

MARTIN LUTHER.

Persons living in this day seldom stop to think what it meant to live four hundred years ago or that the boyhood of "the monk that shook the world" was spent amid poverty and discomfort such as the poorest person in our country could hardly realize. We read of that time that the fire was built on some stones in the middle of the floor and the smoke was left to escape through the cracks and crannies of the roof. There were no windows to the houses or locks to the doors. The candles were splinters of wood dipped in melted fat. The principal food was coarse unleavened rye or barley bread, black and nasty; our common vegetables and garden fruits were entirely unknown, and all the dishes the people had to eat from were rough wooden platters. They had no leather shoes, but instead, great wooden *sabots*. The beds of the poorest classes were hollowed out from logs of wood, a bundle of straw instead was considered quite a luxury, only to be used by sick or very well-to-do persons. Soap there was none and they had neither tea nor coffee, spoons nor forks. The people of the day were firm believers in witchcraft and in the agency of fairies and kobolds and demons and evil spirits of all kinds. Children were much more harshly treated than they are now. The slightest offences met with the severest punishments. There were very few books, printing was in its infancy, and an education, such as we are now unwilling that any boy or girl should grow up without could then be obtained only by sons of the wealthy.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben a little village in Saxony, on the 10th of November 1483, and all over the Christian world the anniversary of his birth has lately been celebrated. It was among such surroundings as above described that his childhood was spent. But his mother, although strict to severity, was a God-fearing woman who cherished great hopes for her son's future and often prayed at his side that he would grow up to do noble work for God. When Martin was six months old the family removed to Mansfeld a place among the Hartz mountains where the father Hans (or John) Luther, was engaged in mining. His home discipline was severe, but his school life was worse still. The schoolmasters of his childhood he said were goliards and tyrants, and the schools were little hells. At fourteen he was sent to a better school at Magdeburg and at fifteen to a still better one at Eisenach, where he began to receive thorough instruction.

About this time thoughts of God came thronging into the boy's mind and he began to ponder what He required him to do. At the age of eighteen he went to the university in Erfurt, then the best in Germany, his father intending that he should be educated for the law. While here he found a Latin Bible and reading it a knowledge of his sins and of the terrible judgment to come came vividly before him. On his way back to Erfurt after visiting his home in the summer of 1505 he was overtaken by a thunder storm. Terrified at the lightning, which was very near, he threw himself from his horse and cried "Holy Anne help me, I will become a monk." The next day he repented of his vow, for he knew how bitterly disappointed his father would be, but the vow had been given and he would abide by it. Soon he entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt and was at once put to the lowest drudgery. Feeling his sinfulness he fasted and prayed and performed the severest penances, but they all availed nothing. He ended his novitiate and took upon himself the full vows of monk and priest. He threw himself into his work with enthusiasm and studied the Bible eagerly and constantly, but could get no peace. His superior thought that he needed more work to do and sent him to the lately founded university at Wittenberg to teach theology and philosophy. He was now about twenty-five.

In 1511 he was sent to Rome on business of the Order and walked all the way, being six weeks upon the journey. In Rome, if anywhere, he hoped to find peace, but society there was worse than any he had yet seen. The city and court were magnificent but sin was everywhere. The priests did not believe what they taught, and Christianity was everywhere sneered at; the very name "Christian" was a synonym for fool. Who could retain his faith in the midst of this corruption? While going up the Holy staircase on his knees, the staircase up which

they assured him Jesus had walked when he was brought before Pilate, the words "the just shall live by faith" flashed across his mind and he at once rose and walked down. Luther went to Rome a true pilgrim but came back a Protestant.

About this time St. Peter's at Rome, which it was intended to make the grandest church in the world, was being built and money was badly needed for the purpose. To obtain it the sale of indulgences was commenced. The saints, the pope said, had performed more good works than were required of them, and the merits of these extra works could be obtained by any sinner who choose to pay for them. Thus by giving a certain sum of money a person could obtain the pardon of all his sins. The greater the sin the larger was the sum required, but by giving sufficient money a person could receive full pardon for any crime and become as innocent as if he had never committed it. Against such scandalous proceedings Luther rebelled. He wrote to several bishops but none would interfere. He then prepared ninety-five Theses calling in question the theory of indulgences, and their sale, and on

fourths of Germany was on Luther's side. This with various other political reasons delayed proceedings against him, and while they delayed Luther was not idle. He published an account of his trial, wrote a tract on the supremacy of the pope, and demanded to be tried by a general council. On the 10th of June 1520 the pope issued a bull against "the wild boar who had broken into the Lord's vine-yard." Luther by this time believed that there was nothing for him but death, but was perfectly fearless. The pope having previously condemned his writings to the fire, he on the 10th of December burned the pope's bull in the market place of Wittenberg. This was the last step, from which there could be no return, and a storm had now burst, he said, which would not end till the day of judgment.

The general council which Luther had demanded was called to meet at Worms April 17th 1521 and thither he went. His friends begged him not to go as they feared that he would be treacherously killed, but he said "I will go if there are as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the house tops." The warden on the walls blew a



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the 31st of October, 1517 "the most memorable day in modern European history," nailed them to the door of the Wittenberg church. In a few days these were translated into German and spread all over the country. Controversy raged and the excitement was tremendous. Persons from whom he had expected sympathy denounced him as a heretic, and the following August, 1518, he was summoned to a Diet of the Empire at Augsburg. He was so poor that he had to walk all the way from Wittenberg to Augsburg, and had to borrow a coat that he might appear decently before the princes. They angrily called upon him to recant but he refused unless they would show him wherein he was wrong. The pope's legate said to him "Think you that the pope cares for the opinions of Germany? Think you that the princes will take up arms for you? No indeed. And where will you be then? Under Heaven!" Luther answered. He despaired of his life but would not yield. He, however, escaped from the council at night and went back to Wittenberg.

The pope would willingly have killed him but found to his astonishment that three-

blast upon his trumpet as he entered, and the streets were crowded to see this man about whom all Germany was in an uproar. Few friends he had in that Diet, but God was with him. One man said "Dear Doctor, if you are right, the Lord God stand by you." Another, a gallant soldier, said, "Little monk, little monk, thou hast work before thee that I, and many a man whose trade is war never faced the like of. If thy heart is right, and thy cause is good, go on in God's name. He will not forsake thee." But in all these friendly expressions there was an "if;" Luther alone was sure that he was right. Before all that august assembly, priests, nobles, electors, dukes, Emperor; Italians, Spaniards and Germans, he, a peasant's son, stood alone. Yet not alone for God was with him. He listened to all their accusations and refused to retract one word. "Popes have erred," he said, "and councils have erred. Prove to me out of Scripture that I am wrong, and I submit. Till then my conscience binds me. Here I stand, I can do no more. God help me. Amen."

When he reached his lodgings at the close of the trial he flung up his hands and ex-

claimed "I am through! I am through! If I had a thousand heads they should be struck off one by one before I would retract."

His friends now became convinced that the Diet would condemn him to death and on his way home to await its decision, while passing through the Thuringian forest, he was seized by armed men, and carried to Wartburg Castle, where he remained, known only to a few, disguised as a captive knight and known by the name of the Ritter George. Here he stayed until the storm had blown over and political troubles held the attention of the authorities. While here Luther translated the New Testament and ere long he had the joy of seeing the whole Bible, in their own tongue, in the homes of all his countrymen.

The victory for which Luther had so long fought was now won. Books multiplied and the new doctrines spread rapidly. Churches could not hold the crowds who flocked to hear the great Reformer preach, and Luther spoke at times to 25,000 in the market place.

The Reformation was now fairly on its way, the country was marching rapidly on towards religious freedom, and no one could bar its progress.

Thinking of Dr. Martin Luther so long as a monk and a reformer it is difficult to think of him at the same time as a loving husband and a devoted father. In spite of great opposition he married Katherine von Bora who had been a nun in a distant convent. She was sixteen years his junior. The last twenty years of his life were less eventful but were spent happily in the care of his wife and children. He was passionately devoted to his children and allowed them all kinds of innocent enjoyment.

The death of two of his children he felt keenly, and when the third, Magdalen, in whom he saw promise of a beautiful character, died at the age of fourteen he was almost broken hearted.

The various political difficulties during the latter part of his life troubled Luther greatly. He reached his last birthday, we are told, sick at heart and sick in body. His sight failed gradually and in writing to a friend in January 1546 he calls himself "old, spent, worn, weary, cold, and with but one eye to see with." At the end of the month he went to his birth place but took cold on the way and on the 14th of February he preached in the church there for the last time. He never saw his wife and home again.

He wanted to get home but could not. He went to bed apparently as usual on the night of the 17th, but became restless and lay upon a sofa in the next room, and died between two and three in the morning. His two sons and his friend Jonas were with him. When they asked him if he would still stand by Christ and the doctrine which he had preached he said "Yes." Almost his last words were "It is death, I am going; Father into thy hands I commend my spirit."

TEACHERS' MEETING.

One of the things that needs attention in the autumn days is the teachers' meeting. Perhaps it has been taking a vacation; if so, this is the month to end the vacation and to get to work. Perhaps it has died altogether; if so, now is the time to have a resurrection. Perhaps there never has been such a meeting in your school; if so, there never will be a better time than now to start one. The superintendent who allows himself to be persuaded that it is impossible to have a teachers' meeting in his school needs a new infusion of heroism. This is one of the "impossible things" that ought to be done whether possible or not. The superintendent who succeeds is a man who does not falter in his duty before difficulties. No matter, then, how the croakers say, there should be a teachers' meeting in every Sunday-school. Suppose the teachers live in the country, scattered over a large parish; take the meeting around from house to house, and let waggons be sent to gather them together. Or, if it is a city school, whose teachers have so many "engagements" that they can not spare an evening for a weekly meeting; if they are not willing to cut off anything else for the sake of preparing to do their work well as teachers, there is need for a revival of the spirit of zeal and consecration. It is the work that costs most that shows most in real results.

—West. Teacher.

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