

MARTIN LUTHER.



THE HISTORY OF PROTESTANTISM, the first volume of which has just been published, is a work worthy of its erudite author, and enterprising publishers.* The Reformation, to which, more than to aught else, England owes her greatness, is traced from its very germ in the time of the early Christian martyrs, right through the long series of heroic defenders of the faith, till the end of the first volume brings us to the triumph of Luther on the occasion of the protest (of 1529) of the Protestant Princes. If ever a book deserved careful reading this does; it is full of instruction, and replete with interest, and will well repay perusal.

The following extract may be interesting to our younger readers. The portrait is engraved from a painting by Louis Cranach, dated 1543; Luther being then sixty years old.

"At the age of fourteen years (1497) Martin was sent to the Franciscan school at Magdeburg. At school the hardships and privations amid which his childhood had been passed not only attended him but increased. His master often flogged him; for it was a maxim of those days that nothing could be learned without a free use of the rod; and we can imagine that the buoyant or boisterous nature of the boy often led him into transgressions of the rules of school etiquette. He mentions having one day been flogged fifteen times. What added to his hardships was the custom then universal in the German towns, and continued till a recent date, if even now wholly abandoned, of the scholars begging their bread, in addition to the task of conning their lessons. They went, in small companies, singing from door to door, and receiving whatever alms the good burghers were pleased to give them. At times it would happen that they received more blows, or at least more rebuffs, than alms."

"The instruction was gratis, but the young scholar had not bread to eat, and though the means of his father were ampler than before, all were needed for the support of his family, now numerous; and after a year Luther was withdrawn from Magdeburg and sent to a school in Eislebnach, where having relatives he would have less difficulty, it was thought, in supporting himself. These hopes were not realised, because perhaps his relations were poor. The young scholar had still to earn his meals by singing in the streets. One day Luther was perambulating Eislebnach, stopping before its likeliest dwellings, and striving with a brief hymn to woo the inmates to kindness. He was sore pressed with hunger, but no door opened, and no hand was extended to him. He was greatly downcast; he stood musing within himself what should become of him. Alas! he could not endure these hard-

ships much longer; he must abandon his studies; he must return home, and work with his father in the mines. It was at that moment that Providence opened for him a home.

"As he stood absorbed in these melancholy thoughts, a door near him was opened, and a voice bade him come in. He turned to see who it was that spoke to him. It was Ursula, the wife of Conrad Cotta, a man of consideration among the burghers of Eislebnach. Ursula Cotta had marked the young scholar before. He was accustomed to sing in the church choir on Sundays. She had been struck with the sweetness of his voice. She had heard the harsh words with which he had been driven away from other doors. Taking pity, she took him in, and made him sit down at her board; and not only did she appease his hunger for the time, but her husband, won by the open face and sweet disposition of the boy, made him come and live with them.

"Luther had now a home; he could eat without begging or singing for his bread. He had found a father and mother in this worthy pair. His heart opened; his young genius grew livelier and lovelier every day. Penury, like the chill of winter, had threatened to blight his powers in the bud; but this kindness, like the sun, with genial warmth, awakened them into new vigour. He gave himself to study with fresh ardour; tasks difficult before, became easy now. If his voice was less frequently heard in the streets, it cheered the dwelling of his adopted parents. Madame Cotta was fond of music, and in what way could the young scholar so well repay her kindness as by cultivating his talent for singing, and exercising it for the delight of this 'good Shunammite?' Luther passed, after this, nearly two years at Eislebnach, equally happy at school in the study of Latin, rhetoric, and verse-making, and at home where his hours of leisure were filled up with song, in which he not unfrequently accompanied himself on the lute. He never, all his after-life, forgot either Eislebnach or the good Madame Cotta. He was accustomed to speak of the former as 'his own beautiful town,' and with reference to the latter he would say, 'There is nothing kinder than a good woman's heart.' The incident helped also to strengthen his trust in God. When greater perils threatened in his future career, when man stood aloof, and he could descry no deliverance near, he remembered his agony in the streets of Eislebnach, and how visibly God had come to his help."

USEFULNESS.

HOW ample our means and opportunities of doing good in the world! Is knowledge power? Teachers, textbooks, schools abound. May property be useful? Many avocations are open to us, in which we may provide a livelihood, and have much to spare for others in need. Has good example a strong and happy influence? There is grace to help us to adorn a good profession before many witnesses. Will the prayer of faith open the windows of heaven, and call down plentiful rains of spiritual blessings? All are welcome to the throne of grace, and are assured that if they ask it shall be given them. All may not, indeed, have the genius and learning of a Calvin, and be able to write rich volumes for the instruction of future generations. Not many may have the eloquence of a Whitfield, and be competent to carry with them listening multitudes, swaying their emotions as the whirlwind does the forest. Few may possess the wealth of a Peabody, or have wherewith to provide schools and education for communities and states; and only such as George Muller may, simply bowed before the Hearer of prayer, secure ample resources for conducting extensive institutions of charity.

But are not the rivulets and streams useful, in common with the great rivers, in refreshing the earth? What these may lack in quantity, may they not make up in number? Or the ten thousand times ten thousand stars of the night—do they not, as well as the moon, give beauty to the sky, and light the traveller on his way? Genius, learning, wealth, eloquence, and such gifts and acquirements, consecrated to religion, may be necessary as the Mississippi, the Amazons, the Nile, in order that the knowledge of the Lord may cover the whole earth, as the waters fill the sea. But the comparatively little efforts and influences of the masses of Christendom will be useful too. They are the rivulets and streams that are to bear an important part in refreshing a wilderness-world, and making the desert blossom as the rose. They are the stars