

THE Presbyterian Quarterly.

No. 48--APRIL, 1899.

I. GENESIS OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

For great events in either Church or State there are usually well defined periods of preparation. Such events do not arise suddenly, but come to pass in their fulness of time.

It is with them as with a mighty river. Its vast volume of rushing waters is the product of many smaller streams, and these in turn are made up of many lesser rivulets, which, gathering from distant mountains and flowing through fertile plains, combine to make the great river—the St. Lawrence, the Mississippi or the Amazon; the Rhine, the Danube or the Nile. To understand the river aright, we must trace its various converging streams to their respective sources, in the recesses of lofty mountains, in the depths of trackless forests, or amid the loneliness of distant lakes. Thus explorers have sought the sources of the Nile, the Mississippi and the Amazon, and in this way reliable geography is made.

So it is with the Providence of God, as it works out its great movements, alike in the life of nations and in the history of the Church. These movements can only be rightly understood by tracing the various streams of influence

V. THE DOCTRINAL ISSUES PRESENTED BY THE CASE OF DR. M. H. HOUSTON.

It is not our purpose to discuss the ecclesiastical status of Dr. Houston. We would only say that his present relation to the Presbytery of Louisville reminds us of nothing so much as Mahomet's coffin.

Neither do we purpose to give any detailed statement of his doctrinal views. We have no doubt that Dr. Houston thinks he fully understands his own position. We doubt whether any one else does. What, for example, does the reader understand by the following statement taken from his printed answer to the indictment of Louisville Presbytery?

"In answer to Specification V., paragraph 5, the undersigned denies that he dissents, or ever has dissented from the statement in the Shorter Catechism that 'No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God.' He holds that every man is deeply sinful before God. . . . But he also holds that there is a life such as that of the Apostle Paul, which says, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me.' . . . This is the life filled with the Spirit of Christ." . . . And in his answer to Specification V., paragraph 2, he says : . . . "The perfect or entire sanctification which he affirms is being filled with the Spirit of Christ. He uses the word perfect because it is a word used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.' . . . There is such a perfection as being filled with the Holy Spirit."

We confess our entire inability to fit together the first and last parts of this statement. It is to us just as unintelligible as if he had said, "I have never denied, nor do I now deny, that two and two make four, or that a triangle has three sides. But I do also firmly hold that two and two

make five, and that there is such a thing as a quadrilateral triangle."

But we meet with no such difficulty of comprehension when we turn from Dr. Houston's personal views to the general doctrinal issue, which his case has brought into special prominence. That, the reader need not be told, is the question, whether it is possible to attain to perfect sanctification in this life. There is no difficulty in determining what answer is given to this question by our Standards. The Shorter Catechism question and answer just quoted (of which Dr. Houston omits the latter part) is the end of this controversy, to every man who takes the Standards in their entirety as "the just and true exhibition of his faith and principles." And there ought to be just as little difficulty in deciding which side the Scriptures take upon this issue. "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." And such decisive testimonies against Perfectionism might be indefinitely multiplied.

Hence it will be found that only the most ignorant fanatics, or heretics to whom the Word of God is a mere rope of sand, are open, unblushing claimants to sinless perfection. The Perfectionism with which the Church has had to deal, has nearly always been in some disguised or modified form. In the present article, therefore, we will give but brief attention to the barefaced form of this heresy, but will discuss at greater length its subtle, underground developments.

I. As just intimated, Perfectionism, in its undisguised, unblushing form, rarely ever confronts us except in the person of some ignorant fanatic. In nearly every such case, the claimants to entire sanctification are walking refutations of their own pretensions. Argument with them is out of the question. They merit no better treatment, perhaps, than was accorded one of their number by the eccen-

tric Rowland Hill, in the story which Dr. Dabney used to tell with such gusto. It seems that this worthy called on Mr. Hill early one morning and found him making his toilet. During the progress of his ablutions, Mr. Hill asked the reputed saint if it was true that he claimed to be entirely sanctified. The man answered in sanctimonious accents, that he was thankful to say that he had not committed one sin for the past ten years. Whereupon Mr. Hill, without another word, threw the contents of the wash-basin into his face! The sequel need not be described, but it was demonstrated to Rowland Hill's entire satisfaction that the man had not been sufficiently sanctified to lose either his temper or his tongue.

Worthy of more serious treatment, however, is the claim to entire sanctification which has formed part of many heretical movements, in many parts of the Church, and in all periods of Church history. Perfectionism has always displayed a most accommodating spirit, a willingness to ally itself with any and every form of error that would serve its turn. A list of the heresies with which it has been associated would cover a large part of the catalogue of false doctrine. The Nicolaitans and Simonians of the Apostolic age, the Gnostics of the second century, and the Manichæans of the third, were Perfectionists. So were the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and the Molinists and other Quietists and Mystics of the Middle Ages. Perfectionism has been affiliated with such well known forms of error as Pelagianism, Socinianism, Pantheism and Arminianism; and it has formed part of the vagaries of such obscure and short-lived sects as the followers of Jemima Wilkinson and Joanna Southcott. It has never flourished upon Calvinistic soil; we believe that the founders of the Oberlin Theology, C. G. Finney and Asa Mahan, enjoy the doubtful honor of having first introduced the doctrine of entire sanctification into Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. Of all forms of false doctrine, however, Pela-

gianism seems to furnish the most natural basis for Perfectionism. An instructive instance of this is seen in the doctrinal development of C. G. Finney, who began life a moderate Calvinist, rapidly developed into a Pelagian, and ended an out and out Perfectionist. Such, indeed, are the natural affinities of these two heresies, that if you will take off the cover from the most attractive specimen of Perfectionism, you are certain to get a whiff of Pelagianism within.

For this reason we will give the Pelagian heresy a brief examination, in order to see how readily it lends itself to the purposes of the Perfectionists.

As is well known, Pelagius laid the foundations of his doctrinal system in the denial of the penal consequences of Adam's sin upon his posterity. He maintained that all men come into the world with the moral status of Adam before the Fall. He denied, of course, innate depravity or original sin. When confronted with the notorious fact that all men show a distinct bias to evil and aversion to good, he tried to explain that by the power of temptation and the force of evil example. When still further pressed by the fact, that with the most favorable surroundings this bias toward evil still asserts itself, he claimed that this innate propensity was not itself sinful, it was mere natural inclination, like hunger, thirst or pain. It was to be regarded as infirmity, not as sin. He maintained that it would be a violation of the privileges of justice to hold that sinful which was born in a man; applying here the principle that obligation is commensurate with ability. Inasmuch as no man can change his native inclination, he is not to be held accountable for it.

Along with this false theology, he had a false philosophy to match it. In his philosophy he denied the causal connection between motive and volition, asserting that at the supreme moment of choice the will must be *in equilibrio*. He also denied all moral quality to the state of heart, the

motives and dispositions prior to volition; asserting that sin or holiness is predicable solely of the acts of the will, of the naked volition alone. Inasmuch as the act of choice is one and indivisible, he maintained that there was no such thing as the mixed moral quality of actions. "An act must be either right or wrong, and if right it is wholly right; and if wrong, it is all wrong."—*C. A. Finney*.

Such, in brief, is Pelagianism—full worthy of Dr. Dabney's favorite characterization, "A well-knit system of error, proceeding logically from its *πρώτον πσεῦδος*." We will not detain the reader with any refutation of it, except to say that Pelagianism stands or falls with the denial of Adam's sin. Whenever, therefore, we see any one casting a slur upon that doctrine (as, for example, *The Interior* in its recent editorial upon Organic Union), we see in such an insinuation a Trojan Horse, which contains Pelagius and all his hosts. What is more to our present purpose, however, is to see how the Perfectionist, when pressed by Scripture and experience, always takes refuge within the ramparts of his friend, the Pelagian.

Almost the only Scriptural argument of any consequence which Perfectionists use is drawn from the Bible commands, "Be ye holy," "Be ye therefore perfect." These commands, they say, imply the possibility of the attainment of perfection in this present life; for God would not require of us that which it is impossible for us to attain. It is evident at a glance, that this argument leans for support upon just such Pelagian principles as we have noted above. "I ought, therefore I can"—ability commensurate with obligation. This, as we have seen is a first principle with Pelagianism. Now we do not deny the principle, we simply dispute this application of it. And we do this upon the ground of that cardinal distinction in a sound philosophy, the distinction between natural ability, determined by man's mental and physical constitution, and moral ability, determined by the dispositions of his heart. We would

freely admit the injustice of God's requiring any man to be seventy feet tall or his punishing a man for not being able to form a mental image of a circular square. But we can see no injustice in his laying upon us many requirements (perhaps holiness, among other) which we are unable to fulfill, only because of the perverse inclination of an unrenewed or imperfectly sanctified heart. The only reason why a man cannot be perfectly holy is because he will not. That is, while a man may, at one time, by one act of his will, choose perfect conformity to the will of God, that act is certain to be negated, or at least neutralized, by other subsequent volitions in conflict with God's will. And these subsequent volitions are caused by the remains of sinful dispositions, which were all the time in his heart, and which rendered even his first volition of partial value. So that, when the Perfectionist comes at us with the Pelagian sophism, "I ought to be perfect, therefore I can be perfect," we smilingly answer, "You can be perfect—if you will."

But here again, the Perfectionist finds a way of escape provided for him in another of the Pelagian tenets noticed above. And that is, the denial of the sinfulness of the inherent dispositions of the soul, or the assertion that they are not sins but infirmities. If the only obstacle in the way of perfect holiness be native depravity, just say that there is no such thing as original sin, or depravity of nature, and so "go on unto perfection!" This is "the easy method" which Pelagius invented about fifteen hundred years ago, and which many have practised since. Or if you must admit that there are troublesome propensities to evil within you, which you find it hard to subdue, just call them infirmities, not to be considered in making up your estimate of the sanctified state. We once thought we had a Methodist brother in a corner, who claimed to have "experienced sanctification." We began to ask him some questions as to the details of his experience, whether he had any wander-

ing thoughts during prayer, whether he ever felt sudden heat of temper when provoked, or whether he was tormented with unclean or blasphemous imaginings like other men. "Oh yes," he answered with a smile, "I feel that just as you do, but that is not sin, it is infirmity."

Of equal assistance to the Perfectionist is the Pelagian philosophy of the will. When pressed by the undeniable fact that the best of men act from mixed motives, remnants of carnality, pride and selfishness, insinuating themselves into our holiest actions, the Perfectionist seeks to save his position by the Pelagian dogma that moral quality resides in volition alone. From the Pelagian point of view it matters not what was the previous struggle in the man's heart nor what was the complexity of the predispositions issuing in the act of choice. You must fix your attention simply on the act of will itself; that act is either right or wrong, and this decides the case. It is easy to see what help this affords the Perfectionist. Arguing along this line Mr. Finney says, "It seems to be a very general opinion that there is such a thing as imperfect obedience to God, i. e. as respects one and the same act. But I cannot see how an imperfect obedience relating to one and the same act can be possible. Imperfect obedience! What can be meant by this other than disobedient obedience! sinful holiness! If an act is agreeable to the law of God, it is right, wholly right. If it is in any respect different from what the law of God requires it is wrong, wholly wrong." No wonder that the man who could do such superficial thinking as this, should have thought himself entirely sanctified.

It is sufficient to say with regard to all such reasoning, that in deciding the right or wrong of any action, the common sense of mankind always asks concerning any man's act, not only, "what did he do?" but "why did he do it?" And as soon as that question is asked, you have admitted as factors in your moral judgment, the whole complex array of affections and appetencies, dispositions and desires,

aspirations, longings, inclinations, preferences, inducements and what not, which issued in the one single act of choice. And with this admission the Pelagian substructure crumbles, and the Perfectionist superstructure tumbles.

And now let us make one remark before passing to our last head. In this discussion of the relation between Pelagianism and Perfectionism, let not the reader suppose that we have laid the cold corpse of a bygone heresy upon our theological dissecting table, just to exhibit our skill as demonstrator in the anatomy of doctrine. Pelagianism, it is true, is nearly fifteen hundred years old; but it is one of Satan's masterpieces, and it will live and influence for evil the thinking of mankind until the devil is finally and forever shut up in hell. Because of necessary brevity we have not burdened our argument with the names of many Perfectionist writers in the past, who show the hand of Pelagianism shaping their views. But if the reader wants a modern instance, let him take down from his shelf of devotional books *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. (If you haven't it yourself, you can certainly find it in the home of some friend or parishioner.) Now look at the first chapter, and you will see that the Pelagian dictum, "I ought, therefore I can," stands back of all the author's fervent appeals. Turn to Chap. 7 (on *The Will*) and you will find the Pelagian philosophy of volition coloring the entire chapter—and so on, throughout the book.

II. We pass on now to consider Perfectionism in its disguised or modified form, especially as presented in such popular books as the works of Andrew Murray, F. B. Meyer and other leaders of what is commonly known as the Keswick movement. And here our task becomes much more difficult. We have to pass judgment upon the views of men who repel with honest indignation the imputation of Perfectionism.

"Sinless perfection has never been taught at Keswick, and no one holding or teaching it would be allowed to

speak from that platform. Even the suspicion of favoring this view might lead to a man's being dropped from the list of speakers."—*Rev. C. H. C. Macgregor, of London, in New York Evangelist.*

We also have to face the fact that those whose views we criticise are men of eminent piety, tender devotional spirit, and leaders in evangelical enterprises. And further, we do not hesitate to say that the Keswick teaching marks a distinct advance in the apprehension of some of the most important truths upon which sanctification and growth in grace depend. We refer particularly to the fulness and freshness with which these writers present that great central truth of sanctification, the infinite willingness of our Lord Jesus Christ to dwell in the hearts of his people, and to work in them that which is well pleasing in his sight. They also inculcate with great force the necessity of faith and obedience on our part, in order that the great and precious promise of our Lord's indwelling and inworking may be fulfilled in us.

It may seem to some that having made these admissions, we have given up our case. How, it may be said, can writings to which the tribute just paid deservedly belongs, be infected with the taint of heresy? When men of such character expressly repudiate the doctrine of sinless perfection, what justice is there in charging it upon them? But let the reader stop and think. Let him ponder the meaning of this sentence of Holy Writ, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour." The truth is, that when Satan wants to give the doctrine of sinless perfection currency among mankind, he does not always entrust it to some rotten hypocrite or crack-brained enthusiast. He manages to secure John Wesley, the founder of a great body of evangelical Christians, C. G. Finney, the leader of one of the mightiest revival movements of this century, an eminent, devotional

writer like Andrew Murray, or a devoted missionary like M. H. Houston, who shall present it to the world in carefully disguised, attractive form.

But the question before us is simply a question of fact. Do the writings of the Keswick school contain the doctrine of Perfectionism, or do they not? Let us search and see for ourselves.¹ Where the constituent elements of a thing are, there is the thing itself. And we find in the Keswick teachings at least three essential features of Perfectionism.

1. The first of these is the claim to a special experience analogous to regeneration, yet distinct from it; and above and distinct from the experience of ordinary Christians. Let the reader ponder this statement closely. Then let him consider what is meant by such expressions as the following, which he finds in all the writings of the Keswick School: "The Higher Christian Life," "This Blessed Interior Life of Rest and Triumph," "This Hidden Life," "A Lady Eminent in This Life of Trust," "The Teaching of the Inner Life Becoming so Widespread on This Side of the Atlantic," "It was only a short time before this that our brother entered into The Fulness of Blessing;" "At this convention the late Canon B. entered into the Rest of Faith;" "It cannot be too definitely stated that those who are asked to speak at this and similar conventions are those and those only who can bear testimony to a Definite Experience of the Fulness of Blessing."

So much for the language used—what is the thing which these terms are intended to describe? The essence of the Higher Life teaching is this: that by one act of the will—"one step of faith" (*Christian's Secret*, p. 30)—we are raised to a totally different Christian life, above our own past life

¹The reader is asked to study if he will the articles on the Keswick movement in *The Missionary Review of the World*, beginning Jan. 1897; with such books as Andrew Murray's *Abide in Christ*, F. B. Meyers' *Christian Living* and *A Castaway*, and Mrs. Smith's *Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*.

and above that of other ordinary Christians. It is claimed that this new life is one of "rest and triumph," "unshadowed by cloud or defeat;" that ordinary Christians have only occasional glimpses of this life, while those, who by an act of faith and surrender have had a "definite experience of the fulness of blessing," abide in this life continually. We are also given explicit directions as to "how to enter in" to this higher life, and encouraged to believe that if we obey these directions we shall at one bound leave our old life of struggle and conflict behind us.

It is not necessary to say that such teaching is both unscriptural and dangerous. The Scriptures nowhere hint at two kinds of genuine Christians—the ordinary Christian, and the one who has entered into the Rest of Faith. They do not represent two distinct experiences—regeneration and the entrance into the Fulness of Blessing. And their description of the Christian life is just the opposite of this idea of one leap of faith, by which you reach a high table-land of ripeness and blessedness, and leave the old life of conflict and struggle behind. "Let us run with patience the race set before us." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect . . . but I press toward the mark."

And let a man suppose he has had an experience so manifestly unscriptural, and the end must be disappointment, illusion or worse.

2. The second feature of the Keswick teaching which we will notice, is necessarily implied in the first, and is the very thing our Keswick friends indignantly repudiate, viz., Sinless Perfection.

Let a man imagine that by one act of faith and full surrender he has been lifted into a "life of rest and triumph," "a glad, victorious life, unshadowed by cloud or defeat;" and the door is open by which the worst feature of Perfectionism is sure to walk in. For what enemy can bring

defeat into such a life or cast a shadow over it, except sin? The Higher Christian Life is logically a sinless life. And in further proof of this, it can be shown that the Keswick teachers are driven by the logical necessities of this Higher Life doctrine, to use language which describes the very thing which they have in other places expressly repudiated.

Here is a striking example from Mr. Meyer's *Christian Living*. In the chapter entitled, "Sin and Sins," after stating as well as any man could do, the Scriptural doctrine that one element of growth in grace is growing perception of personal sinfulness, pp. 58 and 59, on pages 60 and 61 he whips right around and makes such statements as the following: "Freedom from conscious sin . . . is within the reach of the young disciple and ranks among the elements of Christ . . . as soon as we put ourselves into the true relation to the Spirit of God, we may be kept from conscious sin." That is, the necessities of Higher Life doctrine call for the assertion of some kind of sinlessness. Mr. Meyer's knowledge of Scripture and his own heart require him to assert the presence of indwelling sin in every believer; the result is his holding out before us this remarkable ideal—a man who is consciously sinless, while unconsciously sinful!

This sort of thing calls for no further comment except this one remark. Church History abounds in examples to prove, that no amount of good intentions and earnest protestations can save a religious leader and his followers from the logical consequences of their principles. And deny it as they may, the logical outcome of the Higher Life feature of the Keswick movement is a conceit of sinlessness.

3. A third feature of the Keswick teaching that must impress any thoughtful reader of these books, is their failure to emphasize one most important element of sanctification. We refer to their failure to lay stress on such Bible teachings as, "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation;" "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood

striving against sin;" "Fight the good fight of faith;" "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We do not now remember the occurrence of any one of these texts in their writing. At any rate, no stress is laid upon such passages of Scripture. And this is a radical defect in their whole system—a *suppressio veri*, if not a *suggestio falsi*. They emphasize one aspect of sanctification, and are almost silent upon another which is necessary to fill out the whole truth. Faith, giving yourself up to God, lying passive in his hands as the clay in the hands of the potter, are emphasized to the exclusion of that life of watchful, prayerful endeavor which God has made the equally essential condition of the indwelling and inworking of his grace.

And here is one of the well known ear-marks of Perfectionism. In the leading Perfectionists of half a century ago, C. G. Finney and Asa Mahan, we find almost the same phraseology and essentially the same exaggerated views as in the Keswick writers of to-day. Observe very carefully that the defect of Perfectionism here, is not the teaching of a falsehood but of a half-truth. It is perfectly true that the very God of peace must sanctify us wholly—we cannot sanctify ourselves. It is true that without Christ we can do nothing. It is true that the God of peace must make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.

But is this all of the truth? Is it correct to say in view of this truth, that, "man's part (in sanctification) is to trust, and God's part is to work?" "The preacher who is speaking of man's part in this matter cannot speak of anything but surrender and trust, for this is positively all the man can do" (Christian's Secret pp. 27-29)? Nay, verily! The whole truth on this subject is in brief, this: The grace of Christ which alone can save us from sin, does so in response to our faith, and in co-operation with our own efforts to

resist sin. His grace is sufficient for us and his strength is made perfect in our weakness, only while we ourselves, in obedience to his express commands, "wrestle," "strive," "keep under the body," "crucify the flesh," "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," "resist the devil," "fight the good fight of faith" and "lay hold on eternal life."

But we have carried this examination of the Keswick teaching far enough. Our deliberate and sorrowful conviction is, that no one acquainted with the Perfectionism of the past, can fail to recognize some of its most unmistakable features in this popular and, in some respects, helpful movement.

We had hoped to find space in this article for a comparison between the new writers upon the Christian Life and the old-time authorities upon this subject. Our feeling is that "the old is better." We have gotten more real help in fighting sin and keeping close to our dear Lord from Newton, Edwards and Owen than from Meyer and Murray and all the popular school. We would like to institute an extended comparison between the new and the old, but we have already trespassed upon the reader's patience and the editor's indulgence.

We close with one more reference to that ecclesiastical event which gave the occasion for the writing of this article. That event is to be regarded with unfeigned sorrow. The withdrawal of Dr. Houston from the work of our Church is a calamity to the Church itself and to the cause of truth. We believe the severance of his former relations to be necessitated by his new views. And if it had not been voluntary on his part we would not have hesitated to do our part in making it compulsory. But we do none the less deplore it. We mourn the untimely ending of a missionary career which was just beginning to yield its richest fruit. We deplore the clouded sunset which terminates a day whose high noon was so full of honor and usefulness in the

public service of our Church. But what grieves us most is the injury done to the very cause for which he has confessedly sacrificed his private interests and his public career. We fear that he has inflicted a wound upon the cause of Scriptural holiness which it will take years to heal. There is an inevitable swing to the pendulum of public feeling, and the agitation of his extreme views with the necessary criticism of them, tends to weary men's minds with the very words in which God has clothed some of the most precious truths of Revelation. For this our brother has himself to blame, not those whose sad duty it is to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

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