

THE LIFE OF MARTIN LUTHER

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The Life of Martin Luther by Anonymous

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THE Reformation of religion, which under Providence, was effected by Dr. Martin Luther, is justly entitled to be considered as one of the most important and interesting events recorded in the page of history. The consequences, which it produced throughout the civilized world, can hardly be appreciated, as its influence extended not only to the improvement of our views respecting the doctrines of Christianity, but also materially contributed to the dissemination of more just and enlarged sentiments respecting the nature and foundation of civil liberty.

The apparent inadequacy of the means to the accomplishment of such vast ends cannot fail to strike the mind of every reflecting person. That an obscure individual, without personal advantages or mental endowments, which indicated any decided superiority above many of his fellows, and destitute of the patronage of the great, should have brought about so widely extended a revolution, is truly astonishing. That he should have overturned the most compact and firmly established hierarchy in some of the most powerful European nations, and shaken to its centre the Romish Church, natu-

rally suggests a variety of serious reflections. They lead our thoughts to the overruling hand of God, who, by the weakest instruments, often causes the most important events to come to pass.

Martin Luther was born at Aisleben, an obscure village in the county of Mansfield, Saxony, on the 10th of November, in the year 1483. His parents were John Luther and Margaret Lindeman. His father was distinguished through life for industry and sobriety ; and long after Luther had attracted public attention, his grateful son dedicated a book to him. His mother was exemplary in her conduct, and took great pleasure in teaching him the first principles of religion and morality. Our Reformer always looked back, with feelings of the most lively gratitude, to the care that was thus bestowed upon him at a very tender age, the effects of which remained through the whole course of his life.

It is impossible now to ascertain at what age Luther was sent to school. He was placed under the care of George Omilius, at Aisleben. In that dark age the means of obtaining instruction were very limited. Many schools, however, especially those taught by friars of the order of St. Augustin, still continued the practice of communicating some religious instruction to their pupils. At the age of fourteen he was sent to Magdeburg, but remained here only one year. The Franciscans had founded a school at Issenach, which was in high reputa-

tion in that part of Germany: this induced a great many scholars to repair thither.

Luther remained at this school four years. His ardour and application to his studies were indefatigable, and his proficiency was what might be expected from the union of such labour and such talents, under the direction of so able a master. He excelled all his school-fellows in the proficiency he had made in Greek and Roman literature; the exercises which were prescribed were written with greater facility and accuracy.

The habits and talents of Trebonius were much calculated to render him a popular schoolmaster. He showed the greatest attention and respect to his pupils. When he entered the school he always took off his hat, a custom which, we are told, his colleagues did not observe; and when any stranger was present he used to say, "That this was no ordinary place, for he had no doubt that those who hereafter should become the leading men of the state were present; although we cannot distinguish them, let us honour them."

The principal reason of Luther's repairing to Issenach, was in consequence of his mother having some relations in that neighbourhood who were in good circumstances. Be that as it may, we have the authority of Luther himself, that, when at school, he, like other poor boys, supported himself by begging his food. This, it may be observed, was no uncommon case in those days, even by those who were under no

necessity of doing so; it was rather reckoned honourable, because it showed a proof of humility.

After having laid a good foundation for the farther cultivation of classical learning, he repaired to the university of Erfurt in the end of 1501, or beginning of 1502.

He was created master of arts in 1503. Having now arrived at his twentieth year, his relations esteemed it high time that he should make choice of a profession. Being elated with the figure he had made at the university, and the reputation he had there acquired, they urged him to study law, imagining that this was the most likely way to obtain both honours and wealth. To please them he began to study law, but soon relinquished the task. It is probable that it was with reluctance he proposed to follow the profession of law, but an event of a very affecting nature induced him immediately to abandon it.

There was a young man of the name of Alexius, with whom he was united by the closest ties of friendship. In an excursion to the country, they were overtaken by a thunder-storm, and Alexius was struck dead by the side of Luther, who was unurt. Sudden death, by what circumstances soever accompanied, naturally excites sympathy; but to one of Luther's character, and in his peculiar situation at this time, every thing contributed to excite the strongest emotions. He was more forcibly impressed than he had ever been before with the

uncertainty and vanity of all terrestrial enjoyments;—he therefore determined to consecrate his time and talents to devout meditation, and to live sequestered from the world and its temptations. He vowed on the spot, that if God were pleased to deliver him from his present perilous situation, he would enter into a monastery, and dedicate his powers, both of body and mind, to the service of God. He seems to have considered this alarming incident as an express intimation from the Almighty to become a monk. As he was remarkable for showing respect to his parents, he took an early opportunity of informing them of his resolution. They were of a very different opinion, attempted to dissuade him from entering on a monastic life, and even warned him not to be deluded by the devil. Luther, however, determined to fulfil his vow; and accordingly, in the year 1505, became a member of the Augustin monastery at Erfurt.

Luther's sentiments respecting some of the leading doctrines of the gospel were formed before he had an opportunity of deriving, or even of comparing them with divine revelation: for he had not as yet seen a copy of the Scriptures.

Luther was of a very social disposition, and much beloved by his numerous acquaintance. He had become a monk without having communicated his intention to any one. Previous, however, to entering the monastery, he assembled his friends at his lodgings, and desired them to enjoy themselves this last time, as a

final interruption was about to take place to the agreeable intercourse he was accustomed to have with them. He was about to engage in a monastic life. This intimation confounded them, as he was remarkable for the gaiety of his temper and the playfulness of his humour.

He was a lively and interesting companion, to whom no one could be indifferent; possessed an admirable ear for music, of which he was passionately fond; he had a good voice—performed upon several instruments—and occasionally amused himself in composing music. Tradition has ascribed to him what is commonly called the “Old Hundredth Psalm tune.” His judgment, in regard to musical composition, was relied on by his friends, who frequently submitted to his correction what they had composed. Indeed, through life, he indulged to a certain degree his passion for music. When his views of divine truth became more clear and consistent, he confined himself to the cultivation of sacred music; and at a late period of life he was accustomed to sing a hymn after supper with his family and visitors. Notwithstanding that he naturally possessed a great flow of spirits, what not unfrequently happens to persons of that temper, he was subject to melancholy, from which he was generally relieved by music. From a letter written by him to Linocius, in which he jests upon the subject, we learn that, for the sake of exercise, he amused himself by practising the art of a turner.

Luther was constitutionally of a very ardent