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I. CALVIN'S TRADUCERS—WHO THEY WERE
AND WHAT THEY THOUGHT.

To understand a man should be the honest purpose of all who undertake to write about him. It is acknowledged by those not too friendly to the system known as Calvinistic, that John Calvin is the worst understood of all the men of history, and the best hated. Fairbairn says: "He is one of the best hated men in history; round his name fierce controversies have raged, and still rage. * * There is something imposing in the multitude and variety of aversions that converge on Calvin."

Calvin's doctrine of Election, which he describes as a profound mystery and which must not be curiously examined, but nevertheless is a profitable doctrine, calculated to destroy the very roots of pride and presumption, is the initial cause of the intense hatred of his name. In his system of theology, under this doctrine, occurs the startling statement, that God, for the glory of his righteousness, consigns some to damnation; and the expression, brought against him, "A terror-moving decree." "This celebrated place; *Decretum quidem horribile fateor*, which does honor to his feelings, has also served as the foundation of abuse." (Ancillon, *Melanges Critiques*, p. 37. People accuse Calvin, says that writer, of describing God's decrees as horrible, whereas he simply meant that we ought to tremble at contemplating this mystery; as he himself expresses it in the French version of the "Institutes." Rivett, III, in his treat-

V—PERFECTIONISM.

Some questions are difficult to handle because those who err concerning them seem to many to teach what is intrinsically desirable. In contending for the truth in such cases one appears to oppose what is good. In order to avoid this disadvantage in dealing with the question before us we will begin by noticing the more common pleas which sustain the prejudice.

It is said we limit the grace of God when we deny that sanctification is ever complete in this life. The Scriptures are quoted to prove that our sanctification is the will of God; that the provisions of the Gospel are adequate to the end; that the promises of God contemplate it; that we are commanded to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. No doubt the Scriptures establish all these positions; but they do not touch the issue. The only question about the matter is one of time—whether or not the design of the Gospel is to make us perfectly free from sin in this life.

It is urged again, that we paralyze effort in the pursuit of holiness when we teach that it is never perfectly attained in this life. To this we might oppose the fruits of the two doctrines. It has never been questioned that the churches which oppose perfectionism are as mindful of strict Christian living as their brethren of the opposite view. But we will meet the issue as presented—the natural tendency of the two views. The Calvinist does not encourage a low standard of holiness, because he teaches that the renewed nature is opposed to all sin. The new man is incapable of being content with any degree of sin. Unless the conflict with indwelling sin is consistently and vigorously maintained the inference is that the soul is not in a state of grace at all. The conflict will be life-long, it is true; but it will end at last in complete sanctification. And no one knows how soon life may end. This is the case, as Calvinists view it; and it is not one tending to sloth or compromise with

evil. On the other hand the perfectionist brings the believer to a point in this life where there is no call for further effort. The work is all done. And most of the theories hold that what remains of infirmity is not sin. The conscience is thus drugged and the way prepared for back-sliding.

I. Having answered these two specious objections, let us see how the Scriptures speak in regard to the real question before us. We find that the teaching of the Scriptures, both direct and indirect, is twofold. This is a peculiarity that claims special recognition if our aim is to arrive at the truth. Taking up the direct teaching first, we will content ourselves with presenting two or three specimens as illustrating the point. In 1 John 1:8 it is written, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." John is speaking of himself and other Christians. The verb is in the present tense. The utterance amounts to an unqualified declaration that if any Christian, at any stage of his earthly career, says he has no sin he makes a mistake. But in 1 John 3:9 it is also written, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God." That is, any heart that has been renewed by the Spirit of God finds it impossible to commit sin. Not only advanced Christians, but all believers, have passed the point where it is possible for them to sin. Take a further illustration from the Old Testament. In Ecclesiastes vii:20 it is written, "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not;" and in Psalm xxxvii:37, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." And as a third instance, Noah, Job and David are represented as perfect men; and yet Noah was guilty of drunkenness, David of adultery and Job said, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Let us turn now to the indirect teaching of the Scriptures. We find here also the same twofold form of statement. The Saviour prayed that the Father would sanctify his disciples by the truth; but he also taught them to pray "forgive us our sins." He also

said, "Peace I have with you, my peace I give unto you;" and yet the Christian life is described by the Apostle Paul as a conflict in the soul between the flesh and the spirit. As a third instance take Paul's personal experience as a Christian, given in Romans vii:14-25. After all that has been written and said on the Seventh chapter of Romans we are not ashamed to avow that we see in it Paul's past and present experience—the past referring to his experience before his conversion and the present to his experience after the great change. We cannot turn aside to vindicate our interpretation. It is in accordance with the Apostle's change from the past to the present tense of the verb. In the first part of the personal narrative he says, "I was;" in the second part he says "I find" or "I do." It is agreeable both to the immediate context and to the scope of the whole of the preceding part of the epistle. It is the interpretation given by the best reformed commentators and theologians. We introduce it here simply to say that Romans vii:14 25 is utterly incompatible with the claim that the believer ever reaches in this life a state where a twofold statement is not necessary to express the facts of his experience.

Now what is the result? Evidently both sides of this double statement cannot be true in the same absolute sense. In that case we should have a contradiction. The believer cannot be perfectly holy and actually sinful at the same time. Shall we take one part of the statement and ignore the other? If we take the favorable class of statements and discard the unfavorable, then the Bible represents the believer as free from sin. If we reverse the order of the preceding, the believer is represented as no better than other men. In other matters we do not find it necessary to resort to such devices. It takes both soul and body to make a man. The attributes of the parts are different, but this gives us no trouble. Suppose we submit to the authority of God speaking in his Word, and take both sides of the double statement. Then we have the whole truth. In the first place believers are free from the dominion of sin. They do not sin wilfully. The new nature hates evil. In the

second place, evil is still present with them. It is a law in their members. There is a sense in which they are perfect, but it is only a relative sense. The holy men of the Bible were sincere believers, not hypocrites; and they had all the graces essential to the Christian character. But their lives illustrate the truth that "no mere man since the fall is able, in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word and deed."

Before we leave this double form of Scripture teaching it may be well to remind the reader that it is not confined to the doctrine of Sanctification. We encounter it frequently in the Word of God. It is necessary in order to set forth the whole truth on many subjects; and a disregard of the fact has long been the fruitful source of doctrinal errors. For instance, the Calvinist of Supralapsarian type would find it desirable to explain away such a text as 1 Tim. ii:4, "Who will have all men to be saved;" and the Arminian finds it important to break the force of Romans ix:15, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. But the true design of the atonement is not reached until both sides of the statement is allowed full force.

II. If perfectionism is not taught in the Scriptures, on what does it rest? Strong, in his Systematic Theology (pages 488-489) says: "The theory rests upon false conceptions; first, of the law—as a sliding-scale of requirements graduated to the moral condition of creatures, instead of being the unchangeable reflection of God's holiness; secondly, of sin—as consisting only in voluntary acts, instead of embracing also those dispositions and states of the soul which are not conformed to the divine holiness; thirdly, of the human will—as able to choose God supremely to fulfill at every movement the obligations resting upon it, instead of being corrupted and enslaved by the fall." This is the solution of a strong thinker—a Calvinist, but not a Presbyterian. We prefer, however, a shorter statement of substantially the same solution of the question. We would say that Perfectionism rests upon a false philosophy which leads to false conceptions of sin and the Moral Law. It has long

been fashionable with a certain school to speak of the freedom of the will, and to predicate of that faculty a sovereign power of determining itself independently of all the other faculties of the soul. The notion is entertained that free-agency cannot exist unless the will of the agent is free, not only from compulsive power without but also from any psychological causation arising from his own views and feelings. Having thus severed the connection of the will with the dispositions, the way is open for confining sin to acts of the will. Nothing has moral quality which is not voluntary; and, by the hypothesis, this quality is denied to traits of character. The second consequence is obvious. If the moral law does not cover the dispositions and states of the soul it is not spiritual. If it is not spiritual it expresses, not the nature of God, but simply his preceptive will. The distinctions it reveals are arbitrary, and may be obliterated or modified, as to the divine wisdom may seem expedient. Of course, if this theory of the will is correct the perfectionists are right in making it a basis of their doctrine. And it serves their purpose well. It contains the seed of ability to things spiritually good. It gives to choice that is prevalently good the right to be regarded as wholly good. It brings the law down to the level of sinful subjects. As Dr. Strong says: "This view reduces the debt to the debtor's ability to pay—a short and easy method of discharging obligations. I can leap over a church steeple if I am only permitted to make the church steeple low enough; and I can touch the stars if the stars will only come down to my hand." But the philosophy of the will which underlies perfectionism can be shown to be opinions both from reason and revelation. Any theory of the will that denies responsibility for disposition of soul reason repudiates. Acts are morally appraised by their intention. Here, for example, is a court sitting and a man is on trial for murder. A homicide has been committed and it is proved that the prisoner at the bar did the act. But this does not prove him a murderer. If the testimony shows that he acted with no other intention than lawful self-defence, he is pronounced inno-

cent. If the testimony shows that he acted under great provocation and sudden passion, he is adjudged guilty of murder only in the second degree. It must be proved that the motive was conscious premeditated malice before the prisoner can be condemned as a murderer. Again, on the theory under review, there could be no such thing as character. Men could never deserve either reward or punishment. Confidence and trust in our fellow-men would be impossible. Common sense scouts a theory having such consequences. In like manner it can be shown that the Scriptures condemn a theory that sets aside the spiritual character of the law of God. The Saviour taught that the law condemns evil thoughts and designs. The Apostle Paul declares, "We know that the law is spiritual."

III. There are two classes of theories of perfectionism. The first consists of theories of Pelagian origin or affinity, and are well known to students of Church history. The second consist of more recent forms of the doctrine, which have originated, or found advocates, among those who claim to be Calvinists. We separate the classes at this point in order to make each the subject of a single criticism. Space will not permit more extended discussion.

The theories of the first class all tend to obscure the relation of Christ to our sanctification. The apostle says in I Corinthians, 1:30: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. That according as it is written, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord." The effect of the Gospel is to cultivate humility in believers by keeping them conscious that salvation is wholly of grace. Whatever weakens the sense of dependence on divine grace tends to beget a spirit of boasting. Now a glance at the better known theories is sufficient to show that they are at fault in their tendency. Pelagius taught that character must be an achievement. God could bestow the necessary faculties, but man must establish his own virtue. This is a total subversion of the doctrine of grace. Rome admits the corruption of man since the fall; but holds that baptism

removes the corruption and infuses a principle of life. From that point forward there is ability, not only to keep the law, but to do more than the law demands. The Arminian begins by grounding justification on faith as a pious state of mind, and lays great stress on gracious ability throughout the progress of salvation. The Oberlin theory regards regeneration as simply a change of intention. Virtue consists in the love of being in general, whereas sin is self-seeking. When the soul ceases to seek its own gratification as an end, and learns to choose the welfare of all being, then it is both regenerate and perfect. How foreign all these notions are to the Scripture teaching as to the method by which we are renewed in the image of God, needs not to be argued with the readers of this article. We hold, it is true, that sanctification is a subjective work. We hold, also, that the believer co-operates in this work. But we hold also that the ground of it is the satisfaction of Christ. Christ not only secures justification for his people by providing an eternal righteousness for them, but he also procures their sanctification by purchasing and imparting the Holy Spirit to dwell in them and purify their hearts.

The more recent theories, on the other hand, make a great point of using Christ for present and perfect deliverance from the conflict with indwelling sin. A few citations will not only show this, but will serve to indicate the distinctive features of the several theories. "They (ordinary Christians) have learned only that their sins are forgiven through faith in the atonement of Jesus. They have not yet learned that Jesus, through faith in his name, is the deliverer from the power of sin as well as from its penalty. They sigh and groan in their bondage as if there was no deliverance this side of the grave." (Higher Life, page 32.) According to this theory, as we understand it, the first act of faith takes Christ for justification, a second act takes him for sanctification. In the first instance we cast our burden of guilt upon him, in the second instance our trouble about depravity. In the first act of faith we obtain peace with God, in the second we obtain peace with ourselves. Again:

“We conclude at present with a comprehensive statement of the truth regarding regeneration itself, with which some of our readers are already familiar. It is a new birth, the imparting of a new life, the implantation of a new nature, the formation of a new man. The old nature remains in all its distinctness, and the new nature is introduced in all its distinctness. This new nature has its own desires, its own habits, its own tendencies, its own affections. All these are spiritual, heavenly, divine. Its aspirations are all upwards.”

. . . . “Be warned that the old nature is unchangeable. The hope of transforming that into holiness is vain as the dream of the philosopher’s stone.” The sum of the theory seems to us to be that the believer has two men in him. The new is perfect from the beginning, the old incapable of transformation. Our third list of brief quotations are from a small volume bearing the title, ‘By His Life.’ “We have seen, too, that he sends down his own Spirit of life to fill his willing people. And now I wish to call your attention to the fact that in the New Testament those who receive this fulness of the life of Christ are called perfect.” (Page 64) “To Abraham, the father of all who believe, the command came with assuring preface, ‘I am the Almighty God; walk thou before me, and be thou perfect.’ . . . It may be that not a few Christian workers, in the home land and in the foreign field, have found their work unfruitful because they have not accepted the command of God to be perfect, and have not obeyed in spiritual reality as Abraham obeyed in type.” (Page 65) “There are some questions which God has put under the ban. They are indeterminate here. For us to attempt to decide them is wrong. . . . To this class belongs the question whether a man filled with the Spirit of Christ is sinning in his heart. From its very nature no human mind can penetrate it to the bottom and give it a true answer. Therefore, avoid it, pass it by.” (Page 82)

On these quotations we refrain from indulging any comment, except the remark that they teach us one of the forms of modern perfectionism. Let us turn to the purpose had

in view in making the whole series of extracts. As stated above the purpose is to make one single observation on the whole class. It is a common characteristic of the class that they deny the doctrine of progressive sanctification as taught in the Westminster Standards. The secured blessing ends the conflict in the soul. The new man is perfect from the birth. The Spirit-filled man is perfect, though he must refrain from saying he has no sin. With the processes by which these conclusions have been reached we have nothing to do just now. They unite against the teachings of the Westminster Standards. It is in defense of the doctrine of this noble creed we wish to say a word.

First, as so the Scripturalness of the doctrine of progressive sanctification. Of course, it is admitted that God can instantaneously make the soul of a believer perfectly holy, and that he does so in some instances is seen in the case of the man to whom our Lord said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." But that the Bible teaches that regeneration does not make the new born soul perfectly holy, that there remains to be accomplished in the soul a progressive development of the new principle of life and the corresponding weakening and destruction of native corruption, that this process is not completed by any momentary impulse, that the present life is a state of discipline where this twofold work is carried on, seems so plain that we hesitate to burden the readers with accumulated proof. All the Scripture images by which the saint is compared to living and growing things—as a vine, a fruit tree, a grain of corn, a living body, an infant—are certainly indicative of steady and protracted growth. The figures of crucifixion and mortification by which we are enjoined to destroy the flesh, convey the idea of slow and gradual death. The two images used to represent the Christian's course in this life—the race and the warfare—convey in them the idea of steady progress in the face of difficulties. The account given in Ephesians iv:11-16 of the design for which Christ gives to the church ministers of the Word is to the same purport. The account of

the way in which Christian character is developed (11 Peter 1:5-10) is by adding to faith one grace after another until the man of God is complete in sympathy and beauty. The Apostle Paul had made some progress in the divine life when he said: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In the second place, we wish to say that progressive sanctification does not cloud the Gospel. This is not only intimated but affirmed. "Now, if a man can have no better life than this, it is difficult to see how this joy can be full at present." (By His Life, page 86) Now if there was any gloom in Paul's life we have failed to discover it. And yet he says of himself as a Christian, "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." That he called upon his brethren to rejoice in the Lord always is known to all who read his letter to the churches; and yet we find the conflict of the flesh and Spirit impressively presented in those very epistles. The intention of the believer as presented in the seventh chapter of Romans is far from one of gloom. The act of justification has been passed. On the ground of the satisfaction of Christ the believer is free from the guilt of sin. He is no longer under the law as a covenant of works. Not only so, but he has been united to Christ by faith. Still further, he has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. All the legal difficulties in the way of his restoration to the image of God have been removed; and all the conditions necessary to that end have been secured. Indeed his union with Christ insures his final and complete deliverance from all corruption of nature. Perfectionists are very fond of talking about passing out of the "bondage" of the seventh chapter of Romans into the "sweet liberty" of the eighth. The fact is the strong fighter we encounter in the seventh chapter is the same who exults all the way through the eighth. Such is his sense of security in Christ Jesus that he fears no failure in the conflict. There is now no condemnation to him;

he is a child of God: all things work together for his good. He is persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus his Lord.

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