

CHAPTER II.

MARTIN LUTHER AND HIS ASSOCIATES.

MARTIN LUTHER was born the 10th of November, 1483, at Eisleben, in Saxony. His father was a miner, of Mansfield, and his ancestors were peasants, who lived near the summit of the Thuringian Forest. His early years were spent at Mansfield, in extreme poverty, and he earned his bread by singing hymns before the houses of the village. At the age of fifteen, he went to Eisenach, to a high school, and at eighteen entered the university of Erfurt, where he made considerable progress in the sciences then usually taught, which, however, were confined chiefly to the scholastic philosophy. He did not know either Greek or Hebrew, but read the Bible in Latin. In 1505, he took his degree of bachelor of arts, and, shortly after, his religious struggles commenced. He had witnessed a fearful tempest, which alarmed him, while on a visit at his father's house, and he was also much depressed by the death of an intimate friend. In that age, the serious and the melancholy generally sought monastic retreats, and Luther, thirsty after divine knowledge, and anxious to save his soul, resolved to forsake the world, and become a monk. He entered an Augustinian monastery at Erfurt, soon after obtaining his first degree. But the duties and studies of monastic life did not give his troubled soul the repose he sought. He submitted to all the irksome labors which the monks imposed; he studied the fathers and the schoolmen; he practised the most painful austerities, and fastings, and self-lacerations: still he was troubled with religious fears. His brethren encouraged his good works, but his perplexities and doubts remained. In this state of mind, he was found by Staupitz, vicar-general of the order, who was visiting Erfurt, in his tour of inspection, with a view to correct the bad morals of the monasteries. He sympathized with Luther in his religious feelings, treated him with great kindness, and recommended the reading of the Scriptures, and also the works of St. Augustine.

whose theological views he himself had embraced. Although St. Augustine was a great oracle in the Roman church, still, his doctrines pertaining to personal salvation differed in spirit from those which were encouraged by the Roman Catholic divines generally, who attached less importance to justification by faith than did the venerated bishop of Hyppo. In that age of abuses, great importance was attached, by the church, to austerities, penance, and absolutions for money. But Luther, deeply imbued with the spirit of Augustine, at length found light, and repose, and joy, in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This became more and more the idea of his life, especially at this time. The firmness of his convictions on this point became extraordinary, and his spiritual gladness now equalled his former depression and anxiety. He was soon to find a sphere for the development of his views.

Luther was consecrated as a priest in 1507, and in 1508 he was invited by Frederic, Elector of Saxony, to become a professor in the new university which he had established at Wittemberg. He was now twenty-five years of age, and the fact, that he should have been selected, at that early age, to teach dialectics, is a strong argument in favor of his attainments and genius.

He now began to apply himself to the study of the Greek and Hebrew, and delivered lectures on biblical theology; and his novel method, and great enthusiasm, attracted a crowd of students. But his sermons were more striking even than his lectures, and he was invited, by the council of Wittemberg, to be the preacher for the city. His eloquence, his learning, and his zeal, now attracted considerable attention, and the elector himself visited Wittemberg to hear him preach.

In 1512, he was sent on an embassy to Rome, and, while in Italy, obtained useful knowledge of the actual state of the hierarchy, and of morals and religion. Julius II., a warlike pontiff, sat on the throne of St. Peter; and the "Eternal City" was the scene of folly, dissipation, and clerical extortion. Luther returned to Germany completely disgusted with every thing he had seen—the levity and frivolity of the clergy, and the ignorance and vices of the people. He was too earnest in his religious views and feelings to take much interest in the works of art, or

the pleasures, which occupied the attention of the Italians; and the impression of the general iniquity and corruption of Rome never passed away, and probably gave a new direction to his thoughts.

On his return, in 1512, he was made doctor of divinity, then a great distinction, and renewed his lectures in the university with great ardor. He gave a new impulse to the studies, and a new form to the opinions of both professors and students. Lupinus and Carlstadt, his colleagues, were converts to his views. All within his sphere were controlled by his commanding genius, and extraordinary force of character. He commenced war upon the schoolmen, and was peculiarly hostile to Thomas Aquinas, whom he accused of Pelagianism. He also attacked Aristotle, the great idol of the schools, and overwhelmed scholasticism with sarcasm and mockery.

Such was the state of things when the preachers of indulgences, whom Leo X. had encouraged, in order to raise money for St. Peter's Church, arrived in the country round the Elbe. They had already spread over Germany, Switzerland, and France. Their luxury and extravagance were only equalled by their presumption and insolence. All sorts of crime were pardoned by these people for money. Among the most remarkable of these religious swindlers and pedlers was Tetzel. He was a friar of the Dominicans, apostolical commissioner, inquisitor, and bachelor of theology. He united profligate morals with great pretensions to sanctity; was somewhat eloquent, so far as a sonorous voice was concerned, and was very bold and haughty, as vulgar men, raised to eminence and power, are apt to be. But his peculiarity consisted in the audacity of his pretensions, and his readiness in inventing stories to please the people, ever captivated by rhetoric and anecdote. "Indulgences," said he, "are the most precious and sublime of God's gifts." "I would not exchange my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls, with my indulgences, than he, with his sermons." "There is no sin so great that the indulgence cannot remit it: even repentance is not necessary: indulgences save not the living alone,—they save the dead." "The very moment that the money clinks against the bottom of this chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies to heaven." "And do you know why

our Lord distributes so rich a grace? The dilapidated Church of St. Peter and St. Paul is to be restored, which contains the bodies of those holy apostles and which are now trodden, dishonored, and polluted."

Tetzel found but few sufficiently enlightened to resist him, and he obtained great sums from the credulous people. This abomination excited Luther's intensest detestation; and he accordingly wrote ninety-five propositions, and nailed them, in 1517, to the gates of the church, in which he denounced the traffic in indulgences, and traced the doctrine of absolution to the usurped power of the pope. He denied the value of his absolution, and maintained that the divine favor would only be granted on the condition of repentance and faith.

In these celebrated propositions, he struck at the root of scholastic absurdities, and also of papal pretensions. The spirit which they breathed was bold, intrepid, and magnanimous. They electrified Germany, and gave a shock to the whole papal edifice. They had both a religious and a political bearing; religious, in reference to the grounds of justification, and political, in opening men's eyes to the unjust and ruinous extortions of Rome.

Among those who perceived with great clearness the political tendency of these propositions, and rejoiced in it, was the elector of Saxony himself, the most powerful prince of the empire, who had long been vexed, in view of the vast sums which had been drained from his subjects. He also lamented the corruptions of the church, and probably sympathized with the theological opinions of Luther. He accordingly protected the bold professor, although he did not openly encourage him; or form an alliance with him. He let things take their course. Well did Frederic deserve the epithet of *Wise*.

There was another great man who rejoiced in the appearance of Luther's theses; and this was Erasmus, the greatest scholar of his age, the autocrat of letters, and, at that time, living in Basle. He was born in Rotterdam, in 1467, of poor parents, but early attracted notice for his attainments, and early emancipated himself from the trammels of scholasticism, which he hated and despised as cordially as Luther himself. He also attacked, with elegant sarcasm the absurdities of his age both in literature and

morals. He denounced the sins and follies of the monks, and spoke of the necessity of reform. But his distinguishing excellence was his literary talent and taste. He was a great Greek scholar, and published a critical edition of the Testament, which he accompanied with a Latin translation. In this, he rendered great service to the reformers, especially to Luther. His fascinating style and extensive erudition gave him great literary fame. But he was timid, conservative, and vain; and sought to be popular, except among the monks, whom he uniformly ridiculed. One doctor hated him so cordially, that he had his picture hung up in his study, that he might spit in his face as often as he pleased. So far as Luther opposed monkery and despotism, his sympathies were with him. But he did not desire a radical reformation, as Luther did, and always shunned danger and obloquy. He dreaded an insurrection among the people, and any thing which looked either revolutionary or fanatical. Luther, therefore, much as he was gratified by his favor at first, soon learned to distrust him; and finally these two great men were unfriendly to each other.

Melancthon was too prominent an actor in the great drama about to be performed, to be omitted in this sketch of great men who were on the side of reform. He was born in 1497, and was, therefore, fourteen years younger than Luther. He was educated under the auspices of the celebrated Greek scholar Reuchlin, who was also a relative. At twelve, he was sent to the university of Heidelberg; at fourteen, was made bachelor of arts; and at seventeen, doctor of philosophy. He began to lecture publicly at the age of seventeen; and, for his extraordinary attainments, was invited to Wittenberg, as professor of ancient languages, at the age of twenty-one. He arrived there in 1518, and immediately fell under the influence of Luther, who, however, acknowledged his classical attainments. He was considered a prodigy; was remarkably young looking, and so boyish, that the grave professors conceived but little hope of him at first. But, when he delivered his inaugural oration in Latin, all were astonished; and their prejudices were removed. Luther himself was enthusiastic in his praises, and a friendship commenced between them, which was never weakened by a quarrel. The mildness and gentle-

ness of Philip Melancthon strongly contrasted with the boldness, energy, and tumultuous passions of Luther. The former was the more learned and elegant; the latter was the superior genius — a genius for commanding men, and guiding great enterprises.

But there was another great personage, who now viewed the movement of Luther with any thing but indifference; and this was Leo X., the reigning pope when the theses were published. He belonged to the illustrious family of the Medici, and was chosen cardinal at the age of thirteen. He was the most elegant and accomplished of all the popes, patronized art and literature, and ornamented his capital with palaces, churches, and statues. But with his sympathy for intellectual excellence, he was prodigal, luxurious, and worldly. Indeed, his spirit was almost infidel. He was more ambitious for temporal than spiritual power; and, when he commenced his reign, the papal possessions were more extensive and flourishing, than at any previous period. His leading error was, his recklessness in the imposition of taxes, even on the clergy themselves, by which he lost their confidence and regard. With a very fine mind, he was, nevertheless, quite unfitted for his station and his times.

Thus far, he had allowed the outcry which Luther had raised against indulgences to take its course, and even disregarded the theses, which he supposed originated in a monkish squabble. But the Emperor Maximilian was alarmed, and wrote to the pope an account of Luther's differences with Tetzl. Frederic of Saxony had also written to his holiness, to palliate the conduct of Luther.

When such powerful princes became interested, Leo was startled. He summoned Luther to Rome, to be tried by Prierias. Luther, not daring to refuse, and not willing to obey, wrote to his friend Spalatin to use his influence with the elector to have his cause tried in Germany; and the pope, willing to please Frederic, appointed De Vio, his legate, to investigate the matter. Luther accordingly set out for Augsburg, in obedience to the summons of De Vio, although dissuaded by many of his friends. He had several interviews with the legate, by whom he was treated with courtesy and urbanity, and by whom he was dissuaded from his present courses. But all the persuasion and argument of the cardinal legate were without effect on the mind of Luther, whose

convictions were not to be put aside by either kindness or craft. De Vio had hoped that he could induce Luther to retract; but, when he found him fixed in his resolutions, he changed his tone, and resorted to threats. Luther then made up his mind to leave Augsburg; and, appealing to the decision of the sovereign pontiff, whose authority he had not yet openly defied, he fled from the city, and returned to Wittenberg, being countenanced by the elector, to whom he also addressed letters. His life was safe so long as Frederic protected him.

The next event in the progress of Luther was the Leipsic disputation, June, 1519. The pope seemed willing to make one more effort to convince Luther, before he proceeded to more violent courses. There was then at his court a noble Saxon, Charles Miltitz, whose talents and insinuating address secured him the high office of chamberlain to the pope. He accordingly was sent into his native country, with the dignity of legate, to remove the difficulties which De Vio had attempted. He tried persuasion and flattery, and treated the reformer with great civility. But Luther still persisted in refusing to retract, and the matter was referred to the elector archbishop of Trèves.

While the controversy was pending, Dr. Eck, of the university of Ingolstadt, a man of great scholastic ingenuity and attainment, and proud of the prizes of eight universities, challenged the professors of Wittenberg to a public controversy on Grace and Free Will. He regarded a disputation with the eye of a practised fencer, and sought the means of extending his fame over North Germany. Leipsic was the appointed arena, and thither resorted the noble and the learned of Saxony. Eck was among the first who arrived, and, soon after, came Carlstadt. Luther and Melancthon.

The place for the combat was a hall in the royal palace of Duke George, cousin to the elector Frederic, which was arranged and ornamented with great care, and which was honored by the presence of the duke, and of the chief divines and nobles of Northern Germany. Carlstadt opened the debate, which did not excite much interest until Luther's turn came, the antagonist whom Eck was most desirous to meet, and whose rising fame he hoped to crush by a brilliant victory. Ranke thus describes Luther's

person at this time. "He was of the middle size, and so thin as to be mere skin and bone. He possessed neither the thundering voice, nor the ready memory, nor the skill and dexterity, of his distinguished antagonist. But he stood in the prime of manhood and in the fulness of his strength. His voice was melodious and clear; he was perfectly versed in the Bible, and its aptest sentences presented themselves unbidden to his mind; above all, he inspired an irresistible conviction that he sought the truth. He was always cheerful at home, and a joyous, jocose companion at table; he even, on this grave occasion, ascended the platform with a nosegay in his hand; but, when there, he displayed the intrepid and self-forgetting earnestness arising from the depth of a conviction, until now, unfathomed, even by himself. He drew forth new thoughts, and placed them in the fire of the battle, with a determination that knew no fear and no personal regard. His features bore the traces of the storms that had passed over his soul, and of the courage with which he was prepared to encounter those which yet awaited him. His whole aspect evinced profound thought, joyousness of temper, and confidence in the future. The battle immediately commenced on the question of the authority of the papacy, which, at once intelligible and important, riveted universal attention." Eck, with great erudition and masterly logic, supported the claim of the pope, from the decrees of councils, the opinions of scholastics, and even from those celebrated words of Christ to Peter — "Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my church," &c. Luther took higher and bolder ground, denied the infallibility of councils, and appealed to Scripture as the ultimate authority. Eck had probably the advantage over his antagonist, so far as dialectics were concerned, being a more able disputant; but Luther set at defiance mere scholastic logic, and appealed to an authority which dialectics could not reach. The victory was claimed by both parties; but the result was, that Luther no longer acknowledged the authority of the Roman church, and acknowledged none but the Scriptures.

The Leipsic disputation was the grand intellectual contest of the Reformation, and developed its great idea — the only great principle, around which all sects and parties among the Protestants rally. This is the idea, that *the Scriptures are the only ultimate*

grounds of authority in religion, and that, moreover, every man has a right to interpret them for himself. The rights of private judgment — that religion is a matter between the individual soul and God, and that every man is answerable to his own conscience alone how he interprets Scripture — these constitute the great Protestant platform. Different sects have different views respecting justification, but all profess to trace them to the Scriptures. Luther's views were similar to those of St. Augustine — that "man could be justified by faith alone," which was *his* great theological doctrine — a doctrine adopted by many who never left the communion of the Church of Rome, before and since his day, and a doctrine which characterized the early reformers, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, Cranmer, and the Puritans generally. It is as absurd to say that Luther's animating principle in religion was not this doctrine, as it is unphilosophical to make the reformation consist merely in its recognition. After Luther's convictions were settled on this point, and he had generally and openly declared them, the main contest of his life was against the papacy, which he viewed as the predicted Antichrist — the "scarlet mother of abominations." It is not the object of the writer of this History to defend or oppose Luther's views, or argue any cause whatever, but simply to place facts in their true light, which is, to state them candidly.

Although the Leipsic controversy brought out the great principle of the Reformation, Luther's views, both respecting the true doctrines and polity of the church, were not, on all points, yet developed, and were only gradually unfolded, as he gained knowledge and light. It was no trifling matter, even to deny the supremacy of the Roman church in matters of faith. He was thus placed in the position of Huss and Jerome, and other reformers, who had been destroyed, with scarcely an exception. He thus was brought in direct conflict with the pope, with the great dignitaries of the church, with the universities, and with the whole scholastic literature. He had to expect the violent opposition and vengeance of the pope, of the monks, of the great ecclesiastical dignitaries, of the most distinguished scholars, and of those secular princes who were friendly to Rome. He had none to protect him but a prince of the empire, powerful, indeed, and wise, but old and wavering. There were but few to uphold and defend him — the satirical

Erasmus, who was called a second Lucian, the feeble Staupitz, the fanatical Carlstadt, and the inexperienced Melancthon. The worldly-minded, the learned, the powerful, and the conservative classes were his natural enemies. But he had reason and Scripture on his side, and he appealed to their great and final verdict. He had singular faith in the power of truth, and the gracious protection of God Almighty. Reposing on the greatness of his cause, and the providence of the omnipotent Protector, he was ready to defy all the arts, and theories, and malice of man. His weapon was truth. For truth he fought, and for truth he was ready to die. The sophistries of the schools he despised; they had distorted and mystified the truth. And he knew them well, for he had been trained in the severest dialectics of his time, and, though he despised them, he knew how to use them. The simple word of God, directed to the reason and conscience of men, seemed alone worthy of his regard.

But, beside Scripture and unperverted reason, he had another element of power. He was master of the sympathies and passions of the people. His father was a toiling miner. His grandfather was a peasant. He had been trained to penury; he had associated with the poor; he was a man of the people; he was their natural friend. He saw and lamented their burdens, and rose up for their deliverance. And the people distinguished their true friend, from their false friends. They saw the sincerity, earnestness, and labors of the new apostle of liberty, and believed in him, and made an idol of him. They would protect him, and honor him, and obey him, and believe what he taught them, for he was their friend, whom God had raised up to take off their burdens, and point a way to heaven, without the intercession of priests, or indulgences, or penance. Their friend was to expose the corruptions of the clergy, and to give battle to the great arch-enemy who built St. Peter's Church from their hard-earned pittance. A spirit from heaven enlightened those to whom Luther preached, and they rallied around his standard, and swore never to separate, until the great enemies of the poor and the oppressed were rendered powerless. And their sympathies were needed, and best services, too; for the great man of the age — the incarnated spirit of liberty — was in danger.