

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY.

REFORMATION.—LUTHER.

[CONTINUED.]

Miltitz, the dexterous and learned envoy of the Papacy, had steadily pursued his purpose of bringing Luther to the acknowledgment of the Papal authority, in all matters human and divine. After some negotiation, he had induced the Augustinian monks to send a deputation to their brother, requesting him to make this acknowledgment by letter, as the most authentic form. The request was complied with, and the letter was prefixed to his "Treatise of Christian Liberty"—a brief description of the privileges annexed to Christian feelings, under these two heads—"That the Christian is the freest of men, and subject to none;" and, "That the Christian is the most ready to serve all, and be subject to all." But the letter is the more important document; and strongly expresses at once the writer's habitual deference for the person of the Pope, and his growing contempt for the corruptions surrounding the papal throne.

"It is impossible for me," says Luther, "to be unmindful of your Holiness; since my sentiments concerning the papal office are held forth everywhere as the cause of the contest.

"By means of the impious flatterers of your Holiness, who, without cause, are full of wrath against me, I have been compelled to appeal from the See of Rome to a General Council. But my affection for your Holiness has never been alienated, though I begin to despise and triumph over those who had thought to terrify me by the majesty of your authority. One thing, however, I cannot despise, and that is the cause of my writing this letter—I mean the blame thrown on me for reflecting on your Holiness in person."

After contradicting this charge, he proceeds to state the actual object of his writings: "I have inveighed sharply against unchristian doctrines; and reproved my adversaries severely, not for rudeness, but impiety.

"So far from being ashamed of this, my purpose is, to despise the judgment of men, and to persevere in this vehemence of zeal, after the example of Christ. The multitude of flatterers has rendered the ears of our age so delicate, that as soon as we find that our sentiments are not approved of, we immediately exclaim, that we are slandered; and when we find ourselves unable to resist truth, we accuse our adversaries of detraction. But, let me ask, of what use were salt, if it were not pungent? or of the point of a sword, if it did not wound? Cursed be the man who doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.

"I have resisted, and shall continue to resist, what is called the Court of Rome, as long as the spirit of faith shall live in me. Neither your Holiness, nor any one, will deny, that it is more corrupt than Babylon or Sodom; and sunk, as I understand, in the most deplorable, desperate, and avowed impiety. I lament that, under the sanction of your name, and under the pretext of the good of the church, the people of Christ should be made a laughing-stock.

"Not that I attempt impossibilities, or expect that the endeavours of an individual can accomplish any thing in opposition to so many flatterers in that Babel. But I consider myself a debtor to my fellow-men, for whose welfare it behoves me to be solicitous; so that these Roman pests may at least destroy a smaller number, and in a more humane manner. During many years, nothing has been poured on the world, but monsters, in body and mind, along with the worst examples of the worst actions.

"It is clear as day, that the Church of Rome, in former ages the most holy of churches, has become a den of thieves, a scene of prostitution, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. So that greater wickedness is not to be conceived; even under Antichrist himself."

He then narrates the transactions with Cajetan, Eckius, and Miltitz; concluding by the entreaty that Leo would check the fraud and folly of the people round his throne; and finally declaring, that any attempt to make himself recant, would only be productive of increased difficulty; for he never would consent that man should lay down the law for the interpretation of the word of God.

"On the two conditions, of not requiring me to recant, and of permitting me to interpret Scrip-

ture according to my own judgment, I am willing to do or suffer any thing. I wish to provoke no one; neither do I wish to receive provocation; but, if provocation be given to me, since Christ is my master, I will not hold my tongue."

This was the declaration of that memorable war in which Luther was to lead the powers of European knowledge, liberty, and religion, against the haughty domination of the Papedom. It roused the whole wrath of the Vatican. A German monk displayed the superhuman audacity to assault the Supreme Lord of the faithful, the "Vicer of Christ on earth;" the holder of the two-fold sword of temporal and spiritual empire. The whole hierarchy was in uproar. An assembly of Cardinals, Canonists, and Theologians was instantly summoned, and the thunders that had awed so many monarchs were levelled at the head of this obscure revolter. But the Council suddenly felt that the old activity of Romish vengeance was not now to be let loose with the old success; their debates were long and perplexed; the only point on which they agreed was the guilt of the offender, which they pronounced to be impiety of the most daring and glaring kind. But the Theologians were retarded in their indignation by the Canonists, who reasoned, that no notoriety of crime ought to prevent a man's being heard in his own defence. The receipt was eventually divided into three heads. By the first, the doctrine was condemned; by the second, the books were ordered to be burned; and by the third, Luther was summoned to appear in due season, to stand his trial in Rome. The Bull excited the same protracted discussions, but it was urged forward by the zeal of the leading members of the conclave; and after a bitter struggle between the Cardinals Pucci and Accolti, the latter obtained the dubious honour, by the Papal interposition, of drawing up the furious and feeble anathema against the progress of religious liberty. This celebrated instrument should not be forgotten, while man requires to be reminded of the haughty and unlimited usurpation of the Papacy. It claims for the Pope, in addition to the power of inflicting ecclesiastical punishments, that of depriving the refractory of their property, and their civil privileges.

The Bulls of Pius II. and Julius II., which declared it heresy in any individual to appeal from the Pope to a General Council, were adopted to impress the weight of Luther's offences. But more direct charges were heaped upon his head; no less than forty-one heresies were proclaimed as the fruit of his labours; and he was compared with Porphyry, as an open antagonist to the truth of the Gospel.

But punishment of a more practical nature was next prepared for the criminal and his partisans; and the wrath of Rome had large and fierce variety of vengeance. Luther, and all enlisted in his opinions, were laid under the ban of human nature. They were in an instant cut off from all rights, natural and acquired, pronounced guilty of high treason, incapable of any legal act, of property, freedom, or worship, infamous while they lived, infamous when they died, and unfit for Christian burial. The name of the man, and the memory of his revolt, were equally to be sunk in contemptuous oblivion. His books were to be burned. It was to be a crime to publish, to preach, or even to read his works. The heresiarch himself was ordered to attend, and take his trial at Rome, within two months; and, in case of disobedience, the civil and spiritual authorities alike were commanded to seize him and his adherents, and send them to Rome.

These are the testimonies of history; and from these nothing but frenzy will disdain to be taught, as nothing but impiety and political delusion will dare to question their practical wisdom. We have here the Papacy speaking without fear the sentiments which fear only can ever make it suppress, and which are to it as the blood is to the heart, and the marrow to the bone. Let the Papist who, among us, would boast of his passion for general liberty, of his zeal for general toleration, and of his faithful separation of the allegiance due to his own sovereign, from the homage due to the head of his church, read this Bull, and ask himself, whether he has not been the tool of a palpable and insolent imposture. Let the friends of truth take this document in their hands, and ask those who are still undeceived, whether human language can express a sterner spirit of ty-

ranny over the individual, of usurpation of states, and of the unhesitating and remorseless determination to pursue to blood and ruin every opinion that was not moulded into the shape prescribed by Rome.

Luther's sole crime was the attempt to think for himself on points essential to the first principles of man. He had before him the Scriptures, and he laboured to understand the great code by which he was to be judged before the tribunal, not of man, but of the Eternal. He had offered no human resistance to the authority of his spiritual superiors. He had merely examined for himself, as every man is bound to do by the express command of inspiration, and as, by the common dictate of the understanding, every man obviously must do, who desires to attain that solid and heartfelt conviction of their value, without which practical virtue is a fantasy. He was no rebel, but an inquirer; no preacher of insolent dogmatism and proud self-authority, but a scholar and a reasoner, and ready to give a reason of the faith that was in him. His personal character was touched by no impurity. He stood open to the eyes of mankind, and defied them to discover a stain. Yet this man of learning, intelligence, and genius, was to be dragged through the whole course of the deepest punishments reserved for the traitor and the murderer here, and then consigned to the grave, stripped of every hope which Rome could strip from the disembodied spirit, and consigned, in her furious creed, to eternal damnation.

On earth his memory was to be obliterated, his labours of genius and learning were to be destroyed, his life was to be given over to the law of treason, and his dead body to be deprived of those rites which Rome had pronounced indispensable to the repose of the soul. And for the purposes of this atrocious vengeance, the rights of all temporal sovereigns were to be invaded. No matter to what king Luther was the subject; he was declared the subject of a still superior king, whose dominion extended to every corner of the earth where he could dispatch his mandate. The laws of nations were dust and air before the paramount law of Rome. Neither innocence before the tribunals of the victim's own country, nor true allegiance to his own sovereign, nor the will of that sovereign himself, could be suffered to stand between the slave and that towering and stupendous impiety which, seating itself on "the throne of God, made itself be worshipped as God." For deliverance from this horrible tyranny, Protestant nations cannot be sufficiently thankful; and their vigilance in the preservation of their liberty and independence should be sharpened by every recollection of the former excesses of the Popedom.

The Bull was now to be published in Germany, and Eckius, with the double activity of a beaten disputant, and of a solicitor for preferment at Rome, undertook the mission. This man's character was rapidly developing itself in the colours in which it had been long before painted by the strong discrimination of Luther:—

"Eckius is totally treacherous, and incapable of the obligations of amity. At Rome, and in his private correspondence, he had continually boasted himself of his services to the Papacy, of his confidential intercourse with the Pope, and of the light which he had been the first to throw on the inextricable guilt of the new opinions. In Germany he professed the strong reluctance with which he had undertaken the publication of the Bull. But it is difficult for the most acute treachery to be always on its guard: some of those arrogant letters escaped; they fell into the hands of the Reformers, were published by Luther with notes—and Eckius was shown to be nothing more than a preferment-hunter and a tool."

A letter from the sagacious Miltitz is preserved, which, stating the arrival of the Popish Missionary, is curious as a memorial of the times:—

"I found Eckius at Leipsic, very clamorous and full of threats: I invited him to an entertainment, and employed every means in my power to discover what he proposed to do. After he had drunk freely, he began to relate, in pompous terms, the commission which he had received from Rome, and the means by which he was to bring Luther to obedience. He had caused the Bull to be published in Misnia on the 21st of September, at Merseberg on the 25th, and at Wittenberg on the 29th. He was in the habit of displaying the Bull with great pomp. He lodged with the pub-