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ARTICLE VII.

LUTHER AND HIS WORK.

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THE greatest movement of modern times is the Reformation of the sixteenth century, which began in Germany, and spread at length to every nation in Europe. The originator of the revolution in Germany, and its principal figure for more than a quarter of a century, was Martin Luther. No one can worthily describe the Reformation without assigning the first and most significant place to Luther and his work. And no man can speak intelligibly of Luther who does not dwell on this grand religious revolution. In its initial stages and primitive forms Luther is the Reformation embodied and in elemental ferment. And on the other hand, the Reformation is Luther's deeply scored mark upon the fortunes of Europe and the human race. So indissolubly are they connected in reality and in the thoughts of men.

The general movement throughout Protestant Christendom to mark with special recognition and suitable honors the fourth centennial of the birth of such a man is most deserved and appropriate. And it is as fit for us, in this new world all unknown at his birth, as for his own countrymen and descendants. The work which he began was hemmed in by no national boundaries, by no mountain ranges, by no ocean shores; its benefits were confined to no limits of time, to no single people or tongue. We who dwell in these latter days, whether in Europe or America, we all breathe an atmosphere which was cleared by that convulsion, and which is vital still with the original forces of that age; and Luther's was the spirit that raised the storm, his the thunder that pealed, his the lightnings that leaped and flashed. The

German people cannot justly claim Luther as all their own. They wrong his memory and limit his fame when they extol him simply as a great patriot, — to the German nation what Washington is to America. It was for Christendom that he spoke and toiled; and it is the whole Protestant world that has reaped the fruits of his labor, and that speaks his praise. The principal features of our modern life, those that have most worth, that hold within them most of hope and promise, can be traced directly to the Reformation, and to those parts of it in which Luther broke the way.

In the complex results of that revolution we find the work and trace the influence of many men, and they men of noble stature and of splendid gifts. But we cast no dispraise on any other one among all the heroic figures that fill that age, when we sing first and foremost the name and deeds of Martin Luther. He moved first and alone, at the sole call of conscience and of God, where many others pressed quickly after, and grandly took up the cause. His voice broke the silence, while as yet not another soul was impelled to speak. And when death was the alternative he stood by his words, and made it safe in all Europe to keep one's conscience and abide by the word of God. Many others took up his cry, and it ran throughout Christendom as if angels were its messengers, and filled every court and city and home with its lofty cheer. And this wide and prompt response was no small part of the providential preparation for this great crisis. The Reformation could not have come and taken root and wielded its power, if Melancthon and Zwingli and Calvin and Knox, if Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse and William of Orange, and a host besides, had not in their several ways wrought thereto. But we may say with almost the same propriety that there would have been no Reformation for these men to preach and champion into reality and external strength if Luther's God-given faith and courage had not led the way, and sounded the trumpet, and faced pope and emperor in the very seats of their power. That inspiring example was a moral necessity, to rally the healthy parts of

European society and fire them with enthusiasm in the work of reform. We shall never know how much we owe to those historic scenes at Wittenberg and Leipsic and Worms. Their meaning is quite beyond our poor words to utter. Europe became thereby another world in which to live and toil, and human nature seemed a nobler gift of God. Those glorious thunder-peals rived the darkness that oppressed the nations, and millions of human hearts leaped to life and liberty at that call. And the precise gloom that then rested like a pall upon the world never again shall fill the spaces of this earth or crush the souls of men.

The statue of Luther in the noble monument at Worms, amid the figures of theologians and reformers, of cities and princes, stands colossal and supreme. It is a grand embodiment of a most significant fact. In that great movement many men co-operated, forces of many kinds were combined, results in many fields have been realized. But high above all else the form and genius of Luther tower, and the revolution finds in him its centre and its crown.

A rapid sketch of the main epochs of Luther's life will aid us in recognizing the providential aspects of his career, and in estimating aright his character and special services to his own age and to subsequent times. Three periods may be quite distinctly marked: the first, from his birth to the beginning of the Reformation, from 1483 to 1517; the second, from the posting of the propositions respecting Indulgences to the Peasants' War, from 1517 to 1525; the third, from this beginning of political complications to his death, from 1525 to 1546. The first period is one of training and preparation; the second is the revolutionary and destructive epoch; the third is the constructive and polemic age.

The circumstances of his birth and early life have a bearing upon his career and influence sufficient to call our special attention to them. A genuine peasant, the descendant of a long line of peasants, he inherited nothing which especially fitted him for his later life save the elements of our common human nature in an unusually vigorous and unperverted

state. He was prepared to stand before princes and bishops and learned men by nothing which birth can give or station confer. His reliance, of necessity, was upon the native powers and rights of the human soul and the providence of God. This Saxon David met the papal and imperial Goliath full panoplied, with naught but his sling and stone and shepherd's staff, and in the name of God wounded the hoary giant unto death. Inured to poverty and hardship, often subjected to harsh discipline at home, at school, in the university, and in the cloister, he knew the sterner side of life from long and bitter experience. The four years at the schools of Magdeburg and Eisenach and the four years following at the University of Erfurt developed his rare mental powers and his rich social qualities, and won him many friends and warm commendations. At the completion of his studies he seemed to be on the high road to fame as a humanist and philosopher.

It is here at Erfurt, when about twenty years of age, that he first saw and read the Bible as a whole; and this was the marked beginning of his deeper religious experience. Moved by the deep truths of Scripture, by his own illness, by the sudden death of a near friend, and by a growing sense of sin, he gives up all his flattering worldly prospects, and, against the protest of his father and of many friends, enters the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. There by penances and mortifications, by fastings and vigils and scourgings, through mental struggles and spiritual agony which none can know but those who have come to peace by the same hard road, he wrestles desperately with the problem of personal salvation. "I wore out my body," he says, "with vigils and fastings, and hoped thus to satisfy the law and deliver my conscience from the sting of guilt." "I had a broken spirit and was ever in sorrow." He is profoundly in earnest, and will consent to no superficial and perfunctory relief. The hard yoke of the law oppresses him; his sense of sin is deep; the helplessness of his own soul drives him to despair. The Bible enlightens, but does not soothe him. The fathers deepen his

sense of sin and moral weakness. The church opens no effectual door of peace with God; its penances are mechanical; its absolution does not reach his soul or relieve the burden on his heart.

The way of true peace by personal access to God he finds out for himself, by slow and painful steps. An aged brother in the monastery comforts him by the words of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." The friendly words of the vicar-general of his order point him more plainly to the grace of the gospel. Augustine was a spiritual light in those days of gloom. Above all, the biblical sentence, "The just shall live by faith," rang in his ears and resounded in his soul, and became the clue by which he was led into the peace of God. His ordination to the priesthood in 1507, and his appointment to a professorship of philosophy in the University of Wittenberg in the following year, occur in the midst of this great spiritual struggle, and even give a deeper tone to his cry for deliverance. In 1511 he goes to Rome on a personal and official errand, to be completely disillusionized and scandalized by what he heard and saw in the holy city. This visit was of inestimable value to him in his later duel with the papacy; and it became also the crisis of his religious experience. Faithfully he performs the appointed penances and vows; diligently he visits the sacred shrines, but all in vain. Rome had no cure for a sin-sick soul. And at last, on his way homeward, the gracious truth that our sins are pardoned, not because of the works which we have done, not because of any priestly intercession or human merit, but because of God's free unbounded love, on the sole condition of faith, broke upon his mind and scattered all his doubts and fears. Face to face with God in Jesus Christ this poor soul stood, thrilled with the glorious truth and immovably possessed of the peace of God, which had come to him without priest or churchly aid, or sacrament, or work of merit, vouchsafed to faith alone.

That was the supreme epoch in Luther's inner life. From the truth and hope and glorious joy of that hour nothing

could ever shake him, no earthly power could move him, no facts or threats or doubts could ever beat him back.

> "If e'er, when faith had fallen asleep,
> He heard a voice, 'Believe no more';
> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath, the heart
> Stood up and answered, 'I have felt.'"

Luther is made a doctor of divinity in 1512, and then takes the oath which was the guiding principle of his later career: "to devote his whole life to study and faithfully expound and defend the Holy Scriptures." These biblical studies were a great comfort to his heart and an invaluable preparation for his task as a translator; and in them the course of his training for the work of reform was brought to a fruitful and happy completion.

We have now arrived at the threshold of the Reformation, and we must leave Luther a moment in order to see where and what the great evil was which he smote and the Reformation scattered. It is easy to mistake its character, to underestimate its proportions, and thus to misjudge the movement which was directed against it.

We must always bear in mind that the revolution which Luther sets in motion was religious first and most profoundly. This is its primary character. It had political bearings of great moment; it led to many and striking political results. But it was not a political revolution which Luther inaugurated; and when the political features came to the front, his wonted sagacity and courage failed him. Literary activities prepared the way of this new age, and aided its development at many points, and Luther was in hearty sympathy with this intellectual re-awakening. But it was not in these lines that Luther wrought, it was no new age of learning for which he wrote and toiled and hazarded his life. It is just here that Luther and Erasmus stand far apart. Luther was supremely interested in religion; and because religion was in peril he broke with the old order and called for reform. Erasmus was supremely interested in studies and culture;

and because the stir of religious reform interfered with these he broke with the new and stood by the old order with all its abuses. It is easy to see that nothing less than such religious convictions as Luther's would have sufficed to front those dangers and to snap those bonds.

The church had reached a degree of formalism and tyranny which was almost the precise contradiction of its original idea and early mission. It is only by a great effort that we can at all realize the abuses and glaring corruption of doctrines that had come into the church. And it is important to observe that this state of things had been reached by a process of natural development from false principles. Doubtless there was enough of ambition and selfishness and fraud in the hierarchical conception of the church and of salvation; but it was not all that. The evils which Luther felt and resented were the fruits of a false theory of the priesthood and of the church, which arose in purer days, and had been developed into a vast system through a thousand years of custom and precedents. Clergy and laity were sharply separated, and primary access to the truth and grace of God belonged only to the former; the laity enjoyed those things through the mediation of the clergy. The church, that is the clergy, was the almoner of salvation and all divine grace, and thus the organ of the most gracious and tender and sympathetic ministries which men can ever render or receive; and by a striking course of thought and development this medium of divine grace, this nursery of human souls, had become a prison-house and dungeon and nightmare, fast-locked fetters and goading whips and torments numberless.

The sacraments were essential to salvation; the clergy alone could give validity to any of the sacraments; and thus every spiritual grace to men, even the assurance of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life, was dependent on the capricious and uncertain favor of the priest. The sacraments had been increased in number, so as to be connected with every principal epoch of human life; and at every point the fate, the eternal fate, of men seemed to hang, not upon the

boundless mercy and grace of God, but on the offices and will of fallible and selfish men. Every avenue of approach to the living God and to Jesus Christ was guarded by a sacrament and barred to all effectual entrance save through priestly intercession. And this priestly aid had fallen away from the notion of ministry into the aspect of power, and in many cases had become a mere matter of purchase and sale, as though the grace of God were at the absolute disposal of the officiating priest. Upon such and such conditions the desired blessing was to be had; without those conditions nothing was to be had. Faith went for naught. Repentance availed nothing. Obedience was useless. Prayer could bring no peace. Worship yielded no blessing. The religious instincts of the soul were denied; the religious sentiments were made a means of holding the soul in fetters and filling it with superstitious dread. And the whole vast and immemorial power of the papacy and the hierarchy rested on this claim. It was a divine ordinance that the matter of salvation should be thus arranged. To break through this order was resistance not only to the authority of the church, but also to the will of God.

It is scarcely possible to conceive how complete a contradiction of the substance and spirit of the gospel had thus been effected, how absolute and hopeless was the authority that fettered the souls of men, that degraded the social instincts, that cast contempt on the family and on the state. The system of indulgences, by which for certain meritorious acts or for the payment of certain sums of money immunity from the consequences of sin could be secured for one's self, or for others, was an apt embodiment of the complete externalizing of religion, and of the utter secularizing of most holy offices which this order of things had produced. In it the course of development in false doctrine and evil practice had run its full round, and the unbought grace of God had become a ware in the market, to be knocked down by shameless hands to the highest bidder, without the slightest trace of spiritual life, or moral impulse anywhere to be discerned.

It is true that all this contradicted the original doctrines of the church, and was disowned in principle; and many within the church held to the truth and had spiritual communion with God. Luther deemed himself to be walking in the very path which the church approved, and never once dreamed that in seeking immediate access to God, and when he had found it in preaching this as the duty of all men, he was overstepping the bounds of churchly orthodoxy and leading in the greatest revolution of the ages. The best traditions and the purest lives of the Catholic church for sixteen centuries were all on Luther's side. He might well have expected that nothing could be needed for his vindication but to point out his harmony with the Scriptures and with this purer strain in the Christian life of the ages.

The historical connection of the sale of indulgences with the outbreak of the Reformation is by no means accidental or arbitrary. In this practice the core of the evils which rested upon the church was brought to expression in a concrete and palpable form. And Luther's personal experience precisely fitted him to discern and expose this abuse. And by a remarkable series of events the discovery of this error led to the detection of other errors, and the clue led on from these to others still, until at last the whole network of mediaeval corruption in doctrine and practice was laid bare to the view of all. By this system of indulgences conscience was offended and outraged; and Luther was a man to whom compromise in such a case was simply impossible. When this evil crossed Luther's path, the old and the new stood face to face; instinctively they grappled, and it was a life and death struggle with which all Europe was rocked.

When indulgences are brought near to Wittenberg, and those who have bought them come to Luther, to the confessional over which he presides, relying on these dismal wares for forgiveness rather than on God's mercy, Luther is scandalized and outraged. He stoutly refuses to absolve men unless they show penitence and promise amendment. He appeals to the elector against this abuse. He applies to the

bishops to silence this blasphemy. He preaches and protests and argues and admonishes. And at last, when all else is fruitless, he draws up ninety-five propositions defining the virtue of indulgences, and posts them on the door of the castle church of Wittenberg; and the die of the Reformation is cast.

It is worth while to observe the facts at this point somewhat carefully. Luther is not aiming at a reformation of the church, but at the suppression of an outrageous abuse. He speaks for the church against an evil which insults her fair name. He does not mean to thrust himself forward, or to make a stir of any kind, but to hush the voice of blasphemy and deception. His conscience drives him forward. His duty as a Christian pastor compels him to speak. He fears God and loves men's souls and hates falsehood too much to keep still while such shameful blasphemy and ruin of souls are going on. His theses are not half so revolutionary as his motive in drawing them and his firmness in defending them. He spoke the truth as God had given him to see it, and had made him to experience it; and he became a reformer and liberator of Germany because he would not take back one word of truth which he had uttered. He spoke and acted for himself alone. He meant simply to keep peace with conscience and with God. But in order to do that, as Providence had ordered events, he must encounter the church and the pope, the state and the emperor, and stand alone against them all.

The logic of the case was very simple and obvious. Tetzel's work was ruining men's souls and dishonoring God; there was nothing for a Christian man to do but to condemn that work and at all hazards bring it to deserved shame. If Tetzel stood by his work when reproved, then Tetzel must be resisted and exposed as an enemy of God and the church. If bishops and cardinals came to Tetzel's rescue, still the truth must be spoken, and they must be rebuked. If the pope upheld these deceivers and justifie the shameful iniquity, then, whatever it may cost, Luther must free his conscience,

and stand by the gospel against pope and cardinals and bishops and the whole force of a corrupt and blaspheming church. The path was as straight and plain as any that ever opened before the foot of man. But it was a path in every age untrod save by those elect souls who look on death with tearless eye and march unfaltering to prison and scaffold and stake. And it is Luther's glory that his brave heart never once relented, as step by step he advanced alone along that ominous path, and saw at last to what a perilous issue he was approaching. Who can ever tell how much we owe to this one man's truth and loyalty! That path which he entered with such alacrity and trod at such a risk and with such high devotion must be entered then, or the gloom would deepen, the fetters tighten, and the hope of deliverance be long delayed or quite withdrawn. With every breath of freedom increases our debt to him. With all the fruits of peace which the gospel yields in myriads of human hearts and homes his praise is mingled and his influence is are spread.

The Leipsic disputation of 1519 was most important to Luther and his cause. It forced him to see, what he had been very loth to acknowledge, that the pope might be in the wrong, and that loyalty to conscience might drive him to throw off allegiance to the papacy. In previous negotiations he had pledged himself to desist from all discussion if his assailants would do the same; and he was thus in a false and untenable position. Dr. Eck happily released him by renewing the attack upon him at Leipsic. And then, before a great public assembly, with a cunning and plausible but not able antagonist, Luther had the opportunity to renew his criticism of errors, and to speak out more boldly on the unscriptural pretensions of the papacy. It was here that Luther openly justified certain opinions of John Huss, and arraigned the Council of Constance for its treatment of Huss. This discussion and the correspondence which followed compelled deeper historical investigations, and revealed in new light the errors and corruptions of the church, and prepared Luther to contemplate the necessity of separating himself from it.

After long debate and agitation the papal bolt fell, and Luther was cut off from the communion of the Catholic church. He made the breach final by burning the bull of excommunication and renouncing allegiance to the pope and making his appeal to a general council. It is not long before he advanced from this ground, and planted himself on the Scriptures and the rights of conscience. Popes have erred. Councils have erred. Only the word of God and conscience are always binding, and there is no safety to any soul in neglecting these. Hear Luther's shrill voice insisting: "Thou must be as certain of the matter, that it is the word of God, as thou art certain that thou livest, and even more certain, for on this alone must thy conscience rest. .... Dost thou stand upon pope and councils? then the devil may at once knock a hole in thee, and insinuate, 'How, if it were false? how, if they have erred'? Then thou art laid low at once; therefore thou must bring conscience into play, that thou mayest boldly and defiantly say, 'That is God's word; on that I will risk body and life and a hundred thousand necks, if I had them.'"

When the pope could do no more the emperor took it up. The German nation was in sympathy with Luther, and the pope's ban was harmless. If the civil power did not come to the rescue Luther had won in the quarrel. Accordingly this matter was taken up sharply at the Diet of Worms, in 1521, where the young Spanish emperor, Charles V., first met the German estates. But the German princes had too many grievances of their own against the pope to relish the business of outlawing Luther; and Charles found that he must proceed cautiously. Luther is summoned to Worms, under the imperial protection, to give an account of himself before the Diet; and he promptly responds against many friendly warnings, fully convinced in his own mind that the fate of Huss and Jerome at Constance awaits him there. When the time arrives for him to appear before the emperor he commits himself to God "with strong crying and tears," and with his life in his hand stands alone in the presence of that

august assembly. Being asked if a pile of books lying there are his, he acknowledges them all. When required to retract what he had said in them, he asks time to consider his answer, and is dismissed until the following day. That interval he spends, not in composing his defence, not in examining his works, but in prayer and communion with God to strengthen himself for the deadly hour that is drawing on. At his second appearance he is required to give answer, without discussion, whether he will retract the things condemned in his writings. Then, first in Latin, and afterwards in German, he speaks the words which alone of all that were uttered in that grand assemblage are immortal. He describes his works; he acknowledges human infirmities; he professes himself ready to be corrected by argument and from the Scriptures. And in the true heroic strain he concludes: "I cannot and will not retract anything; for to act against conscience is unsafe and unholy. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen."

Who can tell what struggles of soul came upon him in that crucial hour? Life was as sweet to him as to any one of us. And life and honor and ease were his to command for one word of compliance. How many easier paths must have opened to his thoughts from that perilous place! And he turned away from them all to keep truth with conscience and with God. After that decisive step there was no further agony for him in axe or stake. It is doubtful if the earth has witnessed another scene in mortal life more full of greatness and sublimity. There are gathered the emperor, the papal legate, the great estates of the empire, the glory and strength of church and state. Here stands one poor monk alone, against them all. They bid him retract at peril of his life. He says that he must obey conscience and that he cannot retract; and steadfastly he marches forth to death. He cannot prove false to duty, but he can face death in God's behalf. What wonder that Germany idolized this glorious soul! What wonder that the generations have enshrined his name in gratitude and perpetual honor! What wonder that

so many nations and tongues unite to celebrate his birth and speak his growing praise! "If these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out." Lowell's verse needs scarce a change to fit the case:

> "Life may be given in many ways,
> And loyalty to Truth be sealed
> As bravely in the closet as the field,
> So bountiful is Fate;
> But then to stand beside her
> When craven churls deride her,
> To front a lie *enthroned* and not to yield,
> This shows, methinks, God's plan
> And measure of a stalwart man,
> Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
> Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth,
> Not forced to frame excuses for his birth —
> Fed from within with all the strength he needs."

The ban of the empire, which quickly follows the scene at Worms, becomes the critical question in the political fortunes of Germany for many years, and the movement ceases to be so nearly personal and assumes broader relations and a new direction. At a critical moment he comes forth from the exile in the Wartburg, where he had found personal safety, deeply needed rest for mind and heart, and opportunity for a broader view of the whole situation, to reassume the leadership at Wittenberg in a new character and to display courage and ability of the very highest order. A fanatical element has thrust itself in there, which threatens to drive the movement into wild excess and anarchy. Still under the ban, without legal protection of any kind, he boldly comes to Wittenberg, faces the false prophets and confounds them, preaches and labors incessantly for eight days, till the popular tumult is calmed and the Reformation is permanently rescued from this fanatical direction.

The centre and most active part of Luther's life lies between the years 1517 and 1525, that is, between the posting of the theses and the Peasants' War, when the Reformation has assumed force as a recognized and progressive movement in the empire and in Europe. These eight years were full to

overflowing with great deeds, with rapid movement, with incessant writing, with public speech, with innumerable letters and conferences and plans. During these years Luther is the leader, the centre, the soul of the movement; his personal fortunes are bound up with the progress of the reform. After this he continues to be a prominent figure; but others stand beside him and share his labors and contribute much to the work. The new age is born, and under many hands is gradually gathering order and method and the means of growth.

As political questions come to be mingled more and more with the new movement Luther is involved in these, but shows to much less advantage than in his religious duels with the pope and the emperor. In the Peasants' War he speaks wise and brave words to both peasants and princes; but before long he gives up the cause of the peasants, so nearly connected with his own, and urges on the bloody suppression of their revolt. The attempt to form a defensive league of German princes and cities against the emperor Luther hindered for many years. The efforts at union between the German and Swiss evangelicals is wrecked by Luther's distrust and obstinacy. The Smalcald League of 1531 is formed without Luther's approval, although the dangers to the Reformation compelled him to withdraw his active opposition. In truth, in all political matters Luther lacked confidence and insight and courage; he often looked with suspicion, not to say dread, on the very measures which were giving peace to Germany and strength to the Reformation. He was trained for the work of religious reform; there he was at home, self-possessed, easily first in wisdom and boldness and power. For civil affairs he had no taste, no training, no special gifts, and some very obvious disqualifications. And it is these things which cloud the last period of Luther's life, and cast a certain dimness on the glory of his name and deeds. Ill health, the natural disappointments of reformers, a growing sense that matters had gone beyond his control and were moving irregularly: these things also

make Luther's later years relatively dark and painful. And yet his activity in writing and teaching and preaching was most remarkable, and his services to the evangelical cause in these ways quite to the end of his life were simply beyond estimate. The doctrinal basis of the reformed churches, the revised liturgy, manuals of religious instruction for both public and domestic use, hymns and tunes for public worship, and above all the Sacred Scriptures speaking in the vernacular the wonderful works of God: these are some of the ways in which Luther's later labors greatly served his generation and laid the deep foundations of the reformed church. The prayer with which he fell asleep at Eisleben, in 1546, well illustrates the guiding spirit of his life, and is an edifying utterance of Christian faith: "Heavenly Father, eternal, merciful God, thou hast revealed to me thy dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Him I have taught; him I have confessed; him I love as my Saviour and Redeemer, whom the wicked persecute, dishonor, and reprove. Take my poor soul up to thee!"

There are certain aspects of Luther's life and character which demand more careful examination and fuller statement, and from this study we shall derive a more distinct view of his place and significance in human history.

And the first thing that we note is the striking contrasts in his personal fortunes. He is born a peasant; he is reared amid hardships as one of the common people. He comes to stand before kings and counsellors, and is a leader among the greatest men of his age. He is a charity scholar and a monk. He becomes a great and honored doctor in the university, the head of a happy family, the centre of troops of friends in many lands. He suffers the anathema of the pope, the ban of the empire, as an outcast of his generation. He comes to be the idol of his own nation, the heart of a movement which cleaves the pope's obedience in twain and shivers the emperor's sword. And what he thus wrought he wrought by virtue of his simple manhood under the providence of God. Nothing arbitrary or adventitious contributed

to his greatness and his power. The spectacle is most suggestive and inspiring.

> "O Truth! O Freedom! how are ye still born
> In the rude stable, in the manger nursed!
> What humble hands unbar those gates of morn
> Through which the splendors of the new day burst!"

Luther had a remarkable power over men, and often made the deepest personal impressions. The range of his sympathies was very wide, and his natural interest in men was keen and deep. He understood the life and needs of the common people to perfection, and never lost his hold upon them. At the same time his intellectual gifts commanded the respect of the learned, and among scholars and courtiers he was at home and easily a principal figure. His personal influence probably reached a greater number of people of all ranks than that of any other man of his age. The electors of Saxony were his fast friends and admirers. His colleagues and pupils at Wittenberg stood by him as one man. The pupils at the university doubled in numbers within three years from the posting of the theses. The life-long friendship of Luther and Melancthon is proverbial, and is most honorable to both. At Leipsic Von Hutten's heart is taken by storm, and he offers the support of his sword and pen to every step the Saxon Doctor might wish to take. Caietan, at Augsburg, is dazed and confounded by "the wild beast with strange eyes" whom he came to rebuke, but cannot silence by his authority. The march to Worms was a triumphal procession; enthusiasm and personal love gathered around him all the way; and the sight of his heroism was a fresh revelation of the godlike in man to many and many a soul. The great men of the empire at the Diet were won and charmed, against their will, as the solitary monk, who had braved all the thunders of Rome, calmly faced the bolts of the empire also, and bade them do their worst.

One of the most noticeable qualifications of Luther as a reformer is the gradualness of his own enlightenment, the deliberateness of his personal progress in evangelical ideas.

And this is also the secret of his power over the men of his times, and of that remarkable enthusiasm which attended the early days of the Reformation. Each further step to which he urges the people is a step which he himself has just taken; and it is with all the ardor of a new conviction that he summons others to his side. This is an eminent gift of successful leadership, and was a providential preparation of Luther for his great career. He discovers errors one by one; he sees the bearing of his fundamental truth more and more widely; and his own mind is all the time on fire with these discoveries, and the flame spreads nimbly and far. Providentially he began with the deep facts of personal experience. The great truth that God for Christ's sake forgives men's sins upon the sole condition of faith, he learned by the divine operations within his own soul. From this truth he advances to the clearing up of the whole field of Christian life and doctrine; and here he always feels beneath his feet the solid ground of Scripture and experience, perfectly answering to each other and yielding unshaken peace to his soul.

Luther's superior powers of mind are often lost sight of in the greater attention which his career as a reformer attracts. Undoubtedly the exigencies of his life forced out an unusual growth and productiveness of his mental gifts, as is often the case; but unquestionably his was one of the most powerful intellects of that most intellectual age. Indeed, we do not hesitate to claim for him a high place among the great minds of all nations and of all time. His career at the university, both as pupil and as professor, was a most brilliant one, and gave promise of the very highest success in literature and philosophy. His writings cover a wide range of poetry, and philosophy, and interpretation, and theology, and popular address, and pamphlet, and correspondence; and his productions in any one of these lines alone would have brought him distinction. In the course of events he is brought into contact, either friendly or hostile, with the greatest men of all parties in civil and in ecclesiastical life, and he always appears to advantage; usually he quite outshines his com-

panions. He was a powerful debater, whom his papal antagonists soon learned to dread for his sheer intellectual force. As Döllinger says: "Everything which his opponents had to offer showed itself tame and powerless and colorless by the side of his sweeping eloquence. They stammered; he spoke with the tongue of an orator. It is he only who has stamped the imperishable seal of his own soul alike upon the German language and upon the German mind."

His mind is very original, and works with great and untiring energy. It is amazing to read that in the year 1522 he produced one hundred and thirty-two different treatises, and eighty-three in the following year. And while many of these are tracts for the times, or letters, ephemeral in value, an unusually large number are of permanent worth, and have attained lasting celebrity. His work is original and creative, rather than systematizing and scientific. He gives out truth in concrete forms, in elemental germs, in quickening suggestions, in deep thoughts and seminal truths. The crude materials of systems he furnishes in great abundance and richness, and opens most fruitful veins and inexhaustible quarries, which have been worked for centuries, and out of which noble systems have arisen. But heart and conscience are supreme in Luther; the intellect is a servant and capable minister to the needs of the religious life. And when the demands of conscience are met, the intellect rests; he never uses his mental power for its own sake. There is nothing in him to remind us of Abelard or Aquinas, little that resembles Calvin. His prototypes are rather Paul and Augustine and Anselm, in whom a supreme intellect serves the demands of the moral nature, and displays its grand powers in this service.

There are obvious limitations and deficiencies in Luther's character and deeds, and a consideration of these is essential to a just estimate of the man and his influence. Some of these are attached to the very circumstances of his birth and training. He was born and educated in the Middle Ages. He grew up a devout Catholic, loyal to the papacy, steeped

in scholastic philosophy, a most zealous monk. It would be quite unreasonable to expect that he would wholly emancipate himself from these plastic influences under which the first half of his life was spent. His timidity and want of sagacity in the political aspects of the revolution, which we have already noted, are largely traceable to these facts. The small pains which he took to provide for the external order and discipline of the reformed churches and his excessive deference to the secular magistrates in these matters are to be explained in the same way.

He was capable of strong animosities as well as of firm friendship, and his antipathies were sometimes most unfortunate and ill-advised. The union of Swiss and German Protestants was wrecked on this account. The opposition of Henry of England and of Erasmus was needlessly sharpened and embittered by Luther's temper and prejudice. The delay of close and effective union among the Protestant princes of Germany was due in no small degree to the same cause. Luther was not easily tolerant of opinions that differed from his own, and this infirmity grew upon him with his years. The roughness and violence of expression which often mark his controversial utterances were due partly to a fault and partly to a necessity of the times. As Melancthon said, in his funeral address: "God has given to this last time, on account of the greatness of its diseases, a sharp physician." It was a revolutionary epoch; inveterate evils were to be attacked, tyranny in high places was to be overthrown. Ordinary means would not suffice. He who would be heard and felt must make his words blows, and his deeds thunderpeals. When the fight is on, the time for soft speech is past. When God inspires a man to break the fetters of ages and clear the ground for better growths, it is small wonder if his voice is shrill, if his strokes crush everything before them. Much of what might otherwise be charged to him as a fault of temper and vehement passion, and into which it is undoubtedly true that something of human infirmity did enter, in view of the times and of the work he was set to do, must

be reckoned as a prime element of his greatness, and a principal part of his providential furnishing for his mission.

Luther's work was both critical and constructive. He has won the greatest fame by his revolutionary words and deeds; he has wrought the most permanent benefits by the positive products of his life and thoughts. His course in destructive criticism and open revolt from established authority is quickly run, sometimes with vehemence, occasionally with a heat that borders close upon fanaticism, always under the impulse of conscience and Christian faith; but in a way that was simply necessary and not to be avoided. His constructive genius, however, is equally marked, and after his escape from the Wartburg comes distinctly to the front. He is conservative and law-abiding by nature. Nothing but necessity, the claims of conscience, drives him forward in his progressive attacks upon the papacy and mediaeval doctrine. For a time, when dangerous and inveterate errors are to be exposed and overcome, he makes himself into a very whirlwind, and storms and shrieks and sweeps down everything before him, until it seems as if old chaos would come again. But that work once done, all this vehemence is laid aside; he wreathes his brow with peace, and moves abroad the speaking image of calm persuasive reason. Of the folly which we sometimes see exemplified and commended, of radicalism for the sake of being radical, he shows no trace and he can never be quoted as an example. He tears down what interferes with conscience and loyalty to God's truth; he makes room for faith to breathe and flourish. What then remains of the old he leaves undisturbed; he builds anew simply where it is needful, and aims as quickly as possible to re-establish order and promote peace. Indeed, if we must find a weakness or excess in Luther here, on one side or on the other, we shall be obliged to say that he kept too much of the old order rather than that he brought in too much of the new.

Erasmus praises learning and quiet, and shrinks in alarm from the tumult in which Luther moved and seemed to exult. Luther also loved quiet and peace, and of his own choice had

never entered into strifes. But there were some things which he valued more than peace, or quiet studies, or personal ease; things for which the heavy price of tumult and conflicts and life itself might well be paid. Truth and loyalty to God, room for faith and the Christian life, an open Bible and a pure church, are more indispensable than liberal studies; and for these a path must be opened at any cost. It were better that all things should be shaken to their foundations for a few years, than that religion should perish, and with it art and culture and liberty and manhood. I do not attempt to state our debt to Erasmus, which is real and great, but I know that our debt to Luther is many times as great.

Probably the greatest service which Luther rendered to the church and to the ages is the restoration of the Scriptures to their original place of honor and authority. He almost literally brings the Bible to light and restores its vanished power. He does not simply make it the standard of religious truth, in place of the church and the schoolmen, a prodigious service; he also makes it to speak in the familiar language of daily life, in the very words of the market, the street, and the home. It would be most interesting, and not very difficult, to trace the direct and wide-spread intellectual results of the general diffusion of the Bible in the native tongues of the European states which followed this beginning. The church, with its fixed doctrines based on human authority, from which no one could dissent even on Scriptural grounds without incurring the hazards of heresy, had stifled investigation, had fettered reason, and reduced the grand science of theology to a jejune repetition of antiquated thoughts and formulas. When Luther boldly appealed to the Bible and shook off the nightmare of scholasticism, he did more than bring the Bible to light; he reasserted the rights of reason, and gave a powerful impulse to a true and progressive theology. He made the Bible the religious textbook of the Christian world; he set the human mind aglow with desire to sound the depths of this wonderful book, to interpret life and duty and history in the light of this divine

revelation, to search for truth in every field, and reduce it all to a divine harmony. It is doubtful if a more powerful impulse to a broad and fruitful use of the human mind has ever come from any source in any age.

It is sometimes objected that Protestantism has simply substituted the authority of a book for the authority of the church; and that this is only a change of masters without any real gain. But this saying is much more sharp than wise. When the facts of the case are considered, the gain of Luther's appeal from the church to the Bible is simply prodigious, the danger infinitesimal. The Bible had been reckoned authoritative in all matters of faith and practice from the earliest days; and Luther simply reasserted a forgotten or neglected truth against manifest and dangerous innovation. And no man who expects to be heeded will venture to affirm that the authority of the Bible now rests on men's consciences and hearts, a nightmare and crushing despotism such as the papal church of Luther's day unquestionably was. Christian life may be much less pure and aggressive than it ought to be, Christian thought may fail in force and fruitfulness, but it will scarcely be thought that these things are due to the incubus of an authoritative Bible.

It is a fair question whether Luther's treatment of inspiration and of the canon of Scripture is fully wrought out, and does not rather partake in an extreme way of the one-sided tendency into which his doctrinal discussions often fall. Great care is requisite in studying his writings, not to press single judgments and hasty utterances beyond their legitimate meaning. If we take all that he says on these subjects and place it together, and, qualifying part by part, ascertain his precise teaching, we shall find that he does not distinctly propose a new canon of Scripture, and that he stands firmly by the principle of the exclusive authority of Scripture as the rule of faith. Faith, that is Christian experience, recognizes the authority of Scripture, and as an ever new product of divine grace exactly answers to the unchanging and ever-living word of God. The conception of faith as an indepen-

dent source of religious knowledge, equal or even superior to Scripture, so that Scripture may be judged by it and made needless by it, Luther rejects and condemns. Faith aids us in determining what is Holy Scripture, and also in ascertaining the meaning of Scripture; but it is dependent on the divine word and can never dispense with its aid.

Luther reasserts the usurped rights of the laity and the essential equality of all Christian believers. He reverts to the primitive order and the apostolic definitions against the usage and accepted doctrines of all the intervening centuries. He smites ecclesiasticism in its vital feature, and fundamentally overthrows spiritual despotism in every form. All believers are spiritual persons, and all Christian acts are spiritual acts; and there is in this respect no difference between the laity and the clergy. The right of reform rests with the whole Christian society, and equally with each member thereof. Christian princes may initiate reform if the officers of the church fail of their duty. Any layman may point out evils and call for their correction; and if his voice is not heeded he may join with others and carry the matter before a general council or to the Christian magistrates. The office of the ministry is for the help of Christian people in the right preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments, and for that alone. The papacy is unscriptural and should be abolished; bishops are needless, and it is safer to dispense with them. This was a radical revolution in the idea and order of the church, and has had the widest consequences in the growth of religious liberty.

It is the right of every soul to know the Scriptures and to interpret them for himself. Hear him on this point; "The Romanists say, 'How can we know what is God's word, and what is true or false? We must learn it from the pope and the councils.' Very well, let them decree and say what they will, still say I, thou canst not rest thy confidence thereon nor satisfy thy conscience; thou must thyself decide; thy neck is at stake, thy life is at stake. Wherefore must God say to thee in thine heart, 'This is God's word,' else it

is undecided." This is the right of private judgment in its amplest terms. Luther did not see this principle fully carried out; it is doubtful if he saw how far it would reach, and he would probably have shrunk from some of its practical applications. But we owe to him its bold announcement and its first successful assertion.

Care must be taken lest an unwarranted inference be drawn from Luther's frequent and energetic assertion of the authority of conscience, the competency of faith to determine doctrine. By conscience Luther usually means the awakened moral reason, by means of which we know God, and are said to be in his image and are capable of communion with him. This is the faculty in us to which revelation is addressed, by which Scripture is understood and interpreted, and through which Christian experience unfolds. Faith is the right use of this power when it is turned toward the word and truth of God; and by means of faith, which is a personal act, every Christian is competent to receive all other divine gifts, is able to interpret the Scriptures and avail himself of their authority. But faith finds its content in the Scriptures and the facts to which they point; and Christian experience is a continued reflection of the Scriptures, an ever fresh witness to the truth of the Scriptures which it is all the time realizing and appropriating. It is the false and tyrannical authority of the papal church which Luther is seeking to offset by his doctrine of faith, or the Christian conscience, not at all the authority of the Bible itself. The Scriptures are discerned as the true word of God by the perfect answer which arises to them within the Christian heart and experience; and this experience is continually expanding under the guidance of Scripture, and at the same time is continually attesting anew and with deeper confidence the divine authority of those Scriptures.

Luther's example gives not the faintest warrant to those who ask the liberty of indulging speculations that lie outside the historic faith of the church and are unwarranted by the word of God. He introduced no novelties of doctrine, but

sought to restore the ancient faith. He broke with errors and abuses that were hoary with age and fortressed by immemorial custom. The subtleties and speculations of the schoolmen he cast aside, in order that the unperverted speech of the apostles and fathers might be heard once more. The church of his day had departed from the faith and spirit of the Scriptures. Luther's God-enlightened mind and heart discovered the apostasy, pointed it out, laid it bare, and led men's thoughts back to the pure word of God and to the life that is fed thereby. The whole movement was toward the Scriptures, and not away from them; everything was in the interest of a biblical, not a speculative faith. Human invention had built a purgatory, and had bridged thereby the gulf that yawns between heaven and hell, and had opened the way for the unscriptural notion and practice of prayers for the dead. Luther touches those ideal arches with the Ithuriel spear of Scripture, and they vanish into air, and leave the sharp antithesis our Saviour has drawn.

The many-sidedness of Luther's mind deserves especial attention. We have already observed the wide range of his intellectual gifts and labors. He stood in original and formative relations to many social facts, to the rich germs of a new age of human thought and life; and it ought not to surprise us if many voices from many quarters representing diverse features of modern life, unite to praise him as master and emphasize his contributions to human welfare. The Germans laud him as the liberator of Germany from the long and hateful tyranny of Rome. Worms made full reprisal for Canossa. Americans praise him for the mighty impulse he gave to the spirit of religious and civil liberty. Philologists celebrate him as the creator of classical German by his translation of the Bible. Literary critics commend his hymns, and the style and eloquence of his greater prose productions. Radicals claim him as their great hero who made successful war on absolutism in church and state. Evangelical Protestants praise him for his devotion to the gospel and the interests of pure religion. And all of these have ground for their

claims: through these several channels the mighty life of those times has flowed onward to our day. Luther is justly recognized as a leader in all these splendid movements, and the richness of his gifts, the significance of his work are thus impressively suggested to our thoughts. But we cannot forget that the supreme motive and consuming passion in Luther's life is the defence of the gospel and the life of faith, as his dying prayer declares: "Him I have taught, him I have confessed, him I love as my Saviour and Redeemer."

Four hundred years have set Luther's figure in grander proportions and enhanced our sense of the debt we owe to him. His imperfections are not far to seek or hard to find; but they sink wholly out of our thoughts when we measure the splendid service he has rendered to the thoughts and purposes of men, to the hopes and possibilities of the race. Across the breadth of two continents, throughout ten full generations, he stands unrivalled and supreme, a speaking embodiment of conscience and loyalty to God. There remains yet much to be done ere the movement Luther so grandly began has reached its period, and all its priceless fruits been gathered in. And it becomes us, in celebrating this providential man and career, to comprehend more fully our relations thereto, and to set ourselves with a loyalty like his to solve the still remaining problems in a rational faith and a free Christian civilization. The figure of Luther in the monument at Worms holds up the open Bible as the reformer himself in the historic Diet professed his conscience to be fast bound in the Scriptures. The spirit in our day that most truly catches his inspiration and inherits his aims, and carries on his work to completion, is the one that is most loyal to the word of God, and that brings forth its authoritative truth most faithfully for the renewal of men's hearts and for the supreme guidance of the age.