

4-1-1946

## The Formative Years of Doctor Luther

E. G. Schwiebert

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schwiebert, E. G. (1946) "The Formative Years of Doctor Luther," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 17 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol17/iss1/21>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# *Concordia* *Theological Monthly*

---

---

Vol. XVII

APRIL, 1946

No. 4

---

---

## **The Formative Years of Doctor Luther\***

By E. G. SCHWIEBERT

There can be no doubt that many of Martin Luther's contemporaries realized that he was one of the great men of history. Almost twenty years before he died, his friends began to collect the Reformer's letters and writings, while at different times twelve table companions recorded his conversations with the dinner guests. The three funeral addresses delivered at the time of Luther's death in 1546 testify to this same conviction. Since he had died in his native Eisleben, a service was first held there in the Andreas-Kirche, on which occasion Jonas, who had accompanied Luther on the journey from Wittenberg, preached the sermon. In this funeral sermon Jonas spoke of Luther's genius in glowing praise and pointed out that it had been recognized by all since his early student days. The manner in which the sorrowing people stood silently all along the route from Eisleben to Wittenberg reminds one of the passing of a distinguished world figure of the present day.

Three days later, after Luther's body had been returned to Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen, the town pastor and for many years his friend and co-worker, spoke of him as the great Gospel preacher whom all Germany acclaimed and who was even highly esteemed in many foreign countries. On that same occasion Philip Melanchthon gave a funeral

---

\* This is Chapter IV of a book by Dr. Schwiebert entitled *The Living Luther*, which is soon to be published by Concordia Publishing House.

## 242 THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOCTOR LUTHER

address on behalf of the University. This great Humanist, a brilliant man himself, compared his departed friend with the great men of the Bible and the greatest of the early Church Fathers. Melancthon regarded Luther as the most penetrating theologian of the Christian Church since St. Paul.

Yet, strangely, these intimate companions and admirers apparently took Luther's living, dynamic personality for granted, little realizing that someday he would be lost to them forever. Not one of his co-workers even thought of writing a description of him; nor did anyone take the time to write a biography while he was living.

Luther had promised his friends that he would write an autobiography for the second volume of the *Wittenbergische Ausgabe* of his works. Although it would have been a personal evaluation of his life and work, an autobiography by the Reformer's own pen would have been invaluable to the Luther student, as it would have added insight and understanding to his life and work impossible of attainment by any other writer. Unfortunately, poor health and overwork defeated his purpose. There remain but "a few glances over the shoulder" which the Reformer dashed off for the introduction to the first volume of the Latin edition of his works in 1545. To this may be added a few chance remarks by his fellow professor Nicolaus Amsdorf. The research student, therefore, is dependent for his information on materials gleaned in the form of indirect references found in Luther's voluminous writings and the use of other contemporary source materials.

Still more to be regretted is the fact that when Philip Melancthon at last undertook to write a biography of the departed leader a few months after Luther's death, he was satisfied to produce a mere sketch. Those ten pages do help to establish some of the disputed dates and facts of Luther's life. Yet with Philip's gift for writing and his intimate firsthand information about the man who was his friend, colleague, and neighbor for so many years, he could have given us a detailed biography of the central figure of the Reformation.

The first real attempt at writing a detailed biography of Luther's life was published in the form of seventeen sermons which Johann Mathesius preached to his congregation in

Joachimsthal between 1562 and 1564. *D. Martin Luthers Leben*, the title which he used for the first edition, 1566, is really not a biography in the literal sense. This series of sermons already incorporates much legendary material of that uncritical age; yet, since he was one of Luther's former table companions and also a reliable and conscientious observer, it contains invaluable personal observations. A second biographer, Matthaeus Ratzeberger, the court physician of the Count of Mansfeld and later guardian of Luther's children, supplied some new information and personal touches but must be used with great care because of the legendary embellishments. To this group must be added the biography by Luther's co-worker Friedrich Myconius, *Historia Reformationis*, which was published by Cyprian in 1715 and modernized by the Luther scholar Otto Clemen in 1915.

Martin Luther died in 1546, and shortly after the middle of the century Melancthon, Jonas, and Amsdorf also passed from the Reformation stage, leaving a new generation that knew little or nothing of the true spirit of the Reformer. Luther's writings were available in the Wittenberg and Jena editions, but even these had not been too critically edited. If the text did not fit the traditions of the moment, this generation often took the liberty of changing it to satisfy their prejudices. Slowly a new Lutheranism began to emerge that stressed Luther's doctrines but knew little of the evangelical spirit with which the great Wittenberg professor had inspired his students and congregations. Even Luther, whom no one of this period remembered from life, was made a part of the new historical tradition, just as Washington and Lincoln have today been adapted to twentieth-century thought. A good example of this type of writer was Nikolaus Selnecker, who had heard much about Luther through his father but was now living in the conservative atmosphere of the Dresden court. His *historica narratio et oratio*, 1575, is the first defense of the Formula of Concord and makes of Luther a dogmatic personality. Selnecker's materials, however, did not become fully available until the nineteenth century. It was easy for this age to study Luther's Catechism and the Augsburg Confession but not so simple to recapture the Luther of life. Through Selnecker and other writers of the time an erroneous, one-sided impression was given of Luther, which required

## 244 THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOCTOR LUTHER

centuries to eradicate in Germany and still prevails in some parts of America.

Another weakness of all the sixteenth-century Luther biographies is that they seem to take the formative years of the young Luther for granted. The whole emphasis was placed on the period after 1517. Luther's own sketch from the introduction to the Latin edition of his works also stressed the later period, while Melancthon and Mathesius devoted but a few pages to these early formative years, which are vital to an understanding of the real Luther.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the publishing of many heretofore unknown materials, German historians became intensely interested in the young Luther. They assumed that a careful analysis of Luther's boyhood would explain his whole later development. Scholarly studies and books appeared by such able scholars as Scheel, Holl, Ritschl, Koehler, Boehmer, Strohl, and others, exploring every possible aspect that might shed some light on Luther's formative years. Among the many studies of this period the best are Henri Strohl's *The Religious Evolution of Luther to 1515* (1922); Karl Holl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1921); Heinrich Boehmer's *Der Junge Luther* (1925); and Otto Scheel's *Martin Luther* (1930).

Following the last seventy-five years of Luther research, some very fundamental changes have been made in our conceptions of Martin Luther. Catholic historians have been forced to be far more cautious and less abusive, while Lutheran scholars have discovered that much of the traditional Luther could not be substantiated and that the original Luther must be re-established on the basis of sound historical evidence.

## THE ANCESTRAL HERITAGE

All attempts at tracing the ancestral heritage of Martin Luther have ended in failure because of the scarcity of existing sources. Early records indicate a variant spelling of the family name — Ludher, Luder, Lueder, Lutter, Lauther — all of which philologists trace back to the old German name Chlotar. Nothing is known of the old Luther *Stammhaus*, the old ancestral home in Moehra, from whence the Luthers came, as the building shown to tourists was not erected until 1618 and belonged to a descendant of Luther's uncle, Klein Hans.

As far back as historical research has been able to trace the Luther ancestry, they were living in this Moehra region, just southwest of the Thuringian Forest in the neighborhood of Eisenach. The family belonged to a rather fortunate economic order known as *Erbzinsleute*, a family group that held a village and its neighboring lands in a kind of communal ownership. Since the Middle Ages the family had been free as individuals, for the *Zins*, or tax, which they owed to the Church and to the Elector, was on the land rather than the individuals. The Luthers lived in their German village, with fields, meadows, water, and a common woods divided for use but owned by the entire group from generation to generation. To insure continuous succession, the estate always passed to the youngest son. This custom left the older sons free to migrate to other parts if they felt that by so doing they might improve their circumstances.

Luther's ancestors seem to have been of pure German stock. Otto Scheel, who explored this problem rather thoroughly, contends there is no evidence of racial mixture. Since both his father's and his mother's families came from the western part of Germany, where the Wends had not penetrated, and their ancestral names are German, any claims of racial mixture seem to be without foundation. The family must have been quite large, for in 1521, when Martin Luther stopped off at Moehra on his way from Worms, he learned that his people occupied the whole region between Eisenach and Rennsteig. In 1536 the Luthers had five Hoefe, or small estates, occupied by different branches of the family but considered one under the legal title.

In this beautiful, green, hilly region of western Thuringia, not so far from the Wartburg, lived Heine Luder and his wife, the former Margarethe Lindemann. The four sons of Heine Luder, Grosz Hans, Klein Hans, Veit, and Heinz, must have loved and enjoyed this old family home, but historical records are silent on most of this family history. In this respect a biography by Luther himself or by his friend Philip could have been most enlightening. All that we know is that Luther's father, Grosz Hans, married a young lady of the neighborhood, Margarethe Ziegler. Seckendorf, who was fairly reliable as an historian, stated that her family was Franconian, but the statement cannot be proved. Me-

lanchthon spoke of her as a woman of commendable virtues. Hans Luder, Martin Luther's father (also called Grosz Hans to distinguish him from his younger brother Klein Hans), was an able, hard-working, ambitious young man, who felt that his future would not be too promising in the Moehra region, since he could not inherit any of the family estates. Accordingly he and his young wife decided to go to Eisleben, where the mining industry offered excellent opportunities for an ambitious, hard-working young couple.

In the southeastern part of Eisleben on "Long Street," not more than two blocks from St. Peter's Church, Hans and Margarethe Luder lived in a two-story house, the foundations of which stand to this day. The structure built upon the old foundations and now shown to tourists has little that dates back to the sixteenth century. Here, whether in the exact room on the first floor now claimed matters little, Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483, according to the best available evidence. It seems strange that there should be some uncertainty about the birth of so great an historical character as Martin Luther; yet Melanchthon tells us in his brief biography that not even his mother could recall the exact year of Luther's birth, although she was sure about the hour and the day. Luther's brother, Jacob, claimed that it had been the general impression of the family that the year was 1483, a date also substantiated by the *Liber Decanorum*, the dean's book of the University of Wittenberg. Georg Spalatin, a close friend of the Reformer, wrote in his *Annalen* that it had been in the year 1484. Some modern German historians have tried to prove that Martin Luther was born December 7, 1482; while one of the later *Tischreden*, a Table Talk account by Roerer, claims that Hans Luder had already moved to Mansfeld before Martin was born and that he was the second son in the family. However, modern historical research has discarded as spurious these legendary aspects told by later biographers, and the date set by the first biographer, Philip Melanchthon, has been accepted as the correct one. Nor is the debate as to the time and place of much consequence except that it emphasizes the lack of certainty about most of the story of Luther's boyhood.

As was the custom, on the day following the birth the young son was taken to the lower Tower Room of St. Peter's

Church, the only part of the structure then completed, and baptized by Pastor Bartholomaeus Rennebecher. Since this was on the day of the Festival of St. Martin, Hans Luder's son was named Martin. The original baptismal font used on the occasion had been replaced in 1518, but it was restored in 1827 and is still in use in the *Taufkapelle*, or baptismal room, of the present St. Peter- und Paulskirche.

### THE BOYHOOD YEARS IN MANSFELD

Early in the summer of 1484, for some unknown reason, the Luders left the town of Eisleben and moved to Mansfeld, a town even closer to the Harz Mountains. Perhaps it was because this town was more in the very heart of the mining region. That it was beloved by the inhabitants is shown by a later sixteenth-century saying: "Whom the Lord cherishes, him he favors with a residence in the Mansfeld region." Mining was the principal occupation, but farming was a very close second.

Mansfeld, a town of about the same size as Eisleben, lay about five miles to the northwest and ten miles from Sangershausen. The general pattern of the region that is presented by old cuts is one of hills, meadows, woods, and plains, all combined in a complex, colorful picture of rural life. Through the region ran the important highway from Nuernberg to Hamburg, bringing a constant stream of travelers from north and south. Spangenberg, in the *Mansfelder Chronik*, gives us a rough sketch of the town plan from this early period. According to this drawing the town of Mansfeld had one principal street, running rather haphazardly through the town, which was surrounded by a formidable wall with four strong towers. In the background on a fairly high, steep cliff stood the massive castle of the Grafen of Anhalt, an old and distinguished family related to the Ascanier of Wittenberg.

Near the center of the town was the church square. On a slight elevation stood the St. Georgskirche, and next to the church was the Ratsschule, the city school, which was later renamed in honor of the Reformer. To the villagers, St. George was the leading patron saint, while Andrew, Simon, Jacob, Thomas, and others were the fourteen assistants. The Virgin Mary, Anna, Elizabeth, Hedwig, and Ursula as well as the three Holy Kings were also called upon in moments of great need.



It was into this environment that Luther's parents moved to seek their fortune in the heart of the copper-mining region. That they were very poor seems to be quite evident. One needs but examine the lined faces and toil-worn hands of Luther's parents as painted by Cranach to be convinced that their life was not one of ease, but that they bettered their circumstances only through toil and thrift. Luther later described those early years as "*blutsauer*," extremely bitter, for the newly arrived couple. However, modern research is convinced that the poverty thesis has been much overemphasized as a contributing factor to Luther's later decision to enter the monastery. True, Luther's mother may have carried wood on her back during those early years, but so did the wives of other German burghers in the fifteenth century.

Hans Luder must have bettered his circumstances considerably by the time his son Martin started to school in Mansfeld. When Martin was about eight, his father was already one of the respected citizens of Mansfeld, for in 1491 he was selected as one of four citizens to protect the rights of his fellow burghers in the city council. The complete picture seems to be that of a rather thrifty, steadily rising young couple respected and accepted by the whole community. Just how early Luther's father became a small capitalist, leasing and operating mines and furnaces, we do not know. But an old record indicates that he renewed a five-year contract in 1507 and must have been operating since 1502. Thus by the turn of the century the young man from Moehra had ventured into the mining business for himself. During this time he also purchased a home, on which there was a hundred-gulden mortgage in 1507. He leased one mine and smelter from the Lutichs, the children of his former mining companion, for which he paid 500 gulden rent. Shortly thereafter he was made supervisor of all the property of these minor children. During the same period the records indicate a partnership with a Dr. Dragstedt as well as other interests extending over a rather large area.

When Martin became a priest, his father visited the monastery with a company of twenty horsemen and made a gift of 20 gulden to the Augustinians, a handsome sum in a day when one or two gulden was the price of an ox.

Mathesius recognized this prosperity when he wrote "God blessed the mining industry" of Luther's father and that Hans Luder brought up "his son in a respectful atmosphere, using the money he had rightfully acquired as a miner." When Martin later matriculated at the University of Erfurt, the records classified him as being from a family that "had." The pathetic picture of a poverty-stricken lad who sang from door to door to win his daily sustenance hardly fits into the frame provided by the historical records of a family that belonged to the better burghers of the town. Even the sons of *Patrizier* families, or the more well-to-do classes, participated in the street serenades. Although Hans Luder never became wealthy in the modern sense, he left a family estate of \$18,000.

Likewise, the severity of Luther's childhood has been overemphasized. Like other parents of that era, Luther's did not believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the child. Parents in the fifteenth century believed in unquestioning obedience; and as the young Luther possessed the same indomitable will manifested in his later life, he was, doubtless, a difficult child to handle. Luther said in one of his Table Talks that his father once spanked him so hard that he fled from him and for some time was very bitter about this mistreatment. But who does not recall similar experiences from his own childhood? This was not an age of child psychology, and Luther's parents, like others, lacked the training and time for insight and self-restraint when they felt the moral integrity of their child was endangered. Again Luther tells us that his mother once flogged him on account of a nut until the blood began to flow. But we do not know the whole story, and from the total picture we gather that this was not typical. His father also had his cheerful, jovial moments "over a stein of beer," while his mother often sang to the children. The life of the Luther home was not abnormal. Severity was a common practice in that day, for Luther later advocated a better child psychology for the new Lutheran schools of "placing the apple beside the rod." To be sure, Luther may have received fifteen paddlings in one morning because he did not know his Latin forms; but so did Melancthon receive his daily beatings at Pforzheim some years later. Languages in that day were not taught; they were literally pounded in, and the average students took such treatment for granted and

## 250 THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOCTOR LUTHER

loved their instructors just the same. Furthermore, records show that if these floggings exceeded the point of accepted practice, the parents complained or even withdrew their children from school. Scholars have searched in vain in the early environmental conditions of his boyhood for an explanation of Luther's later soul struggle. In fact, we may safely conclude that the Luther home was one of normal, sincere Catholics, who were highly regarded in the Mansfeld community. Luther's parents took a special interest in the promising young Martin, who, they hoped, might some day be one of the leading lawyers of the whole Anhalt community.

## THE MANSFELD SCHOOL DAYS

Even though our sources of the Mansfeld school days are rather meager, there can be little doubt that they have been much misrepresented in many Lutheran circles. Too much emphasis has been placed on a mere reference to his training here in the tract of 1524 *To the Councilors of All German Cities*. When Luther exclaimed in this call to arms: "We were martyred there," we often forget that the occasion demanded strong language and that Luther was a master at getting the desired effect. After Worms, the enrollment of the University of Wittenberg rapidly dropped to about a third, and Luther, together with his fellow professors, greatly feared for the whole future of German education. In this document the Reformer sought to shake the indifferent German parents from their lethargy toward higher learning. Since monastic education no longer offered an easy retreat for the youth and the lucrative church positions were not a part of the new Lutheran system, Luther feared that the phlegmatic German might conclude that there was no longer a need for higher education. The Wittenberg professor was making an appeal for the new humanistic type of learning, and in such a presentation his own Mansfeld school days suffered by comparison. It is true, Mansfeld may not have had as good a Latin school as Eisenach or Nuernberg; yet the fact remains that after Luther had received his early training here, he was able to carry on at Magdeburg and Eisenach without difficulty. Melancthon praises this later excellent progress, which he says, was due to Luther's ability, but he does not imply that his early training had been inferior. As

we shall see later, when the new Lutheran school system emerged in the thirties, most of the methodology and school organization already in practice at Mansfeld was retained even though the new evangelical spirit supplanted the old Catholic instruction.

As there is considerable difference of opinion among his contemporaries, we are not exactly certain when young Martin began his elementary training in the Mansfeld Latin School. Seven was the customary age; yet there is some evidence which implies that he entered school quite early. Melancthon, the famous school organizer of the Reformation, was certainly familiar with standard practice; still he implies that Luther was so young that Nicolaus Oemler, an old family friend, took him in his arms and carried him to school. Since the distance to school was but a few blocks, this would hardly have been necessary for a boy of six or seven. Nor would Melancthon have mentioned it had not the incident been unusual. Mathesius' biography does not add much light when it states that Luther started in school when "he was old enough to comprehend" the instruction. Certainly that age would vary greatly between average and precocious children. In all likelihood Luther entered school on St. George's Day, March 12, 1488, when he was about four and a half years old, an age which would explain why he had to be carried to school.

The Mansfeld school that Luther attended was a *Trivialschule* in which the medieval *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric was taught. This was considered necessary for all students who were seeking an advanced education. As was common practice, this school was divided into three "Haufen," or groups. First there came the *Tabulisten*, or beginners, who learned the ABC's of Latin, which was largely a memorization of elementary forms and the contents of the *Fibel* or Latin primer. These little youngsters also learned the *Benedicite*, the prayer before meals, and the *Gratias*, the giving of thanks after eating. In addition they learned the *Confiteor*, or the Confession of Sins, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Decalog, and the Hail Mary. Three times in the morning and three times in the afternoon the *Tabulisten* recited, while in the evening at home they were expected to memorize a few Latin words with the help of their parents.

The second group, often called the *Donatisten*, were so named from the *Donat*, a medieval Latin textbook. The *Donat* was published with a German interlinear, providing the study of grammar by the direct method. The study of the Latin language in this division became much more formal. Frequently, the assignment was an entire Psalm or a section from the Latin Vulgate. Doubtless Luther's later mastery of the Latin Bible, his ability to quote verbatim almost at will even late in life, dates back to the Mansfeld days. By about the completion of the sixth grade the student was quite familiar with most parts of the Catholic church service and had mastered the elementary grammar of the Latin language.

The upper division group were known as the *Alexandristen*, from their textbook by Alexander de Villa, in which the student was given more advanced Latin grammar and syntax. It had also a German introduction and made ample use of this native language in the explanations. These students also began to use a Latin-German dictionary. Obviously the student who had finished a good *Trivialschule*, such as the one in Mansfeld, was ready to attend the University, where all assignments were made and delivered in the Latin language. Most of these aspects of the medieval Latin schools were retained by the Humanists and the Lutheran Reformers when they established similar institutions. In the upper division, students also served as choir boys and assisted in the Sunday service. That they might participate intelligently, they were taught the hymns, versicles, responses, and psalms and were given an explanation of the Epistle and Gospel lessons.

Music naturally played an important role in the curriculum of the *Trivialschule*. The students were taught the Catholic liturgy, processions, and recessions as training for the regular and special services held during the church year. Special instruction in all the holy days of the church calendar was given through the *Cisio Janus*. This was not a textbook, but a calendar in verse form, by means of which the students learned to calculate when the church festivals and saints' days would fall. In the *Cisio Janus* every month was treated by two verses. With its abbreviated, hieroglyphic forms the *Cisio Janus* seems somewhat confusing to the modern mind; but in a period in which there were so many saints' days

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOCTOR LUTHER 253

making up the church calendar, the reckoning of church festivals was quite complicated. Instruction in this medieval method seemed practical not only for the clergy but also for the lawyers, businessmen, and other laymen, who could order their daily tasks much more efficiently by avoiding conflict with the church festivals. Nor did the Reformers drop this practice. Melancthon prepared a revised edition of the *Cisio Janus* for the Lutheran schools.

Students were likewise introduced to the theory of music. They were required to learn the Psalm tones and the rules of harmony. In some schools counterpoint and singing in several voices were practiced. Some years ago there was found in the *Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin an old musical treasure which was a composition and versification by Luther in his student days at Eisenach. In this composition the tenor was the main part, with the bass, alto, and the descant woven around it. This explains Luther's later enthusiasm for music, a discipline he had mastered during the Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach days.

Rhetoric, even though it was no longer emphasized as in the early Middle Ages, still occupied a rather respected place in most school systems. According to some old fourteenth-century Luebeck discoveries, the Latin school system was much more practical than would be supposed. Here, according to Warncke, were unearthed all kinds of school materials, wax tablets used by pupils, exercises by students in the lower division, as well as a number of business letters. This seems to testify that much practical instruction was given in these Latin schools. Students were taught how to write letters, proper forms of address, good manners.

Another aspect of rhetoric was the literature which was read and memorized by the students. Through this the teacher also imparted much worldly wisdom which Luther late in life still regarded as very valuable. Among the works read were Cato, Aesop, Sedulius, Plautus, and Terence. All of these writers had been carefully edited, and the materials had been selected that seemed most in keeping with the needs of the times. All of this part of the medieval course of instruction Luther did not criticize in his *Weckruf* of 1524. He regarded some of this literature as being next in importance to the Bible in the building of morality. He did, however, complain that

## 254 THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOCTOR LUTHER

too little time had been devoted to German history, the poets, and general history.

The Latin schools devoted many hours to an explanation of the Gospels and Epistles, the Lord's Prayer, etc. Even the study of the *Fibel*, the first course of instruction, was in a sense an elementary course in religion. Much of the course in music was also of a religious nature. The cantor was a religious instructor who understood the Latin liturgy and the technique of sacred hymn writing. His work was, therefore, regarded as religious instruction. Nor did the Reformation change this aspect of the music course in the Lutheran schools, although its content became more evangelical.

Since so much has been written about the severe discipline that prevailed in the Mansfeld school system, a few of the details and a general evaluation of it in relationship to other German Latin schools may be timely. In the Mansfeld Latin school, as was the custom generally, the lower division had a slate at the top of which was a picture of a wolf. Since the Latin word for wolf is *lupus*, every student whose name appeared on this slate became a *lupus*. Every eight days the teacher checked the record, and each offender received one stroke for the number of times his name was on the slate. Although we have no specific information about Mansfeld, in the statutes of some schools the regulations state that students were to be spanked in the place that God had naturally provided. The accepted reasons for flogging were: a lapse into German, failure to decline or conjugate properly, the use of profanity, or general misbehavior. Thus when Luther was spanked fifteen times one morning, it must have been for a whole week's accumulation of offenses. Nor does this experience imply that it happened frequently.

Another incentive to study was a method of putting students to shame when they were unable to recite or used German in their recitations. An *asinus*, or wooden donkey, was also used in the Mansfeld school. This was hung around the neck of the lowest student in the division at the end of the recitation period. Every time a student became an *asinus*, a record was made on the slate and added to the total of future whippings. Motivation, therefore, was a combination of fear and shame.

The human factor must doubtless have created a varied

condition in different schools. That there were individual cases of student mistreatment cannot be doubted in an age in which corporal punishment was the accepted practice. Yet there was a definite limit as to how far punishment could be carried. Neither parents nor the city council permitted much mistreatment. In most schools a definite system had been set up defining the exact punishment that should be meted out for a certain offense. Sometimes there were complaints on the part of parents, but in some instances, as at Stuttgart in 1501, the authorities passed a resolution that if the parents would not permit the punishment of their children, the children could not attend school.

The young Luther was no doubt frequently spanked, but so was the gentle Melanchthon, and many other boys who were not nearly so gifted. Probably all the boys took the "cleaning of the slate" as a matter of course. And when the Reformer later in life directed the establishment of similar Lutheran schools, the wolf, the donkey, and the rod were retained as an essential part of the psychology of instruction. Since this type of punishment was most effective with youngsters, its application was limited to the lower group. The middle and upper divisions were punished more generally by a system of fines, or *Geldbussen*, a German system still quite common in modern times.

Anyone interested in Luther's early education is confronted by the problem: Just how good was the Mansfeld Latin School? Walther Koehler and Otto Scheel present opposing viewpoints. Koehler claims that it was not even a fully equipped *Trivialschule*, that its instruction was poor, and that Luther could not obtain proper training for entry into the University of Erfurt in this school. This, he says, explains why Luther's father sent the young lad away to school at Magdeburg and Eisenach after he had reached his fourteenth year. Otto Scheel, who has investigated this period more thoroughly than anyone else, does not agree with this viewpoint. He evaluates the commonly quoted Luther criticisms of this period in the light of other contemporary evidence and completely recreates the entire Mansfeld atmosphere.

The early Luther biographies do not imply that the Mansfeld school was an inferior institution. Mathesius even says that there Luther learned his materials "with diligence and



great speed." Graduates from this school must have been prepared for university work, for the *Album* of the University of Wittenberg indicates that seven students matriculated there from Mansfeld between 1515 and 1523, several more between 1523 and 1527, while eighteen enrolled between 1530 and 1538. That these students were actually graduates of Mansfeld cannot, of course, be established as the *ex Mansfelds* of the *matrikel* only indicates the territory or region. But it is reasonable to assume that students did enter the University of Wittenberg directly from this institution. Such evidence leads us to conclude that the Mansfeld school was a full *Trivialschule*, even though its standing may not have been as high as the Eisenach, Ulm, or Nuernberg type of Latin schools.

The poor *Kirchenlatein*, or church Latin, which Luther learned here is often cited as evidence that the Mansfeld instruction was inferior. Luther himself later in life vehemently condemned this church Latin, but a wrong interpretation has sometimes been placed upon his remarks.

To really understand why Mansfeld and other schools instructed students in the late Medieval Latin, we must examine the objectives of its instructors. At the turn of the century, scholasticism was still very strong in the German universities. Humanism was just beginning to get a foothold. In such an atmosphere the German students who attended the universities were expected to understand lectures on the works of the various scholastic writers. To follow university lectures, they had to be familiar with the syllogistic method of reasoning and with the vocabulary of the Schoolmen. When Luther later broke with Rome and changed the University of Wittenberg into an institution in which Biblical Humanism was the accepted method of religious instruction, he naturally was offended with the "donkey manure which the devil had brought into the schools." Had he remained a Catholic, his earlier training would have been as adequate for his daily needs as it was for his Roman critics. It was not the type of Latin, but the change in the point of view that occasioned the Reformer's violent reactions to the former church Latin. Like Erasmus and the Biblical Humanists, he now wanted the Latin of the early Catholic Church and the Greek and Hebrew of the Bible. For his work as the Reformer of the Church his boyhood training was sadly wanting; but for his Roman Catholic con-

temporaries who retained the Thomist, Scotist, or some other scholastic point of view, the Latin of the *Trivialschule* was entirely adequate.

The impression has been left by some Luther biographers that there had been little religious instruction in the Mansfeld school. As had been mentioned, the German *Fibel* used in the lower division was also a book of religion. Although the materials were in Latin, the subject matter aimed to prepare the pupil to be a good Roman Catholic. In the morning the school was opened with prayer and a song, usually "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" or "Veni, Creator." Occasionally the morning session was varied with a few minutes of prayer and a song. The materials to be memorized by the pupils were selected from hymns, prayers, and versicles commonly used in the Catholic church service. In the second and third groups of the school this memorization resulted in the mastery of a considerable body of the *Plenarium*, a full church manual, as we know from Luther's later reaction when he saw the first Latin Bible. He was surprised that the Bible contained much material not found in the pericopes with which he was familiar. By the time a student graduated from one of these Latin schools, he was well prepared to enter into the spirit of Catholic church services and to participate in the various masses which all required their special liturgies. In brief, this training aimed to train the children into loyal members of the Church.

Valparaiso, Ind.

---

## The Greatest Missionary Problem

By H. NAU

The greatest missionary problem facing the Christian Church of the future is the world of Islam, the Moslem world. While the pagan world is comparatively well stocked with Christian missions and missionaries — comparatively well, we say, because we know only too well that in some parts of the pagan world the missionary occupation is but a skeleton one — the world of Islam has been touched only on its outskirts, its fringes. Yet its 250 million people present, and have presented for a long time, a tremendous challenge to our faith. Though it is true that some Moslem lands were difficult of access and others closed by the temper of their population