

Martin Luther

A CHARACTER SKETCH



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1. His Character and Early Life

May 31, 1883

The Background

THROUGH all the ages of papal darkness and oppression, God's care was over his cause and his people. Amid opposition, conflict, and persecution, an all-wise providence was still at work in the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom.

Satan exercised his power to hinder the work of God, by destroying the workmen; but as soon as one laborer was imprisoned, or slain, another was raised up to fill the vacancy. Despite all the opposing powers of evil, angels of God were doing their work, heavenly messengers were searching out men to stand as light-bearers amid the darkness.

Notwithstanding the wide-spread apostasy, there were honest souls who had given heed to all the light which shone upon them. In their ignorance of God's word they had received the doctrines and traditions of men, but when the word was placed within their reach, they earnestly studied its pages, and in humility of heart they wept and prayed for a knowledge of God's will. With great joy they accepted the light of truth, and eagerly sought to impart light to their fellow-men.

Through the labors of Wycliffe, Huss, and kindred workers, thousands of noble witnesses had borne testimony to the truth; yet at the beginning of the sixteenth century the darkness of ignorance and superstition still rested like a pall upon the church and the world. Religion was made to consist in a round of ceremonies, many of them borrowed from heathenism, and all devised by Satan to lead the minds of the people away from God and the truth.

- The worship of images and relics was still maintained.
- The Scriptural ordinance of the Lord's Supper was sup-

planted by the idolatrous sacrifice of the mass.

- Popes and priests claimed the power to forgive sins, and to open and close the gates of Heaven to all mankind.
- Senseless superstitions and rigorous exactions had taken the place of the true worship of God.

The lives of popes and clergy were so corrupt, their proud pretensions so blasphemous, that good men trembled for the morality of the rising generation. With iniquity prevailing in the high places of the church, it seemed inevitable that the world would soon become as wicked as were the antediluvians or the inhabitants of Sodom.

The gospel was withheld from the people. It was regarded as a crime to own or read the Scriptures. Even the higher classes found it difficult to obtain a glimpse of the word of God. Satan well knew that if the people were permitted to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, his deceptions would speedily lose their power. Hence it was his studied effort to shut the Scriptures away from the people, and to prevent their minds from becoming enlightened by the truths of the gospel. But a day of religious light and freedom was about to dawn upon the world, and all the efforts of Satan and his hosts were powerless to prevent its coming.

Foremost among those who were called of God to break the chains of popery, and lead the church into the light of a purer faith, stood Martin Luther. Though, like others in his time, he did not see every point of faith as clearly as we see it today, yet he earnestly desired to know the will of God, and joyfully received the truth as it was made plain to his understanding.

Zealous, ardent, devoted, knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for religious faith but the Scriptures of truth, Luther was the man for his time; and through him God accomplished a great work for the emancipation of the church, and the enlightenment of the world.

Home Life

Like the first heralds of the gospel, Luther sprung from the ranks of poverty. His father earned by daily toil as a miner the means to educate his son. He intended him for a lawyer; but God designed to make him a builder upon the great temple rising so slowly through the centuries.

Luther's father was a man of strong and active mind, and great force of character, honest, resolute and straightforward. His life was characterized by stern integrity; he was true to his convictions of duty, let the consequences be what they might. His sterling good sense led him to regard the monastic system with distrust. He was highly displeased when Luther, without his consent, entered a monastery; and it was two years before the father was reconciled to his son, and even then his opinions remained the same.

Luther's parents were strictly conscientious, earnest, and zealous in the performance of their parental duties, seeking to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Yet with their firmness and strength of character they sometimes erred by exercising too great severity. Their government was one of law and authority. The mother especially manifested too little love in the discipline of her sensitive son. While she gave him faithful instruction in Christian duty, as she understood it, the austerity and even harshness of her training led him to cherish erroneous views of a religious life. It was the influence of these early impressions that led him in later years to choose the life of a monk supposing it to be a life of self-denial, humiliation, and purity, and therefore pleasing to God.

The life of Luther from his earliest years was one of privation, hardship, and severe discipline. The effect of this training was seen in his religious character throughout his life. Luther himself, though conscious that in some respects his parents had erred, found in their discipline much more to approve

than to condemn.

The prevailing sin of parents at the present day lies in the indulgence of their children. The youth are weak and inefficient, with little physical stamina or moral power, because of the neglect of parents to train them in childhood to habits of obedience and industry. The foundation of character is laid at home: no after influence from any earthly source can wholly counteract the effect of parental discipline. If firmness and decision were mingled with love and tenderness in the training of the young, we would see youth coming up, like Luther, qualified for lives of usefulness and honor.

School and University

At an early age Luther was sent to school, where he was treated with a harshness and even violence that he had not been subject to at home. So great was the poverty of his parents that he was obliged to obtain his food by singing from door to door, and he often suffered from hunger.

The gloomy, superstitious ideas of religion then prevailing filled him with fear. He would lie down at night with a sorrowful heart, looking forward with trembling to the dark future, and in constant terror at the thought of God as a stern, unrelenting judge, a cruel tyrant, rather than a kind heavenly Father.

There are few youth at the present day who would not have become disheartened under so many and so great discouragements; but Luther perseveringly pressed forward toward the high standard of moral and intellectual excellence which he had determined to attain.

He thirsted for knowledge, and the earnest and practical character of his mind led him to desire the solid and useful rather than the showy and superficial. At the age of eighteen he entered the University of Erfurt. His situation was now more favorable and his prospects brighter than in his earlier

years. His parents having by thrift and industry acquired a competence, were able to render him all needed assistance. And the influence of judicious friends had somewhat lessened the gloomy effects of his former training.

He now diligently applied himself to the study of the best authors, enriching his understanding with their most weighty thoughts, and making the wisdom of the wise his own. A retentive memory, a vivid imagination, strong reasoning powers, and energetic application to study, soon won for him the foremost rank among his associates.

Proverbs 9

¹⁰ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

That fear dwelt in the heart of Luther, enabling him to maintain his steadfastness of purpose, and leading him to deep humility before God. He had an abiding sense of his dependence upon divine aid, and he did not fail to begin each day with prayer, while his heart was continually breathing a petition for guidance and support. He often said,

“To pray well is the better half of study.”

While one day examining the books in the library of the university, Luther discovered a Latin Bible. He had before heard fragments of the Gospels and epistles at public worship, and he thought that they were the whole of God’s word. Now for the first time he is looking upon the whole Bible. With mingled awe and wonder he turns the sacred pages; with quickening pulse and throbbing heart he reads for himself the words of life, pausing now and then to exclaim,

“Oh, if God would give me such a book for my own!”

Angels of Heaven were by his side, and rays of light from the throne of God flashed upon the sacred pages, revealing the treasures of truth to his understanding. He had ever feared to offend God, but now the deep conviction of his con-

dition as a sinner takes hold upon him, as never before.

Monastic Life

An earnest desire to be free from sin and to find peace with God, led him at last, after many severe conflicts, to enter a cloister, and devote himself to a monastic life. Here he was subjected to the meanest service, being required to act as door-keeper and sweeper, and to beg from house to house.

He was at an age when respect and appreciation are most eagerly craved, and these menial offices were deeply mortifying to his natural feelings; but he patiently endured it all, believing that it was a necessary humiliation because of his sins. This discipline was fitting him to become a mighty workman upon God's building.

Every moment that could be spared from his daily duties, he diligently employed in study, robbing himself of sleep, and grudging even the moments spent in eating his coarse, humble food. Above everything else he delighted in the study of God's word. And he often repaired to the Bible which he had found chained to the convent wall.

As his convictions of sin deepened with the study of the Scriptures, he sought by his own works to obtain pardon and peace. He led a most rigorous life, endeavoring to crucify the flesh by fastings, watchings, and scourgings. He shrank from no sacrifice to become holy and gain Heaven.

As the result of the painful discipline which he imposed upon himself, he lost all strength, and suffered from fainting spasms, from the effects of which he never fully recovered. But with all his efforts, his burdened soul found no relief. He was at last driven to the verge of despair.

When it appeared to Luther that all was lost, God raised up a friend and helper for him. The pious Staupitz opened the word of God to Luther's mind, and bade him look away from himself, cease the contemplation of infinite punishment for

the violation of God's law, and look to Jesus, his sin-pardoning Saviour.

“Instead of torturing yourself for your faults, cast yourself into the arms of your Redeemer. Trust in Him, in the righteousness of His life, in the sacrifice of His death. Listen to the Son of God. He became man to assure you of the divine favor. Love Him who has first loved you.”

Thus spoke this messenger of mercy. His words made a deep impression upon Luther's mind. After many a struggle with long-cherished errors, he was enabled to grasp the truth, and peace came to his troubled soul.

Oh that there were seen in this day, so deep abhorrence of self, so great humiliation of soul before God, and so earnest a faith when light is given, as were manifested by Martin Luther! True conviction of sin is now rarely experienced; superficial conversions abound, and Christian experience is dwarfed and spiritless. And why is this? Because of the false and fatal education given by parents to their children, and by ministers to their people.

The young are indulged in their love of pleasure, and left unrestrained to pursue a course of sin; thus they lose sight of filial obligation, and having learned to trample upon the authority of their parents, they are prepared to trample upon the authority of God.

And the people, in like manner, are allowed, unwarned to unite in the sinful pursuits and pleasures of the world, until they lose sight of their obligations to God, and of his claims upon them. They are assured of divine mercy, but permitted to forget divine justice. They expect salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, without rendering obedience to the law of God. Hence they have no true conviction of sin, and without this there can be no true conversion.

Conversion

Luther searched the Scriptures with untiring interest and zeal, and at last found therein the way of life clearly revealed. He learned that it is not to the pope, but to Christ, that men are to look for pardon and justification.

Acts 4

¹² There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Christ is the only propitiation for sin; He is the complete and all-sufficient sacrifice, for the sins of the whole world, securing the pardon of all who will believe on Him as God has appointed. Jesus himself declares,

John 10

⁹ I am the door. By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.

Luther sees that Christ Jesus came into the world, not to save people in their sins, but to save them from their sins; that the one only way whereby the sinner can be saved is by repentance toward God, because of the transgression of His law, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, both for the pardon of sin and for grace to lead a life of obedience.

Thus he was led to perceive the fallacy of the papal doctrine, that salvation is obtained by punishments and penances, and that men must through hell reach Heaven. He learned from the precious Bible that:

- He who is not cleansed from sin by Christ's atoning blood, can never be cleansed by the fires of hell;
- The doctrine of purgatory is but a cunning device of the father of lies, and
- The present life is the only period for probation granted to man in which to prepare for the society of the pure and holy.

2. Luther at Wittenberg

June 7, 1883

AFTER two years in the cloister, Luther was consecrated to the priest's office, and a year later he was called to a professorship in the University of Wittenberg. Here he applied himself diligently to the study of the ancient languages, especially Greek and Hebrew, that he might study the word of God in the original tongues.

Professorship

He began to lecture upon the Bible; and the book of Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles, were opened to the understanding of crowds of eager listeners. From all parts of Germany and even from foreign countries, students flocked to the university.

Staupitz, the friend and superior of Luther, urged him to ascend the pulpit, and preach the word of God. But Luther hesitated, feeling himself unworthy to speak to the people in Christ's stead. It was only after a long struggle, that he yielded to the solicitations of his friends.

The pulpit in which he first preached was an old rostrum made of rough planks, in a dilapidated chapel propped on all sides to keep it from falling. Here the Reformation preaching was entered upon. When Jesus came to earth, he was cradled in a manger. And the gospel was not first proclaimed in imposing churches, but from the swaying seat of a fisherman's boat, and upon the mountain side, in the plain, and by the highway.

Already Luther was mighty in the Scriptures; and the grace of God rested upon him. His surpassing eloquence delighted and captivated his auditors; the clearness and power with which he presented the truth convinced their understanding, and his deep fervor touched their hearts. The little chapel

could not contain the crowds that sought admission, and he was called to preach in the parish church. So wide-spread had his reputation now become that Frederic the Wise, the Elector of Saxony, came to Wittenberg to hear him.

A Visit to Rome

Luther was still a true son of the papal church, and had no thought that he would ever be anything else. In the providence of God he decides to visit Rome. He pursues his journey on foot, lodging at the monasteries on the way. He passes the Alps, and descends into the plain of Italy, and is filled with wonder as he goes. Visiting a convent in Lombardy, he sees the splendor of the apartments, the richness of the dresses, the luxury of the table, the extravagance everywhere. With painful misgivings he contrasts this scene with the self-denial and hardship of his own life. His mind is becoming perplexed.

At last he beholds in the distance the seven-hilled city. With deep emotion he prostrates himself upon the earth, exclaiming,

“Holy Rome, I salute you!”

He enters the city, visits the churches, listens to the marvelous tales repeated by priests and monks, and goes through all the forms and ceremonies required. Everywhere he looks upon scenes that fill him with astonishment and horror. He sees that the same iniquity exists among the higher clergy as among the lower. He hears the indecent jokes from prelates, and is filled with horror at their awful profanity, even during mass. As he mingles with the monks and citizens, he meets dissipation, debauchery. Turn where he will, in the place of sanctity he finds profanation.

“It is incredible,” he says, “what sins and atrocities are committed in Rome. If there be a hell, Rome is built above it. It is an abyss whence all sins proceed.”

The heart-sickening depravity and blind superstition which he saw on every side led him to press more closely to Christ. On his knees one day Luther was ascending the stairway to St. Peter's, when a voice like thunder seemed to say to him,

“The just shall live by faith!”

He sprang upon his feet in shame and horror, and fled from the scene of his folly. That text never lost its power upon his soul. From that time he saw more clearly than ever before the fallacy of trusting to human works for salvation, and the necessity of constant faith in the merits of Christ.

The truth of God had enlightened his understanding. His eyes had been opened, and were never again to be closed to the Satanic delusions of the papacy. When he turned his face from Rome, he had turned away also in heart, and from that time the separation grew wider, until he severed all connection with the Romish church.

Preaching the Gospel

At the age of twenty-nine Luther received at the University of Wittenberg, the degree of doctor of divinity. Now he was at liberty to devote himself, as never before, to the Scriptures that he loved. He had taken a solemn vow to study carefully and to preach with fidelity the word of God, not the sayings and doctrines of the popes, all the days of his life. He was no longer the mere monk or professor, but the authorized herald of the Bible. He had been called as a shepherd to feed the flock of God, that were hungering and thirsting for the truth.

Luther's feet were now planted upon the true foundation,

Ephesians 2

²⁰ ...the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

He firmly declared that Christians should receive no other doctrines than those which rest on the authority of the sacred

Scriptures. At the sound of these words Rome trembled. They struck at the very foundation of papal supremacy. They contained the vital principle of the Reformation.

In the providence of God, Luther was now to stand as the reformer of the church. He sought to turn the minds of his students away from the sophistries of philosophers and theologians, to the eternal truths set forth by prophets and apostles. He fearlessly attacked the speculative infidelity of the school-men, and opposed the philosophy and theology which had so long held a controlling influence upon the minds of the people. He saw, as we see today, the danger of exalting human theories and speculations above the revealed truths of God's word. He denounced such studies as not only worthless but pernicious, declaring, that,

“...the writings of the prophets and the apostles are more certain and sublime than all the sophisms and theology of the schools.”

He adds,

“Within my heart reigns alone, and must alone reign, faith in my Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the thoughts that occupy me day and night.”

With deep earnestness he declared his faith in Christ as the basis of his hope,—the beginning and the end, the foundation and crowning glory of the plan of salvation. He was listened to with wonder as he spoke of that faith to the students in the university and to the crowded congregations in the church. He was steadily and surely drawing the minds of pupils and hearers away from trust in men, however high their claims, away from self-righteousness, to Christ.

The burden of his preaching was,

“Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to despair

of your own work and cry unto Him, Lord Jesus you are my righteousness and I am your sin. You have taken on yourself what was mine, and given to me what was yours. What you were not, you became, that I might become what I was not.”

Thus fearlessly and firmly Luther presented those great truths which the apostles of Christ had proclaimed with such power. The voice of Paul, sounding down through the centuries, spoke through Luther, exposing superstitions, refuting error, and uprooting heresy.

The Bible vs. Tradition

Priests and prelates, the professed expositors of divine truth, were perverting the Scriptures by their misstatements and prevarications; wresting the word of God to make it sustain their errors and traditions. They sedulously withheld the Bible from the people, well knowing that should they search it for themselves, their faith would be fixed upon Christ, and not upon pope and priests. The light shining forth from God’s word would lead the mind directly away from the Romish faith.

Such had been the experience of Luther. As he saw the terrible apostasy and corruption of the church, he determined to be a faithful steward of God’s word, to dispense to others its holy teachings in their purity and simplicity. He knew that unless the people could be led to receive the word of God as their rule of life, there could be no hope of reform.

He therefore presented the Scriptures to his hearers as the oracles of God, a divine communication as verily addressed to them as though they heard the voice of God speaking to them from Heaven. With great earnestness he urged upon them the importance of gaining for themselves a knowledge of the sacred word.

The Bible was written by holy men under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, and the aid of that same Spirit was indis-

pensable to an understanding of its teachings. It should be studied in humility and in faith, with unwavering confidence in its supreme authority, and with earnest prayer for divine aid. Only in pursuing such a course could the searcher hope to discern spiritual things.

Were the word of God thus studied, it would exert a molding influence upon both the mental and the moral powers, quickening and ennobling the intellect, purifying the soul, thus erecting mighty barrier against the iniquity that was flooding the world.

Luther came not with human ceremonies, traditions, and fables, to impose on the credulity of the people, but with the truth and the power of God to enlighten their understanding, and free their souls from the bondage of superstition and the tyranny of sin.

He declared to his hearers that they must individually believe in Christ, if they would receive salvation through Him; no priest or pope could take the place of the divine Mediator. Those who came to Jesus as repentant, believing sinners, would find pardon and peace, and would have His righteousness imputed to them.

Sanctification is the fruit of faith, whose renewing power transforms the soul into the image of Christ. It was by faith in a crucified Redeemer that souls were saved in the days of the apostles; it was only by the same faith that souls could be saved in the days of Luther.

He taught the people that they must exercise repentance toward God, whose holy law they had transgressed, and faith in Christ, whose blood could atone for their sins. He showed them that all who were truly penitent would pray earnestly for divine aid to battle against their evil propensities, and he also urged upon them the fact that the sincerity of their prayers would be evinced by the energy of their endeavors to render obedience to the law of God.

Precious indeed was the message which Luther bore to the eager crowds that hung upon his words. Never before had such teachings fallen upon their ears. The glad tidings of a Saviour's love, the assurance of pardon and peace through His atoning blood, melted their hearts, and inspired within them an immortal hope. A light was kindled at Wittenberg whose rays should extend to the uttermost parts of the earth, and which was to increase in brightness to the close of time.

3. The First Blow of the Reformation.

June 14, 1883

THE year 1517 marked the beginning of a new era for the church and the world. It was a period of great excitement in Germany.

Tetzel and Indulgences

To replenish her treasuries, the Roman Church had opened a vast market on earth, and made merchandise of the grace of God. Indulgences was the name given to this merchandise. As the dealer entered a town, one went before him, crying,

“The grace of God and of the Holy Father is at your gates.”

And the people welcomed the blasphemous pretender as if he were God himself come down from Heaven to them.

Tetzel, the leader in this infamous traffic, had been convicted of the basest offenses against society and against the law of God; but having escaped the punishment due to his crimes, he was now employed to further the mercenary and unscrupulous projects of the Romish Church. With shameless effrontery he framed the most glaring falsehoods, and related all manner of marvelous tales to deceive an ignorant, credulous, and superstitious people.

Had they possessed the word of God, the unerring detector of sin and Satanic delusions, they could not have been thus deceived. It was to keep them under the control of the papacy, that they might swell the power and wealth of her ambitious leaders, that the Bible had been withheld from them.

Tetzel sets up his traffic in the church, and ascending the pulpit, he with great vehemence extols indulgences as the most precious gifts of God.

“Draw near,” he cries, “and I will give you letters, duly sealed, by which the sins you hereafter desire to commit shall

be all forgiven you.”

“Even repentance is not indispensable.”

“But more than all this, indulgences save not only the living but the dead.”

“The very moment that the money clinks against the bottom of this chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies to Heaven.”

With such Heaven-daring blasphemy spoke this agent of Satan. When Simon Magus offered to purchase of the apostles the power to work miracles, Peter answered him,

Acts 8

²⁰ Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

But Tetzel’s offer was grasped by eager thousands. Gold and silver flowed into his treasury. A salvation that could be bought with money was more easily obtained than that which required repentance, faith and diligent effort to resist and overcome sin. They could sin as they pleased, and money would purchase their pardon.

The doctrine of indulgences had long been opposed by men of learning and piety in the Romish Church, and there were many who had no faith in pretensions so contrary to both reason and revelation. Yet no bishop dared to lift his voice against the fraud and corruption of this iniquitous traffic. The minds of men were becoming disturbed and uneasy, and they eagerly inquired if God would not work through some instrumentality for the purification of His church.

Luther’s Opposition

The traffic in indulgences, subversive as it was of the very foundation principles of the gospel, could not fail to arouse determined opposition on the part of Luther. Though still a papist of the straightest sort, he was filled with horror at the blasphemous assumptions of Tetzel and his associates.

Many of his own congregation had purchased certificates of pardon, and they soon began to come to Luther confessing their various sins, and expecting absolution, not because they were penitent and wished to reform, but on the ground of the indulgence. Luther refused them absolution, and warned them that unless they should repent, and reform their lives, they must perish in their sins.

In great perplexity, they sought out Tetzl, and informed him that Luther, an Augustine monk, had treated his letters with contempt. The friar was filled with rage. He uttered the most terrible curses, caused fires to be lighted in the public square, and declared that he had orders from the pope to burn the heretics who should dare to oppose his most holy indulgences.

Luther now enters boldly upon his work as a champion of the truth, fighting not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. His voice is heard from the pulpit, in earnest, solemn warning. He sets before the people the offensive character of sin, and teaches them that it is impossible for man by his own works to lessen its guilt or evade its punishment. Nothing but repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save the sinner. The grace of Christ cannot be purchased. It is a free gift.

He counsels the people not to buy the indulgences, but to look in faith to their crucified Redeemer. He relates his own painful experience in vainly seeking by humiliation and penance to secure salvation, and assures his hearers that it was by looking away from himself and believing in Christ that he found peace and joy unspeakable. He urges them to obtain, if possible, a copy of the Bible, and to study it diligently. It is those who do not learn and obey its sacred truths that are deceived by Satan, and left to perish in their iniquity.

A bold blow had been struck for the Reformation. But Satan was rallying his forces to control the minds of the people and

maintain the traffic in the grace of God. He aroused such hatred against Luther that many were ready to silence his opposition, even by taking his life. Thus the great controversy between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness went steadily forward.

The Elector's Dream

About this time the elector Frederic had a dream which made a deep impression upon his mind, and which seemed in a remarkable manner to foreshadow the work of the Reformation.

The feast of All-Saints was at hand, and the elector, having retired to rest, lay musing how he should keep the festival, and was praying for the poor souls in purgatory, and beseeching Divine guidance for himself, his counselors, and his people. Thus engaged, he fell asleep, and dreamed that a monk, a true son of the apostle Paul, was sent to him; and that all the saints accompanied him, for the purpose of testifying that he was divinely commissioned.

They asked of the elector, that the monk might be allowed to write something on the church door at Wittenberg. The monk began to write, and the characters were so large and brilliant that they could be read at a great distance; and the pen he used was so long that its extremity reached even to Rome, and wounded the ears of a lion which was crouching there, and shook the triple crown on the pope's head.

All the cardinals and princes ran to support it; and, as the dreamer himself joined in the effort to support the pope's crown, he awoke in great alarm, and angry with the monk who had used his pen so awkwardly.

Presently he fell asleep again, and his strange dream continued; the disturbed lion began to roar, and Rome and all the surrounding States ran to make inquiry; and the pope demanded that the monk be restrained, and demanded this especially of the elector, as the monk dwelt in his dominions.

Once more the elector awoke from his dream, besought

God to preserve the holy father, the pope, and slept again. And still his strange dream continued, and he saw all the princes of the empire crowding to Rome, and all striving to break the mysterious pen. Yet the more they endeavored to break it, the stiffer it became.

When they asked the monk where he found it, and why it was so strong, he replied that he secured it from one of his old schoolmasters; that it belonged to a Bohemian goose¹ a hundred years old; and that it was strong because no man could take the pith out of it. Suddenly the dreamer heard an outcry, and lo, a great number of pens had issued from the long pen of the monk!

The Ninety-Five Theses

The festival of All-Saints was an important day for Wittenberg. The costly relics of the church were then displayed before the people, and a full remission of sin was granted to all who visited the church and made confession. Accordingly on this day the people in great numbers flocked to Wittenberg.

On the 31st of October, the day preceding the festival, a monk went boldly to the church, to which a crowd of worshippers was already repairing, and affixed to the door ninety-five propositions against the doctrine of indulgences. That monk was Martin Luther. He went alone; not one of his most intimate friends knew of his design. As he fastened his theses upon the door of the church, he proclaimed himself ready to defend them the next day at the university itself against all opposers.

¹ John Huss, whose surname in the Bohemian language signifies goose. Huss proclaimed the truth a century before the time of Luther, and when assailed by persecution, he declared: "The wicked have begun by preparing a treacherous snare for the goose. But if even the goose, which is only a domestic bird, a peaceful animal, and whose flight is not very high in the air, has nevertheless broken through their toils, other birds, soaring more boldly toward the sky, will break through them with still greater force. Instead of a feeble goose, the truth will send forth eagles and keen-eyed vultures."

These propositions attracted universal attention. They were read and re-read and repeated in every direction. Great excitement was created in the university and in the whole city. By these theses the doctrine of indulgences was fearlessly opposed.

It was shown that the power to grant the pardon of sin, and to remit its penalty, had never been committed to the pope, or to any other man. The whole scheme was a farce, an artifice to extort money by playing upon the superstitions of the people, a device of Satan to destroy the souls of all who should trust to its lying pretensions.

It was also clearly shown that the gospel of Christ was the most valuable treasure of the church, and that the grace of God, therein revealed, was freely bestowed upon all who should seek it by repentance and faith.

God was directing the labors of this fearless builder, and the work he wrought was firm and sure. He had faithfully presented the doctrine of grace, which would destroy the assumptions of the pope as a mediator, and lead the people to Christ alone as the sinner's sacrifice and intercessor.

Thus was the elector's dream already beginning to be fulfilled. The pen which wrote upon the church door extended to Rome, disturbing the lion in his lair, and jostling the pope's diadem.

The sin-loving and superstitious multitudes were terrified as the sophistries that had soothed their fears were rudely swept away. Crafty ecclesiastics, interrupted in their hellish work of sanctioning crime, and seeing their gains endangered, were enraged, and rallied to uphold the pope.

Luther's theses challenged discussion; but not one dared to accept the challenge. By the grace of God, the blow struck by the monk of Wittenberg shook the very foundation of the papacy, stunned and terrified its supporters, and awakened

thousands from the slumber of error and superstition. The questions which he proposed in his theses had in a few days spread throughout Germany, and in a few weeks they had sounded throughout Christendom.

Many devoted Romanists, who had seen and lamented the terrible iniquity prevailing in the church, but had not known how to arrest its progress, read the propositions with great joy, recognizing in them the voice of God. They felt that the Lord had graciously set His hand to arrest the rapidly swelling tide of corruption that was issuing from the see of Rome. Princes and magistrates secretly rejoiced that a check was to be put upon the arrogant power from which there was no appeal.

The Backlash

Yet there were some who doubted and feared. The prior of Luther's order, frightened by Tetzels, came to the Reformer in great alarm, saying,

“Pray do not bring disgrace upon your order.”

Luther had great respect for this man, and was deeply affected by his words, but rallying he replied,

“Dear father, if the thing is not of God, it will come to naught. If it is, let it go forward.”

But the Reformer had more bitter accusers to meet. Some charged him with acting hastily and from impulse. Others accused him of presumption, declaring that he was not directed of God, but was acting from pride and forwardness.

“Who does not know,” he responds, “that we can seldom advance a new idea without an appearance of pride, and without being accused of seeking quarrels? Why were Christ and all the martyrs put to death? Because they appeared proud despisers of the wisdom of the times in which they lived, and because they brought forward new truths without

having first consulted the oracles of the old opinions.”

Again he declares:

“What I am doing will not be effected by the prudence of man, but by the counsel of God. If the work is of God, who shall stop it? If it is not, who can forward it? Not my will, not theirs, not ours; but your will, yours, holy Father who is in Heaven.”

Luther had been urged on by the Spirit of God to begin his work; but he was not to carry it forward without severe conflicts. The reproaches of his enemies, their misrepresentation of his purposes, and their unjust and malicious reflections upon his character and motives, came in upon him like an overwhelming flood; and they were not without effect.

He had felt confident that the leaders in the church, and the philosophers of the nation, would gladly unite with him in efforts for reform. Words of encouragement from those in high position had inspired him with joy and hope. Already in anticipation he saw a brighter day dawning for the church.

But encouragement had turned to reproach and condemnation. Many of the dignitaries both of the church and of the State were convicted of the truthfulness of Luther's theses; but they soon saw that the acceptance of these truths would involve great changes. To enlighten and reform the people would be virtually to undermine the papal authority, to stop millions of streams now flowing into her treasury, and thus greatly curtail the extravagance and luxury of the Romish leaders.

Furthermore, to teach the people to think and act as responsible beings, looking to Christ alone for salvation, would overthrow the pontiff's throne, and eventually destroy their own authority. For this reason they refused the knowledge tendered them of God, and arrayed themselves against Christ and the truth by their opposition to the man whom He had sent to

enlighten them.

4. Luther's Source of Strength

June 21, 1883

LUTHER trembled as he looked upon himself, one man opposed to the mightiest powers of earth. He sometimes doubted whether he had indeed been led of God to array against himself the whole authority of the church.

“Who was I,” he writes, “to oppose the pope’s majesty, before which the kings of the earth and the whole world tremble? No one can know what I suffered in those first two years, and in what dejection and despair I was often plunged.”

Growing Light of the Word

But he was not left to become utterly disheartened. When human support failed him, he looked to God alone, and learned that he could lean in perfect safety upon that all-powerful arm. Steadfastly the Reformer labored to clear away the rubbish beneath which true faith had been buried for ages.

The dust of ancient errors sometimes obscured his own vision, so that he could not see the truth with perfect clearness; but as he pressed resolutely on, rays of light flashed forth from God’s word, banishing the darkness of superstition, and filling his soul with the brightness of a purer and holier faith.

He rose above despondency; his courage and hope revived. Erelong friends began to rally around him. But he did not forget the Source of his strength. To Spalatin, the elector’s chaplain, and a true friend of the Reformation, Luther wrote:

“We cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture either by study or strength of intellect. Therefore your first duty must be to begin with prayer. Entreat the Lord to deign to grant you, in His rich mercy, rightly to understand His word. There is no other interpreter of the word but the Author of that word Himself. Even as He has said, “They shall be all

taught of God.' Hope nothing from your study and strength of intellect; but simply put your trust in God, and in the guidance of His Spirit. Believe one who has made trial of this matter."

Here we see how Luther came in possession of the truth that woke up the Reformation. It is men of humility and prayer that become mighty men in the Scriptures. They search the word of truth as for hidden treasures. And as they read and pray, and pray and read, they become living channels of light and truth.

Here is a lesson of vital importance to those who feel that God has called them to present to others the solemn truths for this time. These truths will stir the enmity of Satan and of men who love the fables that he has devised. In the conflict with the powers of hell, there is need of something more than intellect and human wisdom.

Conflict with Tetzel

Tetzel, in his rage against Luther, met his theses with antitheses, in which he attempted to defend the doctrine of indulgences, and sustain the power of the pope. Luther advanced with joy to the contest, hoping that the truth, to him so precious, might be revealed to many minds.

"Do not wonder," he wrote to a friend, "that they revile me so unsparingly. I hear their revilings with joy. If they did not curse me, I could not be so firmly assured that the cause I have undertaken is the cause of God."

Yet Luther loved peace. He possessed a tender, sympathetic heart, and while urged by the Spirit of God to defend the truth, he shrunk from causing strife in the church or in the State.

"I tremble, I shudder," said he, "to think that I may be an occasion of discord to such mighty princes."

As Luther, with noble firmness, stood in defense of the gospel, his doctrines spread, and priests and people rallied about him as their standard-bearer. Hard as it was for them to change their opinions, the light of truth was dispelling the darkness of error. Some who secretly rejoiced in the work, took at first no active part in it. But the determined opposition against Luther and the truths he preached, brought these persons to the front, and changed their doubts to the certainty of faith. In the hearts of those who would obey His word, the Lord placed a firmness and decision that nothing could move.

Opposition of Prierias

Satan was perseveringly at work to tear down all that God was moving his servants to build up. One of the adversary's ablest instruments was Prierias, the master of the pontifical palace, who also filled the office of censor.

The leading men in the Catholic Church were divided as to the true authority for interpreting the Scriptures. A part believed that the authority rested in general councils, as representatives of the church; while another part steadfastly maintained that to the pope alone was granted the power of interpretation, and that no one had a right to explain the Scriptures contrary to his decree. Prierias was among the most zealous supporters of the pope.

“Whosoever does not accept and rely upon the teachings of the Roman Church and the Roman pontiff as the infallible rule of faith, and as that from which Holy Scripture itself derives its obligation and authority, is a heretic.”

Thus spoke the haughty Prierias, and then he proceeded to attack Luther with the spirit of a buffoon and inquisitor, rather than with the spirit of a calm and dignified defender of the church of Christ.

Luther met this opponent with the same fearless firmness which he displayed toward other adversaries. He had given

himself to the service of truth, and the Spirit of truth gave him wisdom, strength, and understanding. Prierias had begun his work by laying down certain principles.

“Following your example,” said Luther, “I also will lay down certain principles. The first is the passage of St. Paul: ‘If any one preach unto you another gospel than that is preached, though he be an angel from Heaven, let him be accursed.’ The second is from St. Augustine: ‘I have learned to render to the inspired Scriptures alone the homage of a firm belief that they have never erred: as to others, I do not believe in the things they teach, simply because it is they who teach them.’”

Luther adds:

“If you rightly understand these principles, you will also understand that your whole dialogue is overturned.”

To the insinuations and threats of Prierias he responds in these brave words:

“Do you thirst for blood? I protest that these menaces of yours give me not the slightest alarm. For what if I were to lose my life? Christ still lives; Christ my Lord, and the Lord of all, blessed forever.”

The Bible vs. Tradition

It should be remembered that Luther was attacking with determined blows the institutions of ages. This could not be done without exciting hatred and opposition. No arguments against him could be drawn from the word of God; for his feet were firmly planted upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

When his enemies appealed to custom and tradition, or to the assertions and authority of the Roman pontiff, Luther met them with the Bible and the Bible alone. Here were arguments which they could not answer. Therefore the slaves of formalism and superstition clamored for his blood, as the Jews had

clamored for the blood of Christ.

“He is a heretic,” cried these Roman zealots; “it is a sin to allow him to live an hour longer! Away with him at once to the scaffold!”

But Luther did not fall a prey to their fury. God had a work for him to do, and angels of Heaven were sent to protect him. Many, however, who had received from Luther the precious light, were made the objects of Satan’s wrath, and for the truth’s sake fearlessly suffered torture and death.

Opposition is the portion of all whom God employs to make an advance move in His work by presenting truth specially applicable to their time. The controversy between Christ and Satan is to increase in intensity to the close of this earth’s history.

Those who dare to present truths that are not in harmony with the popular churches and with the world, will thereby become the objects of slander, reproach, and falsehood. Many who at first but partially unite with scoffers, finally lend themselves fully to Satan, to oppose and overthrow what God would build up.

There is today the same disposition to substitute the theories and traditions of men for the word of God as in the days of Christ, of Paul or of Luther. Ministers advance doctrines which have no foundation in the Scriptures of truth, and in place of Bible proof, they present their own assertions as authority. The people accept the minister’s interpretation of the word, without earnest prayer that they may know what is truth. There is no safety in depending upon human wisdom and judgment. Said our Savior,

John 5

³⁹ Search the Scriptures: for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.

All who possess reasoning powers can know for themselves

what is truth. Those who pray and search for light, will receive light. The reason why so many are groping their way in the fog of error is, that they take the assertions of men, instead of searching the word of God for themselves.

Isaiah 8

²⁰ To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Worldlings and superficial Christians will accept nothing which interferes with their selfish love of pleasure; hence they are willingly ignorant of the truth which would save their souls. Satan works with all his deceptive art to present pleasing fables before the people, and he takes thousands in his snare.

Opposition to be Expected

The advocates of truth in our day should not expect their message to be received with greater favor than was that of the early Reformers. Nay, rather, they should expect greater difficulties and more determined opposition than were experienced by Luther and his fellow-laborers.

Satan's hatred for the truth is the same in all ages; but as he sees that his time is short, he makes one last mighty effort, by signs and lying wonders, to deceive and destroy, not merely the unbelieving world, but the great mass of professed Christians who have not received the love of the truth that they might be saved.

In the *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, Paul declares that the second coming of Christ will be preceded by...

2 Thessalonians 2

⁹ ...the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

¹⁰ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

¹¹ And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

¹² That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

There was a present truth—a truth at that time of special importance—in the days of Christ, of Paul, of Luther; there is a present truth for the church today. But truth is no more desired by the men of today than it was by the Jews in the time of Christ, or by papists in the days of Luther. Therefore Satan, working now with tenfold greater power, succeeds as of old in blinding the eyes of men and darkening their understanding.

As those who now labor in the cause of reform, experience conflicts and trials, as they find their path hedged in by difficulties, and obstructed by the rubbish of error, let them remember that they are traveling the same road that prophets, apostles, and reformers of every age have traveled before them.

Christ himself trod a more thorny path than any of His followers. They may comfort themselves with the thought that they are in good company. One mightier than Satan is their leader, and He will give them strength to be steadfast in the faith, and will bring them off victorious.

5. Luther Summoned to Augsburg

June 28, 1883

Jesus Only

LUTHER'S pen was tracing words of truth that shook the very foundations of the papacy.

“Whatever sermons and instructions do not exhibit and make known Jesus Christ, cannot be the daily bread and nourishment of souls. Therefore we must preach Christ alone.”

What words were these to come from a son of the Roman Church! Christ was exalted above the pope. Christ was lifted up before the people as the Lamb of God, who alone can take away the sin of the world. What marvel that Satan was enraged, and that all the power of the Roman hierarchy was excited against Luther? The Reformer continues:

“What is it to know Christ? and what good will come of it? I answer, To learn and know Christ is to understand what the apostle declares, namely, that Christ is made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”

“To believe is nothing else than feeding on this bread from Heaven.”

Concerning the power of the church to remit sin, he writes:

“The remission of sin is out of the power of pope, bishop, or priest, or any man living, and rests solely on the word of Christ and on their own faith. A pope or bishop has no more power to remit sins than the humblest priest.”

To bring the truth more prominently before the people, Luther prepared theses setting forth the new doctrines, and engaged in public discussion of them with his opponents, at one of the leading universities of Germany. This discussion was listened to with deep interest. Educated young men

marked with astonishment the force of Luther's arguments from the Scriptures. They sought out the Reformer, and in private eagerly listened to his explanation of the word of God. They honestly desired to know the truth; therefore the entrance of God's word gave light to their understanding.

The teacher's work was rewarded. When Luther was called to other fields, these young men, with the Bible in their hands, fearlessly proclaimed the words of life. Crowds came together to hear the truth, and many captives were released from the bondage of papal error. These young men became active and useful laborers in the church, and occupied responsible positions in the great work of the Reformation.

Hope for the Youth

Luther saw that the cause of truth had little to hope for from those who had been educated in error, and he felt that its success must depend upon the rising generation. He says:

"I have the glorious hope that as even Christ, when rejected of the Jews, turned toward the Gentiles, so we shall see the rising generation receive true theology, which these old men, wedded to their vain and most fantastical opinions, now obstinately reject."

These words of the Reformer contain a truth that should be heeded by those who are still pressing forward in the work of reform. Men are slow to renounce the cherished errors of a life-time. Many resolutely close their eyes, lest they see the light of truth. Oftentimes the clearest evidence from the word of God serves only to excite their hatred and opposition.

Now, as in the time of Luther, the hopes of reform rest with the young, whose habits and opinions have not yet become stereotyped, and who therefore more readily yield to right influences. Converted to God, the youth of our time may, like the young men whom Luther instructed, fill an important place in the cause of truth.

Papal Authorities Act

The wide spread interest excited by Luther's teachings aroused the fears of the papal authorities, and efforts were at once put forth to quench the dangerous heresy. A letter was written in the pope's name to the elector Frederic, urging him to withdraw his protection from Luther, and intimating suspicion of the elector's fidelity to the church.

The Romanists had misjudged the character of the prince with whom they had to deal. Frederic of Saxony was a devoted servant of the church, but he was also a man of sterling integrity, and he would not sacrifice justice and truth, even to the demands of the pope. To the papal letter he replied, that Luther had uniformly expressed a willingness to defend his doctrines before proper judges, and to submit to their decision if they should be able by the Scriptures to convince him of error.

But the word of God was not the weapon most convenient for Rome to handle. It was the very thing that they did not want brought to light; for they well knew that the truths contained therein would not only condemn their unrighteous course, but would lay their lofty pretensions in the dust. The only weapons which they could safely use were prisons, torture, and death.

Erelong Luther receives a summons to appear at Rome to answer at the papal tribunal to the charge of heresy. This command fills his friends with terror. They know full well the danger that threatens him in that corrupt city, already drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. With indignation they ask among themselves,

“Shall every man who dares lift his voice against the sins of Rome be silenced by death? Shall we permit this great sacrifice?”

Luther's teachings had attracted the attention of thoughtful

minds throughout all Germany. From his sermons and writings issued beams of light which had awakened and illuminated thousands. A living faith was taking the place of the dead formalism in which the church had so long been held. The people were daily losing confidence in the superstitions of Romanism. The barriers of prejudice were giving way.

The word of God, by which Luther tested every doctrine and every claim, was like a two-edged sword, cutting its way to the hearts of the people. Everywhere there was awakening a desire for spiritual progress. Everywhere was such a hungering and thirsting after righteousness as had not been known for ages. The eyes of the people so long directed to human forms and human mediators, were now turning, in penitence and faith, to Christ and Him crucified.

Summons to Augsburg

Luther and his friends knew that he could not hope for justice at Rome. They knew that there would be no safety for him on the journey to Rome, and no safety after his arrival. The Romanists had not been sparing in their denunciations of him, and once in their grasp no human power could release him.

His friends were unanimous in the desire that he should receive his examination in Germany. This arrangement was finally effected, and the pope's legate was appointed to hear the case. The instructions communicated by the pontiff to this official were as follows:

“We charge you to compel Luther to appear before you in person; to prosecute and reduce him to submission without delay, as soon as you shall have received this our order, he having already been declared a heretic by our dear brother Jerome, Bishop of Asculan.”

“If he should return to a sense of his duty, and ask pardon for so great an offense, freely and of his own accord, we give you power to receive him into the unity of the holy mother

church.”

“If he should persist in his stubbornness, and you fail to get possession of his person, we give you power to proscribe him in all places in Germany; to put away, curse, and excommunicate all those who are attached to him, and to enjoin all Christians to shun his society.”

The pope goes still farther, and calls upon his legate, in order entirely to root out the pestilent heresy, to excommunicate all, of whatever dignity in church or State except the emperor, who shall...

“...neglect to seize the said Martin Luther and his adherents, and send them to you under proper and safe authority.”

Here is displayed the true spirit of Romanism. Not a trace of Christian principle, or even of common justice, is to be seen in the whole document. Luther is at a great distance from Rome; he has had no opportunity to explain or defend his position; yet before his case has been investigated, he is summarily pronounced a heretic, and in the same day, exhorted, accused, judged, and condemned; and all this by the self-styled holy father, the only supreme, infallible authority in church or State!

The spirit of the dragon, “that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan” (*Revelation* 12:9), is seen in this transaction. Notwithstanding his cunning, he has in his rage forgotten to be wise.

Augsburg had been fixed upon as the place of Luther’s trial, and thither the Reformer went. Serious fears were entertained in his behalf. Threats had been made openly that he would be waylaid and murdered on the way, and his friends begged him not to venture. Staupitz entreated Luther to come and take refuge with him until the storm should subside.

“It seems to me,” he wrote, “that the whole world is up in arms and combined against the truth. Even so was the crucified Jesus hated. I see not that you have anything else to ex-

pect than persecution. Your most prudent course is to leave Wittenberg for a time and come and reside with me. Then let us live and die together.”

But Luther would not leave the position where God had placed him. He must continue faithfully to maintain the truth, notwithstanding the storms that were beating upon him. His language was,

“I am like Jeremiah, a man of strife and contention; but the more they increase their contentions, the more they multiply my joy. My wife and children are well provided for, my lands and houses and all my goods are safe. They have already torn to pieces my honor and my good name. All I have left is my wretched body; let them have it; they will then shorten my life by a few hours. But as to my soul, they shall not have that. He who resolves to bear the word of Christ to the world, must expect death at every hour.”

6. Luther Before the Pope's Legate

July 12, 1883

UPON arriving at Augsburg, Luther immediately informed the pope's legate that he was in the city. The legate heard the news with joy. He felt assured that the troublesome heretic who was setting the whole world astir was now in his power, and determined that he should not leave Augsburg as he had entered.

The legate's attendant, an Italian courtier of insinuating manners, flattered himself that it would be an easy matter to bring the Reformer to a proper position. He therefore called upon him with professions of great friendship, and gravely gave him instruction in etiquette, thinking thus to inspire him with awe for the great man before whom he was to appear. He urged Luther to accompany him immediately to the presence of the legate; but Luther calmly stated that he must first obtain his safe-conduct.

Irritated at his ill success, the wily Italian exclaimed,

“When all men forsake you, where will you take refuge?”

“Under Heaven,” answered the Reformer, looking reverently upward.

Luther soon received his safe-conduct, and prepared to appear before the legate. On receiving information of the fact, this dignitary was somewhat perplexed to decide what course to pursue with a man of so determined character, and he consulted his friends in regard to the matter.

One was decided in the opinion that he should be made to retract; another, that he be arrested and imprisoned. A third boldly advised that he be put out of the way, while a fourth recommended that an attempt be made to win him over by gentleness. It was decided to adopt the last advice as the

safest.

The First Interview

At his first interview with the Reformer, the legate was reserved, but civil. He expected Luther to yield every point without argument or question, and waited in silence for him to begin his recantation.

Luther stated that he appeared before the legate in response to the summons of the pope, and at the desire of the Elector of Saxony, and declared himself a humble and obedient son of the holy Christian church. Then he proceeded to the point at issue:

“I acknowledge that it was I who published the propositions and theses that are the subject of inquiry. I am ready to listen with all submission to the charges brought against me, and if I am in error, to be instructed in the truth.”

The legate commended Luther’s humility, and at once made known what was expected of him:

“First, you must return to your duty. You must acknowledge your faults, and retract your errors, your propositions, and sermons. Secondly, you must promise to abstain from propagating your opinions. And thirdly, you must engage to be more discreet, and avoid everything that may grieve or disturb the church.”

Luther asked to see the credentials of the cardinal, showing his authority to settle the matter. He was refused, and was told that he had only to renounce his errors, and the cardinal would make all right with the church.

Luther then asked to be informed wherein he had erred. With an air of condescension, the cardinal made answer:

“Two propositions are put forward by you that you must, before all, retract. First, the treasure of indulgences does not consist of the merits and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the man who receives the holy sacrament must have faith in the grace offered to him.”

If generally received, these propositions would be fatal to the commerce of Rome, overturning the tables of the money-changers, and driving out of the temple those who made merchandise of the grace of salvation.

The legate had promised to abide by the testimony of the Scripture; but notwithstanding this he applied to the constitution of the popes in favor of indulgences. Luther declared that he could not accept such constitutions as sufficient proofs on subjects so important;

“...for they wrest the Holy Scriptures, and never quote them to the purpose.”

The legate retorted,

“The pope has authority and power over all things.”

“Save the Scriptures,” answered Luther earnestly.

“Save the Scriptures!” echoed the legate in derision, and he asserted that the pope was higher than councils, and that all who dared to question his authority would receive their deserts.

Concerning the second proposition, which affirmed the necessity of faith in order to grace, Luther stated that to yield that point would be to deny Christ. Said he,

“I cannot, therefore, and I will not yield that point, and, by God’s help, I will hold it to the end.”

The legate replied angrily,

“Whether you will or not, you must this very day retract that article, or else, for that article alone, I will proceed to reject and condemn all your doctrines.”

Luther answered,

“I have no will but the Lord’s. He will do with me what seems good in His sight. But had I a hundred heads, I would rather lose them all than retract the testimony I have borne to the holy Christian faith.”

“I am not come here to argue with you,” answered the prelate. “Retract, or prepare to endure the punishment you have deserved.”

Thus ended the first interview.

The Second Interview

The second conference was held on the following day, and attended by many persons of high position. Before this assembly, Luther read a declaration expressing his regard for the church, his desire for the truth, his readiness to answer all objections to what he had taught, and to submit his doctrines to the decision of certain leading universities.

At the same time he protested against the cardinal’s course in requiring him to retract, without having proved him in error. The legate’s response was,

“Recant, recant.”

He overwhelmed Luther with a perpetual torrent of words, giving him no opportunity to reply. The Reformer therefore begged that he might present in writing his answer to the two charges, the one touching indulgences, and the other respecting faith. The request was reluctantly granted.

The Third Interview

In the third interview, Luther submitted his answer, in which he showed that his position was sustained by the Scriptures, and firmly declared that he could not renounce the truth.

The legate treated Luther's declaration with little short of contempt. He scolded and thundered on incessantly, leaving Luther, as at the preceding interview, no opportunity for reply. With vehement assertions and repeated reference to the papal constitution, he continued to maintain the doctrine of indulgences and to call on Luther to retract.

The Reformer at last declared that if the principle which was claimed as the very foundation of the doctrine of indulgences, could be proved from the papal constitution itself, he would retract. All were startled at this proposition. The friends of Luther were alarmed and embarrassed. The legate and his sustainers could hardly contain their joy.

But their rejoicing was quickly turned to confusion. Luther met the cardinal on his own ground, and triumphed completely. When the wily prelate saw that Luther's reasoning was unanswerable, he lost all self-control, and in a rage cried out:

“Retract, or I will send you to Rome, there to appear before the judges commissioned to take cognizance of your case. I will excommunicate you and all your partisans, and all who shall at any time countenance you, and will cast them out of the church. Full power has been given me for this purpose by the holy apostolic see. Think you that your protectors will stop me? Do you imagine that the pope can fear Germany? The pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany put together.”

“Condescend,” replied Luther, “to forward the written answer I have given you to Pope Leo X, with my most humble prayers.”

In a haughty and angry tone, the cardinal replied,

“Retract, or return no more.”

Luther bowed, and retired with his friends, leaving the cardinal and his supporters to look at one another in utter confu-

sion at the unexpected result of the discussion. The cardinal and the Reformer never met again.

Luther's efforts on this occasion were not without good results. The large assembly present at the conference had opportunity to compare the two men, and to judge for themselves of the spirit manifested by them, as well as of the strength and truthfulness of their position.

How marked the contrast! Luther, simple, upright, firm, stood up in the strength of God, having truth on his side; the pope's representative, self-important, overbearing, haughty, and unreasonable, was without a single argument from the word of God, yet vehemently crying,

“Retract, or be sent to Rome for punishment.”

Yet the legate was deeply impressed by his interviews with the Reformer, and he afterward changed his own views, and himself retracted his errors.

Departure from Augsburg

Luther remained in Augsburg but a few days after his last meeting with the cardinal. Before leaving the city, however, he drew up a respectful letter to the legate, stating that it was useless for him to prolong his stay, as he had been denied a further hearing unless he should retract.

“Thus I again set out in the name of the Lord, desiring to find some place where I may live in peace.”

He closes by stating that he had committed no crime, and ought therefore to have nothing to fear. This letter was intrusted to his friends, who after his departure delivered it to the legate.

Luther set out from Augsburg at night, on horseback, and accompanied only by a guide furnished him by the magistrate. With many forebodings he secretly made his way through the

dark and silent streets of the city. Enemies, vigilant and cruel, were plotting his destruction. Would he escape the snares prepared for him? Those were moments of anxiety and earnest prayer.

He reached a small gate in the wall of the city. It was opened for him, and with his guide he passed through without hindrance. Now they were beyond the limits, and putting their horses to a full gallop, they soon left the city far behind them.

Satan and his emissaries were defeated. The man whom they had thought in their power was gone, escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler.

7. Luther's Royal Protector

July 19, 1883

AT THE news of Luther's departure from Augsburg, the papal legate was overwhelmed with surprise and anger. He had expected to receive great honor for his wisdom and firmness in dealing with this disturber of the church, but now this hope was disappointed. He gave expression to his wrath in a letter to the elector, bitterly denouncing Luther:

“Since Brother Martin cannot be brought by parental measures to acknowledge his errors, and continue faithful to the Catholic Church, I request your highness to send him to Rome, or to banish him from your territories. Be assured that this complicated, evil-intentioned affair cannot be long protracted, for as soon as I shall have informed our most holy lord of all this artifice and malice, he will bring it to a speedy end.”

In a postscript he begs the elector not to tarnish with shame his own honor and that of his illustrious ancestors for the cause of a contemptible monk.

The elector sent Luther a copy of this letter, to which the Reformer answered:

“Let the reverend legate, or the pope himself, specify any errors in writing; let them bring forward their reasons; let them instruct me, who desire instruction, who beg and long for it, so that even a Turk would not refuse to satisfy me.

“If I do not retract and condemn myself, when they have proved to me that the passages of Scripture that I have quoted ought to be considered in a different sense from mine; then most excellent elector, let your highness be the first to prosecute and expel me; let the university reject me, and overwhelm me with indignation. I will go farther; I call Heaven and earth to witness; let the Lord Jesus Christ himself reject and condemn me.

“These are not words of vain presumption, but of firm con-

viction. Let the Lord deprive me of His grace, and every creature of God refuse to countenance me, if, when I have been shown a better doctrine, I do not embrace it.”

In closing, he says:

“I am still, thanks be to God, full of joy, and praise Him that Christ, the Son of God, counts me worthy to suffer in so holy a cause. May He ever preserve your illustrious highness! Amen.”

This letter made a deep impression upon the mind of the elector. He had never thought of giving up Luther, an innocent man, to be put to death by the power of Rome. Now he resolved to stand firm in his defense. In answer to the letter of the legate he wrote:

“Since Dr. Martin has appeared before you at Augsburg, you ought to be satisfied. We did not expect that without convincing him of error, you would claim to oblige him to retract. Not one of the learned men in our states has intimated to us an opinion that Martin’s doctrine is impious, anti-Christian, or heretical.”

He declined sending Luther to Rome, or expelling him from his territories. Luther, having seen this letter, exclaimed:

“With what joy I read and re-read it; for I know what confidence I may repose in these words, at once so forcible and so discreet.”

God in His providence had raised up a man in high position to defend His servant.

The elector saw that there was a general breaking down of the moral restraints of society. The extensive and perfect organization of the Romish Church, and her immense outlay of money, time, and labor to secure order and harmony, was no indication of the real virtue and integrity of her members. A great work of reform was needed.

All the complicated and expensive arrangements to restrain and punish crime would be unnecessary if the members of the church individually acknowledged and obeyed the requirements of God and the dictates of an enlightened conscience. He saw that Luther was laboring to secure this object, and he secretly rejoiced that a better influence was making itself felt in the church.

He saw, also, that as a professor in the university, Luther was eminently successful. All his associates there spoke warmly in his favor. From all parts of Germany flocked students to listen to his teachings. Young men coming in sight of the steeples of Wittenberg for the first time, would stop, and raising their hands toward Heaven, would praise God that He had caused the light of His truth to shine forth from Wittenberg as in former ages from Mount Zion, thence to penetrate to the most remote countries.

Out of Darkness into the Light

Luther is, as yet, but partially converted from the errors of Romanism. But he is forced to battle constantly in defense of the truth which he has already accepted, and in this warfare he is driven for comfort and support to Christ and the Word. And as he compares the holy oracles with papal decrees and constitutions, he is filled with wonder.

“I am reading,” he writes to Spalatin, “the decretals of the popes, and let me whisper in your ear, that I know not whether the pope is anti-Christ himself, or whether he is his apostle, so misrepresented and even crucified does Christ appear in them.”

Yet at this time Luther was still a supporter of the Roman Church, and had no thought that he would ever separate from her communion.

The Reformer continued searching the Scriptures, praying, preaching, and writing. He knew not how soon his work

might close, and he be deprived of liberty or even life; but so long as God should will it, he determined to labor for the up-building of Christ's kingdom. The knowledge that precious souls were everywhere receiving the truth, filled him with joy.

It was his work to build in the temple of the Lord. There were living stones buried from sight amid the papal rubbish of false doctrines, forms, and ceremonies, and he must search them out, and lay them on the true foundation. The followers of Christ were not then united as a peculiar and holy people separate from the world. They were mingled with the sons of Belial, and must be separated by the power of divine truth.

Luther was not blinded to his own peril or to the peril of his converts. He knew that the subjects of Prince Immanuel are not called to the enjoyment of ease and honor and riches, of titles and possessions; but to a life of conflict with the prince of darkness:

- They are to wrestle against principalities and powers, and they must put on the whole armor of God, that they may be able to stand.
- They are called to endure privation, hardship, imprisonment, torture, and death, even as the Captain of their salvation endured before them.

The riches and cooperation of the wicked were subject to His command if He so willed it; but He declares,

John 18

³⁶ My kingdom is not of this world.

And again,

John 14

³⁰ The prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me.

In like manner the servants of Christ have no home, no treasure here. It is only because Jesus reigns, that they are kept from the cruel power of the prince of evil.

The Truth Grows

Luther's voice as a reformer was no longer confined to Germany. His writings and his doctrine were extending to every nation in Christendom. The work spread to Switzerland and Holland. Multitudes of copies of his writings had found their way to France and Spain, and the truth was working in many hearts, reforming the life, and arousing the understanding to perceive the corruption of Romanism.

In England the Reformer's teachings were received as the word of life. In Belgium and Italy also the work was spreading. Thousands were awakening from their death-like stupor to the joy and hope of a life of faith.

In this little moment of calm, Luther works on with renewed hope and courage. His friends urge him to be content with the victories already gained, and to give over the conflict. But he replies,

“God does not conduct, but drives me forward. I am not master of my own actions. I would gladly live in peace; but I am cast into the midst of tumult and changes.”

The Reformer pressed on in the path in which God was leading him; and as he continued to defend the truth, it constantly became more clear to his understanding, and he perceived more fully the arrogant assumptions of the papal power. He says:

“How hard it is to unlearn the errors which the whole world confirms by its example, and which, by long use, have become to us a second nature.

“I had for seven years read and hourly expounded the Scriptures with much zeal, so that I knew them almost all by heart. I had also all the first-fruits of the knowledge and faith of my Lord Jesus Christ; that is, I knew that we were justified and saved, not by our works, but by faith in Jesus Christ; and I even openly maintained that it is not by divine right that the pope is chief of the Christian church.

“And yet...I could not see the conclusion from all this; namely, that of necessity, and beyond doubt, the pope is of the devil; for what is not of God must needs be of the devil.”

Again, he says:

“I do not now give free utterance to my indignation against those who still adhere to the pope, since I, who had for so many years read the Holy Scriptures with so much care, yet held to papacy with so much obstinacy.”

The battle went on. Rome was becoming more and more exasperated by the attacks of Luther. And now it was secretly declared by some of his fanatical opponents, that he who should kill Luther would be without sin.

One day a stranger with a pistol concealed in his sleeve, approached the Reformer, and inquired why he went thus alone. Luther answered,

“I am in the hands of God. He is my help and my shield. What can men do unto me?”

Upon hearing these words, the stranger turned pale, and fled away as from the presence of the angels of God.

Rome was bent upon the destruction of Luther; but God was his defense. His doctrines were sounding everywhere; in convents, in cottages, in the castles of the nobles, in the academies, and in the palaces of kings; and noble men were rising on every hand to sustain his efforts.

8. Luther Appeals to Germany

July 26, 1883

ON THE 23rd day of June, 1520, Luther published an appeal to the emperor and nobility of Germany in behalf of the Reformation of Christianity. In this appeal he declared:

“The Romanists have raised three barriers against all reformation:

1. When the temporal power has attacked them, they have denied its authority, and asserted that the spiritual power was superior to it.
2. When any one rebuked them out of the Scripture, they have answered that no one but the pope was able to interpret Scripture.
3. When they have been threatened with a council, the reply has been, No one but the sovereign pontiff has authority to convoke a council.”

He writes of the pope:

“It is monstrous to see him who is called the vicar of Christ, displaying a magnificence unrivaled by that of any emperor. Is this to represent the poor and lowly Jesus, or the humble St. Peter? The pope, say they, is the Lord of the world! But Christ, whose vicar he boasts himself to be, said, My kingdom is not of this world. Ought the power of the vicar to go beyond that of his Lord?”

Luther writes thus of the universities:

“I fear much that the universities will be found to be great gates leading down to hell, unless they take diligent care to explain the Holy Scriptures, and to engrave them in the hearts of our youth. I would not advise any one to place his child where the Holy Scriptures are not regarded as the rule of life. Every institution where the word of God is not diligently studied, must become corrupt.”

This appeal was rapidly circulated throughout Germany, and exerted a powerful influence upon the people. The whole nation was roused to rally around the standard of reform.

The Threat of Excommunication

Luther's opponents, burning with a desire for revenge, now urged on the pope to take decisive measures against him. The pontiff and his courtiers yielded against their better judgment, and it was decreed that Luther's doctrines should be condemned immediately. Sixty days were to be granted the Reformer and his adherents, after which, if they did not recant, they should be all excommunicated.

It was a terrible crisis for the Reformation. For centuries Rome's sentence of excommunication had been swiftly followed by the stroke of death. Luther was not blind to the tempest about to burst upon him, but he stood firm, trusting in Christ to be his support and shield. With a martyr's faith and courage he wrote:

“What is about to happen I know not, nor do I care to know. I am assured that He who sits on the throne of Heaven has from all eternity seen the beginning, the progress, and the end of this affair. Let the blow light where it may, I am without fear. Not so much as a leaf falls without the will of our Father. How much rather will He care for us! It is a light thing to die; for the Word which was made flesh has Himself died. If we die with Him, we shall live with Him; and passing through that which He has passed through before us, we shall be where He is, and dwell with Him forever.”

When the papal bull reached Luther he said:

“I despise it, and resist it, as impious and false. It is Christ himself who is therein condemned. No reasons are given in it; I am cited to appear, not that I may be heard, but that I may recant. Oh that Charles the Fifth would act as a man! Oh that for the love of Christ he would humble these demons! I glory in the prospect of suffering for the best of causes. Al-

ready I feel in my heart more liberty; for I now know that the pope is antichrist, and that his chair is for Satan himself.”

Luther's Answer

The whole nation waited with intense interest to see what Luther would do. They were not kept long in doubt. With great energy and boldness, he immediately answered in a discourse which he entitled, “Against the Bull of Antichrist.”

Yet the word of the pontiff of Rome still had power. Prisons, torture, and sword were weapons potent to enforce submission. Everything declared that Luther's work was about to close. The weak and superstitious trembled before the decree of the pope, and while there was a general sympathy for Luther, many felt that life was too dear to be risked in the cause of reform.

Amidst the general tumult, Luther remains calm and composed.

“Be of good cheer,” he says to Spalatin. “It was Christ that begun all this, and He will bring it to its appointed issue, even though my lot may be banishment and death. Jesus Christ is here present; and He that is in us is mightier than he that is in the world.”

Luther formally appeals from the authority of the pope to a general council of the Christian church. Having stated his reasons for this step he says:

“Wherefore I most humbly beseech the most serene, illustrious, excellent, wise, and worthy lords, Charles, the Roman Emperor, the electors, princes, counts, barons, knights, gentlemen, cities, and municipalities of the whole German nation, to adhere to this my protest, and unite with me to resist the antichristian proceedings of the pope, for God's glory, in defense of the church and of the Christian faith, and to uphold the free councils of Christendom; and Christ our Saviour will richly reward them by His everlasting grace.

“But if there be any who set my entreaties at naught, preferring obedience to the pope, an impious man, rather than to obey God, I do hereby disavow all responsibility on their account, having given a faithful warning to their consciences, and I leave them to the final judgment of God, together with the pope and all his adherents.”

His next step was to publicly burn the pope’s bull, with the canon laws, the decretals, and certain writings sustaining the papal power. By this action he boldly declared his final separation from the Roman Church. He accepted his excommunication, and proclaimed to the world that between himself and the pope there must hereafter be war. The great contest was now fully entered upon.

The Victory of Faith

Viewed from a human stand-point, the path of duty and righteousness is not a path of peace and safety. By faith we must follow as the Lord leads us onward. But could we always discern the everlasting arms around and beneath us, there would be no occasion for the exercise of faith. The way of God’s choosing may seem dark, yet it is the surest way to the light. In the midst of apparent disaster and defeat, God’s providence is working out His purposes.

The eagle of the Alps is sometimes beaten down by the tempest into the narrow defiles of the mountains. Angry storm-clouds shut in this mighty bird of the forest, their dense, dark masses separating her from the sunny heights where she has built her nest. For a time her efforts to escape seem fruitless. She dashes to and fro, beating the air with her strong wings, and waking the echoes of the mountains with her cries.

At length, with a scream of triumph, she darts upward, and, piercing the clouds, she is once more in the clear sunlight, with the darkness and tempest far beneath. Ever thus, by mighty efforts, have God’s chosen servants urged their way upward, breasting opposition, reproach, and persecution, in

their conflicts with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places.

When the hand of the Lord was upon the prophet Ezekiel in the vision of the valley of dry bones, he was commanded to prophesy to the wind; and in answer to his word, life was restored to the slain, and they stood up before him, an exceeding great army. This figure was presented before the prophet to show him that no work of restoration can be too hard for God to do, and none who trust in Him need ever say, as Israel had said,

Ezekiel 37

¹¹ Our hope is lost.

Like the eagle, Luther had been shut in by dense clouds of superstition and Romish heresy, and he had been beaten about by the fierce tempest of opposition; but on the wings of a mighty faith he had risen above the storm, and was now grandly free, with the sunlight of Heaven shining upon his soul.

Standing under the broad shield of Omnipotence, Luther was doing a mighty work for God. Amid the war of conflicting opinions, he stood as a guide and a covert to a bewildered and benighted people. The torch of truth, kindled at the altar of God's word, he placed in the hands of princes and peasants, who aided him in his work, dispelling the dense darkness, and awakening all Europe from the slumber of ages.

The Lesson for Us

The mighty conflicts and victories, the great sorrows and special joys, by which individuals and nations are carried forward in the path of reform and salvation, are of too great importance to be permitted to pass from the memory. Such experiences cost the heroes of faith too much to be often repeated in history; they should not be lightly regarded.

Those struggles for freedom of conscience, should be a les-

son to all, that no truth which involves self-denial and sacrifice will be favorably accepted by the world. A costly effort is required of every soul that will go in an opposite direction from the multitude. All that stand in Christ's name in defense of the truth must have a history of conflicts and sacrifices. They cannot advance in reform, as Christ leads the way, except at the risk of liberty and life.

It is through divine mercy in giving to the world such men as Martin Luther and his co-laborers that we are now free to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. We who are living so near the close of time should emulate the noble example of the great Reformer. Like Luther we should seek a deep and thorough knowledge of the word of God.

It should be our highest ambition to stand firm as a rock when the strongholds of truth are assailed by an unbelieving world and an ungodly church. In the near conflict, thousands will be called to imitate Luther's constancy and courage. Now is the time for us to receive education and discipline in the school of Christ. Now is the time to cultivate faith and courage. Let the cry pass from one to another of the waiting ones, Stand fast.

Hebrews 10

³⁷ Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

God will again move mightily upon chosen servants to make terrible charges upon the hosts of Satan. The men whom he will accept to carry forward His work, to fight His battles, must be men of principle, brave and firm and true. The customs, traditions, and doctrines, even of professedly great and good men, must have no weight, until first brought to the infallible test of the law and the testimony.

Isaiah 8

²⁰ If they speak not according to this word, it is because there

is no light in them.

To this test, popes and prelates refused to submit, knowing that it would overthrow at once all their pretended power. It was to maintain this great truth that Luther battled so firmly and fearlessly. His words echo down the line to all the tried and tempted defenders of the truth,—Stand fast.

Isaiah 26

⁴ In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.

The Reformer found in Christ a hiding-place from the storms of opposition, wrath, and hatred that threatened to overwhelm him. In Christ alone was peace and strength and security.

Such will be the experience of every Christian. Amid all the changes and agitations of the world, the Rock of our salvation stands firm. It has been assailed by the combined hosts of earth and hell. For centuries have active minds planned, and strong hands labored, to remove this great corner-stone, and lay another foundation for the faith of the world.

The papal power most nearly succeeded in this blasphemous work. But God raised up Luther to cry day and night, as he built upon the walls of Zion.

1 Corinthians 3

¹¹ Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

That great corner-stone, the Rock of Ages, stands today unshaken. Amid all the tumults and conflicts of the world, Christ still offers rest to the weary, and the water of life to the thirsting soul. Through the ages His words come down to us,

John 14

⁶ I am the way, the truth and the life.

9. Papal Plots Against Luther

August 2, 1883

AS LUTHER exalted the word of God, and deposed the human power and authority that had usurped its place, the cry was raised by his enemies that he preached novelties, and that it could not be possible that great and learned men had been in so grave error. To this he answered:

“These are not novelties that I preach. But I affirm that the doctrines of Christianity have been lost sight of by those whose special duty it was to preserve them; by the learned, by the bishops.

“I doubt not, indeed, that the truth has still found an abode in some few hearts, were it only with infants in the cradle. Poor husbandmen and simple children, in these days, understand more of Jesus Christ than the pope, the bishops, or the doctors.”

Luther went steadily forward, rejoicing in his freedom from the shackles of Rome. He spoke and wrote as God moved him, not only confirming all that he had hitherto said, but still more decidedly protesting against the errors and abominations of popery. Every word was a living spark, burning away the accumulated rubbish of ages.

The Public Burning of Luther's Writings

Rome was not idle. Her emissaries hastened to Germany to congratulate the new emperor, Charles the Fifth, and by their flatteries, false representations, and protests, influenced him to employ his power against the Reformation. The emperor gave his consent to the public burning of Luther's writings, beyond the limits of the German States.

The pope's ambassadors were warned that such a step would inflame the wound rather than heal it; that the doctrine of Luther was deeply engraved where it could not be obliterated.

ated, in the hearts of the German people; and that a few fagots consuming a few sheets of paper would be of little avail, while it would ill befit the dignity of the emperor.

An Attempt to Sentence Luther to Death

But these scheming Romans were aiming not merely at the productions of Luther's pen, but at Luther himself.

"These fires," said they "are not sufficient to purify the pestilential atmosphere of Germany. Though they may strike terror into the simple-minded, they leave the author of the mischief unpunished. We must have an imperial edict sentencing Luther to death."

But they found it no easy matter to accomplish this object. The emperor was not prepared to take this step without the advice of his counselors.

"Let us first ascertain," he responded, "what our father, the Elector of Saxony, thinks of the matter. We shall then be prepared to give our answer to the pope."

And the papal delegates were obliged to confer with the good elector. Here flatteries, arguments, and threats alike failed. To their demand that he destroy Luther's writings; and punish the Reformer as he deserved, or deliver him to the papal power, the elector replied that the matter was one of too great importance to be decided hastily, and that his determination in regard to it should be duly communicated to them.

The Elector Calls for a Tribunal

May God help the elector now; for his position is one of great difficulty. He is partially convinced of the truth; but in his circumstances and surroundings a strong pressure is brought to bear against it. On the one side are the emperor, the princes of the empire, and above all the pope, whose power the elector was not yet ready to shake off; on the other side stands a poor monk, Martin Luther; for it is against this

one man that all this assault is directed.

For a time it seemed that Satan was about to triumph. But God gave wisdom to Luther's defender; his courage, that had seemed to waver, again grew strong. He was filled with horror at the thought of delivering up to torture and death a man whom he believed to have been raised up of God to accomplish a great work. He saw that justice should be regarded above the desires of the pope, and he determined to act upon this principle. The elector now gave the papal ambassadors to understand,

“...that neither his imperial Majesty nor any one else had yet made it appear to him that Luther's writings had been refuted, or demonstrated to be fit only for the flames; that he demanded, therefore, that Doctor Luther be furnished with a safe-conduct, and permitted to answer for himself before a tribunal composed of learned, pious, and impartial judges.”

This was far from what the ambassadors desired. Every such opportunity granted to Luther had resulted in the weakening of the papal power and the strengthening and spread of the Reformation. To bring their arguments in contrast with the doctrines of Luther, which they knew they could not controvert, would prove a losing game to them.

Justice and truth were principles which had no place in their system of faith or practice. The arguments which they could use with greatest effect against all opponents were fire and sword. They had expected the elector to yield to their demands, and without delay surrender the obnoxious monk. But Satan's power was circumscribed, and the cruel plots of Rome were frustrated by Him who is the eternal guardian of truth and justice.

Tidings of all that had transpired reached Wittenberg, and the friends of Luther were filled with joy. The Reformer pressed forward in his labors with fresh zeal. His words awoke new hope and courage in the hearts of the fearful and

desponding. Luther stayed his soul upon God. His language was,

“We see not the hand that is guiding us; we cannot, like Israel of old, look upon the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and we hear not the voice that spoke to them from the mount. But if we wait upon the Lord, we shall be satisfied that the great Shepherd of Israel has been leading us all the way in the past, and that the path where He leads will be safe for all who follow Him, even in the stormy days of trial and conflict.”

The Assembly at Worms

The first assembly of the German States after the accession of Charles the Fifth to the empire, gathered at Worms on the 6th of January, 1521.

Never before had so many princes attended this national council. All were eager to take a part in the first acts of the young emperor's government, and all were ambitious to display their power and grandeur. There were important political questions and interests to be considered by this grand assembly, but all these appeared of little moment when contrasted with the cause of the monk of Wittenberg.

The emperor Charles was placed in a position of great perplexity and embarrassment. On the one hand was the papal legate, urging him to execute the pope's bull; on the other was the elector of Saxony, to whom he was in great degree indebted for his crown, and who entreated him to take no step against Luther until he should have granted him a hearing.

Charles had written to the elector to bring Luther with him to the diet, assuring him that the Reformer should be subjected to no injustice, that he should be protected from all violence, and should be allowed a free conference with one competent to discuss the disputed points.

Upon receiving this letter, the elector was not a little per-

plexed. Should he take the Reformer to Worms, he might be leading him to the scaffold. The friends of Luther were anxious and troubled; but he himself was calm. His health was at this time much impaired, yet he seemed anxious to appear before the emperor. He wrote to the elector:

“If I cannot perform the journey to Worms as a man in good health, I will be carried there on a litter. For, since the emperor has summoned me, I can regard it only as the cause of God.

“If they intend to use violence against me, as they probably do, for assuredly it is with no view of gaining information that they require me to appear before them, I commit the matter in the hands of God. He still lives and reigns who preserved the three Israelites in the fiery furnace. If it be not His will to save me, my life is but little worth.

“Let us only take care that the gospel be not exposed to the insults of the ungodly, and let us shed our blood in its defense rather than allow them to triumph. Who shall say whether my life or my death would contribute most to the salvation of my brethren? It is not for us to decide.

“Let us only pray God that our young emperor may not begin his reign by imbuing his hands in my blood. I would rather perish by the sword of Rome. You remember the judgments with which the emperor Sigismund was visited after the murder of John Huss.

“Expect anything from me but flight or recantation. Fly I cannot; still less can I recant.”

The news was quickly circulated at Worms that Luther was to appear before the diet. A general excitement was created. Aleander, the papal legate to whom the care of Luther had been specially intrusted, was alarmed and enraged.

On his way to the diet, this official had had opportunity to learn for himself how generally the gospel proclaimed by Luther had been received. He saw that it had found acceptance with the wealthy and learned, as well as with the poor

and ignorant. Lawyers, nobles, the inferior clergy, many of the monks, and vast numbers of the common people, had embraced it, and received the Bible only as their standard of faith and practice. The supporters of the new faith were firm and fearless, while the partisans of Rome seemed stricken with terror.

The pride of Aleander had been sorely wounded by the reception accorded him on his journey through Germany. So great had been the change in public sentiment that but little honor or even courtesy was shown the representative of Rome. He arrived at Worms in bitterness of spirit, both because of the insults which he himself had received, and because of the wide-spread defection from popery.

The legate saw that Luther's appearance at Worms would result only in disaster to the papal cause. To institute inquiry into a case in which the pope had already pronounced sentence of condemnation, would be to cast contempt upon the authority of the sovereign pontiff. Aleander set himself to prevent this by every means in his power.

Furthermore he was apprehensive that the eloquent and powerful argument of this man, who had already wrought so great mischief, might result in turning away many of the princes from the cause of the pope. He therefore, in the most urgent manner, remonstrated with Charles against Luther's appearance at Worms. He warned, entreated, and threatened, until the emperor yielded, and wrote to the elector that if Luther would not retract he must leave him behind at Wittenberg.

The Reformer was much disappointed that he was forbidden to defend the truth at Worms. Aleander, not content with this victory, labored with all the power and cunning at his command to secure Luther's condemnation. With a persistence worthy of a better cause, he urged the matter upon the attention of princess, prelates, and other members of the assembly,

accusing Luther of sedition, rebellion, impiety, and blasphemy.

Satan's work bears the same stamp from century to century. The charges against Christ, against Stephen, and against Paul, were the same as the accuser of the brethren now urged against Luther.

But in this case his rage brought its own defeat. The vehemence and passion manifested by Aleander, plainly revealed that he was actuated by hatred and revenge rather than by a zeal for religion. It was the prevailing sentiment of the assembly that Luther was innocent.

At this time the pope issued a new bull, and the excommunication which had before been threatened was decidedly pronounced against the Reformer and all who received his doctrines. Thus was broken the last tie that bound Luther to Rome.

10. Aleander's Speech Against Luther

August 9, 1883

WITH redoubled zeal, Aleander now urged upon the emperor the duty of executing the papal edicts. Overcome at last by this importunity, Charles bade the legate present his case to the diet. This was just what Aleander had secretly desired.

With great care he prepared himself to appear before that august assembly. Rome had few advocates better fitted, by nature and education, to defend her cause. Aleander was not only the representative of the sovereign pontiff, invested with all the outward dignity befitting his exalted position, but he was one of the most eloquent men of his age.

The friends of the Reformer looked forward to the result of his speech with some anxiety. The elector absented himself from the assembly, but instructed some of his counselors to be present, and to take notes of the legate's discourse.

There was no little excitement when Aleander, with great dignity and pomp, appeared before the diet. Many called to mind the scene of our Saviour's trial, when Annas and Caiaphas in the judgment-hall of Pilate demanded the death of him "who perverts the nation." *Luke 23:2.*

With all the power of learning and eloquence, Aleander set himself to overthrow the truth. Charge after charge he hurled against Luther as an enemy of the church and the State, the living and the dead, clergy and laity, councils and private Christians.

"There are people who tell us," he said, "that Luther is a man of piety. I will not impugn his private character. I will only remind this assembly that it is a common thing for the devil to deceive men under the appearance of sanctity."

A little further on, however, he attacks the Reformer, heap-

ing upon him the most bitter invectives. Then turning to the emperor, he solemnly appeals to him to withdraw his protection from the monk of Wittenburg:

“I beseech your imperial majesty not to do that which could only reflect dishonor upon your name. Meddle not with an affair in which the laity have no right to interpose. Discharge the duty that properly devolves upon you. Let Luther’s doctrines be proscribed by your authority throughout the empire; let his writings be everywhere committed to the flames. Shrink not from the path of justice. There is enough in the errors of Luther to warrant the burning of a hundred thousand heretics.”

In closing, he endeavors to cast contempt upon the adherents of the new doctrines:

“What are all these Lutherans? A motley rabble of insolent grammarians, licentious priests, disorderly monks, ignorant advocates, degraded nobles, misled and perverted plebeians. How greatly superior is the Catholic party in numbers, in intelligence, in power! A unanimous decree of this illustrious assembly will open the eyes of the simple, show the unwary their danger, determine the wavering, and strengthen the weak-hearted.”

The Lesson for Our Time

The advocates of truth have in every age been attacked with just such weapons. The same arguments that were urged against Luther, are urged by our opponents today:

“Who are these Sabbatarians? They are unlearned, few in numbers, and of the poorer class. Yet they claim to have the truth, and to be the chosen people of God. They are ignorant and deceived. How greatly superior in numbers and influence are our denominations. How many great and learned men are in our churches. How much more power is on our side.”

These are the arguments that have a telling influence upon

the world. But they are no more conclusive now than in the days of the Reformer.

The Reformation did not, as many suppose, end with Luther. It is to be continued to the close of this world's history. Luther had a great work to do in reflecting upon others the light which God permitted to shine upon him; yet he was not to receive all the light which was to be given to the world.

From that time to this new light has been continually shining upon God's word, new truths have been constantly unfolding. God is light, and he is ever imparting light to His followers. Those who refuse to advance as the providence of God leads the way, seek to arrest the progress of those who endeavor to walk in the light.

The churches of this generation profess to be holy, but they permit the love of the world to control them. They have united in spirit and fellowship with the workers of iniquity. They choose to depart from the divine commandment, rather than to separate themselves from the friendship and customs of the world.

They are joined to the idols they have chosen; and because temporal prosperity and the favor of a sin-loving world are granted them, they deem themselves rich and in need of nothing. Pride, luxury, riches, and popularity are their treasures, and in their spiritual blindness they count these an evidence of the love and favor of God.

Was the Romish church in great deception in Luther's day? The Protestant churches are in equally great deception today. They refuse to receive instruction or reproof. Their ministers cry, Peace, peace, and the people love the soothing message. In their willful blindness they believe only that which will not disturb their carnal security.

But in every age of the world, God's true people have learned by experience as well as by the word of inspiration

that prosperity and learning and worldly honor are no evidence of the favor of God. The life of Christ, the Captain of our salvation, teaches the lesson that on earth the true church cannot enjoy the favor of a wicked world.

The legate's address was three hours in length, and his impetuous eloquence made a deep impression upon the assembly. There was no Luther present, with the clear and convincing truths of God's word, to vanquish the papal champion. No attempt was made to defend the Reformer. There was manifest in the assembly a general impulse to root out the Lutheran heresy from the empire.

Rome had enjoyed the most favorable opportunity to maintain the justice of her cause. Her claims had been presented with the utmost skill. The greatest of her orators had spoken in this assembly of princes. All that Rome could say in her own vindication had been said. Error had presented her strongest arguments.

Henceforth the contrast between truth and error would be more clearly seen, as they should take the field in open warfare. The apparent victory was but the signal of defeat. Never from that day would Rome stand as secure as she had stood.

Duke George Calls for Reform

The majority of the assembly were ready to sacrifice Luther to the demands of the pope; but many of them saw and deplored the existing depravity in the church, and desired a suppression of the abuses suffered by the German people in consequence of the extravagances and lies of popery.

The legate had presented the papal rule in the light most favorable for Rome. Now the Lord moved upon a member of the diet to give a true delineation of the effects of papal tyranny. With noble firmness Duke George of Saxony stood up in that dignified assembly, and specified with terrible exactness the wrongs, the deceptions, and abominations of Rome, and their

dire result. He exposed the utter corruption of her ecclesiastical system and its workings. His speech closed with these words:

“These are but a few of the abuses which cry out against Rome for redress. All shame is laid aside, and one object alone incessantly pursued: money! evermore money! so that the very men whose duty it is to disseminate the truth, are engaged in nothing but the propagation of falsehood; and yet they are not merely tolerated but rewarded; because the more they lie, the larger are their gains. This is the foul source from which so many corrupted streams flow out on every side.

“Profligacy and avarice go hand in hand. The officials summon women to their house on various pretenses, and endeavor either by threats or presents, to seduce them; and if the attempt fails, they ruin their reputation. Oh! it is the scandal occasioned by the clergy that plunges so many poor souls into everlasting perdition.

“A thorough reform must be effected. To accomplish that reform, a General Council must be assembled. Wherefore, most excellent princes and lords, I respectfully beseech you to give this matter your immediate attention.”

A more able and forcible denunciation of the abuses of Rome could not have been made by Luther himself; and the fact that the speaker was an opponent of Luther, gave greater influence to his words.

The assembly proceeded to constitute a committee for the purpose of drawing up a list of popish grievances. The list, when completed, was found to number one hundred and one. The report was presented to the emperor with the earnest request that he would do what was just in so important a matter.

“What a loss of Christian souls,” said the committee to the emperor, “what injustice, what extortion, are the daily fruits of those scandalous practices to which the spiritual head of

Christendom affords his countenance! The ruin and dishonor of our nation must be averted. We therefore very humbly, but very urgently, beseech you to sanction a general reformation, to undertake the work, and to carry it through.”

Had the eyes of the assembly been opened, they would have beheld angels of God in the midst of them, shedding beams of light athwart the darkness of error, and opening minds and hearts to the reception of sacred truths. It was the power of the God of truth and wisdom that controlled even the adversaries of the Reformation, and thus prepared the way for the great work about to be accomplished. Martin Luther was not present; but a Greater than Luther had made His voice heard in that assembly.

Luther's Appearance Demanded

Charles could not disregard the appeals of the diet, so utterly unexpected both by the legate and himself. He immediately withdrew the edict for the burning of Luther's writings, and ordered that they be delivered into the hands of the magistrates. The assembly now demanded Luther's appearance before them.

“It is unjust,” urged his friends, “to condemn Luther without having heard him, and without having ascertained from his own lips that he is the author of those books which it is proposed to burn.”

“His doctrine,” said his opponents, “has taken so fast hold on men's minds that it is impossible to check its progress, unless we allow him a hearing. There shall be no disputing with him; and in the event of his acknowledging his writings, and refusing to retract them, we will all, with one accord, electors, princes, and states of the holy empire, in firm adherence to the faith of our ancestors, give your majesty our unsparing aid to carry your decrees into full effect.”

The legate Aleander is greatly troubled by this proposal. He

knows that he has everything to dread from Luther's presence before the diet. He therefore appeals to the princes known to be most favorably disposed toward the pope:

“There shall be no disputing with Luther, you say; but how can we be sure that the genius of this audacious man, the fire that flashes from his eyes, the eloquence of his speech, the mysterious spirit that animates him, will not suffice to excite a tumult? Already there are many who revere him as a saint, and his image is everywhere to be seen encircled with rays of glory, like those which surround the heads of the blessed.”

And now a Satanic thought enters the mind of this agent of the great adversary, and he adds:

“If he must needs be cited to appear, beware, at all events, of pledging the public faith for his safety.”

Aleander hoped that, should Luther appear at Worms, the Romanists might obtain possession of his person, and silence forever that reproving voice, even before it should utter a word in the assembly.

The priests and Pharisees were actuated by the same spirit in their opposition to Paul. Whenever the apostle's words in vindication of the truth were allowed to influence the people, the cause of the Jewish leaders suffered loss; therefore the same Satanic subtlety was employed to silence Paul's voice. Those Jewish leaders knew, as did Aleander, that if truth were presented before the people, it would appear in so striking contrast to error that none could fail to see the distinction.

The same motive led the Jews to destroy Stephen. It was the words of truth which the priests and elders could not controvert that inspired those wicked judges with such madness against this man of God that even while his countenance was shining with the glory from Heaven, they dragged him from the judgment-hall, and silenced his eloquence, not with arguments from the law and the prophets, but with stones.

11. Luther's Journey to Worms

August 16, 1883

LUTHER at Wittenberg hears of the exciting scenes transpiring in the diet. Soon he receives a note of the articles which he will be required to retract. But, like Daniel of old, he purposes in his heart that he will maintain his fidelity to God. He writes to Spalatin:

“Never fear that I will retract a single syllable, since the only argument they have to urge against me is that my writings are at variance with the observances of what they call the Church.

“If our Emperor Charles sends for me only to retract, my answer shall be that I will remain here, and it will be all the same as though I had been at Worms, and returned again. But if the emperor chooses then to send for me, to put me to death as an enemy to the empire, I shall be ready to obey his summons; for, by Christ's help, I will never abandon His word in the hour of battle.

“I know that these blood-thirsty men will never rest until they have taken my life. God grant that my death may be laid to the charge of the papists alone!”

Notwithstanding the entreaties, protests, and threats of Alexander, the emperor at last determined that Luther should appear before the diet. He accordingly issued a writ of summons, and also a safe-conduct insuring Luther's return to a place of security. These were borne to Wittenberg by a herald, who was commissioned to conduct the Reformer to Worms.

This was a dark and threatening hour for the Reformation. The friends of Luther were terrified and distressed. But the Reformer remained calm and firm. He was entreated not to risk his life. His friends, knowing the prejudice and enmity against him, feared that even his safe-conduct would not be respected. And it had been reported that the safe-conduct of heretics was not valid. Luther replied:

“The papists have little desire to see me at Worms; but they long for my condemnation and death. No matter. Pray not for me, but for the word of God. My blood will hardly be cold before thousands and tens of thousands, in every land, will be made to answer for the shedding of it.

“The ‘most holy’ adversary of Christ, the father, and master, and chief of man-slayers, is resolved that it shall be spilled. Amen! The will of God be done. Christ will give me His Spirit to overcome these ministers of Satan. I despise them while I live; I will triumph over them in death.

“They are striving hard at Worms to force me to recant. My recantation shall be this: I said formerly that the pope was Christ’s vicar; now I say that he is the adversary of the Lord, and the apostle of the devil.”

Luther was not to make his perilous journey alone. Besides the imperial messenger, three of his firmest friends determined to accompany him. With deep emotion the Reformer bade farewell to his associates. Turning to Melancthon, he said:

“If I never return, and my enemies should take my life, cease not, dear brother, to teach and stand fast in the truth. Labor in my stead, since I can no longer work. If your life be spared, my death will matter little.”

A multitude of students and citizens, to whom the gospel was precious, bade him farewell with weeping as he departed. The imperial herald, in full costume, and bearing the imperial eagle, led the way on horseback, followed by his servant. Next came the carriage in which rode Luther and his friends. Thus the Reformer set out from Wittenberg.

On the journey they saw that the minds of the people were oppressed by gloomy forebodings. At some towns no honors were proffered them. As they stopped for the night at Naumburg, a friendly priest expressed his fears by holding up before Luther the portrait of an Italian reformer who suffered

martyrdom for the truth's sake. With trembling voice the priest bade Luther,

“Stand fast in the truth, and your God will never forsake you.”

Upon arriving, the next day, at Weimar, they learned that Luther's writings had been condemned at Worms. In the streets of the city the imperial messengers were proclaiming the emperor's decree, and urging all men to bring the proscribed works to the magistrates. The herald, in alarm, asked Luther if, under the circumstances, he still wished to go on. He answered:

“I will go on, though I should be put under interdict in every town.”

Honorable Reception at Erfurt

At Erfurt, Luther was received with honor. Several leagues from the city, the rector of the university, with senators, students, and citizens, met him on horseback, and welcomed him with joyful acclamations. Great numbers of the population thronged the road, and cheered him as he was about to enter the city. All were eager to see the intrepid monk who had dared give battle to the pope. Thus, surrounded by admiring crowds, he entered the city where, in his earlier years, he had often begged a morsel of bread.

He was urged to preach. This he had been forbidden to do; but the herald gave his consent, and the monk whose duty it once was to unclosethe gates and sweep the aisles, now ascended the pulpit, while the people listened, as if spell-bound, to his words.

The bread of life was broken to those hungry souls. Jesus was lifted up before them as above popes, legates, emperors, and kings. Said Luther:

“Christ, our Mediator, has overcome. This is the great news!

and we are saved by his work, not by our own.

“Some perhaps will say, You talk to us much about faith; teach us then how to obtain it. Well, agreed. I will show you how. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘Peace be unto you. Behold my hands!’ That is to say, Look, O man, it is I, I alone, who have taken away your sin and redeemed you, and now you have peace, said the Lord.

“Believe the gospel, believe St. Paul, and not the letters and decretals of the popes.”

Luther makes no reference to his own perilous position. He does not seek to make himself the object of thought or sympathy. In the contemplation of Christ, he has lost sight of self. He hides behind the Man of Calvary, seeking only to present Christ as the sinner’s Redeemer.

As Luther proceeds on his journey he is everywhere regarded with great interest. An eager throng constantly accompanies him. Friendly voices warn him of the purpose of the Romanists.

“You will be burned alive,” say they, “and your body reduced to ashes, as was that of John Huss.”

Luther answers,

“Though they should kindle a fire whose flames should reach from Worms to Wittenberg, and rise up to heaven, I would go through it in the name of the Lord, and stand before them; I would enter the jaws of the behemoth, break his teeth, and confess the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Approach to Worms

The news of Luther’s approach to Worms created great commotion among the supporters of the pope. His arrival might result in the defeat of their cause. An artful plan was at once laid to prevent him from finishing his journey.

A troop of horsemen met him on his way with the message

that a friendly knight desired him to proceed immediately to his fortress. The emperor's confessor was said to be there, awaiting a conference. His influence with Charles was unbounded, and everything might be harmoniously arranged. The messenger urged that there be no delay.

Luther's friends knew not what course to take, but he did not hesitate for a moment.

"I shall go on," he answered, "and if the emperor's confessor has anything to say to me, he will find me at Worms, I repair to the place of summons."

At length Spalatin himself became alarmed for the safety of the Reformer. He heard it reported among the papists at Worms that Luther's safe-conduct would not be respected, and he immediately sent out a messenger to warn him of his danger. As Luther was approaching the city, a note from Spalatin was handed him, containing these words,

"Abstain from entering Worms."

Luther, still unshaken, turned his eyes on the messenger, and said,

"Go tell your master that though there should be as many devils at Worms as there are tiles on its roofs, I would enter it."

And the messenger returned, and repeated the amazing declaration.

Reception at Worms

Splendid was the reception granted Luther upon his arrival at Worms. The crowd that flocked to the gates to welcome him was even greater than at the public entry of the emperor himself. "God will be my defense," said the Reformer, as he alighted from his carriage.

Yet the news of his arrival was heard with alarm by both

friends and foes. The elector feared for Luther's safety, Alexander for the success of his own iniquitous schemes. The emperor immediately convoked his council.

"Luther is come," said he, "what must be done?"

One of the bishops, a rigid papist, responded,

"We have long thought of this matter. Let your majesty rid yourself at once of this man. Did not Sigismund bring John Huss to the stake? One is under no obligation either to give or to observe a safe-conduct in the case of heretics."

"Not so," said the emperor, "what we promise we should observe and keep."

It was therefore decided that Luther should be heard.

All the city were eager to see the Reformer, and he had enjoyed but a few hours' rest when counts, barons, knights, gentlemen, and citizens flocked eagerly about him. Even his enemies could but mark his firm courageous bearing, the kindly and joyous expression upon his countenance, and the solemn elevation and deep earnestness that gave to his words an irresistible power.

Some were convinced that a divine influence attended him; others declared, as had the Pharisees concerning Christ,

John 10

²⁰ He has a devil.

12. Luther Before the Diet

August 23, 1883

ON THE day following his arrival at Worms, Luther was notified to appear in the afternoon before the emperor and the members of the diet. This was the day that he had long desired; but to human appearance there was great danger before him.

Encouragement from Friends

On that day came a letter from a courageous knight, whispering in the Reformer's ear the words of an ancient prophet:

Psalm 20

¹ The Lord hear you in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend you;

² Send you help...out of Zion;

⁴ Grant you according to your own heart, and fulfill all your counsel.

He added:

“O beloved Luther, my venerated father! fear not, and stand firm. The counsel of the wicked has laid wait for you, and they have opened their mouths against you, like roaring lions. But the Lord will arise against them, and put them to flight.

“Fight, therefore, valiantly the battles of Christ. As for me, I, too, will combat boldly. Would to God that I were permitted to see how they frown. But the Lord will purge his vineyard. May Christ preserve you!”

At the appointed hour a herald appeared to conduct Luther to the presence of the diet. The streets were so thronged as to be impassable, and it was only through back ways and gardens that the Reformer and his attendants reached the town-hall. The roofs and the pavements, above, beneath, on every side, were covered with spectators.

When they arrived at the hall, the crowd was so great that the soldiers were obliged to clear a passage. Within the outer inclosure every place was crowded. More than five thousand spectators, German, Spanish, and Italian, thronged the ante-chamber and recesses.

As Luther approached the door which was to admit him to the audience-room and the presence of his judges, an old general, the hero of many battles, touched him upon the shoulder as he passed, and shaking his head said to him kindly,

“My poor monk, my poor monk, you have a march and a struggle to go through, such as neither I nor many other captains have seen the like in our most bloody battles. But if your cause be just, and you are sure of it, go forward in God’s name and fear nothing! He will not forsake you.”

Before the Assembly

The doors are thrown open, and Luther enters. Never had any man appeared in the presence of a more imposing assembly.

- An emperor whose kingdom extended across both hemispheres;
- his brother, the archduke; the electors of the empire, most of whose successors were crowned heads;
- dukes, among whom were those fierce and bloody enemies of the Reformation, the Duke of Alva and his sons;
- archbishops, bishops, and prelates; the ambassadors of foreign nations;
- princes, counts, and barons; and the pope’s ambassadors,

—in all two hundred persons. Such were the judges before whom Martin Luther was to answer for his faith.

A signal victory was won for the truth, by the very fact of Luther’s appearance before that princely council. That a man

whom the pope had condemned should be judged by another tribunal, was virtually a denial of the pope's supreme authority. The Reformer, placed under ban, and denounced from human fellowship by the pope, had been assured protection, and was granted a hearing, by the highest dignitaries of the nation. The pope had commanded him to be silent; but he was about to speak in the presence of thousands assembled from all parts of Christendom.

In the presence of that powerful and titled assembly, the lowly-born Reformer seemed awed and embarrassed. Some princes who were near him, observing his emotion, approached him kindly and one of them whispered,

“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.” (*Matthew 10:28*)

Another said,

“When you are brought before kings, it shall be given you, by the Spirit of your Father, what you shall say.” (*Luke 12:11-12*)

Thus the words of Christ were brought by the great ones of earth to strengthen the Reformer in his hour of trial.

Luther was conducted to a position directly in front of the emperor's throne. All eyes were fixed upon the man who had dared with pen and voice to resist the authority of the pope. A deep silence fell upon the crowded assembly. Then an imperial officer arose, and in a clear voice addressed the Reformer thus:

“Martin Luther, his sacred and invincible Majesty has cited you before his throne, acting on the opinion and advice of the States of the holy Roman Empire, to require you to answer two questions; First, Do you acknowledge these writings to have been composed by you?”

And the speaker pointed with his finger to about twenty volumes placed on a table in the center of the hall, immedi-

ately before Luther.

“Secondly, Are you prepared to retract these works and the propositions contained therein, or do you persist in what you have therein advanced?”

The titles of the books having been read, Luther answered:

“Most gracious emperor, princes, and lords! his imperial majesty puts to me two questions. As to the first, I acknowledge the books just named to be mine. I cannot deny them.

“As to the second, whether I will maintain all these or retract them, seeing it is a question of faith and of one’s salvation and of the word of God, which is the greatest treasure in Heaven and earth, and deserving at all times our highest reverence, it would be rash and perilous for me to speak inconsiderately, without reflection.

“I might affirm either more or less than is consistent with truth; in either case I should fall under the sentence of Christ. ‘He that denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in Heaven.’

“Therefore I beg of your imperial majesty time for reflection, that I may be able to reply to the question proposed, without prejudice to the word of God or to my own salvation.”

In making this request, Luther moved wisely. His course convinced the assembly that he did not act from passion or impulse. Such calmness and self-command, unexpected in one who had shown himself bold and uncompromising, added to his power, and enabled him afterward to answer with a prudence, decision, wisdom, and dignity, which surprised and disappointed his adversaries, and rebuked their insolence and pride.

The different orders of the diet withdrew for consultation, and when again assembled, they agreed to grant the Reformer’s request, on condition, however, that his answer be returned by word of mouth, and not in writing.

As Luther was conducted to his lodgings, a rumor was circulated through the city that the pope had triumphed, and the Reformer would be brought to the stake. Both threats and expressions of respect and sympathy greeted him as he made his way through the crowded streets. Many visited him at his lodgings, and declared themselves ready to defend him with their lives. In the midst of the excitement, the Reformer alone was calm. A letter written by him at this time reveals his feelings:

“I have just made my appearance before the emperor and his brother Ferdinand, and been asked whether I would retract my writings. I answered, The books laid before me are mine; but concerning the revocation, I will say what I will do tomorrow. This is all the time I asked, and all they will give. But Christ being gracious to me, I will not retract an iota.”

Second Appearance

The next day he was to appear before the diet to render his second answer. At times his heart sunk within him as he contemplated the forces that were combined against the truth. His faith faltered as his enemies seemed to multiply before him, and the powers of darkness to prevail.

In anguish of spirit he threw himself with his face upon the earth, and poured out those broken, heart-rending cries which none but God can fully interpret. In his helplessness, his soul fastened upon Christ the mighty deliverer. It was not for his own safety, but for the success of the truth, that he wrestled mightily with God; and he prevailed.

He was strengthened with the assurance that he would not appear alone before the council. Peace returned to his soul, and he rejoiced that he was permitted to uphold and defend the word of God before the rulers of the nation.

As the time for his appearance drew near, he approached a table on which lay the Holy Scriptures, placed his left hand

upon the sacred volume, and raising his right hand to Heaven, he vowed to adhere constantly to the gospel, and to confess his faith freely, even though he should be called to seal his testimony with his blood.

13. Luther's Second Answer Before the Diet

August 30, 1883

WHEN Luther was again ushered into the presence of the diet, his countenance bore no trace of fear or embarrassment. Humble and peaceful, yet grandly brave and noble, he stood as God's witness among the great ones of earth.

The imperial officer now demanded his decision concerning the second question,—whether he was prepared to defend his books as a whole, or desired to retract any part of them. Luther made his answer in a subdued and humble tone, without violence or passion. His demeanor was diffident and respectful, yet he manifested a confidence and joy that surprised the assembly.

After imploring the indulgence of the diet if by reason of his secluded, monastic life he should neglect any of the customary proprieties of courtly address, he observed that his published works were not all of the same character. In some he had treated of faith and good works with such plainness and Christian simplicity that even his enemies were obliged to confess them not only harmless but profitable. To retract these would be to condemn truths which all parties confessed.

The second class of these works were directed against popery, exposing those who by their teaching and example were corrupting all Christendom, both in body and soul.

“No one,” said he, “can deny nor conceal that by the laws and doctrines of the popes the consciences of Christians are held in bondage, burdened and tormented, and that the property and wealth of Christendom, especially of the German nation, are devoured by the incredible rapacity of Rome. Were I to revoke what I have written on this subject, what should I do but strengthen this tyranny, and open a wider door to so many and great impieties?”

The third class of his books were written against individuals

who undertook the defense of Romish tyranny, and the overthrow of the doctrines which he had inculcated. Concerning these he said,

“I freely confess that I have been more violent than was becoming. I do not think myself a saint; but even these books I cannot revoke, because in so doing I should sanction the impieties of my opponents, and they would then take occasion to crush God’s people with still greater cruelty.”

“But,” he continued, “as I am a mere man, and not God, I will defend myself as did Christ, who said, ‘If I have spoken evil bear witness against me.’ By the mercy of God, I implore your imperial majesty, or anyone else who can, whoever he may be, to prove to me from the writings of the prophets that I am in error. As soon as I shall be convinced, I will instantly retract all my errors, and will be the first to cast my books into the fire.”

“What I have just said, I think will clearly show that I have well considered and weighed the dangers to which I am exposing myself; but far from being dismayed by them, I rejoice exceedingly to see the gospel this day as of old a cause of disturbance and disagreement. It is the character and destiny of God’s word.”

“Said Christ, ‘I came not to send peace, but a sword.’ God is wonderful and awful in His counsels. Let us have a care lest in our endeavors to arrest discords we be found to fight against the holy word of God, and bring down upon our heads a frightful deluge of inextricable dangers, present disaster, and everlasting desolations.

“Let us have a care lest the reign of the young and noble prince, the Emperor Charles, on whom, next to God, we build so many hopes, should not only commence, but continue and terminate its course, under the most fatal auspices.”

“I might cite examples drawn from the oracles of God. I might speak of Pharaohs, of kings of Babylon or of Israel, who were never more contributing to their own ruin than when, by measures in appearance most prudent, they thought to establish their authority. God removes the moun-

tains, and they know not.”

“In speaking thus, I do not suppose that such noble princes have need of my poor judgment; but I wish to acquit myself of a duty that Germany has a right to expect from her children. And so, commending myself to your august majesty, and your most serene highnesses, I beseech you, in all humility, not to permit the hatred of my enemies to rain upon me an indignation I have not deserved.”

Luther had spoken in German; he was requested to repeat the same words in Latin. The German tongue did not please the emperor, nor was it readily comprehended by the Spanish and Italian courtiers. Though much exhausted by the previous effort, Luther complied with the request, and repeated his speech in Latin with the same clearness and energy as at the first.

God in His providence directed in this matter. The minds of many of the princes were so blinded by error and superstition that at the first delivery they did not see the force of Luther’s reasoning, but the repetition enabled them to perceive with great clearness the points presented. The Spirit of God set home the truth, and a deep and lasting impression was made. The Reformation had gained a victory which would tell with great power against the papacy.

But those who stubbornly closed their eyes to the light, who were determined not to be convinced of the truth, were enraged at the power of Luther’s words. Of this class was the spokesman of the diet. As Luther ceased speaking, this official said angrily,

“You have not given any answer to the inquiry put to you. You are not to question the decision of the councils; you are required to return a clear and distinct answer. Will you, or will you not retract?”

Luther answered firmly,

“Since your most serene majesty and your high mightiness require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one; and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils; because it is as clear as day that they have often erred and contradicted each other.

“If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture or by cogent reasons; if I am not satisfied by the very texts that I have cited; and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God’s word, I neither can nor will retract anything, for it cannot be right for a Christian to speak against his conscience.”

Then turning his eyes upon the assembly before which he stood, and which held his life in their hands, he said,

“Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me! Amen!”

So stands this righteous man upon the sure foundation, the prophets and apostles, Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Firm and fearless at his post of duty is the great Reformer. Faithful among the faithless, unheeding the storms of malice and revenge, he stands a mighty cedar of Lebanon among the trees of the forest. While the passions and pollutions of the multitude surge around him like waves of the great deep, he stands, a Heaven-sent beacon, to warn the imperiled mariner of the hidden shoal and the rocky shore.

Luther knows not what may be his fate; but he knows that the cause of truth can never fail, and he is ready to die, if need be, knowing that by death he may serve the truth better than by his life.

Light from the throne of God illuminated his countenance. His greatness and purity of character, his peace and joy of heart, were manifest to all, as he testified against the power of error, and witnessed to the superiority of that faith that overcomes the world.

Results of the Answer

When the Reformer ceased speaking, the whole assembly were for a time motionless with amazement. Several of the princes were charmed with his frankness and nobility of soul. The emperor himself, deeply impressed, exclaimed,

“The monk speaks with an intrepid heart and unshaken courage.”

The Spaniards and Italians were confounded, and began to ridicule that moral grandeur which their base and unprincipled minds could not comprehend.

The partisans of Rome had been worsted; their cause appeared in a most unfavorable light. They sought to maintain their power, not by appealing to the Scriptures to show Luther the error of his course, but by a resort to threats, Rome’s un-failing argument. Said the spokesman of the diet, angrily addressing Luther,

“If you do not retract, the emperor and the States of the empire will proceed to consider how to deal with an obstinate heretic.”

Luther’s friends, who had with great joy listened to his noble defense, trembled at these words; but the doctor himself said firmly,

“May God be my helper! for I can retract nothing.”

Luther then withdrew, while the princes consulted. When he was called in again, their orator thus addressed him,

“Martin, you have not spoken with that humility which befits your condition. The distinction you have drawn as to your works was needless; for if you retracted such as contain errors, the emperor would not allow the rest to be burned. It is absurd to require to be refuted by Scripture, when you have been revising heresies condemned by the General Council of Constance. The emperor therefore commands you

to say simply, Yes, or No, whether you mean to affirm what you have advanced, or whether you desire to retract any part thereof.”

Luther replied calmly,

“I have no other answer to give than that I have already given.”

They understood him perfectly. Firm as a rock he stood, while the fiercest billows of worldly power beat harmlessly against him. The simple energy of his words, his fearless bearing, his calm, speaking eye, and the unalterable determination expressed in every word and act, made a deep impression upon the assembly. There was no longer the slightest hope that he could be induced, either by promises or threats, to yield to the mandate of Rome. The monk had triumphed over the rulers of this world.

Charles the Fifth rose from his seat, and the whole assembly rose at the same time.

“The diet will meet again tomorrow morning to hear the emperor’s decision,” announced the chancellor.

There were many in that company actuated by the same spirit which inspired the Pharisees of old. They thirsted for the blood of him whose arguments they could not controvert.

Yet Luther, understanding his danger, had spoken to all with Christian dignity and calmness. His words had been free from pride, passion, and misrepresentation. He lost sight of himself, and of the great men surrounding him, and felt only that he was in the presence of One infinitely superior to popes, prelates, kings, and emperors.

And Christ, reigning in Luther’s heart, spoke through his testimony with a power and grandeur that for the time inspired both friends and foes with awe and wonder. The converting power of God was in that council, impressing the

hearts of the chiefs of the empire.

The pope's adherents, feeling that they had been defeated, angrily asked why the chancellor of the diet had not sooner interrupted the guilty monk. Several of the princes openly acknowledged the justice of Luther's cause.

Many were convinced of the truth; but with some the impressions received were not lasting. The seed sown had not much deepness of earth, and the heat of opposition caused it to wither away.

There was another class who did not at the time express their convictions, but who, having searched the Scriptures for themselves, at a future time declared with great boldness for the Reformation.

The Elector Frederic had looked forward with anxiety to Luther's appearance before the diet, and with deep emotion he listened to his speech. He rejoiced at the doctor's courage, firmness, and self-possession, and was proud of being his protector.

He contrasted the parties in contest; on the one hand the world and the church, in all their pride and power, and on the other a single obscure monk; and he saw the wisdom of popes, kings, and prelates brought to naught by the power of truth.

The papacy had sustained a defeat which would be felt among all nations and in all ages.

14. Charles V Against Luther

September 6, 1883

ALEANDER, the papal legate, clearly perceived the effect produced by Luther's speech. He feared, as never before, for the security of the Romish power, and resolved to employ every means at his command to effect the Reformer's overthrow. With all the eloquence and diplomatic skill for which he was so eminently distinguished, he represented to the youthful emperor the folly and danger of sacrificing, in the cause of an insignificant monk, the friendship and support of the powerful see of Rome.

Charles V Closes His Mind

His words were not without effect. On the day following Luther's answer, Charles Fifth caused a message to be presented to the diet, announcing his determination to carry out the policy of his predecessors to maintain and protect the Catholic religion.

Since Luther had refused to renounce his errors, the most vigorous measures should be employed against him and the heresies he taught. Nevertheless, the safe-conduct granted him must be respected; and before proceedings against him could be instituted, he must be allowed to reach his home in safety.

"I am firmly resolved to tread in the footsteps of my ancestors," wrote the monarch.

Thus he took his position, refusing to accept any light in advance of what his fathers had received, or perform any duty that his fathers had not performed.

He seemed to feel that a change of religious views would be inconsistent with the dignity of a great king. There are many at the present day thus clinging to the customs and traditions of their fathers. When the Lord sends them additional light,

they refuse to accept it, because, not having been granted to their fathers, it was not received by them.

A Danger for Us

We are not placed where our fathers were, consequently our duties and responsibilities are not the same as theirs. We shall not be approved of God in looking to the example of our fathers to determine our duty instead of searching the word of truth for ourselves.

Were our fathers engaged in an evil work? We are not to do wickedly because they did. Were they devoted to a good work? We can imitate them only by performing our duty as faithfully as they performed theirs; by heeding the light granted to us as faithfully as they heeded that which shone upon them; in short, by doing as they would have done had they lived in our day, and enjoyed our privileges and opportunities.

Our responsibility is greater than was that of our ancestors. We are accountable for the light which they received, and which was handed down as an inheritance for us, and we are also accountable for the additional light which is now shining upon us from the sure word of prophecy.

The truth that has convinced the understanding or convicted the soul, by whatever means it may have been given, will judge us at the last great day. No one will be condemned because he did not believe that which was never presented to his understanding or urged upon his conscience. Said Christ of the unbelieving Jews:

John 15

²² If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin.

The Unforgivable Sin

The same divine power had spoken through Luther to the

emperor and princes of Germany. And as the light shone forth from God's word, His Spirit pleaded for the last time with many in that assembly. Had not this appeal been presented to their understanding, their sin had not been so great. But the truth had stood forth in direct and unmistakable contrast with error; therefore their rejection of it sealed their condemnation.

The emperor decides that he will not step out of the royal path of custom, even to walk in the ways of truth and righteousness. Because his fathers did, he will uphold the papacy, with all its cruelty and corruption. With this decision, his day of mercy forever ended.

As Pilate, centuries before, had permitted pride and love of popularity to close his heart against the world's Redeemer; as the trembling Felix bade the messenger of truth,

Acts 24

²⁵ Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you;

—as the proud Agrippa confessed,

Acts 26

²⁸ Almost you persuade me to be a Christian,

—yet turned away from the Heaven-sent message,—so had Charles Fifth, yielding to the dictates of worldly pride and policy, refused his last call from God.

The Diet Divided

Charles had announced his decision in the case of Luther without previous consultation with the diet. This hasty and independent act of the youthful emperor excited the displeasure of that august body.

Two opposite parties at once appeared. Several of the pope's adherents demanded that Luther's safe-conduct should not be respected.

“The Rhine,” they said, “should receive his ashes, as it had received those of John Huss a century ago.”

In after years it was a cause of regret to Charles that he did not act upon this base proposition.

“I confess,” he said toward the close of his life, “that I committed a great fault by permitting Luther to live. I was not obliged to keep my promise with him; that heretic had offended a Master greater than I,—God himself. I might and I ought to have broken my word, and to have avenged the insult he had committed against God. It is because I did not put him to death, that heresy has not ceased to advance. His death would have stifled it in the cradle.”

So great was the darkness which came upon the mind that had willfully rejected the light of truth.

The proposition of the Romanists excited great alarm among the friends of the Reformer. And even one of his inveterate enemies, a duke of Saxony, denounced the infamous suggestion, affirming that the German princes would not tolerate the violation of a safe-conduct.

“Such perfidy,” he said, “befits not the ancient good faith of the Germans.”

Other princes also, who were attached to the Roman Church, supported this protest, and the peril that threatened the life of Luther gradually disappeared.

Two days were spent by the diet in the deliberation upon the proposition of the emperor. Rumors of the designs against Luther were widely circulated, causing great excitement throughout the city.

The Reformer had made many friends, who, knowing the treacherous cruelty of Rome toward all that dared expose her corruptions, resolved that he should not be sacrificed. More than four hundred nobles pledged themselves to protect him.

Not a few openly denounced the royal message as evincing a weak submission to the controlling power of Rome.

On the gates of houses and in public places, placards were posted, some condemning and others sustaining Luther. On one of them were written merely those significant words of the wise man:

“Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child.” (*Ecclesiastes* 10:16)

The popular enthusiasm in Luther’s favor throughout all Germany convinced both the emperor and the diet that any injustice shown him would endanger the peace of the empire, and even the stability of the throne.

There were many who loved and honored the Reformer, and wished to secure his safety, while at the same time they were desirous not to break with the Roman power. Hoping to accomplish this object, the German princes came in a body to the emperor to request time for further efforts for a reconciliation.

“I will not depart from what I have determined,” said he; “I will authorize no one to have any official communication with Luther.”

“But,” he added, “I will allow the man three days’ consideration, during which time anyone may exhort him privately as he may think fit.”

Many of the Reformer’s friends hoped that a private conference would prove successful. But the Elector of Saxony, who knew Luther better, felt assured that he would stand firm. In a letter to his brother, Duke John of Saxony, Frederic expressed his anxiety for Luther’s safety, and his own willingness to undertake his defense.

“You can hardly imagine,” he continued, “how I am beset by the partisans of Rome. If I were to tell you all, you would

hear strange things. They are bent upon his ruin; and if anyone evinces the least interest in his safety, he is instantly cried down as a heretic. May God, who forsakes not the cause of the righteous, bring the struggle to a happy issue.”

Frederic maintained a studied reserve toward the Reformer, carefully concealing his real feelings, while at the same time he guarded him with tireless vigilance, watching all his movements and all those of his enemies.

But there were many who made no attempt to conceal their sympathy. Princes, barons, knights, gentlemen, ecclesiastics, and common people surrounded Luther’s lodgings, entering and gazing upon him as though he were something more than human.

Even those who believed him to be in error could not but admire that nobility of soul which led him to peril his life rather than violate his conscience.

15. Proposed Compromise With Luther

September 20, 1883

NO SOONER had the consent of the emperor been obtained, than an attempt was made to effect a compromise with Luther.

The Archbishop of Treves

The archbishop of Treves, a staunch Romanist and an intimate friend of the Elector Frederic, undertook the office of mediator. The Reformer was summoned to the residence of this prelate, where were assembled several dignitaries of the church, with secular nobles and deputies, among the rest one Cochlaeus, who was there simply as a spy for the pope's legate.

The spokesman of the company was himself desirous of a reformation in the church, and was therefore favorably disposed toward Luther. With great kindness he addressed the Reformer, assuring him that all the princes present were in earnest to save him, but if he persisted in setting up his own judgment against that of the church and the councils, he would be banished from the empire, and would then have no shelter.

To this appeal Luther made answer:

“It is impossible to preach the gospel of Christ without offense. Why, then, should any such fear separate me from the Lord and that divine word which alone is truth? No; rather will I give up body, blood, and life itself.”

Again he was urged to submit to the judgment of the emperor, and then he would have nothing to fear.

“I consent,” said he in reply, “with all my heart, to the emperor, the princes, and even the humblest Christian's examining and judging of my writings; but on one single condition; namely, that they take God's word for their guide. Men have

nothing to do but render obedience to that. My conscience is in dependence upon that word, and I am the bounden subject of its authority.”

The company soon broke up and withdrew. Two or three remained, however, greatly desiring to accomplish their object. But Luther was firm as a rock.

“The pope,” said he, “is no judge in things pertaining to the word of the Lord. It is the duty of every Christian to see and understand how to live and die.”

The failure of this effort was communicated to the diet by the archbishop of Treves. The surprise of the young emperor was equaled only by his indignation.

“It is high time,” he said, “to put an end to this business.”

The archbishop pleaded for two days more, and all the diet uniting in the request, the emperor consented, much against the will of the legate.

The Proposition of Cochlaeus

Another effort was made to effect a compromise. Cochlaeus was ambitious to accomplish what kings and prelates had failed to do. Dining with Luther at his hotel, he in a friendly manner urged him to retract. Luther shook his head. Several persons at the table expressed their indignation that the papists, instead of convincing Luther by arguments, should seek to control him by force.

Cochlaeus then offered to dispute with him publicly, provided he would forego his safe-conduct. A public discussion was what Luther most desired; but he well knew that to forego his safe-conduct would be to imperil his life.

The guests suspected that the proposition of Cochlaeus was a stratagem of popery for delivering Luther into the hands of those who sought his destruction, and in their indignation

they seized the terrified priest, and hurled him out of doors.

The Archbishop Tries Again

The archbishop of Treves desired another interview, and invited to supper the persons who attended the previous conference, hoping that in the midst of familiar intercourse the parties would be more disposed to a reconciliation.

These repeated efforts to move Luther from his steadfastness remind one of Balak conducting Balaam from one point to another, in the vain hope that he might be induced to change the blessing of Israel into a curse. The bishop succeeded no better than did the king of Moab. Human applause and the fear of man were alike powerless to shake the Reformer's decision. He was sustained by a divine power.

Two Officials Try

Still another trial was made. Two officials of high rank, one of whom had manifested much affection for Luther, called upon him at his hotel. The elector sent two of his counselors to be present at this interview. The two first mentioned were desirous, at any sacrifice, to prevent the great division that seemed about to rend the church. Earnestly they entreated Luther to commit the matter to their hands, assuring him that it should be settled in a Christian spirit.

“I answer at once,” said Luther, “I consent to forego my safe-conduct, and resign my person and my life to the emperor's disposal; but as to the word of God....Never!”

One of Frederic's counselors then stood up and said to the envoys,

“Is not that enough? Is not such a sacrifice sufficient?”

And after protesting that he would hear no more, he withdrew. The two envoys did not even yet understand the inflexible firmness of the man with whom they had to deal. Thinking

that they could more easily succeed with him alone, they seated themselves by his side, and again urged him to submit to the diet.

He met these solicitations as Christ met his great adversary,—with the word of God. Said Luther,

“It is written, ‘Cursed is he that trusts in man.’”

They pressed him more and more, until Luther, weary and disgusted, arose and signified to them to retire, saying,

“I will allow no man to exalt himself above God’s word.”

A General Council Proposed

At evening they returned with a new proposition,—a general council. They asked him only to consent to the proposition, without entering into details.

“I consent,” said he, “but on condition that the council decide according to the Holy Scriptures.”

Thinking that this would of course be accepted, they hastened joyfully to the archbishop of Treves, and informed him that Dr. Luther would submit his writings to the judgment of a council.

The archbishop was on the point of communicating the glad tidings to the emperor when a doubt crossed his mind. He had found Luther so firm and confident in his faith, that he decided it would be safest to hear the statement from his own lips. He accordingly sent for him.

“Dear Doctor,” said the archbishop with much kindness, “my doctors assure me that you consent to submit your cause without reserve to the decision of a council.”

“My lord,” said Luther, “I can endure anything except to abandon the Holy Scriptures.”

The archbishop saw that his messengers had not fully explained the facts. Never would Rome give her consent to a council which should take the inspired word alone for its guide.

“Well then,” said the venerable prelate, “let me hear your own remedy for the evil.”

Luther was silent for a moment. Then he spoke with respect and great solemnity:

“I know of none but what is found in the counsel of Gamaliel: ‘If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught. But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest haply you be found even to fight against God!’ Let the emperor, the electors, and the States of the empire, return that answer to the pope.”

The archbishop was at last convinced that further effort was useless. Luther had set his feet upon the sure foundation, and he could not be moved.

The Reformer was convinced that there was nothing to be gained by a longer stay at Worms. Before retiring from the presence of the archbishop he said,

“My lord, I beg you to request his majesty to send me the safe-conduct necessary for my return whence I came.”

“I will attend to it,” said the archbishop, and they parted.

Luther had refused to exchange the yoke of Christ for the yoke of popery. This was his only offense; but it was sufficient to imperil his life. The attention of the whole empire had been directed to this one man, and all their threats and entreaties had failed to shake his fidelity to God and His word.

Luther had not without help maintained his steadfastness. A greater than Luther was with him, controlling his mind, sanctifying his judgment, and imparting to him wisdom in every

hour of peril.

Had the Reformer yielded a single point, Satan and his hosts would have gained the victory. But Luther's unwavering firmness under the iron hand of the pope was the means of emancipating the church and beginning a new and better era.

The influence of this one man, who had dared to think and act for himself in religious matters, was to affect the church and the world not only in his own time, but to all future generations. His firmness and fidelity would strengthen all who should pass through a similar experience, to the close of time.

This was the work of God. Luther's defense before the diet of Worms was one of the grandest scenes recorded in history. The power and majesty of God stand forth above the counsel of men, above the mighty power of Satan.

Luther Commanded to Leave

Shortly after Luther's return to his hotel, two high officers of State, accompanied by a notary, presented themselves. The imperial chancellor addressed him, stating that the emperor, the electors and princes, having vainly exhorted him, his imperial majesty, as defender of the Catholic faith, found himself compelled to resort to other measures.

He commanded Luther to return home in the space of twenty-one days, and on the way to refrain from disturbing the public peace by preaching or writing. Luther was aware that this message would speedily be followed by his condemnation. He answered mildly,

“It has happened unto me according to the will of the Eternal. Blessed be His name!”

He continued:

“And first I humbly, and from the bottom of my heart, thank his majesty, the electors, princes, and States of the empire, that they have given me so gracious a hearing. I neither

have, nor ever have had, a wish but for one thing; to wit, a reformation of the church according to the Holy Scriptures.

“I am ready to do or to suffer all things for obedience to the emperor’s will. Life or death, honor or dishonor, I will bear. I make but one reservation, the preaching of the gospel; for, says St. Paul, the word of God is not to be bound.”

16. Luther in the Wartburg

October 11, 1883

ON THE 26th of April, 1521, Luther departed from Worms. Threatening clouds overhung his path, yet as he passed out of the gate of the city, his heart was filled with joy and praise.

“Satan himself,” said he, “kept the pope’s citadel; but Christ has made a wide breach in it, and the devil has been compelled to confess that Christ is mightier than he.”

“The conflict at Worms,” writes a friend of the Reformer, “resounded far and near; and as the report of it traversed Europe, from the northern countries to the mountains of Switzerland and the towns of England, France, and Italy, many seized with eagerness the mighty weapons of the word of God.”

Luther left the city at ten o’clock, with the friends who had accompanied him to Worms. Twenty gentlemen on horseback surrounded the carriage, and a great crowd attended him beyond the walls.

Letters to the Emperor and States

Upon the journey from Worms, he determined to write once more to the emperor, being unwilling to appear to him as a guilty rebel.

“God is my witness, who knows the thoughts,” said he, “that I am ready with all my heart to obey your majesty through good or evil report, in life or in death, with one exception—save the word of God, by which man lives.

“In all the affairs of this life my fidelity shall be unshaken; for in these, loss or gain has nothing to do with salvation. But it is contrary to the will of God that man should be subject to man in that which pertains to eternal life. Subjection in spirituals is a real worship, and should be rendered only to the

Creator.”

He also addressed to the States of the empire a letter of nearly the same purport, recapitulating what had transpired at Worms. This letter made a deep impression upon the minds of the German people. They saw that Luther had been treated with great injustice by the emperor and the higher clergy, and their feelings were strongly aroused against the arrogant assumptions of the papacy.

Had Charles V understood the real value of such a man as Luther to his empire, a man who would not be bought or sold, who would not sacrifice principle for friends or foes,—he would have cherished and honored instead of denouncing and proscribing him.

Luther journeyed toward home, receiving, as he went, the most flattering attentions from all classes. Dignitaries of the church welcomed the monk upon whom the pope’s curse rested, and secular officers honored the man who was under the ban of the empire.

He decided to turn aside from the direct route, to visit Mora, his father’s birthplace. His friend Amsdorff and a wagoner accompanied him, while the remainder of the party proceeded on their way to Wittenberg. After spending a day with his relatives, enjoying a peaceful rest in marked contrast to the turmoil and strife of Worms, he resumed his journey.

Captured

As the carriage was passing a narrow defile, the travelers encountered five horsemen, completely armed and masked. Two of the men seized Amsdorff and the wagoner, while the other three proceeded to secure Luther. In profound silence they forced him to alight, threw a knight’s cloak over his shoulders, and placed him upon an extra horse. Then the two in charge of Amsdorff and the wagoner released them, and the five all sprang into their saddles, and disappeared with

their prisoner in the thick gloom of the forest.

Through winding and intricate paths they made their way, now advancing and now retracing their steps in such a manner as effectually to elude pursuit. When night fell, they struck into a new road, and swiftly and silently pressed forward, through dark, almost untrodden forests, to the mountains of Thuringia. Here, on a lofty summit, reached only by a steep and difficult ascent, stood the castle of Wartburg. Within the walls of this isolated stronghold, Luther was conducted by his captors, and the heavy gates closed after him, effectually shutting him from the sight and knowledge of the world without.

The Reformer had not fallen into the hands of enemies. A vigilant eye had followed his movements, and as the storm was about to burst upon his defenseless head, a true and noble heart had resolved upon his rescue. It was plain that Rome would be satisfied with nothing short of his death; only by concealment could he be preserved from the jaws of the lion.

The Edict Against Luther

Upon Luther's departure from Worms, the papal legate had procured an edict against him, to which was affixed the emperor's signature and the seal of the empire. In this imperial decree Luther was denounced as:

“Satan himself, under the semblance of a man in a monk's hood.”

It was commanded that as soon as his safe-conduct should expire, measures be taken to stop his work.

- All persons were forbidden to harbor him, to give him food or drink, or by word or act, in public or private, to aid or abet him.
- He was to be seized wherever he might be, and delivered to the authorities.

- His adherents also were to be imprisoned, and their property confiscated.
- His writings were ordered to be destroyed; and finally,
- All who should dare to act contrary to this decree were placed under the ban of the empire.

The emperor had spoken, and the diet had given their sanction to the decree. The whole body of Romanists were jubilant. Now they considered the fate of the Reformation sealed. The superstitious multitude were filled with horror at the thought of Luther as the incarnate Satan whom the emperor had described as clothed in a monk's habit.

A Place of Safety and Solitude

In this hour of peril, God prepared a way of escape for his servant. The Holy Spirit moved upon the heart of the Elector of Saxony, and gave him wisdom to devise a plan for Luther's preservation. Frederick had caused it to be intimated to the Reformer while still at Worms, that his liberty might be sacrificed for a time to secure his own safety and that of the Reformation; yet no hint had been given as to the manner in which this might be accomplished.

With the cooperation of true friends, the elector's purpose was carried out, and with so much tact and skill that Luther was effectually hidden from friends and foes. In fact, both his seizure and his concealment were so involved in mystery that even Frederick himself for a long time knew not where he had been conducted.

This ignorance was not without design; so long as the elector knew nothing of Luther's whereabouts, he could reveal nothing. He had assured himself that the Reformer was safe, and with this knowledge he was content.

Spring, summer, and autumn passed, and winter came, and Luther still remained a prisoner. Aleander and his partisans rejoiced that the light of the gospel seemed about to be extin-

guished. But instead of this, Luther was but filling his lamp from the unfailing storehouse of truth, to shine forth in due time with brighter radiance.

The Danger of Exalting Man

It was not merely to secure his own safety that Luther was, in the providence of God, withdrawn from the stage of public life. Infinite Wisdom overruled all circumstances and events for the accomplishment of His deep designs. It is not the will of God that His work should bear the impress of one man. There were other workers who in Luther's absence must be called to the front, to give character to the Reformation, that it might develop proportionately.

Furthermore, in every reformatory movement, there is danger that it will receive the stamp of the human rather than the divine. As men rejoice in the freedom which the truth brings them, they are inclined to exalt those whom God has employed to break the chains of error and superstition.

These leaders are honored, extolled, and revered, and if they are not truly humble and devoted, unselfish and incorruptible, they gradually lose sight of their continual dependence upon God, and begin to trust in themselves. Soon they seek to control the minds and restrict the consciences of others, seeming to regard themselves as the only channel through which God will communicate light to his church. The work of reform is often retarded because of this spirit indulged by its supporters.

In the friendly security of the Wartburg, Luther for a time gave himself up to repose, and rejoiced in his release from the heat and turmoil of battle. From the castle walls he looked down upon the dark forests that shut him in on every side, then turning his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed,

“Strange captivity! a prisoner by consent, yet against my will!”

“Pray for me,” he writes to Spalatin. “I want nothing save your prayers. Do not disturb me by what is said or thought of me in the world. At last I am quiet.”

The solitude and obscurity of this mountain retreat had another and still more precious blessing for the Reformer. Here he was saved from becoming too greatly elated by success. He was removed from every human prop, shut out from the sympathy and praise which are so often unwisely given, and which so often lead to the most deplorable results.

It is Satan’s studied object to direct men’s thoughts and affections from God, who should receive all praise and glory, and fix them upon human agencies; to exalt the mere instrument which God employs, and ignore the Hand that directs all the events of providence.

Here is a danger against which all Christians should constantly guard. However much they may admire the noble, self-sacrificing deeds of God’s faithful servants, they should remember that God alone is to be exalted. All the wisdom, ability, and grace which men possess, has been given them of God. To Him should be all the praise.

Active in Writing

Luther could not long find satisfaction in quiet and repose. Accustomed to a life of activity and stern conflict, he could ill endure to remain inactive. In these solitary days, the condition of the church rose up before him, and he felt that there was no man who could stand upon the walls and build up Zion.

Again his thoughts returned to himself, and he feared being charged with cowardice in withdrawing from the work. Then he reproached himself for his indolence and self-indulgence. Yet at the same time he was daily accomplishing more than it seemed possible for one man to do. He writes,

“I am going through the Bible in Hebrew and Greek. I mean

to write a discourse in German touching auricular confession, also to continue the translation of the Psalms, and to compose a collection of sermons as soon as I have received what I want from Wittenberg. My pen is never idle.”

While his enemies flattered themselves that he was silenced, they were astonished and confused by tangible proof that he was still active. A host of tracts issuing from his pen, circulated throughout Germany. For nearly a whole year, sheltered from the wrath of all opposers, he exhorted and rebuked the prevailing sins of the time.

He also performed a most important service for his countrymen by translating the original scriptures of the New Testament into the German tongue. Thus the word of God was opened to the understanding of the common people, so that all might read for themselves the words of life and truth.

Thus he labored most effectually to turn all eyes from the pope of Rome to Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.

17. The Reformation During Luther's Imprisonment

October 18, 1883

WHILE Luther was safely hidden in the fortress of Wartburg, how did his strange absence affect the world?

All Germany was thrown into consternation. Inquiries concerning him were heard everywhere. Even his enemies were more agitated by his absence than they could have been by his presence.

The wildest rumors were circulated. Many believed that he had been murdered. There was great lamentation, not only by his avowed friends, but by thousands who had not openly taken their stand with the Reformation. Said the people,

“Never more shall we behold him. Never again shall we hear that bold man whose voice stirred the depths of our hearts.”

Many bound themselves by a solemn oath to avenge his death.

The Romanists saw with terror to what a pitch had risen the feeling against them. Though at first exultant at the supposed death of Luther, they now desired to hide from the wrath of the people. Those who were enraged against him when he was at large, were filled with fear now that he was in captivity.

“The only way of extricating ourselves,” said a Roman Catholic, “is to light our torches, and go searching through the earth for Luther, till we can restore him to a nation that will have him.”

The edict of the emperor seemed to fall powerless. The papal legates were filled with indignation as they saw that it commanded far less attention than did the fate of Luther.

“The ink of the signature,” said they, “has scarcely had time to dry, when, behold, on all sides the imperial decree is torn to pieces.”

The Reformation Grows

The Reformation was constantly gaining in strength. Increasing numbers joined the cause of the heroic man who had, at such fearful odds, defended the word of God. The people said,

“Has he not offered to retract if refuted? and no one has had the hardihood to undertake to refute him. Does that not show that he has spoken the truth?”

The seed which he had sown was springing up everywhere. Luther’s absence accomplished a work which his presence would have failed to do. Other laborers felt a new responsibility, now that their great leader was removed. With new faith and earnestness they pressed forward to do all in their power, that the work so nobly begun might not be hindered.

The Rise of Fanaticism

But while the Reformation was progressing steadily and surely, Satan was not idle. Baffled in all his previous efforts to destroy the work, he adopted another plan of operation. He now attempted what he has attempted in every other reformatory movement,—to deceive and destroy the people by palming off upon them a counterfeit in place of the true work.

As there were false christs in the first century of the Christian Church, so there arose false prophets in the sixteenth century. A few men, deeply affected by the excitement in the religious world, imagined themselves to have received special revelations from Heaven. Refusing to be guided by the word of God, they gave themselves up to be controlled by feelings and impressions.

Instead of heeding the apostle’s injunction to walk by the

same rule, and mind the same things, seeking to be in harmony with those whom God was leading, they determined to move out independently. They claimed to have been divinely commissioned to carry forward to its completion the Reformation but feebly begun by Luther.

In truth, they were undoing the very work which he had accomplished. Luther had presented to the people the word of God as the rule by which their character and faith should be tested. These men substituted for that unerring guide the changeable and uncertain standard of their own feelings and impressions.

“What is the use,” asked they, “of such close application to the Scriptures? Nothing is heard of but the Bible. Can the Bible preach to us? Can it suffice for our instruction? If God had intended to instruct us by a book, would He not have sent us a Bible direct from Heaven? It is by the Spirit only that we can be enlightened. God himself speaks to us, and shows us what to do and what to say.”

Thus did these men seek to overthrow the fundamental principle on which the Reformation was based,—the word of God as an all-sufficient standard of faith and practice. By this act of setting aside the great detector of error and falsehood, the way was opened for Satan to control minds as best pleased himself.

In the town of Zwickau arose one claiming to have been visited by the angel Gabriel, and instructed concerning matters which he was forbidden to reveal. A former student of Wittenberg joined this fanatic, and at once abandoned his studies, declaring that he had received from God himself the ability to explain the Scriptures.

Several other persons who were naturally inclined to fanaticism, united with these men; and as their adherents increased, the leaders effected an organization, being desirous, they said, to follow the example of Christ, and claiming that in them

prophets and apostles were restored to the church.

The proceedings of these enthusiasts created no little excitement. The preaching of Luther had aroused the people everywhere to feel the necessity of reform, and now some really honest persons were misled by the pretensions of the new prophets. Those especially who had a love for the marvelous, united with the fanatical party.

But the heresy was promptly met by workers in the cause of the Reformation. The pastor of the church of Zwickau was a man who exemplified in his own life the truths preached by Luther. He tested all things by the word of God, and therefore was not deceived by these pretenders. He resolutely resisted the delusions which they were seeking to introduce, and his deacons supported him in the work.

The fanatics, opposed by the officers of the church, set themselves against all the established forms of order and organization. Their passionate appeals aroused and excited the people, who, in their zeal against the Romanists, proceeded to violence. A priest bearing the host was pelted with stones, and the civil authorities, being called upon to interfere, committed the assailants to prison.

Intent upon justifying their course, and obtaining redress, the leaders of the movement proceeded to Wittenberg, and presented their case before the professors of the University. Said they,

“We are sent by God to teach the people. We have received special revelations from God himself, and therefore know what is coming to pass. We are apostles and prophets, and appeal to Dr. Luther as to the truth of what we say.”

The professors were astonished and perplexed. This was such an element as they had never before encountered, and they knew not what course to pursue. Said Melancthon,

“There are indeed spirits of no ordinary kind in these men;

but what spirits? None but Luther can decide. On the one hand, let us beware of quenching the Spirit of God, and on the other, of being seduced by the spirit of Satan.”

Doctrines that were in direct opposition to the Reformation were put forth by these men, and the fruit of the new teaching soon became apparent. The minds of the people were diverted from the word of God, or decidedly prejudiced against it.

Both the University and the lower schools were thrown into confusion. The students, spurning all restraint, abandoned their studies, and the States of Germany recalled all that belonged to their jurisdiction.

Thus the men who thought themselves competent to revive and control the work of the Reformation, succeeded only in bringing it to the very brink of ruin.

Luther at the Wartburg, hearing of what had transpired, said with deep concern,

“I always expected that Satan would send us this plague.”

The Romanists now regained their confidence, and exclaimed exultantly,

“One more effort, and all will be ours.”

A Cry for Luther's Return

A prompt and determined effort to check the fanaticism was the only hope of the Reformation. And now there rose throughout all Wittenberg a cry for Luther. Never were his sound judgment and inflexible firmness more greatly needed.

Neither the mild and peace-loving elector nor the timid and youthful Melancthon were prepared to cope with such an enemy. Professors and citizens alike felt that Luther alone could guide them safely at this important crisis. Even the fanatics appealed to his decision.

Luther received numberless letters describing the different phases of this new evil, and its baleful results, and earnestly entreating his presence. He perceived the true character of those pretended prophets, and saw the danger that threatened the church.

All that he had endured from the opposition of both the pope and the emperor had not caused him such perplexity of mind or anguish of soul as did this deceptive work now linking itself with the Reformation. From the cause itself had arisen its worst enemies. Pretended friends were tearing down what he had labored at tremendous odds to build up. The very truths which had brought peace to his troubled heart had been made the cause of dissension in the church.

In the work of reform, Luther had been urged forward by the Spirit of God, and had been carried beyond himself. He had not purposed to take such positions as he did, or to make so radical changes. He had been but the instrument in the hands of infinite power. Yet he often trembled for the result of his work. He had once said,

“If I knew that my doctrine had injured one human being, however poor and unknown,—which it could not, for it is the very gospel,—I would rather face death ten times over than not retract it.”

And now a whole city, and that city Wittenberg itself, is fast sinking into confusion. The doctrine taught by Luther had not caused this evil; but throughout Germany his enemies were eagerly charging it upon him. In bitterness of soul he sometimes asked,

“Is this to be the result of the great work of the Reformation?”

Again, as he wrestled with God in prayer, peace flowed into his mind.

“The work is not mine, but Your own,” he said; “You will not suffer it to be corrupted by superstition or fanaticism.”

But the thought of remaining longer from the conflict in such a crisis, became insupportable. He determined to go forth and meet the disturbing element that threatened so great damage to the cause of truth and righteousness.

18. Luther Returns to Wittenberg

October 25, 1883

ON THE third of March, 1522, ten months after his capture and imprisonment, Luther bade adieu to the Wartburg, and through the gloomy forests pursued his journey toward Wittenberg.

He was under the ban of the empire. Enemies were at liberty to take his life; friends were forbidden to aid or even shelter him. The Imperial Government, urged on by the determined zeal of Duke George of Saxony, were adopting the most stringent measures against his adherents.

So great were the dangers threatening the Reformer's safety, that notwithstanding the urgent demand for his return to Wittenberg, the elector Frederick wrote entreating him to remain in his secure retreat. But Luther saw that the work of the gospel was imperiled, and, regardless of his own safety, he determined to return to the conflict.

Upon arriving at the town of Borne, he wrote to the elector, explaining his course in leaving the Wartburg:

"I have sufficiently shown my deference to your highness, in withdrawing from the public gaze for a whole year. Satan knows that it was not from cowardice that I did so. I would have entered Worms, though there had been as many devils in the town as there were tiles upon its roofs.

"Now Duke George, whom your highness mentioned as if to scare me, is much less to be dreaded than a single devil. If what is passing at Wittenberg were occurring at Leipsic [the usual residence of Duke George], I would instantly mount my horse, and repair there, even though—your highness will, I trust, pardon the expression—it should rain Duke Georges for nine days together, and every one should be nine times as fierce as he! What can he be thinking of in attacking me? Does he suppose that Christ my Lord is a man of straw? May God avert from him the awful judgment that hangs over him!

“Be it known to your highness that I am repairing to Wittenberg under a protection more powerful than that of an elector. I have no thought of soliciting the aid of your highness; and am so far from desiring your protection, that it is rather my purpose to protect your highness. If I knew that your highness could, or would, take up my defense, I would not come to Wittenberg. No secular sword can advance this cause; God must do all, without the aid or cooperation of man. He who has most faith, is the most availing defense; but, as it seems to me, your highness is as yet very weak in faith.

“But since your highness desires to know what to do, I will humbly answer: Your electoral highness has already done too much, and should do nothing whatever. God neither wants nor will He endure, that you or I should take thought or part in the matter. Let your highness follow this advice.

“In regard to myself, your highness must remember your duty as elector, and allow the instructions of his imperial majesty to be carried into effect in your towns and districts, offering no impediment to any one who would seize or kill me; for none may contend against the powers that be, save only He who has ordained them.

“Let your highness accordingly leave the gates open, and respect safe-conducts, if my enemies in person, or by their envoys, should come to search for me in your highness’ States. Everything may take its course without trouble or prejudice to your highness.

“I write this in haste, that you may not feel aggrieved by my coming. My business is with another kind of person from Duke George, one who knows me, and whom I know well.”

It was not to war against the decrees of earthly rulers, but to thwart the plans and resist the power of the prince of darkness, that Luther returned to Wittenberg. In the name of the Lord he went forth once more to battle for the truth. With great caution and humility, yet with decision and firmness, he entered upon his work, maintaining that the word of God must be the test of all doctrines and all actions.

“By the word, we must refute and expel what has gained a place and influence by violence. I would not resort to force against the superstitious, nor even the unbelievers. Whosoever believes, let him draw nigh, and he that believes not, let him stand afar off. Let there be no compulsion. I have been laboring for liberty of conscience. Liberty is the very essence of faith.”

Meeting the Fanatics

The Reformer had no desire to meet the deluded men whose fanaticism had been productive of so great evil. He knew them to be men of hasty and violent temper, who while claiming to be especially illuminated from Heaven would not endure the slightest contradiction, or even the kindest admonition. Arrogating to themselves supreme authority, they required every one, without a question, to acknowledge their claims.

Two of these prophets, Stubner and Cellarius, demanded an interview with Luther, which he deemed it best to grant. He determined to expose the pretensions of these impostors, and, if possible, rescue the souls that had been deceived by them.

Stubner opened the conversation by showing how he proposed to restore the church and reform the world. Luther listened with great patience, and finally replied,

“Of all you have been saying, there is nothing that I see to be based upon Scripture. It is a mere tissue of fiction.”

At these words Cellarius in a violent passion struck his fist upon the table, and exclaimed against Luther’s speech as an insult offered to a man of God. Luther replied,

“Paul declared that the signs of an apostle were wrought among the Corinthians in signs and mighty deeds. Do you likewise prove your apostleship by miracles?”

The prophets answered,

“We will do so.”

Luther rejoined,

“The God whom I serve will know how to bridle your gods.”

Stubner now fixed his eyes upon the Reformer, and said, in a solemn tone,

“Martin Luther, hear me while I declare what is passing at this moment in your soul. You are beginning to see that my doctrine is true.”

Luther was silent for a moment, and then said,

“The Lord rebuke you, Satan.”

The prophets, losing all self-control, shouted in a rage,

“The Spirit! the Spirit!”

Luther answered, with cool contempt,

“I slap your spirit on the mouth.”

Hereupon the outcries of the prophets were redoubled; Celarius, more violent than the others, stormed and raged until he foamed at the mouth. As the result of the interview, the false prophets left Wittenberg that very day.

The fanaticism was checked for a time; but a few years later, it broke out with greater violence and more terrible results. Said Luther, concerning the leaders in this movement:

“To them the Holy Scriptures were but a dead letter, and they all began to cry, ‘The Spirit! the Spirit!’ But most assuredly I will not follow where their spirit leads them. May God in his mercy preserve me from a church in which there are none but saints. I wish to be in fellowship with the humble, the weak, the sick, who know and feel their sins, and sigh and cry continually to God from the bottom of their

hearts to obtain comfort and deliverance.”

Thomas Munzer

Thomas Munzer, who was the most active of these fanatics, was a man of considerable ability, which, rightly directed, would have enabled him to do good; but he had not learned the very first lessons of Christianity; he had not a knowledge of his own heart, and greatly lacked true humility.

Yet he imagined himself ordained of God to reform the world, forgetting, like many other enthusiasts, that the reform should begin with himself. Erroneous writings which he had read in his youth had given a wrong direction to his character and his life. Furthermore, he was ambitious of position and influence, and unwilling to be second, even to Luther.

He charged the Reformers with establishing, by their adherence to the Bible alone, a species of popery, and with forming churches that were not pure and holy. He said,

“Luther has liberated men’s consciences from the papal yoke; but he has left them in carnal liberty, and has not led them to depend on the Spirit, and look directly to God for light.”

He considered himself as called of God to remedy this great evil, and held that manifestations of the Spirit were the means by which this was to be accomplished, and that he who had the Spirit possessed the true faith, though he might never have seen the written word. He said,

“The heathen and the Turks are better prepared to receive the Spirit than many of those Christians who call us enthusiasts.”

It is easier to tear down than to build up. It is far easier to trig the wheels of reform than to draw the chariot up the steep ascent. Men are still to be found who will accept just enough truth to pass as reformers, but who are too self-suffi-

cient to be taught by those whom God is teaching. Such are always leading directly away from the point to which God is seeking to bring his people.

Munzer taught that all who would receive the Spirit must mortify the flesh, wear tattered clothing, neglect the body, be of a sad countenance, and, forsaking all their former associates, retire to desert places, and there entreat the favor of God.

“Then,” said he, “God will come and speak with us as formerly he spoke with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If He were not to do so, He would not deserve our attention.”

Thus was this deluded man, like Lucifer himself, making terms for God, and refusing to acknowledge His authority unless He should comply with these terms.

Men naturally love the marvelous and whatever flatters their pride, and Munzer’s ideas were received by a considerable part of the little flock over which he presided. He next denounced all order and ceremony in public worship, and declared that to obey princes was to attempt to serve both God and Belial.

Then marching at the head of his followers to a chapel which was the resort of pilgrims from all quarters, he demolished it. After this act of violence, being compelled to leave that region, he wandered from place to place in Germany, and even went as far as Switzerland, everywhere exciting a spirit of rebellion, and unfolding his plan for a general revolution.

The minds of men, already beginning to throw off the yoke of the papacy, were also becoming impatient under the restraint of civil authority. Munzer’s revolutionary teachings, claiming divine sanction, led them to break away from all restraint and to give loose rein to their prejudices and passions. The most terrible scenes of sedition and strife followed, and the fields of Germany were drenched with blood.

Luther's Anguish

The anguish which Luther had so long before experienced in his cell at Erfurt, now pressed with redoubled power upon his soul as he saw the results of fanaticism charged upon the Reformation.

The princes constantly repeated, and many believed, that Luther's doctrine had been the cause of the rebellion. Although this charge was without the slightest foundation, it could but cause the Reformer great distress. That the work of Heaven should be thus degraded by being classed with the basest fanaticism, seemed more than he could endure.

On the other hand, Munzer and all the leaders in the revolt hated Luther because he had not only opposed their doctrines and denied their claims to divine inspiration, but had pronounced them rebels against the civil authority. In retaliation they denounced him as a base pretender. He seemed to have brought upon himself the enmity of both princes and people.

The Romanists exulted, expecting to witness the speedy downfall of the Reformation, and they blamed Luther even for the errors which he had been most earnestly endeavoring to correct.

The fanatical party, by falsely claiming to have been treated with great injustice, succeeded in gaining the sympathies of a large class of the people, and as is usually the case with those who take the wrong side, they came to be regarded as martyrs.

Satan's Rebellion Reproduced

Thus the ones who were exerting every energy to tear down the work of the Reformation were pitied and lauded as the victims of cruelty and oppression. All this was the work of Satan, prompted by the same spirit of rebellion which was first manifested in Heaven.

It was Satan's desire for the supremacy that caused discord

among the angels. The mighty Lucifer, “son of the morning,” claimed the right to honor and authority above the Son of God; and this not being accorded him, he determined to rebel against the government of Heaven. He therefore appealed to the angelic host, complaining of God’s injustice, and declaring himself deeply wronged. His false representations won to his side one-third of all the heavenly angels; and so strong was their delusion that they would not be corrected; they clung to Lucifer, and were expelled from Heaven with him.

Since his fall Satan has continued the same work of rebellion and falsehood. He is constantly laboring to deceive the minds of men, and lead them to call sin righteousness, and righteousness sin. How successful has been his work! How often are censure and reproach cast upon God’s faithful servants because they will stand fearlessly in defense of the truth!

Men who are but agents of Satan are praised and flattered, and even looked upon as martyrs, while those who should be respected and sustained for their fidelity to God, are left to stand alone, under suspicion and distrust. Satan’s warfare did not end when he was expelled from Heaven; it has been carried on from century to century, even to the present year.

Governed by Impressions

The fanatical teachers gave themselves up to be governed by impressions, calling every thought of the mind the voice of God; consequently they went to great extremes.

“Jesus,” said they, “commanded His followers to be as little children.”

Therefore they would dance through the streets, clap their hands, and even tumble one another in the sand. Some burned their Bibles, at the same time exclaiming,

“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Ministers indulged in the most violent and unbecoming behavior in the desk, sometimes leaping from the pulpit into the congregation. Thus they gave practical illustration of their teaching, that all forms and order proceeded from Satan, and that it was their duty to break every yoke, and to act just as they felt.

Luther boldly protested against these extravagances, and declared to the world that the Reformation was wholly distinct from that disorderly element. These abuses, however continued to be charged upon him by those who wished to stigmatize his work.

The Word of God vs. Human Wisdom

Fearlessly did Luther defend the truth from the attacks which came from every quarter. The word of God proved itself a weapon mighty indeed in every conflict. With that word he warred against the usurped authority of the pope, and the rationalistic philosophy of the schoolmen, while he stood firm as a rock against the fanaticism that sought to ally itself with the Reformation.

Each of these opposing elements was in its own way setting aside the sure word of prophecy, and exalting human wisdom as the source of religious truth and knowledge:

- Rationalism idolizes reason, and makes this the criterion for religion.
- Roman Catholicism claims for her sovereign pontiff an inspiration descended in unbroken line from the apostles, and unchangeable through all time, thus giving ample opportunity for every species of extravagance and corruption to be concealed under the sanctify of the apostolic commission.
- The inspiration claimed by Munzer and his associates proceeded from no higher source than the vagaries of the imagination, and its influence was subversive of all

authority, human or divine.

True Christianity receives the word of God as the great treasure-house of inspired truth, and the standard and test of all inspiration.

19. Triumph of the Reformation

November 1, 1883

The New Testament in German

UPON his return from Wartburg, Luther gave his attention to the work of revising his translation of the New Testament, and the gospel was soon after given to the people of Germany in their native tongue. This translation was received with great joy by all who loved the truth; but it was scornfully rejected by those who chose human traditions and the commandments of men.

The priests, who themselves knew little of the Scriptures, were alarmed at the thought that the common people would now be able to discuss with them the precepts of God's word, and that their own ignorance would thus be exposed.

Rome summoned all her authority and power to prevent the circulation of the Scriptures; but decrees, anathemas, and tortures were alike in vain. The more she condemned and prohibited the circulation of the Bible, the greater was the anxiety of the people to know what it really taught.

All who could read were eager to study the word of God for themselves. They carried it about with them, and read and reread, and could not be satisfied until they had committed large portions to memory. Seeing the eagerness with which the New Testament was received, Luther immediately began the translation of the Old, and published it in parts as fast as completed.

Conflict with King Henry VIII

About this time there appeared a new foe of the Reformation. Tidings reached Wittenberg that Henry VIII, king of England, had written a book supporting the Romish doctrines, and violently attacking Luther. Henry was one of the most powerful monarchs of Christendom, and he vainly imagined

that he could, without difficulty, annihilate the Reformation.

He drew no arguments from the Scriptures in support of his position, but cited instead only the authority of the church and the traditions of the Fathers. He also resorted to contempt and ridicule of his "feeble adversary," as he termed Luther, styling him also a wolf, a poisonous serpent, a limb of the devil.

The appearance of this book was hailed with great delight by the partisans of Rome. Its superficial reasoning and harsh denunciations suited well a people who willfully rejected the truths of God's word. It was lauded by princes and prelates, and even by the pope himself, and Henry VIII was revered as a prodigy of wisdom, even a second Solomon.

Luther read the work with astonishment and contempt. Its falsehood and insulting personalities, as well as its tone of affected contempt, excited his indignation, and the thought that the pope and his partisans had exulted in so weak and superficial a production, inspired him with a determination to silence their boasting.

Again he took up his pen against the enemies of the truth. He showed that Henry had sustained his doctrines only by the decrees and teachings of men.

"As to me," said he, "I do not cease my cry of, 'The gospel, the gospel! Christ, Christ!' and my enemies continue to reply, 'Custom, custom! Ordinances, ordinances! Fathers, Fathers!' St. Paul says, 'Let not your faith stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' And the apostle, by this thunder-clap from Heaven, at once overturns and disperses, as the wind scatters the dust, all the foolish thoughts of such a one as this Henry.

"To all the decisions of Fathers, of men, of angels, of devils, I oppose," says he, "not the antiquity of custom, not the habits of the many, but the word of the eternal God, the gospel, which they themselves are obliged to admit. It is to

this book that I keep; upon it I rest; in it I make my boast; in it I triumph and exult...The King of Heaven is on my side; therefore I fear nothing.”

And with arguments drawn from the word of God did Luther demolish and scatter to the winds all the sophisms of his opposers. It was with the new doctrines and their advocates as with the Israelites in Egypt,

Exodus 1

¹² The more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew.

The Word Awakening People

Luther's writing were eagerly read alike in the city and in the hamlet. At night the teachers of the village schools would read aloud to little groups gathered at the fireside. With every effort some souls would be convicted of the truth, and, receiving the word with tears of gladness, would in their turn tell the good news to others. The words of inspiration were verified,

Psalms 119

¹³⁰ The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple.

The study of the Scriptures was working a mighty change in the minds and hearts of the people, not only reforming the morals, but arousing the intellectual powers to a strength and vigor heretofore unknown.

The papal rule had placed upon the people an iron yoke which held them in ignorance and degradation. All their instruction and discipline had been of a character to encourage a superstitious observance of forms; the prescribed routine of worship was scrupulously maintained, but in all their service the heart and intellect had little part.

Yet many of these worshipers possessed dormant powers that needed only to be awakened and called into action. The

preaching of Luther, setting forth the plain truths of God's word, and then the word itself, placed in the hands of the common people, had not only purified and ennobled the spiritual nature, but had imparted a new life to the intellectual powers.

Persons of all ranks were to be seen with the Bible in their hands, defending the doctrines of the Reformation. The papists who had left the study of the Scriptures to the priests and monks, now called upon them to come forward and refute the new teachings. But ignorant alike of the Scriptures and of the power of God, priests and friars were totally defeated by those whom they had denounced as unlearned and heretical.

“Unhappily,” says a Catholic writer, “Luther had persuaded his followers that their faith ought only to be founded on the oracles of Holy Writ.”

Crowds would gather to hear the truth advocated by common men, and even discussed by them with learned and eloquent theologians. The shameful ignorance of these great men was made apparent as their arguments were met by the simple teachings of God's word. Persons of little education, women and laborers, were able to give from the Scriptures the reason of their faith.

The success that attended the Reformation excited the most bitter opposition. As the Romish clergy saw their congregations diminishing, they invoked the aid of the magistrates, and by every means in their power endeavored to bring back their hearers. These efforts were but partially successful.

The people were hungering for the bread of life; they had found in the teachings of the Reformation that which supplied the wants of their souls, and they turned away from those who had so long fed them with the worthless husks of superstitious rites and human traditions. Sometimes the people, irritated at the thought that they had so long been deceived by

fables, compelled the priests to leave their positions.

Persecution Spreads the Truth

When persecution was kindled against the Reformers, they gave heed to the words of Christ,

Matthew 10

²³ When they persecute you in this city, flee into another.

The light penetrated everywhere. The fugitives would find somewhere a hospitable door open to them, and there abiding they would preach Christ, sometimes in the church, or, if denied that privilege, in private houses, or in the open air. Wherever they could obtain a hearing was a consecrated temple. The truth, proclaimed with such energy and assurance, spread like fire in the stubble. No effort could stay its progress.

In the city of Ingolstadt, where was a university, and where, also, lived one of the most learned opponents of the Reformation, a young weaver read Luther's works to a crowded congregation. In the same city, the university council having decided that a disciple of Melancthon should be compelled to retract, a woman volunteered to defend him, and challenged the doctors to a public disputation. Women and children artisans and soldiers, had a better knowledge of the Scriptures than learned doctors or surpliced priests.

In vain were both ecclesiastical and civil authorities invoked to crush the heresy. In vain they resorted to imprisonment, torture, fire, and sword. Thousands of believers sealed their faith with their blood, and yet the work went on.

Throughout Germany, particularly in the Saxon States, in France and Holland, in Switzerland, in England, and in other countries, the Lord raised up men to present to the benighted minds of the people the light of God's word. Persecution served only to extend the work; and the fanaticism which Satan endeavored to unite with it, resulted in making more clear

the contrast between the work of Satan and the work of God.

The cause of truth was destined to triumph. God's faithful builders were not toiling alone. Could their eyes have been opened, they would have seen as marked evidence of divine presence and aid as was granted to a prophet of old. When Elisha's servant pointed his master to the hostile army surrounding them and cutting off all chance of escape, the prophet prayed,

2 Kings 6

¹⁷ Lord, I pray You, open his eyes, that he may see.

And, lo, the mountain was filled with chariots and horses of fire, the army of Heaven stationed to protect the servant of the Lord. Thus did the angels of God guard the workers in the cause of the Reformation.

God had commanded His servants to build, and the combined forces of earth and hell were powerless to drive them from the walls. Said the Lord,

Isaiah 62

⁶ I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night.

