself to these crying abuses, and will he keep silence? As pastor, he has earnestly exhorted those who had recourse to his services; as preacher, he has uttered a warning voice from the pulpit. It still remains for him to speak as a theologian; he has yet to address not merely a few souls in the confessional, not merely the assembly of the faithful at Wittenberg, but all those who are, like himself, teachers of the Word of God. His resolution is taken.

It is not the church he thinks of attacking; it is not the pope he is bringing to the bar; on the contrary, it is his respect for the pope that will not allow him to be silent longer on the monstrous claims by which the pontiff is discredited. He must take the pope’s part against those imprudent men

who dare mingle up his venerable name with their scandalous traffic. Far from thinking of a revolution which should overthrow the primacy of Rome, Luther believes he has the pope and catholicism for his allies against these barefaced monks. The festival of All-Saints was a very important day for Wittenberg, and, above all, for the church the elector had built there, and which he had filled with relics. On that day the priests used to bring out these relics, ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones, and exhibit them before the people, who were astonished and dazzled at such magnificence. Whoever visited the church on that festival and made confession, obtained a rich indulgence. Accordingly, on this great anniversary, pilgrims came to Wittenberg in crowds.

On the 31st October 1517, at noon on the day preceding the festival, Luther, who had already made up his mind, walks boldly towards the church, to which a superstitious crowd of pilgrims was repairing, and posts upon the door ninety-five theses or propositions against the doctrine of indulgences. Neither the Elector, nor Staupitz, nor

Spalatin, nor any even of his most intimate friends, had been made acquainted with his intentions. Luther therein declares, in a kind of preface, that he has written these theses with the express desire of setting the truth in the full light of day.

He declares himself ready to defend them on the morrow, in the university, against all opponents. Great was the attention they excited: they were read, and passed from mouth to mouth. Erelong the pilgrims, the university, and the whole city were in commotion.

We give some of these propositions, written with the pen of the monk, and posted on the door of the church of Wittenberg: — 1. “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says repent, he means that the whole life of believers upon earth should be a constant and perpetual repentance.

2. “This word cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance (i.e. confession and satisfaction), as administered by the priest.

3. “Still the Lord does not mean to speak in this place solely of internal repentance; internal repentance is null, if it produce not externally every kind of mortification of the flesh.

4. “Repentance and sorrow — i.e. true penance — endure as long as a man is displeased with himself — that is, until he passes from this life into eternity.

5. “The pope is unable and desires not to remit any other penalty than that which he has imposed of his own good pleasure, or conformable to the canons — i.e. the papal ordinances.

6. “The pope cannot remit any condemnation, but only declare and confirm the remission of God, except in the cases that appertain to himself. If he does otherwise, the condemnation remains entirely the same.

8. “The laws of ecclesiastical penance ought to be imposed solely on the living, and have no regard to the dead.

21. “The commissaries of indulgences are in error when they say, that by the papal indulgence a man is delivered from every punishment and is saved.

25. “The same power that the pope has over purgatory throughout the Church, each bishop possesses individually in his own diocese, and each priest in his own parish.

27. “They preach mere human follies who maintain, that as soon as the money rattles in the strong box, the soul flies out of purgatory.

28. “This is certain, that as soon as the money tinkles, avarice and love of gain arrive, increase, and multiply. But the support and prayers of the Church depend solely on God’s will and good pleasure.

32. “Those who fancy themselves sure of salvation by indulgences will go to perdition along with those who teach them so.

35. “They are teachers of antichristian doctrines who pretend that to deliver a soul from purgatory, or to buy an indulgence, there is no need of either sorrow or repentance.

36. “Every Christian who truly repents of his sins, enjoys an entire remission both of the penalty and of the guilt, without any need of indulgences.

37. “Every true Christian, whether dead or alive, participates in all the blessings of Christ or of the Church, by God’s gift, and without a letter of indulgence.

38. “Still we should not contemn the papal dispensation and pardon; for this pardon is a declaration of the pardon of God.

40. “True repentance and sorrow seek and love the punishment; but the mildness of indulgence absolves from the punishment, and begets hatred against it.

42. “We should teach Christians that the pope has no thought or desire of comparing in any respect the act of buying indulgences with any work of mercy.

43. “We should teach Christians that he who gives to the poor, or lends to the needy, does better than he who purchases an indulgence.

44. “For the work of charity increaseth charity, and renders a man more pious; whereas the indulgence does not make him better, but only renders him more self-confident, and more secure from punishment.

45. “We should teach Christians that whoever sees his neighbor in want, and yet buys an indulgence, does not buy the pope’s indulgence, but incurs God’s anger.

46. “We should teach Christians that if they have no superfluity, they are bound to keep for their own households the means of procuring necessaries, and ought not to squander their money

in indulgences.

47. “We should teach Christians that the purchase of an indulgence is a matter of free choice and not of commandment.

48. “We should teach Christians that the pope, having more need of prayers offered up in faith than of money, desires prayer more than money when he dispenses indulgences.

49. “We should teach Christians that the pope’s indulgence is good, if we put no confidence in it; but that nothing is more hurtful, if it diminishes our piety.

50. “We should teach Christians that if the pope knew of the extortions of the preachers of indulgences, he would rather the motherchurch of St. Peter were burnt and reduced to ashes, than see it built up with the skin, the flesh, and the bones of his flock.

51. “We should teach Christians that the pope

(as it is his duty) would distribute his own money to the poor whom the indulgence-sellers are now stripping of their last farthing, even were he compelled to sell the mother-church of St. Peter.

52. “To hope to be saved by indulgences, is a lying and an empty hope; although even the commissary of indulgences, nay farther, the pope himself, should pledge their souls to guarantee it.

53. “They are the enemies of the pope and of Jesus Christ, who, by reason of the preaching of indulgences, forbid the preaching of the Word of God.

55. “The pope can have no other thought than this: If the indulgence, which is a lesser matter, be celebrated with ringing of a bell, with pomp and ceremony, much more should we honor and celebrate the Gospel, which is a greater thing, with a hundred bells, and with a hundred pomps and ceremonies.

62. “The true and precious treasure of the

Church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

65. “The treasures of the Gospel are nets in which in former times the rich and those in easy circumstances were caught.

66. “But the treasures of the indulgence are nets with which they now catch the riches of the people.

67. “It is the duty of bishops and pastors to receive the commissaries of the apostolical indulgences with every mark of respect.

68. “But it is still more their duty to ascertain with their eyes and ears that the said commissaries do not preach the dreams of their own imagination, instead of the orders of the pope.

71. “Cursed be he who speaks against the indulgence of the pope.

72. “But blessed be he who speaks against the foolish and impudent language of the preachers of

indulgences.

76. “The indulgence of the pope cannot take away the smallest daily sin, as far as regards the guilt or the offense.

79. “It is blasphemy to say that the cross adorned with the arms of the pope is as effectual as the cross of Christ.

80. “The bishops, pastors, and theologians who permit such things to be told the people, will have to render an account of them.

81. “This shameless preaching, these impudent commendations of indulgences, make it difficult for the learned to defend the dignity and honor of the pope against the calumnies of the preachers, and the subtle and crafty questions of the common people.

86. “Why, say they, does not the pope, who is richer than the richest Croesus, build the mother-church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than

with that of poor Christians?

92. “Would that we were quit of all these preachers who say to the Church: Peace! peace! and there is no peace.

94. “We should exhort Christians to diligence in following Christ, their head, through crosses, death, and hell.

95. “For it is far better to enter into the kingdom of heaven through much tribulation, than to acquire a carnal security by the consolations of a false peace.” Such was the commencement of the work. The germs of the Reformation were contained in these propositions of Luther’s. The abuses of indulgences were attacked therein, and this is their most striking feature; but beneath these attacks there was a principle which, although attracting the attention of the multitude in a less degree, was one day to overthrow the edifice of popery. The evangelical doctrine of a free and gratuitous remission of sins was there for the first time publicly professed. The work must now

increase in strength. It was evident, indeed, that whoever had this faith in the remission of sins, announced by the Wittenberg doctor; that whoever had this repentance, this conversion, and this sanctification, the necessity of which he so earnestly inculcated, would no longer care for human ordinances, would escape from the toils and swaddling-bands of Rome, and would acquire the liberty of the children of God. All errors would fall down before this truth. By it, light had begun to enter Luther's mind; by it, also, the light would be diffused over the Church. A clear knowledge of this truth is what preceding reformers had wanted; and hence the unfruitfulness of their exertions. Luther himself acknowledged afterwards, that in proclaiming justification by faith, he had laid the axe to the root of the tree. "It is doctrine we attack in the adherents of the papacy," said he. "Huss and Wickliffe only attacked their lives; but in attacking their doctrine, we take the goose by the neck. Everything depends on the Word, which the pope has taken from us and falsified. I have vanquished the pope, because my doctrine is of God, and his is of the devil." In our own days, too, we have

forgotten this main doctrine of justification by faith, although in a sense opposed to that of our fathers. “In the time of Luther,” observes one of our contemporaries, “the remission of sins cost money at least; but in our days, each man supplies himself gratis.” There is a great similarity between these two errors. There is perhaps more forgetfulness of God in ours, than in that of the 16th century. The principle of justification by the grace of God, which brought the Church out of so much darkness at the period of the Reformation, can alone renew our generation, put an end to its doubts and waverings, destroy the selfishness that preys upon it, establish righteousness and morality among the nations, and, in short, reunite the world to God from whom it has been dissevered.

But if Luther’s theses were strong by the strength of the truth they proclaimed, they were not the less so by the faith of their champion. He had boldly drawn the sword of the Word: he had done so in reliance on the power of truth. He had felt that by leaning on God’s promises, he could afford to risk something, to use the language of the world.

“Let him who desires to begin a good work,” said he when speaking of this daring attack, “undertake it with confidence in the goodness of his cause, and not, which God forbid! expecting the support and consolation of the world.

Moreover, let him have no fear of man, or of the whole world; for these words will never lie: It is good to trust in the Lord, and assuredly he that trusteth in the Lord shall not be confounded. But let him that will not or who cannot risk something with confidence in God, take heed how he undertakes anything.” Luther, after having posted his theses on the gate of All-Saints’ Church, retired, no doubt, to his tranquil cell, full of the peace and joy that spring from an action done in the Lord’s name, and for the sake of eternal truth.

Whatever be the boldness that prevails in these propositions, they still bespeak the monk who refuses to admit a single doubt on the authority of the see of Rome. But, while attacking the doctrine of indulgences, Luther had unwittingly touched on certain errors, whose discovery could not be

agreeable to the pope, seeing that sooner or later they would call his supremacy in question. Luther was not so far-sighted; but he was sensible of the extreme boldness of the step he had just taken, and consequently thought it his duty to soften down their audacity, as far as he could in conformity with the truth. He therefore set forth these theses as doubtful propositions on which he solicited the information of the learned; and appended to them, conformably with the established usage, a solemn declaration that he did not mean to affirm or say anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the rights and decretals of the Roman See.

Frequently, in after-years, as he contemplated the immense and unexpected consequences of this courageous attack, Luther was astonished at himself, and could not understand how he had ventured to make it. An invisible and mightier hand than his held the clue, and led the herald of truth along a path that was still hidden from him, and from the difficulties of which he would perhaps have shrunk, if he had foreseen them, and if he had

advanced along and of his own accord. “I entered into this controversy,” said he, “without any definite plan, without knowledge or inclination; I was taken quite unawares, and I call God, the searcher of hearts, to witness.” Luther had become acquainted with the source of these abuses. Some one brought him a little book, adorned with the arms of the Archbishop of Mentz and Magdeburg, which contained the regulations to be followed in the sale on indulgences. It was this young prelate, then, this graceful prince, who had prescribed, or at least sanctioned, all this quackery. In him Luther saw only a superior whom he should fear and respect. Not wishing to beat the air at hazard, but rather to address those who are charged with the government of the Church, Luther sent him a letter, abounding at once in frankness and humility. It was on the very day he posted up the theses that the doctor wrote to Albert: — “Pardon me, most reverend father in Christ and most illustrious prince,” said he, “if I, who am but the dregs of men, have the presumption to write to your Sublime Highness. The Lord Jesus Christ is my witness that, feeling how small and despicable I

am, I have long put off doing it.....May your Highness condescend to cast a single glance on a grain of dust, and of your episcopal mildness graciously receive my petition.

“Certain individuals are hawking the papal indulgences up and down the country, in your Grace’s name. I am unwilling so much to blame the clamors of these preachers (for I have not heard them), as the false ideas of the simple and ignorant people, who, in purchasing indulgences, fancy themselves assured of salvation.....

“The souls intrusted to your care, most excellent Father, are taught, not unto life, but unto death. The severe and just account that will be required of you increases from day to day.....I could no longer be silent. No! Man is not saved by the work or the office of his bishop..... Even the righteous are saved with difficulty, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life. Wherefore, then, do these preachers of indulgences by their empty fables inspire the people with a carnal security?

“Indulgences alone, to hear them, ought to be proclaimed and extolled.....What! is it not the principal, the sole duty of the bishops to instruct the people in the Gospel, and in the charity of Christ Jesus? Christ himself has nowhere ordained the preaching of indulgences; but he has forcibly commanded the preaching of the Gospel. How dreadful, then, and how dangerous, for a bishop to allow the Gospel to be silent, and that the noise of indulgences alone should re-echo incessantly in the ears of his flock!.....

“Most worthy Father in God, in the instructions to the commissaries, which have been published in your Grace’s name (no doubt without your knowledge), it is said, that the indulgences are the most precious treasure — that by them man is reconciled to God, and that repentance is not necessary to those who purchase them.

“What can I, what ought I to do, most worthy Bishop, most serene Prince? I beg your Highness, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to cast a look of paternal vigilance on this affair, to suppress the

book entirely, and to order the preachers to deliver other sermons before the people. If you do not, fear lest you should one day hear some voice uplifted in refutation of these preachers, to the great dishonor of your most serene Highness." Luther, at the same time, forwarded his theses to the archbishop, and added a postscript inviting him to read them, in order to convince himself on how slight a foundation the doctrine of indulgences was based.

Thus, Luther's whole desire was for the sentinels of the Church to awaken and resolve to put an end to the evils that were laying it waste. Nothing could be more noble and more respectful than this letter from a monk to one of the greatest princes of the church and of the Empire. Never did man act more in accordance with this precept of Christ: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This is not the course of those fiery revolutionists who "despise dominion and speak evil of dignities." It is the cry of a christian conscience — of a priest who gives honor to all, but who fears God above everything. All his prayers, all his

entreaties were unavailing. The youthful Albert, engrossed by pleasures and ambitious designs, made no reply to so solemn an appeal.

The Bishop of Brandenburg, Luther's ordinary, a learned and pious man, to whom he sent his theses, replied that he was attacking the power of the church; that he would bring upon himself much trouble and vexation; that the thing was above his strength; and he earnestly advised him to keep quiet. The princes of the church stopped their ears against the voice of God, which was manifested with such energy and tenderness through the mouth of Luther. They would not understand the signs of the times; they were stuck with that blindness which has caused the ruin of so many powers and dignities. "They both thought," said Luther afterwards, "that the pope would be too strong for a poor mendicant friar like me." But Luther could judge better than the bishops of the disastrous effects of indulgences on the manners and lives of the people, for he was in direct communication with them. He saw continually and near at hand what the bishops know only through unfaithful

reports. Although the bishops failed him, God did not. The Head of the Church, who sitteth in the heavens, and to whom all power is given upon earth, had himself prepared the soil and deposited the seed in the hands of his minister; he gave wings to the seeds of truth, and he scattered it in an instant throughout the length and breadth of his Church.

No one appeared next day at the university to attack Luther's propositions. The Tetzel traffic was too much decried, and too shameful, for any one but himself or his followers to dare take up the glove. But these theses were destined to be heard elsewhere than under the arched roof of an academic hall. Scarcely had they been nailed to the church door of Wittenberg, than the feeble sounds of the hammer were followed throughout all Germany by a mighty blow that reached even the foundations of haughty Rome, threatening with sudden ruin the walls, the gates, and pillars of popery, stunning and terrifying her champions, and at the same time awakening thousands from the sleep of error. These theses spread with the rapidity

of lightning. A month had not elapsed before they were at Rome. “In a fortnight,” says a contemporary historian, “they were in every part of Germany, and in four weeks they had traversed nearly the whole of Christendom, as if the very angels had been their messengers, and had placed them before the eyes of all men. No one can believe the noise they made.” Somewhat later they were translated into Dutch and Spanish, and a traveler sold them in Jerusalem.

“Every one,” said Luther, “complained of the indulgences: and as all the bishops and doctors had kept silence, and nobody was willing to bell the cat, poor Luther became a famous doctor, because (as they said) there came one at last who ventured to do it. But I did not like this glory, and the tune was nearly too high for my voice.” Many of the pilgrims, who had thronged to Wittenberg from every quarter for the feast of All-Saints, carried back with them, instead of indulgences, the famous theses of the Augustine monk. By this means they contributed to their circulation. Every one read them, meditated and commented on them. Men

conversed about them in all the convents and in all the universities. The pious monks, who had entered the cloisters to save their souls, — all upright and honorable men, were delighted at this simple and striking confession of the truth, and heartily desired that Luther would continue the work he had begun. At length one man had found courage to undertake the perilous struggle. This was a reparation accorded to Christendom: the public conscience was satisfied. Piety saw in these theses a blow aimed at every superstition; the new theology hailed in it the defeat of the scholastic dogmas; princes and magistrates considered them as a barrier raised against the invasions of the ecclesiastical power; and the nation rejoiced at seeing so positive a veto opposed by this monk to the cupidity of the Roman chancery. “When Luther attacked this fable,” remarked to Duke George of Saxony a man very worthy of belief, and one of the principal rivals of the reformer, namely Erasmus, “the whole world applauded, and there was a general assent.” “I observe,” said he at another time to Cardinal Campeggio,” that the greater their evangelical piety and the purer their morals, the

less are men opposed to Luther. His life is praised even by those who cannot endure his faith. The world was weary of a doctrine so full of puerile fables and human ordinances, and thirsted for that living, pure, and hidden water which springs from the veins of the evangelists and apostles. Luther's genius was fitted to accomplish these things, and his zeal would naturally catch fire at so glorious an enterprise."

Chapter 6

Reuchlin

We must follow these propositions into whatever place they penetrated, — into the studies of the learned, the cells of the monks, and the halls of princes, to form an idea of the various but prodigious effects they produced in Germany.

Reuchlin received them. He was wearied of the rude combat he had to fight against the monks. The strength displayed by the new combatant in his theses reanimated the dispirited champion of literature, and restored joy to his desponding heart. “Thanks be to God!” exclaimed he after reading them, “at last they have found a man who will give them so much to do, that they will be compelled to let my old age end in peace.” The cautious Erasmus was in the Low Countries when these propositions reached him. He internally rejoiced at witnessing his secret wishes for the rectifying of abuses expressed with so much courage: he approved of the author, exhorting him only to

greater moderation and prudence.

Nevertheless, when some one reproached Luther's violence in his presence: "God," said he, "has given men a physician who cuts deep into the flesh, because the malady would otherwise be incurable." And when a little later the Elector of Saxony asked his opinion on Luther's business, he replied with a smile: "I am not at all surprised that it has made so much noise; for he has committed two unpardonable crimes; he has attacked the pope's tiara and the monks' bellies." Doctor Flek, prior of the monastery of Steinlausitz, had long discontinued reading the Mass, but without telling anyone the real cause. One day he found Luther's theses posted up in the refectory: he went up to them, began to read, and had only perused a few, when, unable to contain his joy, he exclaimed: Ah! ah! he whom we have so long expected is come at last, and he will show you monks a trick or two!" Then looking into the future, says Mathesius, and playing on the meaning of the name Wittenberg: "All the world," said he, "will go and seek wisdom on that mountain and will find it." He wrote to the

doctor to continue the glorious struggle with boldness. Luther styles him a man full of joy and consolation.

The ancient and renowned episcopal see of Wurzburg was filled at that time by Lorenzo de Bibra, a pious, wise, and worthy man, according to the testimony of his contemporaries. When a gentleman came and informed him that he intended placing his daughter in a convent: “Rather give her a husband,” said he. And then he added: “If you require money for her dowry, I will lend it you.” The emperor and all the princes held him in the highest esteem. He mourned over the disorders of the Church, and above all, over those of the convents. The theses reached his palace also: he read them with great joy, and publicly declared that he approved of Luther.

Somewhat later, he wrote to the Elector Frederick: “Do not let the pious Doctor Martin go, for they do him wrong.” The elector was delighted at this testimony, and communicated it to the reformer with his own hand.

The Emperor Maximilian, predecessor of Charles the Fifth, read and admired the theses of the monk of Wittenberg; he perceived his ability, and foresaw that this obscure Augustine might one day become a powerful ally for Germany in her struggle against Rome. He accordingly said to the Elector of Saxony through his envoy: “Take great care of the monk Luther, for the time may come when we shall have need of him.” And shortly after, being in diet with Pfeffinger, the elector’s privy councillor, he said to him: “Well! what is your Augustine doing? In truth his propositions are not contemptible. He will play the monks a pretty game.” At Rome, even in the Vatican, these theses were not so badly received as might have been imagined. Leo X judged rather as a patron of letters than as pope. The amusement they gave him made him forget the severe truths they contained; and as Sylvester Prierio, the master of the sacred palace, who had the charge of examining the books, requested him to treat Luther as a heretic, he replied: “Brother Martin Luther is a very fine genius, and all that is said against him is mere

monkish jealousy.” There were few men on whom Luther’s theses produced a deeper impression than the scholar of Annaberg, whom Tetzel had so mercilessly repulsed. Myconius had entered a convent. On the very night of his arrival he dreamt he saw immense fields of wheat all glistening with ripe ears.

“Cut,” said the voice of his guide; and when he alleged his want of skill, his conductor showed him a reaper working with inconceivable activity.

“Follow him, and do as he does,” said the guide. Myconius, as eager after holiness as Luther had been, devoted himself while in the monastery to all the vigils, fasts, mortifications, and practices invented by men. But at last he despaired of ever attaining his object by his own exertions. He neglected his studies, and employed himself in manual labors only. At one time he would bind books; at another, work at the turner’s lathe, or any laborious occupation. This outward activity was unable to quiet his troubled conscience. God had spoken to him, and he could no longer fall back

into his previous lethargy. This state of anguish endured several years. It has been sometimes imagined that the paths of the reformers were smooth, and that when they had renounced the observances of the Church, nothing but pleasure and comfort awaited them. It is not considered that they arrived at the truth through internal struggles a thousand times more painful than the observances to which slavish minds easily submitted.

At length the year 1517 arrived; Luther's theses were published; they were circulated through Christendom, and penetrated also into the monastery where the scholar of Annaberg was concealed. He hid himself in a corner of the cloister with another monk, John Voigt, that he might read them at his ease. Here were the selfsame truths he had heard from his father; his eyes were opened; he felt a voice within him responding to that which was then re-echoing through Germany, and great consolation filled his heart. "I see plainly," said he, "that Martin Luther is the reaper I saw in my dream, and who taught me to gather the ears." He began immediately to

profess the doctrine that Luther had proclaimed. The monks grew alarmed, as they heard him; they argued with him, and declared against Luther and against his convent. “This convent,” replied Myconius, “is like our Lord’s sepulcher: they wish to prevent Christ’s resurrection, but they will fail.” At last his superiors, finding they could not convince him, interdicted him for a year and a half from all intercourse with the world, permitting him neither to write nor receive letters, and threatening him with imprisonment for life. But the hour of his deliverance was at hand. Being afterwards nominated pastor of Zwickau, he was the first who declared against the papacy in the churches of Thuringia. “Then,” said he, “was I enabled to labor with my venerable father Luther in the Gospel-harvest.” Jonas describes him as a man capable of doing everything he undertook. No doubt there were others besides to whose souls Luther’s propositions were a signal of life. They kindled a new flame in many cells, cottages, and palaces. While those who had entered the convents in quest of good cheer an idle life, or respect and honors, says Mathesius, began to load the name of Luther

with reproaches, the monks who lived in prayer, fasting, and mortification, returned thanks to God, as soon as they heard the cry of that eagle whom Huss had announced a century before. Even the common-people, who did not clearly understand the theological question, but who only knew that this man assailed the empire of the lazy and mendicant monks, welcomed him with bursts of acclamation. An immense sensation was produced in Germany by these daring propositions. Some of the reformer's contemporaries, however, foresaw the serious consequences to which they might lead, and the numerous obstacles they would encounter. They expressed their fears aloud, and rejoiced with trembling.

"I am much afraid," wrote the excellent canon of Augsburg, Bernard Adelmann, to his friend Pirckheimer, "that the worthy man must give way at last before the avarice and power of the partisans of indulgences. His representations have produced so little effect, that the Bishop of Augsburg, our primate and metropolitan, has just ordered, in the pope's name, fresh indulgences for St. Peter's at

Rome. Let him haste to secure the aid of princes; let him beware of tempting God; for he must be void of common sense if he overlooks the imminent peril he incurs." Adelmann was delighted on hearing it rumored that Henry VIII had invited Luther to England. "In that country," thought the canon, "he will be able to teach the truth in peace." Many thus imagined that the doctrine of the Gospel required the support of the civil power. They knew not that it advances without this power, and is often trammelled and enfeebled by it.

Albert Kranz, the famous historian, was at Hamburg on his deathbed, when Luther's theses were brought to him: "Thou art right, Brother Martin," said he; "but thou wilt not succeed..... Poor monk! Go to thy cell and cry: Lord! have mercy upon me!" An aged priest of Hexter in Westphalia, having received and read the theses in his parsonage, shook his head and said in Low German: "Dear Brother Martin! if you succeed in overthrowing this purgatory and all these paperdealers, you will be a fine fellow indeed! Erbenius, who lived a century later, wrote the

following doggerel under these words: — “What would the worthy parson say, If he were living at this day?” Not only did a great number of Luther’s friends entertain fears as to this proceeding, but many even expressed their disapprobation.

The Bishop of Brandenburg, grieved at seeing so violent a quarrel break out in his diocese, would have desired to stifle it. He resolved to effect this by mildness. “In your theses on indulgences,” said he to Luther, through the Abbot of Lenin, “I see nothing opposed to the Catholic truth; I myself condemn these indiscreet proclamations; but for the love of peace and for regard to your bishop, discontinue writing upon this subject.” Luther was confounded at being addressed with such humility by so great a dignitary.

Led away by the first impulse of his heart, he replied with emotion: “I consent: I would rather obey than perform miracles if that were possible.” The elector beheld with regret the commencement of a combat that was justifiable no doubt, but the results of which could not be foreseen. No prince

was more desirous of maintaining the public peace than Frederick.

Yet, what an immense conflagration might not be kindled by this spark!

What violent discord, what rending of nations, might not this monkish quarrel produce! The elector gave Luther frequent intimations of the uneasiness he felt. Even in his own order and in his own convent at Wittenberg, Luther met with disapprobation. The prior and sub-prior were terrified at the outcry made by Tetzel and his companions. They repaired trembling and alarmed to Brother Martin's cell, and said: "Pray do not bring disgrace upon our order! The other orders, and especially the Dominicans, are already overjoyed to think that they will not be alone in their shame." Luther was moved at these words; but he soon recovered, and replied: "Dear fathers! if this work be not of God, it will come to naught; but if it be, let it go forwards." The prior and sub-prior made no answer. "The work is still going forwards," added Luther, after recounting this

anecdote, “and, God willing, it will go on better and better into the end. Amen.” Luther had many other attacks to endure. At Erfurth, he was blamed for the violent and haughty manner in which he condemned the opinions of others: this is the reproach usually made against those men who possess that strength of conviction which proceeds from the Word of God. He was also accused of precipitation and levity.

“They require moderation in me,” answered Luther, “and they trample it under foot in the judgment they pass on me!.....We can always see the mote in our brother’s eye, and we overlook the beam in our own.....Truth will not gain more by my moderation, than it will lose by my rashness. I desire to know (continues he, addressing Lange) what errors you and your theologians have found in my theses? Who does not know that a man rarely puts forth any new idea without having some appearance of pride, and without being accused of exciting quarrels? If humility herself should undertake something new, her opponents would accuse her of pride! Why were Christ and all the

martyrs put to death? Because they seemed to be proud contemners of the wisdom of the time, and because they advanced novelties, without having first humbly taken counsel of the oracles of the ancient opinions.

“Do not let the wise of our days expect from me humility, or rather hypocrisy, enough to ask their advice, before publishing what duty compels me to say. Whatever I do will be done, not by the prudence of men, but by the counsel of God. If the work be of God, who shall stop it? if it be not, who can forward it? Not my will, nor theirs, nor ours; but thy will, O Holy Father, which art in heaven.” — What courage, what noble enthusiasm, what confidence in God, and above all, what truth in these words, and what truth for all ages!

The reproaches and accusations which were showered upon Luther from every quarter, could not fail, however, to produce some impression on his mind. He had been deceived in his hopes. He had expected to see the heads of the Church and the most distinguished scholars in the nation

publicly TheTwoDivorces unite with him; but the case was far otherwise. A word of approbation which escaped in the first moment of astonishment was all the best disposed accorded him; on the contrary, many whom he had hitherto respected the most, were loudest in their censure. He felt himself alone in the Church, alone against Rome, alone at the foot of that ancient and formidable building whose foundations penetrated to the center of the earth, whose walls soared to the clouds, and against which he had aimed so daring a blow. He was troubled and dispirited. Doubts, which he fancied he had overcome, returned to his mind with fresh force. He trembled at the thought that he had the whole authority of the church against him: to withdraw from that authority, to be deaf to that voice which people had obeyed for centuries, to set himself in opposition to that Church which he had been accustomed from his infancy to venerate as the mother of the faithful,.....he, an insignificant monk.....was an effort too great for human power! No step cost him dearer than this. And it was this, accordingly, which decided the Reformation.

No one can paint better than himself the combat in his own soul: — “I began this business,” said he, “with great fear and trembling. Who was I then, I, a poor, wretched, contemptible friar, more like a corpse than a man; who was I to oppose the majesty of the pope, before whom not only the kings of the earth and the whole world trembled, but even, if I may so speak, heaven and hell were constrained to obey the signal of his eyes?.....No one can know what my heart suffered during these first two years, and into what despondency, I may say into what despair, I was sunk. Those haughty spirits who have since attacked the pope with such great hardihood can form no idea of it, although with all their skill they would have been unable to do him the least harm, if Jesus Christ had not already inflicted through me, his weak and unworthy instrument, a wound that shall never be healed.....But while they were content to look on and leave me alone in the danger, I was not so cheerful, so tranquil, nor so confident; for at that time I was ignorant of many things which now, thank God, I know. There were, it is true, many pious Christians who were pleased with my

propositions, and valued them highly; but I could not acknowledge them and consider them as the instruments of the Holy Ghost; I looked only to the pope, to the cardinals, bishops, theologians, lawyers, monks, and priests.....It was from them I expected to witness the 303 influence of the Spirit. However, after gaining the victory over all their argument by Scripture, I at last surmounted through Christ's grace, but with great anguish, toil, and pain, the only argument that still checked me, namely that I should "listen to the Church;" for, from the bottom of my heart, I reverenced the pope's Church as the true Church; and I did so with far more sincerity and veneration than all those scandalous and infamous corrupters who, to oppose me, now extol it so mightily. If I had despised the pope, as those men really despise him in their hearts who praise him so much with their lips, I should have trembled lest the earth should have instantly opened and swallowed me up alive like Korah and his company." How honorable are these combats to Luther! What sincerity, what uprightness of mind they display! and by these painful assaults which he had to sustain from

within and from without, he is rendered more worthy of our esteem that he would have been by an intrepidity unaccompanied by any such struggles. This travail of his soul clearly demonstrates the truth and Divinity of his work. We see that the cause and the principle were both in heaven. Who will dare assert, after all the features we have pointed out, that the Reformation was a political affair? No; it was not the effect of man's policy, but of God's power. If Luther had been urged forward solely by human passions, he would have sunk under his fears; his errors, his scruples, would have smothered the fire kindled in his soul; and he would have shed upon the Church a mere passing ray, as many zealous and pious men have done whose names have been handed down to us. But now God's time was come; the work could not be stopped; the emancipation of the church must be accomplished. Luther was appointed at least to prepare the way for that complete enfranchisement and those extensive developments which are promised to the reign of Jesus Christ.

He experienced, accordingly, the truth of that

glorious promise: Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles. That Divine power which filled the heart of the Wittenberg doctor, and which had impelled him to the combat, soon restored to him all his early resolution.

Chapter 7

Tetzel’s Attack

The reproaches, the timidity, and the silence of his friends had discouraged Luther; the attacks of his enemies produced a contrary effect: this is a case of frequent occurrence. The adversaries of the truth, who hope by their violence to do their own work, are doing that of God himself. Tetzel took up the gauntlet, but with a feeble hand. Luther’s sermon, which had been for the people what the theses had been for the learned, was the object of his first reply. He refuted this discourse point by point, after his own fashion; he then announced that he was preparing to meet his adversary more fully in certain theses which he would maintain at the university of Frankfort-on-the-Oder. “Then,” said he, replying to the conclusion of Luther’s sermon, “each man will be able to judge who is the heresiarch, heretic, schismatic; who is mistaken, rash, and slanderous. Then it will be clear to the eyes of all who it is that has a dull brain, that has never felt the Bible, never read the christian

doctrines, never understood his own doctors.....In support of the propositions I advance, I am ready to suffer all things — prisons, scourging, drowning, and the stake.” One thing strikes us, as we read Tetzel’s reply — the difference between the German employed by him and Luther. One might say they were several ages apart. A foreigner, in particular, sometimes finds it difficult to understand Tetzel, while Luther’s language is almost entirely that of our own days. A comparison of their writings is sufficient to show that Luther is the creator of the German language. This is, no doubt, one of his least merits, but still it is one.

Luther replied without naming Tetzel; Tetzel had not named him. But there was no one in Germany who could not write at the head of their publications the names they thought proper to conceal. Tetzel, in order to set a higher value upon his indulgences, endeavored to confound the repentance required by God with the penance imposed by the Church.

Luther sought to clear up this point.

“To save words,” said he, in his picturesque language, “I throw to the winds (which, besides, have more leisure than I) his other remarks, which are mere artificial flowers and dry leaves, and will content myself with examining the foundations of his edifice of burs.

“The penance imposed by the holy father cannot be that required by Christ; for what the holy father imposes he can dispense with; and if these tow penances were one and the same thing, it would follow that the pope takes away what Christ imposes, and destroys the commandment of God.....Well! if he likes it, let him abuse me (continues Luther, after quoting other erroneous interpretations by Tetzel), let him call me heretic, schismatic, slanderer, and whatever he pleases: I shall not be his enemy for that, and I shall pray for him as for a friend.....But I cannot suffer him to treat the Holy Scriptures, our consolation (Romans 15:4), as a sow treats a sack of oats.” We must accustom ourselves to find Luther sometimes making use of coarse expressions, and such are too

familiar for our age: it was the fashion of the times; and there will generally be found under these words, which would now shock the conventional usages of language, a strength and propriety which redeem their vulgarity. He thus continues: — “He who purchases indulgences, repeat our adversaries, does better than he who gives alms to a poor man who is not reduced to the last extremity. — Now, should we hear the news that the Turks are profaning our churches and our crosses, we could hear it without shuddering; for we have in the midst of us the worst of Turks, who profane and annihilate the only real sanctuary, the Word of

God, that sanctifieth all things. — Let him who desires to follow this precept, beware of feeding the hungry, or of clothing the naked, before they die, and consequently have no more need of assistance.” It is important to compare Luther’s zeal for good works with what he says on justification by faith. The man that has any experience and any knowledge of Christianity, does not require this new proof of a truth, the evidence of which he had himself felt: namely, the

more we are attached to justification by faith, the more we see the necessity of works, and the more we become attached to their practice; while any laxity with regard to the doctrine of faith necessarily brings with it laxity of morals. Luther, and Saint Paul before him and Howard after him, are proofs of the first assertion; every man without faith, and there are many such in the world, is a proof of the second.

When Luther comes to Tetzel's invectives, he answers them in this manner. "When I hear these invectives, I fancy it is an ass braying at me. I am delighted with them, and I should be very sorry were such people to call me a good Christian." We must represent Luther as he was, with all his weaknesses. A turn for jesting, and even for coarse jesting, was one of them. The Reformer was a great man, a man of God, no doubt; but he was still a man and not an angel, and he was not even a perfect man. Who has the right to require perfection in him?

"Finally," added he, challenging his adversary

to battle, “although it is not usual to burn heretics for such matters, here am I at Wittenberg, I, Doctor Martin Luther! Is there any inquisitor who is determined to chew iron and to blow up rocks? I beg to inform him that he has a safe-conduct to come hither, open gates, bed and board secured to him, and all by the gracious cares of our worthy prince, Duke Frederick, elector of Saxony, who will never protect heresy.” We see that Luther was not wanting in courage. He relied upon the Word of God; and it is a rock that never fails us in the storm. But God in his faithfulness afforded him other assistance. The burst of joy by which the multitude welcomed Luther’s theses, had been soon followed by a gloomy silence. The learned had timidly retreated before the calumnies and abuse of Tetzel and the Dominicans. The bishops, who had previously exclaimed against the abuse of indulgences, seeing them attacked at last, had not failed, by a contradiction that is by no means rare, to discover that the attack was unseasonable. The greater portion of the reformer’s friends were alarmed. Many had fled away. But when the first terror was over, a contrary movement took place in

their minds. The monk of Wittenberg, who for some time had been almost alone in the midst of the Church, soon gathered around him again a numerous body of friends and admirers.

There was one who, although timid, yet remained faithful during this crisis, and whose friendship was his consolation and support. This was Spalatin.

Their correspondence was not interrupted. “I thank you,” said Luther, speaking of a particular mark of friendship that he had received, “but what am I not indebted to you?” It was on the 11th November 1517, eleven days after the publication of the theses, and consequently at the very time when the fermentation of men’s minds was greatest, that Luther delighted thus to pour out his gratitude into his friend’s heart. It is interesting to witness in this very letter to Spalatin, this strong man, who had just performed the bravest action, declaring whence all his strength was derived. “We can do nothing of ourselves: we can do everything by God’s grace. All ignorance is invincible for us:

no ignorance is invincible for the grace of God. The more we endeavor, of ourselves, to attain wisdom, the nearer we approach to folly. It is untrue that this invincible ignorance excuses the sinner; otherwise there would be no sin in the world." Luther had not sent his propositions either to the prince or to any of his court. It would appear that the chaplain expressed some astonishment to his friend in consequence. "I was unwilling," replied Luther, "that my theses should reach our most illustrious prince, or any of his court, before they had been received by those who think themselves especially designated in them, for fear they should believe I had published them by the prince's order, or to conciliate his favor, and from opposition to the Bishop of Mentz. I understand there are many persons who dream such things. But now I can safely swear, that my theses were published without the knowledge of Duke Frederick." If Spalatin consoled his friend and supported him by his influence, Luther, on his part, endeavored to answer the questions put to him by the unassuming chaplain. Among others, the latter asked one that has been often proposed in our days:

“What is the best method of studying Scripture?” “As yet, most excellent Spalatin,” Luther replied, “you have only asked me things that were in my power. But to direct you in the study of the Holy Scriptures is beyond my ability. If, however, you absolutely wish to know my method, I will not conceal it from you.

“It is very certain, that we cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture either by study or by the intellect. Your first duty is to begin by prayer.

Entreat the Lord to grant you, of his great mercy, the true understanding of his Word. There is no other interpreter of the Word of God than the Author of this Word, as he himself has said: They shall be all taught of God. Hope for nothing from your own labors, from your own understanding: trust solely in God, and in the influence of his Spirit.

Believe this on the word of a man who has had experience.” We here see how Luther arrived at the possession of the truth which he preached. It was

not, as some pretend, by trusting to a presumptuous reason; it was not, as others maintain, by giving way to malignant passions. The purest, the sublimest, the holiest source — God himself, consulted in humility, confidence, and prayer, — was that at which he drank. But in our days he has found few imitators, and hence it is there are not many who understand him. To every serious mind these words of Luther's are of themselves a justification of the Reformation.

Luther found further consolation in the friendship of respectable laymen.

Christopher Scheurl, the excellent secretary of the imperial city of Nuremberg, gave him the most affecting marks of his regard. We know how dear are the expressions of sympathy to a man's heart when he sees himself attacked on every side. The secretary of Nuremberg did still more: he desired to increase the number of Luther's friends, and with this intent requested him to dedicate one of his works to Jerome Ebner, a celebrated Nuremberg lawyer. "You entertain a high opinion of my

studies," modestly answered the reformer; "but I have a very mean one of them.

Nevertheless, I have desired to conform with your wishes. I have sought.....but among all my stores, that I have never found so paltry before, nothing presented itself that did not appear utterly unworthy of being dedicated to so great a man by so mean a person as myself." Affecting humility! It is Luther who speaks, and it is to Doctor Ebner, whose name is unknown to us, that he compares himself. Posterity has not ratified this decision.

Luther, who had done nothing to circulate his theses, had not sent them to Scheurl any more than to the Elector and his court. The secretary of Nuremberg expressed his astonishment at this. "My design," answered Luther, "was not to give my theses such publicity. I only desired to confer on their contents with some of those who remain with us or near us. If they had been condemned, I would have destroyed them. If they had been approved of, I purposed publishing them. But they have now been printed over and over again, and circulated so

far beyond all my hopes, that I repent of my offspring; not because I fear the truth should be made known to the people, ‘twas this alone I sought; but that is not the way to instruct them. They contain questions that are still doubtful to me, and if I had thought my theses would have created such a sensation, there are some things I should have omitted, and others I should have asserted with greater confidence.” In after-years Luther thought differently. Far from fearing he had said too much, he declared that he ought to have said much more. But the apprehensions he manifested to Scheurl do honor to his sincerity. They show that he had no premeditated plan, no party spirit, no self-conceit, and that he sought for truth alone. When he had discovered it fully, he changed his tone. “You will find in my earlier writings,” said he many years after, “that I very humbly conceded many things to the pope, and even important things, that now I regard and detest as abominable and blasphemous.” Scheurl was not the only respectable layman who, at this time, gave testimony of his friendship for Luther. The celebrated painter, Albert Durer, sent him a

present, perhaps one of his pictures, and the doctor warmly expressed his gratitude for the kindness. Thus Luther practically experienced the truth of these words of Divine Wisdom: A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity.

But he remembered them also for others, and pleaded the cause of the whole nation. The elector had just imposed one tax, and there was a talk of another, probably by the advice of his counsellor Pfeffinger, against whom Luther often vented his biting sarcasms. The doctor boldly placed himself in the breach: “Let not your highness despise the prayer of a poor beggar,” said he. “I beseech you, in God’s name, not to impose a new tax. My heart was bruised as well as the hearts of many of those who are most devoted to you, when they saw how far the last had injured your good fame, and the popularity your highness enjoyed. It is true that the Lord has given you an exalted understanding, so that you see into these matters farther than I or your subjects can. But perhaps it is God’s will that a mean understanding should instruct a greater, in order that no one should trust to himself, but solely

in the Lord our God, whom I pray to preserve your health of body for our good, and your soul for eternal blessedness. Amen." Thus it is that the Gospel, which calls upon us to honor kings, makes us also plead the cause of the people. To a nation it proclaims its duties; and reminds the prince of his subject's rights. The voice of a Christian like Luther, resounding in the cabinet of a sovereign, might often supply the place of a whole assembly of legislators.

In this same letter, in which Luther addresses a severe lesson to the elector, he does not fear to make a request, or rather to remind him of a promise to give him a new coat. This freedom of Luther, at a time when he might fear he had displeased Frederick, does equal honor to the prince and to the reformer. "But if it is Pfeffinger who has charge of it," added he, "let him give it me in reality, not in protestations of friendship. He knows how to spin fine speeches, but they never produce good cloth." Luther imagined that by the faithful counsel he had given his prince, he had well earned his court-dress. But, however that may

be, he had not received it two years after, and he asked for it again. This seems to indicate that Frederick was not so much influenced by Luther as has been supposed.

Chapter 8

Frankfort Discussion

Men’s minds had thus recovered a little from their first alarm. Luther himself felt inclined to declare that his theses had not the scope attributed to them. New events might turn aside the general attention, and this blow aimed at the Romish doctrine be lost in air like so many others. But the partisans of Rome prevented the affair from ending thus. They fanned the flame instead of quenching it.

Tetzel and the Dominicans replied with insolence to the attack that had been made on them. Burning with the desire of crushing the impudent monk who had dared to trouble their commerce, and of conciliating the favor of the Roman pontiff, they uttered a cry of rage; they maintained that to attack the indulgence ordained by the pope, was to attack the pope himself, and they summoned to their aid all the monks and divines of their school. Tetzel indeed felt that an adversary like Luther was

too much for him alone. Greatly disconcerted at the doctor’s attack, and exasperated to the highest degree, he quitted the vicinity of Wittenberg, and repaired to Frankfort-on-the-Oder, where he arrived in the month of November 1517.

The university of this city, like that of Wittenberg, was of recent date; but it had been founded by the opposite party. Conrad Wimpina, an eloquent man, the ancient rival of Pollich of Mellerstadt, and one of the most distinguished theologians of the age, was a professor there. Wimpina cast an envious glance on the doctor and university of Wittenberg. Their reputation galled him. Tetzel requested him to answer Luther’s theses, and Wimpina wrote two lists of antitheses, the object of the first being to defend the doctrine of indulgences, and the second, the authority of the pope.

On the 20th January 1518 took place that disputation prepared so long beforehand, announced with so much pomp, and on which Tetzel founded such great hopes. On every side he

had beaten up for recruits. Monks had been sent from all the cloisters in the neighborhood, and they met to the number of about three hundred. Tetzel read his theses. They even contained this declaration, “that whoever says that the soul does not escape out of purgatory so soon as the money tinkles in the chest, is in error.” But above all, he put forward propositions according to which the pope seemed actually seated as God in the temple of God, according to the apostle’s expression. It was convenient for this shameless trafficker to take shelter, with all his disorders and scandals, under the mantle of the pope.

He declared himself ready to maintain the following propositions before the numerous assembly by which he was surrounded: — 3. “We should teach Christians that the pope, by the greatness of his power, is above the whole universal Church, and superior to the councils, and that we should implicitly obey his decrees.

4. “We should teach Christians that the pope alone has the right of deciding in all matters of

christian faith; that he alone and no one besides him has power to interpret the meaning of Scripture according to his own views, and to approve or condemn all the words or writings of other men.

5. “We should teach Christians that the judgment of the pope cannot err, in matters concerning the christian faith, or which are necessary to the salvation of the human race.

6. “We should teach Christians that, in matters of faith, we should rely and repose more on the pope’s sentiments, as made known by his decisions, than on the opinions of all the learned, which are derived merely from Scripture.

8. “We should teach Christians that those who injure the honor or dignity of the pope, are guilty of high-treason, and deserve to be accursed.

17. “We should teach Christians that there are many things which the Church regards as indisputable articles of universal truth, although

they are not to be found in the canon of the Bible or in the writings of the ancient doctors.

44. “We should teach Christians to regard as obstinate heretics all who declare by their words, acts, or writings, that they will not retract their heretical propositions, even should excommunication after excommunication fall upon them like hail or rain.

48. “We should teach Christians that those who protect the errors of heretics, and who, by their authority prevent them from being brought before the judge who has a right to hear them, are excommunicated; that if in the space of a year they do not change their conduct, they will be declared infamous, and cruelly punished with divers chastisements, according to the law, and for a warning to other men.

50. “We should teach Christians that those who scribble so many books and waste so much paper, who dispute and preach publicly and wickedly about oral confession, the satisfaction of works, the

rich and great indulgences of the Bishop of Rome, and his power; that the persons who take part with those who preach or write such things, who are pleased with their writings, and circulate them among the people and over the world; that those who speak in private of these things, in a contemptuous and shameless manner — should expect to incur the penalties before mentioned, and to precipitate themselves, and others with them, into eternal condemnation at the judgment day, and into merited disgrace even in this world. For if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned.’” We see that Tetzel did not attack Luther only. He probably had the Elector of Saxony in view in his 48th thesis. These propositions, besides, savor strongly of the Dominican. To threaten every contradictor with cruel punishments, was the argument of an inquisitor, to which there were no means of replying. The three hundred monks whom Tetzel had collected stared and listened with admiration to what he had said. The theologians of the university were too fearful of being ranked with the abettors of heresy, or else were too strongly attached to Wimpina’s

principles, openly to attack the astonishing theses that had just been read.

All this affair, about which there had been so much noise, seemed then destined to be a mere sham fight; but among the crowd of students present at the disputation was a youth about twenty years of age, named John Knipstrow. He had read Luther's theses, and had found them conformable to the doctrines of Scripture. Indignant at beholding the truth publicly trodden under foot, without any one appearing in its defense, this young man raised his voice, to the great astonishment of all the assembly, and attacked the presumptuous Tetzel. The poor Dominican, who had not reckoned on any opposition, was quite confused. After a few exertions, he deserted the field of battle, and gave way to Wimpina. The latter resisted more vigorously; but Knipstrow pressed him so closely, that, to finish a struggle so unbecoming in his eyes, the president (Wimpina himself) declared the disputation over, and immediately proceeded to confer the degree of doctor upon Tetzel in recompense of this glorious

combat. In order to get rid of the young orator, Wimpina had him sent to the convent of Pyritz in Pomerania, with an order that he should be strictly watched.

But this dawning light was removed from the banks of the Oder, only to diffuse not long after a greater brilliancy throughout Pomerania. When God thinks fit, he employs even learners to confound the teachers.

Tetzel, wishing to retrieve the check he had experienced had recourse to the ultima ratio of Rome and of the inquisitors, — to fire. He caused a pulpit and a scaffold to be erected in one of the public walks in the environs of Frankfort. Thither he repaired in solemn procession, with his insignia of inquisitor of the faith. He gave vent to all his violence from the pulpit. He hurled thunderbolts, and exclaimed with his stentorian voice, that the heretic Luther deserved to suffer death at the stake. Next, placing the doctor’s propositions and sermon on the scaffold, he burnt them. He knew better how to do this than to maintain theses. At this time he

met with no gainsayers: his victory was complete. The impudent Dominican re-entered Frankfort in triumph. When powerful parties are vanquished, they have recourse to certain demonstrations, which we may well accord to them as some consolation for their disgrace.

These second theses of Tetzel's form an important epoch in the Reformation. They changed the ground of dispute: they transported it from the indulgence-markets to the halls of the Vatican, and diverted it from Tetzel to the pope. In the place of that despicable broker whom Luther had so firmly grasped, they substituted the sacred person of the head of the Church. Luther was filled with astonishment. It is probable that he would erelong have taken this step himself; but his enemies spared him the trouble. It was henceforward no question of a discredited traffic, but of Rome itself; and the blow by which a daring hand had tried to demolish Tetzel's shop, shook the very foundations of the pontifical throne.

Tetzel's theses served as a rallying cry to the

troops of Rome. An uproar against Luther broke out among the monks, infuriate at the appearance of a more formidable adversary than either Reuchlin or Erasmus. Luther's name resounded everywhere from the pulpits of the Dominicans, who addressed themselves to the passions of the people. They called the bold doctor a madman, a seducer, and a demoniac. His doctrine was cried down as the most horrible heresy. "Only wait a fortnight, or a month at most," said they, "and this notorious heretic will be burnt." If it had depended solely on the Dominicans, the fate of Jerome and of Huss would soon have been that of the Saxon doctor also; but God was watching over him. His life was destined to accomplish what the ashes of the Bohemian reformer had begun; for each does the work of God, one by his death, the other by his life. Many began already to exclaim that the whole university of Wittenberg was deeply tainted with heresy, and pronounced it infamous.

"Let us drive out that villain and all his partisans," continued they. In many places these cries succeeded in exciting the passions of the

multitude. The public attention was directed against those who shared Luther's opinions; and wherever the monks were the strongest, the friends of the Gospel experienced the effects of their hatred. It was thus, with regard to the Reformation, that our Savior's prophecy began to be accomplished: Men will revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. In every age this is the recompense bestowed by the world on the decided friends of the Gospel.

When Luther was informed of Tetzel's theses, and of the general attack of which they were the signal, his courage immediately took fire. He felt the necessity of opposing such adversaries face to face; and his intrepid soul had no difficulty in coming to such a decision. But at the same time their weakness revealed to him his own strength, and inspired him with the consciousness of what he really was.

He did not, however, give way to those sentiments of pride so natural to man's heart. "I

have more difficulty to refrain from despising my adversaries," wrote he about this time to Spalatin, "and from sinning in this way against Jesus Christ, than I should have in conquering them. They are so ignorant of human and divine things, that it is disgraceful to have to fight against them. And yet it is this very ignorance which gives them their inconceivable arrogance and their brazen face." But the strongest encouragement to his heart, in the midst of this general hostility, was the intimate conviction that his cause was that of truth. "Do not be surprised," wrote he to Spalatin at the beginning of 1518, "that I am so grossly insulted. I listen to their abuse with joy. If they did not curse me, we could not be so firmly assured that the cause I have undertaken is that of God himself. Christ has been set up for a sign to be spoken against." "I know," said he on another occasion, "that from the very beginning of the world, the Word of God has been of such a nature, that whoever desired to publish it to the world has been compelled, like the Apostles, to abandon all things, and to expect death. If it were not so, it would not be the Word of Jesus Christ." This peace in the midst of agitation is a

thing unknown to the heroes of the world. We see men who are at the head of a government, or of a political party, sink under their toils and vexations.

The Christian generally acquires new vigor in his struggle. It is because he possesses a mysterious source of repose and of courage unknown to him whose eyes are closed against the Gospel.

One thing, however, sometimes agitated Luther: the thought of the dissensions his courageous opposition might produce. He knew that a single word might set the world on fire. At times his imagination beheld prince arrayed against prince, and perhaps people against people. His patriotic heart was saddened; his christian charity alarmed. He would have desired peace; and yet he must speak, for such was the Lords's will. "I tremble," said he, "I shudder at the idea that I may be an occasion of discord between such mighty princes." He still kept silence with regard to Tetzel's propositions concerning the pope. Had he been carried away by passion, he would, no doubt, have instantly fallen upon that astonishing doctrine,

under the shelter of which his adversary sought to protect himself. But he did not; and in his delay, his reserve and silence, there is something grave and solemn, which sufficiently reveals the spirit that animated him. He waited, but not from weakness: for the blow was all the stronger.

Tetzel, after his auto-da-fe at Frankfort, had hastened to send his theses into Saxony. They will serve as an antidote (thought he) against Luther’s.

A man from Halle, commissioned by the inquisitor to circulate his theses, arrived at Wittenberg. The students of the university, still indignant that Tetzel should have burnt their master’s propositions, had scarcely heard of his arrival, before they sought him out, surrounded him, mobbed and frightened him. “How can you dare bring such things here?” said they.

Some of them bought part of the copies he had with him, others seized the remainder. They thus became masters of his whole stock, amounting to eight hundred copies; and then, unknown to the

elector, the senate, the rector, Luther, and all the professors, they posted the following words on the university boards: “Whoever desires to be present at the burning and funeral of Tetzel’s theses, must come to the market-place at two o’clock.” Crowds assembled at the appointed hour, and the Dominican’s propositions were consigned to the flames in the midst of noisy acclamations. One copy escaped the conflagration, which Luther sent afterwards to his friend Lange of Erfurth. These generous but imprudent youths followed the precept of the ancients — Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, and not that of Jesus Christ. But when doctors and professors set the example at Frankfort, can we be astonished that it was followed by young students at Wittenberg? The news of this academical execution soon spread through all Germany, and made a great noise. Luther was deeply pained at it.

“I am surprised,” wrote he to his old master, Jodocus, at Erfurth, “you should have believed I allowed Tetzel’s theses to be burnt! Do you think I have so taken leave of my senses? But what could I

do? When I am concerned, everybody believes whatever is told of me. Can I stop the mouths of the whole world? Well! let them say, hear, and believe whatever they like concerning me. I shall work so long as God gives me strength, and with His help I shall fear nothing." — "What will come of it," said he to Lange, "I know not, except that the peril in which I am involved becomes greater on this very account." This act shows how the hearts of the young already glowed for the cause which Luther defended. This was a sign of great importance; for a movement which has taken place among the youth is soon of necessity propagated throughout the whole nation.

The theses of Tetzel and of Wimpina, although little esteemed, produced a certain effect. They aggravated the dispute; they widened the rent in the mantle of the Church; they brought questions of the highest interest into the controversy. The chiefs of the Church began, accordingly, to take a nearer view of the matter, and to declare strongly against the Reformer.

“Truly, I do not know on whom Luther relies,” said the Bishop of Brandenburg, “since he thus ventures to attack the power of the bishops.” Perceiving that this new conjuncture called for new measures, the bishop came himself to Wittenberg. But he found Luther animated with that interior joy which springs from a good conscience, and determined to give battle. The bishop saw that the Augustine monk obeyed a power superior to his own, and returned in anger to Brandenburg. One day during the winter of 1518, as he was seated before the fire, he said, turning to those who surrounded him: “I will not lay my head down in peace, until I have thrown Martin into the fire, like this brand;” and he flung the billet into the flames. The revolution of the sixteenth century was not destined to be accomplished by the heads of the Church, any more than that of the first century had been by the sanhedrin and by the synagogue. The chiefs of the clergy in the sixteenth century were opposed to Luther, to the Reformation, and to its ministers; as they had been to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, to his Apostles, and, as too frequently happens in every age, to the truth. — “The

bishops," said Luther, speaking of the visit the prelate of Brandenburg had paid him, "begin to perceive that they ought to have done what I am doing, and they are ashamed of it. They call me proud and arrogant — I will not deny that I am so; but they are not the people to know either what God is, or what we are."

Chapter 9

Prierio

A more formidable resistance than that made by Tetzel was already opposed to Luther. Rome had answered. A reply had gone forth from the walls of the sacred palace. It was not Leo X who had condescended to speak of theology: “‘Tis a mere monkish squabble,” he said one day; “the best way is not to meddle with it.” And at another time he observed, “It is a drunken German that has written these theses; when the fumes have passed off, he will talk very differently.” A Roman Dominican, Sylvester Mazzolini of Prierio or Prierias, master of the sacred palace, filled the office of censor, and it was in this capacity that he first became acquainted with the theses of the Saxon monk.

A Romish censor and Luther’s theses, what a contrast! Freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry, freedom of belief, come into collision in the city of Rome with that power which claims to hold in its

hands the monopoly of intelligence, and to open and shut at pleasure the mouth of Christendom. The struggle of christian liberty which engenders children of God, with pontifical despotism which produces slaves of rome, is typified, as it were, in the first days of the Reformation, in the encounter of Luther and Prierio.

The Roman censor, prior-general of the Dominicans, empowered to decide on what Christendom should profess or conceal, and on what it ought to know or be ignorant of, hastened to reply. He published a writing, which he dedicated to Leo X. In it he spoke contemptuously of the German monk, and declared with Romish assurance, “that he should like to know whether this Martin had an iron nose or a brazen head, which cannot be broken!” And then under the form of a dialogue, he attacked Luther’s theses, employing by turns ridicule, insult, and menaces.

This combat between the Augustine of Wittenberg and the Dominican of Rome was waged on the very question that is the principle of

the Reformation, namely: “What is the sole infallible authority for Christians?” Here is the system of the Church, as set forth by its most independent organs: — The letter of the written Word is dead without the spirit of interpretation, which alone reveals its hidden meaning. Now, this spirit is not given to every Christian, but to the Church — that is, to the priests. It is great presumption to say, that He who promised the Church to be with her always, even to the end of the world, could have abandoned her to the power of error. It will be said, perhaps, that the doctrine and constitution of the Church are no longer such as we find them in the sacred oracles.

Undoubtedly: but this change is only in appearance; it extends only to the form and not to the substance. We may go further: this change is progression. The vivifying power of the Divine Spirit has given a reality to what in Scripture was merely an idea; it had filled up the outline of the Word; it has put a finishing touch to its rude sketches; it has completed the work of which the Bible only gave the first rough draft. We must

therefore understand the sense of the Holy Scriptures as settled by the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. From this point the catholic doctors diverge. General councils, said some (and Gerson was one of them), are the representatives of the Church. The pope, said others, is the depositary of the spirit of interpretation, and no one has a right to understand the Scriptures otherwise that as decreed by the Roman pontiff. This was the opinion of Prierio.

Such was the doctrine opposed by the master of the sacred palace to the infant Reformation. He put forward propositions, on the power of the Church and of the pope, at which the most shameless flatterers of the Church of Rome would have blushed. Here is one of the principles he advanced at the head of his writing: “Whoever relies not on the teaching of the Roman Church, and of the Roman pontiff, as the infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures themselves derive their strength and their authority, is a heretic.” Then, in a dialogue in which Luther and Sylvester are the speakers, the latter seeks to refute the doctor’s

propositions. The opinions of the Saxon monk were altogether strange to a Roman censor; and, accordingly, Prierio shows that he understood neither the emotions of his heart, nor the springs of his conduct. He measured the doctor of the truth by the petty standard of the servants of Rome. “My dear Luther,” said he, “if you were to receive from our lord the pope a good bishopric and a plenary indulgence for repairing your Church, you would sing in a softer strain, and you would extol the indulgences you are now disparaging!” The Italian, so proud of his elegant manners, occasionally assumes the most scurrilous tone: “If it is the nature of dogs to bite,” said he to Luther, “I fear you had a dog for your father.” The dominican at last wonders at his own condescension in speaking to the rebellious monk; and ends by showing his adversary the cruel teeth of an inquisitor. “The Roman Church,” says he, “the apex of whose spiritual and temporal power is in the pope, may constrain by the secular arm those who, having once received the faith, afterwards go astray. It is not bound to employ reason to combat and vanquish rebels.” These words, traced by the pen

of a dignitary of the Roman court, were very significant. Still, they did not frighten Luther. He believed, or feigned to believe, that this dialogue was not written by Prierio, but by Ulric Hutten, or by another of the contributors to the Letters of some Obscure Men; who, said, he, in his satirical humor, and in order to excite Luther against Prierio, had compiled this mass of absurdities. He had no desire to behold the see of Rome excited against him. However, after having kept silence for some time, his doubts (if he had any) were dispelled: he set to work, and his answer was ready in two days. The Bible had molded the reformer and begun the Reformation. Luther needed not the testimony of the Church in order to believe. His faith had come from the Bible itself; from within and not from without. He was so intimately convinced that the evangelical doctrine was immovably founded on the Word of God, that in his eyes all external authority was useless.

This experiment made by Luther opened a new futurity to the Church.

The living source that had welled forth for the monk of Wittenberg was to become a river to slake the thirst of nations.

In order that we may comprehend the Word, the Spirit of God must give understanding, said the Church; and it was right so far. But its error had been in considering the Holy Spirit as a monopoly accorded to a certain class, and supposing that it could be confined exclusively within assemblies or colleges, in a city or in a conclave. The wind bloweth where it listeth, had said the Son of God, speaking of God's Spirit; in another place, they shall all be taught of God. The corruption of the Church, the ambition of the pontiffs, the passions of the councils, the quarrels of the clergy, the pomp of the prelates, had banished far from the sacerdotal abodes that Holy Ghost, that spirit of humility and peace. It had deserted the assemblies of the proud, the palaces of the mighty ones of the Church, and had taken up its dwelling with simple Christians and humble priests. It had fled from a domineering hierarchy, that had often trampled under foot and shed the blood of the poor; from a

proud and ignorant clergy, whose chiefs were better skilled in using the sword than the Bible; and dwelt at one time with despised sects, and at another with men of intelligence and learning. The holy cloud, that had departed from the sumptuous basilics and proud cathedrals, had descended into the obscure abodes of the humble, or into the quiet studies, those tranquil witnesses of a conscientious inquiry. The Church, degraded by its love of power and of riches, dishonored in the eyes of the people by the venal use it made of the doctrine of life; the Church which sold salvation to replenish the treasuries drained by its haughtiness and debauchery, — had forfeited all respect, and sensible men no longer attached any value to her testimony. Despising so debased an authority, they joyfully turned towards the Divine Word, and to its infallible authority, as toward the only refuge remaining to them in such a general disorder.

The age, therefore, was prepared. The bold movement by which Luther changed the resting-place of the sublimest hopes of the human heart, and with a hand of power transported them from

the walls of the Vatican to the rock of the Word of God, was saluted with enthusiasm. This is the work that the reformer had in view in his reply to Prierio.

He passes over the principles which the Dominican had set forth in the beginning of his work: “But,” said he, “following your example, I will also lay down certain fundamental principles.

“The first is this expression of St. Paul: Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you. let him be accursed.

“The second is this passage from St. Augustine to St. Jerome: ‘have learnt to render to the canonical books alone the honor of believing most firmly that none of them has erred; as for the others, I do not believe in what they teach, simply because it is they who teach them.’” Here we see Luther laying down with a firm hand the essential principles of the Reformation: the Word of God, the whole Word of God, nothing but the Word of God. “If you clearly understand these points,”

continues he, “you will also understand that your Dialogue is wholly overturned by them; for you have only brought forward the expressions and the opinions of St. Thomas.” Then, attacking his adversary’s axioms, he frankly declares that he believes popes and councils can err. He complains of the flatteries of the Roman courtiers, who ascribe both temporal and spiritual power to the pope. He declares that the Church exists virtually in Christ alone, and representatively in the councils. And then coming to Prierio’s insinuation: “No doubt you judge of me after yourself,” said he; “but if I aspired to an episcopal station, of a surety I should not use the language that is so grating to your ears. Do you imagine I am ignorant how bishoprics and the priesthood are obtained at Rome? Do not the very children sing in the streets these well-known words: — Of all foul spots the world around, The foulest spot in Rome is found.” Such songs as these had been current at Rome before the election of one of the latter popes. Nevertheless, Luther speaks of Leo with respect: “I know,” said he, “that we may compare him to Daniel in Babylon; his innocence has often

endangered his life.” He concludes by a few words in reply to Prierio’s threats: “Finally, you say that the pope is at once pontiff and emperor, and that he is mighty to compel obedience by the secular arm. Do you thirst for blood?.....I protest that you will not frighten me either by your rhodomontades or by the threatening noise of your words. If I am put to death, Christ lives, Christ my Lord and the Lord of all, blessed for evermore. Amen.” Thus, with a firm hand, Luther erects against the infidel altar of the papacy the altar of the only infallible and Holy Word of God, before which he would have every knee to bow, and on which he declares himself ready to offer up his life.

Prierio published an answer, and then a third book “On the Irrefragable Truth of the Church and of the Roman Pontiff,” in which, relying upon the ecclesiastical law, he asserted, that although the pope should make the whole world go with him to hell, he could neither be condemned nor deposed. The pope was at last obliged to impose silence on Prierio.

A new adversary erelong entered the lists; he also was a Dominican. James Hochstraten, inquisitor at Cologne, whom we have already seen opposing Reuchlin and the friends of letters, shuddered at Luther's boldness. It was necessary for monkish darkness and fanaticism to come in contact with him who was destined to give them a mortal blow. Monachism had sprung up as the primitive truth began to disappear. Since then, monks and errors had grown up side by side. The man had now appeared who was to accelerate their ruin; but these robust champions could not abandon the field of battle without a struggle. It lasted all the reformer's life; but in Hochstraten this combat is singularly personified: Hochstraten and Luther; the free and courageous Christian with the impetuous slave of monkish superstitions! Hochstraten lost his temper, grew furious, and called loudly for the heretic's death.....It is by the stake he wished to secure the triumph of Rome. "It is high-treason against the Church," exclaimed he, "to allow so horrible a heretic to live one hour longer. Let the scaffold be instantly erected for him!" This murderous advice was, alas! but too

effectually carried out in many countries; the voices of numerous martyrs, as in the primitive times of the Church, gave testimony to the truth, even in the midst of flames. But in vain were the sword and the stake invoked against Luther. The Angel of the Lord kept watch continually around him, and preserved him.

Luther answered Hochstraten in few words, but with great energy: “Go,” said he in conclusion, “go, thou raving murderer, who criest for the blood of thy brethren; it is my earnest desire that thou forbearest to call me Christian and faithful, and that thou continuest, on the contrary, to decry me as a heretic. Understandest thou these things, blood-thirsty man! enemy of the truth! and if thy mad rage should hurry thee to undertake anything against me, take care to act with circumspection, and to choose thy time well. God knows what is my purpose, if he grant me life.....My hope and my expectation, God willing, will not deceive me.” Hochstraten was silent.

A more painful attack awaited the reformer.

Doctor Eck, the celebrated professor of Ingolstadt, the deliverer of Urban Regius, and Luther's friend, had received the famous theses. Eck was not a man to defend the abuse of indulgences; but he was a doctor of the schools and not of the Bible; well versed in the scholastic writings, but not in the Word of God. If Prierio had represented Rome, if Hochstraten had represented the monks, Eck represented the schoolmen. The schools, which for five centuries past had domineered over Christendom, far from giving way at the first blow of the reformer, rose up haughtily to crush the man who dared pour out upon them the floods of his contempt. Eck and Luther, the School and the Word, had more than one struggle; but it was now that the combat began.

Eck could not but find errors in many of Luther's positions. Nothing leads us to doubt the sincerity of his convictions. He as enthusiastically maintained the scholastic opinions, as Luther did the declarations of the Word of God. We may even suppose that he felt no little pain when he found himself obliged to oppose his old friend; it would

seem, however, from the manner of his attack, that passion and jealousy had some share in his motives.

He gave the name of Obelisks to his remarks against Luther's theses.

Desirous at first of saving appearances, he did not publish his work, but was satisfied with communicating it confidentially to his ordinary, the Bishop of Eichstadt. But the Obelisks were soon extensively circulated, either through the indiscretion of the bishop or by the doctor himself. A copy fell into the hands of Link, a friend of Luther and preacher at Nuremberg. The latter hastened to send it to the reformer. Eck was a far more formidable adversary than Tetzel, Prierio, or Hochstraten: the more his work surpassed theirs in learning and in subtlety, the more dangerous it was. He assumed a tone of compassion towards his "feeble adversary," being well aware that pity inflicts more harm than anger. He insinuated that Luther's propositions circulated the Bohemian poison, that they savored of Bohemia, and by these

malicious allusions, he drew upon Luther the unpopularity and hatred attached in Germany to the name of Huss and to the schismatics of his country.

The malice that pervaded this treatise exasperated Luther; but the thought that this blow came from an old friend grieved him still more. Is it then at the cost of his friend's affections that he must uphold the truth? Luther poured out the deep sorrow of his heart in a letter to Egranus, pastor at Zwickau. "In the Obelisks I am styled a venomous man, a Bohemian, a heretic, a seditious, insolent, rash person.....I pass by the milder insults such as drowsy-headed, stupid, ignorant, contemner of the sovereign pontiff, etc. This book is brimful of the blackest outrages. Yet he who penned them is a distinguished man, with a spirit full of learning, and a learning full of spirit; and, what causes me the deepest vexation, he is a man who was united to me by a great and recently contracted friendship: it is John Eck, doctor of divinity, chancellor of Ingolstadt, a man celebrated and illustrious by his writing. If I did not know Satan's thoughts, I should be astonished at the fury which has led this

man to break off so sweet and so new a friendship, and that, too, without warning me, without writing to me, without saying a single word." But if Luther's heart was wounded, his courage was not cast down. On the contrary, he rose up invigorated for the contest. "Rejoice, my brother," said he to Egranus, whom a violent enemy had likewise attacked, "rejoice, and do not let these flying leaves affright thee. The more my adversaries give way to their fury, the farther I advance. I leave the things that are behind me, in order that they may bay at them, and I pursue what lies before me, that they may bay at them in their turn." Eck was sensible how disgraceful his conduct had been, and endeavored to vindicate himself in a letter to Carlstadt. In it he styled Luther "their common friend," and cast all the blame on the Bishop of Eichstadt, at whose solicitation he pretended to have written his work. He said that it had not been his intention to publish the Obelisks; that he would have felt more regard for the bonds of friendship that united him to Luther; and demanded in conclusion, that Luther, instead of disputing publicly with him, should turn his weapons against

the Frankfort divines. The professor of Ingolstadt, who had not feared to strike the first blow, began to be alarmed when he reflected on the strength of that adversary whom he had so imprudently attacked. Willingly would he have eluded the struggle; but it was too late.

All these fine phrases did not persuade Luther, who was yet inclined to remain silent. “I will swallow patiently,” said he, “this sop, worthy of Cerberus.” But his friends differed from him: they solicited, they even constrained him to answer. He therefore replied to the Obelisks by his Asterisks, opposing (as he said, playing on the words) to the rust and livid hue of the Ingoldstadt doctor’s Obelisks, the light and dazzling brightness of the stars of heaven. In this work he treated his adversary with less severity than he had shown his previous antagonists; but his indignation pierced through his words.

He showed that in these chaotic Obelisks there was nothing from the Holy Scriptures, nothing from the Fathers of the Church, nothing from the

ecclesiastical canons; that they were filled with scholastic glosses, opinions, mere opinions and empty dreams; in a word, the very things that Luther had attacked. The Asterisks are full of life and animation. The author is indignant at the errors of his friend’s book; but he pities the man.

He professes anew the fundamental principle which he laid down in his answer to Prierio: “The supreme pontiff is a man, and may be led into error; but God is truth, and cannot err.” Farther on, employing the argumentum ad hominem against the scholastic doctor, he says to him, “It would be great impudence assuredly for any one to teach in the philosophy of Aristotle, what he cannot prove by the authority of that ancient author. — You grant it. — It is, a fortiori, the most impudent of all impudence to affirm in the Church and among Christians what Christ himself has not taught. Now, where is it found in the Bible that the treasure of Christ’s merits is in the hands of the pope?” He adds farther: “As for the malicious reproach of Bohemian heresy, I bear this calumny with patience through love of Christ. I live in a

celebrated university, in a well-famed city, in a respectable bishopric, in a powerful duchy, where all are orthodox, and where, undoubtedly, so wicked a heretic would not be tolerated." Luther did not publish the Asterisks; he communicated them solely to his friends. They were not given to the public till long after. This rupture between the two doctors of Ingoldstadt and Wittenberg made a great sensation in Germany. They had many friends in common. Scheurl especially, who appears to have been the man by whom the two doctors had been connected, was alarmed. He was one of those who desired to see a thorough reform in the German Church by means of its most distinguished organs. But if, at the very outset, the most eminent theologians of the day should fall to blows; if, while Luther came forward with novelties, Eck became the representative of antiquity, what disruption might not be feared! Would not numerous partisans rally round each of these two chiefs, and would not two hostile camps be formed in the bosom of the empire?

Scheurl endeavored therefore to reconcile Eck

and Luther. The latter declared his willingness to forget everything; that he loved the genius, that he admired the learning of Doctor Eck, and that what his old friend had done had caused him more pain than anger. “I am ready,” said he to Scheurl, “for peace and for war: but I prefer peace. Apply yourself to the task; grieve with us that the devil has thrown among us this beginning of discord, and afterwards rejoice that Christ in his mercy has crushed it.” About the same time he wrote Eck a letter full of affection: but Eck made no reply; he did not even send him any message. It was no longer a season for reconciliation. The contest daily grew warmer. Eck’s pride and implacable spirit soon broke entirely that last ties of that friendship which every day grew weaker.

Chapter 10

Popular Writings

Such were the struggles that the champion of the Word of God had to sustain at the very entrance of his career. But these contests with the leaders of society, these academical disputes, are of little account to the Christian. Human teachers imagine they have gained the noblest triumph, when they succeed in filling a few journals or a few drawing-rooms with the noise of their systems. Since it is with them a mere question of selflove or of party rather than of the welfare of humanity, they are satisfied with this worldly success. Their labors are accordingly like smoke, which, after blinding the eyes, passes away, leaving no trace behind. They have neglected depositing the fire among the masses; they have but skimmed the surface of human society.

It is not so with the Christian; he thinks not of a party, or of academical success, but of the salvation of souls. He therefore willingly neglects the

brilliant contest in which he might engage at his ease with the champions of the world, and prefers the obscure labors which carry light and life to the cottages and homes of the people. This was what Luther did, or rather, following the precept of his Divine master, he did this, and left not other things undone. At the time he was combating with inquisitors, university chancellors, and masters of the sacred palace, he endeavored to diffuse sound knowledge on religious subjects among the multitude. This is the aim of many of the popular works he published about this time, such as his Sermons on the Ten Commandments, delivered two years before in the church of Wittenberg, and of which we have already spoken, and his Explanation of the Lord's Prayer for simple and ignorant Laymen. Who would not be pleased to know how the reformer addressed the people at this period? We will therefore quote some of the expressions that he put forth "to run through the land," as he says in the preface to the latter work.

Prayer, that interior act of the heart, will undoubtedly ever be one of the points by which a

true and vital reformation will begin; Luther accordingly occupied himself on this subject without delay. It is impossible to translate his energetic style, and the strength of that language which grew, so to speak, under his pen, as he wrote; we will however make the attempt.

“When thou prayest,” said he, “let thy words be few, but thy thoughts and affections many, and above all let them be profound.

The less thou speakest the better thou prayest. Few words and many thoughts, is christian: many words and few thoughts, is heathenish.....

“External and bodily prayer is that buzzing of the lips, that outward babble which is gone through without any attention, and which strikes the eyes and the ears of men; but prayer in spirit and in truth is the inward desire, the motions, the sighs, which issue from the depths of the heart. The former is the prayer of hypocrites, and of all those who trust in themselves: the latter is the prayer of the children of God, who walk in his fear.” Then

passing on to the first words of the Lord’s Prayer, Our Father, he expresses himself thus: — “There is no name among all names which more inclines us towards God, than the name of Father. We should not feel so much happiness and consolation in calling him our Lord, or God, or Judge.....By this word Father the bowels of the Lord are moved; for there is no voice more lovely or more endearing to a father than that of his child.

“Who art in Heaven, acknowledges himself a stranger upon earth.

Hence there arises an ardent longing in his heart, like that of a child who dwells far from his father’s country, among strangers, in wretchedness and in mourning. It is as if he said: Alas! my Father! thou art in heaven, and I, thy unhappy child, am on the earth, far from thee, in the midst of danger, necessity, and tribulation.

“Hallowed be thy name. — He who is passionate, envious, an evilspeaker, a calumniator, dishonors that name of God in which he was

baptized. Putting to an impious use the vessel that God hath consecrated to himself, he is like a priest who would take the holy cup and with it give drink to a sow, or gather dung.....

“Thy kingdom come. — Those who amass wealth, who build sumptuous houses, who seek all that the world can give, and pronounce this prayer with their lips, resemble large organ-pipes which peal loudly and incessantly in the churches, without either speech, feeling, or reason.....” Further on Luther attacks the then very popular error of prilgrimages: “One goes to Rome, another to St. James; this man builds a chapel, that one endows a religious foundation, in order to attain the kingdom of God; but all neglect the essential point, which is to become His kingdom themselves. Why goest thou beyond the seas in search of God’s kingdom?.....It is in thine own heart that it should be found.

“It is a terrible thing,” continues he, “to hear this prayer offered up: Thy will be done! Where in the Church do we see this will of God

performed?.....One bishop rises up against another bishop, one church against another church. Priests, monks, and nuns, quarrel, fight, and battle. In every place there is nought but discord.

And yet each party exclaim that their meaning is good, their intention upright; and thus to the honor and glory of God they all together perform a work of the devil.....

“Wherefore do we say Our bread?” continues he in explanation of the words, Give us this day our daily bread. “Because we pray not to have the ordinary bread that pagans eat, and which God gives to all men, but for our bread, ours, who are children of the heavenly Father.

“And what, then, is this bread of God? — It is Jesus Christ our Lord: I am the living bread which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. For this reason (and let us not deceive ourselves), all sermons and all instructions that do not set Jesus Christ before us and teach us to know him, cannot be the daily bread and the nourishment

of our souls.....

“To what use will such bread have been prepared for us, if it is not offered to us, and so we cannot taste it?.....It is as if a magnificent banquet had been prepared, and there was no one to serve the bread, to hand around the dishes, to pour out the wine, so that the guests must feed themselves on the sight and the smell of the viands.....For this cause we must preach Jesus Christ alone.

“But what is it, then, to know Jesus Christ, sayest thou, and what advantage is derived from it?.....I reply: To learn and to know Jesus Christ is to understand what the apostle says: Christ is made unto us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Now this you understand, if you acknowledge all your wisdom to be a condemnable folly, your own righteousness a condemnable iniquity, your own holiness a condemnable impurity, your own redemption a miserable condemnation; if you feel that you are really before God and before all creatures a fool, a sinner, an impure, a condemned man, and if you

show, not only by your words, but from the bottom of your heart, and by your works, that you have no consolation and no salvation remaining except in Jesus Christ. To believe is none other than to eat this bread from heaven." Thus did Luther remain faithful to his resolution of opening the eyes of a blind people whom the priests were leading at their pleasure. His writings, circulating rapidly through all Germany, called up a new light, and scattered abundantly the seeds of truth in a soil well prepared for it. But while thinking of those who were afar off, he did not forget those who were near at hand.

From every pulpit the Dominicans condemned the infamous heretic.

Luther, the man of the people, and who, had he been willing, might with a few words have aroused the popular waves, always disdained such triumphs, and thought only of instructing his hearers.

His reputation, which extended more and more, and the courage with which he raised the banner of

Christ in the midst of the enslaved Church, caused his sermons to be listened to with ever increasing interest. Never had the crowd of hearers been so great. Luther went straight to the mark.

One day, having gone into the pulpit at Wittenberg, he undertook to establish the doctrine of repentance, and on this occasion he delivered a sermon which afterwards became very celebrated, and in which he laid many of the foundations of the evangelical doctrine.

He first contrasts the pardon of men with the pardon of heaven. “There are two kinds of remission,” said he, “remission of the penalty, and remission of the sin. The first reconciles man externally with the Christian Church. The second, which is the heavenly indulgence, reconciles man to God. If a man does not experience within himself that peace of conscience, that joy of heart which proceeds from the remission of God, there are no indulgences that can aid him, even should he purchase all that have ever been offered upon earth.” He continues thus: “They desire to do good

works before their sins are forgiven, while it is necessary for sin to be forgiven before men can perform good works. It is not the works that expel sin; but the sin once expelled, good works will follow! For good works must be performed with a joyful heart, with a good conscience towards God, that is, with remission of sins." He then comes to the principal object of his sermon, and it was also the great aim of the entire Reformation. The Church had been set in the place of God and of his Word; he challenges this claim, and makes everything depend on faith in the Word of God.

"The remission of the sin is in the power neither of the pope, nor of the bishop, nor of the priest, nor of any other man, but reposes solely on the Word of Christ, and on your own faith. For Christ designed not to build our consolation, our salvation, on the word or on the work of man, but solely on himself, on His work and on His Word.....Thy repentance and thy works may deceive thee, but Christ, thy God, will not deceive thee, he will not falter, and the devil shall not overthrow his words. "A pope or a bishop has no

more power than the lowliest priest, as regards remission of sins. And even were there no priest, each Christian, even a woman or a child, can do the same thing. For if a simple Christian says to you, ‘God pardons sin in the name of Jesus Christ,’ and you receive this word with a firm faith, and as if God himself were addressing you, you are absolved.....

“If you do not believe your sins are forgiven, you make God a liar, and you put more confidence in your own vain thoughts, than in God and his Word.....

“Under the Old Testament, neither prophet, priest, nor king had the power of proclaiming remission of sins. But under the New, each believer has this power. The Church is overflowing with remission of sins! If a pious Christian consoles thy conscience with the word of the cross, let it be man or woman, young or old, receive this consolation with such faith as rather to die many deaths than to doubt that it will be so before God.....Repent, do all the works in thy power; but let the faith thou

hast in pardon through Jesus Christ be in the foremost rank, and command alone on the field of battle." Thus spoke Luther to his astonished and enraptured hearers. All the scaffolding that impudent priests had raised to their profit between God and the soul of man, was thrown down, and man was brought face to face with his God. The word of forgiveness descended pure from on high, without passing through a thousand corrupting channels. In order that the testimony of God should be efficacious, it was no longer necessary for men to set their delusive seal to it. The monopoly of the sacerdotal caste was abolished; the Church was emancipated.

Chapter 11

Apprehensions of his Friends

Meanwhile it had become necessary for the fire that had been lighted at Wittenberg to be kindled in other places. Luther, not content with announcing the Gospel truth in the place of his residence, both to the students of the academy and to the people, was desirous of scattering elsewhere the seed of sound doctrine. In the spring of 1518, a general chapter of the Augustine order was to be held at Heidelberg. Luther was summoned to it as one of the most distinguished men of the order. His friends did all they could to dissuade him from undertaking this journey. In truth, the monks had endeavored to render Luther's name odious in all the places through which he would have to pass. To insults they added menaces. It would require but little to excite a popular tumult on his journey of which he might be the victim. "Or else," said his friends, "they will effect by fraud and stratagem, what they dare not do by violence." But Luther never suffered himself to be hindered in the

accomplishment of a duty by the fear of danger, however imminent. He therefore closed his ears to the timid observations of his friends: he pointed to Him in whom he trusted, and under whose guardianship he was ready to undertake so formidable a journey. Immediately after the festival of Easter, he set out calmly on foot, the 13th April 1518.

He took with him a guide named Urban, who carried his little baggage, and who was to accompany him as far as Wurtzburg. What thoughts must have crowded into the heart of this servant of the Lord during his journey!

At Weissenfels, the pastor, whom he did not know, immediately recognized him as the Wittenberg doctor, and gave him a hearty welcome.

At Erfurth, two other brothers of the Augustine order joined him. At Judenbach, they fell in with the elector’s privy councillor, Degenhard Pfeffinger, who entertained them at the inn where

they had found him. “I had the pleasure,” wrote Luther to Spalatin, “of making this rich lord a few groats poorer; you know how I like on every opportunity to levy contributions on the rich for the benefit of the poor, especially if the rich are my friends.” He reached Coburg, overwhelmed with fatigue. “All goes well by God’s grace,” wrote he, “except that I acknowledge having sinned in undertaking this journey on foot. But for that sin I have no need, I think, of the remission of indulgences; for my contrition is perfect, and the satisfaction plenary. I am overcome with fatigue, and all the conveyances are full. Is not this enough, and more than enough, of penance, contrition, and satisfaction?” The reformer of Germany, unable to find room in the public conveyances, and no one being willing to give up his place, was compelled, notwithstanding his weariness, to leave Coburg the next morning humbly on foot. He reached Wurtzburg the second Sunday after Easter, towards evening. Here he sent back his guide.

In this city resided the Bishop of Bibra, who had received his theses with so much approbation.

Luther was the bearer of a letter to him from the Elector of Saxony. The bishop, delighted at the opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with this bold champion of the truth, immediately invited him to the episcopal palace. He went and met him at the door, conversed affectionately with him, and offered to provide him with a guide to Heidelberg. But at Wurtzburg Luther had met his two friends, the vicargeneral Staupitz, and Lange, the prior of Erfurth, who had offered him a place in their carriage. He therefore thanked Bibra for his kindness; and on the morrow the three friends quitted Wurtzburg. They thus traveled together for three days, conversing with one another. On the 21st April they arrived at Heidelberg. Luther went and lodged at the Augustine convent.

The Elector of Saxony had given him a letter for the Count Palatine Wolfgang, duke of Bavaria. Luther repaired to his magnificent castle, the situation of which excites, even to this day, the admiration of strangers.

The monk from the plains of Saxony had a

heart to admire the situation of Heidelberg, where the two beautiful valleys of the Rhine and the Neckar unite. He delivered his letter to James Simler, steward of the household.

The latter on reading it observed: “In truth, you have here a valuable letter of credit.” The countpalatine received Luther with much kindness, and frequently invited him to his table, together with Lange and Staupitz. So friendly a reception was a source of great comfort to Luther. “We were very happy, and amused one another with agreeable and pleasant conversation,” said he; “eating and drinking, examining all the beauties of the palatine palace, admiring the ornaments, arms, cuirasses; in fine, everything remarkable contained in this celebrated and truly regal castle.” But Luther had another task to perform. He must work while it is yet day.

Having arrived at a university which exercised great influence over the west and south of Germany, he was there to strike a blow that should shake the churches of these countries. He began,

therefore, to write some theses which he purposed maintaining in a public disputation. Such discussions were not unusual; but Luther felt that this one, to be useful, should lay forcible hold upon men’s minds. His disposition, besides, naturally led him to present truth under a paradoxical form. The professors of the university would not permit the discussion to take place in their large theater; and Luther was obliged to take a hall in the Augustine convent. The 26th April was the day appointed for the disputation.

Heidelberg, at a later period, received the evangelical doctrine: those who were present at the conference in the convent might have foreseen that it would one day bear fruit.

Luther’s reputation had attracted a large audience; professors, students, courtiers, citizens, came in crowds. The following are some of the doctor’s Paradoxes; for so he designated his theses. Perhaps even in our days they would still bear this name; it would, however, be easy to translate them into obvious propositions: — 1. “The law of God is

a salutary doctrine of life. Nevertheless, it cannot aid man in attaining to righteousness; on the contrary, it impedes him.

3. “Man’s works, however fair and good they may be, are, however, to all appearance, nothing but deadly sins.

4. “God’s works, however unsightly and bad they may appear, have however an everlasting merit.

7. “The works of the righteous themselves would be mortal sins, unless, being filled with a holy reverence for the Lord, they feared that their works might in truth be mortal sins. 9. “To say that works done out of Christ are truly dead, but not deadly, is a dangerous forgetfulness of the fear of God.

13. “Since the fall of man, free-will is but an idle word; and if man does all he can, he still sins mortally.

16. “A man who imagines to arrive at grace by doing all that he is able to do, adds sin to sin, and is doubly guilty.

18. “It is certain that man must altogether despair of himself, in order to be made capable of receiving Christ’s grace.

21. “A theologian of the world calls evil good, and good evil; but a theologian of the cross teaches aright on the matter.

22. “The wisdom which endeavors to learn the invisible perfections of God in his works, puffs up, hardens, and blinds a man.

23. “The law calls forth God’s anger, kills, curses, accuses, judges, and condemns whatsoever is not in Christ. 24. “Yet this wisdom is not evil; and the law is not to be rejected; but the man who studies not the knowledge of God under the cross, turns to evil whatever is good.

25. “That man is not justified who performs

many works; but he who, without works, has much faith in Christ.

26. “The law says, Do this! and what it commands is never done.

Grace says, Believe in Him! and immediately all things are done. 28. “The love of God finds nothing in man, but creates in him what he loves. The love of man proceeds from his well-beloved.” Five doctors of divinity attacked these theses. They had read them with all astonishment that novelty excites. Such theology appeared very extravagant; and yet they discussed these points, according to Luther’s own testimony, with a courtesy that inspired him with much esteem for them but at the same time with earnestness and discernment. Luther, on his side, displayed wonderful mildness in his replies, unrivalled patience in listening to the objections of his adversaries, and all the quickness of St.

Paul in solving the difficulties opposed to him. His replies were short, but full of the Word of God,

and excited the admiration of his hearers. “He is in all respects like Erasmus,” said many; “but surpasses him in one thing: he openly professes what Erasmus is content merely to insinuate.” The disputation was drawing to an end. Luther’s adversaries had retired with honor from the field; the youngest of them, Doctor George Niger, alone continued the struggle with the powerful champion. Alarmed at the daring propositions of the monk, and not knowing what further arguments to have recourse to, he exclaimed, with an accent of fear: “If our peasants heard such things, they would stone you to death!” At these words the whole auditory burst into a loud laugh.

Never had an assembly listened with so much attention to a theological discussion. The first words of the reformer had aroused their minds.

Questions which shortly before would have been treated with indifference, were now full of interest. On the countenances of many of the hearers a looker-on might have seen reflected the new ideas which the bold assertions of the Saxon

doctor had awakened in their minds.

Three young men in particular were deeply moved. One of them, Martin Bucer by name, was a Dominican, twenty-seven years of age, who, notwithstanding the prejudices of his order, appeared unwilling to lose one of the doctor's words. He was born in a small town of Alsace, and had entered a convent at sixteen. He soon displayed such capacity that the most enlightened monks entertained the highest expectations of him: "He will one day be the ornament of our order," said they. His superiors had sent him to Heidelberg to study philosophy, theology, Greek, and Hebrew. At that period Erasmus published several of his works, which Bucer read with avidity.

Soon appeared the earliest writings of Luther. The Alsacian student hastened to compare the reformer's doctrines with the Holy Scriptures.

Some misgivings as to the truth of the Popish religion arose in his mind. It was thus that the light was diffused in those days. The elector-palatine

took particular notice of the young man. His strong and sonorous voice, his graceful manners and eloquent language, the freedom with which he attacked the vices of the day, made him a distinguished preacher. He was appointed chaplain to the court, and was fulfilling his functions when Luther’s journey to Heidelberg was announced. What joy for Bucer! No one repaired with greater eagerness to the hall of the Augustine convent.

He took with him paper, pens, and ink, intending to take down what the doctor said. But while his hand was swiftly tracing Luther’s words, the finger of God, in more indelible characters, wrote on his heart the great truths he heard. The first gleams of the doctrine of grace were diffused through his soul during this memorable hour. The Dominican was gained over to Christ.

Not far from Bucer stood John Brentz or Brentius, then nineteen years of age. He was the son of a magistrate in a city of Swabia, and at thirteen had been entered as student at Heidelberg. None manifested greater application.

He rose at midnight and began to study. This habit became so confirmed, that during his whole life he could not sleep after that hour. In later years he consecrated these tranquil moments to meditation on the Scriptures.

Brentz was one of the first to perceive the new light then dawning on Germany. He welcomed it with a heart abounding in love. He eagerly perused Luther's works. But what was his delight when he could hear the writer himself at Heidelberg! One of the doctor's propositions more especially startled the youthful scholar; it was this: "That man is not justified before God who performs many works; but he who, without works, has much faith in Jesus Christ." A pious woman of Heilbronn on the Neckar, wife of a senator of that town, named Snepf, had imitated Hannah's example, and consecrated her firstborn son to the Lord, with a fervent desire to see him devote himself to the study of theology. This young man, who was born in, made rapid progress in learning; but either from taste, or from ambition, or in compliance with his

father’s wishes, he applied to the study of jurisprudence. The pious mother was grieved to behold her child, her Ehrhard, pursuing another career than that to which she had consecrated him. She admonished him, entreated him, prayed him continually to remember the vow she had made on the day of his birth. Overcome at last by his mother’s perseverance, Ehrhard Snepf gave way. Erelong he felt such a taste for his new studies, that nothing in the world could have diverted him from them.

He was very intimate with Bucer and Brentz, and they were friends until death; “for,” says one of their biographers, “friendships based on the love of letters and of virtue never fail.” He was present with his two friends at the Heidelberg discussion. The Paradoxes and courage of the Wittenberg doctor gave him a new impulse. Rejecting the vain opinion of human merits, he embraced the doctrine of the free justification of the sinner.

The next day Bucer went to Luther. “I had a familiar and private conversation with him,” said

Bucer; “a most exquisite repast, not of dainties, but of truths that were set before me. To whatever objection I made, the doctor had a reply, and explained everything with the greatest clearness. Oh! would to God that I had time to write more!” Luther himself was touched with Bucer’s sentiments. “He is the only brother of his order,” wrote he to Spalatin, “who is sincere; he is a young man of great promise. He received me with simplicity, and conversed with me very earnestly. He is worthy of our confidence and love.” Brentz, Snepf, and many others, excited by the new truths that began to dawn upon their minds, also visited Luther; they talked and conferred with him; they begged for explanations on what they did not understand. The reformer replied, strengthening his arguments by the Word of God. Each sentence imparted fresh light to their minds. A new world was opening before them.

After Luther’s departure, these noble-minded men began to teach at Heidelberg. They felt it their duty to continue what the man of God had begun, and not allow the flame to expire which he had

lighted up. The scholars will speak, when the teachers are silent. Brentz, although still so young, explained the Gospel of St. Matthew, at first in his own room, and afterwards, when the chamber became too small, in the theater of philosophy. The theologians, envious at the crowd of hearers this young man drew around him, became irritated. Brentz then took orders, and transferred his lectures to the college of the Canons of the Holy Ghost.

Thus the fire already kindled up in Saxony now glowed in Heidelberg. The centers of light increased in number. This period has been denominated the seedtime of the Palatinate.

But it was not the Palatinate alone that reaped the fruits of the Heidelberg disputation. These courageous friends of the truth soon became shining lights in the Church. They all attained to exalted stations, and took part in many of the debates which the Reformation occasioned. Strasburg, and England a little later, were indebted to Bucer for a purer knowledge of the truth. Snepf

first declared it at Marburg, then at Stuttgard, Tubingen, and Jena. Brentz, after having taught at Heidelberg, continued his labors for a long period at Tubingen, and at Halle in Swabia. We shall meet with these three men again in the course of our history.

This disputation carried forward Luther himself. He increased daily in the knowledge of the truth. “I belong to those,” said he, “who improve by writing and by teaching others, and not to those who from nothing become on a sudden great and learned doctors.” He was overjoyed at seeing with what avidity the students of the schools received the dawning truth, and this consoled him when he found the old doctors so deep-rooted in their opinions. “I have the glorious hope,” said he, “that as Christ, when rejected by the Jews, turned to the Gentiles, we shall now also behold the new theology, that has been rejected by these graybeards with their empty and fantastical notions, welcomed by the rising generation.” The chapter being ended, Luther thought of returning to Wittenberg. The countpalatine gave him a letter for

the elector, dated 1st of May, in which he said “that Luther had shown so much skill in the disputation, as greatly to contribute to the renown of the university of Wittenberg.” He was not allowed to return on foot. The Nuremberg Augustines conducted him as far as Wurtzburg, from whence he proceeded to Erfurth with the friars from that city. As soon as he arrived he repaired to the house of his old teacher, Jodocus. The aged professor, much grieved and scandalized at the path his disciple had taken, was in the habit of placing before all Luther’s propositions a theta, the letter employed by the Greeks to denote condemnation. He had written to the young doctor in terms of reproach, and the latter desired to reply in person to these letters. Not having been admitted, he wrote to Jodocus: “All the university, with the exception of one licentiate, think as I do. More than this; the prince, the bishop, many other prelates, and all our most enlightened citizens, declare with one voice, that up to the present time they had neither known nor understood Jesus Christ and his Gospel. I am ready to receive your corrections; and although they should be severe, they will appear to me very

gentle. Open your heart, therefore, without fear; unburden your anger. I will not and I cannot be vexed with you. God and my conscience are my witnesses!" The old doctor was moved by these expressions of his former pupil. He was willing to try if there were no means of removing the damnatory theta.

They conversed on the matter, but the result was unfavorable. "I made him understand at least," said Luther, "that all their sentences were like that beast which is said to devour itself. But talking to a deaf man is labor in vain. These doctors obstinately cling to their petty distinctions, although they confess there is nothing to confirm them but the light of natural reason, as they call it — a dark chaos truly to us who preach no other light than Jesus Christ, the true and only light." Luther quitted Erfurth in the carriage belonging to the convent, which took him to Eisleben. From thence, the Augustines of the place, proud of a doctor who had shed such glory on their order and on their city, his native place, conveyed him to Wittenberg with their own horses and at their own expense. Every

one desired to bestow some mark of affection and esteem on this extraordinary man, whose fame was constantly increasing.

He arrived on the Saturday after Ascension day. The journey had done him good, and his friends thought him improved in appearance and stronger than before his departure. They were delighted at all he had to tell them. Luther rested some time after the fatigues of his journey and his dispute at Heidelberg; but this rest was only a preparation for severer toils.