

After a fatiguing journey, he came within sight of the seven-hilled city—so fondly called by some the "queen of the earth and of the Church." His heart shook with emotion;—his eyes filled with tears;—he fell upon his knees;—he kissed the earth;—he broke out in the wildest expressions of veneration and love;—he hastened to join in the devotions of the Church, and to present the credentials of his mission. Everywhere he was received with respect; but everywhere he saw evidence to dispel the illusion of his mind. The grandeur of ancient Rome had departed: the condition of modern Rome was corrupt. Julius II was the reigning pontiff, and his character was not above reproach. The priests in general were idle, ignorant, and profane. There was no devotion in the Church; there was no reverence in the Convent. "It is incredible," said Luther, "what sins and atrocities are committed in Rome. They must be seen and heard to be believed." "The nearer," said Macchiavelli, "we approach the capital of Christendom—meaning Rome—the less do we find of the Christian spirit in the people."

We Italians are principally indebted to the priests for having become impious and profligate." Luther was literally distressed at the immoralities he witnessed. There was an entire change in the current of his feelings. At a later period he said, he would not have missed seeing Rome for a hundred thousand florins.

In returning to Wittenberg, Luther became a more profound student of the Divine Word, and a more earnest expounder of its truths. As a doctor of divinity he sought to realize correct principles of interpretation, and to apply the doctrines and precepts of Scripture thereby educed, to the recognized tenets of the schools. In doing this he exposed afresh the errors of Pelagianism, and re-asserted the arguments of St. Augustine and the Fathers. The propositions affirmed, and the proofs adduced, arrested attention, stimulated inquiry, led to discussion, and thus prepared the way for that doctrinal revolution without which there could have been no external reformation. It is possible that many of his prolegations were too abstract for the popular mind. The discussion of metaphysical and recondite themes could hardly enlist the public sympathy; and yet a correct interpretation of the Bible, and a right apprehension of the doctrines therein revealed, were intimately associated with—were absolutely necessary to, the correction of the outer-abuses beneath which the Church groaned. It was a reformation of doctrine as well as of practice. Luther could never have made the truth bear with such prominence and power upon the errors of the Church, if he had not first realized that truth in his own nature, as well by his logical faculty as by his spiritual consciousness. There can be no true devotion without a sound faith. The one essentially implies the other; and in these days of latitudinarian theology—when the dogmatic character of the Bible is ignored, and the obligation of a clearly defined faith is repudiated—it seems necessary to re-affirm the fundamental principles of religion, that a super-natural revelation was needed, that such a revelation is contained in the Holy Bible—and that by its dicta we are and must be bound. Without a recognition of the supreme authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice we have no basis on which to work; and only in so far as Luther made the Bible his foundation and guide, was he prepared for the mission on which he had almost unconsciously entered.

The controversy on Indulgences became the match which ignited the