

He had now been engaged in the contest upwards of three years. He began, as the reader is aware, by opposing Indulgences, and at first meant nothing more, for at that time the Pope was the object of his deepest reverence, nor would he have believed it right to disobey his commands, or withstand his power. Leo X., as he supposed, was ill-informed and deceived, and would rectify abuses as soon as they were clearly proved to exist. That illusion was quickly dispelled. The Pope hated reform as heartily as any of his predecessors; he wanted money, and he cared not by what means it was obtained. Luther became more enlightened. Popery appeared to him as one great abuse, which must be utterly swept away, to be replaced by a new ecclesiastical creation, conformed to the original pattern. As soon as he perceived this, he shaped his course accordingly, taking measures to produce similar convictions in the minds of others.

What he learned he taught as soon as he had learned it. Judiciously availing himself of the press, his thoughts were embodied in short, plain, pithy tracts, and scattered among the people by thousands, instructing and convincing men in the most effectual manner. His vigorous conceptions being clothed in a remarkably happy and popular style, whatever he wrote was read with great avidity, and his words were truly "winged words," for they flew swiftly through Europe, awakening the slumberers, confirming the weak, and comforting the distressed.

Powerful efforts were made to check the progress of the new movement, and bring about a reaction in favour of Rome. Papal envoys were employed, by whose influence it was hoped that the Reformer might be induced to retrace his steps; first, Cajetan, who stormed and threatened—and then, Miltitz, whose soothing flattery was

of a much more dangerous tendency: but Luther was firm. Not only so; fresh discoveries were made, as he daily read the word of the Lord by Heaven's own light, and meekly received its teachings. These discoveries (for such they were, both to him and to the world at large, because the truth had been hidden for ages) were immediately announced, and of necessity the breach was widened more and more. At length Pope Leo X. was fully roused to action. Justly fearing the consequences of Luther's proceedings, he determined to crush him at once. A Bull was issued, June 13, 1520, condemning forty-one propositions, said to be drawn from the writings of the Reformer. He had made such declarations as these:—That the Pope is not the Vicar of Christ on earth; that indulgences are inefficacious; that purgatory cannot be proved from Scripture; that a new life is the best penance; that the Pope has no power to decree articles of faith; and, that it is contrary to the will of God to burn heretics. For these and similar assertions he was condemned; his books were ordered to be burnt; he, himself, was cited to Rome, on pain of being excommunicated if he did not appear within sixty days; and all secular powers were in that case enjoined to seize and imprison him, that he might be dealt with as his alleged crimes deserved. A special agent, John Eckius, who had quailed before him in argument, and was on that account deeply embittered against him, was despatched to Germany to publish and circulate the Bull, and secure obedience to it. Aleander discharged the same duty in the Netherlands. As he proceeded from city to city, the writings of Luther were collected and burnt; nor would the Legate have hesitated to burn the Reformer himself, if he had been in his power. But he "abode under the shadow of the Almighty."