

THE REFORMATION.

(By the Rev. S. E. Ochsenford, D.D.)

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was an epoch-making event. It was of great importance for all time. All that preceded belonged to the past ages and all that succeeded to modern times. It was the turning point of the ages. It opened the way for the progress, the results of which we of the twentieth century have inherited and on the basis of which we can build for future generations. It prepared the way for freedom of thought and of religion, of which those who lived in the centuries before the Reformation knew little or nothing. It paved the way for the expansion of thought and the spread of religious ideas, which have given to education the broad culture that has made possible a literature unparalleled in the world's history, and to religion a breadth that makes it a dominant influence in the world to-day. From whatever standpoint we view the Reformation as effected, under God, by Luther and his co-workers, it presents food for reflection and cause for unbounded gratitude to God.

When, therefore, in October, we celebrate the Reformation festival, we should not forget that the underlying principle of that great event is that of progress along every line in the life of mankind that tends to the suppression of evil and the advancement of that which is good and uplifting. The world is better to-day because of the great and noble work done by the good, the heroic, the God-fearing men who brought about the Reformation of the Church more than three hundred years ago. During this long period of history the results of their work have been manifesting themselves in manifold ways in the advancement of the Christian religion and in establishing a higher state of civilization among the nations of the world.

It is hardly possible to enumerate all the blessings and benefits that have come to us by reason of this great work. We must content ourselves by calling attention to only a few. But these are so great, so important, and so far-reaching that we can not emphasize them too strongly, especially in view of the fact that there are those who seem to be losing sight of some of these. We are living in a materialistic age, when the minds of men are liable to be turned away from spiritual things to those which are purely material and for this life only. We need to remind ourselves

that there are higher things than the business affairs of this life, and that we only live truly when we pay attention to those things that pertain to spiritual and eternal things.

Among the blessings that have come to us through the Reformation may be mentioned the freedom to worship God in the language of the people. Centuries before the Reformation worship was conducted largely in a foreign language, which few of the common people understood. And there were other restrictions in worship which prevented the people from receiving what we now consider the spiritual benefits of worship. The Reformation changed all this and gave to the mass of people a freedom which they did not previously enjoy. Luther began by changing the Liturgy so as to conform more fully to the spiritual wants of the people, and to publish German hymns, provided with music, to be used in public and private worship. His first hymn-book, published in the year 1524, contained only eight hymns; but it was the beginning of the congregational singing which has ever since been characteristic of our German Churches. A few years ago the author of these lines published a reprint of this first hymn-book, (*) in order to illustrate to the people of our time the humble beginning of our present magnificent hymnological treasures. This first small book was followed in quick succession by others, consisting of hymns written by Luther and his co-workers, and in a comparatively short time the Evangelical Church of Germany and other countries were furnished with a large body of hymns suitable for their religious services. It has been truly said that Luther sang himself into the hearts of the people by means of his evangelical hymns. If the reader will examine our excellent "Church Book," many of these early hymns will be found in English translations, many of which are used in our services to-day; or the equally excellent "Kirchenbuch," in which many of these hymns are found in the original German.

Another benefit was the translation and publication of the Bible in German and then also in English, and later in nearly all the languages of the world. The important fact that we have the Bible in the language we daily use, we owe to Luther and other reformers in Germany, England and other countries. In Roman Catholic times the people did not enjoy the free use of the Bible as we do. One