

childhood of Martin was spent. Almost the entire population consisted of rough miners, most of whom were very poor. Hans Luther somewhat improved his fortunes at Mansfeld, but he seems to have risen in the esteem of his towns-fellows more rapidly than in outward prosperity, for he was soon made a member of the town council, a very honorable office in that day.

Six other children were born to Hans and Margaret Luther during their stay at Mansfeld, and difficult enough it was to maintain and educate this growing family. And yet the sturdy miner was able in time to buy a substantial dwelling on the principal street of the town. A portion of this old house still stands, and over the gateway may be seen the Luther coat-of-arms.

Hereditarily had much to do with Martin Luther's character and career. His father was a man of purity of character and life, and of more than average mental powers. His mother was a woman of strong character and, like her husband, of deep piety. Spalatin, the court preacher, speaks of her as a rare and exemplary woman. Portraits of this worthy couple, painted by Lucas Cranach, now hang on the walls of the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach. One sees a striking resemblance between Margaret Luther and her famous son. The hard toll of the miner and his wife are reflected in their faces. Life for them was a struggle for food and clothing and shelter. This struggle was shared by the children, the biggest burden falling naturally upon Martin, the eldest. There was little that was bright and joyous in the life of these

peasant folk. The tone of the home was earnest and severe. Severity marked the parental discipline. Referring to this in later years the Reformer, while lamenting it, bore grateful testimony, however, to the love and sweet intercourse he enjoyed with his parents.

Perhaps it was to this severe discipline that Martin Luther owed the moral earnestness of his life and that tenderness of conscience that drove him into the monastery at Erfurt. The necessity of having to work hard as a child he regarded as no calamity, as it made him self-reliant and industrious.

At a very early age Martin's school days began. His father was determined 15—Epworth Era—February—37269 that his family should rise above his condition in life. A part of the old school-house still stands where the miner's children received their first instruction. Reading, writing and the rudiments of Latin were the subjects taught in this school. The last-named subject was then, as now, the bugbear of the school-boy. The severity of the school discipline was something to be remembered with shuddering. Schoolmasters, Luther tells us, were in those days tyrants and executioners; the schools were prisons and hells, and in spite of blows, trembling, fear and misery, little or nothing was accomplished. Luther was whipped as often as fifteen times in one morning, without any fault of his, but simply for not knowing what he had never been taught. In this school he remained until he was fourteen years of age, when his father resolved to send him to a better school. (To be continued.)

a proud man; trusting in his own talents and attainments, and eminently ambitious. When he became a Christian therefore, one of his besetting sins would be pride, and as he had been peculiarly favored in his call to the apostleship; in his successes as a preacher, in his standing among the other apostles, and in the revelations imparted to him, there was also peculiar danger that he would become self-confident and proud of his attainments."

We do not know whether Paul was aware of the reason of his great trial, when he made it a matter of prayer. Whether he did or did not know, he did well to consult his best friend. Two things he specifies as to why he made special prayer about this: "That it might depart from me"; that was his object. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice," that being the means he used to attain that object. He knew that his Saviour loved him. He knew that his Saviour had power to deliver him. So he prayed. It is likely that he never prayed more earnestly than he did then. He certainly prayed persistently. He was wont to obtain special answers to his prayers. Here we add delay and silence. Was not this an additional trial to the much-tried servant of the Lord Jesus? Was he never to hear the music of that now silent voice ringing through his very soul, any more? Well the answer came at last. It was a gentle denial, implied rather than spoken; and yet far more than that. It was also an assurance that although the suffering and conflict would continue, it would be attended by a glad realization of the constant nearness of the Master, and of the sufficiency of His abiding help: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength shall be made perfect in weakness." What could that mean but this? "Thou shalt not be permitted to sink under these afflictions. Thine enemies shall not be able to prevail against thee. The more and the more violently thou art afflicted and tried, being upheld by my power, the more eminently will my power be seen and acknowledged. For the weaker is the instrument I use, the more will the power of my grace be manifested." Such is the interpretation of the answer to Paul's prayer, as given by that great Methodist commentator, Dr. A. Clarke.

Paul's reception of that answer was a very joyous one. He would not content to endure even greater suffering and glory in doing so, "that the power of Christ might rest upon him." To which Dr. Clarke gives this interpretation: "That it may overshadow me as a tent or tabernacle, affording me shelter, protection, safety, and rest."

What if Paul's prayer had been literally answered, by the removal of the protective trial, painful as it was? The wise man said long ago, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Paul's was real danger, from which his Master's grace and power delivered him. But what if pride had filled his heart and ruled his conduct? His fall would be a catastrophe. Ruin for himself in time and in eternity would ensue. How much his thought and heart after all become a "castaway," must have afflicted him, what carefulness it must have caused in all he did and purposed. Then the blow such a fall would give the young, struggling, but advancing church. It would be a calamity, the extent and consequences of which no tongue could describe. And what the world's loss would have been.

Yes! In spite and because of the trials and buffetings which led him so earnestly and persistently to pray, Paul's life was enriched, his mind became more effective, his successes multiplied, his Lord was honored, through the operation of the grace that sustained and strengthened him, until his service here was perfected, when he died for the Master.

Thoughts on Prayer

Fifth Paper

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IN the last paper, attention was drawn to two things: His own readiness to hear and answer prayer, and the possibility that we may "hinder" our prayers, however earnestly we may pray. The reader's attention is now to be drawn to another view-point in relation to prayer. It is this: It will sometimes be proved that the kindest, wisest, best answer that God can give to our petitions, is a denial rather than an assent to our desires. But in every such case, we shall have proof that His "nay" is always spoken in a manner worthy of Himself, and that He is

"Good when He gives, supremely good, Nor less when He denies."

A wise parent who loves his child will not hesitate to deny its request for the possession of something he desires, even if he seek it with tears, if that parent knows that the thing asked for will do the child a real injury. Now God is our Father; He is infinitely wise and good; and if what we ask Him to grant is sure to harm rather than to bless us, His love for us will be best expressed by a fitting denial. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought," but He knows.

Even where denial rather than consent is expressed in His answer to our pleas, we are not to think that the matter ends there. If our need be real, and the petition earnest and sincere and trustful, His "nay" will be accompanied by a larger blessing—one more fitted to our condition and our needs. There will be no denial of His promises, no forgetfulness of His pledges, no unreadiness to really supply our needs on His part. Never! "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself."

Perhaps the best illustration of this view of prayer is given by St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians. In the 12th chapter, he speaks of a wonderful

experience he had some fourteen years before. He had been "caught up into paradise, and heard unexpressed words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." He never had an experience like that in his life. He called it a "vision and revelation of the Lord." And you must bear in mind when you study the narrative of Paul's, that "The Lord" was an appellation which he mostly used when speaking of his Saviour, Jesus. That Paul related what really occurred, no one will doubt who fairly studies his character and life. It occurred in the earlier part of his wonderful ministry, and probably it was granted to him by his Master as a needed preparation for his work, and especially to enable him to be steadfast and true, in the many trials and persecutions to which he would be exposed.

Paul speaks also of some great pains, and to us, puzzling trial, which came upon him after the marvelous revelation, which he but barely mentions, for, as to its grand particulars, the seal of silence was set upon his lips. What a soul uplift it must have been. Then he says: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." Figurative expressions these, of course; but they indicated sufferings, bodily and mental, of intense and stubborn kind, which must have made the hard conditions under which he prosecuted his work, still harder.

And he speaks of this as a "gift!" Who would welcome such a gift as that? Why should we exult above measure, through the abundance of the revelations? A nice popular commentator paraphrases Paul's statement in this way: "Lest I should be spiritually proud; lest I should be self-confident and vain, and suppose that I was a special favorite of heaven." And he says further: "There is abundant reason to believe that Paul was naturally