

to make it. An invisible and mightier hand than his held the clue, and led the herald of truth along a path that was still hidden from him, and from the difficulties of which he would perhaps have shrunk, if he had foreseen them, and if he had advanced alone and of his own accord. "I entered into this controversy," said he, "without any definite plan, without knowledge or inclination; I was taken quite unawares, and I call God, the searcher of hearts, to witness". . . .

No one appeared next day at the university to attack Luther's propositions. The Tetzels were too much decried, and too shameful, for any one but himself or his followers to dare take up the glove. But these theses were destined to be heard elsewhere than under the arched roof of an academic hall. Scarcely had they been nailed to the church door of Wittenberg, than the feeble sounds of the hammer were followed throughout all Germany by a mighty blow that reached even the foundations of haughty Rome, threatening with sudden ruin the walls, the gates, and pillars of popery, stunning and terrifying her champions, and at the same time awakening thousands from the sleep of error.

These theses spread with the rapidity of lightning. A month had not elapsed before they were at Rome. . . . Many of the pilgrims, who had thronged to Wittenberg from every quarter for the feast of All-Saints, carried back with them, instead of indulgences, the famous theses of the Augustine monk. By this means they contributed to their circulation. Every one read them, meditated and commented on them. Men conversed about them in all the convents and in all the universities. The pious monks . . . were delighted at this simple and striking confession of the truth, and heartily desired that Luther would continue the work he had begun. At length one man had found courage to undertake the perilous struggle. . . . Piety saw in these theses a blow aimed at every superstition.

Excerpts from J. H. M. D'Aubigne's *The History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 1845, Vol. 1, Chap. V.



HALLOWEEN

- 1517 -

J. H. Merle D'Aubigne

THE FESTIVAL OF ALL-SAINTS was a very important day for Wittenberg, and, above all, for the church the elector [Frederick of Saxony] had built there, and which he had filled with relics. On that day the priests used to bring out these relics, ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones, and exhibit them before the people, who were astonished and dazzled at such magnificence. Whoever visited the church on that festival and made confession, obtained a rich indulgence. Accordingly, on this great anniversary, pilgrims came to Wittenberg in crowds.

On the 31st October 1517, at noon on the day preceding the festival, [Martin] Luther . . . walks boldly towards the church, to which a superstitious crowd of pilgrims was repairing, and posts upon the door ninety-five theses or propositions against the doctrine of indulgences. . . .

Luther therein declares, in a kind of preface, that he has written these theses with the express desire of setting the truth in the full light of day. He declares himself ready to defend them on the morrow, in the university, against all opponents. Great was the attention they excited: they were read, and passed from mouth to mouth. Ere long the pilgrims, the university, and the whole city were in commotion.

We give some of these propositions, written with the pen of the monk, and posted on the door of the church of Wittenberg:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says repent, he means that the whole life of believers upon earth should be a constant and perpetual repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance (i.e. confession and satisfaction), as administered by the priest.

21. The commissaries of indulgences are in error when they say, that by the papal indulgence a man is delivered from every punishment and is saved.
27. They preach mere human follies who maintain, that as soon as the money rattles in the strong box, the soul flies out purgatory.
28. This is certain, that as soon as the money tinkles, avarice and love of gain arrive, increase, and multiply. But the support and prayers of the Church depend solely on God's will and good pleasure.
32. Those who fancy themselves sure of salvation by indulgences will go to perdition along with those who teach them so.
36. Every Christian who truly repents of his sins, enjoys an entire remission both of the penalty and of the guilt, without any need of indulgences.
37. Every true Christian, whether dead or alive, participates in all the blessings of Christ or of the Church, by God's gift, and without a letter of indulgence.
52. To hope to be saved by indulgences, is a lying and an empty hope; although even the commissary of indulgences, nay farther, the pope himself, should pledge their souls to guarantee it.
76. The indulgence of the pope cannot take away the smallest daily sin, as far as regards the guilt or the offence.
95. For it is far better to enter into the kingdom of heaven through much tribulation, than to acquire a carnal security by the consolations of a false peace.

Such was the commencement of the work. The germs of the Reformation were contained in these propositions of Luther's. The abuses of indulgences were attacked therein, and this is their most striking feature; but beneath these attacks there was a principle which, although attracting the attention of the multitude in a less degree, was one day to overthrow the edifice of popery. The evangelical doctrine of a free and gratuitous remission of sins was there for the first time publicly professed. The work must now increase in strength. It was evident, indeed, that whoever had this faith in the remission of sins, announced by the Wittemberg doctor; that whoever had this repentance, this conversion, and this sanctification, the

necessity of which he so earnestly inculcated, would no longer care for human ordinances, would escape from the toils and swaddling-bands of Rome, and would acquire the liberty of the children of God. All errors would fall down before this truth . . . Luther himself acknowledged afterwards, that in proclaiming justification by faith, he had laid the axe to the root of the tree. . . .

In our own days, too, we have forgotten this main doctrine of justification by faith, although in a sense opposed to that of our fathers. "In the time of Luther," observes one of our contemporaries, "the remission of sins cost money at least; but in our days, each man supplies himself gratis." There is a great similarity between these two errors. There is perhaps more forgetfulness of God in ours, than in that of the 16th century. The principle of justification by the grace of God, which brought the Church out of so much darkness at the period of the Reformation, can alone renew our generation, put an end to its doubts and waverings, destroy the selfishness that preys upon it, establish righteousness and morality among the nations, and, in short, reunite the world to God from whom it has been dis severed.

But if Luther's theses were strong by the strength of the truth they proclaimed, they were not the less so by the faith of their champion. He had boldly drawn the sword of the Word: he had done so in reliance on the power of truth. He had felt that by leaning on God's promises, he could afford to risk something, to use the language of the world. "Let him who desires to begin a good work," said he when speaking of this daring attack, "undertake it with confidence in the goodness of his cause, and not, which God forbid! expecting the support and consolation of the world. Moreover, let him have no fear of man, or of the world; for these words will never lie: *It is good to trust in the Lord, and assuredly he that trusteth in the Lord shall not be confounded.* But let him that will not or who cannot risk something with confidence in God, take heed how he undertakes anything." Luther, after having posted his theses on the gate of All-Saints' Church, retired, no doubt, to his tranquil cell, full of the peace and joy that spring from an action done in the Lord's name, and for the sake of eternal truth. . . .

Frequently, in after-years, as he contemplated the immense and unexpected consequences of this courageous attack, Luther was astonished at himself, and could not understand how he had ventured