

THE REFORMATION FROM A BAPTIST POINT OF VIEW.*

THE Reformation of the sixteenth century, like any other great historical movement, may be approached in three ways. We may go back into the remote past and trace minutely the course of events that has here and now found its culmination; we may show that the seed-sowing and the soil being as they were, the harvest is precisely what might have been expected. Or, we may take the movement as we find it, analyze it into its constituent elements, trace the motives and aims of leaders and led, trace the immediate and remote moral and spiritual effects, test everything by the eternal principles of right and truth, as determined by conscience and the written Word. Or, again, we may view the movement as a link in the chain of the accomplishment of the divine purposes, knowing that the Almighty is able to make evil forces to co-operate with good thereunto. This last process we ought always to apply, so essential is it to the proper understanding of the ways of God to men. But we must beware of supposing that this process in any way precludes the first or the second process suggested. The knowledge that divine Providence has overruled a particular course of events for the accomplishment of beneficent ends by no means bars criticism of the actors; no more does it affect the fact that this series of events is itself the product of antecedent evil commingled with antecedent good.

And here we must remember that the cause of God on earth progresses not in straight lines, like a railroad train across yonder prairie, but like yonder tossing ship on yonder surging ocean. It makes progress from age to age, but, owing to the perversity of men, not clear and constant progress. Sometimes it seems to lose ground; but, after all, the apparent loss is transmuted by divine alchemy into means of future gain.

Further, it is not enough that the actors in any great movement be shown to have been sincere. We are to judge according to the eternal principles of right and truth, not according to the conceptions of right and truth that may have been in the minds of such actors

* First delivered as a lecture at Point Chautauqua, in 1880, and published in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, for January 1884.