

SELLING INDULGENCES.

In the dark ages, when Papacy held control of men's consciences and few dared to think, one method which she practiced to supply herself with money was the sale of indulgences. The indulgence was a permission to sin and yet be free from its consequences. Like all great evils it came in gradually, and at first consisted in the forgiveness of sins and remission of the penalty to all who would fight the church's battles – holy wars as they were called – waged against all within her reach whom she deemed "heretics" and infidels. Heretics included all classes of Christians who differed from and did not support Papacy. Infidels were those who disbelieved in Christianity, such as the Mohammedans. Against these she waged her wars, and those who engaged in them and died in battle were sure of heaven, no matter what their previous course of life had been. This cancellation of sins was offered on account, not of repentance and faith in the ransom, but for what they termed the "good work" of slaughtering the church's enemies in the crusades, etc. Thus indulgences got under headway.

Afterward succeeding Popes and councils became still more bold, and argued that if they had a right to remit sins for service to the church, they had also the right to remit them for money for the church, and, if right for the living, it was right also for the dead. By and by they went still further and concluded that if they had a right to remit past sins for money, they had the same right to remit, or excuse, or grant indulgence for sins of the future.

We could not object to this course of reasoning if its premise or starting point were right. If Papacy had one of these rights, we must conclude that she had the others also. But what right has any man to consider any sin cancelled except upon the conditions God

lays down – not works, not money, but faith in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Some of these indulgences expressly mentioned the very sins which might be committed. Some mentioned the number of years that the torments of Purgatory would be shortened to the indulged one. Of Pope John XII. it is recorded that he granted "ninety thousand years of pardons for deadly sins" for the devout repetition of three prayers written in a chapel in Rome.

It was the sale of these future indulgences for money which awakened and aroused a few such honest souls as Luther and gave rise to the Reformation movement, called Protestant, because of their protests and objections to this and other evils recognized in Papacy.

The crisis was reached when Julius I. and afterward Leo X. published indulgences [R554 : page 5] to those who should contribute money to the erection of the world-renowned St. Peter's cathedral at Rome, commenced A.D., 1506. The collecting of these funds from the sale of indulgences was committed to monks of the "Order of St. Dominic," among whom was the notorious Tetzl. According to Luther's account they sold indulgences in the streets, market-places and taverns, teaching that every contributor, if he paid on his own account, opened to himself the gates of heaven, and, if on account of the dead, he instantly liberated a soul from purgatory.

Tetzl traveled in state from town to town, bearing the official document or "bill" of Leo X. on a velvet cushion proclaiming to the credulous multitudes: "Indulgences are the most precious and sublime of God's gifts; this red cross has as much efficacy as the cross of Jesus Christ. Draw near and I will give you letters duly sealed, by which even the sins you shall hereafter desire to commit, shall be all forgiven you. There is no sin so great that indulgence cannot remit. Pay, only pay largely, and you shall be forgiven. But more than all this, indulgences save not the living alone, they also save the dead.

Ye priests, ye nobles, ye tradesmen, ye wives, ye maidens, ye young men, hearken to your departed parents and friends who call to you from the bottomless abyss: – 'We are enduring horrible torment; a small alms would deliver us, you can give it, will you not?' The moment the money clinks in the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes

*Words of Tetzal – by H. Guinness.

God – he has given all power to the pope."*

The following is the form of the indulgences, the blanks being filled to suit circumstances: –

"Our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on thee;...and absolve thee by the merits of his most holy sufferings. I, in virtue of the Apostolic power committed to me, absolve thee from all ...excesses, sins and crimes, that thou mayest have committed, however great and enormous they may be, and of whatever kind....I remit the pains thou wouldst have had to endure in purgatory....I restore thee to the innocence and purity of thy baptism, so that at the moment of death, the gates of the place of torment shall be shut against thee, and the gates of Paradise open to thee. And if thou shouldst live long, this grace [favor – indulgence] continueth unchangeable till the time of thy end. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. The brother John Tetzal, commissary, hath signed this with his own hand."

A scale of prices was so fixed as to draw heavily from the rich and yet not overlook and miss the pennies of the poorer. For instance, the royal crime against the laws of the Church, of marriage with a first cousin cost \$5,000, while the terrible sin of wife-murder or parricide cost only \$20.

The advantage of Papacy in the promulgation of the doctrine of eternal and purgatorial torture is here manifest, and truly they left no power of eloquence unused to prove those awful doctrines, one of which – the worst – Protestantism has resolutely held on to, and as a sweet morsel refuses to give it up, though found contrary to God's character and Word.

No wonder that such deep depravity brought its own overthrow, so that even the church of Rome subsequently found it necessary to condemn it at the council of Trent. But even yet the same principle is in force, though more carefully guarded.

When Protestantism first stepped out it was upon the platform of "Justification by faith," and not by money, prayers or works. However, as we have seen heretofore, the lines of protest are gradually disappearing, and in many ways many of the sects are closely approaching a likeness of their mother. Even in this matter of "Indulgences" we find the spirit of the mother in the daughters. Not that they go to the same extent of depravity in the matter: that would be impossible, for the Father of lies is too crafty to attempt to deceive men in so open a manner in this enlightened nineteenth century, but it is, nevertheless, a fact that indulgences are sold for money in Protestant churches in very many localities.

It is so changed now, that a membership in the so-called churches is reckoned a passport to heaven. And memberships may readily be gained by those who are far from being saints, if they bring influence and money into the church. And even though they be known to be guilty of crimes against their church creeds, or worse, against the laws of God and men; if they have money which can be drawn from to build or furnish a little "St. Peter's," or to clear a church already built, of debt, they are unrebuked and continued in membership with all its implied rights of heavenly rest and happiness at the end.

As the unblushing indulgences of Papacy aroused the indignation of unfettered minds three centuries ago, so this modern phase of indulgence is arousing the contempt of the saints and of the outside world. But here, as there, good is resulting, for men are coming to see that while a membership of the true church, "whose names are written in heaven," is a sure guarantee of eternal life, etc., membership in earthly institutions, called churches, is a totally different matter.
