

**MARTIN LUTHER: AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED IN THE CENTRAL
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
ALLEGHENY, PA., NOV. 9, 1883**

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Martin Luther: An Address Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Allegheny, Pa., Nov. 9, 1883 by J. B. Bittinger

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J. B. BITTINGER

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MARTIN LUTHER.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE

CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
ALLEGHENY, PA., Nov. 9, 1883,

BY

Joseph Bangler
J. B. BITTINGER, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
SEWICKLY, PA.

[PHONOGRAPHED BY THE REV. E. P. HAWES.]

CLEVELAND:
WILLIAM W. WILLIAMS,
1883.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS :

In consenting to speak to you this evening, on the subject assigned me by the Presbytery—Martin Luther—I confess to a sudden feeling of responsibility. I ask myself this simple question : what would, you if your character were to be traversed to-night—what would you want the man who spoke about you to say ? I answer :

Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice—

Now, though Martin Luther is dead, his name lives, and he has a reputation ; and he has a reputation not to be misrepresented, but to be drawn, if drawn at all, as it was, for I believe that he had the courage in this respect of Cromwell, that if he had a mole on his face, he wanted the artist to put the mole into the picture, and yet he did not wish to be stained with false colors. It is really a very serious thing to undertake to speak about one's neighbor—about the dead—a man, over whose grave and work there have been great controversies—controversies that interest every one of us. But, while I think the undertaking is serious, and difficult, my mind is thoroughly resolved that, I shall deal honestly with the subject, according to my knowledge of it.

However, I am embarrassed by another consideration, and yet it is not altogether a disadvan-

tage ; strange enough the public press has taken up wonderfully with this topic. They have favored us with articles longer and shorter on the great reformer ; they have summarized his character and his life ; they have been carried, by their enthusiasm, beyond their wonted descriptions, and given us illustrated papers on this theme. Now, there is about this very diffusion of a knowledge of the facts concerning Luther, the embarrassment to which I refer: "for, what can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath already been done": and the press is King. Everything has been said, and though, if I were to say it for the first time, it would interest you and instruct, for the tale is marvelous ; but now it has been rubbed so threadbare by repetition that, when I touch upon the facts which you know, I am afraid you won't give them the weight and credit which belong to them as facts, because, forsooth, you have already seen all this in the daily papers.

Well, I will run the risk of telling the story over again, and I shall address myself to those, who, perhaps, from the multitude of their daily cares, have not time even to read the newspaper: the busy housewife, who has too much to do after breakfast and before also, to turn to this monitor, adviser and historian ; and the business man, more bent on the prices current, and the ledger in fact, than on "lives of great men,"—if he has committed himself to this place, I trust, I may speak a

word that shall be to the honor of Luther and to the edification and entertainment of this hearer also.

Martin Luther was born at Eisleben, November 10, 1483. His parents were emphatically poor and pious, and that is a great heritage to be born to. The regimen of the house was strict. It was the day when the commandment "Honor thy father and mother" ranked equally with all the other stately commandments, and when it spoke, it spoke with authority. It was the day, moreover, when faith in the saying of Solomon: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes," had not yet died out, or altogether faded into "moral suasion."

Amid the harsh traditions and habits which, had grown up under this reading of the word of God, Luther as a child had hard fare, especially, because he had a hard father. Not that his father had no affections, for a man may have strong affections, and yet his passions may be so turbulent, and his convictions of duty so indurated, that, against his own flesh and blood, from a sense of duty to God's law, he may harden his heart; and besides, the poor boy Martin was born with a large heritage of his father's temper and temperament. He was one of those boys whom you can thrash and thrash again, but whom you cannot subdue, your passion simply kindles the fire of his passions, and he would die, rather than seem to yield. It was a

sad heritage for the boy, it made his life at home a constant terror to himself, and a constant torture. Many a night would he creep stealthily to his bed in the loft—for that was the common sleeping-place—and in the cold and dark of that garret, would shudder at the thought, that his father might ask for him—and come for him ; and yet the father, with all his sternness, when he did climb into that garret, to know what had become of his truant boy, when he came to the cot, yielding to softer impulses, could kneel down, and could pray for that boy, as only a father can pray for a child.

And when this boy went to school it was with him, probably, as it was with Edward Everett, who, speaking on the subject of education in our schools, said he belonged to the "flogged generation." Luther lived in an age when everybody was born in that generation. They were all flogged! The traditions of such school-keeping have come down to our own times, at least to my recollection ; though it may not rain floggings as plentifully now, as it did when the boy Luther, according to his own statement, was flogged fifteen times in one day ! I don't know what else the teacher did on that day, unless it was flogging ! Fifteen floggings because a boy didn't know his accidents, or for some other fault in his learning. This was the atmosphere of the school. It was rigorous ; it was cheerless ; it was to sensitive natures terrific. But Luther was sturdy as a boy,

and he was sturdy through his life. He was none of your whimpering, whining boys or men, who wished to make an apology for sharing the common lot of men or boys, or who thought that he was dealt with more harshly than anyone else. He suffered such things, and he got the interpretation of them in these words: "It is well to bear the yoke in one's youth." There were many days and years coming, when the floggings of home and school were but the thinnest vapor compared with those dark clouds, which gathered later into great tempests, from which the thunders roared like ten thousand beasts of prey, and lightnings flashed that made men's souls quiver; but the boy that could not be flogged out of his convictions, could not, as a man, be scared out of his convictions either. He was made of good timber and it would take great storms to break or founder that vessel.

In due time Martin was sent from home to further his education. He went away because there were no good schools at Eisleben, and because, as a charity scholar, as a singing boy, he might possibly pick up a precarious living by chanting and begging; for that was a part of school discipline, and so he spent, after he had reached the age of fourteen, a year at Magdeburg. Then he came back, and with the ambitious purpose of his father went to Eisenach, where there was a better chance for singing, and a chance for getting a better edu-

cation for singing, and where, it seems, moreover, he had a relative, but a relative of such a hard and close nature that the boy was like to starve on the relationship. But God, who has his own way of providing food for the ravens, did not fail the child whom he was bringing up. Whatever it may have been in the life of Luther, whether it was an accident, or a part of the mysterious rule of a divine providence; as he was following his singing vocation through the town, his voice attracted the notice, which afterwards procured him the patronage of Dame Cotta, a woman, doubtless, who was the portraiture of what Luther says is the noblest conception of which the human soul can lay hold. "There is nothing sweeter on earth than the heart of a woman in which pity dwells." He sang and her heart was touched, and from that hour, she took him to her own home, and in that house he had enough to eat, and there received that part of his training, which I am afraid the narrow circumstances, and the hard lot of home did not permit him to pick up. That is: a little of the *suaviter in modo*—a little bit of that culture, which rubs down the exterior roughness of all men, but especially as it was necessary it should be rubbed down in the case of Luther, and which worked in upon his nature and developed the best parts of it—for his was emphatically a soul that opened up to kindness,—that unfolded its better self to the gentle touch of a sympathetic woman.