

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

A REFORMATION ANNIVERSARY.

LUTHER AND HIS THESES.

Ever since 1669 the thirty-first day of October has been kept by the Protestant Churches of Saxony as a memorable anniversary. It was on that day in 1517 that Luther attached to the church door in Wittenberg his celebrated theses in opposition to indulgences, and, therefore, it forms an important date in the history of the Reformation. Since 1823, especially, it has been observed with the greatest strictness in every Saxon parish. Every shop must be closed and all work suspended, so that every citizen may attend church to sing Luther's hymns, and to listen to the praises of the great German reformer. On Sunday the people may do pretty much what they please, but any public violation of this sacred day is visited with pains and penalties.

Of course I went to hear what the preachers in the capital had to say on the late occasion. I was the more ready to do so from having, a few months ago, seen most of the places rendered famous by the name of Luther, and was, therefore, interested in all the leading features of his life and work. This induced me also to jot down, in chronological order, some of the more prominent events in Luther's life, for easy reference; and on reviewing my notes, it occurred to me that the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN might like to refresh their memories regarding these leading incidents, in view of the 400th anniversary of the reformer's birth to be celebrated next year, without the trouble of hunting through volumes of history. I have therefore transcribed my jottings, and now send them, leaving it for you to say if they are worth being transferred to the columns of your journal.

It is said that the first influences and experiences of the infancy and youth of illustrious men explain to a great extent the character of their subsequent life. Certainly these played an important part in the career of Luther, whether as regards the intellectual or religious preparation of the great reformer.

I.—HIS INTELLECTUAL PREPARATION

was marked by four steps—Mansfeld, Magdeburg, Eisenach, and Erfurt.

Mansfeld.—Martin Luther was born at Eisleben in 1483, and here the visitor is still shown the house in which he first saw the light—now a school for poor children. But his parents soon after removed to Mansfeld. His mother was pious, though ignorant; his father—a miner—was a hard worker, but intelligent. Towards their eight children—of whom Martin was the eldest—both parents were loving but strict, according to the light they had. Their severity produced a timidity which Luther was long in overcoming. They valued education, however, and did not shrink from making sacrifices to send Martin, at the age of fourteen, to study Latin at

Magdeburg.—Here Luther wrought very hard, but more than once was compelled, in company with others as poor as himself, to go about singing from door to door, for the purpose of earning the means of supplying his necessities. Going shortly after to

Eisenach, he was reduced to the same straits, and had again to humiliate himself. In consequence he acquired a serious, even a sad expression, unusual at his age. Here, however, an unexpected joy awaited him. A kind lady—Ursula Cotta—adopted Martin as her son; and with her he remained four years, working with much ardour and great success. The house in which he lived here still bears the name of Luther's house. His father now had attained a certain degree of ease, and sent Martin to the university to study law. This was at

Erfurt, where he distinguished himself by his activity, devoting every moment not spent in the lecture room to reading in the library. It was in the library of this university that he found a complete Bible in Latin, the contents of which so captivated him. There had been, it appears, ninety editions of the Bible between 1440 and 1500, and even a German translation; but all studies were then concentrated upon scholastic controversies. At that period only fragments of the Epistles and Gospels were read in churches, the Old Testament never. At the age of twenty-one years (1505) Luther graduated as Master in Arts.

II.—RELIGIOUS PREPARATION.

The impressions of his infancy and the hardships

of his youth had already produced serious thoughts in Luther's mind. He was prepared for his subsequent work, however, by special circumstances when a student, a monk, and a professor. During his

Student life at Erfurt, there was the reading of the Bible, a severe illness, the death by assassination of one of his friends, the falling of a thunderbolt at his side, and the sight of a picture which represented the Church as a ship filled with clergymen speeding on gaily towards heaven, while the sea around was filled with laymen struggling in vain to lay hold of it. All these conspired to induce him to enter the Augustine Monastery (1505) without even consulting his family.

As a Monk he was harshly treated. The most menial duties of the house were imposed upon him. He was obliged to go about the town with a sack upon his back, begging for the monastery. When freed from these degradations, he applied himself with fresh ardour to study, and to monkish devotions, but without finding peace to his mind. Staupitz, the Vicar-General of the Order, encouraged him by his counsels, and by degrees he began to find in the Bible the response which the wants of his conscience and heart so much needed. At length he was appointed to be a

Professor and preacher at Wittenberg. As professor, first of philosophy and then of theology, he took the Bible as the point of his teaching; and so successful were his lessons that the town of Wittenberg named him preacher. At the request of Staupitz, his superior, he accepted the office, and so great became his authority that he was appointed (1510?) a delegate to Rome to transact some business of the Order with the Pope. All readers of his life remember with what joy Luther entered the Holy City, and with what sadness he left it, after seeing the corrupt and scandalous lives of those who then frequented the Papal court. Still he continued to venerate the Pope (Julian II., "violent, ignorant, cruel,") whom he did not consider responsible for the painful scenes he had witnessed. In 1512, on the order of Staupitz, Luther took the degree of Doctor. His teaching as professor and preacher, founded upon Rom. 1. 17: "The just shall live by faith"—a sentence which had made a new man of him—had now a growing success, and one as extensive as it was deserved. [Germany is full of souvenirs of Luther. At Wittenberg you are shown the cell in which he lived, his chair, the table at which he wrote, the cup out of which he drank his beer, etc. His dwelling-house is now a school. The university at which he taught, was united with that of Halle in 1817. An oak, enclosed by a railing, stands outside one of the gates, and marks the spot where he burned the papal bull of excommunication, Dec. 10th, 1530.]

III.—PERSONAL ACTS WHICH DECIDED THE REFORMATION.

Luther's preaching, although novel in its character, did not assume a polemical or offensive tone. Nothing as yet had indicated the coming struggle. This was determined by Tetzel, and each of the five following years formed a step in advance.

1517.—Tetzel, an immoral man who had been condemned at Innsbruck to be thrown into the river in a sack, sold indulgences, and the people bought them. Luther protested against their doing so, and wrote to the neighbouring bishops regarding them. Finally, on 31st October, he affixed to the door of the *Schlosskirche* at Wittenberg his famous 95 theses in opposition to the sale of indulgences. In fifteen days the theses had spread throughout Germany.

1518.—Not wishing to be severe upon the Pope, he wrote him a very submissive letter, but the Pope cited him to appear at Augsburg to explain his conduct to Cajetan, the legate. Contrary to the advice of his friends, who feared treachery, Luther went, and after a week's interviews, the legate demanded retractation, pure and simple. "If I have taught error, prove it; it is better to obey God than man," was the substance of Luther's reply. Feeling his insecurity, he left by night on a horse provided by Staupitz, and by forced marches escaped, to the great disappointment of the legate.

1519.—The Pope, annoyed at the result of this interview, sent another of his councillors, Miltiz, to draw Luther into his net by soft speeches. Succeeding by flattery to excite the reformer's self-esteem, he promised to make as little noise as possible. But a doctor having provoked one of Luther's friends to a dispute at Leipsic, and having attacked himself, he repaired thither, accompanied by 200 students. The

discussion that followed led him to state and to prove that neither the authority of the Pope, nor the doctrines of indulgences, penance, purgatory, etc., had any support from the Bible. From that day Luther regarded the papacy with a different eye, and commenced a series of publications in which the whole reformation was included.

1520.—Being now excommunicated by Dr. Eck, Luther, amidst the applause of the university students, and inhabitants of Wittenberg, burned the bull upon the pupil square, and no longer hesitated to call the Pope the Antichrist.

1521.—The Emperor Charles V., to stop the religious agitation, called Luther to the Diet of Worms, giving him a safe conduct, all being done to get a hold of the great reformer, and to retain him. Here again retractation pure and simple was demanded; and once more his reply was, "Convince me first by clear and peremptory arguments from the Scriptures." It was while on the journey to Worms that he is said to have composed that hymn beginning, "*Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott,*" which the French historian Michelet calls the *Marcellaise* of the Reformation.

IV.—A TRUCE.—STRUGGLES AND PROGRESS.

After this meeting at Worms, the rupture with the Church was complete. Luther was put under the ban of the Empire, and would not long have escaped the wiles of his enemies, but for the precaution of the Elector of Saxony, who sent a troop of masked horsemen to seize him while returning from Worms, and to carry him, apparently as a prisoner, to the Wartburg, one of his castles. Here he remained nine months, under the name of "Junker George," giving himself up entirely to study, and commencing his translation of the Bible, which was not completed until 1534. At present, visitors to the castle, of whom there are immense numbers yearly, are shown, in addition to numerous portraits of Luther and his family, the miner's lamp used by his father, the musical instrument used by Luther at Eisenach, an old stove, his bed, and the vertebra of a whale which served him as a foot-stool.

Luther left his retreat unexpectedly and returned to Wittenberg to check the intemperate zeal of some of his friends—Professor Carlstadt, pushing the principles of reform much farther than he, had so excited the students that they went about, breaking into convents, destroying all images found in the churches, overturning the altars, etc. The reformer hastened to repress these excesses which threatened to compromise the cause of the Reformation. About the same time (1524) some hot-headed peasants, in the name of the principles of liberty, proclaimed by Luther, revolted against feudal oppression, which was then intolerable in Germany. Luther used his influence both with the peasants and their masters, to bring about a reconciliation; but this did not take place until a bloody battle had been fought at Frankenhausen.

In 1525 Luther threw off the monk's habit, never to resume it. The same year he married Katarina von Bora, who had formerly been a nun, and who henceforward worthily seconded her husband in all his work.

In 1529 after the Diet of Spire, which confirmed the edict of Worms, a great number of princes and of free cities protested against the orders of the Emperor, and thereafter the Reformers received the name of Protestants.

In 1530, at the Diet of Augsburg, the principles of the Reformers were set forth in a confession which has received the name of the "Confession of Augsburg," which sometimes serves to designate the Lutheran Church.

In 1531 the Protestant States formed a defensive league called the "League of Schmalkalden," the articles of which were drawn up by Luther, Melancthon, and other Reformers, in an old house still indicated by an inscription.

In 1532 was signed the "Peace of Religion," which assured liberty to the Protestants, until the convocation of a general Council (Council of Trent, 1545).

In 1566 Luther died at the age of sixty-two years at Eisleben, where he had been born. His body was taken to Wittenberg, and buried in the church from which his voice is said to have shaken the world. Beside him lie Melancthon (1560), and the Electors Wederich the Wise (1525), and John the Stedfast (1532).

V.—THE REFORMER AND THE MAN.

Luther has justly been called the "father of the Reformation." Humanly speaking, without him the