YOUTH, CONVERSION, AND FIRST LABOURS OF LUTHER (1483–1517)

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Chapter 1

Luther’s Descent

All was ready. God who prepares his work through ages, accomplishes it by the weakest instruments, when His time is come. To effect great results by the smallest means — such is the law of God. This law, which prevails everywhere in nature, is found also in history. God selected the reformers of the Church from the same class whence he had taken the apostles. He chose them from among that lower rank, which, although not the lowest, does not reach the level of the middle classes. Everything was thus intended to manifest to the world that the work was not of man but of God. The reformer Zuingle emerged from an Alpine shepherd’s hut; Melancthon, the theologian of the Reformation, from an armorer’s shop; and Luther from the cottage of a poor miner.

The first period in man’s life — that in which he is formed and molded under the hand of God — is always important. It is eminently so in the career

of Luther. The whole of the Reformation is included in it. The different phases of this work succeeded one another in the soul of him who was to be the instrument for effecting it, before they were accomplished in the world. The knowledge of the change that took place in Luther's heart can alone furnish the key to the reformation of the Church. It is only by studying the particulars that we can understand the general work. Those who neglect the former will be ignorant of the latter except in its outward appearance. They may acquire a knowledge of certain events and certain results, but they will never comprehend the intrinsic nature of that revival, because the principle of life, that was its very soul, remains unknown to them. Let us therefore study the Reformation in Luther himself, before we proceed to the events that changed the face of Christendom.

In the village of Mora, near the Thuringian forests, and not far from the spot where Boniface, the apostle of Germany, began to proclaim the Gospel, had dwelt, doubtless for many centuries, an ancient and numerous family of the name of

Luther. As was customary with the Thuringian peasants, the eldest son always inherited the dwelling and the paternal fields, while the other children departed elsewhere in quest of a livelihood.

One of these, by name John Luther, married Margaret Lindemann, the daughter of an inhabitant of Neustadt in the see of Wurzburg. The married pair quitted the plains of Eisenach, and went to settle in the little town of Eisleben in Saxony, to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows.

Seckendorf relates, on the testimony of Rebhan, superintendent at Eisenach in 1601, that Luther’s mother, thinking her time still distant, had gone to the fair of Eisleben, and that contrary to her expectation she there gave birth to a son. Notwithstanding the credit that is due to Seckendorf, this account does not appear to be correct: in fact, none of the oldest of Luther’s historians mention it; and besides, it is about twenty-four leagues from Mora to Eisleben, and in the condition of Luther’s mother at that time,

people do not readily make up their minds to travel such a distance to see a fair; and, lastly, the evidence of Luther himself appears in direct opposition to this assertion. John Luther was an upright man, diligent in business, frank, and carrying the firmness of his character even to obstinacy. With a more cultivated mind than that of most men of his class, he used to read much. Books were then rare; but John omitted no opportunity of procuring them. They formed his relaxation in the intervals of repose, snatched from his severe and constant labors. Margaret possessed all the virtues that can adorn a good and pious woman. Her modesty, her fear of God, and her prayerful spirit, were particularly remarked. She was looked upon by the matrons of the neighborhood as a model whom they should strive to imitate. It is not precisely known how long the married pair had been living at Eisleben, when, on the 10th of November, one hour before midnight, Margaret gave birth to a son. Melancthon often questioned his friend's mother as to the period of his birth. "I well remember the day and the hour," replied she, "but I am not certain about the year." But Luther's

brother James, an honest and upright man, has recorded, that in the opinion of the whole family the future reformer was born on St. Martin's eve, 10th November, 1483. And Luther himself wrote on a Hebrew Psalter which is still in existence: "I was born in the year 1483." The first thought of his pious parents was to dedicate to God, according to the faith they professed, the child that he had given them. On the morrow, which happened to be Tuesday, the father carried his son to St. Peter's church, where he received the rite of Infant Baptism and was called Martin in commemoration of the day.

The child was not six months old, when his parents quitted Eisleben to repair to Mansfeldt, which is only five leagues distant. The mines of that neighborhood were then very celebrated. John Luther, who was a hardworking man, feeling that perhaps he would be called upon to bring up a numerous family, hoped to gain a better livelihood for himself and his children in that town. It was here that the understanding and strength of young Luther received their first development; here his

activity began to display itself, and here his character was declared in his words and in his actions. The plains of Mansfeldt, the banks of the Wipper, were the theater of his first sports with the children of the neighborhood.

The first period of their abode at Mansfeldt was full of difficulty to the worthy John and his wife. At first they lived in great poverty. “My parents,” said the Reformer, “were very poor. My father was a poor wood-cutter, and my mother has often carried wood upon her back, that she might procure the means of bringing up her children. They endured the severest labor for our sakes.” The example of the parents whom he revered, the habits they inspired in him, early accustomed Luther to labor and frugality. How many times, doubtless, he accompanied his mother to the wood, there to gather up his little faggot!

There are promises of blessing on the labor of the righteous, and John Luther experienced their realization. Having attained somewhat easier circumstances, he established two smelting

furnaces at Mansfeldt. Beside these furnaces little Martin grew in strength, and with the produce of this labor his father afterwards provided for his studies. “It was from a miner’s family,” says the good Mathesius, “that the spiritual founder of Christendom was to go forth: an image of what God would do in purifying the sons of Levi through him, and refining them like gold in his furnaces.” Respected by all for his integrity, for his spotless life, and good sense, John Luther was made councillor of Mansfeldt, capital of the earldom of that name. Excessive misery might have crushed the child’s spirit: the competence of his paternal home expanded his heart and elevated his character.

John took advantage of his new position to court the society which he preferred. He had a great esteem for learned men, and often invited to his table the clergy and schoolmasters of the place. His house offered a picture of those social meeting of his fellow-citizens, which did honor to Germany at the commencement of the sixteenth century. It was a mirror in which were reflected the numerous

images that followed one another in the agitated scene of the times. The child profited by them. No doubt the sight of these men, to whom so much respect was shown in his father's house, excited more than once in little Martin's heart the ambitious desire of becoming himself one day a schoolmaster or a learned man.

As soon as he was old enough to receive instructions, his parents endeavored to impart to him the knowledge of God, to train him up in His fear, and to mold him to christian virtues. They exerted all their care in this earliest domestic education. The father would often kneel at the child's bedside, and fervently pray aloud, begging the Lord that his son might remember His name and one day contribute to the propagation of the truth. The parent's prayer was most graciously listened to. And yet his tender solicitude was not confined to this.

His father, anxious to see him acquire the elements of that learning for which he himself had so much esteem, invoked God's blessing upon him,

and sent him to school. Martin was still very young. His father, or Nicholas Emler, a young man of Mansfeldt, often carried him in their arms to the house of George Emilius, and afterwards returned to fetch him home. Emler in after-years married one of Luther's sisters.

His parents' piety, their activity and austere virtue, gave the boy a happy impulse, and formed in him an attentive and serious disposition. The system of education which then prevailed made use of chastisement and fear as the principal incentives to study. Margaret, although sometimes approving to too great severity of her husband, frequently opened her maternal arms to her son to console him in his tears. Yet even she herself overstepped the limits of that wise precept: He that loveth his son, chasteneth him betimes. Martin's impetuous character gave frequent occasion for punishment and reprimand. "My parents," said Luther in after-life, "treated my harshly, so that I became very timid. My mother one day chastised me so severely about a nut, that the blood came. They seriously thought that they were doing right; but they could

not distinguish character, which however is very necessary in order to know when, or where, or how chastisement should be inflicted. It is necessary to punish; but the apple should be placed beside the rod." At school the poor child met with treatment no less severe. His master flogged him fifteen times successively on one morning. "We must," said Luther, when relating this circumstance — "we must whip children, but we must at the same time love them." With such an education Luther learnt early to despise the charms of a merely sensual life. "What is to become great, should begin small," justly observes one of his oldest biographers; "and if children are brought up too delicately and with too much kindness from their youth, they are injured for life." Martin learnt something at school. He was taught the heads of his Catechism, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, some hymns, some forms of prayer, and a Latin grammar written in the fourth century by Donatus who was St. Jeromes's master, and which, improved in the eleventh century by one Remigius, a French monk, was long held in great repute in every school. He

further studied the calendar of Cisio Janus, a very singular work, composed in the tenth or eleventh century: in fine, he learnt all that could be taught in the Latin school of Mansfeldt.

But the child’s thoughts do not appear to have been there directed to God.

The only religious sentiment that could then be discovered in him was fear.

Every time he heard Jesus Christ spoken of, he turned pale with affright; for the Savior had only been represented to him as an offended judge. This servile fear — so alien to true religion — may perhaps have prepared him for the glad tidings of the Gospel, and for that joy which he afterwards felt, when he learnt to know Him who is meek and lowly in heart.

John Luther wished to make his son a scholar. The day that was everywhere beginning to dawn, had penetrated even into the house of the Mansfeldt miner, and there awakened ambitious

thoughts. The remarkable disposition, the persevering application of his son, made John conceive the liveliest expectations. Accordingly, in 1497, when Martin had attained the age of fourteen years, his father resolved to part with him, and send him to the Franciscan school at Magdeburg. His mother was forced to consent, and Martin prepared to quit the paternal roof.

Magdeburg was like a new world to Martin. In the midst of numerous privations, for he scarcely had enough to live upon, he inquired — he listened. Andrew Proles, provincial of the Augustine order, was at that time warmly advocating the necessity of reforming religion and the Church.

It was not he, however, who deposited in the young man’s heart the first germ of the ideas that were afterwards developed there.

This was a rude apprenticeship for Luther. Thrown upon the world at the age of fourteen, without friends or protectors, he trembled in the

presence of his masters, and in the hours of recreation he painfully begged his bread in company with children poorer than himself. “I used to beg with my companions for a little food,” said he, “that we might have the means of providing for our wants. One day, at the time the Church celebrates the festival of Christ’s nativity, we were wandering together through the neighboring villages, going from house to house, and singing in four parts the usual carols on the infant Jesus, born at Bethlehem. We stopped before a peasant’s house that stood by itself at the extremity of the village. The farmer, hearing us sing our Christmas hymns, came out with some victuals which he intended to give us, and called out in a high voice and with a harsh tone, Boys, where are you? Frightened at these words, we ran off as fast as our legs would carry us. We had no reason to be alarmed, for the farmer offered us assistance with great kindness; but our hearts, no doubt, were rendered timorous by the menaces and tyranny with which the teachers were then accustomed to rule over their pupils, so that a sudden panic had seized us. At last, however, as the farmer continued calling after

us, we stopped, forgot our fears, ran back to him, and received from his hands the food intended for us. It is thus," adds Luther, "that we are accustomed to tremble and flee, when our conscience is guilty and alarmed.

In such a case we are afraid even of the assistance that is offered us, and of those who are our friends, and who would willingly do us every good." A year had scarcely passed away, when John and Margaret, hearing what difficulty their son found in supporting himself at Magdeburg, sent him to Eisenach, where there was a celebrated school, and in which town they had many relatives. They had other children; and although their means had increased, they could not maintain their son in a place where he was unknown. The furnaces and the industry of John Luther did little more than provide for the support of his family. He hoped that when Martin arrived at Eisenach, he would more easily find the means of subsistence; but he was not more fortunate in this town. His relations who dwelt there took no care about him, or perhaps, being very poor themselves, they could not give

him any assistance.

When the young scholar was pinched by hunger, he was compelled, as at Magdeburg, to join with his schoolfellows in singing from door to door to obtain a morsel of bread. This custom of Luther’s days is still preserved in many German cities: sometimes the voices of the youths form an harmonious concert. Often, instead of food, the poor and modest Martin received nothing but harsh words. Then, overwhelmed with sorrow, he shed many tears in secret, and thought with anxiety of the future.

One day, in particular, he had already been repulsed from three houses, and was preparing to return fasting to his lodgings, when, having reached the square of St. George, he stopped motionless, plunged in melancholy reflections, before the house of a worthy citizen. Must he for want of bread renounce his studies, and return to labor with his father in the mines of Mansfeldt?.....Suddenly a door opens — a woman appears on the threshold: it is Ursula, the wife of

Conrad Cotta, and daughter of the burgomaster of Ilefeld. The Eisenach chronicles style her “the pious Shunamite,” in remembrance of her who so earnestly constrained the prophet Elisha to stay and eat bread with her. The christian Shunamite had already more than once remarked the youthful Martin in the assemblies of the faithful; she had been affected by the sweetness of his voice and by his devotion. She had heard the harsh words that had been addressed to the poor scholar, and seeing him stand thus sadly before her door, she came to his aid, beckoned him to enter, and gave him food to appease his hunger.

Conrad approved of his wife’s benevolence: he even found so much pleasure in the boy’s society, that a few days after he took him to live entirely with him. Henceforward his studies were secured. He is not obliged to return to the mines of Mansfeldt, and bury the talents that God has intrusted to him. At a time when he knew not what would become of him, God opened the heart and the house of a christian family. This event disposed his soul to that confidence in God which the

severest trials could not afterwards shake.

Luther passed in Cotta’s house a very different kind of life from that which he had hitherto known. His existence glided away calmly, exempt from want and care: his mind became more serene, his character more cheerful, and his heart more open. All his faculties awoke at the mild rays of charity, and he began to exult with life, joy, and happiness. His prayers were more fervent, his thirst for knowledge greater, and his progress in study more rapid.

To literature and science he added the charms of the fine arts; for they also were advancing in Germany. The men whom God destines to act upon their contemporaries, are themselves at first influenced and carried away by all the tendencies of the age in which they live. Luther learned to play on the flute and on the lute. With this latter instrument he used often to accompany his fine alto voice, and thus cheered his heart in the hours of sadness. He took delight in testifying by his melody his lively gratitude towards his adoptive

mother, who was passionately fond of music. He himself loved the art even to old age, and composed the words and airs of some of the finest hymns that Germany possesses. Many have even passed into our language.

These were happy times for young Luther: he could never think of them without emotion. One of Conrad's sons coming many years after to study at Wittenberg, when the poor scholar of Eisenach had become the first doctor of the age, was received with joy at his table and under his roof. He wished to make some return to the son for the kindness he had received from the parents. It was in remembrance of this christian woman who had fed him when all the world repulsed him, that he gave utterance to this 181 beautiful thought: "There is nothing sweeter on earth than the heart of a woman in which piety dwells." Luther was never ashamed of these days in which, oppressed by hunger, he used in sadness to beg the bread necessary for his studies and his livelihood. Far from that, he used to reflect with gratitude on the extreme poverty of his youth. He looked upon it as one of the means that

God had employed to make him what he afterwards became, and he accordingly thanked him for it. The poor children who were obliged to follow the same kind of life, touched his heart. “Do not despise,” said he, “the boys who go singing through the streets, begging a little bread for the love of God (panem propter Deum): I also have done the same. It is true that somewhat later my father supported me with much love and kindness at the university of Erfurth, maintaining me by the sweat of his brow; yet I have been a poor beggar. And now, by means of my pen, I have risen so high, that I would not change lots with the Grand Turk himself. Nay more, should all the riches of the earth be heaped one upon another, I would not take them in exchange for what I possess. And yet I should not be where I am, if I had not gone to school — if I had not learnt to write.” — Thus did this great man see in these his first humble beginnings the origin of all his glory. He feared not to recall to mind that the voice whose accents thrilled the empire and the world, once used to beg for a morsel of bread in the streets of a small town. The Christian finds a pleasure in such

recollections, because they remind him that it is in God alone he should glory.

The strength of his understanding, the liveliness of his imagination, the excellence of his memory, soon carried him beyond all his schoolfellows.

He made rapid progress especially in Latin, in eloquence, and in poetry. He wrote speeches and composed verses. As he was cheerful, obliging, and had what is called “a good heart,” he was beloved by his masters and by his schoolfellows.

Among the professors he attaches himself particularly to John Trebonius, a learned man, of an agreeable address, and who had all that regard for youth which is so well calculated to encourage them. Martin had noticed that whenever Trebonius entered the schoolroom, he raised his cap to salute the pupils. A great condescension in those pedantic times! This had delighted the young man. He saw that he was something. The respect of the master had elevated the scholar in his own estimation. The colleagues of Trebonius, who did not adopt the

same custom, having one day expressed their astonishment at his extreme condescension, he replied (and his answer did not the less strike the youthful Luther): “There are among these boys men of whom God will one day make burgomasters, chancellors, doctors, and magistrates. Although you do not yet see them with the badges of their dignity, it is right that you should treat them with respect.” Doubtless the young scholar listened with pleasure to these words, and perhaps imagined himself already with the doctor’s cap upon his head!

Chapter 2

The University

Luther had now reached his eighteenth year. He had tasted the sweets of literature; he burnt with a desire of knowledge; he sighed for a university education, and wished to repair to one of those fountains of learning where he could slake his thirst for letters. His father required him to study the law. Full of hope in the talents of his son, he wished that he should cultivate them and make them generally known. He already pictured him discharging the most honorable functions among his fellowcitizens, gaining the favor of princes, and shining on the theater of the world. It was determined that the young man should go to Erfurth.

Luther arrived at this university in 1501. Jodocus, surnamed the Doctor of Eisenach, was teaching there the scholastic philosophy with great success.

Melancthon regrets that at that time nothing was taught at Erfurth but a system of dialectics bristling with difficulties. He thinks that if Luther had met with other professors, if they had taught him the milder and calmer discipline of true philosophy, the violence of his nature might have been moderated and softened. The new disciple applied himself to study the philosophy of the Middle Ages in the works of Occam, Scotus, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas. In later times all this scholastic divinity was his aversion. He trembled with indignation whenever Aristotle's name was pronounced in his presence, and he went so far as to say that if Aristotle had not been a man, he should not have hesitated to take him for the devil. But a mind so eager for learning as his required other aliments; he began to study the masterpieces of antiquity, the writings of Cicero, Virgil, and other classic authors. He was not content, like the majority of students, with learning their productions by heart: he endeavored to fathom their thoughts, to imbibe the spirit which animated them, to appropriate their wisdom to himself, to comprehend the object of their writings,

and to enrich his mind with their pregnant sentences and brilliant images. He often addressed questions to his professors, and soon outstripped all his fellowstudents.

Blessed with a retentive memory and a strong imagination, all that he read or heard remained constantly present to his mind; it was as if he had seen it himself. “Thus shone Luther in his early years. The whole university,” says Melancthon, “admired his genius.” But even at this period the young man of eighteen did not study merely to cultivate his intellect: he had those serious thoughts, that heart directed heavenwards, which God gives to those of whom he resolves to make his most zealous ministers. Luther was sensible of his entire dependence upon God, — simple and powerful conviction, which is at once the cause of deep humility and of great actions! He fervently invoked the divine blessing upon his labors. Every morning he began the day with prayer; he then went to church, and afterwards applied to his studies, losing not a moment in the whole course of the day. “To pray well,” he was in the habit of

saying, “is the better half of study.” The young student passed in the university library all the time he could snatch from his academical pursuits. Books were as yet rare, and it was a great privilege for him to profit by the treasures brought together in this vast collection. One day — he had then been two years at Erfurth, and was twenty years old — he opens many books in the library one after another, to learn their writers’ names. One volume that he comes to attracts his attention. He has never until this hour seen its like. He reads the title — it is a Bible! a rare book, unknown in those times. His interest is greatly excited: he is filled with astonishment at finding other matters than those fragments of the gospels and epistles that the Church has selected to be read to the people during public worship every Sunday throughout the year. Until this day he had imagined that they composed the whole Word of God. And now he sees so many pages, so many chapters, so many books of which he had had no idea! His heart beats, as he holds the divinely inspired volume in his hand. With eagerness and with indescribable emotion he turns over these leaves from God. The first page on

which he fixes his attention narrates the story of Hannah and of the young Samuel. He reads — and his soul can hardly contain the joy it feels.

This child, whom his parents lend to the Lord as long as he liveth; the song of Hannah, in which she declares that Jehovah “raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes;” this child who grew up in the temple in the presence of the Lord; those sacrificers, the sons of Eli, who are wicked men, who live in debauchery, and “make the Lord’s people to transgress;” — all this history, all this revelation that he has just discovered, excites feelings till then unknown. He returns home with a full heart. “Oh! that God would give me such a book for myself,” thought he. Luther was as yet ignorant both of Greek and Hebrew. It is scarcely probable that he had studied these languages during the first two or three years of his residence at the university. The Bible that had filled him with such transports was in Latin. He soon returned to the library to pore over his treasure. He read it again and again, and then, in

his astonishment and joy, he returned to read it once more. The first glimmerings of a new truth were then beginning to dawn upon his mind.

Thus had God led him to the discovery of his Word — of that book of which he was one day to give his fellow countrymen that admirable translation in which Germany has for three centuries perused the oracles of God. Perhaps for the first time his precious volume has now been taken down from the place it occupied in the library of Erfurth. This book, deposited upon the unknown shelves of a gloomy hall, is about to become the book of life to a whole nation. In that Bible the Reformation lay hid.

It was in the same year that Luther took his first academical degree — that of bachelor.

The excessive labor to which he had devoted himself in order to pass his examination, occasioned a dangerous illness. Death seemed approaching him: serious reflections occupied his mind. He thought that his earthly existence was

drawing to an end. The young man excited general interest.

“It is a pity,” they thought, “to see so many expectations so early blighted.” Many friends came to visit him on his bed of sickness. Among their number was a venerable and ages priest, who had watched with interest the student of Mansfeldt in his labors and in his academic career.

Luther could not conceal the thoughts that occupied his mind. “Soon,” said he, “I shall be called away from this world.” But the old man kindly replied, “My dear bachelor, take courage; you will not die of this illness.

Our God will yet make of you a man who, in turn, shall console many. For God layeth his cross upon those whom he loveth, and they who bear it patiently acquire much wisdom.” These words struck the young invalid.

It was when he was so near death that he heard the voice of a priest remind him that God, as

Samuel’s mother said, raiseth up the miserable. The old man had poured sweet consolation into his heart, had revived his spirits; never will he forget it. “This was the first prediction that the worthy doctor heard,” says Mathesius, Luther’s friend, who records the fact, “and he often used to call it to mind.” We may easily comprehend in what sense Mathesius calls these words a prediction.

When Luther recovered, there was a great change in him. The Bible, his illness, the words of the aged priest, seem to have made a new appeal to him: but as yet there was nothing decided in his mind. Another circumstance awakened serious thoughts within him. It was the festival of Easter, probably in the year 1503. Luther was going to pass a short time with his family, and wore a sword according to the custom of the age. He struck against it with his foot, the blade fell out, and cut one of the principal arteries. Luther, whose only companion had run off in haste to seek for assistance, finding himself alone, and seeing the blood flowing copiously without being able to check it, lay down on his back, and put his finger

on the wound; but the blood escaped in despite of his exertions, and Luther, feeling the approach of death, cried out, “O Mary, help me!” At last a surgeon arrived from Erfurth, who bound up the cut. The wound opened in the night, and Luther fainted, again calling loudly upon the Virgin. “At that time,” said he in after-years, “I should have died relying upon Mary.” Erelong he abandoned that superstition, and invoked a more powerful Savior. He continued his studies. In he was admitted M.A. and doctor of philosophy. The university of Erfurth was then the most celebrated in all Germany. The others were but inferior schools in comparison with it. The ceremony was conducted, as usual, with great pomp. A procession by torchlight came to pay honor to Luther. The festival was magnificent. It was a general rejoicing. Luther, encouraged perhaps by these honors, felt disposed to apply himself entirely to the law, in conformity with his father’s wishes.

But the will of God was different. While Luther was occupied with various studies, and beginning to teach the physics and ethics of Aristotle, with

other branches of philosophy, his heart ceased not from crying to him that religion was the one thing needful, and that above all things he should secure his salvation. He knew the displeasure that God manifests against sin; he called to mind the penalties that his Word denounces against the sinner; and he asked himself, with apprehension, whether he was sure of possessing the divine favor. His conscience answered, No! His character was prompt and decided: he resolved to do all that might ensure him a firm hope of immortality. Two events occurred, one after the other, to disturb his soul, and to hasten his resolution.

Among his university friends was one named Alexis, with whom he lived in the closest intimacy. One morning a report was spread in Erfurth that Alexis had been assassinated. Luther hastens to ascertain the truth of this rumor. This sudden loss of his friend agitated him, and the question he asked himself, What would become of me, if I were thus called away without warning? fills his mind with the keenest terrors. It was in the summer of the year 1505 that Luther, whom the ordinary

university vacations left at liberty, resolved to go to Mansfeldt, to revisit the dear scenes of his childhood and to embrace his parents. Perhaps also he wished to open his heart to his father, to sound him on the plan that he was forming in his mind, and obtain his permission to engage in another profession. He foresaw all the difficulties that awaited him. The idle life of the majority of priests was displeasing to the active miner of Mansfeldt.

Besides, the ecclesiastics were but little esteemed in the world; for the most part their revenues were scanty; and the father, who had made great sacrifices to maintain his son at the university, and who now saw him teaching publicly in a celebrated school, although only in his twentieth year, was not likely to renounce the proud hopes he had cherished.

We are ignorant of what passed during Luther’s stay at Mansfeldt.

Perhaps the decided wish of his father made him fear to open his heart to him. He again quitted

his father’s house to take his seat on the benches of the academy. He was already within a short distance of Erfurth, when he was overtaken by a violent storm, such as often occurs in these mountains.

The lightning flashed — the bolt fell at his feet. Luther threw himself upon his knees. His hour, perhaps, is come. Death, the judgment, and eternity summon him with all their terrors, and he hears a voice that he can no longer resist. “Encompassed with the anguish and terror of death,” as he says himself, he made a vow, if the Lord delivers him from this danger, to abandon the world, and devote himself entirely to God. After rising from the ground, having still present to him that death which must one day overtake him, he examines himself seriously, and asks what he ought to do.

The thoughts that once agitated him now return with greater force. He has endeavored, it is true, to fulfill all his duties, but what is the state of his soul? Can he appear before the tribunal of a terrible God with an impure heart? He must become holy.

He has now as great a thirst for holiness, as he had formerly for knowledge. But where can he find it, or where can he attain it? The university provided him with the means of satisfying his first desires. Who shall calm that anguish — who shall quench the fire that now consumes him? To what school of holiness shall he direct his steps? He will enter a cloister: the monastic life will save him.

Oftentimes has he heard speak of its power to transform the heart, to sanctify the sinner, to make man perfect! He will enter a monastic order.

He will there become holy: thus will he secure eternal life. Such was the event that changed the calling, the whole destiny of Luther.

In this we perceive the finger of God. It was his powerful hand that on the highway cast down the young master of arts, the candidate for the bar, the future lawyer, to give an entirely new direction to his life. Rubianus, one of Luther’s friends at the university of Erfurth, wrote thus to him in afterlife: “Divine Providence looked at what you were one

day to become, when on your return from your parents, the fire from heaven threw you to the ground, like another Paul, near the city of Erfurth, and withdrawing you from our society, drove you into the Augustine order." Analogous circumstances have marked the conversion of the two greatest instruments that Divine Providence has made use of in the two greatest revolutions that have been effected upon the earth: Saint Paul and Luther. Luther reenters Erfurth. His resolution in unalterable. Still it is not without a pang that he prepares to break the ties so dear to him. He communicates his intention to no one. But one evening he invites his university friends to a cheerful but frugal supper. Music once more enlivens their social meeting. It is Luther's farewell to the world.

Henceforth, instead of these amiable companions of his pleasures and his studies, he will have monks; instead of this gay and witty conversation — the silence of the cloister; and for these merry songs — the solemn strains of the quiet chapel. God calls him, and he must sacrifice

everything. Still, for the last time, let him share in the joys of his youth! The repast excites his friends: Luther himself is the soul of the party. But at the very moment that they are giving way without restraint to their gaiety, the young man can no longer control the serious thoughts that fill his mind. He speaks — he makes known his intention to his astonished friends. They endeavor to shake it, but in vain. And that very night Luther, fearful perhaps of their importunate solicitations, quits his lodgings. He leaves behind him all his clothes and books, taking with him only Virgil and Plautus; he had no Bible as yet. Virgil and Plautus! an epic poem and comedies! striking picture of Luther's mind! There had in effect taken place in him a whole epic — a beautiful, grand, and sublime poem; but as he had a disposition inclined to gaiety, wit, and humor, he combined more than one familiar feature with the serious and stately groundwork of his life.

Provided with these two books, he repairs alone, in the darkness of night, to the convent of the hermits of St. Augustine. He asks admittance.

The gate opens and closes again. Behold him separated for ever from his parents, from the companions of his studies, and from the world! It was the 17th August 1505: Luther was then twenty-one years and nine months old.

Chapter 3

His Father’s Anger

Luther was with God at last. His soul was in safety. He was now about to find that holiness which he so much desired. The monks were astonished at the sight of the youthful doctor, and extolled his courage and his contempt of the world. He did not, however, forget his friends. He wrote to them, bidding farewell to them and to the world; and on the next day he sent these letters, with the clothes he had worn till then, and returned to the university his ring of master of arts, that nothing might remind him of the world he had renounced.

His friends at Erfurth were struck with astonishment. Must so eminent a genius go and hide himself in that monastic state, which is a partial death?

Filled with the liveliest sorrow, they hastily repair to the convent, in the hope of inducing Luther to retrace so afflicting a step; but all was

useless. For two whole days they surrounded the convent and almost besieged it, in the hope of seeing Luther come forth. But the gates remained closely shut and barred. A month elapsed without anyone being able to see or speak to the new monk.

Luther had also hastened to communicate to his parents the great change that had taken place in his life. His father was amazed. He trembled for his son, as Luther himself tells us in the dedication of his work on monastic vows addressed to his father. His weakness, his youth, the violence of his passions, all led John Luther to fear that when the first moment of enthusiasm was over, the idle habits of the cloister would make the young man fall either into despair or into some great sin. He knew that this kind of life had already been the destruction of many. Besides, the councillorminer of Mansfeldt had formed very different plans for his son. He had hoped that he would contract a rich and honorable marriage. And now all his ambitious projects are overthrown in one night by this imprudent step.

John wrote a very angry letter to his son, in which he spoke to him in a contemptuous tone, as Luther informs us, while he had addressed him always in a friendly manner after he had taken his master-of-arts degree.

He withdrew all his favor, and declared him disinherited from his paternal affection. In vain did his father's friends, and doubtless his wife, endeavor to soften him; in vain did they say: "If you would offer a sacrifice to God, let it be what you hold best and dearest, — even your son, your Isaac." The inexorable councillor of Mansfeldt would listen to nothing.

Not long after, however (as Luther tells us in a sermon preached at Wittenberg, 20th January 1544), the plague appeared, and deprived John Luther of two of his sons. About this time some one came and told the bereaved father the monk of Erfurth is dead also!.....His friends seized the opportunity of reconciling the father to the young novice. "If it should be a false alarm," said they to him, "at least sanctify your affliction by cordially

consenting to your son’s becoming a monk!” — “Well! so be it!” replied John Luther, with a heart bruised, yet still half rebellious, “and God grant he may prosper!” Some time after this, when Luther, who had been reconciled to his father, related to him the event that had induced him to enter a monastic order: “God grant,” replied the worthy miner, “that you may not have taken for a sign from heaven what was merely a delusion of the devil.” There was not then in Luther that which was afterwards to make him the reformer of the Church. Of this his entrance into the convent is a strong proof. It was a proceeding in conformity with the tendencies of the age from which he was soon to contribute his endeavors to liberate the Church.

He who was destined to become the great teacher of the world, was as yet its slavish imitator. A new stone had been added to the edifice of superstition by the very man who was erelong to destroy it. Luther looked to himself for salvation, to human works and observances. He knew not that salvation cometh wholly from God. He sought after

his own glory and righteousness, unmindful of the righteousness and glory of the Lord. But what he was ignorant of as yet, he learnt soon after. It was in the cloister of Erfurth that this immense transformation was brought about, which substituted in his heart God and his wisdom for the world and its traditions, and that prepared the mighty revolution of which he was to be the most illustrious instrument.

When Martin Luther entered the convent, he changed his name, and assumed that of Augustine.

The monks had received him with joy. It was no slight gratification to their vanity to see one of the most esteemed doctors of the age abandon the university for a house belonging to their order. Nevertheless they treated him harshly, and imposed on him the worst occupations. They wished to humble the doctor of philosophy, and to teach him that his learning did not raise him above his brethren. They imagined, besides, by this means to prevent him from devoting himself so much to his studies, from which the convent could reap no

advantage. The former master of arts had to perform the offices of porter, to open and shut the gates, to wind up the clock, to sweep the church, and to clean out the cells. Then, when the poor monk, who was at once doorkeeper, sexton, and menial servant of the cloister, had finished his work: Cum sacco per civitatem! Away with your wallet through the town! cried the friars; and laden with his bread-bag, he wandered through all the streets of Erfurth, begging from house to house, obliged perhaps to present himself at the doors of those who had once been his friends or his inferiors. On his return, he had either to shut himself up in a low and narrow cell, whence he could see nothing but a small garden a few feet square, or recommence his humble tasks. But he put up with all. Naturally disposed to devote himself entirely to whatever he undertook, he had become a monk with all his soul. Besides, how could he have a thought of sparing his body, or have had any regard for what might please the flesh? It was not thus that he could acquire the humility, the sanctity which he had come to seek within the walls of the cloister.

The poor monk, oppressed with toil hastened to employ in study all the moments that he could steal from these mean occupations. He voluntarily withdrew from the society of the brethren to give himself up to his beloved pursuits; but they soon found it out, and surrounding him with murmurs, tore him from his books, exclaiming, “Come, come! It is not by studying, but by begging bread, corn, eggs, fish, meat, and money that a monk renders himself useful to the cloister.” Luther submitted: he laid aside his books, and took up his bag again. Far from repenting at having taken upon himself such a yoke, he is willing to go through with his task.

It was then that the inflexible perseverance with which he always carried out the resolutions he had once formed, began to be developed in his mind.

The resistance he made to these rude assaults gave a stronger temper to his will. God tried him in small things, that he might learn to remain unshaken in great ones. Besides, to be able to

deliver his age from the miserable superstitions under which it groaned, it was necessary for him first to feel their weight. To drain the cup, he must drink it to the very dregs.

This severe apprenticeship did not however last so long as Luther might have feared. The prior of the convent, at the intercession of the university to which Luther belonged, freed him from the humiliating duties that had been laid upon him. The youthful monk then returned to his studies with new zeal. The works of the Fathers of the Church, especially of St.

Augustine, attracted his attention. The exposition of the Psalms by this illustrious doctor, and his book On the letter and the Spirit, were his favorite study. Nothing struck him more than the sentiments of this Father on the corruption of man’s will and on Diving Grace. He felt by his own experience the reality of that corruption and the necessity for that grace.

The words of St. Augustine corresponded with

the sentiments of his heart.

If he could have belonged to any other school than that of Jesus Christ, it would undoubtedly have been to that of the doctor of Hippo. He almost knew by rote the works of Peter d'Ailly and of Gabriel Biel. He was much taken with a saying of the former, that, if the Church had not decided to the contrary, it would have been preferable to concede that the bread and wine were really taken in the Lord's supper, and not mere accidents.

He also carefully studied the theologians Occam and Gerson, who both express themselves so freely on the authority of the popes. To this course of reading he added other exercises. He was heard in the public discussions unravelling the most complicated trains of reasoning, and extricating himself from a labyrinth whence none but he could have found an outlet.

All his auditors were filled with astonishment. But he had not entered the cloister to acquire the reputation of a great genius: it was to seek food for

his piety. He therefore regarded these labors as mere digressions.

He loved above all things to draw wisdom from the pure source of the Word of God. He found in the convent a Bible fastened by a chain, and to this chained Bible he was continually returning. He had but little understanding of the Word, yet was it his most pleasing study. It sometimes happened that he passed a whole day meditating upon a single passage. At other times he learned fragments of the Prophets by heart. He especially desired to acquire from the writings of the Prophets and of the Apostles a perfect knowledge of God's will; to grow up in greater fear of His name; and to nourish his faith by the sure testimony of the Word. It would appear that about this time he began to study the Scriptures in their original languages, and to lay the foundation of the most perfect and most useful of his labors — the translation of the Bible. He made use of Reuchlin's Hebrew Lexicon, that had just appeared. John Lange, one of the friars of the convent, a man skilled in Greek and Hebrew, and with whom he always remained closely connected,

probably was his first instructor.

He also made much use of the learned commentaries of Nicholas Lyra, who died in 1340. It was from this circumstance that Pflug, afterwards bishop of Naumburg, said: Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset.

The young monk studied with such industry and zeal that it often happened that he did not repeat the daily prayers for three or four weeks together. But he soon grew alarmed at the thought that he had transgressed the rules of his order. He then shut himself up to repair his negligence, and began to repeat conscientiously all the prayers he had omitted, without a thought of either eating or drinking. Once even, for seven weeks together, he scarcely closed his eyes in sleep.

Burning with desire to attain that holiness in quest of which he had entered the cloister, Luther gave way to all the rigor of an ascetic life. He endeavored to crucify the flesh by fasting, mortifications, and watching.

Shut up in his cell, as in a prison, he struggled unceasingly against the deceitful thoughts and the evil inclinations of his heart. A little bread and a small herring were often his only food. Besides he was naturally of very abstemious habits. Thus he was frequently seen by his friends. Long after he had ceased to think of purchasing heaven by his abstinence, content himself with the poorest viands, and remain even four days in succession without eating or drinking. This we have on the testimony of Melancthon, a witness in every respect worthy of credit. We may judge from this circumstance of the little value we ought to attach to the fables that ignorance and prejudice have circulated as to Luther's intemperance.

At the period of which we are speaking, nothing was too great a sacrifice that might enable him to become a saint, — to acquire heaven. Never did the Romish church possess a more pious monk. Never did cloister witness more severe or indefatigable exertions to purchase eternal happiness. When Luther had become a reformer,

and had declared that heaven was not to be obtained by such means as these, he knew very well what he was saying. “I was indeed a pious monk,” wrote he to Duke George of Saxony, “and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortifications even to death, by means of my watching, prayers, reading, and other labors.” We are approaching the epoch which made Luther a new man, and which, by revealing to him the infinity of God’s love, put him in a condition to declare it to the world.

Luther did not find in the tranquillity of the cloister and in monkish perfection that peace of mind which he had looked for there. He wished to have the assurance of his salvation: this was the great want of his soul.

Without it, there was no repose for him. But the fears that had agitated him in the world pursue him

to his cell. Nay, they were increased. The faintest cry of his heart re-echoed loud beneath the silent arches of the cloister. God had led him thither, that he might learn to know himself, and to despair of his own strength and virtue. His conscience, enlightened by the Divine Word, told him what it was to be holy; but he was filled with terror at finding, neither in his heart nor in his life, that image of holiness which he had contemplated with admiration in the Word of God. A sad discovery, and one that is made by every sincere man! No righteousness within, no righteousness without! all was omission, sin, impurity!.....The more ardent the character of Luther, the stronger was that secret and constant resistance which man's nature opposes to good; and it plunged him into despair.

The monks and divines of the day encouraged him to satisfy the divine righteousness by meritorious works. But what works, thought he, can come from a heart like mine? How can I stand before the holiness of my judge with works polluted in their very source? "I saw that I was a great sinner in the eyes of God," said he, "and I did

not think it possible for me to propitiate him by my own merits.” He was agitated and yet dejected, avoiding the trifling and stupid conversation of the monks. The latter, unable to comprehend the storms that tosses his soul, looked upon him with surprise, and reproached him for his silence and his gloomy air. One day, Cochloeus tells us, as they were saying mass in the chapel, Luther had carried thither all his anxiety, and was in the choir in the midst of the brethren, sad and heart-stricken.

Already the priest had prostrated himself, the incense had been burnt before the altar, the Gloria sung, and they were reading the Gospel, when the poor monk, unable any longer to repress his anguish, cried out in a mournful tone, as he fell on his knees, “It is not I — it is not I.” All were thunderstruck: and the ceremony was interrupted for a moment.

Perhaps Luther thought he heard some reproach of which he knew himself innocent; perhaps he declared his unworthiness of being one of those to whom Christ’s death had brought the gift of eternal

life. Cochloeus says, they were then reading the story of the dumb man's cry from whom Christ expelled a devil. It is possible that this cry of Luther, if the account be true, had reference to this circumstance, and that, although speechless like the dumb man, he protested by such an exclamation, that his silence came from other causes than demoniacal possession. Indeed, Cochloeus tells us that the monks sometimes attributed the sufferings of their brother to a secret intercourse with the devil, and this writer himself entertained that opinion. A tender conscience inclined Luther to regard the slightest fault as a great sin. He had hardly discovered it, before he endeavored to expiate it by the severest mortifications which only served to point out to him the inutility of all human remedies. "I tortured myself almost to death," said he, "in order to procure peace with God for my troubled heart and agitated conscience; but surrounded with thick darkness, I found peace nowhere." The practices of monastic holiness, which had lulled so many consciences to sleep, and to which Luther himself had had recourse in his distress, soon appeared to him the unavailing

remedies of an empirical and deceptive religion. “While I was yet a monk, I no sooner felt assailed by any temptation than I cried out — I am lost! Immediately I had recourse to a thousand methods to stifle the cries of my conscience. I went every day to confession, but that was of no use to me. Then bowed down by sorrow, I tortured myself by the multitude of my thoughts. — Look! exclaimed I, thou art still envious, impatient, passionate!...It profiteth thee nothing, O wretched man, to have entered this sacred order.” And yet Luther, imbued with the prejudices of his time, had from early youth considered the observances, whose worthlessness he had now discovered, as a certain remedy for diseased souls. What can he think of the strange discovery he has just made in the solitude of the cloister? It is possible, then, to dwell within the sanctuary, and yet bear in one’s bosom a man of sin!.....He has received another garment, but not another heart.

His expectations are disappointed. Where can he stop? Can all these rules and observances be mere human inventions? Such a supposition

appears to him, at one time, a temptation of the devil, and at another, an irresistible truth. By turns contending with the holy voice that spake to his heart, and with the venerable institutions that time had sanctioned, Luther passed his life in a continual struggle. The young monk crept like a shadow through the long galleries of the cloister, that re-echoed with his sorrowful moanings. His body wasted away; his strength began to fail him; it sometimes happened that he remained like one dead. On one occasion, overwhelmed with sorrow, he shut himself up in his cell, and for several days and nights allowed no one to approach him. One of his friends, Lucas Edemberger, feeling anxious about the unhappy monk, and having a presentiment of the condition in which he was, took with him some boys who were in the habit of singing in the choirs, and knocked at the door of the cell. No one opens — no one answers. The good Edemberger, still more alarmed, breaks open the door. Luther lies insensible upon the floor, and giving no sign of life. His friend strives in vain to recall him to his senses: he is still motionless. Then the choristers begin to sing a sweet hymn. Their

clear voices act like a charm on the poor monk, to whom music was ever one of his greatest pleasures: gradually he recovers his strength, his consciousness, and life. But if music could restore his serenity for a few moments, he requires another and a stronger remedy to heal him thoroughly: he needs that mild and subtle sound of the Gospel, which is the voice of God himself. He knew it well. And therefore his troubles and his terrors led him to study with fresh zeal the writings of the prophets and of the apostles.

Chapter 4

Pious Monks

Luther was not the first monk who had undergone such trials. The gloomy walls of the cloister often concealed the most abominable vices, that would have made every upright mind shudder, had they been revealed; but often also, they hid christian virtues that expanded there in silence, and which, had they been exposed to the eyes of the world, would have excited universal admiration. The possessors of these virtues, living only with themselves and with God, attracted no attention, and were often unknown to the modest convent in which they were enclosed: their lives were known only to God. Sometimes these humble solitaries fell into that mystic theology, — sad disease of the noblest minds! which in earlier ages had been the delight of the first monks on the banks of the Nile, and which unprofitably consumes the souls of those who become its victims.

Yet if one of these men was called to some

high station, he there displayed virtues whose salutary influence was long and widely felt. The candle was set on a candlestick, and it illumined the whole house. Many were awakened by this light. Thus from generation to generation were these pious souls propagated; they were seen shining like isolated torches at the very times when the cloisters were often little other than impure receptacles of the deepest darkness.

A young man had been thus distinguished in one of the German convents.

His name was John Staupitz, and he was descended from a noble Misnian family. From his tenderest youth he had had a taste for knowledge and a love of virtue. He felt the need of retirement to devote himself to letters.

He soon discovered that philosophy and the study of nature could not do much towards eternal salvation. He therefore began to learn divinity; but especially endeavored to unite practice with knowledge. “For,” says one of his biographers, “it

is in vain that we assume the name of divine, if we do not confirm that noble title by our lives." The study of the Bible and of the Augustine theology, the knowledge of himself, the battles that he, like Luther, had had to fight against the deceits and lusts of his heart, led him to the Redeemer. He found peace to his soul in faith in Christ. The doctrine of election by grace had taken strong hold of his mind. The integrity of his life, the extent of his knowledge, the eloquence of his speech, not less than a striking exterior and dignified manners, recommended him to his contemporaries. Frederick the Wise, elector of Saxony, made him his friend, employed him in various embassies, and founded the university of Wittenberg under his direction. This disciple of St. Paul and St. Augustine was the first dean of the theological faculty of that school whence the light was one day to issue to illumine the schools and churches of so many nations. He was present at the Lateran council, as proxy of the Archbishop of Saltzburg, became provincial of his order in Thuringia and Saxony, and afterwards vicar-general of the Augustines for all Germany.

Staupitz was grieved at the corruption of morals and the errors of doctrine that were devastating the Church. His writings on the love of God, on christian faith, and on conformity with the death of Christ, and the testimony of Luther, confirm this. But he considered the former evil of more importance than the latter. Besides the mildness and indecision of his character, his desire not to go beyond the sphere of action he thought assigned to him, made him fitter to be the restorer of a convent than the reformer of the Church. He would have wished to raise none but distinguished men to important offices: but not finding them, he submitted to employ others. “We must plough,” said he, “with such horses as we can find; and with oxen, if there are no horses.” We have witnessed the anguish and the internal struggles to which Luther was a prey in the convent of Erfurth. At this period a visitation of the vicargeneral was announced. In fact Staupitz came to make his usual inspection. The friend of Frederick, the founder of the university of Wittenberg, and chief of the Augustines, exhibited much kindness to those monks who were under his authority. One of these

brothers soon attracted his attention. He was a young man of middle height, whom study, fasting, and prolonged vigils had so wasted away that all his bones might be counted. His eyes, that in after-years were compared to a falcon's, were sunken; his manner was dejected; his countenance betrayed an agitated mind, the prey of a thousand struggles, but yet strong and resolute. His whole appearance was grave, melancholy, and solemn.

Staupitz, whose discernment had been exercised by long experience, easily discovered what was passing in his mind, and distinguished the youthful monk above all who surrounded him. He felt drawn towards him, had a presentiment of his great destiny, and entertained quite a paternal interest for his inferior. He had had to struggle, like Luther, and therefore he could understand him. Above all, he could point out to him the road to peace, which he himself had found. What he learnt of the circumstances that had brought the young Augustine into the convent, still more increased his sympathy. He requested the prior to treat him with greater mildness, and took advantage of the

opportunities afforded by his station to win the confidence of the youthful brother. Approaching him with affection, he endeavored by every means to dispel his timidity, which was increased by the respect and fear that a man of such exalted rank as Staupitz must necessarily inspire.

Luther’s heart, which harsh treatment had closed till then, opened at last and expanded under the mild beams of charity. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” Luther’s heart found an echo in that of Staupitz. The vicar-general understood him, and the monk felt a confidence towards him, that he had as yet experienced for none. He unbosomed to him the cause of his dejection, described the horrible thoughts that perplexed him, and then began in the cloister of Erfurth those conversations so full of wisdom and of instruction. Up to this time no one had understood Luther. One day, when at table in the refectory, the young monk, dejected and silent, scarcely touched his food. Staupitz, who looked earnestly at him, said at last, “Why are you so sad, brother Martin?” — “Ah!” replied he, with a deep

sigh, “I do not know what will become of me!” — “These temptations,” resumed Staupitz, “are more necessary to you than eating and drinking.” These two men did not stop there; and erelong in the silence of the cloister took place that intimate intercourse, which powerfully contributed to lead forth the future reformer from his state of darkness.

“It is in vain,” said Luther despondingly to Staupitz, “that I make promises to God: sin is ever the strongest.” “O my friend!” replied the vicar-general, looking back on his own experience; “more than a thousand times have I sworn to our holy God to live piously, and I have never kept my vows. Now I swear no longer, for I know I cannot keep my solemn promises. If God will not be merciful towards me for the love of Christ, and grant me a happy departure, when I must quit this world, I shall never, with the aid of all my vows and all my good works, stand before him. I must perish.” The young monk is terrified at the thought of divine justice. He lays open all his fears to the vicar-general. He is alarmed at the unspeakable holiness of God and his sovereign majesty.

“Who may abide the day of his coming?

And who shall stand when he appeareth?” (Malachi 3:2.) Staupitz resumes: he knows where he had found peace, and he will point it out to the young man. “Why,” said he, “do you torment yourself with all these speculations and these high thoughts?.....Look at the wounds of Jesus Christ, to the blood that he has shed for you: it is there that the grace of God will appear to you. Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins, throw yourself into the Redeemer’s arms. Trust in him — in the righteousness of his life — in the atonement of his death. Do not shrink back; God is not angry with you, it is you who are angry with God. Listen to the Son of God. He became man to give you the assurance of divine favor. He says to you, You are my sheep; you hear my voice; no man shall pluck you out of my hand.” But Luther does not find in himself the repentance which he thinks necessary for salvation: he replies, and it is the usual answer of distressed and timid minds: “How can I dare believe in the favor of God, so long as there is no

real conversion in me? I must be changed, before he will accept me." His venerable guide shows him that there can be no real conversion, so long as man fears God as a severe judge. "What will you say then," asks Luther "to so many consciences to which a thousand insupportable tasks are prescribed in order that they may gain heaven?" Then he hears this reply of the vicar-general, or rather he does not believe that it comes from man: it seems to him like a voice from heaven. "There is no real repentance except that which begins with the love of God and of righteousness. What others imagine to be the end and accomplishment of repentance, is on the contrary only its beginning. In order that you may be filled with the love for God. If you desire to be converted, do not be curious about all these mortifications and all these tortures. Love him who first loved you!" Luther listens — he listens again. These consolations fill him with joy till then unknown, and impart new light. "It is Jesus Christ," thinks he in his heart; "yes, it is Jesus Christ himself who so wonderfully consoles me by these sweet and healing words." These words, indeed, penetrated to the bottom of the

young monk’s heart, like the sharp arrow of a strong man. In order to repent, we must love God. Guided by this new light, he begins to compare the Scriptures. He looks out all the passages that treat of repentance and conversion. These words, till then so dreaded, to use his own expression, “are become to him an agreeable pastime and the sweetest of recreations. All the passages of Scripture that used to alarm him, seem now to run to him from every part, — to smile and sport around him.” “Hitherto,” exclaims he, “although I carefully dissembled the state of my soul before God, and endeavored to express towards him a love which was a mere constraint and a fiction, there was no expression in Scripture so bitter to me as that of repentance. But now there is none so sweet or more acceptable. Oh! how delightful are all God’s precepts when we read them not only in books, but also in our Savior’s precious wounds!” Although Luther had been consoled by Staupitz’ words, he nevertheless fell sometimes into despondency. Sin was again felt in his timid conscience, and then all his previous despair banished the joy of salvation.

“O my sin! my sin! my sin!” cried the young monk one day in the presence of the vicar-general, with a tone of profound anguish. “Well! would you only be a sinner in appearance,” replied the latter, “and have also a Savior only in appearance? Then,” added Staupitz with authority, “Know that Jesus Christ is the Savior even of those who are great, real sinners, and deserving of utter condemnation.” It was not alone the sin he discovered in his heart that agitated Luther; the troubles of his conscience were augmented by those of reason. If the holy precepts of the Bible alarmed him, some of the doctrines of that divine book still more increased his tortures.

The Truth, which is the great medium by which God confers peace on man, must necessarily begin by taking away from him the false security that destroys him. The doctrine of Election particularly disturbed the young man, and launched him into a boundless field of inquiry. Must be believe that it was man who first chose God for his portion, or that God first elected man? The Bible, history,

daily experience, the works of Augustine, — all had shown him that we must always and in every case ascend to that first cause, to that sovereign will by which everything exists, and on which everything depends. But his ardent spirit would have desired to go still further; he would have wished to penetrate into the secret counsels of God, unveiled his mysteries, seen the invisible, and comprehended the incomprehensible. Staupitz checked him. He told him not to presume to fathom the hidden God, but to confine himself to what he has manifested to us in Jesus Christ. “Look at Christ’s wounds,” said he, “and then will you see God’s counsel towards man shine brightly forth. We cannot understand God out of Jesus Christ. In him, the Lord has said, you will find what I am, and what I require. Nowhere else, neither in heaven nor in earth, will you discover it.” The vicar-general did still more. He showed Luther the paternal designs of Providence in permitting these temptations and these various struggles that his soul was to undergo. He made him view them in a light well calculated to revive his courage. By such trials God prepares for himself the souls that he

destines for some important work. We must prove the vessel before we launch it into the wide sea. If there is an education necessary for every man, there is a particular one for those who are destined to act upon their generation. This is what Staupitz represented to the monk of Erfurth.

“It is not in vain,” said he to him, “that God exercises you in so many conflicts: you will see that he will employ you, as his servant, for great purposes.” These words, to which Luther listened with astonishment and humility, inspired him with courage, and led him to discover strength in himself which he had not even suspected. The wisdom and prudence of an enlightened friend gradually revealed the strong man to himself. Staupitz went further: he gave him many valuable directions for his studies, exhorting him, henceforward, to derive all his theology from the Bible, and to put away the systems of the schools. “Let the study of the Scriptures,” said he, “be your favorite occupation.” Never was good advice better followed out. What particularly delighted Luther, was the present Staupitz made him of a Bible: but

it was not that Latin one, bound in red leather, the property of the convent, and which it was all his desire to possess, and to be able to carry about with him, because he was so familiar with its pages, and knew where to find each passage. Nevertheless, at length he is master of the treasure of God. Henceforward he studies the Scriptures, and especially the epistles of St. Paul, with ever-increasing zeal. To these he adds the works of St. Augustine alone. All that he reads is imprinted deeply in his mind. His struggles have prepared his heart to understand the Word. The soil has been ploughed deep: the incorruptible seed sinks into it with power. When Staupitz quitted Erfurth, a new dawn had risen upon Luther.

But the work was not yet finished. The vicar-general had prepared the way: God reserved its accomplishment for an humbler instrument. The conscience of the young Augustine had not yet found repose. His body gave way at last under the conflict and the tension of his soul. He was attacked by an illness that brought him to the brink of the grave. This was in the second year of his

abode in the convent. All his distresses and all his fears were aroused at the approach of death. His own impurity and the holiness of God again disturbed his mind. One day, as he lay overwhelmed with despair, an aged monk entered his cell, and addressed a few words of comfort to him. Luther opened his heart to him, and made known the fears by which he was tormented. The venerable old man was incapable of following up that soul in all its doubts, as Staupitz had done; but he knew his Credo, and had found in it much consolation to his heart. He will therefore apply the same remedy to his young brother. Leading him back to that Apostles' creed which Luther had learnt in early childhood at the school of Mansfeldt, the aged monk repeated this article with kind goodnature: I believe in the forgiveness of sins. These simple words, which the pious brother pronounced with sincerity in this decisive moment, diffused great consolation in Luther's heart. "I believe," he repeated to himself erelong on his bed of sickness, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins!" — "Ah!" said the monk, "you must believe not only in the forgiveness of David's and of Peter's

sins, for this even the devils believe. It is God's command that we believe our own sins are forgiven us." How delightful did this commandment seem to poor Luther! "Hear what St. Bernard says in his discourse on the Annunciation," added the aged brother: "The testimony of the Holy Ghost in thy heart is this: Thy sins are forgiven thee." From this moment light sprung up in the heart of the young monk of Erfurth. The word of grace had been pronounced: he had believed in it. He disclaims all merit of salvation, and resigns himself confidingly to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He does not at first perceive the consequences of the principle he has admitted; he is still sincere in his attachment to the Church, and yet he has no further need of her; for he has received salvation immediately from God himself, and henceforth Roman-catholicism is virtually destroyed in him. He advances, — he seeks in the writings of the apostles and prophets for all that can strengthen the hope which fills his heart. Each day he invokes support from on high, and each day also the light increases in his soul.

Luther’s mental health restored that of his body, and he soon rose from his bed of sickness. He had received a new life in a twofold scene. The festival of Christmas, that soon came, gave him an opportunity abundantly tasting all the consolations of faith. He took part in these holy solemnities with sweet emotion; and when in the ceremonial of the day he had to chant these words: O beata culpa, quae talem meruisti Redemptorem! his whole being responded Amen, and thrilled with joy.

Luther had been two years in the cloister, and was to be ordained priest.

He had received much, and saw with delight the prospect afforded by the sacerdotal office of freely distributing what he had freely received. He wished to take advantage of the ceremony that was about to take place to become thoroughly reconciled with his father. He invited him to be present, and even requested him to fix the day. John Luther, who was not yet entirely pacified with regard to his son, nevertheless accepted the invitation, and named Sunday, 2nd May, 1507.

Among the number of Luther's friends was the vicar of Eisenach, John Braun, who had been a faithful counsellor to him during his residence in that city. Luther wrote to him on the 22nd April. This is the oldest letter of the reformer, and it bears the following address: "To John Braun, holy and venerable priest of Christ and Mary." It is only in Luther's two earliest letters that the name of Mary is found.

"God, who is glorious and holy in all his works," says the candidate for the priesthood, "having most graciously condescended to raise me up — me, a wretched and in all respects unworthy sinner, and to call me by his sole and most free mercy to his sublime ministry; I ought, in order to testify my gratitude for such divine and magnificent goodness (as far at least as mere dust and ashes can do it) to fulfill with my whole heart the duties of the office intrusted to me." At last the day arrived. The miner of Mansfeldt did not fail to be present at his son's ordination. He gave him indeed no unequivocal mark of his affection and of

his generosity by presenting him on this occasion with twenty florins.

The ceremony took place. Hieronymus, bishop of Brandenburg, officiated.

At the moment of conferring on Luther the power of celebrating mass, he placed the chalice in his hands, and uttered these solemn words, “Accipe potestatem sacrificandi pro vivis et mortuis: receive the power of sacrificing for the quick and the dead.” Luther at that time listened calmly to these words, which conferred on him the power of doing the work of the Son of God; but he shuddered at them in after-years. “If the earth did not then open and swallow us both up,” said he, “it was owing to the great patience and long-suffering of the Lord.” The father afterwards dined at the convent with his son, the young priest’s friends, and the monks, The conversation fell on Martin’s entrance into the monastery. The brothers loudly extolled it as a most meritorious work; upon which the inflexible John, turning to his son, asked him: “Have you not read in Scripture, that you should

obey your father and mother?” These words struck Luther; they presented in quite a new aspect the action that had brought him into the bosom of the convent, and they long re-echoed in his heart.

Shortly after his ordination, Luther, by the advice of Staupitz, made little excursions on foot into the neighboring parishes and convents, either to divert his mind and give his body the necessary exercise, or to accustom him to preaching.

The festival of Corpus Christi was to be celebrated with great pomp at Eisleben. The vicar-general would be present, and Luther repaired there also.

He had still need of Staupitz, and sought every opportunity of meeting this enlightened guide who directed his soul into the path of life. The procession was numerous and brilliant. Staupitz himself bore the consecrated host, Luther following in his sacerdotal robes. The thought that it was Jesus Christ himself whom the vicar-general carried, the idea that the Savior was there in person

before him, suddenly struck Luther’s imagination, and filled him with such terror that he could scarcely proceed. The perspiration fell drop by drop from his face; he staggered, and thought he should die of anguish and affright. At length the procession was over; the host, that had awakened all the fears of the monk, was solemnly deposited in the sanctuary; and Luther, finding himself alone with Staupitz, fell into his arms and confessed his dread. Then the good vicar-general, who had long known that gentle Savior, who does not break the bruised reed, said to him mildly: “It was not Jesus Christ, my brother; he does not alarm; he gives consolation only.” Luther was not destined to remain hidden in an obscure convent. The time was come for his removal to a wider stage. Staupitz, with whom he always remained in close communication, saw clearly that the young monk’s disposition was too active to be confined with so narrow a circle. He spoke of him to the Elector Frederick of Saxony: and this enlightened prince invited Luther in 1508, probably about the end of the year, to become professor at the university of Wittenberg. This was the field on which he was to

fight many hard battles. Luther felt that his true vocation was there.

He was requested to repair to his new post with all speed: he replied to the call without delay, and in the hurry of his removal he had not time to write to him whom he styled his master and well-beloved father, — John Braun, curate of Eisenach. He did so however a few months later. “My departure was so hasty,” said he, “that those with whom I was living were almost ignorant of it. I am farther away, I confess: but the better part of me remains with you.” Luther had been three years in the cloister at Erfurth.

Chapter 5

The University of Wittenberg

In the year 1502, Frederick the Elector founded a new university at Wittenberg. He declared in the charter confirming the privileges of this high school, that he and his people would look to it as to an oracle. At that time he had little thought in how remarkable a manner this language would be verified. Two men belonging to the opposition that had been formed against the scholastic system, — Pollich of Mellerstadt, doctor of medicine, law, and philosophy, and Staupitz — had had great influence in the establishment of this academy. The university declared that it selected St. Augustine for its patron, — a choice that was very significant. This new institution, which possessed great liberty, and which was considered as a court of final appeal in all cases of difficulty, was admirably fitted to become the cradle of the Reformation, and it powerfully contributed to the development of Luther and of Luther's work.

On his arrival at Wittenberg, he repaired to the Augustine convent, where a cell was allotted to him; for though a professor, he did not cease to be a monk. He had been called to teach physics and dialectics. In assigning him this duty, regard had probably been paid to the philosophical studies he had pursued at Erfurth, and to the degree of Master of Arts which he had taken. Thus Luther, who hungered and thirsted after the Word of God, was compelled to devote himself almost exclusively to the study of the Aristotelian scholastic philosophy. He had need of that bread of life which God gives to the world, and yet he must occupy himself with human subtleties. What a restraint! and what signs it called forth! “By God’s grace, I am well,” wrote he to Braun, “except that I have to study philosophy with all my might. From the first moment of my arrival at Wittenberg, I was earnestly desirous of exchanging it for that of theology; but,” added he, lest it should be supposed he meant the theology of the day, “it is of a theology which seeks the kernel in the nut, the wheat in the husk, the marrow in the bones, that I am speaking. Be that as it may, God is God,”

continues he with that confidence which was the soul of his life; “man is almost always mistaken in his judgments; but this is our God.

He will lead us with goodness for ever and ever.” The studies that Luther was then obliged to pursue were of great service to him, in enabling him in after-years to combat the errors of the schoolmen.

But he could not stop there. The desire of his heart was about to be accomplished. That same power, which some years before had driven Luther from the bar into a monastic life, was now impelling him from philosophy towards the Bible. He zealously applied himself to the acquisition of the ancient languages, and particularly of Greek and Hebrew, in order to draw knowledge and learning from the very springs whence they gushed forth. He was all his life indefatigable in labor. A few months after his arrival at the university, he solicited the degree of bachelor of divinity. He obtained it at the end of March 1509, with the particular summons to devote himself to biblical

theology, — ad Biblia.

Every day, at one in the afternoon, Luther was called to lecture on the Bible: a precious hour both for the professor and his pupils, and which led them deeper and deeper into the divine meaning of those revelations so long lost to the people and to the schools!

He began his course by explaining the Psalms, and thence passed to the Epistle to the Romans. It was more particularly while meditating on this portion of Scripture, that the light of truth penetrated his heart. In the retirement of his quiet cell, he used to consecrate whole hours to the study of the Divine Word, this epistle of St. Paul lying open before him. On one occasion, having reached the seventeenth verse of the first chapter, he read this passage from the prophet Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith. This precept struck him. There is then for the just a life different from that of other men: and this life is the gift of faith. This promise, which he received into his heart, as if God himself had placed it there, unveils to him the mystery of

the christian life, and increases this life in him. Years after, in the midst of his numerous occupations, he imagined he still heard these words: The just shall live by faith. Luther's lectures thus prepared had little similarity with what had been heard till then. It was not an eloquent rhetorician or a pedantic schoolman that spoke; but a Christian who had felt the power of revealed truths, — who drew them forth from the Bible, — poured them out from the treasures of his heart, — and presented them all full of life to his astonished hearers. It was not the teaching of a man, but of God.

This entirely new method of expounding the truth made a great noise; the news of it spread far and wide, and attracted to the newly established university a crowd of youthful foreign students. Even many professors attended Luther's lectures, and among others Mellerstadt, frequently styled the light of the world, first rector of the university, who already at Leipsic, where he had been previously, had earnestly combated the ridiculous instructions of scholasticism, had denied that "the light created

on the first day was Theology," and had maintained that the study of literature should be the foundation of that science. "This monk," said he, "will put all the doctors to shame; he will bring in a new doctrine, and reform the whole church; for he builds upon the Word of Christ, and no one in the world can either resist or overthrow that Word, even should he attack it will all the arms of philosophy, of the sophists, Scotists, Albertists, Thomists, and with all the Tartaretus." Staupitz, who was the instrument of God to develop all the gifts and treasures hidden in Luther, requested him to preach in the church of the Augustines. The young professor shrunk from this proposal. He desired to confine himself to his academical duties, he trembled at the thought of increasing them by those of the ministry. In vain did Staupitz say solicit him: "No! no!" replied he, "it is no slight thing to speak before men in the place of God." What affecting humility in this great reformer of the Church! Staupitz persisted; but the ingenious Luther, says one of his biographers, found fifteen arguments, pretexts, and evasions to defend himself against this invitation. At length, the chief

of the Augustines persevering in his attack, Luther said: “Ah, doctor, by doing this you deprive me of life. I shall not be able to hold out three months.” — “Well! so be it in God’s name,” replied the vicar-general, “for our Lord God has also need on high of devoted and skillful men.” Luther was forced to yield.

In the middle of the square at Wittenberg stood an ancient wooden chapel, thirty feet long and twenty wide, whose walls propped up on all sides were falling into ruin. An old pulpit made of planks, and three feet high, received the preacher. It was in this wretched place that the preaching of the Reformation began. It was God’s will that that which was to restore his glory should have the humblest beginnings. The foundations of the new Augustine Church had just been laid, and in the meanwhile this miserable place of worship was made use of. “This building,” adds Myconius, one of Luther’s contemporaries, who records these circumstances, “may well be compared to the stable in which Christ was born. It was in this wretched enclosure that God willed, so to speak,

that his wellbeloved Son should be born a second time. Among those thousands of cathedrals and parish churches with which the world is filled, there was not one at that time which God chose for the glorious preaching of eternal life." Luther preaches: everything is striking in the new minister. His expressive countenance, his noble air, his clear and sonorous voice, captivate all his hearers. Before his time, the majority of preachers had sought rather what might amuse their congregation, than what would convert them. The great seriousness that pervaded all Luther's sermons, and the joy with which the knowledge of the Gospel had filled his heart, imparted to his eloquence an authority, a warmth, and an unction that his predecessors had not possessed. "Endowed with a ready and lively genius," says one of his opponents, "with a good memory, and employing his mother tongue with wonderful facility, Luther was inferior to none of his contemporaries in eloquence. Speaking from the pulpit, as if he were agitated by some violent emotion, suiting the action to his words, he affected his hearers' minds in a surprising manner, and carried them like a

torrent wherever he pleased. So much strength, grace, and eloquence are rarely found in these children of the North." — "He had," says Bossuet, "a lively and impetuous eloquence that charmed and led away the people." Soon the little chapel could not hold the hearers who crowded to it. The council of Wittenberg then nominated Luther their chaplain, and invited him to preach in the city church. The impression he there produced was greater still. The energy of his genius, the eloquence of his style, and the excellency of the doctrines that he proclaimed, equally astonished his hearers. His reputation extended far and wide, and Frederick the Wise himself came once to Wittenberg to hear him.

This was the beginning of a new life for Luther. The slothfulness of the cloister had been succeeded by great activity. Freedom, labor, the earnest and constant action to which he could now devote himself at Wittenberg, succeeded in re-establishing harmony and peace within him. Now he was in his place, and the work of God was soon to display its majestic progress.

Chapter 6

Journey to Rome

Luther was teaching both in the academical hall and in the church, when he was interrupted in his labors. In 1510, or according to others in 1511 or 1512, he was sent to Rome. Seven convents of his order were at variance on certain points with the vicar-general. The acuteness of Luther's mind, his powerful language, and his talents for discussion, were the cause of his selection as agent for these seven monasteries before the pope. This divine dispensation was necessary for Luther. It was requisite that he should know Rome. Full of the prejudices and delusions of the cloister, he had always imagined it to be the abode of sanctity.

He set out and crossed the Alps. But he had scarcely descended into the plains of the rich and voluptuous Italy, before he found at every step subjects of astonishment and scandal. The poor German monk was entertained in a wealthy convent of the Benedictines on the banks of the Po,

in Lombardy. The revenues of this monastery amounted to 36,000 ducats; 12,000 were devoted to the table, 12,000 were set apart for the buildings, and the remainder for the wants of the monks. The splendor of the apartments, the richness of their dress, and the delicacy of their food, confounded Luther. Marble, silk, luxury in all its forms — what a novel sight for the humble brother of the poor convent of Wittenberg!

He was astonished and was silent; but when Friday came, what was his surprise at seeing the Benedictine table groaning under a load of meat.

Upon this he resolved to speak. “The Church and the pope,” said he, “forbid such things.” The Benedictines were irritated at this reprimand of the unpolished German. But Luther having persisted, and perhaps threatened to make their irregularities known, some thought the simplest course would be to get rid of their importunate guest. The porter of the convent forewarned him of the danger he incurred by a longer stay. He accordingly quitted this epicurean monastery, and reached Bologna,

where he fell dangerously ill. Some have attributed this to the effects of poison; but it is more reasonable to suppose that the change of diet affected the frugal monk of Wittenberg, whose usual food was bread and herrings. This sickness was not to be unto death, but to the glory of God. He again relapsed into the sorrow and dejection so natural to him. To die thus, far from Germany, under this burning sky, and in a foreign land — what a sad fate. The distress of mind that he had felt at Erfurth returned with fresh force. The sense of his sinfulness troubled him; the prospect of Gods judgment filled him with dread. But at the very moment that these terrors had reached their highest pitch, the words of St. Paul, that had already struck him at Wittenberg, The just shall live by faith, recurred forcibly to his memory, and enlightened his soul like a ray from heaven. Thus restored and comforted, he soon regained his health, and resumed his journey towards Rome, expecting to find there a very different manner of life from that of the Lombard convents, and impatient of efface, by the sight of Roman holiness, the melancholy impressions left on his

mind by his sojourn on the banks of the Po.

At length, after a toilsome journey under a burning Italian sun, at the beginning of summer, he drew near the seven-hilled city. His heart was moved within him: his eyes sought after the queen of the world and of the Church. As soon as he discovered the eternal city in the distance, — the city of St. Peter and St. Paul, — the metropolis of Catholicism, — he fell on his knees, exclaiming, “Holy Rome, I salute thee!” Luther is in Rome: the Wittenberg professor stands in the midst of the eloquent ruins of consular and imperial Rome — of the Rome of so many martyrs and confessors of Jesus Christ. Here had lived that Plautus and that Virgil whose works he had carried with him into the cloister, and all those great men at whose history his heart had so often beat with emotion.

He beholds their statues, — the ruins of the monuments that bear witness to their glory. But all that glory — all that power has fled: his feet trample on their dust. At each step he calls to mind the sad presentiments of Scipio shedding tears as

he looked upon the ruins — the burning palaces and tottering walls of Carthage, and exclaimed, “Thus will it one day be with Rome!” “And in truth,” said Luther, “the Rome of the Scipios and Caesars has become a corpse. There are such heaps of rubbish that the foundations of the houses are now where once stood the roofs. It is there,” added he, as he threw a melancholy glance over these ruins, “it is there that once the riches and the treasures of the world were gathered together.” All these fragments, against which his feet stumble at every step, proclaim to Luther within the very walls of Rome, that what is strongest in the eyes of man may be easily destroyed by the breath of the Lord.

But with these profane ashes are mingled other and holier ones: he recalls them to mind. The burialplace of the martyrs is not far from that of the generals of Rome and of her conquerors. Christian Rome with its sufferings has more power over the heart of the Saxon monk than pagan Rome with all its glory. Here that letter arrived in which Paul wrote, The just shall live by faith. He is not far

from Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. Here is the house of Narcissus — there the palace of Caesar, where the Lord delivered the Apostle from the jaws of the lion. Oh, how these recollections strengthen the heart of the monk of Wittenberg!

But Rome at this time presented a very different aspect. The warlike Julius II filled the papal chair, and not Leo X, as some distinguished German historians have said, doubtless through inattention. Luther has often related a trait in the character of this pope. When the news reached him that his army had been defeated by the French before Ravenna, he was repeating his daily prayers: he flung away the book, exclaiming with a terrible oath: “And thou too art become a Frenchman.....It is thus thou dost protect thy Church?.....” Then turning in the direction of the country to whose arms he thought to have recourse, he added: “Saint Switzer, pray for us!” Ignorance, levity, and dissolute manners, a profane spirit, a contempt for all that is sacred, a scandalous traffic in divine things — such was the spectacle afforded by this unhappy city. Yet the pious monk remained for

some time longer in his delusions.

Having arrived about the period of the feast of St. John, he heard the Romans repeating around him a proverb current among them: “Happy the mother whose son performs mass on St. John’s eve!” — “Oh, how should I rejoice to render my mother happy!” said Luther to himself. Margaret’s pious son endeavored to repeat a mass on that day; but he could not, the throng was too great. Fervent and meek, he visited all the churches and chapels; he believed in all the falsehoods that were told him; he devoutly performed all the holy practices that were required there, happy in being able to execute so many good works from which his fellow-countrymen were debarred. “Oh! how I regret,” said the pious German to himself, “that my father and mother are still alive! What pleasure I should have in delivering them from the fire of purgatory by my masses, my prayers, and by so many other admirable works!” He had found the light; but the darkness was far from being entirely expelled from his understanding. His heart was converted; his mind was not yet enlightened: he had faith and

love, but he wanted knowledge. It was no trifling matter to emerge from that thick night which had covered the earth for so many centuries.

Luther several times repeated mass at Rome. He officiated with all the unction and dignity that such an action appeared to him to require. But what affliction seized the heart of the Saxon monk at witnessing the sad and profane mechanism of the Roman priests, as they celebrated the sacrament of the altar! These on their part laughed at his simplicity. On day when he was officiating he found that the priests at an adjoining altar had already repeated seven masses before he had finished one. “Quick, quick!” cried one of them, “send our Lady back her Son;” making an impious allusion to the transubstantiation of the bread into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. At another time Luther had only just reached the Gospel, when the priest at his side had already terminated the mass.

“Passa, passa!” cried the latter to him, “make haste! have done with it at once.” His astonishment was still greater, when he found in the dignitaries

of the papacy what he had already observed in the inferior clergy. He had hoped better things of them.

It was the fashion at the papal court to attack Christianity, and you could not pass for a well-bred man, unless you entertained some erroneous or heretical opinion on the doctrines of the Church. They had endeavored to convince Erasmus, by means of certain extracts from Pliny, that there was no difference between the souls of men and of beasts; and some of the pope's youthful courtiers maintained that the orthodox faith was the result of the crafty devices of a few saints. Luther's quality of envoy from the German Augustines procured him invitations to numerous meetings of distinguished ecclesiastics. One day, in particular, he was at table with several prelates, who displayed openly before him their buffoonery and impious conversation, and did not scruple to utter in his presence a thousand mockeries, thinking, no doubt, that he was of the same mind as themselves. Among other things, they related before the monk, laughing and priding themselves upon it, how, when they were repeating mass at the altar, instead

of the sacramental words that were to transform the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of our Savior, they pronounced over the elements this derisive expression: Panis es, et panis manebis; vinum es, et vinum manebis. Then, continued they, we elevate the host, and all the people bow down and worship it.

Luther could hardly believe his ears. His disposition, although full of animation and even gaiety in the society of friends, was remarkably serious whenever sacred matters were concerned. The mockeries of Rome were a stumbling block to him. “I was,” said he, “a thoughtful and pious young monk. Such language grieved me bitterly. If ‘tis thus they speak at Rome, freely and publicly at the dinner table, thought I to myself, what would it be if their actions corresponded to their words, and if all — pope, cardinals, and courtiers — thus repeat the mass! And how they must have deceived me, who have heard them read devoutly so great a number!” Luther often mixed with the monks and citizens of Rome. If some few extolled the pope and his party, the majority gave a free course to

their complaints and to their sarcasms. What stories had they not to tell about the reigning pope, or Alexander VI, or about so many others! One day his Roman friends related how Caesar Borgia, having fled from Rome, was taken in Spain. As they were going to try him, he called for arc, and asked for a confessor to visit him in his prison. A monk was sent to him, whom he slew, put on his hood, and escaped. “I heard that at Rome; and it is a positive fact,” says Luther. Another day, passing down a wide street leading to St. Peter’s, he halted in astonishment before a stone statue, representing a pope under the figure of a woman, holding a scepter, clothed in the papal mantle, and carrying a child in her arms. It is a young woman of Mentz, he was told, whom the cardinals elected pope, and who was delivered of a child opposite this place. No pope, therefore, passes along that street. “I am surprised,” says Luther, that the popes allow such a statue to remain.” Luther had thought to find the edifice of the Church encompassed with splendor and strength, but its doors were broken down, and the walls damaged by fire. He witnessed the desolation of the sanctuary, and drew back with

horror. All his dreams had been of holiness, — he had discovered nought but profanation.

The disorders without the churches were not less shocking to him. “The police of Rome is very strict and severe,” said he. “The judge or captain patrols the city every night on horseback with three hundred followers; he arrests every one that is found in the streets: if they meet an armed man, he is hung, or thrown into the Tiber. And yet the city is filled with disorder and murder; whilst in those places where the Word of God is preached uprightly and in purity, peace and order prevail, without calling for the severity of the law.” — “No one can imagine what sins and infamous actions are committed in Rome,” said he at another time; “they must be seen and heard to be believed. Thus, they are in the habit of saying, If there is a hell, Rome is built over it: it is an abyss whence issues every kind of sin.” This spectacle made a deep impression even then upon Luther’s mind; it was increased erelong. “The nearer we approach Rome, the greater number of bad Christians we meet with,” said he, many years after. “There is a vulgar

proverb, that he who goes to Rome the first time, looks out for a knave; the second time, he finds him; and the third, he brings him away with him. But people are now become so clever, that they make these three journeys in one." Machiavelli, one of the most profound geniuses of Italy, but also one of unenviable notoriety, who was living at Florence when Luther passed through that city on his way to Rome, has made the same remark: "The strongest symptom," said he, "of the approaching ruin of Christianity (by which he means Roman-catholicism) is, that the nearer people approach the capital of Christendom, the less christian spirit is found in them. The scandalous examples and the crimes of the court of Rome are the cause why Italy has lost every principle of piety and all religious feeling. We Italians," continues this great historian, "are indebted principally to the Church and the priests for having become impious and immoral." Luther, somewhat later, was sensible of the very great importance of this journey. "If they would give me one hundred thousand florins," said he, "I would not have missed seeing Rome!" This visit was also very advantageous to him in regard

to learning. Like Reuchlin, Luther took advantage of his residence in

Italy to penetrate deeper into the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. He took lessons in Hebrew from a celebrated rabbi, named Elias Levita. It was at Rome that he partly acquired that knowledge of the Divine Word, under the attacks of which Rome was destined to fall.

But this journey was most important to Luther in another respect. Not only was the veil withdrawn, and the sardonic sneer, the mocking incredulity which lay concealed behind the Romish superstitions revealed to the future reformer, but the living faith that God had implanted in him was there powerfully strengthened.

We have seen how he at first gave himself up to all the vain observances which the Church enjoined for the expiation of sin. One day, among others, wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the pope to all who should ascend on their knees what is called Pilate’s Staircase, the poor Saxon

monk was humbly creeping up those steps, which he was told had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. But while he was performing this meritorious act, he thought he heard a voice of thunder crying from the bottom of his heart, as at Wittenberg and Bologna, The just shall live by faith. These words, that twice before had struck him like the voice of an angel from God, resounded unceasingly and powerfully within him. He rises in amazement from the steps up which he was dragging his body: he shudders at himself; he is ashamed of seeing to what a depth superstition had plunged him. He flies far from the scene of his folly. This powerful text has a mysterious influence on the life of Luther. It was a creative sentence both for the reformer and for the Reformation. It was in these words God then said, Let there be light! and there was light.

It is frequently necessary for a truth to be presented many times to our minds in order that it may produce the due effect. Luther had profoundly studied the Epistle to the Romans, and yet the doctrine of justification by faith there taught had

never appeared so clear to him. Now he comprehends that righteousness which alone can stand before God; now he receives for himself from the hand of Christ that obedience which God of his free gift imputes to the sinner, as soon as he raises his eyes with humility to the crucified Son of Man. This was the decisive epoch of Luther's inner life. That faith which had saved him from the terrors of death, became the very soul of his theology, his stronghold in every danger; the principle which gave energy to his preaching and strength to his charity; the foundation of his peace, the encouragement to his labors, his comfort in the life and in the death.

But this great doctrine of a salvation proceeding from God and not from man, was not only the power of God to save Luther's soul; it became in a still greater degree the power of God to reform the Church: — an effectual weapon wielded by the apostles, — a weapon too long neglected, but taken at last, in all its primitive brightness, from the arsenal of the omnipotent God. At the very moment when Luther uprose from his

knees on Pilate’s Staircase, in agitation and amazement at those words which Paul had addressed fifteen centuries before to the inhabitants of that metropolis, — Truth, till then a melancholy captive, and fettered in the Church, uprose also to fall no more.

We should here listen to what Luther himself says on the matter.

“Although I was a holy and blameless monk, my conscience was nevertheless full of trouble and anguish. I could not endure those words — the righteousness of God. I had no love for that holy and just God who punishes sinners. I was filled with secret anger against him: I hated him, because, not content with frightening by the law and the miseries of life us wretched sinners, already ruined by original sin, he still further increased our tortures by the Gospel.....But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood these words, — when I learnt how the justification of the sinner proceeds from the free mercy of our Lord through faith, ...then I felt born again like a new man; I

entered through the open doors into the very paradise of God. Henceforward, also, I saw the beloved and Holy Scriptures with other eyes. I perused the Bible, — I brought together a great number of passages that taught me the nature of God’s work. And as previously I had detested with all my heart these words, — The righteousness of God, I began from that hour to value them and to love them, as the sweetest and most consoling words in the Bible. In very truth, this language of St. Paul was to me the true gate of Paradise.” Thus when he was called on solemn occasions to confess this doctrine, Luther always recovered his enthusiasm and rough energy. “I see,” observed he at an important moment, “that the devil is continually attacking this fundamental article by means of his doctors, and that in this respect he can never cease or take any repose. Well then, I, Doctor Martin Luther, unworthy herald of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, confess this article, that faith alone without works justifies before God; and I declare that it shall stand and remain for ever in despite of the emperor of the Tartars, the emperor of the Persians, — in spite of

the pope and all the cardinals, with the bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, — in spite of kings, princes, and nobles, — and in spite of all the world and of the devils themselves; and that if they endeavor to fight against this truth, they will draw the fires of hell upon their heads. This is the true and holy Gospel, and the declaration of me, Doctor Luther, according to the teaching of the Holy Ghost.....There is no one," continues he, "who has died for our sins, if not Jesus Christ the Son of God. I say it once again, should all the world and all the devils tear each other to pieces and burst with rage, that it is not the less true. And if it is He alone that taketh away our sins, it cannot be ourselves and our own works. But good works follow redemption, as the fruit grows on the tree. That is our doctrine — that is what is taught by the Holy Ghost and by all the communion of saints. We hold fast to it in the name of God. Amen!" It was thus Luther found what had been overlooked, at least to a certain degree, by all doctors and reformers, even by the most illustrious of them.

It was in Rome that God gave him this clear

view of the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. He had gone to the city of the pontiffs for the solution of certain difficulties concerning a monastic order: he brought away from it in his heart the salvation of the Church.

Chapter 7

Luther returns to Wittenberg

Luther quitted Rome, and returned to Wittenberg: his heart was full of sorrow and indignation. Turning his eyes with disgust from the pontifical city, he directed them with hope to the Holy Scriptures — to that new life which the Word of God seemed then to promise to the world. This Word increased in his heart by all that the Church lost. He separated from the one to cling to the other. The whole of the Reformation was in that one movement. It set God in the place of the priest.

Staupitz and the elector did not lose sight of the monk whom they had called to the university of Wittenberg. It appears as if the vicar-general had a presentiment of the work that was to be done in the world, and that, finding it too difficult for himself, he wished to urge Luther towards it.

There is nothing more remarkable, — nothing, perhaps, more mysterious than this person, who is

seen everywhere urging forward Luther in the path where God calls him, and then going to end his days sadly in a cloister. The preaching of the young professor had made a deep impression on the prince; he had admired the strength of his understanding, the forcibleness of his eloquence, and the excellency of the matters that he expounded. The elector and his friend, desirous of advancing a man of such great promise, resolved that he should take the high degree of doctor of divinity. Staupitz repaired to the convent, and took Luther into the garden, where, alone with him under a tree that Luther in afteryears delighted to point out to his disciples, the venerable father said to him: “My friend, you must now become Doctor of the Holy Scriptures.” Luther shrunk at the very thought: this eminent honor startled him. “Seek a more worthy person,” replied he. “As for me, I cannot consent to it.” The vicargeneral persisted: “Our Lord God has much to do in the Church: he has need at this time of young and vigorous doctors.” These words, adds Melancthon, were perhaps said playfully, yet the event corresponded with them; for generally many omens precede all

great revolutions. It is not necessary to suppose that Melancthon here speaks of miraculous prophecies. The most incredulous age — that which preceded the present one — saw an exemplification of this remark. How many presages, without there being any thing miraculous in them, announced the revolution in which it closed!

“But I am weak and sickly,” replied Luther. “I have not long to live. Look out for some strong man.” — “The Lord has work in heaven as well as on earth,” replied the vicar-general: “dead or alive, He has need of you in his council.” “It is the Holy Ghost alone that can make a doctor of divinity,” then urged the monk still more alarmed. — “Do what your convent requires,” said Staupitz, “and what I, your vicar-general, command; for you have promised to obey us.” — “But my poverty,” resumed the brother: “I have no means of defraying the expenses incidental to such a promotion.” — “Do not be uneasy about that,” replied his friend: “the prince has done you the favor to take all the charges upon himself.” Pressed on every side, Luther thought it his duty to give way.

It was about the end of the summer of 1512 that Luther set out for Leipsic to receive from the elector's treasurers the money necessary for his promotion. But according to court custom, the money did not arrive. The brother growing impatient wished to depart, but monastic obedience detained him. At length, on the 4th October, he received fifty florins from Pfeffinger and John Doltzig. In the receipt which he gave them, he employs no other title than that of monk. "I, Martin," wrote he, "brother of the order of Hermits." Luther hastened to return to Wittenberg.

Andrew Bodenstein of the city of Carlstadt was at that time dean of the theological faculty, and it is by the name of Carlstadt that this doctor is generally known. He was also called the A.B.C. Melancthon first gave him this designation on account of the three initials of his name. Bodenstein acquired in his native country the first elements of learning. He was of a serious and gloomy character, perhaps inclined to jealousy, and of a restless temper, but full of desire for

knowledge, and of great capacity. He frequented several universities to augment his stores of learning, and studied theology at Rome. On his return from Italy, he settled at Wittenberg, and became doctor of divinity. “At this time,” he said afterwards, “I had not yet read the Holy Scriptures.” This remark gives us a very correct idea of what theology then was. Carlstadt, besides his functions of professor, was canon and archdeacon. Such was the man who in after-years was destined to create a schism in the Reformation. At this time he saw in Luther only an inferior; but the Augustine erelong became an object of jealousy to him. “I will not be less great than Luther,” said he one day. Very far from anticipating at that period the great destinies of the young professor, Carlstadt conferred on his future rival the highest dignity of the university.

On the 18th October 1512, Luther was received licentiate in divinity, and took the following oath: “I swear to defend the evangelical truth with all my might.” On the day following, Bodenstein solemnly conferred on him, in the presence of a

numerous assembly, the insignia of doctor of divinity.

He was made a biblical doctor, and not a doctor of sentences; and was thus called to devote himself to the study of the Bible, and not to that of human traditions. He then pledged himself by an oath, as he himself related, to his well-beloved and Holy Scriptures. He promised to preach them faithfully, to teach them with purity, to study them all his life, and to defend them, both in disputation and in writing, against all false teachers, so far as God should give him ability.

This solemn oath was Luther’s call to the Reformation. By imposing on his conscience the holy obligation of searching freely and boldly proclaiming the Christian truth, this oath raised the new doctor above the narrow limits to which his monastic vow would perhaps have confined him. Called by the university, by his sovereign, in the name of the imperial majesty and of the see of Rome itself, and bound before God by the most solemn oath, he became from that hour the most

intrepid herald of the Word of Life. On that memorable day Luther was armed champion of the Bible.

We may accordingly look upon this oath, sworn to the Holy Scriptures, as one of the causes of the revival of the Church. The sole and infallible authority of the Word of God was the primary and fundamental principle of the Reformation. Every reform in detail that was afterwards carried out in the doctrine, morals, or government of the Church, and in its worship, was but a consequence of this first principle. In these days we can scarcely imagine the sensation produced by this elementary and simple but longneglected truth. A few men of more enlarged views than the common, alone foresaw its immense consequences. Erelong the courageous voices of all the Reformers proclaimed this mighty principle, at the sound of which Rome shall crumble into dust: “The Christians receive no other doctrines than those founded on the express words of Jesus Christ, of the Apostles, and of the Prophets. No man, no assembly of doctors, has a right to prescribe new ones.” Luther’s position was

changed. The summons that he had received became to the reformer as one of those extraordinary calls which the Lord addressed to the prophets under the Old Covenant, and to the apostles under the New. The solemn engagement that he made produced so deep an impression upon his soul that the recollection of this oath was sufficient, in after-years, to console him in the midst of the greatest dangers and of the fiercest conflicts. And when he saw all Europe agitated and shaken by the Word that he had proclaimed; when the accusations of Rome, the reproaches of many pious men, the doubts and fears of his own too sensible heart, seemed likely to make him hesitate, fear, and fall into despair, — he called to mind the oath that he had taken, and remained steadfast, calm, and full of joy. “I have gone forward in the Lord’s name,” said he in a critical moment, “and I have placed myself in his hands. His will be done! Who prayed him to make me a doctor?..If it was He who created me such, let him support me; or else if he repent of what he has done, let him deprive me of my office.....This tribulation, therefore, alarms me not. I seek one thing only,

which is to preserve the favor of God in all that he has called me to do with him.” At another time he said: “He who undertakes any thing without a Divine call, seeks his own glory. But I, Doctor Martin Luther, was forced to become a doctor. Popery desired to stop me in the performance of my duty: but you see what has happened to it, and worse still will befall it. They cannot defend themselves against me. I am determined, in God’s name, to tread upon the lions, to trample dragons and serpents under foot. This will begin during my life, and will be accomplished after my death. From the period of his oath, Luther no longer sought the truth for himself alone: he sought it also for the Church. Still full of the recollections of Rome, he saw confusedly before him a path in which he had promised to walk with all the energy of his soul. The spiritual life that had hitherto been manifested only within him, now extended itself without. This was the third epoch of his development. His entrance into the cloister had turned his thoughts towards God; the knowledge of the remission of sins and of the righteousness of faith had emancipated his soul; his doctor’s oath

gave him that baptism of fire by which he became a reformer of the Church.

His ideas were soon directed in a general manner towards the Reformation.

In an address that he had written, as it would seem, to be delivered by the provost of Lietzkau at the Lateran council, he declared that the corruption of the world originated in the priests' teaching so many fables and traditions, instead of preaching the pure Word of God. The Word of Life, in his view, alone had the power of effecting the spiritual regeneration of man. Thus then already he made the salvation of the world depend upon the re-establishment of sound doctrine, and not upon a mere reformation of manners. Yet Luther was not entirely consistent with himself; he still entertained contradictory opinions: but a spirit of power beamed from all his writings; he courageously broke the bonds with which the systems of the schools had fettered the thoughts of men; he everywhere passed beyond the limits within which previous ages had so closely confined him, and

opened up new paths. God was with him.

The first adversaries that he attacked were those famous schoolmen, whom he had himself so much studied, and who then reigned supreme in all the academies. He accused them of Pelagianism, and forcibly inveighing against Aristotle, the father of the schools, and against Thomas Aquinas, he undertook to hurl them both from the throne whence they governed, the one philosophy, and the other theology. “Aristotle, Porphyry, the sententiary divines (the schoolmen),” he wrote to Lange, “are useless studies in our days. I desire nothing more earnestly than to unveil to the world that comedian who has deceived the Church by assuming a Greek mask, and to show his deformity to all.” In every public discussion he was heard repeating: “The writings of the apostles and prophets are surer and more sublime than all the sophisms and all the divinity of the schools.” Such language was new, but men gradually became used to it. About a year after he was able to write with exultation: “God is at work. Our theology and St. Augustine advance admirably and prevail in our

university. Aristotle is declining: he is tottering towards his eternal ruin that is near at hand. The lectures on the Sentences produce nothing but weariness. No one can hope for hearers, unless he professes the Biblical theology." Happy the university of which such testimony can be given!

At the same time that Luther was attacking Aristotle, he took the side of Erasmus and Reuchlin against their enemies. He entered into communication with these great men and with other scholars, such as Pirckheimer, Mutianus, and Hutten, who belonged more or less to the same party. He also, about this period, formed another friendship that was of great importance through the whole course of his life.

There was at that time at the elector's court a person remarkable for his wisdom and his candor: this was George Spalatin. He was born at Spalatus or Spalt in the bishopric of Eichstadt, and had been originally curate of the village of Hohenkirch, near the Thuringian forests. He was afterwards chosen by Frederick the Wise to be his secretary, chaplain,

and tutor to his nephew, John Frederick, who was one day to wear the electoral crown.

Spalatin was a simple-hearted man in the midst of the court: he appeared timid in the presence of great events; circumspect and prudent, like his master, before the ardent Luther, with whom he corresponded daily.

Like Staupitz, he was better suited for peaceful times. Such men are necessary: they are like those delicate substances in which jewels and crystal are wrapped to secure them from the injuries of transport. They seem useless; and yet without them all these precious objects would be broken and lost. Spalatin was not a man to effect great undertakings; but he faithfully and noiselessly performed the task imposed upon him. He was at first one of the principal aids of his master in collecting those relics of saints, of which Frederick was so long a great admirer. But he, as well as the prince, turned by degrees towards the truth. The faith, which then reappeared in the Church, did not lay such violent hold upon him as upon Luther: it

guided him by slower methods. He became Luther’s friend at court; the minister through whom passed all matters between the Church and the State. The elector honored Spalatin with great intimacy: they always traveled together in the same carriage. Nevertheless the atmosphere of the court oppressed the good chaplain: he was affected by profound melancholy; he could have desired to quit all these honors, and become once more a simple pastor in the forests of Thuringia. But Luther consoled him, and exhorted him to remain firm at his post. Spalatin acquired general esteem: princes and learned men showed him the most sincere regard. Erasmus used to say, “I inscribe Spalatin’s name not only among those of my principal friends, but still further among those of my most honored protectors; and that, not upon paper, but on my heart.” Reuchlin’s quarrel with the monks was then making a great noise in Germany. The most pious men were often undecided what part they should take; for the monks were eager to destroy the Hebrew books in which blasphemies against Christ were to be found. The elector commissioned his chaplain to consult the doctor of

Wittenberg on this matter, as his reputation was already great. Here is Luther's answer: it is the first letter he addressed to the court-preacher: — "What shall I say? These monks pretend to cast out Beelzebub, but it is not by the finger of God. I cease not from groaning and lamenting over it. We Christians are beginning to be wise outwardly, and mad inwardly. There are in every part of our Jerusalem blasphemies a hundred times worse than those of the Jews, and all there are filled with spiritual idols. It is our duty with holy zeal to carry out and destroy these internal enemies. But we neglect that which is most urgent; and the devil himself persuades us to abandon what belongs to us, at the same time that he prevents us from correcting what belongs to others."

Chapter 8

Faith

Luther did not lose himself in this quarrel. A living faith in Christ filled his heart and his life. “Within my heart,” said he, “reigns alone (and it ought thus to reign alone) faith in my Lord Jesus Christ, who is the beginning, middle, and end of all the thoughts that occupy my mind by day and night.” All his hearers listened with admiration as he spoke, whether from the professor’s chair or from the pulpit, of that faith in Jesus Christ. His teaching diffused great light. Men were astonished that they had not earlier acknowledged truths that appeared so evident in his mouth. “The desire of self-justification,” said he, “is the cause of all the distresses of the heart, But he who receives Jesus Christ as a Savior, enjoys peace; and not only peace, but purity of heart. All sanctification of the heart is a fruit of faith.

For faith is a divine work in us, which changes us and gives us a new birth, emanating from God

himself. It kills the old Adam in us; and, by the Holy Ghost which is communicated to us, it gives us a new heart and makes us new men. It is not by empty speculations," he again exclaimed, "but by this practical method, that we can obtain a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ." It was at this time that Luther preached those discourses on the Ten Commandments that have come down to us under the title of Popular Declamations. They contain errors no doubt; Luther became enlightened only be degrees. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But what truth, simplicity, and eloquence are found in these discourses! How well can we understand the effect that the new preacher must have produced upon his audience and upon his age! We will quote but one passage taken from the beginning.

Luther ascends the pulpit of Wittenberg, and reads these words: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

Then turning to the people who crowded the

sanctuary, he says, “All the sons of Adam are idolaters, and have sinned against this first commandment.” Doubtless this strange assertion startled his hearers. He proceeds to justify it, and the speaker continues: “There are two kinds of idolatry — one external, the other internal.

“The external, in which man bows down to wood and stone, to beasts, and to the heavenly host.

“The internal, in which man, fearful of punishment or seeking his own pleasure, does not worship the creature, but loves him in his heart, and trusts in him.....

“What kind of religion is this? You do not bend the knee before riches and honors, but you offer them your heart, the noblest portion of yourselves.....Alas! you worship God in body, but the creature in spirit.

“This idolatry prevails in every man until he is healed by the free gift of the faith that is in Christ

Jesus.

“And how shall this cure be accomplished?

“Listen. Faith in Christ takes away from you all trust in your own wisdom, righteousness, and strength; it teaches you that if Christ had not died for you, and had not thus saved you, neither you nor any other creature would have been able to do it. Then you learn to despise all those things that are unavailing to you.

“Nothing now remains to you but Jesus Christ — Christ alone, — Christ all-sufficient for your soul. Hoping for nothing from any creature, you have only Christ, from whom you hope for everything, and whom you love above everything.

“Now Christ is the one, sole, and true God. When you have him for you God, you have no other gods.” It is in this manner Luther shows how the soul is brought back to God, his sovereign good, by the Gospel, according to the words of Jesus Christ: I am the way; no man cometh unto

the Father but by me. The man who speaks thus to his age aims at something more than the correction of a few abuses; he is earnest above all things to establish true religion. His work is not merely negative; it is primarily positive.

Luther afterwards turns his discourse against the superstitions which then filled Christendom; — the signs and mysterious characters, the observance of certain days and months, familiar spirits, phantoms, the influence of the stars, witchcraft, metamorphoses, incubi and succubi, the patronage of saints, etc. etc. etc.; one after another he attacks these idols, and with vigorous arm overthrows all these false gods.

But it was particularly in his lecture-room, before an enlightened and youthful audience, hungering for the truth, that he displays all the treasures of God's Word. "He explained Scripture in such a manner," says his illustrious friend Melancthon, "that, in the judgment of all pious and well-informed men, it was as if a new morn had risen upon the doctrine after a long night of

darkness. He showed the difference that existed between the Law and the Gospel. He refuted the then prevalent error of the churches and of the schools, that men by their works merit the remission of sins, and become righteous before God by an outward discipline. He thus led men's hearts back to the Son of God. Like John the Baptist, he pointed to the Lamb of God that has taken away the sins of the world; he explained how sin is freely pardoned on account of the Son of God, and that man receives this blessing through faith. He made no change in the ceremonies. On the contrary, the established discipline had not in his order a more faithful observer and defender. But he endeavored more and more to make all understand these grand and essential doctrines of conversion, of the remission of sins, of faith, and of the true consolation that is to be found in the cross. Pious minds were struck and penetrated by the sweetness of this doctrine; the learned received it with joy. One might have said that Christ, the apostles, and the prophets were now issuing from the obscurity of some impure dungeon." The firmness with which Luther relied on the Holy

Scriptures imparted great authority to his teaching. But other circumstances added still more to his strength. In him every action of his life corresponded with his words. It was known that these discourses did not proceed merely from his lips: they had their source in his heart, and were practiced in all his works. And when, somewhat later, the Reformation burst forth, many influential men, who saw with regret these divisions in the Church, won over beforehand by the holiness of the reformer's life and by the beauty of his genius, not only did not oppose him, but, further still, embraced that doctrine to which he gave testimony by his works. The more men loved christian virtues, the more they inclined to the reformer. All honest divines were in his favor. This is what was said by those who knew him, and particularly by the wisest man of his age, Melancthon, and by Erasmus, the illustrious opponent of Luther. Envy and prejudice have dared to speak of his disorderly life. Wittenberg was changed by this preaching of faith, and that city became the focus of a light that was soon to illumine all Germany, and to shine on all the Church.

It was in 1516 that Luther published the work of an anonymous mystic theologian (probably Ebland, priest at Frankfort), entitled German Theology, in which the author shows how man may attain perfection by the three methods of purification, illumination, and communion. Luther never gave himself up to the mystic theology, but he received from it a salutary impression. It confirmed him in his disgust for the dry teaching of the schoolmen, in his contempt for the works and observances so much trumpeted by the Church, and in the conviction that he felt of man's spiritual helplessness and of the necessity of grace, and in his attachment to the Bible. "I prefer," wrote he to Staupitz, "the mystics and the Bible to all the schoolmen;" thus placing the former teachers in the next rank to the sacred writers. Perhaps, also, the German Theology aided him in forming a sounder idea on the sacraments, and above all on the mass; for the author maintains that the eucharist gives Christ to man, and does not offer up Christ to God. Luther accompanied this publication by a preface, in which he declared that, next to the Bible and St.

Augustine, he had never met with a book in which he had learnt more of God, Christ, man, and of all things. Already many doctors began to speak ill of the Wittenberg professors, and accused them of innovation. “One would say,” continues Luther, “that there had never lived men before us who taught as we teach.

Yes, in truth, there have been many. But the anger of God, which our sins have deserved, has prevented us from seeing and hearing them. For a long time the universities have banished the Word of God into a corner. Let them read this book, and then let them say whether our theology is new, for this is not a new book.” But if Luther derived from the mystic divinity whatever good it contained, he did not take the bad also. The great error of mysticism is to overlook the free gift of salvation. We are about to notice a remarkable example of the purity of his faith.

Luther had an affectionate and tender heart, and desired to see those whom he loved in possession of that light which had guided him into the paths of

peace. He took advantage of every opportunity that occurred, as professor, preacher, or monk, as well as of his extensive correspondence, to communicate his treasure to others. One of his former brethren in the convent of Erfurth, the monk George Spenlein, was then residing in the convent of Memmingen, perhaps after having spent a short time at Wittenberg.

Spenlein had commissioned the doctor to sell various articles that he had left with him — a tunic of Brussels cloth, a work by an Eisenach doctor, and a hood. Luther carefully discharged this commission.

He received, says he in a letter to Spenlein, dated the 7th April 1516, one florin for the tunic, half a florin for the book, and a florin for the hood, and had remitted the amount to the father-vicar, to whom Spenlein owed three florins. But Luther quickly passes from this account of a monk's wardrobe to a more important subject.

"I should be very glad to know," wrote he to

friar George, “what is the state of your soul. Is it not tired of its own righteousness? does it not breathe freely at last, and does it not confide in the righteousness of Christ? In our days, pride seduces many, and especially those who labor with all their might to become righteous.

Not understanding the righteousness of God that is given to us freely in Christ Jesus, they wish to stand before Him on their own merits. But that cannot be. When you were living with me, you were in that error, and so was I. I am yet struggling unceasingly against it, and I have not yet entirely triumphed over it.

“Oh, my dear brother, learn to know Christ, and him crucified.

Learn to sing unto him a new song, to despair of yourself, and to say to him: Thou, Lord Jesus Christ, art my righteousness, and I am thy sin. Thou hast taken what was mine, and hast given me what was thine. What thou wast not, thou didst become, in order that I might become what I was

not! — Beware, my dear George, of pretending to such purity as no longer to confess yourself a sinner: for Christ dwells only with sinners. He came down from heaven, where he was living among the righteous, in order to live also among sinners. Meditate carefully upon this love of Christ, and you will taste all its unspeakable consolation. If our labors and afflictions could give peace to the conscience, why should Christ have died? You will not find peace, save in him, by despairing of yourself and of your works, and in learning with what love he opens his arms to you, taking all your sins upon himself, and giving thee all his righteousness." Thus the powerful doctrine that had already saved the world in the apostolic age, and which was destined to save it a second time in the days of the Reformation, was clearly and forcibly explained by Luther. Passing over the many ages of ignorance and superstition that had intervened, in this he gave his hand to Saint Paul.

Spenlein was not the only man whom he ought to instruct in this fundamental doctrine. The little truth that he found in this respect in the writings of

Erasmus, made him uneasy. It was of great importance to enlighten a man whose authority was so great, and whose genius was so admirable. But how was he to do it? His court-friend, the Elector's chaplain, was much respected by Erasmus: it is to him that Luther applies.

"What displeases me in Erasmus, who is a man of such extensive learning, is, my dear Spalatin," wrote Luther, "that by the righteousness of works and of the law, of which the apostle speaks, he understands the fulfilling of the ceremonial law. The righteousness of the law consists not only in ceremonies, but in all the works of the Decalogue. Even if these works should be accomplished without faith in Christ, they may, it is true, produce a Fabricius a Regulus, and other men perfectly upright in the eyes of the world; but they then deserve as little to be styled righteousness, as the fruit of the medlar to be called a fig. For we do not become righteous, as Aristotle maintains, by performing righteous works; but when we are become righteous, then we perform such works. The man must first be changed, and afterwards the

works. Abel was first accepted by God, and then his sacrifice." Luther continues:

"Fulfil, I beseech you, the duty of a friend and of a Christian by communicating these matters to Erasmus." This letter is thus dated: "In haste, from the corner of our convent, 19th October 1516." It places in its true light the relation between Luther and Erasmus. It shows the sincere interest he felt in what he thought would be really beneficial to this illustrious writer. Undoubtedly, the opposition shown by Erasmus to the truth compelled Luther somewhat later to combat him openly; but he did not do so until he had sought him to enlighten his antagonist.

At last then were heard explained ideas at once clear and deep on the nature of goodness. Then was declared the principle, that what constitutes the real goodness of an action is not its outward appearance, but the spirit in which it is performed. This was aiming a deadly blow at all those superstitious observances which for ages had oppressed the Church, and prevented christian

virtues from growing up and flourishing within it.

“I am reading Erasmus,” says Luther on another occasion, “but he daily loses his credit with me. I like to see him rebuke with so much firmness and learning the grovelling ignorance of the priests and monks; but I fear that he does not render great service to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. What is of man is dearer to him than what is of God. We are living in dangerous times. A man is not a good and judicious Christian because he understands Greek and Hebrew.

Jerome who knew five languages, is inferior to Augustine who understood but one; although Erasmus thinks the contrary. I very carefully conceal my opinions concerning Erasmus, through fear of giving advantage to his adversaries. Perhaps the Lord will give him understanding in His time.” The helplessness of man — the omnipotence of God, were the two truths that Luther desired to re-establish. That is but a sad religion and a wretched philosophy by which man is directed to his own natural strength. Ages have tried in vain this so

much boasted strength; and while man has, by his own natural powers, arrived at great excellence in all that concerns his earthly existence, he has never been able to scatter the darkness that conceals from his soul the knowledge of the true God, or to change a single inclination of his heart. The highest degree of wisdom attained by ambitious minds, or by souls thirsting with the desire of perfection, has been to despair of themselves. It is therefore a generous, a comforting, and supremely true doctrine which unveils our own impotency in order to proclaim a power from God by which we can do all things. That truly is a great reformation which vindicates on earth the glory of heaven, and which pleads before man the rights of the Almighty God.

No one knew better than Luther the intimate and indissoluble bond that unites the gratuitous salvation of God with the free works of man. No one showed more plainly than he, that it is only by receiving all from Christ, that man can impart much to his brethren. He always represented these two actions — that of God and that of man — in the same picture. And thus it is, that after

explaining to the friar Spenlein what is meant by saving righteousness, he adds, “If thou firmly believest those things, as is thy duty (for cursed is he who does not believe them), receive thy brethren who are still ignorant and in error, as Jesus Christ has received thee. Bear with them patiently. Make their sins thine own; and if thou hast any good thing, impart it to them.

‘Receive ye one another,’ says the apostle, ‘as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.’ (Romans 15:7.) It is a deplorable righteousness that cannot bear with others because it finds them wicked, and which thinks only of seeking the solitude of the desert, instead of doing them good by long-suffering, prayer, and example.

If thou art the lily and the rose of Christ, know that thy dwelling-place is among thorns. Only take care lest by thy impatience, by thy rash judgments, and thy secret pride, thou dost to thyself become a thorn.

Christ reigns in the midst of his enemies. If he

had desired to live only among the good, and to die for those only who loved him, for whom, I pray, would he have died, and among whom would he have lived?" It is affecting to see how Luther practiced these charitable precepts. An Augustine monk of Erfurth, George Leiffer, was exposed to many trials.

Luther became informed of this, and within a week after writing the preceding letter to Spenlein, he came to him with words of comfort. "I learn that you are agitated by many tempests, and that your soul is tossed to and fro by the waves.....The cross of Christ is divided among all the world, and each man has his share. You should not, therefore, reject that which has fallen to you. Receive it rather as a holy relic, not in the vessel of silver or of gold, but in what is far better — in a heart of gold, — in a heart full of meekness. If the wood of the cross has been so sanctified by the body and blood of Christ, that we consider it as the most venerable relic, how much more should the wrongs, persecutions, sufferings, and hatred of men, be holy relics unto us, since they have not only been touched by

Christ’s flesh, but have been embraced, kissed, and blessed by his infinite charity.”

Chapter 9

Luther’s First Theses

Luther’s teaching produced its natural fruits. Many of his disciples already felt themselves impelled to profess publicly the truths which their master’s lessons had revealed to them. Among his hearers was a young scholar, Bernard of Feldkirchen, professor of Aristotle’s physics in the university, and who five years later was the first of the evangelical ecclesiastics who entered into the bonds of matrimony.

It was Luther’s wish that Feldkirchen should maintain, under his presidence, certain theses or propositions in which his principles were laid down. The doctrines professed by Luther thus gained additional publicity.

The disputation took place in 1516.

This was Luther’s first attack upon the dominion of the sophists and upon the papacy, as

he himself characterizes it. Weak as it was, it caused him some uneasiness. “I allow these propositions to be printed,” said he many years after, when publishing them in his works, “principally that the greatness of my cause, and the success with which God has crowned it, may not make me vain. For they fully manifest my humiliation, that is to say, the infirmity and ignorance, the fear and trembling with which I began this conflict. I was alone: I had thrown myself imprudently into this business. Unable to retract, I conceded many important points to the pope, and I even adored him.” Some of the propositions were as follows: “The old Adam is the vanity of vanities; he is the universal vanity; and he renders all other creatures vain, however good they may be.

“The old Adam is called the flesh, not only because he is led by the lusts of the flesh, but further, because should he be chaste, prudent, and righteous, he is not born again of God by the Holy Ghost.

“A man who has no part in the grace of God, cannot keep the commandments of God, or prepare himself, either wholly or in part, to receive grace; but he rests of necessity under the power of sin.

“The will of man without grace is not free, but is enslaved, and that too with its own consent.

“Jesus Christ, our strength and our righteousness, he who trieth the heart and reins, is the only discerner and judge of our merits.

“Since all is possible, by Christ, to the believer, it is superstitious to seek for other help, either in man’s will or in the saints.” This disputation made a great noise, and it has been considered as the beginning of the Reformation.

The hour drew nigh in which the Reformation was to burst forth. God hastened to prepare the instrument that he had determined to employ. The elector, having built a new church at Wittenberg, to which he gave the name of All Saints, sent Staupitz into the Low Countries to collect relics for the

ornament of the new edifice. The vicar-general commissioned Luther to replace him during his absence, and in particular to make a visitation of the forty monasteries of Misnia and Thuringia.

Luther repaired first to Grimma, and thence to Dresden. Everywhere he endeavored to establish the truths that he had discovered, and to enlighten the members of his order. — “Do not bind yourselves to Aristotle or to any other teacher of a deceitful philosophy,” said he to the monks, “but read the Word of God with diligence. Do not look for salvation in your own strength or in your good works, but in the merits of Christ and in God’s grace.” An Augustine monk of Dresden had fled from his convent, and was at Mentz, where the prior of the Augustines had received him. Luther wrote to the latter, begging him to send back the stray sheep, and added these words so full of charity and truth: “I know that offenses must needs come.

It is no marvel that man falls; but it is so that he rises again and stands upright. Peter fell that he

might know he was but a man. Even in our days the cedars of Lebanon are seen to fall. The very angels — a thing that exceeds all imagination! — have fallen in heaven, and Adam in paradise.

Why then should we be surprised if a reed is shaken by the whirlwind, or if a smoking taper is extinguished?" From Dresden Luther proceeded to Erfurth, and reappeared to discharge the functions of vicar-general in that very convent where, eleven years before, he had wound up the clock, opened the gates, and swept out the church. He nominated to the priorship of the convent his friend the bachelor John Lange, a learned and pious but severe man: he exhorted him to affability and patience. "Put on," wrote he to him shortly after, "put on a spirit of meekness towards the prior of Nuremberg: this is but proper, seeing that he has assumed a spirit of bitterness and harshness. Bitterness is not expelled by bitterness, that is to say, the devil by the devil; but sweetness dispels bitterness, that is to say the finger of God casts out the evil spirit." We must, perhaps, regret that Luther did not on various occasions remember this

excellent advice.

At Neustadt on the Orla there was nothing but disunion. Dissensions and quarrels reigned in the convent, and all the monks were at war with their prior. They assailed Luther with their complaints. The prior Michael Dressel, or Tornator, as Luther calls him, translating his name into Latin, on his side laid all his troubles before the doctor. “Peace, peace!” said he.

“You seek peace,” replied Luther; “but it is the peace of the world, and not the peace of Christ that you seek. Do you not know that our God has set his peace in the midst of war? He whom no one disturbs has not peace.

But he who, troubled by all men and by the things of this life, bears all with tranquillity and joy — he possesses the true peace. Say rather with Christ: The cross, the cross! and there will be no cross. For the cross ceases to be a cross, as soon as we can say with love: O blessed cross, there is no wood like thine!” On his return to Wittenberg,

Luther, desiring to put an end to these dissensions, permitted the monks to elect another prior.

Luther returned to Wittenberg after an absence of six weeks. He was afflicted at all that he had seen; but the journey gave him a better knowledge of the Church and of the world, increased his confidence in his intercourse with society, and afforded him many opportunities of founding schools, of pressing this fundamental truth that "Holy Scripture alone shows us the way to heaven," and of exhorting the brethren to live together in holiness, chastity, and peace. There is no doubt that much good seed was sown in the different Augustine convents during this journey of the reformer. The monastic orders, which had long been the support of Rome, did perhaps more for the Reformation than against it. This is true in particular of the Augustines. Almost all the pious men of liberal and elevated mind, who were living in the cloisters, turned towards the Gospel.

A new and generous blood erelong circulated through these orders, which were, so to speak, the

arteries of the German church. As yet nothing was known in the world of the new ideas of the Wittenberg Augustine, while they were already the chief topic of conversation in the chapters and monasteries. Many a cloister thus became a nursery of reformers. As soon as the great struggle took place, pious and able men issued from their obscurity, and abandoned the seclusion of a monastic life for the active career of ministers of God's Word. At the period of this inspection of 1516 Luther awakened many drowsy souls by his words. Hence this year has been named "the morning star of the gospel-day." Luther resumed his usual occupation. He was at this period overwhelmed with labor: it was not enough that he was professor, preacher, and confessor; he was burdened still further by many temporal occupations having reference to his order and his convent. "I have need almost continually," writes he, "of two secretaries; for I do nothing else all the day long but write letters. I am preacher to the convent, I read the prayers at table, I am pastor and parish minister, director of studies, the prior's vicar (that is to say, prior eleven times over!), inspector

of the fish-ponds at Litzkau, counsel to the inns of Herzberg at Torgau, lecturer on Saint Paul, and commentator on the Psalms.....I have rarely time to repeat the daily prayers and to sing a hymn; without speaking of my struggles with flesh and blood, with the devil and the world.....Learn from this what an idle man I am!" About this time the plague broke out in Wittenberg. A great number of the students and teachers quitted the city. Luther remained. "I am not certain," wrote he to his friend at Erfurth, "if the plague will let me finish the Epistle to the Galatians. Its attacks are sudden and violent: it is making great ravages among the young in particular. You advise me to fly. Whither shall I fly? I hope that the world will not come to an end, if Brother Martin dies. If the pestilence spreads, I shall disperse the brothers in every direction; but as for me, my place is here; duty does not permit me to desert my post, until He who has called me shall summon me away.

Not that I have no fear of death (for I am not Paul, I am only his commentator); but I hope that the Lord will deliver me from fear." Such was the

resolution of the Wittenberg doctor. Shall he whom the pestilence could not force to retire a single step, shrink before Rome? Shall he yield through fear of the scaffold?

Chapter 10

The Relics

Luther displayed the same courage before the mighty of this world, that he had shown amidst the most formidable evils. The elector was much pleased with the vicar-general, who had made a rich harvest of relics in the Low Countries. Luther gives an account of them to Spalatin; and this affair of the relics, occurring at the moment when the Reformation is about to begin, is a singular circumstance. Most certainly, the reformers had little idea to what point they were tending. A bishopric appeared to the elector the only recompense worthy the services of the vicar-general. Luther, to whom Spalatin wrote on the subject, strongly disapproved of such an idea.

“There are many things which please your prince,” replied he, “and which, nevertheless, are displeasing to God. I do not deny that he is skillful in the matters of this world; but in what concerns God and the salvation of souls, I account him, as

well as his councillor Pfeffinger, sevenfold blind. I do not say this behind their backs, like a slanderer; do not conceal it from them, for I am ready myself, and on all occasions, to tell it them both to their faces. Why would you," continues he, "surround this man (Staupitz) with all the whirlwinds and tempests of episcopal cares?" The elector was not offended with Luther's frankness. "The prince," wrote Spalatin, "often speaks of you, and in honorable terms." Frederick sent the monk some very fine cloth for a gown. "It would be too fine," said Luther, "if it were not a prince's gift. I am not worthy that any man should think of me, much less a prince, and so great a prince as he. Those are my best friends who think the worst of me. Thank our prince for his kindness to me; but I cannot allow myself to be praised either by you or by any man; for all praise of man is vain, and only that which comes from God is true." The excellent chaplain was unwilling to confine himself to his court functions. He wished to make himself useful to the people; but like many individuals in every age, he desired to do it without offense and without irritation, by conciliating the general favor. "Point

out," wrote he to Luther, "some work that I may translate into our mother tongue; one that shall give general satisfaction, and at the same time be useful." Agreeable and useful!" replied Luther; "such a question is beyond my ability. The better things are, the less they please. What is more salutary than Jesus Christ? and yet he is to the majority a savor of death. You will tell me that you wish to be useful only to those who love what is good. In that case make them hear the voice of Jesus Christ: you will be useful and agreeable, depend upon it, to a very small number only; for the sheep are rare in this region of wolves." Luther, however, recommended to his friend the sermons of the Dominican Tauler. "I have never read," said he, "either in Latin or in our own language, a theology sounder, or more in conformity with the Gospel.

Taste, then, and see how sweet the Lord is, but not till after you have first tasted and felt how bitter is everything that we are ourselves." It was in the course of the year 1517 that Luther entered into communication with Duke George of Saxony. The

house of Saxony had at that time two chiefs. Two princes, Ernest and Albert, carried off in their youth from the castle at Altenburg by Kunz of Kaufungen, had, by the treaty of Leipsic, become the founders of the two houses which still bear their names. The Elector Frederick, son of Ernest, was, at the period we are describing, the head of the Ernestine branch; and his cousin Duke George, of the Albertine. Dresden and Leipsic were both situated in the states of this duke, whose residence was in the former of these cities. His mother, Sidonia, was daughter of George Podiebrad, king of Bohemia. The long struggle that Bohemia had maintained with Rome, since the time of John Huss, had not been without influence on the prince of Saxony. He had often manifested a desire for a Reformation. “He has imbibed it with his mother’s milk,” said the priests; “he is by birth an enemy of the clergy.” He annoyed the bishops, abbots, canons, and monks in many ways; and his cousin, the Elector Frederick, was compelled more than once to interfere in their behalf. It seemed that Duke George would be one of the warmest partisans of a Reformation. The devout Frederick,

on the other hand, who had in former years worn the spurs of Godfrey in the Holy Sepulchre, and girding himself with the long and heavy sword of the conqueror of Jerusalem, had made oath to fight for the Church, like that ancient and valiant knight, appeared destined to be the most ardent champion of Rome. But in all that concerns the Gospel, the anticipations of human wisdom are frequently disappointed. The reverse of what we might have supposed took place. The duke would have been delighted to humiliate the Church and the clergy, to humble the bishops, whose princely retinue far surpassed his own; but it was another thing to receive into his heart the evangelical doctrine that would humble it, to acknowledge himself a guilty sinner, incapable of being saved, except by grace alone. He would willingly have reformed others, but he cared not to reform himself.

He would perhaps have set his hand to the task of compelling the bishop of Mentz to be contented with a single bishopric, and to keep no more than fourteen horses in his stables, as he said more than once; but when he saw another than himself step

forward as a reformer, — when he beheld a simple monk undertake this work, and the Reformation gaining numerous partisans among the people, the haughty grandson of the Hussite king became the most violent adversary of the reform to which he had before shown himself favorable.

In the month of July 1517, Duke George requested Staupitz to send him an eloquent and learned preacher. Luther was recommended to him as a man of extensive learning and irreproachable conduct. The prince invited him to preach at Dresden in the castle-chapel, on the feast of St. James the Elder.

The day arrived. The duke and his court repaired to the chapel to hear the Wittenberg preacher. Luther joyfully seized this opportunity of testifying to the truth before such an assemblage. He selected his text from the gospel of the day: Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, etc. (Matthew 20:20-23). He preached on the unreasonable desire and prayers of men; and then spoke emphatically on the

assurance of salvation. He established it on this foundation, that those who receive the Word of God with faith are the true disciples of Jesus Christ, elected to eternal life. He next treated of gratuitous election, and showed that this doctrine, if presented in union with the work of Christ, has great power to dispel the terrors of conscience; so that men, instead of flying far from the righteous God, at the sight of their own unworthiness, are gently led to seek their refuge in Him. In conclusion, he related an allegory to three virgins, from which he deduced edifying instructions.

The word of truth made a deep impression on his hearers. Two of them in particular seemed to pay very great attention to the sermon of the Wittenberg monk. The first was a lady of respectable appearance, who was seated on the court benches, and on whose features a profound emotion might be traced. It was Madame de la Sale, first lady to the duchess. The other was a licentiate in canon law, Jerome Emser, councillor and secretary to the duke. Emser possessed great talents and extensive information. A courtier and

skillful politician, he would have desired to be on good terms with the two contending parties — to pass at Rome for a defender of the papacy, and at the same time shine in Germany among the learned men of the age. But under this pliant mind was concealed a violent character. It was in the palace-chapel at Dresden that Luther and Emser first met; they were afterwards to break more than one lance together.

The dinner hour arrived for the inhabitants of the palace, and in a short time the ducal family and the persons attached to the court were assembled at table. The conversation naturally fell on the preacher of the morning.

“How were you pleased with the sermon?” said the duke to the Madame de la Sale. — “If I could hear but one more like it,” replied she, “I should die in peace.” — “And I,” replied George angrily, “would rather give a large sum not to have heard it; for such discourses are only calculated to make people sin with assurance.” The master having thus made known his opinion, the courtiers gave way

uncontrolled to their dissatisfaction. Each one had his censure ready. Some maintained that in his allegory of the three virgins, Luther had in view three ladies of the court; on which there arose interminable babbling. They rallied the three ladies whom the monk of Wittenberg had thus, they said publicly pointed out. He is an ignorant fellow, said some; he is a proud monk, said others. Each one made his comment on the sermon, and put what he pleased into the preacher's mouth. The truth had fallen into the midst of a court that was little prepared to receive it. Every one mangled it after his own fashion. But while the Word of God was thus an occasion of stumbling to many, it was for the first lady a stone of uprising. Falling sick a month after, she confidently embraced the grace of the Savior, and died with joy. As for the duke, it was not perhaps in vain that he heard this testimony to the truth. Whatever may have been his opposition to the Reformation during his life, we know that at his death he declared that he had no hope save in the merits of Jesus Christ.

It was natural that Emser should do the honors

to Luther in his master's name. He invited him to supper. Luther refused; but Emser persisted, and prevailed on him to come. Luther thought he should only meet a few friends; but he soon perceived that a trap had been laid for him. A master of arts from Leipsic and several Dominicans were with the prince's secretary. The master of arts, having no mean opinion of himself, and full of hatred towards Luther, addressed him in a friendly and honied manner; but he soon got into a passion, and began to shout with all his might. The combat began. The dispute turned, says Luther, on the trumpery of Aristotle and St. Thomas. At last Luther defied the master of arts to define with all the learning of the Thomists what is the fulfilling of God's commandments. The embarrassed disputant put a good face on the matter.

"Pay me my fee," said he holding out his hand, "da pastum." One would have said that he wished to give a regular lesson, taking his fellow-guests for his pupils. "At this foolish reply," adds the reformer, "we all burst into laughter, and then we parted." During this conversation a Dominican was

listening at the door. He longed to enter and spit on Luther’s face: but he checked himself, and boasted of it afterwards. Emser, charmed at seeing his guests disputing, and appearing himself to preserve a due moderation, was earnest in excuses to Luther for the manner in which the evening had passed. The latter returned to Wittenberg.

Chapter 11

Return to Wittenberg

Luther returned zealously to work. He was preparing six or seven young theologians who were shortly to undergo an examination for a license to teach. What rejoiced him most of all was, that their promotion would tend to the discredit of Aristotle. “I could desire to multiply the number of his enemies as soon as possible,” said he. With this intent he published certain theses about that time which merit our attention.

Free-will was the great subject treated of. He had already touched upon it in the Feldkirchen theses; he now went deeper into the question. There had been from the very commencement of Christianity, a struggle more or less keen between the two doctrines of man’s liberty and his enslavement.

Some schoolmen had taught, like Pelagius and other doctors, that man possessed of himself the

liberty or the power of loving God and or performing good works. Luther denied this liberty; not to deprive man of it, but in order that he might obtain it. The struggle in this great question is not therefore, as is generally said, between liberty and slavery: it is between a liberty proceeding from man, and one that comes from God.

Those who style themselves the partisans of liberty say to man: “Thou hast the power of performing good works; thou hast no need of greater liberty.” The others, who are called the partisans of servitude, say on the contrary: “True liberty is what thou needest, and God offers it thee in his Gospel.” On the one side, they speak of liberty to perpetuate slavery; on the other, they speak of slavery to give liberty. Such was the contest in the times of St. Paul, of St. Augustine, and of Luther. Those who say, “Change nothing,” are the champions of slavery: the others who say, “Let your fetters fall off,” are the champions of liberty.

But we should deceive ourselves were we to

sum up all the Reformation in that particular question. It is one of the numerous doctrines maintained by the Wittenberg doctor, and that is all. It would be indulging in a strange delusion to pretend that the Reformation was a fatalism, — an opposition to liberty. It was a noble emancipation of the human mind. Snapping the numerous bonds with which the hierarchy had bound men's minds, — restoring the ideas of liberty, of right, of free examination, it set free its own age, ourselves, and the remotest posterity. But let it not be said that the Reformation delivered man from every human despotism, but made him a slave by proclaiming the sovereignty of Grace. It desired, no doubt, to lead back the human will, to confound it with and render it entirely subject to the Divine will; but what kind of philosophy is that which does not know that an entire conformity with the will of God is the sole, supreme, and perfect liberty; and that man will be really free, only when sovereign righteousness and eternal truth alone have dominion over him?

The following are some of the ninety-nine

propositions that Luther put forth in the Church against the Pelagian rationalism of the scholastic theology: — “It is true that man, who has become a corrupt tree, can will or do naught but evil.

“It is false that the will, left to itself, can do good as well as evil; for it is not free, but in bondage.

“It is not in the power of man’s will to choose or reject whatever is offered to it.

“Man cannot of his own nature will God to be God. He would prefer to be God himself, and that God were not God.

“The excellent, infallible, and sole preparation for grace, is the eternal election and predestination of God. “It is false to say that if man does all that he can, he removes the obstacles to grace.

“In a word, nature possesses neither a pure reason nor a good will.

“On the side of man there is nothing that goes before grace, unless it be impotency and even rebellion.

“There is no moral virtue without pride or without sorrow, that is to say, without sin.

“From beginning to end, we are not masters of our actions, but their slaves.

“We do not become righteous by doing what is righteous; but having become righteous, we do what is righteous.

“He who says that a divine, who is not a logician, is a heretic and an empiric, maintains an empirical and heretical proposition.

“There is no form of reasoning (of syllogism) that holds with the things of God. “If the form of the syllogism could be applied to Divine things, we should have knowledge and not belief of the article of the Holy Trinity.

“In a word, Aristotle is to divinity, as darkness to light.” “Man is a greater enemy to the grace of God than he is to the law itself.

“He who is without God’s grace sins continually, even should he neither rob, murder, nor commit adultery.

“He sins, in that he does not fulfill the law spiritually.

“Not to kill, not to commit adultery, externally only and with regard to the actions, is the righteousness of hypocrites.

“The law of God and the will of man are two adversaries, that without the grace of God can never be reconciled. “What the law commands, the will never wished, unless through fear or love it puts on the appearance of willing.

“The law is the task-master of the will, who is not overcome but by the Child that is born unto us. (Isaiah 9:6.) “The law makes sin abound, for it

exasperates and repels the will.

“But the grace of God makes righteousness abound through Jesus Christ, who causes us to love the law.

“Every work of the law appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin.

“The will, when it turns towards the law without the grace of God, does so in its own interest alone.

“Cursed are all those who perform the works of the law.

“Blessed are all those who perform the works of God’s grace.

“The law which is good, and in which we have life, is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. (Romans 5:5.) “Grace is not given in order that the work may be done more frequently and more easily, but because without grace there

can be no work of love.

"To love God is to hate oneself and to know nothing out of God." Thus Luther ascribes to God all the good that man can do. There is no question of repairing, of patching up, if we may use the expression, man's will: an entirely new one must be given him. God only has been able to say this, because God alone can accomplish it. This is one of the greatest and most important truths that the human mind can conceive.

But while Luther proclaimed the powerlessness of man, he did not fall into the other extreme. He says in the eighth thesis: "It does not hence follow that the will is naturally depraved; that is to say, that its nature is that of evil itself, as the Manichees have taught." Originally man's nature was essentially good: it has turned away from the good, which is God, and inclined towards evil. Yet its holy and glorious origin still remains; and it is capable, by the power of God, of recovering this origin. It is the business of Christianity to restore it to him. It is true that the Gospel displays man in a

state of humiliation and impotency, but between the two glories and two grandeurs: a past glory from which he has been precipitated, and a future glory to which he is called. There lies the truth: man is aware of it, and if he reflects ever so little, he easily discovers that all which is told him of his present purity, power, and glory is but a fiction with which to lull and sooth his pride.

Luther in his theses protested not only against the pretended goodness of man's will, but still more against the pretended light of his understanding in respect to Divine things. In truth, scholasticism had exalted his reason as well as his will. This theology, as some of its doctors have represented it, was at bottom nothing but a kind of rationalism. This is indicated by the propositions we have cited. One might fancy them directed against the rationalism of our days. In the theses that were the signal of the Reformation, Luther censured the Church and the popular superstitions which had added indulgences, purgatory, and so many other abuses to the Gospel. In those we have just quoted, he assailed the schools and rationalism,

which had taken away from that very Gospel the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, of his revelation, and of his grace. The Reformation attacked rationalism before it turned against superstition. It proclaimed the rights of God, before it cut off the excrescences of man. It was positive before it became negative. This has not been sufficiently observed; an yet if we do not notice it, we cannot justly appreciate that religious revolution and its true nature.

However this may be, the truths that Luther had just enunciated with so much energy were very novel. It would have been an easy matter to support these propositions at Wittenberg; for there his influence predominated. But it might have been said that he had chosen a field where he knew that no combatant would dare appear. By offering battle in another university, he would give them greater publicity; and it was by publicity that the Reformation was effected. He turned his eyes to Erfurth, whose theologians had shown themselves so irritated against him.

He therefore transmitted these propositions to John Lange, prior of Erfurth, and wrote to him: “My suspense as to your decision upon these paradoxes is great, extreme, too great perhaps, and full of anxiety. I strongly suspect that your theologians will consider as paradoxical, and even as kakodoxical, what is in my opinion very orthodox. Pray inform me, as soon as possible, of your sentiments upon them. Have the goodness to declare to the faculty of theology, and to all, that I am prepared to visit you, and to maintain these propositions publicly, either in the university or in the monastery.” It does not appear that Luther’s challenge was accepted. The monks of Erfurth were contented to let him know that these propositions had greatly displeased them.

But he desired to send them also into another quarter of Germany. For this purpose he turned his eyes on an individual who plays a great part in the history of the Reformation, and whom we must learn to know.

A distinguished professor, by name John

Meyer, was then teaching at the university of Ingolstadt in Bavaria. He was born at Eck, a village in Swabia, and was commonly styled Doctor Eck. He was a friend of Luther, who esteemed his talents and his information. He was full of intelligence, had read much, and possessed an excellent memory. He united learning with eloquence. His gestures and his voice expressed the vivacity of his genius.

Eck, as regards talent, was in the south of Germany what Luther was in the north. They were the two most remarkable theologians of that epoch, although having very different tendencies. Ingolstadt was almost the rival of Wittenberg. The reputation of these two doctors attracted from every quarter, to the universities where they taught, a crowd of students eager to listen to their teaching. Their personal qualities, not less than their learning, endeared them to their disciples. The character of Dr. Eck had been attacked; but one trait of his life will show that, at this period at least, his heart was not closed against generous impulses.

Among the students whom his reputation had attracted to Ingolstadt, was a young man named Urban Regius, born on the shores of an Alpine lake.

He had studied first at the university of Friburg in Brisgau. On his arrival at Ingolstadt, Urban followed the philosophical courses, and gained the professor's favor. Compelled to provide for his own wants, he was obliged to undertake the charge of some young noblemen. He had not only to watch over their conduct and their studies, but even to provide with his own money the books and clothing that they stood in need of. These youths dressed with elegance, and were fond of good living. Regius, in his embarrassed condition, entreated the parents to withdraw their sons. — "Take courage," was their reply. His debts increased; his creditors became pressing: he knew not what to do. The emperor was at that time collecting an army against the Turks. Recruiting parties arrived at Ingolstadt, and in his despair Urban enlisted. Dressed in his military uniform, he appeared in the ranks at their final review previous

to leaving the town. At that moment Dr. Eck came into the square with several of his colleagues. To his great surprise he recognized his pupil among the recruits. “Urban Regius!” said he, fixing on him a piercing glance. “Here!” replied the young soldier.

“Pray, what is the cause of this change?” The young man told his story. “I will take the matter upon myself,” replied Eck, who then took away his halberd, and bought him off. The parents, threatened by the doctor with their prince’s displeasure, sent the money necessary to pay their children’s expenses. Urban Regius was saved, and became somewhat later one of the bulwarks of the Reformation.

It was through Dr. Eck that Luther thought of making his propositions on Pelagianism and scholastic rationalism known in the south of the empire.

He did not, however, send them direct to the Ingolstadt professor, but forwarded them to a

common friend, the excellent Christopher Scheurl, secretary to the city of Nuremberg, begging him to transmit them to Eck at Ingolstadt, which was not far from Nuremberg. “I forward you,” said he, “my propositions, which are altogether paradoxical, and even kakistodoxical, as it would appear to many. Communicate them to our dear Eck, that most learned and ingenious man, in order that I may see and hear what he thinks of them.” It was thus Luther spoke at that time of Dr.

Eck: such was the friendship that united them. It was not Luther that broke if off.

But it was not on this field that the battle was to be fought. These propositions turned on doctrines of perhaps greater importance than those which two months later set the Church in flames; and yet, in despite of Luther’s challenges, they passed unnoticed. At most, they were read within the walls of the schools, and created no sensation beyond them. It was because they were only university propositions, or theological doctrines; while the theses which followed had reference to an evil that

had grown up among the people, and which was then breaking bounds on every side throughout Germany. So long as Luther was content to revive forgotten doctrines, men were silent; but when he pointed out abuses that injured all the world, everybody listened.

And yet in neither case did Luther propose more than to excite one of those theological discussions so frequent in the universities. This was the circle to which his thoughts were restricted. He had no idea of becoming a reformer. He was humble, and his humility bordered on distrust and anxiety. “Considering my ignorance,” said he, “I deserve only to be hidden in some corner, without being known to any one under the sun.” But a mighty hand drew him from this corner in which he would have desired to remain unknown to the world. A circumstance, independent of Luther’s will, threw him into the field of battle, and the war began. It is this providential circumstance which the course of events now calls upon us to relate.