

The time was come to take a decisive stand. His resolution was soon formed. He could not retract, because he felt assured that truth was on his side. If he persevered, it was at the risk of all that was dear to man. But he had learned to reason as Paul did: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" He heard the voice from heaven; "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues"—and he was prompt to obey. By the bold act of December 10, he defied the Pope, and publicly withdrew from his communion and allegiance. It was not mere bravado—it was not insolence—it was not pride—it was not revenge—it was a soul emerging from bondage to freedom, bursting its fetters, and asserting the rights which God had given and tyrants taken away.

Nor did Luther repent of the transaction. Next day he lectured to the students as usual, and solemnly urged them to shake off the yoke of Antichrist, as they regarded the salvation of their souls. Shortly after, he selected thirty articles from the Papal decretals and laws, and published them in a tract, intermingling some remarks of his own, that all men might see how completely he was justified in what he had done. The last two articles were thus expressed:—

"Art. 29. The Pope has power to interpret Scripture, and to teach as he pleases; and no person is allowed to interpret in a different way.

"Art. 30. The Pope does not derive from the Scriptures, but the Scriptures derives from the Pope, authority, power, and dignity."

Books containing such assertions, he argued, deserved to be burnt. At any rate, no reasonable man, who revered the Bible, could defend them, or pity their fate.

Writing to Staupitz, a few months afterwards, Luther said:—"When I burnt the Pope's books and his bull, I did it trembling and with prayer, but now I rejoice in that deed more than in any transaction of my whole life; for those books are more pestilent than I had imagined."\*

Yes—it was the act of a hero—of one of those mighty men of God, who are raised up for special services in times of trial, and whose movements, if they appear to some strange and startling, are, nevertheless, in perfect harmony with the claims of truth. O for more of the spirit of Luther!

#### The Religious Character of the Reformation.

Incorrect and partial views of the Protestant Reformation have been sometimes propounded. Its literary or its political aspects have been almost exclusively regarded, as though the benefits which Europe derived from the movement were secular rather than religious. Now, it is certainly true that literature owes much to the Reformation; that science has advanced with giant strides ever since; and that the progress of constitutional freedom during the last three centuries is gratifying in the highest degree to all who desire the improvement of society:—but these, though confessedly important, are only the *indirect* advantages which have been derived from that great change. It was a glorious revival of religion. In this respect, it resembled the first manifestation of Christianity.

The Reformers were men of talent—variously and highly gifted—and some of them men of profound learning, after the training of those days. They were also, in an eminent sense, men of God. Their religious experiences, as detailed by themselves,

\* Epistolæ (DeWette) i. 542.