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“THE HIGHER LIFE.”

BY REV. J. T. COOPER, D. D.

I FEEL inclined to call the attention of the readers of the *Repository* to a phase of Christian belief indicated by the above caption. This I attempt with some degree of reluctance. This hesitation arises, not only from the fact that my engagements at present will hardly permit me to do full justice to the subject; but from the fact that it is difficult to speak on a subject of this kind without seeming to give some encouragement to those professing Christians who are satisfying themselves with small attainments in the divine life. The Apostle, however, did not refrain from setting forth the gratuitous character of our justification from the consideration that those to whom he was writing might “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness”—“continuing in sin that this grace might abound.” Neither does it become us to abstain from warning against mistaken views in relation to that spiritual life into which the Lord, by his grace, brings us, simply because some, through the deceitfulness of sin, may be led to indulge in a loose and careless way of living. In the hope that it may have the effect of preventing any such use being made of our remarks, I would here take occasion to say: Reader, whatever may be the truth in relation to the point we propose to discuss, it is unquestionable that no man can encourage himself in the way of sin without exposing himself to the displeasure of God, and, if he be a child of God, laying a foundation for future sorrow. Nor is it possible for him while in this state to enjoy that peace and rest of soul which it is the privilege of the true Christian to realize. I do not set myself in opposition to what is called “the higher life doctrine,” because I would have you to be satisfied to live on a plane which may, in the exercise of Christian charity, be reconciled with the existence of grace in the heart, even though in addressing you I would have to say to you, as Paul said to the Corinthians: “Are ye not carnal and walk as men?” Far from it. It is your duty, and you will find it to be to your everlasting interest, to press onward to higher, and still higher attainments—seeking every day to reach clearer, fresher discoveries of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and to achieve new triumphs in your conflicts with sin and Satan.

There are two principles in this higher life doctrine. In the first place there

his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." The case is very similar to that of the Samaritan converts for whom, we are told, Peter and John prayed that they might receive the Holy Ghost, where the reference plainly is to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

I have thus called attention to some scripture texts which the advocates of the higher life doctrine are accustomed to quote in vindication of their position that there is a work performed by the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of some Christians *different in kind* from that which is experienced by other truly converted Christians.

If the passages we have been considering form no conclusive evidence of such a work, we need not look for others; for they constitute the basis on which the doctrine rests.

That there is no such class of Christians recognized in the scriptures, may, I think, be fairly inferred from the fact that the apostle, in giving the qualifications of deacons and bishops, specifies no grace of the Spirit which is not to a greater or less degree common to *all* Christians. Why is this? Surely if there be a specific work of the Spirit of the character asserted by our friends, the strong presumption is that it would have been not only mentioned, but insisted on, as an indispensable qualification for the office of a deacon or bishop. We shall look in vain, however, for any thing of this sort.

The second feature of this system or doctrine, namely, that of perfection or entire sanctification, will, perhaps, receive attention in the next number.

PLYMOUTHISM.*

BY REV. JAMES HARPER, D. D.

WHEN confronted with any religious system or opinion, it is natural to ask first, Whence is it? second, What is it? and third, Is it in consonance with the standards we recognize?—in other words, to view it historically, dogmatically, and casuistically. Such, at least, is the line of investigation which I mean to pursue in handling Plymouthism, the theme assigned to me. Our essay will thus resolve itself into three parts: The first tracing the origin and progress; the second, the specific nature or tenets; and the third, the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Plymouthism.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PLYMOUTHISM.

To Ireland belongs the credit, or discredit, of being the birth-place of Plymouthism; although the name might be supposed to imply that the system so designated had originated in England. It may, however, as well be noted at this point, that the party most concerned are very strenuous in repudiating the title, "Plymouth Brethren," frequently applied to them, choosing rather to be known as "The Brethren," or "The Christian Brethren." The only objec-

*A paper read before the United Presbyterian Synod of New York, at its late meeting, and published by request of that body.

tion we have to employ these appellations exclusively, is that they are frequently inconvenient, affording no suitable abstract term to designate the system, unless we resort to the barbarous form, "Brethrenism," and no proper adjective by which to mark anything as characteristic of the system, or of its adherents. Just as, without meaning to be offensive, we call some men Lutherans, others Calvinists, and others, again, Romanists, will we take the liberty of calling "The Brethren" Plymouthites, and their system, Plymouthism.

Although men are still living who watched by the cradle of Plymouthism, and witnessed, or even contributed to its birth, considerable obscurity rests upon its origin, and the materials accessible to the outside world, at least, for framing a sketch of its history, are singularly scanty.

Studying accuracy in our statements, both as to the rise and character of Plymouthism, yet not confident of having reached the truth in all particulars, and, therefore, bespeaking the charitable judgment of any who, in this matter, may be better informed than ourselves, we shall present a meagre summary of facts, as we deem them, mingled with some conjectures, surmises and reflections of our own, touching the origin, tenor and tendency of Plymouthism.

About the year 1828, a number of persons of a serious and inquiring turn of mind, some of them students at the university, and some engaged in other pursuits, began to meet together at stated times for the purpose of reading the New Testament in the original Greek, and thereby extending their acquaintance with the word of God. By degrees this little company, most if not all of whom were Episcopalians, began to assume the character of an ecclesiastical association; and at length they resolved to engage in the observance of the Lord's Supper, without the presence of any ordained minister of the Gospel. Mr. A. N. Groves, a student at the university, seems to have been at first the leading spirit in the society; but there is no evidence that he, or any of his associates, had any intention to set up a new sect, or to secede from the church to which they belonged. In 1829 Mr. Groves went to Persia to labor as a missionary. In 1836 he returned home, and on his return was greatly grieved, it is alleged, to find that a new and very exclusive sect had sprung up from the association which a few years before he had helped to form.

In 1831 a society similar to that established in Dublin, was formed in Plymouth, England, through the agency of some of the members of the Dublin society. About the same time the movement extended to Cork, in Ireland, to Bristol, in England, and to other places.

The association in Plymouth, though not the parent society, seems to have been the first to assume a distinctive standing as an ecclesiastical sect; and hence, as we suppose, the entire party with which it was identified came to be popularly designated "The Plymouth Brethren." There is some reason to believe that some persons of the Quaker persuasion were among the earliest members of the Plymouth society, and that through their influence a more rapid advance was made by the society toward the position of an independent denomination—a position naturally repugnant to those nurtured in the capacious bosom of the Church of England.

Thus simple and unpremeditated seems to have been the initial stage in the development of Plymouthism—a system and organization now so wide-spread!

The thought will readily occur to any one familiar with the history of sects, and the complex workings of the human mind, that this movement must have been favored by the state matters existing at the time of its origin and early progress; and inquiry serves to justify such a presumption. As in the material, so in the mental world, the powers both of attraction and repulsion exist and operate. By each of these powers is the current of human thought and opinion, especially within the sphere of religion, largely affected. Under the law of repulsion, one extreme may beget another. On this principle may the rise and success of Plymouthism be, to a large extent, accounted for. It was primarily a reaction from, and a protest against, high church clericalism, ritualism, and Arminianism. At the time it arose, the air of Dublin was surcharged with influences which, in their combination, might readily generate such a prodigy. Within the established church two, if not three, parties or "schools" existed; one being inclined to ritualism and lofty Episcopal pretensions, though professing great hostility to Rome; another marked by strong puritanical leanings; while a third, perhaps, may be described as cold and secular, priding itself more in the dignity of a civil establishment than in apostolic succession, and regarding the other parties, at least the Calvinistic one, as visionary and fanatical. From time to time, also, persons yearning for the simplicity of the primitive church had seceded from the established church, and attempted to realize in separate organizations their own ideals of a scriptural church order and worship. Conspicuous among those who felt constrained to pursue such a course, were Rev. John Walker, a fellow of Trinity College, and, as such a position implies, an accomplished scholar, and Rev. John Kelly, a man of acute and vigorous mind. Both of these men were, on certain points, intensely Calvinistic, on others hyper-Calvinistic, and in so far as they were such, practically hostile to genuine Calvinism.

In 1804, Mr. Walker resigned his fellowship, and devoted himself to the establishment of a sect exhibiting the characteristics of the apostolic church, according to his ideas of that church. In the meetings of this party, the service of song and even that of prayer were omitted, while great attention was given to the study of the Scriptures, and to certain practices, such as the ceremony of the "holy kiss," supposed to be still obligatory. In 1804 or 1805, Mr. Walker, moved with a desire to arrest the spread of Arminian or semi-Arminian doctrines, prepared and published an address to the followers of John Wesley in Ireland, in which, with singular clearness and energy, he combats the peculiar doctrinal sentiments of Wesley and exhibits the teaching of the Bible on the points in dispute. In the course of this address, however, he advances views touching sanctification, which reappear among the characteristic features of Plymouthism. For instance, he remarks, "According to Scripture, I am not warranted to consider it any part of the work of grace to mend our fallen nature. That nature is as bad, as wholly evil in a believer as in the unbeliever, as bad in the most established believer as in the weakest." The parallelism

between this statement and the representations of Plymouthites on the same point, will be at once apparent to any one familiar with the utterances of the latter. Mr. Walker lived on till 1833, and we cannot doubt that Plymouthism was, in a large degree, the product of his speculations and experiment as a reformer. There is reason to think also that Mr. Kelly's views were in some measure conducive to the production of Plymouthism, and transfused into it.

It is worthy of notice that the erratic, but gifted Edward Irving, who, for some time before the rise of Plymouthism, had blazed like a comet in the ecclesiastical sky of Britain, put forth views on certain points to which those cherished by Plymouthites bear so marked a resemblance, that we are inclined to believe that Irvingism was one of the influences which conspired to produce Plymouthism, or at least to prepare the way for it.

Between the rise of Plymouthism and that of Puseyism, now known as Ritualism, there was a close coincidence in point of time. It might be instructive to trace how each of these mutually divergent systems, could spring up and draw nourishment from the same soil, and how much of internal resemblance between them may exist, notwithstanding their outward contrast; but our limits forbid indulgence in these collateral explorations.

In 1832, the Dublin Society of the Brethren received an important accession to its ranks, in the person of Rev. John Nelson Darby, who, after some experience as a lawyer, had become a minister of the established or Episcopal church, and officiated as such for some time in county Wicklow. This man, who still lives, and who recently visited this country, has done more, perhaps, than any other, in the way of shaping and spreading the principles of the Brethren; insomuch that as a sect, they are often called "Darbyites." That he is a man of no small energy of mind is undeniable. As an author, he has been prolific; but his writings are disfigured by a carelessness and clumsiness of style, which on almost every page tax the patience and penetration of the reader. We have at times been tempted to think that his very obscurity may have increased his influence over certain minds; the impression being thus made that, like a rapt seer, the writer is in communication with an unseen world, and swells with thoughts for which human language affords no adequate vehicle. In Mr. Darby's writings, there is an apparent perverse straining after originality, a feature discernible in many of the writings which come from Plymouth sources. He seems to take a pleasure in differing from almost all previous interpreters of Scripture, and in so differing, he seldom appears to be embarrassed by the thought that he might be wrong, and they right. Almost every doctrine, also, entering into the ordinary evangelical creed, must be either rudely rejected by Mr. Darby, or else reconstructed and readjusted by him. He is a born iconoclast. He has no reverence for the thought of the ages. The church, in his estimation, has become thoroughly corrupt, and with rusty rapier and battle axe, he enters its precincts and deals remorseless thrusts and blows at almost every object he encounters. Before such resolution and self-confidence, weak minds are apt to quail, and hence, in part, may Mr. Darby's influence be accounted for.

In his ardent zeal, Mr. Darby passed over, in 1838, to the continent of Europe, and devoted himself for a time, to the propagation of his views there, especially in Switzerland, where a reaction in favor of evangelical faith had set in. Indeed, it seems to be rather a characteristic of Plymouthites to wait till others have broken up the soil and sown the seed, and then press in to reap, if possible, the harvest. We have been informed by a prominent minister of the Waldensian church in Italy, that such was the course pursued by the Brethren in his own field of labor. When he had succeeded in gathering up a congregation, composed mostly of converts from Romanism, the Brethren came along and began to perplex the minds of the people by telling them that their pastor was ignorant of the truth, and that it behooved them to absent themselves from his meetings, and come to hear the truth in the meetings which they, the Brethren, were holding. Indeed, from so many and such respectable sources does the charge come against Plymouthites, of pursuing toward other Christian denominations a burrowing, intrusive policy, and so consonant is this policy with the tone which pervades the system of Plymouthism, that we are constrained to regard the charge as well-founded.

The Brethren, as writers, and we presume as speakers, are very dogmatical, each of them seeming to be sure that he is right. An air of oracular confidence and authority is characteristic of their utterances. Unless supernaturally guided, so many infallible men must soon quarrel, and the quarrels emerging in such circumstances must be deadly, for no one can yield, each being assured that he is in the right. Accordingly, we find that as early as 1845, the Brethren had fallen out by the way, and were using toward each other very unbrotherly language. Mr. B. W. Newton, a Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, who stood at the head of the society in Plymouth, having broached certain speculations touching the humanity of Christ, which were counted heretical by Mr. Darby, was by him publicly denounced, and formally cut off from the fellowship of the faithful. At the same time, the society in Bristol, headed by Mr. Muller, of Orphan-house fame, came under the ban of Mr. Darby, because it declined to concur with him in his procedure toward Mr. Newton and his adherents. However obscure and mystical Mr. Darby may be in his statements of doctrine, and in his reasoning, he is direct, definite, lucid and forcible in his denunciations. Not even an old Hebrew prophet could be more so. Thus there originated two chief divisions or classes of the Brethren, namely, "The open," and "The exclusive" Brethren; the former practising open communion, and in many cases, we believe, continuing to occupy the position of members in other denominations; just as John Wesley, after he had originated a sect which was virtually a new denomination, retained still his connection with the Church of England; the latter, not only assuming a separate ecclesiastical form, but also restricting themselves in communion to their own number. In some respects "The open" Brethren are more dangerous to the peace and order of evangelical churches, than are the exclusives; for they can insinuate themselves more easily into the confidence of those churches, and leaven them imperceptibly with their sentiments; but the exclusive party is more self-consistent, and,

under the leading of Darby and some others of kindred spirit, has made remarkable progress.

In the publication of tracts and pamphlets, some of them very excellent, and others very objectionable, the Plymouthites have been most industrious; but with the exception of the writings of Darby, which are quite extensive, few works of an elaborate kind in advocacy of the peculiar tenets of the brethren have appeared. In a large number of the tracts issued by them, the Plymouthites seek to instill their opinions by insinuation, rather than by direct statement. The aim of many of these little publications is to beget dissatisfaction in regard to the state of the commonly recognized branches of the Church of Christ. This pious croaking proves a ready passport to the confidence of many worthy persons, especially those of a morbid cast of mind; and these become easy converts, when, before their wondering eyes, the sacred and serene retreat which Plymouthism promises is adroitly displayed. To persons, also, impatient of restraint, and ambitious to exercise their gifts, a strong inducement to join them is held out by the Brethren in the practical inferences which they draw from the universal priesthood of believers. It does not appear to be a characteristic of the Brethren to go out to the heathen and teach them; but rather, as already hinted, to prey upon existing churches, and detach from them as many as possible. It may be urged in reply that many of the revivalists, or so-called evangelists, of the day, are Plymouthites. Our answer to this is, that while many, doubtless, of those meteoric or planetary preachers are tinctured, some of them perhaps unwittingly, with Plymouth sentiments, very few of them belong to the exclusive Brethren, that is, the Brethren proper. Nor are we aware that these Brethren have ever undertaken to carry on a mission to the heathen; although they have not hesitated to step in and sow the seeds of division among the converts gathered by the labors of churches, which are so unctuously pronounced by the Plymouthites unfit to exist. While we do not deny the right of the Brethren, so far as man is concerned, to diffuse their peculiar views among any of the other Christian denominations, we cannot but think that their zeal would be less open to censure and suspicion, if it impelled them rather to seek the evangelization of the benighted tribes of earth, than insinuate themselves artfully among professing Christians, and seek to draw them away from the churches in which it may be they had learned effectually the way of life. The growth of Plymouthism implies rather the depletion of the existing churches, than the diminution of the area of heathenism. It has already been remarked, that Plymouthism is attractive to those who are weary of sacerdotalism and ritualistic mummary, while the liberty which it promises commends it to restless spirits that fret under the decorous order and salutary restraints which the New Testament warrants and enjoins; but it needs to be added that for churches like our own, of a pronounced Calvinist type, it has, in some respects, special attractions, professing, as it does, adherence to the doctrines of divine sovereignty, and of salvation by grace alone. The importance and amount of truth which they hold makes Plymouthites the more dangerous, for, with the truth, the error which they hold can more readily be instilled. While fully

conceding that among the Brethren are many men of unquestionable piety, we believe that their system is unscriptural, and that it needs to be sedulously guarded against, and where it betrays its presence in the churches, to be promptly dealt with. Hitherto its success has been largely owing to the fact that it worked quietly, and seemed to be nothing worse than an excess of sensitiveness, or whimsical moodiness on the part of those affected by it. Few took notice of it, or seemed to be aware of its existence. Even in so comprehensive and recent work as Dr. Hodge's "Systematic Theology," there is not, so far as we have observed, a single reference to Plymouthism. In such circumstances, it might easily push its way. It is high time, however, for the churches to awake to the peril in which they stand of being gradually permeated by the poison which, we are persuaded, lurks in this plausible system.

THE EARLY LIFE OF REV. JAMES FISHER.

BY PROF. JOHN P. LAMBERTON.

THE famous Rev. George Gilfillan, of the United Presbyterian church of Scotland, in his book called "Modern Christian Heroes," has devoted a chapter to the "Fathers of the Secession," from whom both his church and ours derive their origin; and Rev. Dr. Barr has lately furnished to the *EVANGELICAL REPOSITORY* several extracts from his brilliant sketches. Thinking that some readers may be willing to learn more of these worthies, I propose to lay before them a fuller account of the early life of Rev. James Fisher, the youngest of the Fathers, as illustrating educational and ecclesiastical matters as well as Christian life at that time. My chief authority in this sketch is a volume of memorials by Rev. John Brown, D. D., Professor of Exegetical Theology in the United Presbyterian church, published at Edinburgh, 1849.

James Fisher was born January 23, 1697, at Barr, in the southern part of Ayrshire, Scotland. His father, Rev. Thomas Fisher, had been pastor there since 1693, but had become dissatisfied with the place, as, in his own words to his Presbytery, he found "himself prejudiced in health from the air of that place so that he is not able to exercise his ministerial work, which is uneasy to his mind." He therefore asked for "an act of transportability," which seems to mean a release from his congregation with liberty to seek employment in other Presbyteries. After consulting the people of his charge, and getting a statement from physicians, the Presbytery of Ayr granted his request on March 4, when little Jamie was only six weeks old. In April of the following year, Mr. Fisher received a call from Auchtergaven, and commissioners were appointed by the Presbytery of Perth "to agent his transportation with the Presbytery of Ayr," and soon he was placed in charge of the parish and his family was transferred from one side of Scotland to the other, from the bleak moorland of Ayr to the fertile and romantic banks of the Tay. As the father was not a native of Ayrshire, and James never returned there, Mr. Gilfillan had