

and an appeal had to be made to the pope in Rome. But who would make the long journey? The brothers wanted Martin Luther to go, as he was able and eloquent, and had read all the Church fathers and the Bible. Thus in the winter of 1510 the desire of Luther's heart for many years was realized. For Rome was the Eternal City, and the seat of the Vicar of Christ on earth, and Luther thought that to visit it must be like visiting the very gates of Paradise.

But cosmopolitan Rome shocked this earnest monk to the core of his being, who had trembled to handle the body and blood of Christ at his first Mass. Everywhere he looked, he saw the corruption and immorality which abounded in the clergy, from the lowest priest, unrepentant, performing Mass; and likewise unrepentant worshipers buying forgiveness of sins from the priests; even up to the papacy itself.

Concluding his business with the pope, he visited each and every one of the churches, and saw each and every place having to do with the history of Rome and with the Church. While ascending, on his knees, the twenty-eight steps of the *Scala Santa* of the Lateran, or sacred stairway—said to have been brought to Rome from Pilate's judgment hall—reciting the *Pater Noster* at each step—as each *Pater Noster* would grant him fifty years' release from Purgatory—he heard, “The just shall live by faith,” spoken so loudly, it seemed to him, that he stood up and looked around for the speaker.

Many times he had read those words, in his studies of the Bible at Erfurt which no one else had read. The meaning of them burst across his heart and mind in an instant, like the lightning which once caused him to become a monk, was it only five years before? Immediately he descended the stairs, and leaving Rome, turned his face toward home.



XXXVI. The Paper on the Door.

WHAT did the monk discover? The doctrine of “justification by faith,” which means that forgiveness of sins, instead of being got by fasts and penances and ceremonies, is given freely to those who have faith in Christ. “The just”—those who are made righteous—“shall live by faith”—are made so by a life of faith, not works. Martin Luther discovered that he could not be good enough to earn his salvation—it was this point which caused him terror—but that God knew this to be the case, and made com-

plete provision for human sinfulness, and human salvation, in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this provision was available freely, by faith, not by *Pater Nosters* or “monkery”—it was this point in which he found peace at last.

The doctrine of the Catholic Church can be called “justification by faith *and* works,” that is, the man who has faith will give evidence of it by the good works he does. No doubt you remember, do you not, that for centuries, the clergy of the Church had become more and more corrupt. Such men as these, who were the men who let the Bible gather dust in the monastery libraries, were the men who abounded in Martin Luther’s day, and their poor example and ignorant teaching did much to lead Christians astray into believing many wrong things about the Catholic Church and her teaching. The wicked clergy’s example seemed to say that the doctrine of the Church was “justification by works,” and no faith or repentance was required.



Pope Leo X by Raphael.

Luther was an obscure monk in an out of the way monastery, and things might have ended there, and the world never heard of him, had not the new pope unwittingly brought things to a head. Do you remember that Lorenzo de’ Medici had paid a great sum to have his son John made a cardinal at the age of thirteen? This boy, now grown up, had just been made Pope Leo X; and when he had been elected pope by the cardinals, he wrote to his brother in Florence, “The papacy is ours, brother; let us enjoy it!” He used his influence to greatly increase the arts and learning in Rome, and continued Julius II’s grand project, St. Peter’s Basilica.

Now the church of St. Peter’s required an enormous sum of money, and the pope was at war at the time with the duke of Ur-bi’no, which also required funds. But why did the pope not use the money which came into Rome from all over Christian Europe for these projects? That money was used to maintain the papal court, the bishoprics, the monasteries, and the luxurious lifestyle to which the popes and cardinals had by now become accustomed. Additional monies were needed to carry on the additional projects, so Leo X revived the practice of selling indulgences.

Indulgences were not available every day. During the Crusades they were given to those who took the cross to fight against the Turks. In 1506 Julius II had sold them to

obtain money for the building of the new St. Peter's church in Rome. But someone might go their entire life and not have the opportunity to obtain an indulgence, so when the opportunity arose, people were often very anxious to get a dispensation from the treasury of merits, to shorten their stay in Purgatory.

Now it so happened that in Luther's part of Germany, the agent of the pope who was authorized to sell indulgences, John Tetzel, was a worldly, avaricious man of bad reputation. When he entered a town, riding in a carriage, and accompanied by a cavalcade of horsemen to protect him from robbers, the sheriff blew the trumpet, announcing to all, "The grace of God and St. Peter is before your gates." The whole town turned out to accompany Tetzel to the church, as well as all the school children, priests, friars, monks, and nuns, and a grand parade ensued. After paint-



Luther as a Monk.
Thomas Cranach

ing a terrorizing picture of the souls of loved ones being tormented in Purgatory, Tetzel implored the people to come and buy indulgences for them, for he shamelessly said, "As soon as the money in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory's fire springs."

In his hands, the doctrine of indulgences degenerated to a shocking contradiction, making the whole thing an offense to true piety. Both the Church and God were to let sin go unpunished, and even repentance was no longer required, if the money had been paid! The ignorant townspeople did not know better, and eagerly paid for the indulgences, happily believing that by giving their life's savings, they had released parents, siblings, or children from torment, who from that day dwelt in Paradise.

But Luther was not an ignorant townsman, and this gross misrepresentation of pure doctrine made his blood boil. Since his return from Rome, he had received his doctorate in theology, and become the professor of biblical theology at Wittenberg University. He had obtained a copy of Erasmus' New Testament, and studied it with joy. Luther served as the priest for the Wittenberg city church, and was not only made prior of his monastery, but was given charge over eleven Augustinian monasteries. He quietly determined to do something to protect his parishioners from the corrupt doctrine preached by Tetzel.

Thus on the day before the festival of All Saints (October 31, 1517), when the relics of the church were displayed to the crowds who flocked to town, Luther passed down the long street with a paper in his hand, on which was written ninety-five theses, or statements, against indulgences. He nailed this paper upon the door of the church, which served as a sort of bulletin board for the university, and so as to attract the most attention among the people. He intended to bring up points for discussion among the scholars, and in so doing, arrive at the truth of the matter.

He claimed that no indulgence of a pope can avail anything if there was not genuine repentance toward God. Only God can do away with the punishment for guilt. A repentant man needed no indulgence, for in forsaking his sin, he has already received forgiveness. The pope cannot help a soul in Purgatory, for he has no power over the dead; besides, if the pope could save souls from Purgatory, why does he not do so out of Christian love, and not for the sake of money only?

He invited all who might wish to oppose him to a debate, to which no one came. But the theses, much to the surprise of Luther, aroused all Germany. It was said that within a month they were known throughout Christendom. They were published in Latin, and German, and spread everywhere; debated in the universities, and discussed around the simple tables of the peasants as well.



XXXVII. A Thunderstorm Breaks.

LUTHER now found himself at the center of a storm, with powerful enemies on one hand, and powerful friends on the other. For enemies, he could count the Emperor Maximilian, who denounced him as a heretic, and Pope Leo X, who summoned him to Rome to answer charges. For friends, he could count the Elector Frederick of Saxony, who knew Luther to be a sincere and devout Catholic, a model priest, professor and administrator of all the Church had entrusted to him. He did not claim to know what was the correct position in the controversy, but trusted Luther to.

Luther also gained the admiration of Erasmus, the most highly regarded scholar in Christian Europe, and advisor to King Charles of Spain. He as well earned the lifelong friendship of Philip Melanchthon, the young professor of Greek at Wittenberg, and already so proficient in the Greek New Testament and the classics that he had been la-