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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF INFANT SALVATION.

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(In five parts.)

PART V.

"Ethical" Tendencies.

THE most serious peril which the orderly development of the Christian doctrine of the salvation of infants has had to encounter, as men strove, age after age, more purely and thoroughly to apprehend it, has arisen from the intrusion into Christian thought of what we may, without lack of charity, call the unchristian conception of man's natural innocence. For the task which was set to Christian thinking was to obtain a clear understanding of God's revealed purpose of mercy to the infants of a guilty and wrath-deserving race. And the Pelagianizing conception of the innocence of human infancy, in however subtle a form it may be presented, puts the solution of the problem in jeopardy by suggesting that no such problem exists and no solution is needed. We have seen how some Greek Fathers cut the knot with the facile formula that infantile innocence, while not deserving of supernatural reward, was yet in no danger of being adjudged to punishment. We have seen how, in the more active hands of Pelagius and his companions, as part of a

THE LONGING OF THE SOUL FOR GOD.

BY ETHELBERT D. WARFIELD.

From *The Observer* (New York), July 15, 1897.

I USED to wonder in the lonely hours of quiet meditation what the Psalmist meant when he said :

“ As the hart panteth for the water brooks,
So panteth my soul for Thee, O God !”

This was in my boyhood, in that indefinite time when the soul is alive and active, and the mind keen and receptive. Lying under the trees in the midsummer heats and looking up into the leafy boughs, my mind would recall the constant symbolism of the Bible for deep longing, the thirst of the soul, and it was a strange and unfamiliar conception. More, indeed, because the idea of the depth of longing itself was incomprehensible than because the symbol was unknown.

It is not easy for men who dwell in the temperate regions to realize the parching thirst of the dry and arid tropic land. When the fierce midday heat of the desert is like the breath of a furnace, and the sun seems to stoop from the heavens, the intense desire for water to alleviate the untempered heat is without a parallel in the experience of northern peoples. But this was not the key to my early difficulty, nor does it seem to me to be the reason why so few are able to grasp the series of beautiful texts in which God is depicted as the object of the deepest and most tender longing. The knowledge of what is meant by “soul thirst” can only come when we have, at least, begun to feel the heat and burden of the day. This thirst may have many objects, but there is but one draught that can wholly quench it. Let us see a moment what these objects are.

This is an age of material things. On every hand there are material pleasures, things which delight the eye, the ear, the taste and the mind. Man scarcely possesses a wish which cannot be gratified provided

he has the one key. We are prone to lament that this one key is money. Is it right that we should? Surely not. Everything after its own kind. Material things should yield to material spells. If the spiritual gifts were to be found with locks fitted by the same key then truly we might cry out. But since the days of Simon Magus the purchase of spiritual gifts by material means has been unknown. Men have gone through the form. Indeed the church of God has seemed but a place of simoniacal exchange. But they who paid the price went away unsatisfied. They carried away the symbol, but not the gift it symbolized.

This soul-thirst then must be for something spiritual. The young man has a thousand fancies. They dance before his eyes, they lure his eager feet, they lead him—whither? Can this spiritual longing be evil? Can it be like the longing of Faust for that which is forbidden? Is it sometimes the thirst of an evil nature for the bread which satisfieth not, for the water which when drunken but makes the thirst tenfold more keen? Is it sometimes only the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life?

It is too true that it is. And we are wont to think of the desire for these things as more powerful than the desire for good. We even appear to reckon the intensity of the "soul thirst" of man to be inversely as its nobility.

I cannot accept this view. It is so easy to be cynical; so easy to throw away assurance of God's love and take a pessimistic sorrow in its place; so easy to substitute the questionings of doubt for joy in the Holy Spirit. I love to dream that men are aspiring to the good as well as striving after the pleasant; to dream that I may feel encouraged to do something to help on the work.

What a glorious heritage is the record of God's schooling of its prophets! What a splendid assurance for the heart which needs a lonely walk with God, to know that it was by such means that God prepared his most faithful ministers!

I have wondered what must have been the thoughts

of Abraham as with the child of his hopes, the child of God's promises, he wearily, yet sturdily, passed on even unto the third day, to the solitary height of Mount Moriah. I have many times felt when on some mountain top the singular sense of awe which must seize every heart upon the summit of a commanding elevation. The sense of elevation of spirit is at times oppressive. Think how Abraham must have felt as he stood there face to face with God. What must have been the soul-thirst which gave him courage to endure the torture of earthly longings apparently realized only to be forever robbed of their object !

Happily, we have preserved to us an exact record of one man's feelings after forty years in the desert, face to face with God. And in Joshua's declaration, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," is summed up the story of that communion. It was worth more as a training in wisdom than all the learning of the Egyptians which he had left behind. Just as Sherman's generalship was better than all the scientific rules of Jomini. They who follow the desert pathway may but break a dry crust at the water course ; they who follow Egypt's wisdom have the flesh pots. Things change not even in these days.

Meditation is the mood, of all others, least characteristic of the modern temper. The youngest understands how very necessary action is. "Be strong, quit you like men ;" "Gird up the loins of your mind ;" and all injunctions couched in similar terms meet with ready response in this age. It is more difficult to bring men to understand that the "race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ;" most difficult to impart the sweetness of a longing which can only be wholly satisfied beyond the valley of shadows but which on earth gains at least surcease of pain.

It has one mark which is full of blessing. He who seeks to quench the world thirst rises up from the task weary, and anxious only for repose. He who seeks to gratify the soul's deep longing comes from the seeking only eager to go forth into the world to aid others in the quest.

It has seemed to me always as if in changing the Legends of Arthur, Mr. Tennyson might with advantage have changed the quest of the Holy Grail into a more general triumph. The touch of monastic exclusiveness, of ascetic self-love, still remains on the lovely story. The Spirit of Christ would more truly have led those who found the grail to win for all the faithful a sight of it, and in so far a successful quest. It was perhaps impossible to retain the picturesqueness of the legends without retaining the strange minglings of Christianity, superstition and paganism. The truth of God is only simple and sublime, human inventions broken reflexions, elusive, picturesque and fascinating.

Is it not true that our lives are of this sort? There is a pagan survival in much of our self-love. Even when the peaceful hour of meditation comes, we are apt to look within at self, instead of looking out on "the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," to pour out a libation to heathen gods rather than a prayer to the God of wisdom and of truth.

Sometimes in the hour of a great bereavement, in the face of a great worldly loss, we stand face to face with a lost past, a vacant present, and a hopeless future, and our heart cries out for that which has been taken from us. Such was David's position when he cried, "O Jonathan, my brother Jonathan, would God I had died for you," and when his own son perished in his wickedness, and he cried, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom," or even more in his restrained but bitter sorrow for the dead babe whom he had slain by his sin. In such moments men can at least gain some idea of how strong the longing of the soul for God should be; how strong?—yes, but a strength with no poignancy or pain. Happily, it was the same man who has left us the loveliest expressions of longing for God. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God," David exclaims, and when he was in the wilderness of Judah and the world was dark about him, he exclaimed again, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is."

Such thirst to those who have never felt it may seem but a dream ; to such as have learned from it to go and drink of the fountain of living waters, of the waters which are like a well-spring in the heart of them who drink, this thirst is the symbol of a spiritual communion sweet beyond all else.

THE SECRET OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.¹

BY W. ROBERTSON NICOLL.

From *The British Weekly* (London), July 8, 1897.

(*In two parts.*)

PART I.

IN his most beautiful book, "Grace Abounding," Bunyan speaks as follows : " Upon a day the good providence of God did cast me to *Bedford*, to work on my calling ; and in one of the streets of that *Town*, I came where there were three or four poor *Women* sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God ; and being now willing to hear them discourse I drew near to hear what they said, for I was now a brisk Talker also myself in the matters of Religion. But I may say *I heard, but I understood not* ; for they were far above, out of my reach. Their talk was about a new Birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature. They talked how God had visited their souls with His love in the *Lord Jesus*, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the Devil. Moreover they reasoned of the suggestions and temptations of Satan in particular ; and told to each other by which they had been afflicted, and how they were

¹ Address delivered at the close of the Session, Theological College, Bala, Wales, July 1st.