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Influence of Lutheranism Outside the Lutheran Church

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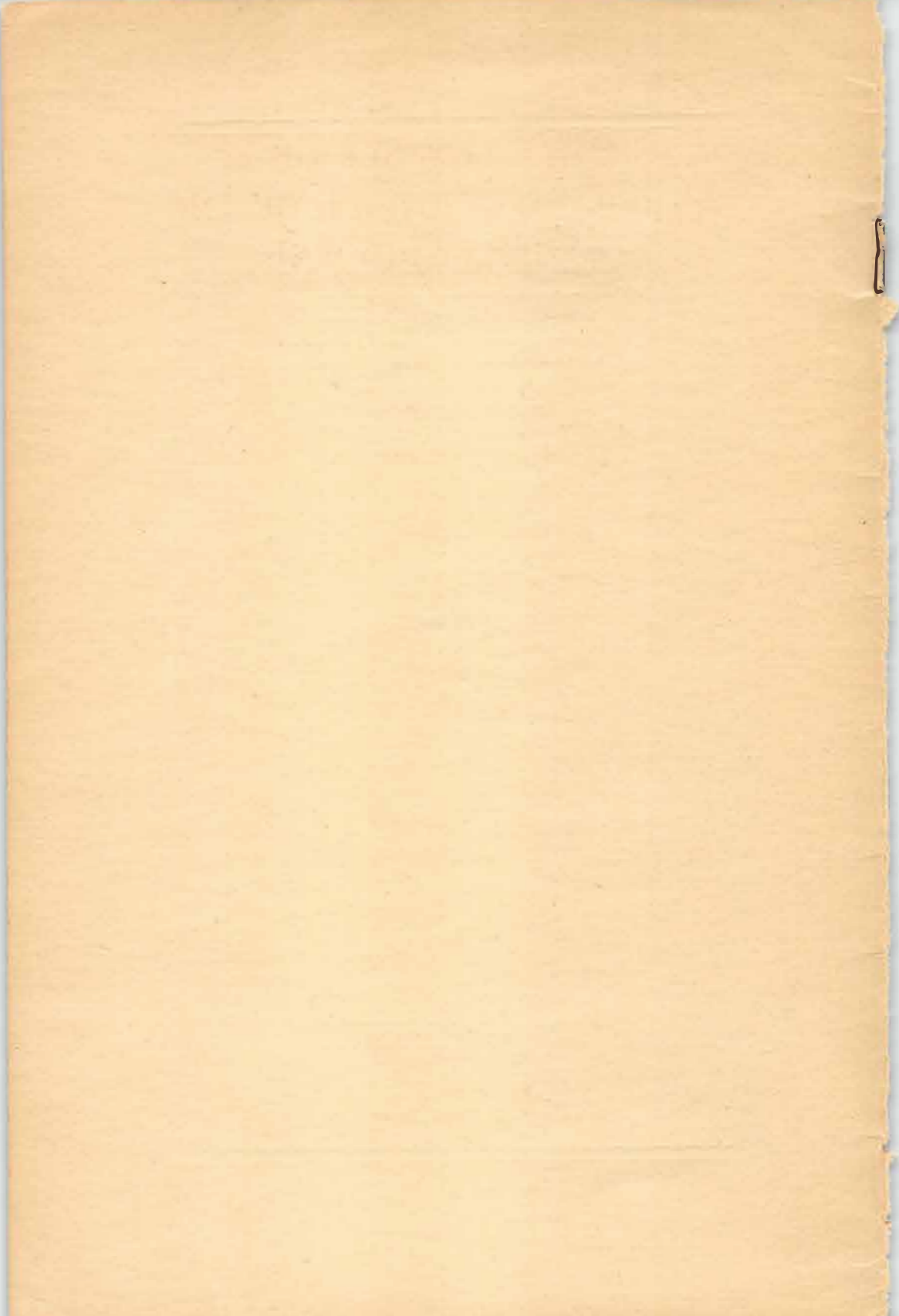
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**THE INFLUENCE OF
LUTHERANISM
OUTSIDE OF THE
LUTHERAN
CHURCH**



By JACOB A. DELL

FILE
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THE INFLUENCE OF LUTHERANISM OUTSIDE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

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The editor of a Swedish paper published in Minneapolis, in comparing the different contributions of the various European nations to the world's progress and welfare, wrote: "Germany has given Europe culture and science and Lutheranism." This editor was writing on the war, and this no doubt confined her attention to European conditions; for otherwise she must certainly have included not only Europe, but the whole world within the circle of influence of Germany's most notable contribution to the welfare of mankind, Lutheranism.

Lutheranism, I take it, implies a great deal more than simply that communion of Christians which today bears the name of the great reformer, together with its distinctive doctrine and practice. This largest of Protestant communions, the Lutheran church, is merely one of many results which radiate in all directions, into all the corners of the world and into every stratum of society, from the life and work of the Wittenberg doctor of theology. Lutheranism should include all that exists in the world today which did not exist before Luther and whose existence can be traced directly to the fact that Luther lived; all the motives, ideas, principles, tendencies and accomplishments of these four centuries which owe their inception to the world-upheaving struggle of the conscientious German monk.

In Luther's case the world has not been chary of its praise. Here is one prophet who has not been without honor both in his own country and without, for students of history the world over and of widely different nationalities and faiths have vied with one another in paying glowing tribute to his genius. It is said that there have been more books written about Luther than about any other human being who ever lived, save One. And the reason is readily apparent, for, as one author says, "Luther was the most influential and significant man in the spiritual history of the world, since Christ." (Mead).

Such a sweeping statement requires some degree of proof, and it shall be my purpose in this essay to adduce that proof from the words of world-renowned scholars, whose knowledge of facts and whose veracity cannot be impugned. Right here, credit is due to two booklets recently published in other Synods, from which the testimony to Luther's effect on the world has been in great measure derived: "Luther and our Fourth of July", by William Dallman, Northwestern Publishing House, and "The Reformation and its Effects", by C. Hale Sipes, The Lutheran Publication Society.

I. The Influence of Lutheranism Upon the Enemies of Luther.

Sipes in his booklet asks the question, "Did the Reformation have a good effect upon the Roman Catholic church?" and answers it thus, "Yes. The Reformation produced what is called the Catholic Counter-Reformation; that is, a reformation within the Roman Catholic church herself. 'Had Protestantism', says Draper, in his 'Intellectual Development of Europe', 'produced no other result than this, it would have been an unspeakable blessing to the world.' And Froude declares, 'That any faith, any piety is alive now, even in the Roman church itself, is due in large measure to the poor miner's son.'"

The best witness to the beneficent effect of Lutheranism upon Roman Catholicism is the miserable condition of South America. For almost four hundred years Rome has held undisputed sway in our neighbor continent. Those four centuries have beheld the introduction into the world of almost all that is worth while in modern civilization. But in all that time South America has not advanced in religion more than a step or two beyond the paganism which the Spanish explorers found there or the fifteenth century Catholicism which they introduced.

Bishop Homer C. Stuntz, in his tract, "Roman Catholicism in South America", says, "On October 4, 1913, the last bigoted stronghold of Romish intolerance in the Southern hemisphere was captured. On that day the Chamber of Deputies of Peru, by a vote of sixty-six to four repealed the old law, substituting for it a law granting freedom of conscience and worship to the four million of Peru." So as late as two years ago there were coun-

tries in South America where no religion but Catholicism was tolerated.

And the result? Dr. Gerhard Schilling, Methodist missionary in the Argentine describes in the November Missionary Review, 1915, a dance of Christian Indians in Bolivia. "These dances," he says, "took place during one of the church festivals. I saw them gather for the dance sewed into the skins of the alpaca, imitating bears, or wearing masks representing lions or rats. This consisted of stepping slowly to the weird sound of bamboo flutes, meanwhile describing large circles. At another signal they stop altogether, when their squaws regale them with small tin cups filled with diluted raw alcohol, manufactured from sugar-cane. In a few minutes dancing is resumed, and some of the men kept this up for forty or forty-eight hours, when they fell in death-like stupor to the ground. They never took off their masks or fancy dresses during all this time and even slept out their debauch in the attire of their orgies." Thus far what he describes is not essentially different from the pagan religious ceremonies of our North American Indians. But the next sentence is astounding. "This", he says, "was in honor of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary."

In another article in the same magazine we read, "A Roman Catholic priest from North America, who has a parish in Buenos Aires, throws light on the subject when he says: 'We have no such liberty, power, or influence in Argentina as we have in the United States. Both native and foreign elements are entirely irreligious. In our own parish only eight per cent. attend church. . . . We priests are hated, reviled and despised. . . . It is considered bad luck to meet one of us on the street.' . . . The above statement was made to Robert E. Speer and to Rev. S. D. Daugherty, a Lutheran missionary still resident here."

Now we know that Roman Catholics in America, England, and Germany, yes, even in France, Italy and Spain, are not in such a deplorable condition as those of South America, where for four hundred years Catholicism has had a free hand. But why are conditions better in these other lands? One must naturally come to the conclusion that it is because Romanism has there been forced to compete with the power of the Reformation in greater or less degree: because there she came in contact, unwill-

ing, it is true, but nevertheless real contact with the salt of the earth.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic writers have asserted that very thing. In an address before the Massachusetts Historical Society, delivered on the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth, the Honorable Robert C. Winthrop said: "We come today to recognize Martin Luther as, beyond all other men, the instrument of God in giving the impulse by thought, word and act, to that world-wide movement which resulted not merely in the reformation of Europe, but in all that we Americans now enjoy, and all that we rejoice in being. Pilgrim and Puritan, Cavalier and Roundhead, Huguenot and Quaker, yes, and Roman Catholic also, consciously or unconsciously, all alike felt that impulse," etc.

Robertson says: "The opinions which had been propagated by Luther...led to that happy reformation in religion which rescued one part of Europe from the papal yoke, and mitigated its rigor in the other." Catholics themselves have praised Luther for what he did for them. Among others, Michelet, in the introduction to his "Life of Luther", is frank to acknowledge his gratitude: "It is not incorrect to say, that Luther has been the restorer of liberty in modern times. If he did not create, he at least courageously affixed his signature to that great revolution which rendered the right of examination lawful in Europe. And if we exercise in all its plenitude today, this first and highest privilege of human intelligence, it is to him we are most indebted for it; nor can we think or speak or write without being made conscious, at every step, of the immense benefit of this intellectual enfranchisement. To whom do I owe the power of publishing what I am now writing but to this liberator of modern thought?"

So we can say, Where Lutheranism has affected Catholicism, the latter has advanced; where Lutheranism has not affected it, Catholicism has remained stationary in its fifteenth century position.

II. The Influence of Lutheranism on the Principles of Government.

The separation of church and State has become a sort of Protestant shibboleth; and yet the Reformation, a religious con-

troversy and the source of Protestantism, has also touched with its magic hand the baser metals of State affairs and turned them to gold. Not that the reformers themselves or their followers have ever assumed temporal authority as a divine right, for it is just such arrogant meddling in world politics which they decry; but just as the new birth in Christ shows itself in an individual by new habits of honesty and virtue, so also did the spiritual regeneration of the world, accomplished by a baptism of fire four hundred years ago, show itself in new habits of thought which pervaded every realm of man's activity, among them civil government. As Harnack said, "Luther freed religion, and by that he freed all things."

Of course, the Reformation did not create liberty: that is a possession of the human race which has always been prized. Remember the conversation of Paul and the chief captain of the Roman guard. "Art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born." (Acts 22: 28). But the German Reformation and Martin Luther, as its head and motive power, did accomplish the restoration of that ancient boon of civil liberty. Dr. Eliot says, "One consequence (of the Reformation) was an increase of civil and religious liberty."

How was it done? Simply by doing away with the Pharisaism of the Middle Ages and reaffirming the original Christian doctrine of the equality of all men before God, in Christ. "Out of that", as one writer puts it, "has come at length, here and elsewhere the Declaration of Independence, which asserts the equality of all men before human law."

As sparks show which way the wind is blowing, so also did occasional sparks of resentment indicate in pre-Reformation times the coming of a conflagration which "became unquenchable and enveloped the whole world." (Carlyle). For example, "when one of the Popes at Avignon had the temerity to demand tribute from England and imposed the payment of interest upon the tax which had not been paid for years, Parliament refused to honor his claim. Wycliff, a professor at the University of Oxford, placed himself on the side of Parliament and reminded the successor of Saint Peter that the Lord had entrusted him with the flock in order that he might lead it in pastures, not clip it." (G. T. Rygh, in Luth. Survey.)

But it was not until Luther, by those words and deeds which we all know and admire, had established for all time the principle of religious liberty, that civil liberty came into its own. It was there the French Revolution was born—not all its horrible deeds, but the love of liberty which inspired it; it was that which made possible Puritanism in England; it was that which led to the sailing of the Mayflower to the shores of a new continent where the Pilgrim Fathers hoped to establish a community where they might worship God according to the dictates of conscience. Carlyle, in describing that ever memorable scene at the Diet of Worms, says, "It is the greatest moment in the modern history of men. English Puritanism, England and her Parliaments, the French Revolution, America and the vast work there these two centuries, Europe and her work everywhere at present—the germ of it all lay there. Had Luther in that moment done other, it had all been otherwise."

Scholars are unanimous in giving credit to Luther and the Reformation, of which he was the moving spirit, for the widespread increase in civil as well as religious liberty in these four centuries since the world was awakened by the rapping of a hammer on the church door at Wittenberg. No less a personage than our own Benjamin Franklin acknowledged that liberty was born in Germany. He said, "We are a nation born to liberty. . . . America best cultivates what Germany brought forth." And the testimony of other great men is ready at hand to show that England with her Magna Charta and with her boast of being the home of liberty, did not produce, but only transplanted, the seeds of liberty which thrive so well on this continent of the New World. Thus Daniel Webster, in a speech delivered at Bunker Hill in 1843, proclaimed: "The spirit of commercial and foreign adventure on the one hand, and on the other, the assertion and maintenance of religious liberty, having their source in the Reformation, and this love of religious liberty drawing after it or bringing along with it, as it always does, an ardent devotion to the principle of civil liberty also, were the powerful influences under which character was formed and men trained for the great work of introducing English civilization, English law, and, what is more than all, Anglo-Saxon blood, into the wilderness of North America."

Thus, too, the Honorable Robert C. Winthrop, whom I have

quoted before, declares that Luther was "the instrument of God in giving the impulse by thought, word and act to that world-wide movement which resulted not merely in the reformation of Europe, but in all that we Americans now enjoy and all that we rejoice in being." And the historian Froude says: "The traces of that one mind are to be seen today in the mind of the modern world. Had there been no Luther, the English, American and German peoples would be thinking differently, would be acting differently, would be altogether different men and women from what they are at this moment."

Other quotations follow:

"No country has more reasons than this Republic to recall with joy the blessings Luther assisted to secure for the world, in emancipating thought and conscience, and impressing the stamp of Christianity upon modern civilization. Although America had not been discovered by Columbus when Luther was born, Luther's far-reaching influence, which today is felt from the Atlantic to the Pacific, helped to people our northern continent with the colonists, who laid the foundation of its future liberties on the truths of the Bible."—*Hon. John Jay*, Nov. 13, 1883.

"Out of the principles of Luther have been evolved the representative government, the free institutions and the liberty, equality and fraternity, which are the birthright of every American citizen."—*Benjamin Lossing*, *Luth. Quarterly*, Oct., 1892, p. 561.

"Luther towers above all the reformers as George Washington towers over the heroes of the revolution. To him, as has been well said, Rome owes her resurrection—to him, it may be said with equal truth, millions of souls owe their salvation. England loves his memory, for what has he not done for her national and religious life? The free millions of the United States may well rise up and do him honor, by cherishing his example, pondering his history, and maintaining his creed."—*Bishop Thorold of Rochester, England*.

"In the Lutheran reformation a new people was begotten, with new ideas, invested with loftier prerogatives and aims, and intended by Providence to found in the New World a great Christian Republic, one of the mightiest agencies in human progress."—*Daniel Dorchester*.

"Luther fought the battle of civil and religious liberty for us and all men. There are strong grounds for our American respect for the great name of Luther. * * * No better qualities were ever transferred to this country than came over with the families who, either willingly or by force, had derived their theology and religious experience from Luther. * * * (The Lutheran theology's) general influence had been pure and helpful to our general religious development. As a nation, then, we have ample reason to revere the memory of Luther. * * * He has been our heroic Protestant as fully as if he had been born on our shores, for his

children came hither, and have helped us to fight all our battles and rear this new western civilization."—*Editor Buckley of the (Methodist) Christian Advocate.*

"Who can doubt that the United States of America are, not indeed wholly, but in great part, indebted for their position, as contrasted with that of Mexico and the political communities of South America, to this expansion of the power of the individual, which is the uniform and legitimate fruit of Protestantism principles?"—*Professor G. P. Fisher.*

"That the principles of Martin Luther are the fundamental principles of our American Republic, there can be no question."—*John H. Treadwell.*

Lutheranism produced modern civil liberty.

III. The Influence of Lutheranism upon Liberty in General.

The liberty of conscience brought about by the Reformation also impressed the idea of liberty upon other spheres of activity besides civil government. It gave the world free thought, and as a corollary of that primary proposition there followed naturally freedom in the expression of thought, that is, free speech and the free press. "About one and the same epoch", says Mignet, "Columbus opened the seas to man's enterprise; Copernicus, the heavens to his researches; Luther, the boundless realms of truth to his unfettered intellect. These three grand pioneers of modern progress gave to the world: Columbus, a new continent; Copernicus, the laws of spheres; Luther, the right of free thought. This last and most perilous achievement was the prize of an indomitable will. Summoned for four years to submit, Luther for four years said, No! He said to the legate, No! He said to the Pope, No! He said to the emperor, No! That heroic and pregnant No! bore within it the liberties of the world."

The printing press and the German Reformation early formed a powerful coalition. It was just about fifty years after the death of Gutenberg that the press answered the first trumpet-call of the Reformation and immediately became an ally by spreading the Ninety-five Theses throughout Germany in fourteen days. All through the bitter struggle this ally proved itself of inestimable worth, and when the smoke of battle cleared away it was only right that the ally should share in the spoils, as it did. The first important work of the press was performed in the service of truth, and when truth triumphed, she rewarded the press by crowning it with freedom.

What this freedom of the press, and that which always accompanies it, free speech, has meant to the world can hardly be estimated. Think of the persecution of the Waldensians in France and the Lollards in England, because they thought forbidden thoughts and dared to express them. Think of the insult offered to Wycliff's bones, the fagots piled about John Huss and Jerome of Prague, the death on the gallows of Savonarola, because they were courageous enough to speak their minds in an age of intolerance. Imagine a Spanish Inquisition, with a Torquemada at its head, transplanted to our free soil in this twentieth century, if you can; picture nine thousand of our countrymen being burned at the stake after a mock trial wherein they were allowed no defense—and you will appreciate perhaps the blessing of free speech. Then think, too, of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's night in Paris on the twenty-fourth of August, 1572, and you will rejoice in the fact that the influence of the German Reformation under Luther has forever made such things impossible in Christian civilization.

That it was Luther and Lutheranism again which accomplished this noteworthy achievement, there can be no doubt. As Lord Acton (a Roman Catholic) has said: "Liberty of conscience once secured, secures all the rest." Here is the testimony of various scholars:

"We may, with Goethe, confess a debt to Luther in respect of that freedom from the fetters of mental narrowness characteristic of this new age, which is of all liberties the most precious, which is the true foundation and the real safeguard of all."—*W. S. Lilly, Renaissance Types*, pp. 301-308.

"It is not incorrect to say that Luther is the restorer of liberty in modern times. * * * To whom do I owe the power of publishing what I am now writing, but to this liberator of modern thought?"—*Michelet, Roman Catholic*.

"In the truest sense Luther is the father of modern civilization. He emancipated the human mind from ecclesiastical slavery. He proclaimed that freedom of thought without which it is easy to see that, despite the great modern inventions, the spirit of the Dark Ages must have been indefinitely prolonged, and the course of modern civilization must have been essentially different. It was the spiritual freedom which Luther asserted that produced political freedom and the freedom of the press; Luther's spirit was to make the invention of Gutenberg the true servant of humanity and to open to the benign genius of liberty the lands to

which Gioja's mariners' compass should point the way."—*G. W. Curtis, New York Editor.*

"It was the decisive moment in modern history. The mightiest intellect of the age was roused into sudden action; the intellect whose giant strength was to shiver to atoms the magnificent fabric of papal superstition, and give freedom of thought and liberty to man. Luther rose up inspired."—*Eugene Lawrence, Harper's, vol. 39, p. 101.*

Luther and Lutheranism produced free thought, free press, free speech.

IV. The Influence of Lutheranism upon Literature and Education.

If we reckon only the writings of Luther himself as his contribution to literature, we will be dealing with no mean figure. And if we add to that the amazing array of books written about Luther, we must make room in history's archives for a whole library. But if we go further and take into consideration all the books on any subject at all, which would not have been written if Luther had not lived, we are tempted to make use of the Apostle John's extravagant expression, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books." (Jno. 21, 25.)

One accomplishment of Luther's is a work whose literary significance is only second to its religious importance; I refer to his translation of the Bible into German. Other men have translated the Bible—Wycliff did it with the help of a friend—but I do not believe that anyone has ever equalled Luther's feat of translating the Bible and creating a language at the same time; giving his people at one stroke the Word of God and a language in which to read it. It was as if he had taken the molten, fluid elements of the German tongue and poured them into a mold where they hardened and crystallized into an established written language. Without lessening or detracting from the praise due to such literary geniuses as Goethe and Schiller and the no less to be admired prose writers of Germany, we must admit that the medium of expression which they used, owes its existence to the literary genius of the great reformer, whose worth as a theologian has obscured somewhat the glory that is due him as an author.

And yet Luther's personal attainments in this line are but insignificant when compared to the magnificent additions that

have been made to the sum total of Man's knowledge and culture because Luther lived and produced Lutheranism. In the words of Thomas Horne, "The light which sprang out of religion, as soon as it was freed from the incumbrances and pollutions of superstition, widely diffused itself through the whole circumference of human affairs. It was the commencement of a new era in the history of the human mind, and without incurring the charge of exaggeration from any competent judge, it may be confidently asserted that its beneficial influence has been felt in every branch of learning, in every branch of science, and in every institution of civil society."

In Sipes' booklet on "The Reformation and its Effects" we find this statement: "It was through Luther's influence that the world received the public school system. He directed attention to the importance of establishing such schools in a treatise addressed to the mayors and aldermen of the German cities, in 1524. The proud position of Germany today as the acknowledged schoolmaster of the world is largely due to the adopting and working out of the educational ideas of Luther. The Reformation gave a mighty impulse to the mental progress of the world. Those nations that accepted the doctrines of the Reformation received a marvelous intellectual quickening. The inspiring effect of the Reformation upon literature and popular education can be seen by contrasting the enlightenment of those nations that accepted Protestantism with the ignorance and superstition of those countries that remained under the ecclesiastical yoke of Rome. 'Since the Reformation,' says Fisher, 'the literary achievements of the Catholic side have been, in comparison with those of the Protestants, insignificant.'"

"All modern intellectual life that does not stand in a direct or indirect connection with the Reformation movement has something flat and meager; it does not reach the root of life. Thus the influence of the Reformation reaches far beyond the religious realm, also upon those that knowingly reject and combat it; in reality it forms an essential portion of the general intellectual movement."—*Rudolf Eucken, "Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker,"* p. 354.

V. The Influence of Lutheranism on Religion.

However much we owe to Luther on the score of free government, free thought, free speech, and free press, and on the

score of literature and education, mankind's chief debt to him is for his contribution in the field of religion. But it is difficult, in this connection, to distinguish between the effect of Luther's principles on Christians within the Lutheran church and their effect on the remainder of Protestantism. The general effect on the whole Christian world has been the same; a casting out of the errors and abuses of mediæval Romanism and a return to apostolic Christianity. According to a quotation from the *London Quarterly Review*, "October 31 should be a festive day in our calendar, as it is the birthday of the glorious Reformation, the re-baptism, in the laver of evangelical freedom, of the Gospel of Christ." What blessed things Lutheranism means to us Lutherans, we know; but those same blessings extend also in different degree to Calvinist and Methodist and Baptist, to Catholic and sectarian. As far as they have cast out superstition and error, and in whatever degree they have apprehended God's saving grace in Christ, through the resurrected means of grace, in that degree they are indebted to the principles of the Reformation.

Carlyle, in his book "Heroes and Hero-Worship", says that the European world was asking, "Am I to sink ever lower into falsehood, stagnant putrescence, loathsome accursed death; or, with whatever paroxysm, to cast the falsehoods out of me, and be cured and live?"

"The voice of God uttered itself in Luther," writes John Tulloch in the *Nineteenth Century* (April, 1884), "that the mass of lies which had become identified with mediæval Christendom should no longer continue. The voice was heard in many lands, and there were many who arose to help the German monk, and carry forward the great work; but that reformation became possible in England and Scotland as well as Germany, and that Protestantism after many struggles was able to receive a footing in Europe, was owing in large part, as it has been said, 'to the intense personal conviction and contagious faith of one man—Martin Luther.'"

In the book, "Rome, Reform, and Reaction", by Forsyth, the world-wide scope of the effect of Luther's principles is brought out. "It was an immense revolution", we read; "every new ideal of life must be. It reopened the world to religion, to the believer. The new world of America, discovered just before, was not so vast as the new world now opened to the

human spirit. We might say the one was discovered in order to be a refuge and a sphere for the other. Where would English faith have been without America to fly to. Freedom took a new meaning for the world and for nations, as men were set free by faith and started on a new moral career. . . . When the kingdom of God and His righteousness were sought by faith in Christ, all else seemed added. Luther taught men and convinced men anew what true religion, true Christianity was; and in its wake came science, and the modern State with its civic and municipal life and social rights. . . . Luther, I reiterate, rediscovered Paul and the New Testament. He gave back to Christianity the Gospel, and he restored Christianity to religion. But in giving us back the old he brought to pass the new age. He magnified the individual to himself, and so he opened a new world to the world. . . . The ideal (of Catholicism) is an outgrown Paganism, which the Reformation first broke. . . . The old pagan idea did not really receive its death blow till the Reformation. . . . The new age, the new human career, then first broke out of the old faith when Luther brought that faith to light. Assisi was well, but it did not do what had to be done, and what was done at Wittenberg, Worms, and the Wartburg."

And Dr. Buchheim, a professor in King's College, London, has this to say: "The Reformation is the source, directly or indirectly, by action or reaction, of everything great and noble which has taken place from about the beginning of the sixteenth century. Through the Reformation alone men of all creeds have become free and enlightened. . . . It was by the tremendous sacrifices brought during the terrible thirty years war that the Lutherans saved religious liberty for the world."

We may say then that not only Lutherans, but all evangelical Protestants owe that which they hold dearest to the pioneer principles of Luther.

What a man he was—to leave the stamp of his personality so clearly marked upon all that follows him in modern history! Religion, government, education, literature, thought and the expression of thought, all find their emancipation proclamation in the principles of Luther, discovered by that inspired leader in the Word of God, and, once discovered, jealously preserved by

his enlightened heirs. The effect of Lutheranism? God knows—men only estimate.

“Kings and emperors,” says Cummings, “have made pilgrimages to the tomb of that monk, and nations cherish in their hearts his imperishable name. Peter, the Great, Frederick, the Great, Charles V., Wallenstein, and, lastly, Napoleon Bonaparte, visited the spot where the remains of the reformer lie, and even these very names, the sounds of which still shake the casements of the world, are but ciphers beside the dust of Luther.” Says Dr. Krauth: “Four potentates ruled the mind of Europe in the Reformation, the Emperor, Erasmus, the Pope and Luther. The pope wanes, the emperor is little, Erasmus is nothing, but Luther abides as a power for all time. His image casts itself upon the current of the ages, as the mountain mirrors itself in the river that winds at its foot—the mighty fixing itself immutably upon the changing.”