

## Luther and Tetzel.

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TWO leading characters occupy the stage in the opening scene of the great drama of the Reformation—Luther and Tetzel. The conflict in which they became engaged, although it lasted only for a couple of years, or rather less, must always be of interest. It cannot indeed be said any longer that, had there been no Tetzel with his scandalous preaching of the Indulgence, there would have been no Luther to inaugurate the glorious Reformation. We know now that Luther's heterodox views had for some years past been maturing in his mind, and that sooner or later they must have involved him in a breach with the Church. Still, an encounter with an Indulgence-preacher was just the kind of event to attract the eyes of others towards him, and Luther made the most of it, and certainly succeeded in making out of it a veritable stepping-stone to fame. It became the event which gained for him a European reputation.

Martin Luther was born at Eisleben, in Saxony, in 1483. His father, Hans Luther, was a miner, and at the time of their eldest son's birth, was in great poverty, although he afterwards became sufficiently prosperous to own several furnaces at Mansfeldt, a

town about fifteen leagues from Eisleben. When Martin was about fourteen, he was sent to school with the Franciscans at Magdeburg, and after a year to another school at Eisenach. It was here, that whilst, after the custom of poor scholars, singing for alms before the windows of well-to-do people, he won the regards of a certain lady named Ursula Cotta. The result was that, with her husband's approval, she took him to reside in her house, and thus enabled him to go on in due course to higher studies. Accordingly, in 1501, being now eighteen, he was sent to the University of Erfurt, another Saxon town of the neighbourhood, and there we are told he made great progress in his study of philosophy and classics. "The whole University," wrote Melanchthon, the colleague of his after-days, "admired his genius." In one respect, however, he seems to have been curiously neglectful of the opportunities which this University offered him. Since the invention of printing, about 1450, the printing-presses of Germany had multiplied editions of the Bible both in Latin and English, and a widespread interest in the study of the Sacred Text had naturally ensued. This was particularly true of Erfurt. "Erfurt," says Janssen, "was a place where Biblical study was in its bloom at that time, much importance being attached to it, and a distinct course of lectures being devoted to it." And yet, says d'Aubigné, repeating the tale which used to be so dear to the Protestant mind: one day "he had then been two years at Erfurth and was twenty years old—he opens every book in the library (of the Augustinian monastery). One volume . . . attracts his attention. He had never until this

hour seen its like. He reads the title—it is a Bible! a rare book unknown in those times.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1505, he took his doctor's degree, and shortly afterwards entered the Augustinian convent in the town, the convent in whose library he had discovered the Bible. His mode of entering was strange and sudden. He was travelling by night, and was caught in a thunderstorm. The lightning flashed right over his head, and kneeling down, he made a vow to St. Anne that if he were preserved from death he would enter a monastery. The storm blew over, and he returned to Erfurt. That evening he bade adieu to his friends, and at midnight knocked at the door of the Augustinian convent in the town. They took him in apparently without difficulty, not fearing, as the Superiors of a modern religious house would most certainly fear, lest a vocation thus suddenly formed should be afterwards as suddenly abandoned. In 1508, he was transferred from the monastery at Erfurt to the monastery of the same Order at Wittenburg. It was the residence and principal city of the domain of the Elector John Frederick of Saxony, and this Prince had just founded there a new University in the welfare and progress of which he was keenly interested. Luther, now a priest, was appointed Professor of Philosophy in this new University.

That he showed talent in the discharge of his professorial duties, as likewise of others which were

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Reformation*, i. p. 156, English Translation. D'Aubigné refers for this statement to Mathesius, one of Luther's companions. Mathesius is not a very trustworthy writer, but even he does not say as much as this. Nevertheless, the story has become a cherished Protestant tradition, and is embodied in a painting belonging to the Bible Society, the book-plates from which are widely circulated.

assigned to him, is not to be denied. It must be clear to any careful student of his history and writings that he was endowed with talent of a high order. His thought indeed was full of confusion, and one marvels how a man of talent could pass through a systematic course of theological study, and yet show himself to have so completely missed and confounded notions which by the general mass of students were correctly imbibed. But if he was unable to analyze an idea into its constituents, as is necessary for one who will apprehend it correctly, he could take hold of an idea as a whole, if it happened to please him, with a firm grasp, and set it forth to himself and others in a thoroughly popular way, by the aid of vigorous speech and homely illustration. Then, too, he had an imperious will, which overmastered the mass of those brought into contact with him. In short, he was a born leader of men, and belonged to the first rank of popular writers and orators.

His spiritual experiences during the ten years of monastic life which preceded his breach with the Catholic Church were at all events interesting. According to his own account, he was "a Religious of the strictest observance." "I was a pious monk," he says, "and so strictly followed the Rule of my Order, that I dare to say if ever any man could have been saved by monkery, I was that monk." "I was a monk in earnest, and followed the Rules of my Order more strictly than I can express. If ever monk could obtain Heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of all this the friars who have known me can testify.

If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortifications even to death, by means of watchings, prayers, readings, and other labours." How far this may have been true it is difficult to say. Whatever his fellow-monks may have been able to testify, there is no extant record of their confirmatory testimony on this point. One thing at least is clear from Luther's own words. His spiritual endeavours, whether earnest or not, were singularly ill-regulated. In his zeal for reading, we are told he sometimes omitted his Office for three or four weeks together, after which in a fit of remorse he would set to work to repair the omission by continuous recitation of all that had been left unsaid. This is hardly what one would have expected in one claiming that his observance was punctiliously exact. However, it seems that he was much agitated during this period by the sense of sin. Apparently he had strong passions which frequently asserted themselves, and which he sought to subdue by prayer and fastings, but in subduing which the conception of God which he placed before him was very much that of a God of avenging justice and very little that of a God of mercy. His companions were distressed by his singularity, and naturally doubted whether he was not mad, and when one day the reading in the refectory was of the Gospel of the man possessed by a blind and dumb devil whom our Lord cured, Luther suddenly flung himself upon the ground and cried out aloud: "It is not I! It is not I!" He was in fact in a thoroughly morbid state of soul, and was besides the victim of intense scrupulosity. His superior, Staupitz, gave him occasionally some good and sensible advice,

as when he said to him: "Enough, my son; you speak of sin, but know not what sin is; if you desire the assistance of God, do not act like a child any longer." The advice was certainly required, but it does not seem to have left any abiding impression on his mind. What eventually brought on the crisis in his life was, if we are to believe what is recorded, a vision of an old monk who met him one day when out walking. "I know," said the old monk, what will cure you of the evils which torment you." "What is it?" said Luther. "Faith," responded the monk. "Have you not read the words of St. Bernard, in his sermon on the Annunciation: Believe that through the merits of Jesus thy sins will be forgiven; it is the evidence which the Holy Spirit infuses into the heart of man; for he says, Believe, and thy sins shall be forgiven."

St. Bernard's doctrine is sound enough. Faith, the faith which relies on God's word, is the underlying virtue among those by which man prepares his heart for the Divine forgiveness. But Luther put his own sense on the word "faith" and on the corresponding word "justification;" taking the one to mean an assurance of personal salvation ("Believe firmly that you undoubtedly are justified, and then you are justified"); and the other to mean, not an infusion of justice into the heart of the person justified, but a mere external imputation of it. For such a doctrine there is no warrant in Scripture, but, having managed to connect in his own mind, and afterwards in the minds of others, the word "faith" with this unnatural meaning, he could appeal to all the passages in St. Paul's Epistles which assert that justification is by

faith, and claim them as so many proofs of his newly-discovered doctrine. It is this doctrine which he afterwards called the *Articulus stantis vel cadentis Ecclesiæ*; and, if we cannot quite accept this description of it, at least we can recognize that it is the cornerstone of the Lutheran and Calvinistic systems. It strikes at the very roots of the Catholic system of sacraments and grace, of penance and satisfaction, especially as Luther managed to graft on to it a doctrine of the non-freedom of the human will, and of the total depravity of fallen nature. This crisis must have taken place two or more years before his breach with the Church, and during the interval he does not appear to have been conscious, although others noticed it, of the growing opposition of his views to those of the Catholic Church.

We have now before us, as fully as is possible within the limits of a short essay, a picture of this champion of Protestantism. I will pass on then to the occasion which led to his encounter with Tetzl.

Julius II., who, according to Pastor, had the truer claim to give his name to the age usually called the age of Leo X., had it brought under his notice that the ancient Basilica of St. Peter, which had been given to the Church by the Emperor Constantine, was now falling into decay. He determined to use the opportunity, and to employ all the architectural talent of that brilliant period, in order to erect a new Basilica in its place which by its magnificence should be worthy of its position as the memorial of the Apostles and the central church of the Catholic world. Did it lie within our subject-matter, we might

take occasion to lament that a work so excellent in itself should have been accompanied by the destruction of the older Basilica. But I have too much matter to deal with to permit of such digression. Julius II. commenced the work, and devoted large funds to its accomplishment. These, however, were far from sufficient, and it became evident that the cost of a building of such magnitude could be defrayed only by a successful appeal to the piety of the Christian world. Accordingly, Leo X., the successor of Julius, proclaimed an Indulgence: that is to say, he granted an Indulgence of a most ample kind to all, wherever they might be, who would contribute according to their means towards the expenses of the rising Basilica.

This is not the place for a detailed exposition of the Catholic doctrine of Indulgences, but it is necessary that the reader should bear in mind its leading features. An Indulgence, as may be seen from any Catholic exposition of doctrine, from the Catechism of the Council of Trent downwards, does not profess to pardon the guilt of past sin and reconcile the soul to God; still less does it pretend to give leave for future sins. What it offers is a remission of the temporal punishment remaining over when the guilt and eternal punishment of the sin has been forgiven. It thus presupposes, and usually enjoins explicitly, as indispensable for gaining its fruits, that the person should first seek the pardon of guilt in the Sacrament of Penance; and it enjoins, as the condition of gaining it, some work of piety or charity, such as prayer or almsgiving. Now what we have to consider is whether it be true that the system of Indulgences,



into contact with which Luther was brought, differed in any essential particulars from our modern system. This is necessary, because the charge brought against the Catholic Church as justifying Luther's revolt from her obedience was, in its original and ancient form, that Indulgences were permissions to commit sin, or at least pretended remissions of the guilt of sin, sold in the most barefaced way over the counter, so to speak, for sums of money, amidst degrading accompaniments. We have partially succeeded in convincing modern and more enlightened students that this is by no means a true account of our teaching, and have caused them to remodel the charge, which, as it now-a-days mostly runs, is that we have altered our system from what it was in the days of Luther ; that then it certainly pretended to be a sale of forgiveness for money, but that now, in deference to the outcry made against such an enormity, we have revised it, and cast it into a more subtle form.

We have to notice then that at all events in offering an Indulgence in return for alms to a good work, Leo X. was acting not differently from our modern Church. Almsgiving, especially when it is for some sacred object, is a recognized form of good work, such as may be stimulated and rewarded by an Indulgence. Thus it is one of the required conditions for one or two of the eight great Indulgences. In this latter case the Pope leaves it free to us to apply our alms to such religious objects as our conscience suggests. But there is no reason why he should not himself present to us a particular object. He might, for instance, grant an Indulgence to those

who would give alms for the new Westminster Cathedral, in which case he would only be doing what was done by his predecessors to assist the building of most of the great Cathedrals which are England's glory. Or he might prescribe that the alms should be applied to some still more universal object. He might, for instance, attach an Indulgence, either partial or plenary, to the alms which he asks of us on the Epiphany for Indian Seminaries, or on Good Friday for the Holy Places at Jerusalem. This last-mentioned object closely resembles that of the Indulgence of Leo X. Regard the building of St. Peter's merely as the erection of a fine architectural monument, and the sacred character of the work is easily forgotten. But regard it as the erection of a house of God far more truly such than the Temple of Solomon, and its sacred character at once returns into prominence. So far, then, we have discovered no impropriety in the Pope's action.

In our own days, if such an Indulgence were proclaimed, the Pope would write to the Bishops, directing them to make the announcement to the residents in their dioceses, and to make arrangements for the placing of alms-boxes in the several churches, for the time and manner most appropriate for giving in the alms, and likewise for some official method of forwarding to Rome what had been collected. Probably if the Indulgence offered were of the public kind to be mentioned presently, the Bishops would also be exhorted to see that special sermons were preached and devotions held, so that the Indulgence-time might be a time of grace. We know that such is the modern custom at the time of what is called a

Jubilee Indulgence—an Indulgence which comprises not merely the Indulgence strictly so-called, or the remission, plenary or partial, of temporal punishment, but also the bestowal on many confessors of special faculties to absolve from cases otherwise reserved to Bishops or to the Holy See. In the days of Luther the method followed was in principle the same, but in its actual details somewhat different.

For the preaching of this Indulgence in Germany that country was divided into three parts, with only one of which we need to concern ourselves. Albrecht of Brandenburg, Archbishop of Mainz, Bishop of Magdeburg, and Administrator of the see of Halberstadt, was appointed commissioner for the district comprising the whole of Saxony and Brandenburg. That is to say, it was his office to see that the Indulgence was effectually made known in these parts, and to collect the money given. With him was associated the Guardian of the Franciscans at Mainz, but the latter seems to have renounced his charge, and hardly figures in the history. This Albrecht—who, it may be incidentally remarked, was a young man of high family, only twenty-four at the time of his appointment—was under the usual obligation of paying the fee for his Pallium. That there should have been such fees is quite intelligible, for the Holy See with its vast staff of officials for the conduct of a world-wide business must be supported, and it is right that those for whose benefit they are established should support them. Still, it was a grave scandal, and must be acknowledged as such, that the fees exacted should have been so enormous. In Albrecht's case they amounted to no less than thirty thousand

gold guildens. What made matters worse, was that this was the third vacancy in the see within a short interval. Thus the burden on the revenues of the see was crushing.

Albrecht undertook to provide the sum out of his own private resources, and this is how he did it. By representing to the Pope the greatness of the difficulty, he obtained the commissionership of the Indulgence, with leave to retain a certain portion of the proceeds for himself, on the understanding that he paid up his Pallium money at once. This arranged, on the security of the Indulgence he proceeded to borrow the necessary sum from the famous bank of the Fuggers at Augsburg, a consequence of which arrangement was that the Fuggers sent a clerk to accompany the Indulgence-preachers, who kept one of the three keys to the alms-chests. This transaction of Albrecht's is another disedifying thing to which we must frankly acknowledge, but it probably illustrates the mode in which, beginning from the most harmless intentions, a man may gradually and unconsciously entangle himself in a grave scandal.

Albrecht's next duty was to choose a sub-commissioner to whom he might entrust the actual preaching of the Indulgence, and he chose John Tetzel. Tetzel was a Dominican friar, who seems to have been endowed with a gift of popular eloquence, which enabled him to draw large congregations and to move them to contribute handsomely to the objects advocated. He had had much experience and an uninterruptedly successful career as an Indulgence-preacher during the two previous decades, for it must not be supposed that the Indulgence for St. Peter's

Church was a novelty at the time. It was a novelty perhaps in its importance and amplitude, but was but one among many Indulgences which were being constantly issued in aid of one good work or another.

We have now reached Tetzel, but before informing ourselves of the manner in which he fulfilled his commission, we must notice briefly the character of the instructions given to him. Our concern is much more with the system than with the man who had to work it, and even as regards him, in the great dearth of direct evidence, we have a better chance of judging him fairly in proportion as we can understand better the nature of his charge. Archbishop Albrecht issued an *Instructio Summaria ad Subcommissarios Pœnitentiarum et Confessores*. It is a long document, and in it he first prescribes to the preachers and their assistant the mode in which they were to conduct themselves, and explains very lucidly the character and provisions of the Indulgence. The directions for the preacher are, no one can deny it, both wise and edifying. All are to begin by taking an oath of fidelity to observe these directions, and are threatened with censures and deprivation of office in the case of neglect. They are to keep always in mind the glory of God, the reverence due to the Apostolic See, and the furtherance of the object for which the alms are solicited. They are to conduct themselves everywhere in a becoming manner, and to avoid taverns and doubtful houses, and likewise excessive and useless expenses, "lest their conduct should be despised, and with it the religious exercises over which they are to preside." They are to know that in hearing confessions they are constituted Apostolic penitentiaries, as repre-

senting the Pope, and are endowed accordingly with ample faculties, and they are to be careful that their behaviour is worthy of so exceptional an office. Hence they are to see that they set up their confessionals—over which they are to place the Papal arms, and their own names in large letters—only in places sufficiently open and public, nor must they hear confessions during the sermons or Stations of the Cross, lest they should seem to be drawing away the people from the fruit of the Divine Word. Nor again are they to hear any confessions outside the church where the Indulgence Cross is erected, save those of persons legitimately hindered from coming by sickness or old age, and those of great nobles. When they reach a town in their course they are to erect an Indulgence Cross, and daily after Vespers and Compline, or after the *Salve Regina*, or at some other suitable time, they are to gather round the Cross and solemnly venerate it. They are to give at least three sermons each week as long as the Station in any place lasts, whilst in Advent or Lent, they must give one every day, and on feast-days two. And during these sermons there is to be no preaching elsewhere, that the people may be free to attend.

During the first week they are to explain clearly the nature and immense value of the Indulgence offered, and likewise of the Papal power to grant it. In explaining too, they are to keep to the text of the Bull, and show how it empowers them to absolve and dispense, commute or compound, nor must they run off into strange and irrelevant subtleties, a thing the less tolerable since the Bull itself provides them with

abundant material for their discourse, all drawn from the heart of theology and canon law.

This brings us to the other point in the Bull, the nature of the graces, *i.e.*, the benefits offered. There are, says Albrecht's summary, "*four principal graces* which it grants. Of these the *first* is a 'Plenary Indulgence,' or plenary remission of all sins by which the pains of Purgatory are fully forgiven and blotted out." The term "plenary remission of sins" should be remarked, as it is on such a phrase that those fix who strive to make out that an Indulgence is a forgiveness of the guilt of sin. But the phrase is usual in grants of Indulgence even to this day, and means, as the expository clause just given distinctly declares, a remission of the sin as regards all its temporal punishment. In such a remission a sacramental absolution is presupposed as having taken away the guilt and eternal punishment, and it is because, by supervening on this, the Indulgence takes away likewise all the temporal punishment, that it is called a "plenary remission of sins."

The Instruction goes on to assign the conditions for gaining this Plenary Indulgence. "Although (it says) nothing can be given in exchange which will be a worthy equivalent for so great a grace, the gift and grace of God being priceless, still that the faithful may be the more readily invited to receive it, let them, *after having first made a contrite confession*, or at least having the intention of so doing at the proper time, visit at least seven churches assigned for this purpose, and in each say devoutly five Our Fathers and Hail Marys in honour of the Five Wounds of Jesus Christ, by which our redemption was wrought ;

or else one *Miserere*, to obtain pardon for sins." The italicized clause is to be specially noticed, as proving conclusively that there was no thought of granting absolution of guilt otherwise than through the Sacrament of Penance. The visit to seven assigned churches, for which in smaller places visits to seven altars were substituted, marks the intention of assimilating this Indulgence to the Indulgence of the Seven Stations practised in the City of Rome.

A second condition for the Indulgence was the contribution towards the building expenses of St. Peter's, and Archbishop Albrecht proceeds to prescribe the necessary amount according to the rank and means of the contributors. Kings and royal persons, Archbishops and Bishops, must contribute at least twenty-five Rhenish gold florins; abbots, counts, and barons, ten florins; others down to those whose annual income is about five hundred florins, must contribute six; those with an income of two hundred must give six florins; others half a florin. If there should be any difficulty about these amounts the parties are to consult their confessors, and with their advice to give what seems a becoming proportion of their means, and the confessors are to remember that the object for which the Indulgence is granted is not less the salvation of the faithful than the needs of the building; and accordingly are not to send any one away without his Indulgence for want of means to contribute. Of the poor it is added specially that "those who have no money must supply by their prayers and fasts, since the Kingdom of Heaven should be made open to the poor as much as to the rich." This scale of assessments disproves the buying



and selling theory. If it were true that Indulgences were offered as goods in the market, to be bought and sold, the prices should have been uniform for all. The code of prices disappears, and that of contributions comes in, when such a scale of assignments as this is borne in mind. Besides, as we have seen, the notion of price is expressly repudiated in the Instructions.

So much as to the first principal grace offered, which was the Plenary Indulgence itself. The *second principal grace* was the grant of what was called a *Confessionale*. This was permission to choose a suitable confessor from the ranks either of the secular or regular clergy, who, being chosen, would in virtue of the grant have power to absolve the recipient of the *Confessionale* once in his life (1) from any censures he might have incurred, (2) from all sins otherwise reserved to the Apostolic See or by the Bishops; and (3), as often as desired, from sins not reserved; (4) to communicate to him a Plenary Indulgence once in life and in time of danger of death; and likewise to dispense him from certain vows and to minister to him the Holy Eucharist. Such a *Confessionale*, like the Indulgence, which has been called the first principal grace, was granted in view of alms contributed to the building fund, though the alms in this instance was much less—a mere nothing in fact—for it was only a quarter of a florin; and besides it was given to the poor gratuitously. These permissions to choose a confessor, and grants to the person chosen of the ample faculties mentioned, were attested by written documents. Such a document was obviously necessary that it might be known at any time afterwards that

the holder had really received the permission which it recorded. But it must not be supposed that the *Confessionale* (for this name is usually applied to the document) was itself any forgiveness of sins. The absolution could only be given in the confessional when the holder approached his chosen confessor in the Sacrament of Penance and sought absolution in the usual way. This is another important point, for those who undertake to show that Indulgences were bought and sold are wont to appeal to these *Confessionalia* and say: "Here is the Indulgence itself with the price named upon it." Such persons must be told that they are under a complete misapprehension; that, to begin with, the *Confessionalia*, as seen in this one crucial case, had nothing to do with a Plenary Indulgence to be gained then and there; and secondly, that they gave no Indulgence themselves, still less forgiveness of sins, but only attested the leave given to choose a confessor and the grant to him of special power to be used in the Sacrament of Penance.

Of the third and fourth principal graces I need say nothing, as they have no bearing on the Indulgence controversy.

We can see now that this historical Indulgence, at all events in the form in which it was conceived by Leo X. and by his Commissioner, Albrecht of Brandenburg, did not differ in kind, and hardly in its circumstances, from those to which we are accustomed. We can see, too, that the intention was to make the preaching of the Indulgence into a sort of "mission," as we should now term it, the people being stirred up by special prayer and devotions during the period of one or two weeks, to take seriously to heart the

affair of their souls, and to make a good Confession and Communion. Evidently the aim was to associate the erection of a church which was to be the head of all Churches with a grand religious awakening throughout the world. The Pope therefore and his commissioners must be acquitted of the blame which the attacks of Luther have heaped upon them, and this is the point of principal importance which we have desired to prove.

But what about Tetzl, and the actual execution of the project? Was he faithful to the injunctions given him, or did he disregard them utterly, and pervert the good purpose of the Indulgence into a downright scandal?

According to the accounts that have come down to us from Protestant sources he went about with much parade. When he entered a town he came seated in a magnificent car, with the Bull resting on a velvet cushion, and a red cross carried in front of him. On his approach the bells were rung, and all flocked out to meet him. When he reached the principal church of the place, the red cross was erected, the Bull placed in front of it, and likewise a large money-chest. Then Tetzl ascended the pulpit and began to extol the value of his wares.

"Indulgences," he said, "are the most precious of God's gifts. . . . Come, and I will give you letters by which even the sins you intend to commit may be pardoned. I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in Heaven, for I have saved more souls by Indulgences than the Apostle by his sermons." Then he appealed to them to buy. "Bring—bring—bring," he said, pointing to his strong

box, and, according to Luther, he used to shout these words with such a bellowing that you might have thought him a mad bull.<sup>1</sup>

If such were Tetzel's methods, no wonder that good men were scandalized. And we are told that the scandal was brought forcibly under Luther's notice in the following manner. Tetzel had come to Jutabock, a place not far from Wittenberg. Into Wittenberg itself he was not permitted to enter, but the inhabitants went off to hear him, and Luther's penitents came back refusing to give up their sins. When he exhorted and rebuked them, they showed him the Indulgences they had received from Tetzel, and told him they had bought permission to continue in their sins, whilst nevertheless assured of immunity from guilt and punishment. This is the traditional story, but a very decisive argument entitles us to dismiss it at once. Luther, as we are about to see, presently framed his indictment against Tetzel, and it does not contain a word of suggestion that the latter undertook to forgive future sins. Presumably therefore what happened was much more simple. Those who were wont to attend Luther's confessional at Wittenberg, on this occasion went to the neighbouring town to gain the Indulgence. If Luther was already set against the doctrine of Indulgences, the natural effect of such an incident would be to stir the bile of so excitable a person, and that this was in reality his doctrinal position at the time, is clear from a sermon which he forthwith delivered at the Castle church. For in it he denounced not only Tetzel, but the very doctrine of Indulgences which the Catholic Church

<sup>1</sup> D'Aubigné, *Ibid.* pp. 241—243.

holds still as she ever has held. It cannot be proved from Scripture (he says) that Divine justice demands of the sinner any other penance or satisfaction save reformation of heart. "Do nothing in favour of Indulgences. Have you means: Give to him who is hungry; that will be more profitable than to give it for heaping up stones and much better than to buy Indulgences."

A short time afterwards he drew up his famous Theses against Tetzel's preaching, ninety-five in number, and on the eve of All Saints, 1517, nailed them to the door of the same Castle church. It was a challenge to all opposers to meet him in the arena of theological disputation, when he would be prepared to defend the doctrines contained in the Theses. It is a mistake to suppose that any exceptional courage was required to make the challenge, which was in accordance with the custom among scholars of those days. But Luther was availing himself of the custom to play a crafty game. He had, as has been said, already come to hold a doctrinal system, in all essential particulars identical with that which is now called by his name, and in such a system Indulgences can have no place. At the same time he was anxious to continue as long as possible in good favour with the Pope, and hence in his Theses he attempts to draw a distinction between Tetzel's doctrine of Indulgences and that of Pope Leo. The former he vilifies; the latter he stamps with his approval. But what he attributes to the Pope is merely his own personal doctrine; what he condemns in Tetzel, being the acknowledged doctrine of the Church, was doubtless also that of the Pope. Still

by this contrivance Luther was able to indulge in professions of submissiveness, as he does for instance in his letter to Leo X. of the following spring, in which he says: "Wherefore, Most Blessed Father, I offer myself prostrate at the feet of your Blessedness with all that I have and am, cause me to live or die, call me or recall me, approve me or condemn me, just as you please, I will recognize your voice as the voice of Christ, who presides and speaks in you." But while he wrote thus to the Pope, in private he expressed himself in other language. To his friend, Spalatinus, he had written on February 15, 1518, that is three months later than the publication of his Theses, but two months before his profession of submission to the Pope's decision: "To you, Spalatinus, alone and to our friends I declare that Indulgences seem to me to be nothing else than an illusion offered to souls, and useful only to those who are lazy and snore over the way of Christ."<sup>1</sup> For holding this, he added that "he had stirred up against him, six hundred Minotaurs, Radamantothaurs, and Caco-taurs." It will be noticed that in this letter he draws no distinction between Tetzel's doctrine of Indulgences and that of the Pope's. He condemns Indulgences *sans phrase*.

I should have wished to give some specimens of the Ninety-five Theses. This, however, is obviously impossible in a short tract, and I must be content to repeat that their substance, and indeed almost the entirety of their contents, is directed against the very same doctrine which we now hold. Of course Luther misrepresents this doctrine in every particular, but his

<sup>1</sup> De Wette, i. 92.

misrepresentations are such as to show that what he is misrepresenting is our orthodox doctrine and none other. We may therefore draw the valuable conclusion which writers like Bishop Creighton have challenged<sup>1</sup>—that our present doctrine is no new doctrine devised after these sad experiences of the sixteenth century to take the place of one that had become hopelessly discredited, but is in itself the ancient doctrine which has come down to us from time immemorial.

There are no doubt one or two phrases in the Theses which, indirectly rather than directly, suggest that the preachers have made unsound or disedifying statements, and they must be allowed their due weight in our estimate of Tetzel's personal management of his mission. We shall have to mention them presently, for we must now turn to Tetzel, and the way in which he responded to Luther's attacks upon him.

When he saw Luther's Ninety-five Theses, and marked the enthusiasm with which they had been taken up by many influential persons around him, he withdrew from Saxony and retired to Frankfort-on-Oder. Here there was a University in which Conrad Wimpina, a friar of Tetzel's own Order of St. Dominic, was a distinguished professor. He was a friend and former professor to Tetzel himself, and it was natural that the latter should take counsel with him on so critical an occasion. Presently there appeared a set, or rather two sets of theses—Anti-theses they were called—in reply to Luther's Ninety-five; one set of One Hundred and Six Theses being

<sup>1</sup> In his *History of the Papacy*.

a counter-statement of the doctrine of Indulgences, the other of Fifty Theses, on the Papal power to grant them.

The description of Tetzel, given higher upon the faith of Lutheran authorities, prepares us to find in these Antitheses the brutal, reckless, and ignorant utterances of a buffoon. What we do find is a calm and scientific theological statement, quite remarkable for its force and lucidity. Indeed, I do not know where a theologian could go for a more satisfying defence of Indulgences against current Protestant difficulties. Bishop Creighton remarks that Tetzel "does not so much argue as contradict." Of course he does not. Theses are propositions which a theologian is prepared to defend by argument against those who will discuss with him. Arguments, therefore, do not appear in the Theses themselves, except in so far as simple statement of the truth is oftentimes itself the best refutation of error; and in this sense, Tetzel's Theses are a luminous refutation of Luther's. They prove at least this, that Tetzel thoroughly grasped both the nature and the complexity of his duties. Thus Luther asserts that "those who believe themselves to be secure of their salvation because of these letters of Indulgences, will be damned together with their teachers." Of course he means to suggest that the contrary was Tetzel's teaching. The latter replies in calmer language: "It is erroneous to say that no one can have such *conjectural* knowledge as human nature is capable of," that he has gained the Indulgence if he has done what the Jubilee requires. Also that "it is erroneous to say that one who has gained the Papal



Indulgence duly in every way, that is, after true contrition and confession, is not reconciled to God." These two propositions completely dispel Luther's fallacy. For we are absolutely certain that if we fulfil all the conditions we gain the fruits of the Indulgence, and as regards the "if," we can have moral, or conjectural certainty, as he calls it, that we have had true sorrow, made a good confession, and done what the Indulgence prescribes.

Again, Luther asserts that it is very hard even for learned men to extol all the amplitude of Indulgences, without depreciating the necessity of true contrition. And he explains that there is this contradiction between the two, that whereas true contrition makes us anxious to embrace penances, Indulgences take them away and cause us to hate them when they come. To this Tetzl replies that even a moderately learned man can extol the two things without difficulty. For Indulgences do not touch remedial penances, whereas this is what true contrition loves to continue throughout life. Again, according to Luther, those preach the doctrine of men who preach that when the coin chinks in the chest, the soul at once flies to Heaven, the suggestion being that this had been Tetzl's preaching. Tetzl by his reply shows us what had been his real teaching which had given a handle to this misrepresentation—"He errs who denies that a soul can fly as quickly up to Heaven as a coin can chink against the bottom of the chest." He does not, that is, offer an assurance that at once on the giving of the money the effect will follow, but that when the effect does

follow it will be sudden and complete in its accomplishment. These are a few specimens to which others could be added in order to prove that Tetzl's Theses are not only theologically correct but compiled with real skill.

There are, however, other qualities about them which cannot fail to impress those who are striving to read the character of the author through the lines of his utterance. It is almost impossible to think of him as a buffoon, such a love of sobriety and moderation pervades every line of his propositions, and not only of the Theses, but likewise of his two sermons or rather notes for sermons, which are still extant. Nor is the pervading tone merely one of sobriety. It is also one of dignified self-repression. He has been made the victim of many outrageous charges, but there is no trace of irritation in his language. He takes up the doctrinal points one after another, but disregards the personal suggestions until he draws near the end. Then he refers to them in a few becoming sentences. "For one who has never heard them (he says) to declare in public Theses that the Indulgence-preachers employ scandalous language (*verborum libidinem*) before the people, and take up more time in explaining Indulgences than in expounding the Gospel, is to scatter lies picked up from others, to spread fictions in place of truths, and to show oneself light-minded and credulous; and is to fall into mischievous error." Here I think we have a true account of what had happened. There were plenty of mischief-makers to concoct scandalous stories if they were likely to be welcomed, and Luther had shown a readiness to welcome this kind of slander

if not to add to it from his own imagination, and poor Tetzel was the sufferer.

There is another proposition among Tetzel's Theses which shows how keenly he suffered under the injuries done him, and which sets him before us as the very opposite of a buffoon, as a man of delicate feeling, at least of delicate religious feeling. This, however, is a point which I find some difficulty in setting forth, so foul and unbearable are the words which Luther did not hesitate to ascribe to his opponent. Suffice it to say, that he accused him of having not only taught that Indulgences could forgive every sin, but also of having named as gross a sin as a filthy imagination ever conceived, and claimed that even that could be forgiven by the Indulgence then offered. Tetzel replies very quietly and meekly, but evidently with repressed indignation, that of course, as God is prepared to pardon all our sins, even that particular sin, were it possible, comes within the range of Divine forgiveness. Then he adds, "that to ascribe (such words to another) in downright contradiction to the truth of facts, was to be moved by hatred, and to thirst for a brother's blood." It was this charge, however, that ultimately killed him. He got testimonials from the authorities of two towns where some forms of the story had localized the alleged offence, and he sent the manuscript of the sermon supposed to have contained it to the Pope. But after a two years' interval, a Papal envoy, named Miltitz, came into the neighbourhood. He had picked up the stories about Tetzel as he went along, and being hopeful of gaining over Luther by some displays of kindness, he was prone to interpret things

as favourably for the latter as possible. In spite of Tetzel's remonstrances, when Miltitz found him out in his convent at Leipzig, he expressed his belief that the obnoxious words had been really used. Of course this is a piece of evidence against Tetzel which needs to be taken into account. Still it is clear that Miltitz was in other respects over-credulous, and Luther had no difficulty in leading him by the nose when the meeting between them took place. I am inclined, therefore, to lay small stress upon Miltitz's opinion on this point in regard to Tetzel. It was an opinion, however, which fell with terrible weight on the over-wrought Dominican. He took to his bed, and fell into a burning fever, which before long carried him off. If he was innocent, as for my part I firmly believe him to have been, of a blasphemy against the honour of our Blessed Lady, it was peculiarly appropriate that he should have expired just as his brethren in the choir were singing, "*Sub tuum præsidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genitrix.*"

I have now covered the ground I had marked out for this article. We have seen what I trust will be thought sufficient evidence that the Catholic doctrine of Indulgences was the same in those days as in these, and that the celebrated Indulgence which Luther made use of to lift himself into fame, was projected by no mere greed for gain, but for a high and holy purpose which the arrangements made for its granting might well have seemed calculated to promote. I have also submitted some reasons tending to show that the balance of probability is much more in Tetzel's favour than against him. We must be careful, however, not to press these conclusions too far. It is

quite impossible to deny that there were grave abuses connected with the Indulgence-preaching at that time. Indeed, had there not been, it is not easy to see how Luther could have been so successful in prejudicing large multitudes against the system. Moreover, not to mention other Catholic expressions of opinion, we have to remember that at the Council of Trent, when the proposal was brought forward that these travelling Indulgence-preachers should be abolished altogether, all previous legislation having failed to protect the system against abuse, there was unanimity among the Bishops in favour of the change, the German Bishops being especially zealous for it. The point on which I wish to insist is, in short, not that there were no abuses, but that the abuses lay in practices unworthy of the accepted system, not in the doctrinal system itself. There seems no reason to suppose that these faulty Indulgence-preachers ever went so far as to teach that an Indulgence could be gained by one who had not first, by confession and contrition, obtained forgiveness of all grievous sin, and recovered, if he had ever lost it, the grace of God for his soul. Still less is there evidence that they told their hearers, or that their hearers would have believed them if they had, that an Indulgence was a permission to sin in the future. Catholic doctrine in the past was always too clear, and Catholic missionaries too well instructed. Where the preachers misconducted themselves will doubtless have been in their dealing with the monetary aspects of the Indulgence. To recommend the charity for which alms was demanded was perfectly lawful, but we can imagine how they converted such recommendations into a sort of hawking of wares in

their possession, and we can imagine also how a certain amount of avarice may have mingled with the work. It was good then that the change was made, for, thank God, all such abuses are things of the past. There is nothing now to disguise from us, when we give alms at times of Jubilee, or otherwise, that we are giving to God, and that it is God, who can see into our hearts, who will know and judge if we are giving from a humble and contrite heart for His honour and glory, and for the promotion of a good work.

And the result is that under present conditions the system of Indulgences is a system of unmixed spiritual good. Of the Jubilee Indulgence of 1825, as it was held in Rome, Cardinal Wiseman was witness; and has left us an account in his *Four Last Popes* :

It is a year in which the Holy See does all it can to make Rome spiritually attractive, and spiritually only. The theatres are closed, public amusements suspended; even private recreation pressed within the bounds of Lenten regulations. But all that can help the sinner to amendment, or assist the devout to feed his faith and nourish his piety, is freely and lavishly ministered. The pulpit is occupied by the most eloquent preachers, awakening the consciences or instructing ignorance; the confessionals are held in constant possession by priests who speak every language; pious associations or confraternities receive, entertain, and conduct from sanctuary to sanctuary the successive trains of pilgrims; the altars are crowded by fervent communicants; while, above all, the spiritual remission of temporal punishment for sins known familiarly to Catholics under the name of Indulgence, is more copiously imparted, on conditions by no means over easy. Rome, during that year, becomes the attracting centre of Catholic devotion, the magnet which draws it from every side. But it does not exhaust it, or absorb it; for multitudes go back full of gratitude to

Heaven and the Holy See for the blessings which they feel they have received, and the edifying scenes in which they have been allowed to partake.

The Cardinal speaks only of Rome itself, but the same scenes are repeated throughout the world, if on a smaller, in many places a very much smaller, scale. Shortly we shall all have another opportunity of witnessing them, and taking part in them, and shall then know from our experience what a powerful means of grace for the regeneration of souls is a Jubilee Indulgence.

