

den peal of thunder rent the sky. The beaten man looked up, a strange light in his sorrowful face. 'O Thou Ancient, Almighty One,' said he, 'Thy voice tellest me Thou still livest, and hast not forsaken me.' Yet, if he had judged by seeming, he might well have thought God had forsaken him in the days that followed. The victorious Kaiser marched on to Wittenberg, and took it. Nor was this all. The Elector had left his cousin, Duke Maurice, to guard his hereditary states."

"Duke Maurice? The Elector that now is?"

"Even so. He is the head of the younger branch of the House of Saxony, called the Albertine, as Duke John Frederick is of the elder, the Ernestine. Our Duke had treated him as a son or a young brother, receiving him when he quarrelled with his father, and making peace between them. So he trusted him absolutely. But Duke Maurice betrayed the trust, and ravaged with fire and sword the lands given him to guard."

"Traitor!"

"Hush, boy! we must not speak evil of dignities, and he is our ruler now. Wait for the end of my tale, which is the strangest part of it. But you see how Duke John Frederick lost all, even his liberty. His very life was threatened. He was alone amongst strangers and enemies: parted from his family, and from all he loved—save indeed that one faithful friend, Master Lucas Kranach the painter, implored leave to share his captivity, and got it. The Kaiser is a stern conqueror, and he has spared the conquered no drop in the bitter cup of humiliation. Wherever he went, and even to the Low Countries, beyond the bounds of our empire, he must needs carry with him his captives, the Elector and the Landgrave, to grace his triumph, and be mocked and gazed at by the crowd. Was not that enough for a man—for a prince—to bear, without the agony of knowing he had failed; had ruined his princely House, lost the broad lands his fathers left him, and wrought no deliverance in the earth for the cause he loved, and the people who trusted him?"

Wenzel bowed his head. That seemed to him indeed a bitter lot, worse even than his own. Father Fritz went on—

"Our Prince had a brief parting granted him, beneath the walls of Wittenberg, with the Duchess Sybilla. Knowest thou, boy, how true hearts beat the same in palace and in cottage? But thou art too young to know, or to guess at even, the great deep love that comes to those whose lives have been as one together, according to God's ordinance. It was hard to part, but these were the words he said, 'Be comforted. What I suffer now I suffer for His sake, whose I am and whom I serve.' And later, another word of his has come to us—a word that tells all the story of those long years of captivity—'Living or dying, imprisoned or free, I am still His.' That is what he has lived in, ever since."

"And the Duchess?" Wenzel asked. "Methinks, perhaps, it was harder even for her."

"With her sons, and a few faithful friends, who have followed her from Wittenberg, she has kept her little court in Gotha—less a court, indeed, than a Christian household, given to piety and good works. She has been much in prayer for her dear lord's deliverance, and we see to-day the answer to her prayers. Yet have those years of captivity not been lost. God's service may be done as well in a prison as on a throne. For any man, wheresoever he may be, who can look up to Him and say, 'I am still His,' is strong, and with a strength the world knows not. So strong was our captive Prince that even his conqueror, Kaiser Karl, acknowledged it, and bid high for his help in a plan he had at heart. He would gladly have given him his freedom back, and more. It was about what they call the *Interim*. You have heard the word, no doubt?"

"I heard the pastor who came to see me when I was ill talk of it with Farmer Speyer; but I understood them not."

"'Twas a kind of law the Kaiser tried to impose upon us Protestants, to keep until a General Council should be called together, to decide all matters of religion. We were to conform to the Romish Church in most things, only keeping our freedom in one or two, not of the first importance."

"But you would not do *that*—not for life itself?" said the young Bohemian.

"Our new Elector agreed to it, to please the Kaiser, who had so lately given him his cousin's lands and dignities. But his heart was not in it, so he did not press it on his subjects, and quiet folk in country places, like ourselves, were not troubled. But in Wittenberg, and the other towns, there was much trouble and perplexity. Even Dr. Philip

Melanchthon—sore I grieve to say it!—gave way and the people, like sheep having no shepherd, followed suit. It was then that we missed the stout heart and the clarion voice of God's chosen minister and watchman, Dr. Martin Luther. But, meanwhile, our Prince had so borne himself in defeat and captivity, that friend and foe alike paid him honour, and prized his good word. Thus the Kaiser was fain to get it for his new scheme. But he who belongs to Christ dare sell himself to none other; so our Duke stood out against threat and promise like a rock against the wave. And not in this alone; all through these years, his blameless life and conversation, in the midst of his enemies, have been to us a beacon light shining afar and silently, yet strengthening faith and brightening hope. The Kaiser's captive has indeed been Christ's free man."

"And now he is regaining his freedom—but how?" asked Wenzel.

"A strange thing has come about, through the providence of God, who holds in His hand the hearts of princes. Duke Maurice has turned suddenly against the Kaiser, who made him Elector, and by one quick, brilliant stroke has rent from him the fruits of his victories—more as yet I know not. But they say we Protestants are to have peace and freedom now, and as the firstfruits of it, the two princes, Duke John Frederick and the Landgrave of Hesse, are set free—Why, friends, what is the matter?" he asked in surprise, as his tale was brought to a sudden conclusion by the entrance of five or six of the people belonging to the farm, looking tired and rather out of temper, as those who have missed a sight they expected to see.

The story they poured out in answer was somewhat confused, but it seemed that their preparations had been almost completed, when the village magistrate got a message to the effect that the Duke, wearied with his journey, and having many friends to see, was remaining for a few days in Nuremberg. But, it was added, the Duchess intended going part of the way to meet him, and would perhaps pass through their village to-morrow. That, at least, would be some consolation; she would see their desire to do honor to her Lord, and be gratified. Still, there was much lamentation over the wreaths and the arches. Then Jonas Speyer himself came in, and invited Father Fritz to remain for the midday meal, which he did, but nothing more passed at that time between him and Wenzel.

Yet Wenzel had heard enough. Have you ever seen a ray of sunshine strike suddenly upon a bit of glass, a bright stone, a dewdrop even, changing the tiny thing into a light and a glory, almost a miniature sun? So, for Wenzel, out of all the story the old man told him, shone out four little words—"I am still His." Over and over he said them to himself, in the simple expressive German, "*Ich bin ja Sein.*" "Yes," thought he, "I, too—Wenzel, the poor scholar—I am still His. No more, and no less, than Duke John Frederick of Saxony. *His*—the dear Lord Christ's—His now, His forever. To do what He will with, not what I will. 'Living or dying,'—that is clear enough; 'imprisoned or free'—that is harder. What am I now but imprisoned—and by His own hand, too—shut up, so that I cannot go forth, though, happily, amongst friends, not foes? But—I am still His. Even we ourselves, stupid as we often are, make the best of what is our own, take care of it, put it to the best use we know. So He can use me—as He will. That is His concern, not mine. For me it is enough that I am His—Thine. Thine, blessed Lord Jesus, Thine now—Thine for ever." And, as these thoughts filled his heart, a great peace came over the troubled soul of Wenzel, the poor scholar.

(To be continued.)

THE BIBLE CLASS.

PAUL'S JOY OVER THE PHILIPPIANS.

(For Oct. 10th.—Selections from *Philippians*.)

BY PHILIP A. NORDELL, D.D.

The church at Philippi, founded on the second missionary journey, was the first fruit of Paul's labors in Europe. Many circumstances combined to awaken very tender feelings in the Apostle's heart at the remembrance of this church. It seems to have given him more of joy and less of anxiety than any other church founded by him. Other churches were torn by factions or invaded by false doctrines, personal enemies who cruelly maligned him and dispar-

*An Exposition of Lesson 41 in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lessons* on "The Three Great Apostles."