

Historical Essay on Martin Luther and Beer, in the Style of a Folk Song

By Martin Lohrmann

CHORUS:

Martin Luther drank the beer that Katie Luther brewed
Tastes alright and helped him fight his indigestion, too
Table talk around the clock with a gospel-loving dude
Martin Luther drank the beer that Katie Luther brewed

1.

In Germany of that time the water was not clean
People emptied their chamber pots into the nearest stream
So if you really wanted to take care of your health
Drinking beer was a proven way to detoxify yourself

2.

Making beer was something everyone was doing
Nearly 200 homes in Wittenberg were licensed for homebrewing
In addition to the salary that he made each year
Luther was paid in bushels of malt to use for brewing beer.

CHORUS

3.

Katie Luther's beer had a decent reputation
But circumstances might impose some limitations
One bumper of a summer there wasn't enough grain
They had no beer for 40 days and, yes, Martin complained¹

4.

Luther knew that life ain't always smooth and level
Sometimes a Christian ends up in fights against the devil
The devil wants to get us down, so Luther recommends
Go and have some fun hanging out with your friends²

CHORUS

5.

The drunkenness of Noah came up as a preaching text
So Luther said that he would work to preach from experience³
Yet Luther also knew alcohol was a problem for his Germans
He preached the blessings of sobriety in many of his sermons,
(For instance, his 1539 Sermon on Moderation and Soberness
in Luther's Works, volume 51)⁴

6.

Luther said that drinking beer helped him get his rest
And that kept him from sinning and that helped him to stay blessed
In that way his sleep served him as a kind of fasting
That's how beer can lead us to life everlasting⁵

CHORUS

NOTES

¹ For verses 1-3, see Martin Treu, *Katherine von Bora, Luther's Wife*, 48; and Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 17-18 and 240-243.

² LW 54:17-18.

³ LW 54:207.

⁴ LW 51:291-299.

⁵ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532* (Fortress, 1990), 431.