

# *The Story of Luther*

by

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(1931)

## INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther was the great Reformer of the Church. His work of reformation took place in the sixteenth century of our Christian era. We know that Christ founded the Church in the first century. In the fifteen centuries that intervened, the visible Church on earth had become sadly corrupted. How had this come about?

This deterioration had been a slow process, and it had its beginnings in seemingly small things, seemingly unimportant deviations from the rule of truth laid down by our Lord and His apostles and recorded in the New Testament. In the course of time, many false doctrines crept into the Church, doctrines that undermined the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Instead of adhering strictly to the Gospel doctrine of salvation by faith through the grace of God, men in the Church taught a doctrine of salvation by works. They did not deny Christ's redeeming work altogether, but argued that Christ's sacrifice on the cross had been for the purpose of removing the guilt of original sin and that man himself, by his good conduct and pious works, must atone for his actual sins.

Since, however, according to the teachings of the Church, men could not live lives sufficiently good to remove all their guilt, the doctrine of purgatory was developed. Purgatory was taught to be a place, an intermediate state, between heaven and hell, a place of suffering, though not as severe as in hell. Into it all those passed who had not made sufficient satisfaction for their sins on earth. There they could make the necessary satisfaction by suffering the pangs of purgatory until they were purged of all guilt; and then they could pass on into heaven. Moreover, their time in this state could be shortened by the prayers of their living friends and relatives or by the saying of masses.

The doctrine concerning the Mass, or Holy Communion, was also perverted. Instead of being regarded as a means of grace, it was changed into a sacrifice; that is, Christ's body, it was claimed, was sacrificed by the priest in an unbloody manner for the sins of the living and of the dead. The saying of masses for individual church-members, for which money was paid, was taught to be beneficial, even if the individual did not have the saving faith in his heart; and in the case of the departed, masses were supposed to assist their souls, so that they might pass through the fires of purgatory more rapidly.

Instead of preaching the Gospel of free grace for sinners, the priests taught the people the Law and trained them to do good works. Not Christ

the loving and merciful Savior was presented to them, but Christ the awful Judge of the quick and the dead. It was held to be useless to approach Him with a request, as He would not listen to it; so the people were told to use the Virgin Mary and other saints as their intercessors. And the saints were supposed to be those pious men and women of the past who had performed all the good works required for their own acceptance with God, and many more in addition. These "extra" works the saints could offer in their prayers of intercession for others and thus move Christ to be merciful to them.

Moreover, it was considered especially worthy of merit if large donations were given to the Church, if pilgrimages were undertaken to the shrines of the saints and offerings made to them there.

These are only a few of the many errors and superstitions that had been introduced into the Church to darken the light of the saving Gospel of Christ. There were many, many more.

In time, the Bishop of Rome had acquired such power and prominence in Western Europe that he was virtually the lord of what was then called the Western World. Emperors and kings trembled at his word. He claimed supremacy over Church and State. To support this claim, it was asserted that our Lord had singled out Peter from among the Twelve and made him His vicar on earth, with full authority and power to rule the world (he himself or through his successors) until Christ's return. To this end it was said that Peter had taken up his residence at Rome and had been made the first Bishop of the Christian Church. It was finally asserted that as the Roman bishop (or Pope, as he was called) was the representative of Christ on earth, his word, being Christ's word, was absolutely final in all matters of faith and practice.

On the basis of such claims, which have neither Scriptural nor historical foundation, the power of the Pope and his clergy was gradually extended until all of Western Europe was in bondage to them. The individual man, regardless of his position, simply became the slave of the priesthood, which, in turn, obeyed the Roman bishop. He could not obtain forgiveness of sins except at the hands of the priests and monks. They could absolve him from his sins and open the gates of heaven, or they could excommunicate him and consign his soul to hell.

As time went on, there were those, however, who by their study of the Scriptures had come to realize that these errors of the Church needed correction. These men valiantly raised their voices to proclaim the truth. Though they failed to bring about any immediate change, the seed sown by them continued to grow and bear fruit. We usually call these men the forerunners of the Reformation.

One of these forerunners was John Wyclif of England. He preached against various evils in the Church and also against the errors and abuses of the Papacy. He maintained: "The Roman Church is not superior to the other churches; Peter had no preeminence over the other apostles, and the Pope, as far as his power to forgive sins is concerned, is but the equal of every other pastor." The worship of saints and images he rejected, although he

honored the saints. Every one able to read, he taught, has the right to get his religion direct from the Bible. "God's Word is the basis for every article of faith."

Another such great teacher was John Huss of Bohemia. He studied the Bible and the writings of Wyclif and found the truth of the Gospel. Thus he, too, was moved to preach against the prevailing errors and evils of the Church. He sought to give to hungry souls the bread of the Word of God, which in those days was so seldom presented. With outspoken earnestness he exposed the superstitions of the people and the false teachings and sins of the clergy.

The same council that condemned Wyclif, who was already dead, tried and condemned the Bohemian Huss--the Council of Constance, which itself had been convened for the purpose of reforming the Church in head and members, that is, from the Pope down to clergy and people! Huss was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, a little over a hundred years before Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg in Germany.

God was also in other ways preparing the world for the Reformation. There came into the western part of Europe a revival of learning that had a direct influence upon religion in this way, that the ancient languages, Hebrew and Greek, in which the Old and the New Testament were written, began to be studied. Previously the Latin translation of the Scriptures had been in use as the authorized version. This new study of the Bible in its original tongues led men to a better and fuller understanding of what the Holy Spirit teaches us therein.

The invention of the printing-press was another factor of importance. When John Gutenberg of Mainz gave to Europe the printing-press and movable type, he paved the way for the rapid dissemination of the Bible and other books. Previously, books had been very expensive, as they had to be laboriously copied by hand. Now, by means of the printing-press, they could be prepared at a very small fraction of the former cost. When Luther later wrote his books and pamphlets, they could be printed cheaply and distributed very quickly all over Europe.

In this way and others, which need not be mentioned here, God had prepared the world for the Reformation which came through His blessed instrument, Martin Luther.

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## 1. Childhood and School-Days

Great men are not born great. A wise man once said, "What is to become great must begin small." George Washington became the "Father of His Country," but the circumstances of his childhood did not give any special signs of his future greatness. No one would have dreamed that the infant Abraham Lincoln, born in a rude Kentucky cabin, would one day be hailed as the Great Emancipator. It is God, the Ruler of the destinies of this world, who makes men great. It was He who, near the close of the fifteenth century, caused a child to be born who was to be greater than Washington and Lincoln, greater than any other man in modern times, who was to change "the aspect of human history for all time to come." This child was not born in a king's palace, but in the humble home of a miner; not in some great metropolis, but in a small Saxon village; his birth was not heralded by the great and mighty ones of the world, but it gladdened the hearts of only the parents and immediate relatives and friends. And yet this child--Martin Luther--had been chosen by Divine Providence to be His instrument for the reformation of the Church and by that great work to bring untold and immeasurable blessings to the whole world.

Martin Luther, the eldest son of John and Margaret Luther, was born in Eisleben, at the foot of the Hartz Mountains in Saxony, November 10, 1483, just about nine years before Christopher Columbus startled the world by his discovery of America.

The Luthers were Germans. John Luther, reared as a peasant in the village of Moehra, on the southwestern slopes of the Thuringian Forest, had come to Eisleben in order to work in the mines there. He thus came from a peasant family, but became a miner by vocation. We can understand therefore why Martin Luther afterwards called himself both a miner's and a peasant's son. For he said, "My father was a poor miner," and on another occasion he told his friend Melanchthon, "I am a peasant's son. My father, grandfather, all my ancestors, were real peasants."

John Luther's baby boy was baptized the day after his birth, and since it was St. Martin's Day, his parents named him for that saint. The home into which little Martin was born was a poor one. At the time, his father was trying hard to advance himself in the world, and so the household was conducted very frugally. Every penny that could be saved was laid aside to enable John Luther to have the means of setting up his own smelting-furnaces. This was also the reason why John and Margaret Luther moved to the town of Mansfeld when little Martin was only six months old; for that town offered them better business opportunities.

There in Mansfeld, Martin's childhood was to be spent. He himself afterwards described the extreme frugality practiced in the home and the great sacrifices made by his parents in these words: "My father was a poor miner, and my mother carried the wood from the forest on her back. They both worked their flesh off their backs in order to bring up their children." This boy, in that home of poverty, was destined, however, to make millions rich--rich not in their world's goods, but rich in God.

Childhood is usually a carefree and happy time, a time upon which men later in life often look back with longing. Martin Luther's childhood was not like that. One reason for this was the severe discipline which his parents practiced toward their children, of whom there were ultimately seven besides Martin. Not that they did not love their offspring, for they surely did that. One of the pleasant pictures that we have of John Luther shows him kneeling at Martin's bedside, fervently praying aloud that his boy might grow up to become an honorable man, who would help to spread the truth in the world. Parents who pray for their children certainly love them.

In their intense desire to bring up their children well, these devout parents believed that great strictness was necessary; for does not the Bible say, "He who loves his son chastens him betimes"? But they sometimes overstepped the limits of that excellent precept. For the slightest breaking of the rules, the severest punishments were meted out. When Martin Luther was a grown man, he still remembered their severity. He tells us: "My father flogged me so severely one day that I ran away and had a grudge against him. My parents were so hard with me that I grew shy. On account of a miserable nut my mother once beat me till the blood flowed." Yet he excused them because of their good intentions, saying: "In the depths of their hearts they meant well; but they did not know how to distinguish the dispositions to which punishment is to be adapted." These experiences taught him, when he himself became a father, to temper severity with kindness, and he gave us this golden rule for child-training: "One must punish so that the apple goes with the rod."

Martin's parents were very religious. The Roman Catholic religion--the only official one in Central and Western Europe at the time--was largely a religion of fear and superstition rather than a religion of faith and love. The Church professed to be Christian, but failed to show its members the blessedness of faith in Christ Jesus as the Savior of sinners. And so John and Margaret Luther, as well as the schoolteachers in Mansfeld, though they tried to instruct their children in Christianity, only succeeded in filling their hearts with fear and dread. Instead of showing them a loving Savior, they pictured Christ to them as a stern Judge. Luther declares: "From early childhood I was accustomed to turn pale and tremble whenever I heard the name of Christ, for I was taught that we ourselves had to atone for our sins, and since we could not sufficiently make amends or do acceptable works, our teachers directed us to the saints in heaven, and made us call upon Mary the Mother of Christ, and implore her to avert from us Christ's wrath, and make Him inclined to be merciful to us."

The boy Martin lived in horror of witches, spirits, and hobgoblins that haunted his childhood days. The dark forests covering the gloomy mountains around Mansfeld he imagined were filled with such beings, ready to pounce down upon him at any time. He needed light--and so did millions of others; and when God finally gave him the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," he helped to make that saving light shine into great numbers of other hearts.

When Martin was six years old, his father entered him in the little hillside school of Mansfeld. John Luther wanted to give his eldest son a

better education than he had enjoyed. It was a Latin school, for Latin was the language of the educated world in those days. So his instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, music, history, and religion was given in that language. He became quite adept in the use of that language. It sometimes happened that educated men practically forgot their mother tongue and used Latin altogether. Luther, however, did not. He afterwards gave his people the German Bible and thus laid the foundation of the modern German language.

Schooldays normally are happy days, often the happiest of childhood; but Luther's schooldays were not happy. His teachers were tyrants. They used the rod to pound the lessons into their pupils, and Martin, though naturally bright and wide-awake, received his full share of the rod. One forenoon alone he was given fifteen floggings. There could be little enjoyment in attending school under such circumstances, and so, later in life, Luther's memories of his schooldays were not pleasant. "The preceptors were usually unskilled and as cruel as the hangman," he said. It is a wonder that he did not become disgusted altogether with books, schools, and teachers and run away. But he did not. God's hand was over him. He was leading this boy through such and other experiences, as we shall see, in order to shape him into an instrument for a work that was to benefit the modern world in the most important field--the field of religion, the salvation of souls.

## 2. At High School and College

John Luther, as we have seen, was ambitious to get ahead in the world and was willing to make every necessary sacrifice to gain his end; but he was not so ambitious as to neglect the needs of his children or to limit their opportunities in life. He might have put his eldest son Martin to work and thus have had some help from him. He did not do this, however. He wanted Martin to get the best education possible, so he planned to send him to a higher school after his schooling at Mansfeld had been finished. Peter Reinicke, overseer at the mines, had a son at school in Magdeburg. There the Brethren of the Common Life, a society of priests and laymen, conducted a school. No tuition was required of the students. John Luther, who had no funds to spare at that time for Martin's education, decided to send him there. Moreover, the Brethren had an arrangement whereby the needy students could meet their personal expenses. They were permitted to earn a little money by singing at church or before the homes of wealthy citizens.

So we next see the young boy Martin on his way to Magdeburg in the year 1497. It was his first longer journey, for Magdeburg was about sixty miles from his home--not far in our days of railroad trains, automobiles, and airplanes, but something of a journey in those days. It was also his first visit to a large city, for Magdeburg, on the Elbe River, was a city of 40,000 inhabitants. There we soon find him, together with other students, outside of school hours going around from house to house singing carols in four-part harmony, for a "hand-out." Luther himself describes an experience they had in this connection:

"One day, 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-part harmony the usual carols on the Infant Jesus born at Bethlehem. We stopped before a peasant's house that stood by itself at the extreme end 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 our 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 that we are accustomed to tremble and flee when our conscience is guilty and alarmed. In such cases, we are afraid even of the assistance that is offered us, and of those who are our friends and would willingly do us every good."

While at Magdeburg, young Luther received an insight into the life of the begging monks, and what he saw was strangely prophetic of what he himself was to do a little later in life. "When, in my fourteenth year, I went to school at Magdeburg, I saw with my own eyes a prince of Anhalt...who went in a friar's cowl on the highway to beg bread. Like a donkey, he carried a sack which was so heavy that he bent under it, while his companion walked by his side without a burden. This prince alone might serve as an example of the grisly shorn holiness of the world. They had so cowed him that he did all the works of the cloister like any other brother, and he had so fasted, watched, and mortified his flesh that he looked like a death's-head, mere skin and bones. Indeed, he soon after died, for he could not long bear to live such a severe life. In short, whoever looked at him had to gasp for pity and must needs be ashamed of his own worldly occupation."

Martin Luther's life at Magdeburg, as can readily be seen, was not a pleasant one. A boy of fourteen needs parental care and attention, and this was impossible under the circumstances. Insufficient and irregular food was bound to weaken the growing boy. One day he was taken sick with a high fever and, due to ignorance prevalent in those days, was forbidden water. His thirst finally became unendurable. While everyone else was away at church, he crawled to the kitchen on hands and knees, drank his fill of cold water, and then dragged himself back to his mat, where he fell into a refreshing sleep; and when he awoke, he was quite well again!

However, John Luther must have learned how his son was faring at Magdeburg. A year was hardly over when he took Martin away and put him into the St. George's School at Eisenach. At Eisenach, "that dear city," as Luther referred to it ever afterwards, he was to find many things he had lacked up to this time, save one thing, namely, the knowledge of his Savior. That discovery was to be made later.

Eisenach was located at the foot of the Wartburg, famous already at that time, but years after to be made still more famous by Luther. It took the fifteen-year-old boy twenty-five miles farther away from home. Eisenach



was his mother's home town. Martin's parents hoped that their relatives living there would look out for his needs. In this they were disappointed. Perhaps these people were too poor themselves to feed an extra mouth. So Martin had to shift for himself once more, and the beginning in Eisenach was not much different from what it had been at Magdeburg. He was again singing for his bread, which meant that he often went hungry and became weak and sickly. But he did not lose heart. Later in life he thus spoke of these times: "Do not despise the boys who go singing through the streets begging a little bread for the love of God; I also have done the same....I was 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. And yet I should not be where I am if I had not gone to school, if I had not learned to write."

One day he and his friends had been turned away from three homes without obtaining a penny or even a crust of bread. They were downcast, but persevering. They would try once more. They came to one of the stately homes of the town and sang. Suddenly the door was opened, and the boys were invited in to be fed. And even more, Martin was asked by the good woman of the house to make his home with her thereafter. The lady was Ursula Cotta, wife of Conrad Cotta, one of the councilors of the town. She had evidently been attracted to Martin by his sweet voice and his wholeheartedness. Thus the lad found a home in a strange land. There he enjoyed excellent care. There he learned what culture and refinement are. Above all, the mother-love which Mrs. Cotta bestowed upon him opened up the springs of his own heart. He never forgot her kindness. It was in remembrance of her that he later gave utterance to this beautiful thought: "There is nothing sweeter on earth than the heart of a woman in which piety dwells."

From now on life takes on new colors for young Martin. He enters heart and soul into his studies. His progress is steady and rapid. We find him excelling in languages. The joy and happiness of his heart breaks out in song. He writes poetry, a gift which afterwards makes him the father of Protestant hymnody. His happy, sunny disposition makes him beloved by his schoolmates and his teachers.

At Eisenach he had the privilege of sitting at the feet of good teachers. Thy story is told of John Trebonius, Martin's favorite instructor, a learned man who had the habit of doffing his biretta (ecclesiastical cap) upon entering the classroom. His reason for such politeness was this: "There are," he said, "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."

When a famous professor of Erfurt University visited the school, Martin was appointed to deliver the Latin address of welcome. He made a good impression on the celebrated visitor, for that gentleman said to Trebonius: "Sir, you have a good school here. It is in excellent condition. Keep an eye on that Luther. There is something in that boy. By all means prepare him for the university and send him to us at Erfurt." To Martin he added: "My son, the Lord has bestowed special gifts on you, use them faithfully in His service. When you are ready and wish to come to us at Erfurt, remember

that you have a good friend there, Doctor Jodocus Trutvetter. Appeal to him; he will give you a friendly reception."

No wonder Luther liked Eisenach and called it his "dear city." Here he had found loving care, a second home, success in his work, and favor in the sight of men. "He found fewer thorns and more roses, but the Rose of Sharon he found not." Strange that a young lad could grow up in a home within the Church, be trained in schools of the Church, and reach the age of eighteen years without finding his Savior. That was because the Church was corrupt, and was teaching commandments of men instead of the Gospel, which leads sinners to Christ.

Fortunately for young Martin, his father had by dint of hard work, frugality, and honesty brought himself to a position of financial comfort, so that he could send him to the University of Erfurt after his graduation from St. George's at Eisenach. John Luther was more ambitious than ever for his eldest son, since he himself had become first of the four aldermen of Mansfeld. Martin must be a lawyer. The father provided the necessary funds, and in May, 1501, the son matriculated at the university.

We need not dwell long on his work there. He spent about four years in hard study, receiving his degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1502 and his Master of Arts three years later.

On his way home to Mansfeld at Easter, in 1504, he had a mishap, accidentally wounding himself with his rapier, which, student-fashion, he carried at his side. He almost bled to death before the doctor arrived, and during the night the wound bled afresh. In his fear he prayed for help--to the Virgin! Afterwards he told his friends, "Had I died then, I should have placed my trust for salvation in Mary."

All his learning had not led him to the knowledge of Him who came into the world to redeem mankind!

### 3. Friar Augustine

Man proposes, God disposes. John Luther had dreams of seeing his gifted eldest son becoming a great doctor of jurisprudence. Martin Luther was hard at study to make his father's dream come true. God, however, in whose hands lie the destinies of all men, had other plans. And so a very sudden and decided change took place in young Luther's life.

Amidst all the success and happiness of his life at Eisenach and Erfurt, there had been a cloud of fear and uneasiness upon his heart. He was not at peace with his God. Though an obedient son and a diligent student, he was not sure that God was gracious to him. He was afraid that his weaknesses and shortcomings would condemn him before the judgment-seat of Christ. The thought of death and the Judgment to come appalled him. On this account, two events which occurred--one soon after the other--led him to take a step which rudely shattered his father's hopes and changed the whole course of his own career.

The sudden death of a very dear friend was a severe blow to him. He was shocked and deeply agitated. "What if it had been I?" he asked himself. "What would become of me if I were thus called away without warning?"

In the summer he visited his parents. On his way back, not far from Erfurt, a violent storm overtook him. There was no shelter near. The thunder rolled and the lightning flashed. Suddenly a bolt flashed and crashed to the ground so close that Martin threw himself upon his knees, thinking his turn had come and that death was upon him. He saw himself eternally lost. In his terror he shrieked out a vow to the patron saint of the miners, "Help, dear St. Anne, and I'll become a monk!" And forthwith he became a monk.

As soon as he came to Erfurt, he began his preparations for entering a convent. On the evening of July 16, 1505, having invited his close friends to a farewell party, he announced his intentions. "Today you still see me and then nevermore."

His friends were astounded and tried to dissuade him, but in vain. The die was cast. The next morning they solemnly accompanied him to the cloister of St. Augustine in Erfurt. With tears they bade him farewell. The doors of the cold building closed behind him. The promising, brilliantly gifted Master of Arts had voluntarily buried himself in a cloister. But he was to come forth from it a new and a different man.

What is a cloister? A cloister, or monastery, is the home of those persons who desire to leave the world in order to serve God by a regulated mode of life, away from the contact of the sinful world. In order to become a member of such an order of monks or, in the case of women, nuns, an individual must take the threefold vow of chastity (to remain unmarried for life), poverty (to renounce all worldly possessions), and obedience (to the order or the Church). The life in a cloister was arranged according to strict rules: so many hours for sleeping; so many for labor; so many for prayer, meditation, and study. Besides, certain exercises such as fasting, self-chastisement, menial labor, and others were to be undertaken in order to mortify the flesh.

This mode of living had been practiced in the Church for a thousand years before the days of Luther, and although it was based upon a false notion of service to God, yet God had found ways and means of using the monastic system to serve good purposes. During the early Middle Ages the monks had been the leading missionaries of the Church. The cloisters had originally been the schools for the young. Before the art of printing was introduced in Europe, the monks had laboriously made copies of the Bible and other writings and thus preserved them for future generations. In many other ways the early cloisters had been a blessing to humanity. The greatest men and noblest women of the Middle Ages had been trained in the cloisters or by the people of the cloisters.

However, the orders had become wealthy and powerful in the course of time. Decay and corruption had set in. In order to remedy this condition, new orders, such as the mendicant friars, were introduced. But these did not

alter the fundamental evils of the system, which, no doubt, were these-- that the monks and nuns were considered "saints of God," that the cloistered life was the holiest way of living, that one might earn special favors before God for oneself and others by it, that the cloister was the sure way to heaven.

That was the reason why Luther became a friar. In the cloister he hoped to become holy and thus be sure of eternal life. "I made the vow," he stated afterwards, "for the salvation of my soul. I entered the spiritual state for no other reason than to serve God and please Him in eternity."

Luther had taken this step without consulting his parents. Now he wrote and told them what he had done. His father was very angry and sent him a reply in which he expressed his dissatisfaction in unmistakable terms, withdrawing all favor and disinheriting him from his fatherly affection. Luther tells us: "My father was near going mad about it; he was ill satisfied and would not allow it. He sent me an answer in writing, addressing me in terms that showed his displeasure and renouncing all further affection." However, father and son were reconciled again in the course of time, although the father never approved of the action of his son. When Martin told his father the incident that led him to his rash vow, John Luther remarked laconically, "God grant that you may not have taken for a sign from heaven what was merely a delusion of the devil!"

In the cloister, Luther meanwhile was going through his year of probation. His fellow-friars had received him with joy. It was rather a distinction to get an esteemed master of arts from the university into their order. At the same time they desired to show him that learning and worldly position made him no better than they. So they gave him the meanest tasks that had to be done. He had to act as porter, open and close the gates, wind the clock, sweep the chapel, and scrub the cells. When this work was finished, they gave him a sack and bade him to out and beg from house to house for bread and other gifts for the benefit of the cloister. It was hard work, humiliating toil, but Luther did not flinch. Was he not doing this to become holy before God? What, then, did his feeling or the opinions of men matter?

His year of probation over, he was solemnly received into the order. He took the threefold oath of the monk and chose the new name Augustine to signify that the old life was past, that a new man had been born. His fellow monks told him that he was now as pure as a child just baptized.

As friar he gave himself to study with new zeal, especially to the study of the Latin Bible. He was to be found poring over the big cloister Bible, which was chained to its place in the library lest it might be stolen; for such books were very expensive in those days. He also began the study of the original languages in which the Bible was written, Hebrew and Greek, and thus laid the foundation for his later gift to the people--the German Bible.

All his deep study, however, had to be done in addition to the regular tasks of the cloister and at the expense of necessary rest and relaxation. Once for seven successive weeks he scarcely closed his eyes in sleep.

Besides, he was so conscientious in the performance of his duties, fastings, and prayers that he wore himself down and became mere skin and bones. Later he said: "I was indeed a pious monk and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could have gone to heaven by his observance of monastic vows, I should have been that one. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortification, watchings, prayers, reading, and other labors even to death."

And yet he did not feel in his heart that he was achieving the holiness he longed for. For his conscience was not at rest. He felt that great truth more and more which the poet expresses in the words:

I know that, when I try to be  
Upright and just and true to Thee,  
I am a sinner still.

The more he delved into the Scriptures, the better he learned to know his own sinful heart, and the farther away the goal of perfection was. "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 atone for my sins by my own deeds." Again: "I tortured myself almost to death in order to procure peace for my troubled heart and agitated conscience; but being surrounded by thick darkness, I found peace nowhere." "Every day I went to confession, but that was of no use to me....'Look,' explained I, 'you are still envious, impatient, passionate. It profits you nothing, O wretched man, to have entered this sacred order!'"

In the darkness of soul which surrounded him, there came, however, a ray of heavenly light which gave him comfort. For though the Church had long neglected the teaching of the Gospel in its fulness and purity, God had not allowed the saving truth to be lost altogether; though the spring of living water was choked and cluttered up with the rocks and weeds of man-made doctrines and vain superstitions, it had not wholly ceased to flow. And so there were still "those in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal." One of these faithful hearts was John Staupitz, the vicar-general of the Augustinian order.

This devout man had been attracted by Martin Luther and had befriended him, so that Luther confided to him his troubles. One day when his heart was particularly burdened, Staupitz told his young friend: "Why do you torment yourself with all these speculations? Behold the wounds of Jesus Christ, the blood that He has shed for you. It is there that the grace of God will appear to you....Throw yourself into the Redeemer's arms. Trust in Him....He became man to give you the assurance of divine favor."

Although the blessed meaning of these words did not at once penetrate Luther's heart, this ray of heavenly light was ultimately to break forth in his soul with the brightness of the noonday sun. "If Dr. Staupitz, or rather God through Dr. Staupitz, had not helped me out of my trials, I should have drowned in them," he wrote in later years.

In 1507 Martin was, in accordance with the rules of his order, ordained to

the priesthood. His father came with some of his friends to be present for the event, bringing his son a gift of twenty gold-pieces. At the banquet held in his honor, Martin tried to convince his father that, after all, his entering the cloister had been a wise and noble act. But old John Luther was not convinced. His answer was brief and to the point: "Have you not read in Scripture that you should obey your father and mother?"

Thus we see that John Luther, though softened, was not yet reconciled to the step his Martin had taken. But God, who had permitted him to enter the cloister, was already preparing the way out.

Thy ways are little known  
To my weak, erring sight;  
Yet shall my soul, believing, own  
That all Thy ways are right.

#### 4. University Professor

The town of Wittenberg, lying about seventy miles east of Erfurt and sixty miles north, was at the beginning of the sixteenth century a place of "small, old, mean, and low huts, more like a village than a city." The population was less than 3,000 people. Pigs, cows, and geese had the customary freedom of the town. There were neither paved streets nor sidewalks. It had been selected by Frederick the Wise, the Elector, or ruler of Saxony, as the location of a university, which he founded in 1502.

John Staupitz, vicar-general of the Augustinian order, had been charged by the elector to choose proper men for the professorships. Martin Luther was temporarily appointed to lecture on philosophy. Thus we see him going to Wittenberg in 1508, about a year and a half after his ordination, when he was twenty-five years old. In the spring of the following year, he received the degree of Bachelor of the Bible.

In Wittenberg, at the suggestion of Staupitz, he began to preach in the chapel of the Augustinian cloister there. His preaching attracted attention. One learned man whose heart was touched by Luther's words said: "This friar will confound all doctors, bring a new doctrine, and reform the Church; for he stands on the writings of the prophets and apostles and relies on the words of Christ."

In the same year, however, Luther was transferred back to Erfurt by his superiors in order to teach at the University of Erfurt. There he taught from 1509 to 1512. It was from Erfurt that he took a journey during this time that was to leave a lasting impression upon his life.

It so happened that strife had arisen in the order of St. Augustine, and it was deemed necessary to send a representative to Rome to lay the matter before the Pope. The man chosen for this task was John von Mecheln of Nuremberg, and Martin Luther was ordered to accompany him on the journey. The trip was to be no pleasure jaunt, for it had to be made on foot, and during the winter at that. Still, Luther was overjoyed. What did a few

hardships matter? He was to have the chance to see Rome, the Holy City-- for that is what Rome meant to the average man in those days. It stood for everything worthy and noble. It was the home of His Holiness the Pope, the head of Christendom, the vicar of Jesus Christ!

It was a long, hard journey of several hundred miles. They were often weary and footsore. At one time their troubles were such that Martin despaired of reaching his goal. He relates the incident himself: "On the journey to Rome, the brother with whom I was traveling and I were very tired one night and slept with windows open until about six o'clock. When we awoke, our heads were full of vapors, so that we could only go on four or five miles that day, tormented by thirst and yet sickened by the wine and desiring only the water, which is deadly there. At length we were refreshed by two pomegranates, with which excellent fruit God saved our lives."

At last they saw from the top of a hill the domes and spires and towers of the great seven-hilled city on the Tiber. Luther was overawed. He fell on his knees, exclaiming: "Hail, thou holy Rome, hail! Thrice holy for the martyrs' blood that was shed in thee"!

The two travelers found lodging in a cloister of the city. Their business was dispatched as quickly as possible. Luther then had the opportunity to see the sights. Four whole weeks were spent in this way. Many things impressed him, others disappointed him sadly. He did not find it a place of great holiness, a city of saints, as he had imagined. The very opposite condition met him at every turn. There was an atmosphere of worldliness, a lack of seriousness, a winking at sin and vice. He heard stories that shocked him about the evil life of a former Pope. He heard priests and monks laugh at, and make sport of, sacred matters. Their duties were performed in a mechanical manner, rushed through to have them over. "O sacred Rome, yes, truly consecrated by the holy martyrs and their blood shed there, but rent asunder; and the devil as cast the Pope upon it!" he exclaimed at a later time...."If there is a hell, Rome is built over it!" And again: "Do not the very children sing in the streets these well-known words, 'Of all foul spots the world around, the foulest spot in Rome is found?'"

He visited many cloisters and churches and even said mass himself. Years afterwards he stated: "Almost had I wished that my parents were no longer living, for I was so certain that in Rome I could pray them out of purgatory." One place attracted him particularly. It was the chapel Sancta Sanctorum, in which there was a stairway of twenty-eight steps. These were said to have been originally the stairs of Pilate's palace in Jerusalem upon which Jesus had walked during His Passion. An earlier Pope had declared that everyone who climbed this stairway on his knees would receive remission of his sins, forgiveness for nine years of sins for every step. Certain prayers had to be repeated during the performance. Thousands of pilgrims had climbed the stairs. Luther, of course, did likewise. He still was fearful of his soul's future.

On his knees he started up, but his heart was doubtful. "What if it is not true? Then I am yet in my sins! Who knows?" So his act did not give him

the peace he had hoped for. Luther's son Paul wrote later that his father thought of St. Paul's words, "The just shall live by faith," while he was crawling up on his knees.

Whether he at that time already grasped the import of this Scripture passage is doubtful; but it was another ray of heavenly light that was meant to begin the dawn of a bright spiritual morning in his heart.

The return journey was uneventful as far as we know. Luther had seen Rome. He was glad that he had seen it, but he was not anxious to see it again. "I would not take 100,000 guilders for having been in Rome. I might else think I were doing the Pope an injustice. But what we have seen we speak," he said later.

After another year at Erfurt, Luther was transferred back to Wittenberg to teach theology there. That had been his heart's wish. His diligent study of the Word of God was to lead him farther and farther into the saving knowledge of Him who is the Center of Scripture, Jesus Christ, the Savior. He soon learned to trust in Him fully for salvation.

But before this happened, a new honor was bestowed upon him. In October, 1512, the university gave him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. We are told two things by him in this connection: "When I was made doctor, I did not yet know the light"; and, "I, Doctor Martin, have been called and forced to become a doctor without my choice, purely from obedience. I had to accept the degree of doctor and to swear and vow allegiance to my beloved Holy Bible, to preach it faithfully and purely."

He took his vow very seriously. His study of the Scriptures at last brought him to saving faith in Christ. We see this plainly from a letter written to his friend George Spalatin in 1516: "I should be very glad to know what is the state of your soul. Have you learned to despise your own righteousness and to put your trust in the righteousness of Christ alone? Many do not know the righteousness of God, which is given us abundantly and freely in Christ, but they endeavor to do good works and depend on their own merits. You were full of this great error when you were here, and I was full of it. Even now I must fight against it and have not finished. Therefore, my beloved brother, learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to despair of yourself and to say to Him, 'Thou, Lord Jesus, are my Righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou hast assumed what was mine and given me what was Thine.'"

I know that, though in doing good  
I spend my life, I never could  
Atone for all I've done.  
But though my sins are black as night,  
I dare to come before Thy sight  
Because I trust Thy Son.



## 5. The Hammer-Blows that Shook the World

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

The evil traffic to which he refers had not arisen in the Church overnight. It was the result of errors that had crept into the Church over a period of centuries and had grown in the course of time.

Many centuries before Luther's time the error had become current in the Church that, when a Christian had committed certain great sins, he could not be restored to good standing in the Church until he had performed certain acts of penance laid down by the clergy. After a time it was taught that these acts of penance could be set aside upon the payment of a price, either in money or land or other gifts to the Church, or by doing some special work, such as joining a crusade to wrest the Holy Land from the hand of the Moslems. This remission of the penances was an indulgence. Thus an indulgence originally referred only to punishments pronounced by the Church. A further development in time was this--that by indulgence the Church could also relieve the individual from the torments of the fire of purgatory. While the Church in its official statements regarding indulgences did not altogether ignore the contrition required for the forgiveness of sins, the effect of this traffic nevertheless was this--that the common man thought he was buying "forgiveness for past sins and at the same time liberty to commit more." To the crowds who flocked to the indulgence fairs, the message practically was that St. Peter, for hard cash, would open and guarantee heaven. (W.S. Lilly, Secretary of the Catholic Union of Great Britain.)

But the fact that such a grievous practice was allowed in the Church gives us an insight into the conditions of the times. The Church had gone far astray in the neglect of the Gospel. It had become so corrupt that in its midst every sort of evil flourished. Not that there were no Christians in the Church in those days. God has never left Himself without witnesses in this world. But the leaders of the Church were at fault. For this reason the cry had been heard for over a century, "The Church must be reformed in head and members."

Yes, in head, not meaning Christ, who is the true and only Head of His Church; but the Pope, who was considered the visible head and vicar of Christ. Many of the Popes had been evil and vicious men. Some did not even accept the Bible as the truth.

At this time Leo X was Pope. He had been made a priest at the age of seven years, a cardinal at thirteen, and Pope at thirty-eight. "Let us enjoy the Papacy," he said, "since God has given it to us." What he believed may be seen from his own words. On one occasion he exclaimed, "What an immense

sum have we made out of this fable about Christ!" Luther tells us this about Leo: "He would amuse himself by having two clowns dispute before his table on the immortality of the soul. One took the affirmative, the other the negative side of the question. Leo said to him who argued that the soul is immortal: 'Although you have brought forward good reasons and arguments, yet I agree with him who is of the opinion that we die like the beasts; for your doctrine makes us melancholy and sad, but his gives us peace of mind.'"

It could hardly be expected that such a Pope would be much concerned about the welfare of the Church and its members. He spent money like water to enjoy himself and to enable himself to foster the arts and sciences, the study of which had recently been revived in the world. And to raise such money, he sold church offices. So we need not be at all surprised to find him proclaiming an indulgence. He was building a new St. Peter's Church in Rome and needed money badly; besides, it was a good excuse to get funds for his pleasure also. The best means of raising the funds was to sell indulgences. The man who had charge of the sale of these indulgences in certain parts of Germany was a notorious Dominican friar by the name of John Tetzel, a man without a conscience and singularly qualified for the task.

Wherever Tetzel and his helpers went, they were given an ovation. Enormous crowds came to the meetings. The Pope's bull (decree) of indulgence was carried on a splendid cushion of satin or cloth of gold. This is the indulgence, translated into English:

Indulgence  
In the Name of the Pope  
For the Entire Life

I, by virtue of the apostolic power entrusted to me, do absolve you from all ecclesiastical censures, judgments, and punishments which you have merited; besides this, from all excesses, sins, and crimes you may have committed, however great and shameful they may have been, and for whatever cause, even in those cases reserved for our Most Holy Father, the Pope. I obliterate every taint of unvirtues, all signs of infamy, which you may have received. I release you from all punishments which you would have endured in purgatory. I permit you again to participate in the sacraments of the Church. I incorporate you again in the community of the sanctified and replace you in the state of innocence and purity in which you were at the hour of your baptism, so that in the moment of death the door through which the sinner enters the place of torture and punishment will be closed and that door will be open to you which leads into the paradise of joys. If you should not soon die, so shall this grace remain unshakable until the end of your life. In the name of the Holy Father. Amen. JOHANN TETZEL, *Apostol. Commissarius*

Tetzel used every kind of argument to sell his ware. "Come, come, will you not invest ten, five, or a quarter gulden to get remission of all your sins and freedom from the terrors of purgatory?" He even went so far as to induce people to purchase an indulgence for a departed friend or relative. He made the whole matter very simple to the unlearned by repeating a certain jingle, which ran something like this: "As soon as the money in the

coffer rings, the soul out of purgatory's fire springs."

Again he harangued: "Do you not hear your dear parents crying out, 'Have mercy upon us! We are in sore pain, and you can set us free for a mere pittance. We have borne you, we have trained and educated you, and you are so hard-hearted and cruel that you leave us to roast in the flames when you could so easily release us!?"

How could the simple-minded, ignorant, and deluded people refuse such an appeal!

But not every one was favorably impressed by Tetzels work. The Elector Frederick the Wise forbade the sale of indulgences in Saxony. Luther, who at this time was not only professor but also had charge of the pulpit and the confession of the Wittenberg church, preached several sermons against this sale. He pointed out that in the sale of indulgences, sorrow for sins, repentance, was not mentioned. "At that time," he relates, "I was preacher here, a young doctor full of fire and handy at the Scriptures. Now, when great multitudes ran from Wittenberg to buy indulgences at Juterbock and Zerbst, I began to preach very moderately that something better could be done than buying indulgences; that he who repents receives forgiveness of sins, gained by Christ's own sacrifice and blood and offered from pure grace, without money, and sold for nothing."

Neither the wise elector's prohibition nor the learned young professor's sermons had their desired effect upon all the people of Wittenberg when the opportunity to buy indulgences came to them. For when the energetic Tetzels set up his market at Juterbock, just across the Saxon border twenty miles away, some of them rushed over as fast as they could, bought indulgences and then, on their return, demanded that Luther recognize them.

Luther was now face to face with what he considered a very serious problem. What should he do about it? He studied the whole question long and well. Then he acted. How?

He did not think that he could decide so weighty a matter himself. He felt, however, that the learned men of the university might be induced to look into all sides carefully and that thus a satisfactory solution would surely be found. How could the question be placed before them? That was not so difficult. According to the custom of the time, all that was required was to post on the door of the Castle Church theses, or propositions, for a public debate held every Friday. So Martin Luther prepared his theses, ninety-five in all, and at noon on October 31, 1517, took a hammer and nails and posted them at the proper place. He knew that they would be read by the crowds who would come to church the next day, which was All Saints' Day.

Here are a number of the famous theses published by Luther on that occasion, translated from the Latin original:

1) Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, "Repent ye," etc., intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence.

2) This word *penitence* cannot be understood of sacramental penance, *i.e.*, of the confession and satisfaction performed under the ministry of the priests.

5) The Pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties except those that he has imposed by his own authority or by that of the canons.

13) The dying pay all penalties by death and are already dead to the canon laws and are by right relieved from them.

37) Every Christian who feels true sorrow has of right plenary remission of pain and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

38) The remission, however, imparted by the Pope is by no means to be despised, since, as already indicated, it is a declaration of the divine remission.

41) Apostolic pardons ought to be proclaimed with caution lest the people falsely suppose that they are placed before other good works of charity.

Very few people, no doubt, heard the blows of the hammer when that pale and haggard friar nailed his propositions to one of the doors of the Castle Church. But the effect of that act was such as if they had been heard all over Europe. Everybody was interested in them, from the common people to the clergy and rulers, simply because they expressed what tens of thousands of people in Germany and all Europe had been feeling in their hearts.

Everyone," said Luther, "complained of the indulgences; and as all the bishops and doctors had kept silence and nobody was willing to bell the cat, poor Luther became a famous doctor, because, as they said, there came one at last who ventured to do it. But I did not like this glory, and the tune was nearly too high for my voice."

The theses were printed and in two weeks were spread over Germany and in four weeks over all Christendom "as if the very angels themselves had been the messengers." Luther's name was on the lips of everyone. He became famous, so to say, overnight.

Thus this day, October 31, 1517, may be said to be the day when the reformation of the Christian Church began.

## 6. "'Tis a Mere Monkish Squabble"

Neither Luther nor anyone else at the time had any idea how far-reaching and revolutionizing the effect of the Ninety-five Theses would be. Luther's friends commended him for his stand. Others wrote him from afar, praising him. Pope Leo heard about the theses, too, but he was not even alarmed. "'Tis a mere monkish squabble!" he said. "The best way is not to meddle with it." On another occasion he added: "It is a drunken German that has written these theses; when the fumes have passed off, he will talk

very differently."

However, opposition soon began to rise. Luther was severely criticized. Tetzel attacked him, charging him with heresy. Others rallied to the defense of the indulgences. A prominent university gave Tetzel the doctor's degree. Other honors were heaped upon him. Luther's friends became concerned. They remembered what had happened to Wyclif and Huss and Savonarola. Luther was cautioned to be careful. Some officials feared he would disgrace the university. One man told him: "You speak the truth, good brother, but you'll not accomplish anything. Back to your cell and pray, 'God have mercy upon me!'"

Luther himself had not expected any serious opposition. "I hoped the Pope would protect me, for I had so fortified my theses with proofs from the Bible and papal decretals that I was sure he would condemn Tetzel and bless me. But where I expected a benediction from Rome, there came thunder and lightning instead, and I was treated like the sheep that had roiled the wolf's water. Tetzel went scot-free, and I must submit to be devoured."

Luther's courage did not fail, however, He had acted after careful and prayerful thought. He was not to be frightened by foes or persuaded by friends until convinced that he had done wrong. He declared: "I teach men to depend only on Jesus Christ and not on their own merits through prayer and other good works; for we cannot be saved through our own power, but only through the mercy of God. I cannot recant that."

Matters stood thus for about nine months. Finally the Pope spoke. On August 7, 1518, Luther was handed Leo's order to come to Rome within sixty days to answer to the charge of heresy, false doctrine. Had Luther followed that order, the whole affair would have been ended, for he would not have returned alive.

The Elector Frederick in the meantime had come to be a staunch supporter of Martin Luther in the controversy. He was a powerful prince in the Roman Empire. And he was not at all willing to see the leading professor of his university go to Rome. While the question of going was being debated by them, a change in orders was made by the Pope through the influence of Cardinal Cajetan. That gentleman was the papal representative in Germany. He had counseled Leo to command Luther to be tried at Augsburg, where a diet of the empire was to be held. So Luther was not forced to leave German soil.

To Augsburg he went in October on foot, though not at all well, accompanied by Staupitz. Some of his friends were fearful for his safety. "They'll burn you there!" they warned him. Yet he had courage enough to declare: "Even in Augsburg Jesus Christ reigns in the midst of His enemies. Jesus lives; let Martinus die!"

In those days a safe-conduct was considered very important when one was summoned to appear for such a trial. A safe-conduct was a document promising that no harm should befall the accused while away from the protection of his own ruler. Luther, against the advice of his friends, proceeded to Augsburg without one. But they insisted on getting one from

the Emperor Maximilian before he set foot in the headquarters occupied by the cardinal.

Cajetan greeted the monk who appeared before him kindly. He did not wish to discuss the matter. All that Luther needed to do was to revoke everything he had written about repentance and indulgence. This Luther was not ready to do, however, at least not until he had been shown his error. Now the shrewd cardinal began to argue, not doubting in the least that he would soon silence the young professor. But, alas! the monk had him in a dilemma before he knew it. Exasperated, he cried: "Go! Recant or never come to me again!" To Staupitz he said later: "I do not care to talk with the beast any more, for he has deep eyes and amazing speculations in his head."

Luther wisely left Augsburg secretly and hurried homeward. Had he tarried, he likely would have been taken to Rome as a heretic in spite of the emperor's safe-conduct, for the Pope had given Cajetan orders to that effect. He arrived safely in Wittenberg just a year after he had posted his theses.

"Had the cardinal at Augsburg acted more moderately and received me as a suppliant, things would never have gone so far. For up to that time I knew but little of the errors of the Pope. Had he kept quiet, I should have done the same," Luther declared afterwards.

Cajetan in his rage sent a letter to Frederick the Wise, demanding that Luther be delivered to Rome in chains. This the elector, however, refused to do. He was determined that his *protégé* be given a fair trial.

But there is more than one way to treat a heretic, thought Rome. "Cajetan has destroyed this cause by trying to use force in a matter that called for wise counsel and strategy." So the Pope sent a second agent, a smoother one, his own chamberlain, Charles von Miltitz. He had been in Rome for some time and did not fully realize what had taken place in Germany. He was astonished to find the sentiment among the people chiefly in favor of Luther. The sale of indulgences had ceased for lack of buyers. Tetzel was in disgrace. Miltitz estimated that an army of 25,000 soldiers would not be strong enough to take Martin Luther out of Germany. He saw that shrewd diplomacy, and not force, was necessary to cope with the situation.

Miltitz had a meeting with Luther at Altenburg. He fiercely denounced Tetzel as a fraud. He flattered Martin and assured him with tears in his eyes that he had misjudged the Pope. He did not demand that he retract what he had written. But he did ask him to be silent and to allow the controversy to die out. Luther agreed to say no more if his opponents kept silence. It actually seemed as though everything were settled.

But it had been otherwise decreed by God. Luther had a friend and colleague at Wittenberg, named Carlstadt, who came forth with a set of theses against Dr. Eck, professor at the University of Ingolstadt. Eck had once been Luther's friend, but had turned against him in the matter of indulgences. In his reply to Dr. Carlstadt, Eck attacked Luther. Thus the promise given by Miltitz that both sides keep silent was broken. Luther

felt free to reply to Eck's attacks. The result was the Leipzig debate in the summer of 1519, which lasted three weeks. Since Carlstadt was no match for the wily Eck, Luther had to defend the truth himself. This he did ably on the basis of Scripture. The chief result was that Luther now came to the parting of the ways. If the Roman Catholic Church would not listen to arguments based upon the clear, plain Word of God, then he must cease to be a Roman Catholic. There was no alternative. He must go his way alone. Alone? No, not alone. A few friends supported him, and he placed his trust in God and in God's Word.

## 7. Luther's Declarations of Independence

The die was cast! Luther had taken his stand on the Scriptures. On the basis of the Word of God he now proceeded to uncover the fundamental errors of the Church of Rome. From August to November, 1520, he published three great papers in which he made his position plain to all the world.

The first of these documents was his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. In it he appealed to the German people to stand for their national rights. Too long had they been cowed and overridden by the servants of the Pope at Rome. "I have pitched my song in a high key," he said. "But what am I to do? I am in duty bound to speak." He declared that the minions of Rome had "built three walls about themselves behind which they have hitherto defended themselves." With God's help he intended to hammer these walls down.

This is the first wall: The people had been told that the Pope and his servants (the churchly power) were not subject to kings and magistrates (the temporal power). "The Pope is above all, subject to no one on earth, and can therefore be judged by none but God." A member of the clergy therefore could not be judged by the law of the nation for his misdeeds. That had been taught and practiced for centuries. Luther, however, declared that all Christians were on an equal footing in this respect and that all, without distinction of person, were alike subject to the temporal power. Crime should be punished by the temporal ruler whether the offender were Pope, priest, or peasant.

He argued thus: "There is no difference among Christians save of office alone. We are all Christians by a higher consecration than Pope or bishop can give; for the bishop's consecration is just as if, in the name of the whole congregation, he took one member out of the community, each member of which has equal power, and ordered him to exercise this power for the rest. Or it is just as though ten brothers, coheirs as king's sons, were to choose one from among them to rule over their inheritance. They would, all of them, still remain kings and have equal power although one were chosen to govern.

"To make it still clearer: If a little company of Christian laymen were taken prisoners and carried away to a desert and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop and were there to agree to choose one of them, married or unmarried, and were to order him to baptize, to celebrate Mass,

to absolve, and to preach, this man would be as truly a priest as though all the bishops and all the Popes had consecrated him. A priest therefore in Christendom is nothing but an official. As long as he holds his office, he has precedence over others. If he is deprived of it, he is a peasant or townsman like the rest. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man, has the office and function of his calling, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every man in his work must be useful and beneficial to the rest.

"To say that the temporal authority, being inferior to the clergy, dare not punish them, is as though one were to say that the hand may not help when the eye is suffering. Inasmuch as the temporal power has been ordained of God for the punishment of the bad and the protection of the good, we must let it do its duty throughout the whole Christian body without respect of persons, whether it strike Pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or anybody else."

Thus Luther broke down the first wall.

"The second wall," he said, "is still more flimsy and worthless." It was the claim that the Pope was the only one who could interpret the Bible correctly. "They wish to be the only masters of the Holy Scriptures," Luther wrote, "even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the Pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith; and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it...."

"But not to fight them with mere words, we will quote the Scriptures. St. Paul says 1 Cor. 14: 'If to anyone something better is revealed, though he be sitting and listening to another in God's Word, then the first, who is speaking, shall hold his peace and give place.' What would be the use of this commandment if we were to believe only him who does the talking or who has the highest seat? Christ also says in John 6 that all Christians shall be taught of God. Thus it may well happen that the Pope and his followers are wicked men, and no true Christians, not having true understanding. On the other hand, an ordinary man may have true understanding. Why, then, should we not follow him? Has not the Pope erred many times? Who would help Christendom when the Pope errs if we were not to believe another who had the Scriptures on his side more than the Pope?"

"Only think of it yourself! They must confess that there are pious Christians among us who have the true faith, Spirit, understanding, Word and mind of Christ. Why, then, should we reject their word and understanding and follow the Pope, who has neither faith nor Spirit? That would be to deny the whole faith and the Christian Church. Moreover, it is not the Pope alone who is always in the right if the article of the Creed is correct: 'I believe one holy Christian Church'. Otherwise the prayer would have to run, 'I believe in the Pope at Rome,' and so reduce the Christian Church to one man."

"In the olden days Abraham had to listen to his Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth. Balaam's



ass also was wiser than the prophet himself. If God, then, spoke by an ass against a prophet, why should He not be able even now to speak by a righteous man against the Pope?"

Thus Luther demolished the second wall.

The third was the claim that no one could hold a church council unless it was called, or confirmed, by the Pope himself. "The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. For when the Pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him and to constrain him according to the word of Christ in Matt. 18: 'If your brother sin against you, go and tell it him between you and him alone. If he hears you not, then take with you one or two more. If he hears them not, tell it to the church. If he hears not the church, consider him a heathen.' Here every member is commanded to care for every other. How much rather should we do this when the member that does evil is a ruling member and by his evil-doing is the cause of much harm and offense to the rest! But if I am to accuse him before the church, I must bring the church together.

"They have no basis in Scripture for their contention that it belongs to the Pope alone to call a council or to confirm its actions, for this is based merely upon their own laws, which are valid only insofar as they are not injurious to Christendom or contrary to the laws of God. When the Pope deserves punishment, such laws go out of force, since it is injurious to Christendom not to punish him by means of a council.

"Therefore, when necessity demands and the Pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a faithful member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council...Would it not be an unnatural thing if a fire broke out in a city and everybody were to stand by and let it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn, for the sole reason that nobody had the authority of the burgomaster or perhaps because the fire broke out in the burgomaster's house? In such case, is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and call the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government or anywhere else! In the same way, if the enemy attacks a city, he who first rouses the others deserves honor and thanks. Why, then, should he not deserve honor who makes known the presence of the enemy from hell and awakens the Christians and calls them together?"

Having destroyed the barriers behind which Rome had entrenched itself, Luther now proposed twenty-six reforms that should be carried out for the bettering of the spiritual estate and six for the improvement of the temporal estates.

This writing created a profound impression throughout Germany and was widely approved.

Luther concluded this document with the words: "I know another little song about Rome....If their ears itch for it, I shall sing them that song too and pitch the notes to the top of the scale."

The "other little song" was not long in appearing. Two months later Luther published his treatise *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In it he attacked the very heart of the whole papal system. He pointed out that, as the ancient King Nebuchadnezzar once held the children of Israel captive in Babylon, so the Roman Church had held the Church captive by a seven-fold chain, the doctrine of the seven sacraments. In doing so, Rome had invented sacraments never ordained by Christ and had corrupted those which He did establish. The Romanists had added all sorts of needless vows and works by which to merit grace, given freely in Baptism. They had taken the cup from the laity in the Lord's Supper and had transformed the Sacrament into an unbloody sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead.

In his third document, which was published in November, Luther gave the world his masterful *Treatise on Christian Liberty*, in which he describes the lofty meaning of faith and shows the sum total of Christian life in these two truths:

"A Christian man through faith is a free lord of all things and subject to none."

"A Christian man through love is the free servant of all things and subject to all."

These three documents were Luther's declarations of independence. Thereby he rent asunder the last ties that bound him to the Church of Rome. He had challenged her authority, attacked her doctrines, and ridiculed her practices. Rome had burned other men for less. What would Rome do to Martin Luther?

## 8. Burning the Last Bridge Behind Him

Before these great documents of Luther were written and published, Rome had already acted against the Reformer. Luther found out, of course, what was being planned and done to silence him. After the Leipzig Debate between Eck and Carlstadt, in which Luther had figured so prominently, Eck hastened to Rome to report to the Pope what the "beast of Wittenberg" was doing and how dangerous for the papal cause the situation was becoming. The people favored Luther, and the powerful elector was protecting him.

The result was that a document called "the papal bull" was prepared against Luther. The Pope signed it on June 15, 1520. Dr. Eck was commissioned to convey it to Germany and to publish it there.

Here are some sentences from it: "Arise, O Lord, arise, judge Thy cause, be mindful of the reproaches with which the foolish reproach Thee daily. Incline Thine ears to our prayers since foxes have arisen, seeking to spoil Thy vineyard, whose care, government, and administration Thou didst entrust to Peter as its head and Thy vicar and to his successors; the boar out of the woods is seeking to waste it, and a peculiar wild beast does devour it.

"Arise, O Peter, attend to the cause of the Holy Roman Church, mother of all churches and queen of the faith! Arise, thou, too, O Paul! Let the entire congregation of saints and the rest of the Church Universal arise."

And against whom? Why Luther, of course. Statements from his writings now follow and are pronounced grievous errors, heresies. The Pope calls God to witness that he has done everything in fatherly love to bring Luther back to the truth. His teachings can no longer be tolerated. "No one of sound mind is ignorant how poisonous, how pernicious, how seductive to godly and simple minds, and finally how contrary to all love and reverence for the holy Roman Church--the foundation and source of all virtue, without which everyone is proved to be an infidel--these errors are."

The Pope, in the bull, commanded Luther to repent within sixty days of all he had said and done against the Roman Church. All his erroneous writings should be burned. If he decided to recant, he could do so in writing; but the Pope would rather have him appear before him in person to prove the sincerity of his repentance. If, on the other hand, he and his adherents did not repent, they were to be regarded as obstinate heretics, withered branches of the vine of Christ, and must be punished according to the law of the Church.

Neither the Pope nor Dr. Eck or the other papal advisers, however, had sensed the real sentiment of the people in the matter. When Eck carried the bull triumphantly into Germany, he was greatly surprised that there was opposition to it on every side. There was, first of all, a strong feeling that Luther should not be condemned without a trial, that he was not receiving "fair play." Again, there were those who believed that Luther's charges had not simply been drawn out of "thin air" and that there was "more fact than fiction in what Luther had been saying about 'dear Rome.'" Luther's monumental writings, discussed in the previous chapter, were being read during this time by thousands. The conviction was growing in the hearts of these good people that God had at last sent a deliverer to the Church who would cleanse it of its evils and corruptions, and they were not ready to stand idly by and see their champion destroyed by the enemies of the truth.

It was a critical time. Princes and emperors before this had trembled when Rome had taken similar action against them. Luther's friends were deeply concerned for him. They knew in what grave danger he now stood. They were fearful of what the final outcome would be. Nor did they try to minimize the power and influence of his adversaries.

At first Luther did not act as if Leo X had actually issued the bull against him. He took it up as a trick of Dr. Eck's to intimidate him.

"I know nothing of Eck," he wrote to a friend, "except that he has arrived with a long beard, a long bull, and a long purse; but I laugh at his bull....I despise and attack it as impious, false, and in every respect worthy of Eck." So he wrote a tract against it, *On the New Bull and Falsehood of Eck*, treating it as Eck's forgery. But it was not a trick. Rome was in deadly earnest. It was serious business. Luther realized this too when he said, "Eck is stirring up the bottomless pit against me."

"It is Christ Himself who is condemned therein. No reasons are given in it. I am cited to Rome, not to be heard, but that I may eat my words. Oh, that Charles V would act like a man and that for the love of Christ he would attack these wicked spirits! I rejoice in having to bear such ills for the best causes. Already I feel greater liberty in my heart, for at last I know that the Pope is Antichrist and that his throne is that of Satan himself."

He wrote another tract, *Against the Bull of the Antichrist*, and had it distributed broadcast. In it he said: "If the Pope does not retract and condemn this bull and punish Dr. Eck besides, then no one is to doubt that he is God's enemy, Christ's persecutor, Christendom's destroyer, and the true Antichrist."

So we have the Pope calling on Luther to retract and Luther demanding the same of the Pope. What a situation!

However, no matter how much in earnest the Romanists were, the Germans were not to be frightened into quick submission. Dr. Eck found that out very soon.

But what was happening to Dr. Eck and the bull? Both were having a difficult time. Many bishops refused to give it publicity. In some towns where it was published, it was posted in such out-of-the-way places that comparatively few people read it. At Leipzig, where Eck had been in high favor during the debate with Carlstadt and Luther the year before, he was now ridiculed and denounced. Some of the university students posted placards condemning Eck for his action. At Erfurt the students tore copies of the bull into bits and threw them into the Gera River, exclaiming, "Since it is a *bull*a [bubble], let it float."

And that was not all. When the bull was sent to Wittenberg for publication, the professors refused to post it. Instead, the early hours of December 10, 1520, saw this notice posted: "All friends are invited to assemble about nine o'clock at the Church of the Holy Cross outside the city walls, where the godless books of the papal constitutions and scholastic theology will be burned according to the ancient and apostolic usage, inasmuch as the boldness of the enemies of the Gospel has waxed so great that they have cast the godly, evangelical books of Dr. Luther into the fire. Come, pious and zealous youth, to this pious and religious spectacle, for it is now the time when Antichrist must be exposed."

At the appointed hour Luther, together with Melanchthon, Carlstadt, and others, strode out of the Elster Gate of Wittenberg. Many students and citizens joined the procession. A heap of fagots was lighted on which Luther placed a number of papal writings. As the flames leaped upward, Luther stepped forward again and threw the bull threatening him with excommunication into the fire, uttering the words, "Because you have vexed the Holy One of God [Christ], let the everlasting fire consume you!"

Afterwards he defended his action in a short treatise in which he said: "I, Martin Luther...make known hereby to everyone that by my wish, advice, and

act...the books of the Pope of Rome...were burned." And then he gave the reasons why he felt himself in duty bound, as a baptized Christian and a sworn doctor of the Holy Scriptures, to root out all false doctrine.

To this day the spot is shown in Wittenberg where this daring act was done. At the Luther Oak a tablet commemorates it, bearing this inscription: "Dr. Martin Luther burned at this place, on December 10, 1520, the papal bull."

When Luther's friends heard of it, they were astounded; his enemies were furious. What would happen now? By his action Martin Luther had made the rupture between himself and the Roman Church complete. By burning the papal bull, he had burned the last bridge behind him!

Therefore Leo X, on January 3, 1521, announced the formal excommunication of Luther and his followers, and thus before the whole Church he was declared a heathen. He demanded that the emperor add the imperial ban so that Luther would become an outlaw before Church and State, without the right to live!

## 9. Before the Tribunal of Caesar

Late in March, 1521, an imperial messenger from Worms waited on Dr. Martin Luther in Wittenberg and handed him a summons from Emperor Charles V. When Luther broke the seal of the letter, this is what he read:

"Charles, by the grace of God, emperor-elect of the Romans....

"Honorable, well-beloved, and pious....

"We and the states of the holy empire here assembled, having resolved to institute an inquiry touching the doctrine and books that you have lately published, have issued for your coming hither, and your return to a place of security, our safe-conduct and that of the empire, which we send you herewith.

"Our sincere desire is that you should prepare immediately for this journey in order that within the space of twenty-one days fixed by our safe-conduct you may without fail present yourself before us. Fear neither injustice nor violence. We will firmly abide by our aforesaid safe-conduct and expect that you will comply with our summons. In so doing, you will obey our earnest wishes.

"Given in our imperial city of Worms, the sixth day of March, in the year of our Lord 1521 and the second of our reign.

CHARLES"

What had happened in the meantime? How had this citation to Worms come about?

Since the papal bull had been issued against Luther, a new emperor had been crowned. It was Charles V, the grandson of Maximilian, who had died January 12, 1519. The coronation had taken place October 23, 1520. As

emperor he was obligated to obey the Pope and to support the Holy Roman Church, even though the Pope had opposed his election. Charles was very young, only twenty years old. Yet he knew that the peace of his empire, which included Spain and Germany and the Netherlands--to say nothing of the territories in the New World--was bound up with the peace of the Church.

But in Germany the Church just then was not at peace. Everything was in uproar on account of Martin Luther and his teachings. Charles wanted the favor of the Pope, and the Pope was insisting that action be taken without delay in the matter of the "German heresy." On the other hand, Luther was being protected by the powerful Elector Frederick the Wise. And to Frederick, Charles owed his crown, for it had been offered to Frederick first, who refused it and threw his support to the side of Charles. The Pope was asking that Luther be placed into the ban of the empire and outlawed altogether. Frederick was asking that Luther be at least given a hearing.

Charles V was on his way up the Rhine at the time to hold his first diet at Worms. He told Frederick to bring Luther to Worms. He was to have his hearing under the emperor's protection. Leo X sent as his chief legate an Italian, named Aleander, who is represented as a shrewd, immoral, lying church dignitary. The diet was opened on January 28.

Aleander argued for hours against Luther's appearance. Glapio, the emperor's confessor, suggested a private hearing before a special committee. To this the elector would not consent. He pleaded for a hearing before the emperor and the diet.

One man, reporting on these proceedings, which lasted seven days, wrote: "The friar makes plenty of work. Some would gladly crucify him, and I fear he will hardly escape them. Only they must take care that he does not rise again on the third day!"

It was agreed at last that Luther be heard, but that no discussion be allowed. The question should simply be put to him "whether or not he intended to insist upon the writings he had published against our holy Christian faith." If so, the imperial ban would have to be pronounced against him forthwith.

Thus it came about that the summons was sent to Luther by Charles through the imperial herald, Caspar Sturm.

Would Luther go to Worms? He had been asked the question before and had replied: "I will do what in me lies, to be carried there sick if I cannot go there well. He lives and reigns who preserved the three young men in the furnace of the Babylonian king. If He is unwilling to keep me, my life is a small thing....I will not flee, much less recant. So may the Lord Jesus strengthen me!"

Now he had the emperor's order in his hands. It promised him safe-conduct. Huss had had that a hundred years before and had been burned nevertheless. Luther's friends feared for him. Even the elector was full of grave concern. Luther himself realized the danger, of course. He told his

friends: "The papists do not desire my coming to Worms, but my condemnation and death. It matters not. Pray not for me, but for the Word of God. Before my blood has grown cold, thousands of men in the whole world will have become responsible for having shed it. The most holy adversary of Christ--the father, the master, the generalissimo of murderers--insists on its being shed. So be it. Let God's will be done." "And if they'll build a fire between Wittenberg and Worms that will reach up to heaven, I'll still go in God's name and tread between the teeth in the mouth of Behemoth and confess Christ."

On April 2, Luther's party started out in a common canvas-covered wagon, furnished by the magistrates of Wittenberg. When the Wittenberg friar said goodbye to his dear friend and coworker Philip Melanchthon, he stated: "My dear brother, if I do not return and my enemies put me to death, continue to teach and stand fast in the truth. Labor in my stead since I shall no longer be able to labor for myself. If you survive, my death will be of little consequence."

It was a journey of about three hundred miles. They had to pass through such cities as Leipzig, Naumburg, Erfurt, Frankfort, and Appenheim. Everywhere the people crowded to see Luther. Some hailed him as a hero, others cursed him as a heretic. At Erfurt he preached of salvation by grace through faith to an enormous crowd. Here they were joined by several others who traveled along to Worms, one of whom was a young clergyman, named Justus Jonas, who became a close friend and helper of Luther's in the cause of the Reformation.

As Luther drew near to Worms, he wrote to his friend George Spalatin, who was already in Worms: "I'll go on to Worms and [sic as] if there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs."

On the morning of April 16 they arrived at Worms. The citizens crowded the streets to see the man whose name was a household word everywhere. Several thousand escorted him to his hotel.

Aleander reported to Rome: "When Luther left the wagon, a priest embraced him, touched his gown three times, and on leaving boasted of having handled a relic of the great saint. I suspect they'll soon say he performs miracles. This Luther, on getting down from the wagon, looked around with demoniac eyes and said, 'God will be with me.' Then he entered a room, where many lords looked him up, with whom he also dined, and after dinner all the world ran to see him."

On the next afternoon, at four, the imperial marshal and the imperial herald came to escort Luther to the bishop's palace, where the diet was in session. The throngs so crowded the streets that the members of the group had to pick their way through backyards and alleys to reach it. At the bishop's palace the celebrated Captain George Frundsberg tapped Luther on the shoulder and said: "Little friar, you are now walking a dangerous path to make a stand such as I and many generals have not made in the most desperate battles. But if you are in the right and sure of your cause, fare forth in God's name and be of good cheer. God will not forsake you." Well spoken!

Shortly Luther was ushered into the hall. What a brilliant assembly that was! There were the powerful and influential leaders of State and Church. In the center stood the dazzling throne of the emperor, in which the pale, youthful Charles V sat. Luther entered with a smile on his face. Luther and Charles V,--Charles V and Martin Luther,--the two men in whom were personified the forces that were to change the course of history, were face to face with each other!

The proceedings began.

"Martin Luther, his sacred and invincible Imperial Majesty," thus an officer addressed him, "has cited you before his throne in accordance with the advice and council of the states of the Holy Roman Empire to require you to answer two questions:

"First, Do you acknowledge these books [piled on the table before him] to have been written by you?

"Secondly, Are you prepared to retract these books and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions expressed in them?"

The titles of the books were read aloud.

"Your Imperial Majesty asks me two things, first, whether these books are mine, and secondly, whether I will stand by them or recant part of what I have published. First, the books are mine; I deny none of them. The second question, whether I will reassert all or recant what is said to have been written without warrant of Scripture, concerns faith and the salvation of souls and the Word of God, than which nothing is greater in heaven or on earth and which we ought to reverence. Therefore, it would be rash and dangerous to say anything without due consideration, since I might say more than the thing demands or less than the truth, either of which would bring me in danger of the sentence of Christ: 'Whoso shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.' Therefore I humbly beg Your Imperial Majesty to give me time to think that I may answer without violence to the Word of God or peril to my soul."

After some hesitation the request for twenty-four hours' time to consider was granted. Luther returned to his hotel. He spent the night in prayer and consultation.

The next day, April 18, at four, Luther was again taken to the council chamber. The hall was crowded as before. The weather was warm and sultry. There was a long wait in the courtyard. It grew dark. The candles and torches were lighted. At last the diet was ready to hear him. He entered the room. The question was put to him: "Do you wish to defend all of your books or to retract some of them?"

Luther's reply was a long address. First he delivered it in Latin, for the emperor could not understand German well, and then he repeated it in German. He apologized for the strong terms he had used against his opponents, but as far as the doctrines were concerned, it must first be



shown that they were contrary to Scripture. If so, then he would be the first to consign them to the flames. If not, then they must stand as the truth.

"You have not spoken to the point," he was told. "Give a simple and plain answer without horns."

Luther replied: "Since Your Imperial Majesty, Electoral and Princely Graces demand a simple, artless, true answer, I will give one which shall have neither horns nor teeth. Unless I be overcome and convinced by proofs of the Holy Scriptures or by manifestly clear grounds and reasons--for I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone, because it is an open and known fact that they have often erred and opposed each other--and I am convinced by those passages adduced and introduced by me and my conscience is bound in God's Word, I can or will recant nothing, since it is neither safe nor advisable to do aught against conscience. God help me! Amen."

The upshot of the proceedings was this--that after some deliberation the emperor added his condemnation to the excommunication by the Pope.

Martin Luther left Worms on April 26 for Wittenberg. His enemies were busy preparing the document which was to be his formal condemnation as an outlaw and heretic. This decree was formally signed by Emperor Charles on May 26. This meant that his property rights were not to be respected, that his books were to be burned, and that it was every good Christian's duty to take Luther, either dead or alive, and turn him over to the authorities for punishment. The Edict of Worms, as the document of condemnation was called, declared in part: "Whereas Luther, whom we had invited to appear before us at Worms, has stubbornly retained his well-known heretical opinions, therefore, with the *unanimous* consent of the electors, princes, and estates of the empire, we have determined upon the execution of the bull as a remedy against this poisonous pest, and we now command everyone, under pain of the imperial ban, from the 14th day of this month of May, not to shelter, house, or give food or drink to aforesaid Luther nor succor him by word or deed, secretly or publicly, with help, adherence, or assistance, but to take him prisoner wherever he may be found and to send him to us securely bound; also, to overpower his adherents, abettors, and followers, and to confiscate their possessions. Luther's poisonous books and writings are to be burned and in every way annihilated."

When the time for his arrival at Wittenberg came, Luther did not appear. Instead, it was reported that his party had been attacked near Castle Altenstein, on May 4. Luther's companions had fled. Luther himself had disappeared!

"O God, is Luther dead, who will henceforth teach us the holy Gospel so clearly?" wrote Albrecht Durer, the famous Nuremberg artist, in his diary when he heard the news.

## 10. The Studious Knight

But he shall live who valued not his life,  
Whose heart no ban by man imposed could daunt;  
Who, loving peace, yet gave himself to strife,  
Brought low with homely words the arrogant,  
Defied Rome's threats with courage adamant.  
And when the shining armor lies in rust,  
That quiet answer, "I will not recant"--  
That challenge to God's truth, a sacred trust,  
Shall live in human hearts  
When crowns and thrones are dust.

Not far from the town of Eisenach, surrounded by the black forests of the mountains of Thuringia, towers a lofty and isolated fortress named Wartburg, carefully guarded by high walls, a place where the knights of old had fortified themselves against their enemies, a castle famous in story and legend.

There in the summer and fall of the year 1521 dwelt a bearded knight called Knight George. He could be seen from time to time emerging from the heavy gate of the castle in order to wander through the surrounding country. Sometimes he went with a single companion, sometimes he accompanied a hunting party. But he was not much of a huntsman. Instead of joining in the chase after the dogs had driven the game from the covers, he philosophized: "Is not this the image of the devil setting on his dogs, that is, the bishops--those representatives of Antichrist--and urging them in pursuit of poor souls?"

On one occasion a young hare was taken. Instead of allowing it to be killed, the bearded knight wrapped it in his cloak and placed it safely, as he thought, in the middle of a thicket. But when the frightened little thing started out for its nest, the dogs scented it and killed it. Sorrowfully the Knight George exclaimed, "O Pope, and you too Satan, it is thus you endeavor to destroy even those souls that have been saved from death!"

One day he and a companion took a longer hike than usually, and becoming tired they entered a wayside inn to eat and rest. Instead of spending the time drinking and talking with the other guest, Knight George laid aside his sword, took from his pouch several books, and was soon deep in study. Strange behavior for a knight!

On another occasion they stopped at one of the convents where Martin Luther had rested on his way to Worms. One of the monks, upon scrutinizing the features of the bearded Knight George, suddenly uttered a surprised exclamation. "It is Luther!" As quick as a flash his companion dragged Knight George away, and they were both galloping back to the Wartburg before the astonished brother could collect himself.

But the cat was out of the bag. Knight George was none other than Martin Luther. How had he become Knight George, and what was he doing at the

Wartburg?

The attack on Luther's party, mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, had been made by his friends in order to spirit him away, lest he be taken by his enemies and burned. They took him to the fortress, put knight's clothing on him, and bade him grow a beard to make the disguise complete. Very few people had been let into the secret. Although the Elector Frederick had helped to make the plans for it, even he did not know where Luther was hidden away, so that if Charles V asked him after the friar's disappearance where Luther was, he could truthfully say that he did not know. Everybody speculated as to his whereabouts. There was intense excitement in Germany. Luther's friends feared he had been murdered. His enemies fervently hoped so. Rumors of all kinds spread around. One report was that his dead body had been found in an old mine; another, that he had fled to Denmark and was sheltered there by the king.

For ten months the bold confessor at Worms was kept carefully guarded at the fortress. For some time even Melanchthon at Wittenberg did not know what had happened to him. When he found out, he exclaimed happily: "Our beloved father lives; take courage and be firm." Luther wrote him: "If you were to see me, you would take me for a soldier, and even *you* would hardly recognize me." Not many, however, knew the truth until Luther himself divulged that he was alive, and very much so.

Life at the Wartburg was not what Luther had been accustomed to, but he soon managed to be at the work he loved best--studying and writing. His friends sent him books and gave him the news of all that was going on in the outside world. A little room in the Wartburg, still shown to visitors, was his workshop. Soon letters, tracts, papers, books, were going out from there into the world. Luther was not dead, his enemies now knew, but alive and as active as ever.

That was not all. He began to translate the Bible into German. Should the common people know the Word of God, they must have it in their own language so that everyone could read it for himself.

He completed the first draft of his translation of the New Testament at the Wartburg. Afterwards it was printed in Wittenberg and eagerly sought after by the people.

Later Luther translated also the Old Testament and published the entire German Bible in 1534.

"What pains he took!" writes Dr. Dallmann. "He studied zoology in order to give the right names to the animals named in the Bible. He had a butcher slaughter several sheep and teach him to name the parts so that he could translate correctly....Melanchthon had to correspond with learned men everywhere for information concerning the coins in the New Testament....He listened to the mothers talking to their children at play in the streets, to the plain people in the shops and markets, and as he heard them speak, so he wrote. He studied to get at the real sense of the Hebrew and the Greek writers, and then wrote it down in the real, racy, plain, and popular German."

"Sometimes," he said, "we sought two, three, four weeks for a single word, and even then we did not always find it."

"We are now sweating over the prophets. What a big job it is to make the Hebrew writers speak German! How they balk and will not give up their Hebrew tongue and speak in the barbaric German! Just as if you would force a nightingale to imitate a cuckoo!"

It was a monumental piece of work, and all the world has since paid eloquent tribute to the Friar of Wittenberg for his great German Bible. What is especially important for us is this: that William Tyndale, who labored so zealously to give us our English Bible, received much help in his translation from Martin Luther's German Bible.

But we have gone a little ahead of our story. We left Luther still at the Wartburg. Things were not going so well at Wittenberg as they should have. Luther was becoming uneasy about the situation.

Wittenberg had filled up with religious fanatics, cranks. Dr. Carlstadt was one of the leaders among them. They also wished to reform the Church, but not in the spirit of Luther. They told the people that they were directly inspired by the Holy Ghost. They despised the Bible and all book-learning. Carlstadt told the university students to quit their books and learn a trade or become farmers. This agitation finally stirred up the mob, so that the churches were broken into, the images torn down, the church furniture demolished, paintings and crucifixes broken and burned, and the church services changed. The Catholics said: "See what the Reformation will do to the Church!"--for Luther received the blame for all this trouble.

When Knight George heard of all that was going on, he became greatly concerned about his cause. Who would be able to put an end to the Wittenberg fanaticism? Melanchthon grieved over it, but was powerless. Frederick the Wise was at his wit's end how to solve this problem. The consensus of opinion among the level-headed people in Wittenberg was that Luther alone could straighten out things. So the city council sent him a request to come back. Luther wanted to do so badly. The elector, fearing for his safety, said no.

Luther, always a man who thought for himself, finally decided the question for himself. He wrote his friends in Wittenberg to be on the lookout for him. Then one day he quietly left the Wartburg, where he had been for ten months, and started on the five-day journey to his home.

At Jena he stopped at the Black Bear inn. He was still in his knight's clothing--in doublet and hose and a red leather cap, with belt and sword--and sat down at a table. Shortly afterwards two young students came in, and the knight in a friendly way began to speak to them.

"You are Swiss, I perceive, but from what canton?"

"From St. Gall."

"If you are going to Wittenberg, you will there meet a fellow-countryman of yours, Dr. Schurff."

They liked this gracious knight.

"Sir, could you inform us where Martin Luther is at present?"

"I know for certain that he is not at Wittenberg; but he will be there shortly. Philip Melanchthon is there. Study Greek and Hebrew that you may clearly understand the Scriptures."

"If God spare our lives, we will not return home without having seen and heard Dr. Luther, for it is on his account that we have undertaken this long journey."

Thus the conversation continued. The two youths were invited to have supper with Knight George. When they finally parted, he said to them: "When you reach Wittenberg, salute Dr. Schurff for me."

"Most willingly," they answered. "But what name shall we give?"

"Tell him simply, 'He that is to come salutes you.'"

A few days later when the students called on Dr. Schurff at Wittenberg, whom should they see in the room but the strange knight of the Black Bear inn! And thus they found out that their friend had been the great Luther himself.

When Luther reached Borna, a small town near Leipzig, he remembered that he had left the Wartburg without the permission of the elector. So he wrote him a letter to inform him as to his actions:

"Grace and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

*"Most Serene Elector, Gracious Lord:*

"The events that have taken place at Wittenberg, to the great reproach of the Gospel, have caused me such pain that if I were not confident of the truth of our cause, I should have given way to despair....I have sufficiently given way to Your Highness by passing this year in retirement. The devil knows well that I did so not through fear. I should have entered Worms had there been as many devils in the city as tiles on the housetops. Now, Duke George [a bitter opponent of the Reformation], with whom Your Highness frightens me, is yet much less to be feared than a single devil. If that which is passing at Wittenberg were taking place at Leipzig [the duke's city], I should immediately mount my horse to go thither, although--may Your Highness pardon these words--for nine whole days together it were to rain nothing but Duke Georges and each one nine times more furious than he is. What does he think of by attacking me? Does he take Christ, my Lord, for a man of straw?"

"Be it known to Your Highness that I am going to Wittenberg under a protection far higher than that of princes and electors....

"As for what concerns me, Your Highness must act as an elector; you must let the orders of His Imperial Majesty take their course in your towns and rural districts. You must offer no resistance if men desire to seize or kill me, for no one should resist dominions except He who has established them....

"I have written this letter in haste that you may not be made uneasy at hearing of my arrival. I hope to do with a Man very different from Duke George. He knows me well, and I know Him pretty well.

"Your Electoral Highness's humble servant,

"MARTIN LUTHER"

Luther's arrival at Wittenberg on March 6 was a triumph. All rejoiced to see their great hero back again. On the following Sunday he was in the pulpit and every day thereafter for a solid week. And never were more powerful and effective sermons delivered. The people were brought back to their senses. Luther blamed no one for the troubles that had arisen, but allowed the Word of God to quiet the disturbed waters. Order was restored. Fanaticism was checked at Wittenberg. The Word of God prevailed. And thus a movement was curbed "which might have become a conflagration to take hold of the whole of Germany and destroy all the institutions of State and Church."

The agitation of the fanatics continued, however, in other places, and as a result a serious revolt of the peasants in certain parts of Germany ensued. Luther was asked to arbitrate between the rebellious peasants and their oppressors, the princes. Luther, himself a peasant's son, knew how these poor people had for many years been grievously wronged. He therefore raised his voice in earnest admonition to the princes, denouncing them for their wrong-doing. But at the same time he declared that he was not a fomentor of revolutions and warned the peasants against riot and rebellion. He contended that his work of reformation was not a political, but a spiritual matter, and so he again took his stand with the Word of God for law and order, reminding the peasants of St. Paul's words: "Whosoever resists the power resists the ordinance of God; and they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Unfortunately Luther's wise counsel was not accepted, and his efforts in behalf of peace were of no avail, and there was much bloodshed before the revolution was finally quelled.

## 11. The Wittenberg Nightingale

In the years following the trying days at Worms and the labors at the Wartburg, Luther carried on the work of the reformation of the Church with much zeal and courage. It is self-evident that where Luther's teachings

were accepted, changes had to follow in the outward affairs of the Church after the principle had been recognized that the Word of God, not Pope or church council, is the highest authority in the Church. Everything contrary to the Word had to be abolished, and so the celebration of the Mass as a sacrifice was discontinued, the adoration of the saints stopped, and the Corpus Christi festival and most of the saint days were no longer celebrated. Luther was very conservative, however, in these measures. He did not take the extreme view that because something had been done by the Romanists, therefore it must now be done away with. His test was rather, "Is a thing sinful?" If so, then a Christian is in duty bound to avoid it. Something is sinful, however, only if it is against Scripture. In those matters where Scripture neither commands nor forbids, a Christian has the right to use his Christian liberty.

He said: "I condemn no ceremonies but those opposed to the Gospel....In short, I hate nobody worse than him who upsets free and harmless ceremonies and turns liberty into necessity."

In many places in Germany and in the Netherlands the followers of Luther set up the Lutheran teachings and practices. But this was not always done without serious opposition and even bitter persecution. In Wittenberg, and in Saxony in general, under the protection of a favorable elector there was little or no difficulty with these matters. But elsewhere there was imprisonment and even death of the evangelicals, as Luther's followers were called.

At Brussels in July, 1523, two young Augustinian friars who had been active in preaching the pure Gospel were burned to death for refusing to renounce their faith. When Luther heard of it, he commemorated their martyrdom with a beautiful poem, which was sung as a hymn in town and country in Germany and in the Netherlands. It opens with the stanza:

By help of God I fain would tell  
a new and wondrous story,  
And sing a marvel that befell  
to His great praise and glory.  
At Brussels, in the Netherlands  
He has His banner lifted,  
To show His wonders by the hands  
of two youth highly gifted  
with rich and heavenly grace.

Then after describing the martyrdom, the hymn closes with these lines:

Their ashes never cease to cry,  
the fires are ever flaming.  
Their dust throughout the world does fly,  
their murderers' shame proclaiming.  
The voices which with cruel hands  
they put to silence living  
Are heard, though dead, throughout all lands,  
their testimony giving  
and loud hosannas singing.

To his friends in the Netherlands, Luther wrote: "You were preferred before all the world by having been counted worthy to cover and seal the Gospel with your own blood and by the martyrdom of these two pearls of Jesus Christ, who did not regard their lives in order that Christ might be praised."

In arranging an order or service for the churches, Luther also introduced congregational singing. For centuries the singing had been done by the clergy, and in Latin, although the congregations were finally allowed to join the choir in certain responses. Only on special festive occasions were the people permitted to sing an appropriate hymn. The religious songs that were in existence were sung in the homes and outside of public worship. Not many of these, in Luther's opinion, were fitted for the church service. It was necessary therefore to get appropriate hymns in German for the congregation. Luther set himself that task, although he would have preferred to have others do it, and tried to encourage his friends George Spalatin and Paul Speratus to help him.

He was a great friend of music from his youth, as we have seen. He wished to put music also into the service of the restored Gospel. "Next to theology," he exclaimed, "I give the first and highest honor to music."

"I am minded," he said, "after the example of the prophets and the Fathers of the Church, to make German psalms for the people, that is, spiritual hymns, so that the Word of God may be kept among the people through song."

In what was probably his first hymn, he gave voice to the central doctrine of the Reformation--the salvation of man through the redemption of Christ. It begins with the line, "Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice"; it is still found in most Lutheran hymnbooks. Luther's friend Paul Speratus matched Luther's virgin effort with a hymn on the same theme, opening with the words, "Salvation unto us is come," a hymn which is also still sung the world over.

In 1524 Luther published the first Lutheran hymnbook. It was only a little pamphlet containing eight hymns, four by Luther, three by Paul Speratus, and one by an unknown author. This was the tiny spring from which sprang the mighty stream of Protestant hymnody.

Soon the people were singing these hymns everywhere. Edition after edition of the hymnal was published and with each one an increasing number of hymns. At the end of the year 1524 Luther had written twenty-four hymns, and in the following years twelve more flowed from his pen. They were not all original. Sometimes he revised hymns already in existence, sometimes he translated old Latin hymns. His greatest hymn, written before 1529, was "A Mighty Fortress," the theme of which is taken from Psalm 46. It has been called "the Battle-hymn of the Reformation," and as one of his biographers states, it is "Luther in song. It is pitched in the very key of the man. Rugged and great, trustful in God, and confident, it was the trumpet-call of the Reformation."

The hymns of Luther and those who followed his example in this blessed work



became a great medium for the spread of the truths of the Reformation. The people learned them by heart and sang them gladly. All that the enemies could do to stem the tide of Lutheran song was in vain. Cajetan had to admit: "By his songs he has conquered us." A later prominent Catholic historian wrote: "The fine songs of Luther have seduced more souls from the [Roman] Church than the arch-heretic with his teachings." An English writer of note expressed the same truth in these words: "Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible."

Thus Luther was the father of the evangelical hymn. He was called the "Nightingale of Wittenberg," and the Lutheran Church became the "singing Church."

It might be added in this connection that already in the century of the Reformation the influence of Luther's songs extended far beyond the borders of Germany, for instance, into the Netherlands, the Scandinavian lands, and into England and Scotland. The first Protestant hymnbook in England was composed of "forty-one hymns of Luther and others translated by Miles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter, in the original meter and sung to the original Lutheran melodies."

True witness, brave, outspoken,  
To stop him men assayed;  
Their sword and spear lay broken  
While he stood undismayed.  
The Word! The Word! It must prevail!  
Hear the melodious trilling  
Of Wittenberg's bold nightingale  
Through every household thrilling.

## 12. The Gem of the Reformation

The new life which had come to the Church through Luther's work extended itself into many directions. One of these was the field of education. We saw how Luther in his childhood and early youth suffered because the schools were inadequate and the teachers often brutal. That there were good schools also and intelligent teachers we noted from Luther's experiences in his "dear city" of Eisenach. The chief defect of these schools, whether Latin or German, whether in city or village, whether good or bad, was that the Gospel was not taught in them. Luther himself passed from the common school to the university without coming to the knowledge of Christ, the Savior of sinners.

While Luther was in the seclusion of the Wartburg, Carlstadt in his fanatical spirit had "reformed the Wittenberg city school to death." Luther therefore, on his return, took steps to reestablish it and to consider in his reformatory work also the condition of the schools elsewhere in Germany. In the year 1524 he addressed an *Appeal to the Councilors of All Cities in German Lands to Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*. This document has been called "the most important educational treatise ever written." Its pleas in behalf of good schools

for higher education are still worth our study. His chief arguments are as follows:

First, that the work of Satan, who hates good schools, may be frustrated. "Such sly, secret, insidious temptation by the devil must be frustrated with great Christian zeal. Dear sirs, must so much money annually be spent for rifles, highways, thoroughfares, dams, and the like unnumbered things in order that a city may enjoy temporal peace and comfort, why should not at least as much be invested in the needy, poor youth by engaging one or two able men as teachers? When one gulden is spent to war against the Turks, would it not be better to spend one hundred gulden to train one lad to become a true Christian, since one true Christian is better and more useful than all men on earth? Where formerly a citizen spent so much money and goods for indulgences, masses, cloisters, pilgrimages, etc., how much more should he not give today for schools, now after the light of the Gospel has come and he has been rescued from robbers! Why, do you not see that where men oppose, complain, struggle, and tear about it, the devil reigns?"

Secondly, that the grace of God may not be received in vain: "May we remember our former misery in which we lived! I think that Germany has never before heard so much of God's Word as now. If we permit this to pass by without gratitude and honor, we are in danger of suffering even worse darkness and plague. Beloved Germans, buy while the market is open, gather while the sun shines and the weather is good, make use of God's grace and Word as long as you have it. For this you shall know--God's Word and grace is like a fleeting shower, which does not return where once it has been. It has been with the Jews; but past is past, they now have nothing. St. Paul brought it to Greece; but here too past is past, now they have the Turk. Rome and Latin land also had it; past is past, they now have the Pope. And you Germans need not think that you will always have it, for ingratitude and contempt will drive it away. Therefore take hold and hold fast whoever can. Idle hands will have an evil year."

Thirdly, to obey God's command, Deut. 6:5. "What do we older folks live for if not for the care of the young, to teach and train them?" "The prosperity of a city does not depend on the accumulation of great riches, the building of walls and houses, many guns and armors. Indeed, where there is much of this and fools come into power, the loss of such a city is all the greater and worse. Rather is this a city's greatest and best prosperity, salvation, and power, that it has many fine, learned, sensible, righteous, well-trained citizens. These can then gather riches and all kinds of goods, keep them, and properly use them."

In his efforts for good Christian higher schools, he has in mind the training of good men for the German state and the education of able ministers and preachers of the Gospel.

He also raised his voice in behalf of common schools and answered objections that were raised by those who claimed that they could teach their boys and girls at home. He advocated that all boys be sent to school for two hours every day and the girls for one hour and besides learn useful trades and arts at home. "Let the boys attend school an hour or two a day

and work the rest of the time at home, learn a trade, etc. Do they not spend about ten times as much time otherwise shooting tadpoles, playing ball, running, and wrestling? And a little maid surely has so much time that she can spend an hour a day at school and yet look after her work at home, especially since she sleeps, dances, and plays away much more time."

Thus, as Dr. Reu says: "Even though it remained for a later time to establish real common schools as we understand them, yet the beginnings of these lay in those city schools which Luther proposed, with their two hours of instruction a day for the boys and one hour for the girls and the rural schools conducted by sextons. So Luther indeed cannot without modification be regarded as the founder of the present evangelical common school; still the foundation and the germ-like beginnings of this were indeed given by him."

In the interest of good schools, Luther made a survey of a part of Saxony and found many priests lazy, ignorant, and unfaithful. Some had no Bible, others did not know the Ten Commandments, and the rudiments of the Christian religion were not properly taught and explained, especially not to the children. Already in 1516 he had begun to preach on the Ten Commandments, on the Lord's Prayer, and on other parts of the Catechism. He gave into the hands of the people an explanation of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as early as 1520.

From year to year this work continued, until when in early 1529 he published his Small Catechism. Thereby he wished to place into the hands of fathers, teachers, and pastors a handbook by means of which the chief parts of the Christian faith and short explanations of them should be taught. In the preface he addressed the pastors especially: "I beg you for God's sake, my dear sirs and brethren, heartily to discharge the functions of your office, sympathize with the people committed to your care, and help us to bring the Catechism among them, especially the young."

"Those who will not learn should be told how they deny Christ and are no longer Christians. They should not be permitted at Holy Communion nor to sponsor a child at its baptism nor yet dare use a single part of evangelical liberty, but be committed to the Pope and his officials, even the devil himself. And parents and house-lords should deny them meat and drink."

Luther later wrote the elector that "thanks to this simple instruction, the youth of Saxony now understood the Bible better than the monks and nuns under the Papacy." He called it "a right Bible for the laity."

This Small Catechism has been used the world over since then, and many are the glowing tributes of praise bestowed upon it. It has rightly been called "the Gem of the Reformation." One famous historian says of this gem: "It is as childlike as it is deep-minded, as plain as it is unfathomable, simple and sublime. Happy he that feeds his soul with it, that clings to it! He has unfailing comfort in every moment, behind a thin shell the kernel of truth, which satisfies the wisest of the wise."

By Luther's hand a little gem  
Was brought out from an ancient mine,  
Where precious pearls of priceless truth  
In all their early beauty shine.

This gem unfolds the Law of God  
That we might know what He requires,  
And walk the way of His commands  
In deeds and words and in desires.

It tells us how the worlds were framed  
And man before his Maker stood,  
To prove the power of Him who spake  
And found His works were very good.

It glorifies a Father's love,  
A love that did not spare to give  
His Son to shed His sacred blood,  
That sinners might not die, but live.

It praises God the Holy Ghost,  
The Teacher of all saving grace,  
Who guides us into all the truth  
And makes our hearts His dwelling place.

It tells us how we ought to pray,  
As our dear Lord Himself has said.  
It speaks of "water and the world"  
And of the breaking of the bread.

We prize this Reformation gem  
And pray that God may bless its way  
In church and school and in the home,  
For time and for eternity.

*(W.M. Czamanske)*

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### 13. Two Memorable Meetings

(1) At Worms, Luther had stood alone against the world. After Worms, in spite of Luther's condemnation, the number of his followers grew from year to year. Not only the Elector of Saxony, but also other princes of Germany joined the evangelical cause. Lutheran pamphlets and books were printed and distributed. City after city asked for Lutheran preachers and got them.

The Edict of Worms still stood, but it was not executed because the emperor, having his hands full of troubles of his own, did not dare to antagonize the powerful German princes and cities which had become

evangelical.

By 1529, however, the emperor had settled his other difficulties, and he now proceeded to call a diet which was to convene at the city of Spires for the purpose of demanding the execution of the Edict of Worms. This simply meant that Luther must be turned over to the authorities for execution, the Lutheran books must be burned, the "Lutheran heresy" must be rooted out, and the Roman Catholic religion must be restored by force as the only religion of the whole German Empire.

The situation was critical indeed. What should, what could, the evangelical princes gathered at Spires do? Should they give up the faith that had become so precious to them? Could they return to a religion of which they now knew, on the basis of God's Word, was full of error and unscriptural practices? No. Rather than do that, they would be willing to sacrifice everything, endure anything. Their faith was far more dear and meant much more to them than all their possessions, their crowns, and even their lives.

Luther, of course, was not at this meeting, but the princes were his spiritual children. They were men who had been brought out of the darkness of Romanism into the light of the truth; and as he had stood before the Diet of Worms unafraid and unshaken, ready to die for the truth, so these staunch followers of his now stood up before the Diet of Spires, boldly bravely, courageously. He would not recant; they would not retreat!

These princes therefore drew up a declaration, which was presented to the diet April 19, 1529, and which stated their position in unmistakable terms. They said that they would never consent to an agreement that would check the preaching of the Gospel in their lands. They appealed to the Bible. This Word is the only truth; it is the sure rule of all doctrine and all life and can never fail or deceive anyone. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the powers of hell, while all the human vanities set up against it shall fall.

"For these reasons, most dear lords...we earnestly entreat you to weigh carefully our grievances and our motives. If you do not yield to our request, we *protest*, by these present, before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Savior, who will one day be our Judge, as well as before all men and all creatures, that we for us and for our people neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree in anything that is contrary to God, to His holy Word, to our right conscience, and to the salvation of our souls."

It was on account of this "protest" that the evangelicals henceforth were called *Protestants*. This protest was too much for the papal and imperial party. They did not dare to make good their threats. And the Word of God again prevailed.

(2) Luther's position that the Scriptures are the supreme authority in matters of faith, and that neither the decrees of Popes or church councils nor the writings of the Church Fathers are superior to or even on the same

level with the inspired Word, had brought about his condemnation by the Romanists. The position that the Scriptures are superior to human reason was to raise up other enemies against him.

While the Reformation was making progress slowly but surely in Germany, a reform movement was also underway in Switzerland. The leader was Ulrich Zwingli, parish priest at Zurich. He renounced the Papacy and introduced the preaching of the Gospel, although his method was much more radical than Luther's. He insisted that images, pictures, organs, singing of the choir, and other church customs be done away with altogether. He agreed with Luther on the doctrine of justification by faith, but did not fully agree on the doctrines of original sin, the person of Christ, the means of grace, and others.

When Carlstadt in 1524 denied the real presence of the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, Luther opposed him; but Zwingli supported him. For he held that Holy Communion was merely a memorial supper and that both the Sacrament of the Altar and that of Holy Baptism were only signs or emblems of the grace of God.

Luther preached and wrote against the errors of Calstadt, Zwingli, and others in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. For him there was no sense in the argument that Christ's body and blood could not be really present under the bread and wine in the Sacrament. For him the claim that this was an *unreasonable* doctrine did not hold water because Christ had said at the time of the institution, "This is My body." Since Christ had said it, that ended the matter. For His Word is the highest authority, and whether human reason can or cannot grasp it was altogether beside the point. Nothing was to drive him from the simple and clear words of his Lord and Master.

That there should be a desire for a union between the reform movements in Germany and Switzerland was to be expected. If the two parties could be united, they might then take a united stand against the Romanists. In order to bring about such a union, the German Landgrave Philip of Hesse arranged a meeting in which the doctrinal difficulties should be ironed out. He invited the representative men on both sides to his castle at Marburg in Hesse. For this reason the meeting is called the Colloquy of Marburg. Luther went there reluctantly, as he did not think an agreement could be reached. The historic discussion took place on Saturday and Sunday, October 2 and 3, 1529.

Luther was the chief spokesman on his side, Zwingli and Ecolampadius on the other. When Zwingli, in the course of the debate, insisted that it was against reason to believe the true body of Christ in heaven could be in so many places on earth when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, Luther said that not human reason, which errs, must decide the question, but the plain Word of God. He raised the velvet cloth on the table before him and wrote out the words with a piece of chalk, "This is My body." To that text he adhered. Nothing could move him to leave it. When Zwingli said *is* means *represents*, Luther replied that *is* means *is*, for that was what Christ had said.

In the end they had to part without reaching an agreement on this point.

There could be no union without unity. Still, in spite of the difference between them, Zwingli said: "There are no people on earth with whom I should rather unite than with the Wittenbergers." Luther had to tell him, sadly, "You have a different spirit from ours."

The two parties separated peaceably, as Luther wrote to a friend: "Nevertheless we gave them the hand of peace and charity, agreeing that bitter words and writings should be stopped and each should teach his own opinion without invective, but not without argument and defense. So we parted."

Thus Luther also in this controversy stood out as the champion of the Word of God.

## 14. The Augsburg Confession

What is the next scene in the great historic panorama unfolding before our eyes?

The protest of Spires was rejected by Emperor Charles V. The messengers who conveyed it to him were treated like prisoners. They had to make their escape in the dark of the night. The whole question regarding Luther and his doctrines was still hanging fire.

The emperor therefore called another diet, this one to convene in the ancient city of Augsburg in the spring of 1530. He courteously invited the evangelical princes to attend it and to work together with him to heal the sad division in the Church. All animosities were to be put aside, and everyone's views were to be heard in love and kindness. Elector John the Constant of Saxony, who had succeeded Frederick the Wise after the latter's death in 1525, ordered Luther and his co-workers Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, and Justus Jonas to draw up brief articles in defense of the evangelical doctrines and practices. While the work was under way, Dr. Eck, Luther's old opponent, issued a book against Luther in which he charged the Reformer with being as bad as the ancient heretics. "Eck ceases not to circulate against us the most diabolical calumnies," Melanchthon said later. Therefore it was decided to change the articles of defense into articles of faith, so that the Lutherans might be able to prove to all the world that they were not heretics, but believers in the old orthodox, apostolic, Christian creed. Melanchthon was given the task of putting the document into the right form; he worked on it until the time for its presentation.

On April 3, 1530, the elector, together with Luther, Melanchthon, and Jonas, started out from Wittenberg for Augsburg. After a twelve-day journey they arrived at Coburg. Luther was allowed to go no farther for he was still an outlaw of the empire, and for him to pass out of the domain of the elector with safety was out of the question. The others resumed the journey southward leaving him at the beautiful Coburg Castle.

It was there that Luther spent many months praying for the cause which this time he could not represent himself and which his friends had to defend for

him.

Luther was, of course, in constant communication with his friends, and they turned to him again and again for encouragement and counsel. Comparing his stay in the castle on the hill with the going of Moses to the top of a hill near Mount Sinai, where the great leader raised his hands in prayer for the success of Israel's cause, Luther now pleaded night and day with God for His blessing upon the defenders and confessors of the truth at Augsburg. "He was the real general of the spiritual war that was then waging. His letters ceased not to bear to the contestants the directions which they needed, and numerous pamphlets issuing from his stronghold, like discharges of musketry, spread confusion in the enemy's camp," says the historian D'Aubigné.

There are many things that could be told about Luther's stay at Coburg, some sad and some happy. Not long after he came there, the news reached him that his aged father had died peacefully in the true faith. It was with a grief-rent heart that he exclaimed: "Alas! it is by the sweat of his brow that he made me what I am." In addition, he suffered from such a severe illness that the elector had to send a physician from Augsburg. "At Coburg," he said, "I sometimes felt as though death were not far off, and I would look about for a place where they might bury me." To Melanchthon he wrote: "My dear Philip, I cannot write at any length. My headache is again so severe that I cannot read your letter with any understanding. I can hardly bear to see the light."

Meanwhile the preparations for the diet were well under way at Augsburg. Melanchthon and the other supporters of Luther were doing their best to get their confession into suitable form. When it was completed, Melanchthon sent a copy of it to Luther for his criticism. Luther's approval was expressed in the words: "I am well pleased with it and cannot see how I could improve or change it; nor would it be proper for me to attempt it, for I cannot step so softly and gently. Christ, our Lord, grant that it may bring forth rich abundance of precious fruit. This is our hope and prayer."

The emperor, after much delay, finally arrived at Augsburg. It was his wish that all the princes, including the evangelicals, take part in a Corpus Christi procession with him the next day. The Lutherans begged to be excused. "An act of worship is in question," they replied. "Our conscience forbids it." The emperor also forbade the Lutheran ministers who had come to Augsburg to preach any longer, for they had attracted immense crowds, to the envy and disgust of the Romanists. The Lutheran princes begged the emperor not to silence the preaching of the pure Gospel. When the opponents refused to listen to their petition, one of the Lutherans, the Margrave of Brandenburg, stepped forward and stretched out his neck toward the emperor, exclaiming: "Rather than allow the Word of the Lord to be taken from me, rather than deny my God, I would kneel down before Your Majesty and have my head cut off!" Charles V was surprised and agitated. He hastily cried out in broken German, a language which he could not speak well, "Dear Prince, not the head off, not the head off!"

After various discussions and delays, the emperor at last set the time for



the presentation of the Lutheran articles of faith--June 25--"destined to be the greatest day of the Reformation and one of the most glorious in the history of Christianity and mankind." Two days before, the Lutheran princes met at the elector's. Melancthon had completed the document. It was ready for their signatures. The spirit in which these men signed that historic paper is noteworthy. Each prince knew that he might lose everything, even his life, if he signed it. The statement of the Prince of Anhalt is typical. He declared as he wrote his name:" I would rather quit the country of my father, staff in hand, rather gain my bread by cleansing the shoes of the foreigners, than receive any other doctrine than that which is contained in this confession."

At length the great day came on which the confession was to be presented. The chapel where the meeting was to be held, with a seating capacity of two hundred, was soon filled. All around the building a great crowd of eager listeners was gathered. Through the open windows they hoped to hear what was going on. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Charles V seated himself on his throne. The Lutheran princes stood up as the two chancellors of the Saxon elector, Brueck and Beyer, stepped before the throne, one with a Latin, the other with a German copy of the confession in his hands.

It was agreed that the German copy be read. Chancellor Beyer, in a clear and sonorous voice, began to read slowly and distinctly so that his words could be heard also by many in the courtyard below. There was rapt attention even though the reading took two hours. And the effect was startling. Many who had heard only the criticism against the Lutherans from the lips of their enemies were surprised to hear now with their own ears that the teachings of the Lutherans were orthodox. "I have been misinformed concerning this doctrine," Duke William of Bavaria said to John the Constant. "It is the truth, the pure truth; we cannot deny it!" exclaimed the Bishop of Augsburg, in whose palace the meeting was held.

When Luther at Coburg heard that the confession had been read and how it had been received, he wrote the elector:

"The adversaries imagine they have done a wonderful thing by forbidding the preaching of the Gospel, and they do not see, poor simpletons, that by the reading of the confession in the presence of the diet there has been more preaching than in the sermons of ten doctors. What bright people they are! Master Agricola and the other ministers are reduced to silence, but in their place appear the Elector of Saxony and the other princes and lords who preach before His Imperial Majesty and the members of the whole empire freely, to their beard and before their noses. Yes, Christ is in the diet, and He does not keep silence; the Word of God cannot be bound. They forbid it in the pulpits and are forced to hear it in the palace. Poor ministers cannot announce it, and great princes proclaim it. The servants are forbidden to listen to it, and their masters are compelled to hear it. They will have nothing to do with it during the whole course of the diet, and they are forced to submit to hear more in one day than is heard ordinarily in a whole year....When all else is silent, the very stones cry out, as says our Lord Jesus Christ."

To Cardinal Albert, Primate of Germany, Luther wrote a few weeks later:

"Your Highness as well as the other orders of the empire has doubtless read the confession delivered by our people, which, I am persuaded, is so composed that with joyous lips it may say with Christ, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite me?' It shuns not the light and can sing with the psalmist, 'I will speak of Thy testimonies before kings and will not be ashamed.' But I can well conceive that our adversaries will by no means accept the doctrine; much less, however, are they able to confute it. I have no hope whatever that we can agree in doctrine, for their cause cannot bear the light. Such is their bitterness, with such hatred are they kindled, that they would endure hell itself rather than yield to us and relinquish their new wisdom. I know that this our doctrine is true and grounded in the Holy Scriptures. By this confession we clearly testify and demonstrate that we have not taught wrongly or falsely."

"Thus," as one historian puts it, "the seed which Luther had sown had grown wonderfully. June 25, 1530, is properly regarded as the real birthday of the Lutheran Church. From this day on she stands before all the world as a body united by public confession and separate from the Roman Church. The lone but courageous confessor of Worms saw himself surrounded with a stately host of true Christian heroes, who were not afraid to place their names under his confession, although they knew that it might cost them goods and blood, life and limb."

The Diet of Augsburg, which was intended to crush the Lutherans, really strengthened them. From now on it was no longer a lone monk battling for this cause, but a Church, with a confession, the Augsburg Confession, taking its place among the religious bodies of the world--a Church with the proud distinction of being the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament.

Faith of our fathers, *living* faith,  
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword!  
It cannot die because its springs  
Flow from the ever-living Word.  
Faith of our fathers, living faith;  
Lord, keep us in this faith till death!

Faith of our fathers, *precious* faith,  
Like jewel brought from darksome mine!  
Than god or silver more we prize  
The lustrous glory that is thine.  
Faith of our fathers, precious faith;  
Lord, keep us in this faith till death!

Faith of our fathers, *stalwart* faith,  
An anchor holding us secure  
Amid life's thund'ring wind and waves--  
The Word is its foundation sure.  
Faith of our fathers, stalwart faith;

Lord, keep us in this faith till death!

Faith of our father, *holy* faith,  
Thrice hallowed by the Savior's cross,  
To which we lift our trusting eyes  
And count for it all things but loss.  
Faith of our fathers, *holy* faith;  
Lord, keep us in this faith till death!

(*Karl Kretzmann*)

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## 15. Husband and Father

Now we must turn from the discussion of theology and controversy to tell a few things about the personal life of our hero.

While Luther was in the retirement of the Wartburg, he wrote many tracts and books, as we have already noted, attacking unscriptural practices that had gained a foothold in the life of the Church. One of these was a book on monastic vows. In it he also attacked the vow of celibacy and showed why no one need any longer feel himself bound by a vow that was against the natural order of things and not at all commanded by God's Word.

This book caused many parish priests as well as monks in the cloisters and also nuns in the nunneries to renounce their vows, leave the seclusion, and marry. Luther did all he could to encourage such actions, since he was thoroughly convinced that it is far better for Church and State as well as for the individual soul to have men and women live in pure wedlock than in unnatural celibacy, which often was only a life of gross immorality. Of course, his enemies railed against him. They said he had begun the reformation of the Church only because he wished to marry. But he did not marry at the time, although many of his followers urged him to do so. In fact, he remained unmarried for a number of years. Scoffingly his enemies charged him for not having the courage to do what he had counseled others to do.

When he returned to Wittenberg from the Wartburg, he took up his old abode in the Black Cloister there (called "black" because of the black robes of the Augustinian friars). In the course of time all the friars left, and he and the aged prior had the gloomy old building with its many cells all to themselves. It surely was a lonely place, even for a man as busy as Martin Luther always was. A wife and children would have helped to make it bright and cheerful. Still Luther remained single. As late as November, 1524, he wrote: "I am like the creature in the hands of the Lord whose heart He can kill and revive at any moment; but as my heart has stood hitherto and now is, it will not happen that I take to myself a wife. Not as though I never felt my flesh and sex, for I am neither wood nor stone; but marriage is foreign to my thoughts, for daily I await the death and the punishment of a heretic."

And yet he married in the following year--eight years after the publication of his famous theses on indulgences. How did he come to make up his mind?

Two years before, it happened that twelve nuns had escaped from a nunnery at Nimbschen, near Grimma. Three of them went to live with relatives, but the other nine did not know where to go. Since it was an unlawful act to help such runaway nuns, most people were afraid to do so. Finally it was thought that Luther might be able to do something for them. So Leonard Coppe of Torgau, at the risk of his life, hid them in herring barrels and brought them to Wittenberg.

We have the following letter of Luther about the affair, written to his friend George Spalatin:

"Wittenberg, April 10, 1523

"Grace and peace. Nine fugitive nuns, a wretched crowd, have been brought to me by honest citizens of Torgau. I mean Leonard Coppe and his nephew, Wolf Tomitsch; there is therefore no cause for suspicion. I pity them much, but most of all the others who are dying everywhere in such numbers in their cursed and impure celibacy. This sex, so very, very weak, joined by nature or rather by God to the other, perishes when cruelly separated. O tyrants! O cruel parents and kinsmen in Germany! O Pope and bishops, who can curse you enough? Who can sufficiently execrate the blind fury which has taught and enforced such things? But this is not the place to do it.

"You ask what I shall do with them. First I shall inform their relatives and ask them to support the girls. If they will not, I shall have the girls otherwise provided for. Some of the families have already promised me to take them; for some I shall get husbands if I can. Their names are: Magdalene von Staupitz, Elsa von Canitz, Ave Grosse, Ave von Schoenfeld and her sister Margaret, Laneta von Golis, Margaret and Catherine Zechau, and Catherine von Bora. Here are they who serve Christ, in need of true pity. They have escaped from the cloister in miserable condition. I pray you also to do the work of charity and to beg some money for me from your rich courtiers, so that I can support the girls a week or two until their kinsmen or others provide for them....The poor, who would willingly give, have nothing. The rich either refuse or give so reluctantly that they lose the credit of the gift with God and take up my time begging from them. Nothing is too much for the world and its way. Of my annual salary I have only ten or fifteen gulden left, besides which not a penny has been given me by my brothers or by the city. But I ask them for nothing, to emulate the boast of Paul, despoiling other churches to serve my Corinthians free....

"Farewell and pray for me.

"MARTIN LUTHER"

Luther found places for six of them. The three who remained in Wittenberg were Catherine von Bora and the sisters Ave and Margaret Schoenfeld. These

sisters afterwards married and moved away from Wittenberg. Catherine found a home with the family of a prominent citizen of the city. Jerome Baumgaertner of Nuremberg, a friend of Melanchthon's, fell in love with her and she with him. He left Wittenberg with the understanding that he would come back soon to claim her as his bride. Jerome, however, failed to return, and when Catherine heard that he had married a young girl of wealth, she became quite ill over the affair.

When a certain pastor named Glatz sued for her hand, Luther endeavored to persuade her to marry Glatz. This she definitely refused to do and told Luther's friend Amsdorf candidly that she was willing to marry--Luther.

The outcome of the whole matter was the marriage of Luther and Catherine von Bora in June, 1525. And a happy marriage it was. Luther's aged parents were present at the wedding celebration as were a number of friends.

All Germany was interested in that wedding, and presents came from all sides. The elector gave the bridal pair the Black Cloister and a hundred pieces of gold, the university a silver and gold loving-cup.

Twelve years later Luther wrote of his happy wedded life: "God be praised, I succeeded very well; for I have a pious and faithful wife on whom a man's heart may well rely....O dear Lord God, marriage is not an unnatural thing, but a gift of God, the very sweetest, most chaste life, far superior to all celibacy, when it turns out well."

So Catherine became mistress of the old Black Cloister and changed the friar's quarters into a real home--a happy home--a Christian home. Six children, in the course of time, came to bless this union--Hans, Elizabeth, Magdalene, Martin, Paul, and Margaret.

Catherine was a splendid manager and ruled her household well. "I would not change my Katie for France and Venice," said her proud husband, "because God has given her to me and other women have much worse faults; and she is true to me and a good mother to my children....The greatest happiness is to have a wife to whom you can trust your business and who is a good mother to your children. Katie, you have a husband who loves you; many an empress is not so well off."

Fortunate it was that he who had so many duties to perform had such an able helpmeet at his side, who conducted the affairs of the home so successfully that he did not have to neglect his important work.

Luther was a kind father to his children, though strict in the interest of good training and diligent in their religious instruction. When he was passing through the trying weeks at Coburg, he wrote to his wife frequently. His eldest son Hans was about four years old then, and the letter Luther wrote to him is a classic:

"Grace and peace in Christ, dear little son. I am glad to hear that you are studying and saying your prayers. Continue to do so, my son, and when I come home, I will bring you a pretty present.

"I know a lovely, pleasant garden where many children are. They wear golden jackets and gather nice apples under the trees, and pears and cherries, and purple plums and yellow plums, and sing, and run, and jump, and are happy, and have pretty little ponies with golden reins and silver saddles. I asked the man who owned the garden who they were. He said, 'They are the children who say their prayers and study and are good.' Then said I, 'Dear man, I also have a son, whose name is Hans Luther. May he come into the garden and eat the sweet apples and pears and ride a fine pony and play with these children?' Then the man said, 'If he says his prayers and is good, he may come into the garden, and Phil and Justy, too; and when they all come, they shall have whistles and drums and fifes and shall dance and shoot little crossbows.' Then he showed me a fine, large lawn in the garden for dancing, where hung real golden whistles and fine silver crossbows. But it was yet early and the children had not finished eating, and I could not wait to see them dance. So I said to the man, 'My dear sir, I must go and write at once to my dear little Hans about all this, so that he will say his prayers and study and be good, so that he may come into the garden. And he has an Auntie Lena whom he must bring with him.' Then the man said, 'All right, go and tell him about it.' So, dear little Hans, study and say your prayers and tell Phil and Justy to say their prayers and study too, so you may all come into the garden together. God bless you! Give Auntie Lena my love and a kiss from me.

Your loving father,

MARTIN LUTHER"

Elizabeth did not live to be a year old. Magdalene died when she was thirteen. How the father's heart was torn with their loss! At Magdalene's bedside he prayed in true Christian resignation: "Lord, I love her very much and would like to keep her. But, dear Lord, since it is Thy will to take her away, I am glad to know that she will be with Thee." Upon her grave he placed this sweet epitaph:

Here rest I, Luther's daughter, Magdalene,  
With all the saints, upon my bed, serene.  
Although by nature born in sin  
And lost in death I would have been,  
Henceforth I live and have the highest good,  
Eternal life, through Jesus' precious blood.

In spite of these sorrows and other trials that entered Luther's home, it was an extremely happy one. A French writer who got his insight into the family life at the Black Cloister from Luther's *Table-talk*, has this to say: "Among these joys Luther had those of the heart, of the man, the innocent happiness of the family and home. What family more holy, what home more pure?"

## 16. Table-Talk

Luther was a voluminous writer. Few men have equaled him in literary output. We have from time to time in our story mentioned his writings and quoted from them. Besides his translation of the Bible, he wrote commentaries on various books of the Bible. His commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is perhaps the best of these; it has been translated into other languages. These commentaries of Luther are being read and studied by men in all parts of the world even today. Luther also published many sermons and books on religious questions, all of them in the interest of the reformation of the Church. He wrote many letters. Theologians, educators, doctors, princes, even kings, were in correspondence with him.

One interesting volume which Luther did not write himself, but the contents of which are nevertheless by him, is his *Table-talk*. In it the human side of this great man is so nicely shown that it has become one of the most widely known books of Luther. Carlyle calls it "the most interesting of all books proceeding from Luther, with many unconscious displays of the man--and what a nature he had!"

This volume had the following origin. Luther was very hospitable. Friends were frequently invited. Poor students of the university were guests at his table. Luther's private secretary and his friends were also present for a time. Various of these guests got into the habit of writing down the comment and observations which Luther made during the course of the conversation at meals. Sometimes the talk was about deep theological questions; sometimes Luther told incidents of his childhood or of his experience in the cloister, at Rome, at Erfurt, and the like.

In the following paragraphs a number of these comments are given.

### Music

Music is a fair, beautiful gift of God and near theology. I would not give up my little music for a great deal. The young should always be trained in this art; for it makes fine, skillful people.

### The Birds in the Garden

Towards evening one day two little birds which had their nest in the Doctor's garden came flying and were frequently frightened away by passersby. The Doctor said: "Oh, dear little birds, don't fly away! You are welcome to all you can find here if you could only believe me. Even so we do not trust and believe God as we should, who gladly grants and gives us every good thing."

### God's Almightyness Even in the Smallest Things

All of God's works are plainly to be seen, yet they are incomprehensible and unfathomable. For who can say how God made the smallest thing or the least creature, how He gave the flea or the louse its legs or to man a

seeing eye? In all creatures, even in the very smallest and even in their members, God's almightiness and great miracles shine and can be seen. Which person, however wise and holy, can make of a fig a fig tree or another fig, or of a cherry seed another such seed or a cherry tree? Or how could he know in what manner God created all things and lets trees and other plants grow and preserves them?

### The Bible Tree

Doctor Luther once spoke with sadness of the factions and sects that despised God's Word. "Oh, that I were a good poet! I would then gladly write a precious song of the benefit, the power, and the fruit of the divine Word. For without God's Word, all is nothing and in vain. Therefore God has bound us to His Word. I have now for several years read the Bible through twice each year, and as if the Bible were a great, large, mighty tree and all the words were limbs and branches, I would knock at all the limbs and little branches, anxious to know what was on them and what they could do, and always I shook down a few more apples and pears."

### God's Word Alone

After Doctor Martinus and others had one day told each other humorous things for quite a long time, they began to speak of a serious matter--the life to come. The Doctor gave this as his opinion: "There will be a new heaven and a new earth. The flowers, leaves, grass, will be so beautiful and fair and as lovely as an emerald, and all creatures will be most beautiful. We shall then be as we now fain would be. The eyes and lashes will then sparkle and glisten like polished silver. The members and fingers that we now have we shall have again, but in a different form, all glorified. There will be everything that we here would like to have: righteousness, peace, joy, blessedness; and we shall be free from all sickness, diseases, and misfortune. If God has made this temporal, perishable kingdom--heaven and earth and all that in them is--so beautiful, how much fairer will yonder imperishable and eternal kingdom be!"

### Knowing that Our Doctrine Is Correct

Above all, we must know whether this our doctrine that we teach is the Word of God. For if we know that, we can firmly build on it that it shall and must abide, and no devil shall upset it, much less the world with all its courtiers, however much they may rage and rave.

### What the Bishop of Mainz Thought of the Bible

At the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Bishop Albrecht of Mainz once read in the Bible. Accidentally one of his councilors came along and said to him, "Gracious Lord, what is Your Reverence doing with that book?" He answered, "I don't know what kind of book that is, for everything that is in it is against us."

### The Greatest Harm

We could suffer no greater harm than that God's Word be taken from us or



adulterated, so that it were no longer pure among us. May God guard and protect us and ours from this harm! May He rather let us die or be killed by the Turk before such trouble comes, or otherwise may He let us die blessedly, in grace!"

### Luther Learning the Catechism

Luther said: "Though I am an old Doctor of Holy Scripture, yet I have not finished what the children learn. I do not yet fully understand the Ten Commandments of God, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer. I cannot study and learn it all, but I still study at it daily and pray the Catechism with my son Hans and my little daughter Margaret."

### To Worms in 1521

As the emperor's herald had summoned me on Tuesday after Easter, the escort started the following day and returned to Worms, where they damned me and burned my books. Then, when I came to Erfurt, I was informed that I had already been condemned at Worms. Public warnings against me were posted in all the cities. So the herald asked me whether I still intended to proceed to Worms. Though the question made me fear and tremble, I answered him, "I will enter the city though as many devils be there as tiles on the roofs."

### Of Guns and Artillery

They are a cruel, destructive instrument, that bursts walls and rocks and blows up the people into the air. I believe they were invented by the devil himself in hell. Against guns neither strength nor courage avails; they bring death before one sees them. If Adam had seen the instrument that his children have made, he would have died of grief.

### Wonder Food

Christ one day fed five thousand, besides women and children, with five loaves, so that they were all satisfied; and then they gathered up twelve baskets full of fragments that remained. If such a miracle were performed today, all the world would wonder, as the people also did then. But fleshly hearts do not see and notice that God daily and constantly performs great miracles. They do not think of them, much less do they marvel at them and thank God for them. The Lord gives water out of a rock; bread, wine, beer, butter, and cheese out of the sand. The ground supplies us with all kinds of vegetables and fruits, with gold, silver, brass, etc. But because He gives all this unceasingly and in such abundance, no one regards it as a miracle.

### Too Many Books

Doctor Luther once complained of the great number of books, saying that there was no end or limit to them because everyone wanted to make books. "Some do it for their glory," said he, "so they will be praised and get a great name thereby. Some do it for gain and thus further the evil. So through many books the dear Bible is buried and covered, so that the text is not given any attention. When I was young, I accustomed myself to the

Bible, read it often, and made myself familiar with the text. I became so well acquainted with it that I knew where every text was written when it was spoken of. I wish all my books were buried nine yards under the earth on account of the evil example which many might follow--writing many books to become renowned. Christ did not die that we should glorify ourselves, but He died that His name alone may be hallowed."

#### Of God's Unceasing Kindness

If our heavenly Father were not so liberal in the distribution of His gifts, we should be more thankful to Him. If, for instance, He would let all men be born with only one leg or foot and later on, in his seventh year, would give him the other leg and in his fourteenth year would give him one hand and the other at the age of twenty, then we should appreciate God's gifts and benefits more and prize them more highly; and we should be more thankful if for awhile we were deprived of them and had to do without them. But now God showers His gifts upon us all at once. Just now He has given us a whole ocean of His Word. He also gives us freely all manner of languages and arts. All kinds of good books can be cheaply bought for little money. And in addition, He gives learned men who can teach correctly and skillfully so that a young boy, if he is no dunce, can learn and study more in one year than boys formerly could in several years--so cheap is education at present. Woe unto us who are so lazy, careless, neglectful, and unthankful!

#### Remarkable Preachers

When Dr. Martinus saw the cattle in the pasture field, he said: "There go our preachers--the milk-carriers, butter-carriers, cheese-carriers, wool-carriers that daily preach faith in God, that we should trust Him as our Father; for He will care for us and feed us."

#### The Rose

Luther had a rose in his hand and admired it as a beautiful handiwork, a creature of God wonderfully made, and said: "If any man were able to make a single rose, he ought to be presented with an empire. But the many, yea, countless gifts of God are not noticed because they are so common and we daily use them. So they are not highly valued, and men think it must be so."

#### Kindness Often Wasted

I was frequently deceived by impudent beggars and vagabonds. I once clothed one and gave him a generous amount to take with him, and he was a desperate rogue. He came to me and asked my advice in a matter of conscience, and I comforted him. But he deceived me! I thought all people were like myself.

#### More Good than Bad in Nature

Although original sin deserves to be punished with many wild, bad beasts that injure men, as for instance lions, wolves, bears, snakes, etc., yet

our merciful, gracious God has so lessened our punishment that a much greater number of animals must benefit and serve us. Is it not true that there are many more sheep than wolves, many more lobsters than scorpions, a much greater number of fishes than of snakes, more oxen than lions, more cows than bears, more rabbits than foxes, more ducks, geese, and chickens than vultures and crows--a great many more of the good than of the bad? And a careful comparison would convince anyone that there are by far more useful animals than harmful ones, and that in all creatures more good than bad traits, more benefit than harm, can be found. Nobody can imagine how much good our God does to us through the elements. The earth brings forth trees, furnishes wood, all kinds of animals, ore, rivers of water, wells, all kinds of grain, herbs, also wool. Who can enumerate all the benefits that we derive from the ground? It is all created for us, the human race.

### An Experience with a Dying Man

Dr. Martin told of a certain Dr. Henning Goede, a lawyer at Wittenberg who did not know much of God. Luther came to him when he was sick and asked him how he was getting along. He said he was sick. Luther then said to him: "My dear man, you are weak, and you ought to make your peace with God. You had better take the Holy Sacrament so that you may be ready when God calls you." To this Dr. Henning replied: "Why, there is no need of that. God will not lock me out so suddenly." But it happened even as Luther had told the man. The following day he lost his speech and died soon after. Thus he went and did not know much of God. "Now," said the Doctor, "may we at all times be ready so that when God knocks at our door to summon us out of this life, we may be prepared to take a Christian leave from this world!"

## 17. To the Home Above

The last years of Luther's life were in a way the happiest, although there were dark clouds at times to hide the sunshine. For instance, bodily sickness afflicted him much. He was able to see the truth which he had restored to the Church spread into many directions. Where formerly only a few had found the light amidst the darkness and superstition of the Papacy, there multitudes now had that light and were guided by it in the way to life. In a will which he wrote with his own hand in 1542, Luther declared: "To me, a poor, unworthy, miserable sinner, God, the Father of mercy, has entrusted the Gospel of His dear Son and has kept me therein true and faithful. Through my means many in this world have received the Gospel and hold me to be a true teacher despite Popes, emperors, kings, princes, priests, and all the devils' wrath."

Early in the year 1546 he was called away from Wittenberg to Mansfeld. He had been requested by the Counts of Mansfeld to settle a dispute that had arisen between them. His health was by no means good, and he should not have undertaken the journey, especially not in midwinter; but he felt that it was the call of duty, and so he went. His three sons accompanied him. Luther wanted them to become acquainted with the place and scenes of his birth. At Halle he visited his old friend Justus Jonas, to whom he

presented a goblet with this inscription:

Luther this glass, himself a glass, does on a friend bestow  
That each himself a brittle glass may by this token know.

He journeyed on from Halle with a guard of honor of more than a hundred armed horsemen.

His wife, who was naturally worried about him, received many loving letters from him.

Finally Eisleben, the place of his birth, was reached. Here the meeting was to take place. Five times in fourteen days he wrote to his "dear Katie" from that town. His last letter, written after the trouble between the counts had practically been settled, told her of his intention to come home:

"Eisleben, February 14, 1546

"Grace and peace in the Lord. Dear Katie, we hope to come home this week if God will. God has shown great grace to the lords, who have been reconciled in all but two or three points. It still remains to make the brothers Count Albert and Count Gebhard real brothers. This I shall undertake today and shall invite both to visit me that they may see each other; for hitherto they have not spoken to each other, but have embittered each other by writing. But the young lords and the young ladies, too, are happy and make parties for fools' bells and skating and have masquerades and are very jolly, even Count Gebhard's son. So we see that God hears prayer.

"I send you the trout given me by the Countess Albert. She is heartily happy at this union.

"Your little sons are still at Mansfeld. [Hans, Martin, and Paul were visiting at Mansfeld while he transacted his business at Eisleben.] James Luther will take care of them. We eat and drink like lords here, and they wait on us so well--too well indeed, for they might make us forget you at Wittenberg. Moreover, I am no more troubled with the stone. Jonas' leg has become right bad; it is looser on the shinbone, but God will help it. [Dr. Jonas had gone along on this trip and had hit his leg against a trunk, injuring it badly.]

"You may tell Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, and Cruciger everything.

"A report has reached us here that Dr. Martin Luther has left for Leipzig or Magdeburg. Such tales are invented by those silly wisecracks, your countrymen. Some say the emperor is thirty miles from here, at Soest in Westphalia; some, that the French and the Landgrave of Hesse are raising troops. Let them say and sing; we will wait on God. God bless you!

"DR. MARTIN LUTHER"

On February 17, when everything had been brought to a happy conclusion, Luther suddenly complained of pains in the chest. The application of hot cloths relieved him sufficiently to enable him to join his friends at supper. Jonas and Coelius, the latter the counts' court preacher, were staying with him. When he returned to his room and had finished his usual evening prayer, the pains returned. His friends gave what relief they could and remained near him. His sons Paul and Martin had hurried to his bedside. Hans, however, was still away. To Jonas he said: "I was baptized here at Eisleben; how if I were to remain here?"

After a sleep of an hour or so he awoke and arose, and with the words "Into Thine hand I commit my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth," went to his bed in the adjoining room. Another attack came after midnight. Death was approaching, and he knew it. He prayed this beautiful prayer:

"O my heavenly Father, one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thou God of all comfort, I thank Thee that Thou hast given for me Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, in whom I believe, whom I have preached and confessed, loved and praised, whom the wicked Pope and all the godless shame, persecute, and blaspheme. I pray Thee, dear Lord Jesus Christ, let me commend my soul to Thee. I am certain that I shall be with Thee forever and that no one can ever, ever, tear me out of Thy hands....

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, Thou faithful God."

Other prayers and Scripture passages came from his lips at intervals.

When he was asked by Jonas and Coelius: "Venerable father, will you die steadfastly adhering to Christ and the doctrines you have preached?" he answered distinctly, "Yes!"

He passed away between two and three o'clock on that Thursday morning, February 18, 1546.

After a service the next day, held in St. Andrew's Church, at which Coelius preached the sermon, the funeral procession started out for Wittenberg, where the great Reformer was buried in the Castle Church, to the doors of which he had once nailed his theses against the sale of indulgences. His friend Bugenhagen preached the German sermon, and his friend Melanchthon delivered a Latin address.

What Luther meant to the Church of his day and what he should mean to us, his spiritual children, may be fittingly summed up with a paragraph from the communication of his death made to the students of Wittenberg University:

"Alas! passed away is the charioteer and chariot of Israel, who has guided the Church in this senile period of the world. For not human sagacity has discovered the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins and trust in the Son of God, but God has revealed it through this man, whom God Himself called forth, as we have seen. May we therefore love this man's memory and the

doctrine which he taught and be modest and consider the great tribulations and stupendous changes which will follow his demise! But Thou, O Son of God, Immanuel, crucified and resurrected for us, I supplicate Thee that Thou wouldst rule Thy Church, maintain and protect it. Amen."

God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure  
Shall now and evermore endure.