

THE  
PRINCETON REVIEW.

---

JULY 1842.

---

No. III.

---

*Stephen Olwell*

---

- ART. I.—1. *The Last Will and Testament of James Smithson, London.*  
2. *The Letters of John Q. Adams, F. Wayland, Thomas Cooper, Richard Rush, S. Chapin, to John Forsyth, Secretary of State, on the subject of the trust assumed by the United States, under the will of James Smithson.*  
3. *The Congressional Proceedings and Documents on the same subject.*

THE large bequest made by James Smithson to the United States, struck us at first with a surprise, which we have never wholly overcome. It was rather a novelty, that a distant nation should be selected as trustee, to carry out the intentions of a testator: and this novelty has drawn much attention to the construction of the will. We confess our misgivings that every project hitherto proposed for the right fulfilment of this trust, has failed entirely of responding to the views of the liberal donor. For reasons inexplicable to us, he has chosen to express his wishes in terms so general, as to create hazard of mistaking his meaning. It cannot be doubted, he had the good of society in view. The liberality of the bequest shows he designed to accomplish much. The key to this will is the same which must be applied to every other, the intention of the giver. We are unworthy the trust unless we carefully provide that

*John Brown*

ART. III.—*The Scriptural Doctrine of Sanctification stated and defended against the error of Perfectionism.*  
By W. D. Snodgrass, D. D. Philadelphia : Presbyterian Board of Publication. 1841. pp. 112.

THIS judicious and excellent treatise presents, in a small compass, the substance of the modern controversy on the doctrine of entire sanctification in the present life. The author's statements are calm and clear, his method logical, his arguments conclusive, and his style simple and dignified. Though it is not long since we called the attention of our readers to this subject, especially in the form in which it is presented by the Oberlin professors, we think they will not regard the following pages as misapplied, when they consider how ceaseless are the efforts of the advocates of error to propagate a doctrine which the history of the church teaches us seldom fails to become, in one form or other, an apology for sin.

The notion of the actual attainment, in some instances, of perfect virtue in this life, is so gratifying to human pride, that we need not wonder at its adoption by some in nearly every age of the world. Contrary as it is to scripture and experience, it is too deeply radicated in man's selfishness, not to find apologists and advocates among the conceited, the enthusiastic, and such as are unaccustomed to an impartial scrutiny of their own hearts. It flatters exceedingly all those pretensions to superior sanctity which are disjoined from humility, penitence, and ardent aspirations after entire assimilation to the perfection of the divine moral character. In most of the false religions of the earth, the doctrine of human perfection, manifested in at least some peculiarly favored instances, has, if we mistake not, formed an essential article of belief; and in all countries, perhaps, individuals have been found, possessing an exemption from the common frailties of their race. A kind of perfection has been claimed for Greek and Roman sages, for Hindoo devotees, for Mahommedan saints; and even for the savage warrior, smiling in death at the impotent efforts of his enemies to extract from his agonized nature the shriek, or the groan of suffering. That Pantheism, which is the philosophical basis of most of the popular systems of idolatry, assumes as a fundamental position, such a union of man to the Deity, as constitutes the leading principle of modern perfectionism,

in its purest and most sublimated form. Hence originates the deification of men, as well as the divine worship paid to stocks, stones, rivers, mountains, wind, and all the inferior parts of the creation; Pantheism, (elevating a creature of yesterday to the rank of a divinity,) which is supposed by many to have been of more ancient date than the universal deluge,\* was maintained in all following ages till the time of Christ, and was not entirely relinquished even by some of his professed disciples. Holding such a principle, they were prepared to adopt other opinions equally preposterous and unchristian. To this, perhaps, should be attributed, in part, at least, the antiuonianism and perfectionism of some of the heretics in the apostolic age—so the Nicolaitans and Simonians—who maintained that they were released from all obligation to the law, and that none of their actions, however contrary to the letter of the precept, were really opposed to the divine will, and worthy of punishment: and how could they, who were parts of God, or rather identical with him, commit sin? “The Gnostics of the first and second centuries, and the Manichæans of the third, believed human souls to be particles of the celestial light, of the same essential nature with God himself, and no otherwise corrupt or corruptible, than by being combined with sinful matter. The new Platonists of Egypt, held substantially the same opinions. Hieronymus, in the preface to his dialogues against Pelagius, says that Manichæus, Precillian, Evagrinus, Hyperboreus, Flavianian, Origen, and the Menalians of Syria, were Perfectionists.\*” The brethren and sisters of the Free Spirit, in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, held that all things flowed by emanation from God; that rational souls were portions of the divine essence; that the universe was God; and that by the power of contemplation, they were united to the Deity, and acquired hereby a glorious and sublime liberty, both from sinful lusts, and the common instincts of nature.† “In the latter part of the seventeenth century, the disciples of Michael de Molinos in Spain, France, and Italy, were Perfectionists.”§ It is worthy of remark, that in none of all these, during so many successive centuries, do we trace any evidence of the belief of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit

\* See the Princeton Review, Vol. 13, p. 539.

† Literary and Theological Review, Vol. 3, p. 28.

‡ Buck's Theological Dict. and Mosheim.

§ Lit. and The. Review, ut supra.

on the heart, turning its affections to God, and securing the perfection of its obedience. For the most part, they asserted, that regeneration and complete deliverance from sin could be effected by contemplation, and the soul thus be so identified with God, as to constitute them not two things united, but one being; and in this way, they explained the indwelling and controlling agency of the Most High in man. Of the reality and presence of native moral corruption, as maintained by consistent Calvinists, they seem to have had no conception.\* Pelagius and Celestius, in the fourth century, who denied the innate sinfulness of the human heart, and the consequent necessity of efficacious grace in its renewal, maintained, with entire systematic consistency, that men might live without sin during the whole period of their life; that some had actually so lived for many years, and that others, restored by repentance after transgression, had subsequently continued perfect in holiness to the close of their days.† The primitive Quakers, the French Prophets, the Shakers, Jemima Wilkinson, Joanna Southcott, and the great body of Mystics in every communion, held to perfection in this life, as the attainment of the privileged few; and the advocates of this doctrine have usually represented the denial of it as involving great licentiousness, and a state of utter spiritual bondage. The views of the famous John Wesley, the father of Arminian Methodism, are well known to the reading part of the religious community. He affirmed, as Whitfield asserts, “that no Baptist or Presbyterian writer, whom he had ever read, knew any thing of the liberties of Christ;” to which statement Whitfield replied, in his own pointed and emphatical manner—“What! neither Bunyan, Henry, Flavel, Halyburton, nor any of the New-England and Scotch Divines? See, dear sir, what narrow-spiritedness and want of charity arise from your principles; and then do not say aught against election any more, on account of its being destructive of meekness and love. I know you think meanly of Abraham, though he was eminently called the friend of God, and I believe also of David, the man after God’s own heart.”‡ Wesley gives us an account of the steps by which he was led, during a

\* Lit. and Theol. Review, ut supra.

† Lit. and Th. Review, Vol. 3, p. 29, where we have in a note a curious specimen of the arguments of Celestius on this subject. Also Wigger’s *Hist. of Augustinism and Pelagianism*.

‡ Gillie’s *Life of Whitfield*, New-Haven edition, 1812, p. 256.

course of many years, to embrace what he calls the doctrine of "Christian perfection," which, as he explains it, though it includes the idea of freedom from sin, implies neither perfection in knowledge nor infallibility, nor security against temptations and infirmities.\* According to the system of the Romish church, good men may not only attain to perfection, but perform, moreover, works of supererogation, serving as a fund of merit, for the advantage of believers of inferior spiritual attainments.

It is not till lately that Perfectionism has been professed within the pale of Congregational and Presbyterian churches. By our fathers it was accounted heresy, inconsistent with the express testimony of the scriptures, contradictory to Christian experience, and subversive of the entire scheme of the gospel. But, in consequence of certain Pelagian speculations, concerning moral agency, human ability, and the divine influence in sanctification,—errors that have become extensively popular—individuals, once reputed most zealous for revivals of religion, have been led to join Pelagius and other kindred spirits, in their views of the attainableness of perfection in the present life. Such, as we believe, is the philosophical origin of Perfectionism, as held by the professors at Oberlin, and their theological friends.

That we may not misrepresent the meaning of those to whom we refer, we will state their doctrine of perfection in their own language. "What is perfection in holiness? In answer to this inquiry I would remark," says Mr. Mahan,† "that perfection in holiness implies a full and perfect discharge of our entire duty, of all existing obligations in respect to God and all other beings. It is perfect obedience to the moral law." With respect to the attainableness of perfection in this life, the same writer says, "We have evidence just as conclusive, that perfect and perpetual holiness is promised to Christians, as we have that it is required of them." "We have the same evidence from scripture, that all Christians may, and that some of them will, attain to a state of entire sanctification in this life, that they will attain to that state in heaven." "There is positive evidence that some of them did attain to this state." Mr. Finney affirms, and in this, we suppose, he expresses the

\* Wesley's plain account of Christian Perfection, New-York edition, 1837, pp. 3, 18, and *passim*.

† Christian Perfection, pp. 4, 27, 38.

opinion of his associates at Oberlin, that sinless perfection for the time being, is implied in the lowest degree of true piety. "It seems to be a very general opinion," says he, "that there is such a thing as imperfect obedience to God ; (i. e.) as it 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, but disobedient obedience ! a sinful holiness ! Now, to decide the character of any act, we are to bring it into the light of the law of God ; if agreeable to this law, it is obedience—it is right—wholly right. If it is in any respect different from what the law of God requires, it is wrong—wholly wrong."\* Here we have the doctrine that all Christians are sometimes perfect, or are perfect so far as they have any true holiness ; and it is a very natural inference from such premises, that believers may attain to a confirmed state of perfection in the present life. This conclusion is adopted by Mr. Finney, as well as by Mr. Mahan.

To disprove the perfectionism taught in the above extracts, or to show that none of the saints are entirely free from sin in the present life, will be our object in this essay.

We shall begin with noticing the principal arguments, which are commonly adduced by perfectionists of different descriptions, in support of their views of this subject. We shall next exhibit direct evidence of the sinful imperfection of the heart of the saints in this life ; and lastly, we shall show the great practical importance of the doctrine for which we contend, in opposition to the error which it controverts.

The arguments of the Perfectionists are first to be considered.

The command of God requires perfection, is one of their arguments. Answer. It is doubtless true, that the Most High does command us to be perfect ; and to enjoin any thing less than perfection, would be inconsistent with his own purity, and those eternal principles of rectitude, according to which he governs the universe. The law expresses his feelings towards moral objects ; but it leaves wholly undetermined the question, whether his rational creatures will acknowledge, or reject his authority. His command, in any instance, neither supposes that it will be obeyed, nor implies any insincerity in him, provided he foresees that it will not be obeyed. The contrary supposition would be

\* Oberlin Evangelist, Vol. 1.

incompatible with some of the most undeniable facts of revealed religion. Does the divine command to be perfect, prove that some may, or will obey this righteous precept? Then, for the same reason, the divine prohibition of all sin in mankind, equally proves that some of them may pass through a long life without a single act of transgression. It is by no means certain, therefore, that all the human race are or have been sinners; and, of course, the doctrine of universal depravity, unequivocally and frequently as it is taught in the scriptures, may be false. It is as easy to imagine that some never sin, as that they become perfectly holy after they have acquired a sinful character. The opinion of Pelagius with regard to this subject, was, therefore, more specious and more logical than is the notion of those who make God's requirement of perfect sanctification an argument that some are perfectly sanctified in this life; while, with strange inconsistency, they assert the universal moral depravity, anterior to conversion, of such of mankind as have sufficient knowledge to be moral agents. Besides, entire holiness is plainly obligatory on all rational creatures; and no strength of depraved affection or hopelessness of condition can release any from the demands of the law of God. On this principle, the devils in their place of torment, are bound to love their Maker, and yield themselves implicitly to his authority. To say they are not thus bound, is to take their part against their Maker, and pronounce them entirely excusable and innocent in their present rebellion, rage and blasphemy. But does it follow, because they are under law, that they will, therefore, ever return to their duty? The Bible, on the other hand, assures us, that their misery, and consequently, their enmity to God, will be without end.

The command of God, it is alleged, implies our ability to obey; and it is reasonable to suppose that where ability exists, it will, sometimes at least, manifest itself by obedience. This argument has been strongly urged, both to account for the existence of sin, (for where there is ability to obey, there is also supposed to be ability to disobey, or "the power of contrary choice,") and to show the practicality of obedience, in the highest degree, to all the divine requisitions. "Were it not," says Mr. Finney,\* "that there

\* Lectures on Revivals of Religion, p. 17.

is a sense in which a man's heart may be better than his head, I should feel bound to maintain, that persons holding this sentiment, that man is unable to obey God without the Spirit's agency, were no Christians at all—obligation is only commensurate with ability." Again he says,\* "certain it is that men are able to resist the utmost influence that the truth can exert upon them, and therefore have ability to defeat the wisest, most benevolent, and most powerful exertions which the Holy Spirit can make to effect their sanctification." Mr. Mahan says,† "I infer that a state of perfect holiness is attainable in this life, from the commands of scripture, addressed to Christians under the new covenant." The philosophy, from which perfection is thus inferred, had been previously asserted by certain divines of celebrity in Connecticut. In proof of this, the reader is referred to two or three citations from the *Christian Spectator*, formerly published at New-Haven. "Free moral agents can do wrong under all possible preventing influence."‡ "We know that a moral system necessarily implies the existence of free agents, with the power to act in despite of all opposing power. This fact sets human reason at defiance, in every attempt to prove that some of these agents will not use that power and actually sin."§ Again: "God not only prefers on the whole that his creatures should forever perform their duties rather than neglect them, but purposes on his part to do all in his power to promote this very object of his kingdom."|| In all these statements, the implication is clear, that men are, of course, able to do whatever God requires of them; and that the mind is in reality self-moved in all its moral exercises.

We readily admit that men have the requisite faculties to obey God, in other words, that they are moral agents. And this is often what is meant by natural ability. We admit also that the inability of sinners is a moral inability, inasmuch as it relates to moral objects, arises from moral causes, and is removed by a moral change. The possession, however, of natural ability, in the sense just stated, does not establish the conclusion contended for in the preceding argument. Because men or devils have the requisite intellectual or physical faculties to serve their Creator, does it certainly follow, that they will serve him? As it regards moral

\* Oberlin Evangelist, Lect. 21, p. 193. † Christian Perfection, p. 28.

‡ Christian Spectator, 1830, p. 563. § Ibid, 1831, p. 617. || Ibid, 1832, p. 660.

ability, it is absurd to imagine that the rule of duty is to be measured by this. On this supposition, there is really no rule of right except the inclinations of creatures; or, guilt is diminished in proportion to the stubbornness and virulence of the principle of evil to be overcome; which is but saying, in other language, that the more sinful, the more bent on rebellion any one is, the less is he to blame for his disobedience. Mankind by nature, then, are perfectly innocent in hating God, and in rejecting the manifold overtures of the gospel; for it is clear from this inspired volume, that they are "dead in trespasses and sins." Their disinclination to obedience is affirmed to be so great, that it can be overcome by nothing less than the direct exertion of Almighty power. "No man," says Christ, "can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him." Accordingly, the commencement of holiness in the sinner's heart is again and again described by such phrases as indicate the highest manifestation of the immediate and creative agency of God. It is the donation of a new heart—a second birth—a new creation—a resurrection from the dead. These figures, strong as they are, are doubtless used with the utmost propriety, as most happily expressive of the inveteracy of the evil disposition to be vanquished, of the sinner's moral helplessness, and of his absolute dependance on sovereign grace. The continuance of believers in obedience is also constantly ascribed to the same power by which they were originally renewed after the image of God. "Without me," says Jesus Christ, "you can do nothing." "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Here we learn that the growth of the fruit in the first instance, and its permanency afterwards, are both owing to the choice, purpose, and effectual agency of the Redeemer. "We are not sufficient of ourselves," says Paul, "to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in God, will perform (finish) it until the day of Jesus Christ." The good work here intended, is doubtless, as appears from the connexion, the implantation of holiness in the heart by the efficacious grace of God. "Who are kept," says Peter, "by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." From these passages, and, indeed, from the whole tenor of the Bible, it is evident, that, whatever may be

men's natural power, or freedom as moral agents, their depraved propensities present as effectual an obstacle to obedience, as the want of liberty itself would do. At the same time, they are constantly blamed for that disinclination, or moral inability, which, but for the interposition of omnipotent grace, insures their destruction. They have ruined themselves; and their only hope is in the mercy and unconquerable might of their injured Creator, who may justly leave them to perish in their perverseness. There is no reason, then, for the conclusion, that because men have the natural ability, they will, therefore, obey the law of God, any more than there is ground for arguing with Pelagius, that a portion of the human race will live without sin, from the commencement of their existence till death; and, consequently, that for them, no repentance, no pardon, no Saviour, will be necessary; or, than there is ground for inferring with Universalists, the future probable, if not certain, return of devils and the spirits of lost men in hell, to their duty and to happiness. The argument from ability, therefore, in this instance, is of too wide a sweep in its general application, to be admitted as of any force; for it manifestly goes to undermine the whole gospel, and overthrow all the revealed principles of the moral government of God.

Another argument, connected with the foregoing, in favour of Perfectionism, is founded in an erroneous philosophy concerning the nature of sin. This affirms, that those propensities which we cannot overcome by the force of our own sovereign determination, are merely constitutional susceptibilities, or physical attributes, having no moral character, the extirpation, or extinguishment of which is, consequently, not necessary to sinless perfection. Thus it has been argued, that the most selfish innate desires and passions are in themselves innocent, being nothing more than incentives or occasions to sin, which must be expected to continue after the heart has become completely sanctified.

This summary method of disposing of the subject must doubtless be very gratifying to those who choose rather to find an apology for their sins, than to confess and mourn over them before God. Where there is no sin, there is surely no occasion for godly sorrow on account of sin. Let the standard of duty be low enough, and it will be easy to show that perfection belongs to many men, or to all men, or even to the inhabitants of hell themselves. Suppose, for example, that malice, hatred of God, enmity to creatures,

and furious blasphemy, under circumstances of hopeless suffering, are not criminal ; and it will follow, incontrovertibly, that these feelings and acts are perfectly innocent in Satan and his hosts, in their present state of misery. God cannot, therefore, with propriety punish them for their present irreconcilable malignity, and that conduct which flows spontaneously from their hearts. In this view of the subject, the devils are as truly perfect now, as they were when they existed enthroned seraphs in the heavenly paradise. Their condition has, indeed, been changed ; but then the divine law has been altered to suit their new condition. To bring this reasoning to bear on the case before us—if the natural passions of anger, revenge, covetousness, pride and ambition be not in themselves wrong, and if nothing but strong resolutions against sin, a resistance of our evil propensities, a devout and moral life, and reliance on the grace of Christ, be needful to constitute a sinless character, then we admit that many of the human race have attained to perfection in this life. Yea, verily, according to this philosophy, sinless perfection is consistent with an eternal war in the breast between principle and passion ; and, as there is reason to suppose that the physical attributes of the soul will continue after death, it is next to certain that the saints in glory will be obliged to maintain an unceasing conflict with such innocent things as their love of self-indulgence, their fondness for distinction and power, and their constitutional susceptibility to resentment and revenge. Deny the principle of concupiscence to be sinful, and what hinders its existence, its disquieting irruptions, its violent onsets even within the walls of New Jerusalem ?

This philosophy requires an exposition of the law, entirely contrary to the scriptures. The sacred volume condemns the first risings of inordinate desire, and, of course, all vicious tendencies to transgression in the soul. “Whoso hateth his brother, is a murderer.” “Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” It requires us, not merely to choose and strive after, but to possess and exercise right affections and passions ; to love God and our neighbour ; to feel kindly even to our enemies. “Thou shalt not covet,” is one of its express prohibitions. Yet coveting may exist, when from the restraints of conscience and fear there is no effort, no purpose, to obtain the desired object. The affection is wrong and is forbidden, though it lead to no corres-

pendent external acts, or conscious determinative volition of the mind.

It was an apprehension of the spirituality of the law which convinced the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, of the exceeding corruption of his heart, and destroyed all his self-righteous hopes. "I had not known sin but by the law ; for I had not known lust," (concupiscence,) that is, I had not known that it was sin, "except the law had said, thou shalt not covet." "For I was alive without" (a just apprehension and sense of) "the law once ; but when the commandment came," (with a clear view of its spiritual requirements, and immutable obligation,) "sin revived, and I died." Thus plain it is, that, whether we call the principle of concupiscence constitutional or not, it is still sinful in the eye of the law. Words may create confusion in the mind ; but they do not change the nature of things. So long as the Christian is agitated in any degree, by excessive or ill-directed devices, he is deficient in his obedience, and therefore continues to be a transgressor.

Changing his ground, the advocate of the doctrine of perfection in this life sometimes asserts, that though Christians cannot accomplish their own sanctification, and ought not to attempt it, yet if they cast themselves upon Christ for this boon, it will be bestowed upon them. Instead of working themselves, they must come to Christ to work in them, both to will and to do, and he will make them perfect. This notion, too, is affirmed by the very men who contend, when it suits their purpose, that sinners have perfect ability to change their own hearts, and believers perfect ability to do all that is required of them. "I am willing to proclaim it to the world," says Mr. Mahan,\* "that I now look to the very God of peace to sanctify me wholly." "I have forever given up all idea of resisting temptation, subduing any lust, appetite, or propensity, or of acceptably performing any service for Christ, by the mere force of my own resolutions. If any propensities which lead to sin are sacrificed, I know that it must be done by an indwelling Christ." "If you will cease from all efforts of your own, and bring your sins and sorrows and cares and propensities which lead to sin, to Christ, and cast them all upon him, if, with implicit faith, you will hang your whole being upon him, and make it the great object of life to know him, for the purpose of

\* *Christian Perfection*, pp. 189, 190, 191.

receiving and reflecting his image—you will find that all the exceeding great and precious promises of his word are, in your own blissful experience, a living reality.” “You shall have a perpetual and joyful victory.” “Every where, and under all circumstances, your peace in Christ shall be as a river.”

From these, and other similar passages in the writings of the new Perfectionists, it would seem that Christians have nothing to do but to lie passively in the hands of Christ, and “roll the responsibility” of their sanctification upon him. What mean, then, the numerous scriptural inculcations upon believers to strive, to run, to wrestle, to fight, to put on the whole armour of God? It is manifest from the inspired volume, that we are to come to Christ, not for the purpose of saving ourselves the trouble of a personal warfare, but that we may engage in such a warfare with good motives, with becoming zeal, with persevering energy, and with success. The effect of faith is not drowsiness, but vigilance; not self-satisfied repose, but self-distrust; not slothfulness, but untiring activity. When Christ works in us, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure, it is that sustained, quickened by his power, we may work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. The present is not the first time in which Pelagian self-sufficiency and Antinomian indolence have been found co-inhabitants of the same dwelling, interchangeably occupying one another’s places, and adopting one another’s phraseology. But how are these apparent contradictions to be reconciled? They cannot be; yet, after all, it is not intended by the writers to whom we refer, to ascribe all holiness to divine agency. Their meaning appears to be, that Christ will sanctify us wholly, if we look to him for such a blessing; yet there is no provision, in their system, to secure the act of looking itself. Man begins to turn, and God completes the sanctification of man. Hence it is affirmed, that, notwithstanding the promises of the new covenant, insuring perfection in this life, comparatively few of the saints do ever become perfect on this side of the grave.

The fact that the saints are in scripture sometimes said to be perfect, has been alleged as another argument in favour of Perfectionism.

We answer, that the word perfection is used in different senses. It is sometimes employed to express advancement and maturity in the Christian character and in knowledge,

as distinguished from the comparatively low conceptions, weakness and inconsistencies of mere infants in the divine life. "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," that is, the thoroughly instructed. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." It is sometimes used to denote evangelical uprightness, or sincere piety, in distinction from an empty profession of godliness. In this sense of the word, perfection belongs to all real saints. Thus the Psalmist says, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." Here perfect and upright, agreeably to a well known rule of Hebrew construction, are evidently synonymous terms. A perfect man, in this place then, is a man who is sincere in his religious profession, a real friend of God, and an heir of heaven. The wicked are said to "shoot in secret at the perfect," that is, at the regenerated children of God. "For the upright," says Solomon, "shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it." In this passage, too, the terms uprightness and perfection have the same meaning. Noah is said to have been a perfect man; yet the phrase is immediately explained as signifying the reality of his piety, or his humble walk with God. That he was not without the remains of moral corruption, is manifest from a subsequent instance of intoxication, with which he is charged in the scriptures. Job is also affirmed to be a perfect man. But that it was not intended to assert his freedom from sin, is apparent from his conduct, which is recorded, for he afterwards cursed the day of his birth. He, also, himself confessed his want of sinless perfection. "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." In the same sense we are to understand the phrase as used by Hezekiah, when he says, "Remember now, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect, that is, with a sincere heart." That sinless perfection was not intended, seems evident from what the scriptures tell us concerning his conduct soon after the prayer, in which these words are contained. "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up: therefore wrath was upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding,

Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart." Most clearly, therefore, though he was perfect in the sense of sincere, or truly pious, he was yet far from being sinless. Of several of the kings of Judah, it is said that their heart was perfect with the Lord, yet actions are attributed to them utterly inconsistent with the supposition, that they were exempt from all sinful defects. The obvious meaning of the phrase as applied to those good men is, that they were sincere believers, and maintained, by their example and public acts, the doctrines, institutions and laws of true religion in their dominions. It is affirmed of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." In this passage, it is plainly the design of the inspired writer to teach us that Zacharias and Elizabeth were eminent saints, maintaining an example of impartial and universal obedience. That he did not mean to attribute to them sinless obedience is manifest, because in the context Zacharias is charged with criminal unbelief, for which he was punished with the temporary loss of the power of speech. What ! a perfectly holy man subject himself to the divine displeasure, and struck dumb, for his distrust of God's word ! Paul calls upon those whom he had addressed as perfect, to be followers of him, Phil. iii. 15, 17 ; yet, in the same connexion he says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." It is certain, therefore, that in the one instance, the word has a different meaning from what it has in the other ; for it is absurd to suppose that a wise and humble man, who confessed himself to be still imperfect, would exhort those whom he regarded as sinless, to look to him as an example. Some have understood by the perfect, whom Paul addressed, full grown men in Christian knowledge, in distinction from children. Accordingly, Beza translates the passage "*quotquot itaque adulti sumus, hoc sentiamus.*"

One of the arguments of Mr. Mahan, on which he strongly insists, is expressed in the following terms. "The Bible positively affirms, that provision is made in the gospel for the attainment of a state of perfection, and that to make such provision is one of the great objects of Christ's redemption."<sup>\*</sup>

This language is ambiguous in several respects. It may

\* Christian Perfection, p. 20.

mean, that God has revealed it as his determination, that his people, or some of them, shall become perfect in the present world ; and, in this sense, it is but an assumption of the doctrine to be proved. It may mean that God's plan includes the complete sanctification of his children, at some future period of their existence ; a fact which no one questions, and which proves nothing with respect to the subject in dispute. God has also made provision for the deliverance of his people from sickness, pain and all afflictions, and for the enjoyment of the Redeemer's presence in glory ; but this purpose concerning the elect, is not accomplished, till they are released from the present world by death. Does Mr. Mahan mean, that nothing hinders the perfect obedience of Christians but their own culpable abuse, or disregard of their privileges ? Very well ; and it may with equal truth be said, that nothing different from this, hinders the perfect obedience of impenitent sinners. Does he mean merely that believers might be perfect but for their own fault ? It is also true, as the apostle assures us, that the very heathen are without excuse ; and the damned themselves are doubtless inexcusably criminal for their present rebellion. Does he mean, that the atonement secures the perfect holiness of Christians in the present life ? This is simply a begging of the question ; and it is moreover contradicted by fact ; since the great body of believers are, by the acknowledgment of Mr. Mahan himself, far from perfect holiness. Does he mean that the Spirit of God is able and gracious enough to make them perfect ? So the Spirit of God is able and gracious enough to make the whole world perfect, and even to exclude all sin from the universe. But his power and mercy are ever regulated, in their exercise, by his wisdom and his supreme regard to the interests of universal being. The only question, in reference to this subject, is, what is God's revealed purpose ? Has he any where told us that his people, or a part of them, will become perfectly holy during their abode in this world ? If not, the removal of external obstacles to their perfection no more proves that they will be perfect, than God's readiness to receive every true penitent justifies the conclusion, that all mankind will repent and cordially embrace the overtures of the gospel. The loose manner in which Mr. Mahan expresses himself, makes it difficult to say what he does mean, except that he intends to assert that God has done or will do something that renders it certain a part of his people will grow to a state of

perfection, before they exchange earth for heaven. Excellent, therefore, as Dr. Woods's discussion of this subject mainly is, we cannot agree with him in saying, that "devout Christians and orthodox divines have in all ages maintained the same doctrine" with Mr. Mahan, concerning "the provisions of the gospel." We must know what Mr. Mahan means by the provisions of the gospel, before we can say any thing like this. In all "the practical writings of Calvin, Flavel, Owen, Bunyan, Watts, Doddridge, President Davies, and Good," not a sentence can be found which implies that God has, in such a sense, made provision for the complete sanctification of his children while they "abide in the flesh," that his plan includes this result of his administration towards them; and if Mr. Mahan does not mean so much as this, he means nothing to his purpose.

Mr. Mahan also affirms that "perfection in holiness is promised to the Christian in the new covenant under which he is placed."\*

If it be true, that God has promised that his people shall become perfect in this life, the question is settled. But what are the proofs adduced of this fact? Why, he cites a number of passages, which, if they are at all relevant to his design, prove that all Christians become completely holy at the moment of their regeneration. The promises he mentions belong to all under the new covenant. These are contained in Jer. xxxi. 31-34, and Heb. viii. 8-11; Deut. xxx. 10; Jer. i. 20; Mah. xxxii. 30, 40; Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27; Mah. xxxvii. 23; Is. lix. 21, and Luke i. 74, 75, &c. God circumcises the hearts of all his people; he puts his law in their inward parts; he takes away the stony heart out of their flesh; and he causes them to walk in his statutes. But does Mr. Mahan believe, (as he should, in order to be consistent with himself,) that all the elect are completely sanctified, at the very instant of their conversion? So far from it that he says, "the great men of the church are slumbering in Antinomian death, or struggling in legal bondage, with barely enough of the evangelical spirit to keep the pulse of spiritual life faintly beating."† But does Mr. Mahan believe that the promises of the new covenant have failed, with respect to "the great mass of the church?" How, then, can he argue from these promises, that any part of the church will be completely sanctified in this life? Again, he says,

\* Christian Perfection, p. 22.

† Idem, pp. 100. 101

“from the evangelical simplicity of their first love, they, (i. e. the great mass of Christians,) fall into a state of legal bondage, and after a fruitless struggle of vain resolutions with the world, the flesh and the devil, they appear to descend into a kind of Antinomian death.” “The spirit of Antinomian slumber prevails, and death, and not a present Christ, is looked for as the great deliverer from bondage.” What does this mean? Has God forgotten his covenant? Or is it simply conditional? But a conditional covenant, from its very nature, does not insure the compliance of a single individual with its proposals. The truth, however, is, that the promises enumerated by Mr. Mahan, have their incipient fulfilment here, and will be accomplished, in the broadest extent of their meaning, hereafter. God, therefore, is faithful, though it remain true, that none are entirely free from sin on this side of heaven.

Some have insisted on those texts, in which God promises to cleanse his people from all sin, as an evidence that they may attain to perfection in this life.

In some instances, to be cleansed from sin, is equivalent to pardon, or gratuitous justification. Thus, in Ps. li: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin;” that is, save me from the deserved consequences of my disobedience. Again, in allusion to ceremonial purification, which represented atoning blood, David says in the same psalm, “purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Thus, in Jer. xxxiii. 8: “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me.” That this refers to justifying grace, rather than sanctification, seems evident from what immediately follows—“and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.” Thus, also, in 1 John i. 7, 8, “The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanseth us from all sin,” that is, obtaineth our pardon; for it is not the atonement, but a direct divine influence, which removes the power and pollution of sin. Again: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Here, to forgive sins, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness, appear to be equivalent phrases. In the sense of pardon, or free justification, all believers are cleansed from sin, since they are all acquitted, and viewed and treated as perfectly righteous, for the Redeemer’s sake.

Where deliverance from the dominion of sin is promised, reference is in part had to what takes place in this world, but, more especially, to the future perfection of the heavenly state. The purifying process begins in the new birth, and is gradually carried forward in sanctification, till the work is completed in glory. But how does the promise of future entire emancipation from the thralldom of sin, prove that this blessing will be obtained immediately, or during the brief term of our earthly existence? It is also promised to believers, that they shall be delivered from all sorrow, that they shall vanquish completely death and hell, and shall live and reign with Christ; and it might as well be argued, that these promises will have their full accomplishment here, as those which relate to the entire purgation of the saints from their moral defilement. The truth is, God's faithfulness peculiarly appears in sustaining his people, amidst the temptations and difficulties connected with a state of sinful imperfection, till death is swallowed up in victory. Every good thing which the Lord has spoken will be shortly accomplished; and is his veracity to be distrusted, because he does not give to his children in this world, the perfect rest and triumph of heaven? Was God unfaithful to his ancient saints, because he did not send them the promised Messiah in the time of Moses? I may remark in general, that if we regard not the scope of a passage, nor the peculiar import of scriptural phrases, nor the analogy of the faith, we may, from insulated texts, deduce doctrines as preposterous as any that were ever advanced by the greatest heretics. Thus from the passage, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world," we might argue, in opposition to the repeated declarations, and general tenor of the scriptures, that Christ sanctifies or pardons and saves the whole human race. Whereas, the truth intended to be taught in these words, is the reality, and universal extent of the atonement of Christ.

"I argue," says Mr. Mahan,\* "that perfection in holiness is attainable in this life, and that the sacred writers intended to teach the doctrine, from the fact, that inspired men made the attainment of this particular state the subject of definite, fervent, and constant prayer."

So we have examples of inspired men, praying for the purity and blessedness of the heavenly state. But do be-

\* *Christian Perfection*, p. 34.

lievers, while sojourning on earth, ever literally become companions of the glorified? Paul was continually pressing toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; the acquisition of this prize was the object of his most earnest labours, of his most fervent prayers; and Mr. Mahan supposes\* that the "mark" at which the apostle so strenuously aimed, was the "resurrection of the dead." But was Paul actually raised from the dead, during the period of his abode in this world? Or, does it follow, because he continued to sigh and groan, being burdened, that he did not pray in faith for a glorious resurrection? Christ taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This prayer was offered by the apostles, and has been offered by the most devoted Christians, in all later ages; yet to this day, much the greater part of mankind continue the slaves of sin, and ignorant of the way of salvation by the Mediator. Are we to conclude, therefore, that this prayer has been so long, and by such multitudes of the excellent of the earth, offered in vain?

Perfectionists have urged the prayer of Christ, recorded in John xvii. 21, 23, as a proof of their doctrine, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one." "The union here prayed for," says Mr. Mahan, "is a union of perfect love." "We must admit that this love, and consequent union, will exist among believers, or maintain, 1st, That Christ prayed for that which he requires us to believe that it is not for the glory of God to bestow upon his children. 2d, That the world are never to believe in Christ."†

That this prayer was offered in behalf of all God's children, cannot admit of a doubt. But if it was offered for all, it has been answered in part at least, with respect to all, since the supplications of the Son are ever prevalent with the Father. However imperfect Christians may be, they are all united to their head by a living faith, they all have essentially the same views of the gospel; they approve of one another's character, and rejoice in the prosperity of the kingdom, of which they are all subjects; they all hate sin, and love the same divine objects; they have all been washed

\* Christian Perfection, p. 60.

† Id. p. 33.

in the same blood, have been renewed by the same spirit, have become partakers of the same hope, and have been made heirs of the same salvation. The union among believers, as it is far more pure and sacred than that which subsists among worldly men, is destined to grow in strength, while all earthly friendships decay, and to endure forever. Nor, apparently defective as it is, has it been wholly ineffectual in carrying a conviction to the ungodly of the divine reality and power of the gospel. In consequence of the example of Christians, notwithstanding the many inconsistencies with which it has been marred, the "world" have been constrained to admit the divine mission and character of the Redeemer. But Mr. Mahan seems to suppose that this prayer is not answered at all, except with regard to those who become perfectly sanctified in the present life. What must be the inference? Plainly this—that, with respect to the great body of Christians hitherto, during their mortal pilgrimage, the prayer of the Saviour has been followed by no correspondent effect. According to Mr. Mahan's interpretation, therefore, Christ has failed to secure the object which he sought; for this writer supposes that comparatively few of the saints have attained to that perfection, which their master prayed they should possess. But if the prayer has failed of an answer till now, with respect to millions of Christians, what evidence is there that it will not equally fail, in all the future ages of time? It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude, not that the great intercessor has prayed in vain, but that the Perfectionists have misapprehended and misinterpreted his prayer. Our Lord said, "I pray not thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." The word evil may be understood to include both sin and suffering, as well as the temptations and buffetings of Satan. If, therefore, we forget facts, and the general testimony of the scriptures, in our exposition of particular texts, we may infer from this last cited passage, that all real believers have done with conflicts, and enjoy perfect freedom from afflictions and sorrows.

Mr. Mahan thinks that Paul's proposing himself as an example to other Christians, "shows that he had arrived to a state of entire sanctification."<sup>†</sup>

Paul does not propose himself as a perfect example. He was worthy of imitation in any respects; and so are

\* *Christian Perfection*, p. 39.

many other good men, who would be the last persons on earth to claim the character of entire obedience. That Paul was imperfect, and that, after all his attainments, he felt himself to be so, will fully appear in the sequel. As for the passages which Mr. Mahan cites to prove the perfection of Paul's obedience, they assert nothing more than the sincerity of his faith, the eminency of his self-denial, and his fidelity as an apostle and minister of Christ. When he declared that he was pure of the blood of all men, he referred merely to the clearness and fulness with which he had preached the gospel. But can none, save one who is perfectly holy, declare to his hearers all the counsel of God?

Some have considered 1 John, iii. 9, as proving that saints may be entirely free from sin in this life. "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."

It is the opinion of some writers, that the apostle here refers to the sin of total and final apostacy, against which all true Christians are secured by the power and presence of God. The connexion, however, seems to warrant the conclusion, that John's object is to exhibit one of the distinguishing evidences of true religion, which is obedience. Some in the primitive church were Antinomians, supposing, with many modern Perfectionists, that Christians were freed from the rule of duty, and were at liberty to live according to their inclinations. To meet this impious dogma, as well as excite believers to the diligent pursuit of holiness, the sacred writer affirms that regeneration implies the implantation of a virtuous "seed," or "principle," which, by its own proper tendency, prompts to all the works of faith and labours of love. The real Christian, therefore, cannot be the committer or doer of sin, in such a sense as implies an habitual and totally depraved character. He longs for perfect holiness, and assiduously strives to keep all the commandments of God. In other words, he is habitually a new man, both in his heart, and in the overt actions of his life. The connexion, both preceding and following the text, accords with this interpretation. The 10th verse is, "In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." Such are the scope and design of the passage. The other interpretation is moreover attended with difficulties not easy to be removed.

1. It overthrows a leading doctrine of the greater part of

the Perfectionists, (who are Arminians,) concerning the defectibility of the saints. Here we learn that regeneration includes the idea of permanency or certain perseverance in obedience, "His seed remaineth in him." Most surely then, Wesleyans and other Arminian Perfectionists, ought not to cite this passage as an evidence of their doctrine; since if it proves any thing in their favour, it proves too much for their cause.

2. Admit the interpretation of the Perfectionists, and it will follow, that none but the perfectly holy had been born of God, or are real Christians. The language of the apostle is very explicit: "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin." If by not committing sin here, be intended absolute perfection, then the smallest sin, either external or internal, is enough to demonstrate a professor of religion to be a hypocrite. On this ground, therefore, the difference between saints and sinners must be, not in the nature of some or all of their exercises, but the perfection of the former, and the imperfection of the latter. The last part of the text is, if possible, stronger than the first: "He cannot sin, because he is born of God." If the meaning be he cannot sin at all, then of course no one who does sin at all, has within him the smallest spark of true religion.

3. The interpretation adopted by the Perfectionists, makes John contradict himself in this very epistle; for he does expressly affirm that none of the children of men in this world are entirely free from sin. In chap. i. ver. 8, he tells us, "If we say that we have no sin," (as some pretended that all their actions as believers were pure,) "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." In the language of the New Testament, the affirmation that the truth is not in one, seems to be the same as saying that he is not a real Christian. Paul speaks of men of "corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth," that is, devoid of the Christian spirit, or of evangelical piety. John in the 2d chapter of this epistle, uses the same phrase. "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Elsewhere the same apostle speaks of the truth as being in Christians, as dwelling in them; and them he represents as walkers in the truth. Thus he teaches us that the boast of perfection indicates not superior sanctity, but gross self ignorance, or intentional falsehood, and a destitution of the genuine traits of the Christian character. In chap. iii. ver. 3, he says, "and every one that hath this hope

in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." Macknight has the following note on this passage. "The apostle, as Beza observes, doth not say, hath purified himself, but purifieth himself; to show that it is a good man's constant study to purify himself, because no man in this life can attain to perfect purity. By this text, therefore, as well as by 1 John i. 8, those fanatics are condemned who imagine they are able to live without sin." From the foregoing passages, it is apparent that John taught a very different doctrine from that of sinless perfection in this life. And is it credible, that he has been guilty of gross self contradiction, in the course of a single brief letter?

It may be said in favour of the doctrine of perfection of the saints in this life, that it is honourable to Christ, and implied in his all-sufficiency as the Saviour of his people. Will he not, it may be asked, be all to his people that they need or desire?

We answer, that he will be all to them that he has promised, but that he will do nothing for them, contrary to his own express declarations, and the wisdom of his general counsels. We are ill qualified to judge what, except so far as he has revealed his purpose in his word, it is wisest and best for him to do. There are some things, which he will not do for his people. He will not, for example, make them all of gigantic stature, and Herculean strength; nor render them immortal upon the earth, nor cause them to live to the age of Methuselah, nor raise them at once, in intellect and knowledge, to an equality with the angels; nor free them, while they continue here, from the universally experienced pains and ills of this mortal existence. To expect from him such achievements, betrays either infidelity, or the utmost extravagance of enthusiasm. That he will ultimately accomplish the entire sanctification of his people, is certain: this they are bound to believe; but to look to him without any warrant from his word, for such a manifestation of his grace in this world, betokens rather weakness and presumption, than suitable confidence in his faithfulness and power. When he assures us that he will do for us whatever we ask, it is with the expressor implied condition, that our petitions are in accordance with his purposes as made known in the scriptures. Has he ever told us in the Bible, that he will, if we ask him, purify us from all sin in the present world? If not, it seems opinionated pride and ignorance, rather than eminent faith and holiness, to expect him, out of a regard to our wishes, thus

to turn aside from the course of his ordinary gracious operations. Besides, so long as we continue here, we must come to him as needy, as empty, as sinners. But these are not the characteristics of such as are completely sanctified. They have as truly entered into their rest, as any of the saints with Christ in Paradise.

“But some have professed to be perfectly holy.”

Such were not the saints, of whom we have an account in the scriptures. These all confessed their continual proneness to sin; and depended all their life long on the resources of rich, free, superabounding grace. Some, indeed have claimed perfection; but they resembled the pharisee, who thanked the Lord for his moral superiority over other men, much more nearly than the contrite publican, who smote upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The church of Rome too has claimed infallibility. A man’s favourable opinion of himself is but a poor argument to show that he is either good or great. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” “There is,” says Solomon, “a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.” It is the self-righteous hypocrite who cries “stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.” “These,” says God, “are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.” Many poor enthusiasts have believed themselves inspired, and capable of working miracles; and some have affirmed their possession of attributes strictly superhuman and divine. Are the Behmenites, the French prophets, the disciples of Ann Lee, and the Mormons, then, to be acknowledged as the divinely illuminated messengers of God? “Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.” When a man professes an eminence in holiness, surpassing that ascribed to any of the scripture saints, he is for that reason to be distrusted; and if he boasts of a perfection, which the Bible denies to pertain to any of the human race in this world, he is to be at once regarded, without the trouble of further examination, either as a deceiver, or the subject of a morbid fanaticism. It is not for a moment to be deemed possible,—whatever may be his professed experimental knowledge of religion, or his zeal, or the apparent blamelessness of his life,—that he is in the right, in opposition to the explicit declaration of the scriptures. “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to the word, it is

because there is no light in them." At all events if one come to us with a professedly new revelation, he is not worthy of attention from us, until we find him performing works, which are plainly and incontestably miraculous.

It is, moreover, said by Perfectionists, that the common orthodox doctrine on this subject is discouraging, and leads to licentiousness.

The same objection has been made to the doctrines of entire depravity, regeneration by effectual grace, election, justification by faith alone, the atonement of Christ, and indeed the whole scheme of evangelical truth contained in the Bible. Infidels too have professed to reject the sacred volume, on the ground of the alleged evil tendency of many of its narratives, precepts, and exhibitions of divine character. Does it follow then, that the influence of the doctrines of grace is bad, or that the Bible does not give us the most just and consistent view of God? Certainly not.

He who needs the expectation of perfect holiness in this life, to stimulate his efforts in religion, is yet a stranger to the ingenuous nature of that faith which is the fruit of divine grace. The true Christian loves holiness, and will, therefore, strive to make advances in the divine life. Did Baxter, Brainerd, Martyn and Payson labour any the less diligently for Christ, because they did not expect perfect rest on this side of heaven? Has any advocate of Perfectionism ever surpassed those holy men in watchfulness, in fervent prayers, in the most self-denying sacrifices, and in unwearied attention to all the demands of duty? The common doctrine concerning the imperfection of the heart of the saints in this world, is adapted to produce and strengthen some very important branches of the Christian character—particularly humility, a great fear of sin, watchfulness against temptation, and habitual active dependance on the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit." "O," says the believer, convinced of this truth, "how potent must be my corruptions; and how hopeless, but for Almighty grace, my state!" It teaches, in the most impressive manner, the unwearied faithfulness of the Redeemer, who, inconstant and unworthy as they all are, will never leave one of his ransomed people to perish. How sweet, how tender the gratitude, which such a view of his unceasing care cannot fail to inspire. The doctrine, at the same time, serves to wean the believer from the world, where he is ever to bear the burthen of sin, and dispose him to seek, with the most intense desires, for the freedom, rest, and

blessedness of heaven. It helps to make welcome the grave and eternity. To one who knows the evils of his heart, it is fitted, when clearly understood, to impart a hope, which would be otherwise impossible; since it assures him that the struggles he feels within him, have been common to others, who now love and adore in the unclouded vision of the Lamb. He is, therefore, animated to press forward in his holy warfare, till he shall drop all the sorrows of his mortal state, and lay down his arms at the side of the grave.

We now proceed to state the more direct evidence of the sinful imperfection of all the saints in this life.

1. The first argument is derived from the direct testimony of the Bible

Not a single text can be adduced, which, properly understood, attributes perfection to good men in this life. On the contrary, the criminal imperfection of them all is most plainly asserted. Witness Eccl. vii. 20: "For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." It is as evident from this passage that no one on earth is perfectly holy, as that any are imperfect. Prov. xx. 9: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Mr. Mahan suggests, that reference is here had to a man's past life. The language, however, supposes present imperfection. Should one say, "I have made my heart clean," the words would imply, not that his heart had always been clean, (for that which has never been impure, needs no cleansing,) but that he had accomplished his perfect sanctification. To say "I am pure from any sin," is equivalent to saying, "I am free from that depravity which was once my character." The passage then strongly denies the sinless perfection of any of the human race, in this world. 1 Kings, viii. 46: "There is no man that sinneth not." Mr. Mahan contends that this means simply, that every man is peccable, or liable to sin. If so, the passage supposes that all men here are in a very different state from that of the angels and saints in heaven, who are in no danger of apostatizing from God. Is it not natural then to conclude that there is in the hearts of the saints here, something which peculiarly exposes them to sin? And what can this be but a sinful propensity? Mr. Wesley disposes of the passage in a different manner. "Doubtless," says he, "thus it was in the days of Solomon: yea, and from Solomon to Christ, there was no man that sinned not." But he supposes that the declaration is not applicable to the times of the gospel. With such as have a suitable

reverence for the scriptures, this method of explaining away the text requires no comment. "What," says Eliphaz, the Temanite, "is man that he should be clean, and he which is born of a woman that he should be righteous?" "If I say I am perfect," (or sinless,) remarks Job, "it shall also prove me perverse." "How does this declaration," asks Mr. Mahan, "which Job applies to himself and to no other person, prove that all other saints, and Christians even, are imperfect?" It is sufficient to reply, that Job was one of the best men of his own or any other age; that he is celebrated as such in the book of Ezekiel, and that he is proposed to Christians in the New-Testament as a model of distinguished patience. "And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man?" And is it no evidence of perverseness in men of far inferior moral attainments, to boast of their perfection? "Who," says the Psalmist, "can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Here it is intimated, that all have errors or faults, from which they need to be purified by the grace of God. The New Testament is no less explicit on this subject than the Old. We need not here adduce the passages already quoted from the first epistle of John, as they must be fresh in the reader's remembrance. James iii. 2: "For in many things we offend all," or are all offended. We can see nothing in the connexion, or in the nature of the thing, which limits this declaration to any particular description of men. The apostle evidently includes himself and his fellow Christians.

2. Many of the exhortations, addressed to Christians, and the prayers offered in their behalf, imply that they are not at present completely sanctified. They are required to make advancement in piety. "Grow in grace." But where one is perfect in holiness, he can "grow in grace," only by an increase of his natural capacity. His whole duty is done; and can he do more than his duty? "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity." Could such an exhortation, with any propriety, be addressed to one whose obedience, according to his capacity, was as perfect as that of Gabriel? A large portion of the precepts written to Christians in the New Testament, import the necessity of improvement, of progress in the divine life. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ

himself, and God, even our Father, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." Would this be a suitable prayer in behalf of those already stablished in perfect goodness? "We pray exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." The Lord make you to increase and abound in love." "The God of peace sanctify you wholly." "Now the God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight." The prayer for perfect sanctification supposes, that the blessing has not already been obtained; as the prayer that sinners may be regenerated, assumes, that they are yet in an unrenewed state. The foregoing passages may serve as a specimen of the prayers of inspired men in behalf of their brethren; and, while they prove the moral imperfection of those for whom they were presented, they give us no reason to conclude that a full answer to them was obtained on this side of the tomb. To infer the contrary, would be as unreasonable, as to infer that a sincere prayer for the deliverance of believers from all evil, must secure its object perfectly in the present world.

3. It is the duty of all men daily to ask of God the forgiveness of their sins. This is evident from the form of prayer which our Lord taught his disciples, which is given as a general guide to our daily devotions, and which contains in substance the petitions needful for Christians during their whole life. That the prayer, as it respects the subjects which it brings into view, whether the precise form be adopted or not, is designed for daily use, is manifest from one of its petitions. "Give us this day our daily bread." It is then added, "and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." We shall all, therefore, need daily to pray for pardoning mercy. But the daily need of forgiveness supposes the daily commission of sins to be forgiven. The daily prayer implies daily confession of sin. And does Christ require us to confess offences, of which we are not guilty? The insertion of this petition among the rest, was doubtless intended to remind us of the sinful imperfection of all our services in the present world. Mr. Mahan's evasion of this argument, that it involves the supposition, that "the kingdom of God will never come, and that the Christian will never be in a state in this life in which he will not be subject to injuries from others," is rather confirmatory, than subversive, of the inference I have

maintained. Mr. Mahan virtually allows, then, that so long as Christians are "subject to injuries from others," this prayer is suitable for all believers. And are they not still "subject to injuries?" The prayer, therefore, is with propriety used by Christians at this day; and it remains to be proved, that it will cease to be appropriate to their circumstances, so long as the sun and the moon endure.

4. The same doctrine is evident from the history which the Holy Ghost has given us in the scriptures, of the most eminent saints in ancient times. Noah was once intoxicated; Abraham practised dissimulation concerning his wife; Isaac indulged sinful partiality towards Esau; Jacob sometimes indulged criminal distrust; Lot was shamefully overcome by temptation; Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips; Aaron was too accommodating to the sinful wishes of his countrymen, and formed an image for idolatrous worship; David committed crimes, for which his holy soul was afterwards humbled in the dust; Solomon's old age was disgraced by his idolatries; Job and Jeremiah impatiently cursed the day of their birth. Shall I speak of the faults of Eli, and Samuel, and Jehosaphat, and Asa, and Hezekiah, and Josiah? Unpleasant as the recollection of their failings is, it may be profitable, to impress upon us the necessity of continual vigilance and prayer. It is important to observe, that to those holy men, the remembrance of their sins was grievous, and the burden of them was intolerable.

Let us look now at the saints, of whom we have an account in the New Testament. Not one of them is presented to us with a faultless character. In the little family of Christ, we observe the spirit of worldly ambition. We hear the disciples inquiring among themselves, who shall be greatest; they were warm in dispute; and carry their mutual complaints to their meek and compassionate Lord.—Who can think of the confidence of Peter, and his subsequent lapse, though so soon followed by his repentance, without exclaiming, "what are the holiest men, unaided and unsustained by the grace of God!" Much as Peter's character afterwards was improved, his sanctification was still imperfect. "But when Peter," who was in that instance too much actuated by motives of carnal policy, "was come to Antioch, I," says Paul, "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Thus weak in himself and liable to transgress, was that great apostle, whose very name denotes firmness and constancy. James, and the gentle, affectionate

John actuated by a spirit of revenge, would fain have commanded fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans, who refused to receive their master. Yet Mr. Mahan thinks, that John became perfectly holy in this life. Because John was conscious of the sincerity of his obedience, it is inferred, that he was free from sin. Paul and Barnabas contended and divided, with a spirit of acrimony, ill befitting their eminent meekness, self-denial, and devotion to the cause of the Redeemer. Yet in Mr. Mahan's view, it is at least "doubtful," whether Paul in that instance, deviated in the smallest degree from perfect holiness. The same writer makes the apostle attest his own perfection in a number of passages, which simply assert the reality of his faith and piety, though he expressly says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which 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 apostolical epistles to the churches, faults are specified and reprov'd, which render it certain that the religion of the primitive Christians was by no means such as dreaming Perfectionists claim for themselves. Thus do Bible facts on this subject, explain and establish the Bible doctrine.

5. The most holy men mentioned in scripture have confessed, and that in their best frames, their remaining sinfulness. "Against thee, thee only," says David, "have I sinned." "Mine iniquities have gone over my head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." "Behold I am evil," says Job, "what shall I answer thee?" Nehemiah and Daniel include themselves in their confessions of the sins of their people. Paul again and again renounces all dependance on his own righteousness, and casts himself, without reserve, on the atonement and perfect obedience of the Saviour. These were among the best men that ever lived; and if they felt themselves to be still imperfect, is it not evident, that others who regard themselves as purified from all sin, are miserably deceived?

6. The warfare, which the scriptures teach us, exists through life in the bosoms of good men, implies the imperfection of their obedience, or the continuance of evil principles, however mortified and weakened, in their hearts. It is no where intimated, that any of the saints have arrived

at such a state, that they have nothing more to do in opposing sin in their hearts. On the contrary, they are all exhorted to continual watchfulness and diligence, lest they be overcome by temptation. "Be sober, be vigilant." It is clearly implied in many exhortations, that Christians will be obliged to fight the good fight of faith till they die. Is it not plain from this, that there will always be sin in them to resist? Would it not be absurd to direct men to fight an enemy already completely vanquished and destroyed? To evade this argument, shall we be told of innocent susceptibilities to sin, which render perpetual resistance necessary? On this principle, as we have already observed, there must be an inward warfare in heaven; since men carry with them their innocent mental susceptibilities into the regions of endless purity. But is there any warfare in that world? Were the saints here perfectly holy, we see no reason why they should be any more troubled with internal conflicts, than are the glorified spirits in heaven.

According to the more common interpretation of orthodox divines, the apostle, in Rom. vii. is describing his own experience, and that of every believer in this world. In that chapter, he speaks of sin dwelling in him; of willing what he could not perform; of finding a law, that when he would do good, evil was present with him; of delighting in the law of God, after the inward man, and yet seeing another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin in his members; and he adds the pathetic exclamation, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He speaks as if two distinct persons within him were contending for the mastery; and he rests all his hope of the final victory of the good principle over its opposite, on the mere grace of the Redeemer. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind, I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." No real difficulty exists from the connexion, in supposing this passage to be descriptive of the Christian experience of Paul himself, and of other true saints. It has been appropriated by the best of men, as most happily expressive of their own views of themselves; while most of the opponents in modern times of its application to true Christians, have also had Arminian or Pelagian notions of the great doctrines of grace. The orthodox interpretation is the most natural, and such as the plain, unlettered Christian, who

had no system to support, would be most likely to adopt. Some of the phrases employed express a state of feeling, which is never found in a totally depraved sinner. Can such an one truly say, that he allows not the evil which he commits, that he hates what he does, and that he delights in the law of God after the inward man? The Psalmist represents it as one of the characteristics of a good man, that "his delight is in the law of the Lord." "O Lord, how love I thy law!" "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." As for the confession, "I am carnal, sold under sin," it merely expressed the strong sense which Paul had of the power of, indwelling sin, as it was manifested in the effects which he noticed in the following connexion.

In Gal. v. 17, the apostle speaks of an inward spiritual conflict as common to Christians. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." By the flesh here, as is evident from what follows, is intended the corrupt nature, or sinful disposition of mankind. This flesh is affirmed to exist in Christians, and to counteract the impulses of their new, or spiritual nature. The combatants being thus in the field, the contest can never be intermitted, till the foe is finally routed and destroyed.

7. The temper, represented in the scriptures as necessary to acceptable prayer, implies, on the part of the offerers, the consciousness of remaining sin. None are permitted to mention their own goodness as the meritorious ground of acceptance. Humility and penitence are indispensable to a right approach to the throne of grace. We read of one, who, without any confession of sin, boasted before God of his good deeds; but we are assured by the supreme judge, that this man found no favour with his maker. Observe Daniel's prayer. After confessing his own sin, as well as the sin of his people, he said, "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name." Observe the prayer of the Psalmist. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Observe the prayer of Isaiah. "Behold thou art wroth, for we have sinned; in thy ways is continuance, and

we shall be saved. For we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity forever; behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." Here we see the church relinquishing all confidence in herself, in her strength, in her goodness, taking to herself everlasting shame, and reposing all her hope in the sovereign mercy and gracious covenant of her God. In the spirit of this passage, Jeremiah prays, "Though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake." Of that penitent submission, which prostrates the pride of the heart, and all the powers of the soul before the divine Majesty, we are most impressively taught the necessity in the parable of the publican and pharisee. He, whose prayer was graciously accepted, had no good actions to enumerate, no apology to offer for his transgressions. His only plea was mercy, through the great propitiation provided for the guilty and the lost. The pharisee, on the other hand seemed to regard himself as perfect. See the repenting prodigal. He tells of no good that he has done. He speaks not even of his compunction, his sorrow, his long and painful journey, to regain the parental mansion, and sue for an abused parent's love. No, with shame and weeping, he cries, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am not worthy to be called thy son." The current language of the Bible accords with these examples. The Lord fills the poor with good things, but he sends the rich empty away. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their prayer." But what have such promises to do, with those who believe that they have already attained to perfection? Are they poor, destitute in their own eyes? What, they who have only to be thankful for the forgiveness of what is past, and to be satisfied with their present purity and worthiness? This is pharisaism, this is arrogance, indeed, if any thing can deserve the name. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

S. The same doctrine is confirmed by the testimony of those in later times, who have given the best evidence of eminent meekness, humility and a disinterested consecration of themselves to the service and cause of God. In the confessions and writings of the great Augustine, the power of indwelling sin is acknowledged with a strength and pungency of expression, which prove the depth of his conviction, and the intenseness of his penitential sorrow. The ardent and intrepid Luther is full of this most humiliating subject, that he may drive the church from every other refuge, to the atoning sacrifice and the immaculate righteousness of her Redeemer. Baxter, Owen, Flavel, Charnock, Bates, Howe, Bunyan, and a host of their godly contemporaries, unite in their acknowledgments of the exceeding potency of remaining sin in the hearts of the best of God's people. Who has not observed the strong language of Edwards, Brainerd, and Payson, as they confessed and mourned over the sins that were mixed with, and defiled their holiest services? John Newton, Winter, Scott, Martyn, and indeed most of those who have seemed eminently spiritual, have been full and constant in expressing their conviction of the criminal imperfection of their best works, the strength of their innate corruptions, and their entire dependance on the power and sovereign grace of God to direct and uphold them. And if these were not real saints, who, in modern times are entitled to the appellation? Are they, who profess to depend on their good life for acceptance with God, while they oppose, calumniate and hold up to ridicule the peculiar doctrines of the gospel? Are those zealots, proud, censorious and dogmatical, who boast of their perfect deliverance from sin? "By their fruits ye shall know them; do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

On this subject, the great and good Wilberforce says: "To put the question concerning the natural depravity of man to the severest test; take the best of the human species, the watchful, diligent, self-denying Christian, and let him decide the controversy; and that, not by inferences drawn from the practices of a thoughtless and dissolute world, but by an appeal to his personal experience; go with him to his closet, ask him his opinion of the corruption of the heart; and he will tell you, that he is deeply sensible of its power, for that he has learned it from much self-examination, and long acquaintance with the workings of his own mind. He will

tell you, that every day strengthens this conviction ; yea, that hourly he sees fresh reason to deplore his want of simplicity in intention, his infirmity of purpose, his low views, his selfish unworthy desires, his backwardness to set about his duty, his languor and coldness in performing it ; that he finds himself obliged continually to confess that he feels within him two opposite principles, and that he cannot do the things that he would. He cries out in the language of the excellent Hooker, “ the little fruit which we have in holiness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt and unsound ; we put no confidence at all in it, we challenge nothing in the world for it, we dare not call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt books ; our continual suit to him is, and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences.”

9. The Bible teaches us to look for the accomplishment of our perfect conformity to God, as a part of that peculiar and glorious reward which is reserved for a future life. “ I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.” “ It doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is.” Is not the implication clear and unanswerable, that our moral assimilation to Christ will not be completed, till we awake in eternity, and behold him in his unveiled glory ? But according to the scheme of the Perfectionists, that which makes Heaven most attractive to the pious heart, may be fully enjoyed upon earth ; we may be as sinless, and, according to our capacity, as much conformed to the Redeemer here as are any of the saints in his immediate presence before the throne. Why then, should Christians so eagerly, as the Bible represents them do, fix the eyes of their faith and desire on the celestial Paradise ? Why do they so joyfully anticipate the second coming of their victorious Prince and deliverer ? We are assured, that “ the spirits of just men made perfect ” are collected together in “ the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Why are we not told, that their dwelling-place is upon earth, as well as in the distant country beyond the tomb ?

10. God deals with the best of his people here, as in a state of imperfection. They are subject to the discipline of affliction. The voice of divine providence, as well as of the word to them, is, “ arise ye, for this is not your rest ; for it is polluted.” It is plainly a doctrine of scripture, that mankind suffer only because they are sinners. Sickness, pain, disappointments, and the other calamities of life, are, in

innumerable passages, represented as divine judgments, or expressions of God's righteous displeasure against the wickedness of the world. "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth." "There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin." "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled." "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Our blessed Lord was exposed to suffering, in the capacity of our substitute. Had he not acted in this character, his life would have been as happy, as it was innocent and holy. "The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all;" and therefore he was bruised, tortured, and put to death upon the accursed tree. His was a peculiar case, unparalleled in the history of our world; the result of an expedient of the divine government, to save the guilty, in consistency with the demands of righteousness, and the maintenance of the honor of God. The sufferings of no other person are strictly vicarious, or avail to the removal of the divine anger against transgressors.

With respect to Christians, however distinguished by their attainments in piety, afflictions are affirmed to be fatherly chastisements, and proofs of the paternal faithfulness of their covenant God. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." From this passage it is plain, that believers are never visited with the "rod," and with "stripes," except on account of their "transgression" and their "iniquity." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." None of God's children then, in this world, can wholly escape chastisement; and the reason is, they all need correction. "As many as I love," said Christ, "I rebuke and chasten." He told his disciples, that "in the world," they should "have tribulation." "We must," said Paul, "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." "For we that are in this

tabernacle do groan, being burdened." "For they verily for a few days chastened us, after their own pleasure : but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." The plain doctrine of the apostle here is, that after believers have become fully partakers of the divine holiness, the end designed to be answered by God's chastisement, will have been accomplished. The undeniable inference, therefore, is, that then their sufferings will cease. And this is what we should have reason to expect. Is it credible that a wise and merciful parent will inflict needless pain on his own children ? Mr. Mahan himself virtually admits the force of this reasoning. "The rod," he says, "properly applied, brings the child into a state in which the rod is no more needed. So of the rod in the hand of our heavenly Father. Its object is to render us partakers of his holiness. Till this end is accomplished, the rod will be used. When this end is accomplished, it will no longer be needed."\* But we have already seen, that all God's people here are, to a greater or less degree, the subjects of affliction. Will Mr. Mahan pretend, that they who claim to be perfect, are less liable, than other professors of religion, to the common natural evils of this life ? If not, their claim, according to the principle, allowed by himself, can have no good foundation.

Will it be said, that believers suffer according to general laws ? Be it so ; but by whom, I ask, were those general laws established, and were they not formed by their author, in view of all the wants which would ever take place under their operation ? Besides, who does not know that the scriptures, in numerous instances, ascribe all the calamities which befall creatures, to the sovereign appointment and direct agency of that being, on whom are dependent all the laws of nature, and all the results to which they give birth ? A few passages to this effect have already been quoted. It is apparent from these, and many other texts, that the hand of God is as much to be acknowledged in the evils we suffer, as in those events that are strictly miraculous, and which occur without the intervention of means, or second causes. Since then, affliction is ordained on account of sin, the perfectly obedient ought to be as exempt from affliction, as are any of the saints in heaven. Every bereavement therefore, that the Perfectionist sus-

\* *Christian Perfection*, p. 66.

tains, every pain he feels, demonstrates the falseness of his creed. Were he what he professes to be, this poor, dying world would be a most unsuitable residence for him; and he would, without doubt, ascend at once to join his kindred in the skies, and swell the shouts of their praise. The entire system of divine providence here proceeds upon the assumption, that the whole human race are so depraved, as to need perpetual restraints, and the intermingling of painful inflictions with the attractive influences of mercy.

We have now to show the great practical importance of correct views of this subject.

Some have said, that, if the doctrine we have maintained be true, it is not worthy of being contended for, especially at the risk of peace; and it has been sometimes intimated, that the contrary scheme, though erroneous, may excite Christians more powerfully than the truth would do, to the indefatigable pursuit of holiness. This notion directly contradicts the Bible. There we learn, that believers are sanctified through the truth; and we are urged to "buy the truth, and sell it not." No portion of revealed truth can be of little consequence; since we are told, on the best authority, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." The common doctrine here defended therefore, provided that it be scriptural, cannot be of small importance, in its relation to truth and duty. Nor has it been received as of small importance, by either its enlightened friends, or its enemies. Great stress was laid upon it by Augustine and the reformers; and it has been deemed of vital moment, by the most distinguished later theologians in our own country, and in Europe. While it has been held by the orthodox, it has been strongly opposed by the wildest and most erratic of the opposers of evangelical doctrines. This fact indicates clearly the tendency of the different schemes on this subject. In every well-instructed and well-balanced mind, the scriptural doctrine of the imperfection of good men in this life stands not as an isolated truth, but as an inseparable part of a system of religious belief, experience and practice.

The Perfectionist if consistent with himself, must have different apprehensions of God, from those which are possessed by the advocates of orthodoxy. Where is the Perfectionist who has clear and correct views of the universality, definiteness, and immutability of the divine purposes? Can an instance be found of such an one, who does not confound

the decrees of God with his commands ; thus virtually undermining the stability of the divine government, and taking away the foundation of our confidence, in the ultimate prevalence of truth and holiness over error and wickedness ? Besides, as holiness is the same in all beings, he, who regards himself as perfectly sanctified, must believe that he is, in proportion to his capacity, as pure and as good as his Creator. How far below the representations of the Bible must be such a man's views of the righteousness and moral glory of the adorable Supreme ?

Perfectionism explains away, or virtually repeals God's holy and unchangeable law. In some instances, its advocates directly affirm, that the obligations of the law have been abrogated, with respect to all believers ; and that Christ has so fulfilled its demands, that his people are not, in any sense, answerable for their delinquencies. They are said to cease from their works, and to "roll the responsibility of their future and eternal obedience upon the everlasting arm."\* In order to maintain the dogma of personal perfection, it is necessary to make it consist in something far short of the consummate virtue required in the word of God. Hence real sins are called weaknesses, frailties, or innocent constitutional temptations. Concupiscence is reduced to the blameless, though, when they become excessive, somewhat dangerous cravings of physical appetite. Supreme self-love is declared to be an essential characteristic of intelligent moral agency, against which there is no law ; which is the spring of all virtue as well as of vice, and to which no more blame can be attached than to the pulsations of the heart, or the vibrations of a pendulum. Affections, as such, have no character ; they are but the innocent susceptibilities of our nature, and their most violent workings are innocent, except so far as they are produced or modified by a previous deliberate act of the will. In all other cases, they are passive emotions, like the involuntary impressions made upon the brain by the bodily senses. It follows, on this principle, that love to God and hatred of him, are equally indifferent things ; and that they become praiseworthy or criminal, solely in consequence of their connexion with some previous purpose of the mind. It must hence be inferred, that when God commands us to love him, he does not mean what he says ; but that he is to be understood as simply

\* *Literary and Theological Review*, Vol. i. p. 558.

requiring us to do what we can to approve of his character, and yield obedience to his commands. Thus his law, in its high and spiritual import, is frittered down to an accommodation to the taste, or moral inability of mankind. Observe the language of Mr. Finney. "It is objected," says he, "that this doctrine lowers the standard of holiness to a level with our own experience. It is not denied that in some instances this may have been true. Nor can it be denied, that the standard of Christian perfection has been elevated much above the demands of the law in its application to human beings in our present state of existence. It seems to have been forgotten, that the inquiry is, what does the law demand—not of angels, and what would be entire sanctification in them; nor of Adam, previously to the fall, when his powers of body and mind were all in a state of perfect health; not what will the law demand of us in a future state of existence; not what the law may demand of the church in some future period of its history on earth, when the human constitution, by the universal prevalence of correct and thorough temperance principles, may have acquired its pristine health and powers; but the question is, what does the law of God require of Christians of the present generation; of Christians in all respects in our circumstances, with all the ignorance and debility of body and mind which have resulted from intemperance and the abuse of the human constitution through so many generations?"

"The law levels its claims to us as we are, and a just exposition of it, as I have already said, under all the present circumstances of our being, is indispensable to a right apprehension of what constitutes entire sanctification."\*

Perfectionism often and directly leads to the most gross, palpable and blasphemous forms of Antinomianism. It has been conjoined with the horrible notion, that to the Christian all actions are alike; that sin in his case ceases to be sin; that his doings, however perverse, are not his own, but are the works of Jesus Christ himself, whose will impels his perfect ones in all they think, say and do. Hence some of the Perfectionists have talked of themselves as divine; as incarnations of the Deity, possessing at once the righteousness, strength and infallibility of the Redeemer. By many, the utility and necessity of all divine ordinances are denied, as fit only for the uninstructed and carnal, who have not

\* Oberlin Evangelist, Vol. ii. p. 50.

yet entered into their rest. In the writings of even the more sober Perfectionists of this day, expressions are found which seem to contain the germ of these extravagant and impious pretensions.

It is scarcely needful to remark, that the belief in perfectionism cannot stand in connexion with clear scriptural apprehensions of the total moral corruption of unregenerate men. Hence, whatever words the defenders of this scheme have used, they have universally, so far as we know, denied the essential difference, as it respects the spring and nature of their exercises, between saints and impenitent sinners. The governing motive, namely, self-love, or the desire of happiness, however it may vary in its results, is represented to be the same in both classes, or, at the most, any change effected in this respect, is to be attributed simply to the operation of principles, which, though stimulated perhaps by a divine influence, are yet common to both. With such philosophy, to speak of any as totally depraved, is to use words without meaning; or to adopt a phrasology, fitted to bewilder and mislead those who are incapable of reducing doctrines to their legitimate and primary elements. The history of Perfectionism shows indeed, that most of its advocates have renounced the use of evangelical language on this subject; and have maintained, either that men are naturally no more inclined to evil than good, or that a portion of the divine moral image has been imparted to the whole human race.

Perfectionism has been commonly, as it is naturally, connected with a want of reverence for the Bible. Mr. Wesley reproves those, who infer from the conduct of the apostles, that some are entirely free from sin in this life, in the following terms: "Will you argue thus, if two of the apostles once committed sin, then all other Christians in all ages, do and must commit sin as long as they live? Nay, God forbid we should thus speak." Again. "What if the holiest of the ancient Jews did sometimes commit sin? We cannot infer from hence that all Christians do and must sin as long as they live."\* Thus scripture examples are made to prove nothing against the doctrine of perfection. Mr. Mahan contends that the passages in the Old Testament, which assert the imperfection of good men, ought not to be adduced as evidence that none under the gospel are perfectly holy. His words are, "Whatever is said of the character of

\* Wesley's Plain Account of Christian Perfection, pp. 19, 20.

saints, under the old dispensation, cannot be applied to Christians under the new, unless such application was manifestly intended by the sacred writer." Speaking of the declaration in Eccl. viii. 20, he says, "It was made with reference to men in the state then present, and not with reference to their condition under an entirely different dispensation."\* Thus easily does he dispose of passages, which contradict his view. Many have supposed the prophets and primitive Christians to have been unenlightened and carnal, compared with themselves. Many Perfectionists have substituted impulses, or the inward light, for the teaching of the word; and have spoken in disparaging terms of the latter, as compared with the internal illumination, of which they boast. In exemplification of this remark, we might refer the reader to the votaries of ancient Quakerism, Shakerism, and Mystics and Quietists of every description. And no wonder, that they who are perfect, undervalue that volume which condemns their creed, and which was written by men who confessed themselves to be sinners. What! the perfect condescend to be taught by those who are imperfect. It is absurd in the extreme. Besides, it is natural to suppose, that they who are perfectly holy, should read the word of God, rather on the tablet of their own minds, than on the perishing pages of a book, printed by human hands. It has accordingly been no uncommon occurrence, for those who imagined themselves to have attained to the highest degree of sanctification, to abandon the reading of the scriptures, and trust to the supposed illapses and movings of the Spirit within them. And what is this but a species of infidelity, under the guise of a superior sanctity and devotion? "Search the scriptures," says Jesus Christ, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."

We see, then, why it is, that Perfectionism has so generally led to the wildest enthusiasm. Notwithstanding the warnings of some of its more intelligent and sober champions,† it has been very extensively connected with confidence in impressions, visions, and unaccountable voices, to the practical rejection of that word of truth, light and power

\* Mahan on Christian Perfection, p. 67.

† Wesley's Plain Account, pp. 119, 120, where are some sound and important remarks on this subject. The Oberlin professors have written against some of these extravagances, yet they maintain opinions which lead to the most pernicious enthusiasm, and their paper, it is said, is read and admired by some of the most fanatical of the Perfectionists in the western country.

which speaks from heaven. Many of its disciples have professed to be literally inspired; and with the pretext of obeying divine instruction, have committed the most disgraceful excesses.

It is also the parent and the offspring of monkish austerities, inasmuch as it readily and almost necessarily attributes the source of sin to the body, or the animal appetites, which, though not wrong in themselves, will yet become the certain occasion of transgression, unless they be kept in subjection by the strictest regimen, and a kind of unceasing penance. Most of the Romish recluses, who inflicted the severest castigation upon themselves, and endeavored to drive out sin by voluntary hunger, cold and nakedness, professed by these means to be seeking, or actually enjoying the blessing of unstained purity, and unalloyed communion with God. Some of the Protestant preachers and believers of the doctrine in our own country, seem to be verging towards the same superstition; and to imagine that such abstinence and dietetics as they inculcate, connected with a general reception of their creed, would, in the course of a few generations, almost entirely extirpate sin and its consequences from our world. What less can Mr. Finney mean when he says, "Is it not true, my brethren, that the mind is, in this state of existence, dependent upon the physical organization for all its developements—and that every transgression of physical law tends strongly to a violation of moral law?" Again. "I am now fully convinced, that the flesh has more to do with the backsliding of the church, than either the world or the devil. Every man has a body, and every man's body, in this age of the world, is more or less impaired by intemperance of one kind or another. Almost every person, whether he is aware of it or not, is in a greater or less degree a dyspeptic, and suffering under some form of disease arising out of intemperance. And I would humbly ask, is it understood and proclaimed by ministers, that a person can no more expect healthy manifestations of mind in a fit of dyspepsia than in a fit of intoxication? Is it understood and preached to the church, that every violation of the physical laws of the body, as certainly and as necessarily prevents healthy and holy developements, in proportion to the extent of the infraction of physical law, as does the use of alcohol? I am convinced that the temperance reformation has just begun, and that the total abstinence principle, in regard to a great many other subjects besides alcohol, must prevail

before the church can prosper to any considerable extent.”\* To such an absurd extreme does this leader of Perfectionism carry his notions respecting the connexion between the body and the soul; and so clearly does he lay down principles of temperance, which are rather Pythagorean, Gnostical, or Papal, than conformable to the precepts and maxims of pure Christianity.

Correct views of this subject are important, on account of their necessary connexion with the great system of truth and duty, revealed in the scriptures. A number of errors springing from Perfectionism, as the waters from a fountain, have already been noticed. As a general fact, the Perfectionist is a Pelagian in his views of native depravity, decrees, election, the divine agency in regeneration, and gratuitous justification; and he denounces the doctrines of Paul, according to their plain import, as they are taught in his epistles to the Romans and the Ephesians, as injurious to the interests of holiness, and in the highest degree dishonorable to God. Experience has proved that Perfectionism peculiarly prepares the ground, where it is cultivated and flourishes, for an abundant crop of infidelity, and the most odious forms of delusion and imposture.

As to the practical fruits of this error, may we not be permitted to ask, without subjecting ourselves to the imputation of uncharitableness, do we not see enough of them at Oberlin itself, represented by its admirers as the very focus of all moral light and of holiness, to justify the severest crimination? What mean the constant denunciations against the church; against orthodox and faithful ministers; and against all who dare to resist the dangerous innovations, which go forth, like swarms of locusts, from that seat of superficial learning, and of bold, reckless speculation? What mean the complaints which we hear from the west, of the disorganizing spirit and conduct of the students and preachers from that seminary; the divisions they have created, and sought to create, in once powerful churches; and the resolutions condemnatory of their proceedings, adopted by ecclesiastical bodies, formerly believed to be sufficiently favorable to the extraordinary opinions and measures, which have characterized the theological revolution of the last fifteen or twenty years? What mean the violent acts of some of the

\* Oberlin Evangelist, as quoted in the April number of the Princeton Review, pp. 243, 244.

professedly perfect ones, blindfolding, menacing, and unmercifully beating a youthful offender, accused of attempting to corrupt one of the female members of the school ; and that, after they had themselves deceived him, and seduced his mind, by a feigned correspondence, and other acts of dissimulation, not unworthy of the disciples of Loyala ? What mean the published apologies for those disgraceful acts, under the eye, and with the sanction of the fathers of the heresy ? What mean the apparent conceit, arrogance, dogmatism and radicalism of not a few of the ill-instructed young men, who are sent out from Oberlin, to preach down dead professors of religion, and dead ministers, and orthodox creeds and catechisms, and to proselyte the world to the kind of sanctity taught by the faculty of that institution ? But we forbear. It is, we are persuaded, but to know Oberlin thoroughly, to be convinced of the utter falseness of all its pretensions to uncommon spiritual mortification and holiness. Perfectionism, indeed, can never bear a rigid and impartial scrutiny, as to its visible effects, any more than as to the radical principles which produce them. Its grapes, however beautiful in the eye of the distant or cursory spectator, are still the grapes of Sodom ; and its clusters are the clusters of Gomorrah. In proportion to the developements which are made, new evidence is afforded, that this heresy, however diversified, or modified by circumstances, is every where the same in its essential features, and in its tendency ; arrayed alike against evangelical doctrine and order ; fostering fanaticism and spiritual pride ; and, whether it nominally acknowledge or reject the ordinances of the gospel, taking away the grounds which support them, and robbing them of the salutary influence, which in their legitimate use, they are adapted and designed to exert.

It is time to draw these extended remarks to a close.

Reader ! the progress of this doctrine, the indifference of many professedly evangelical men with regard to its diffusion, and the disposition manifested by not a few to apologize for its propagation, are indications most unpropitious to the cause of humble, meek, spiritual Christianity. Perfectionism, with whatever professions “of love, tenderness, and devotion,” it may be accompanied, is not the progeny of light, but of darkness ; and as truly as Universalism or Socinianism, it should be viewed and treated by ministers and churches, as a fundamental error. Tending as it does to sap the foundations of all true religion and genuine mo-

rality, apostacy to it should be regarded as an evidence either of a peculiar species of monomania, a profound ignorance of the meaning of the terms employed, or of the want of that humility, without which all pretensions to piety are vain.

Be jealous of any system of mental philosophy, the principles of which naturally lead to the adoption of this great error, so contrary to the word of God, and the conscious experience of the most eminent believers. It is worthy of very serious inquiry, (if indeed there be any room to doubt on the subject,) whether some modern speculations concerning moral agency, and the divine influence in the production of holiness, have not contributed largely to the existence and progress of the peculiar form of this error, which has within the last few years, swept, like a simoom, over some of the fairest portions of our Zion. Guard, with constant vigilance, the citadel of truth at its very vestibule.

Christian reader ! “ Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines ; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with meats, which have not profited them, that have been occupied therein.”

This subject urges upon you most impressively the duty of a humble walk with God. Is it true, that sin mixes with and pollutes all your doings—your most disinterested charities, your holiest prayers, your most grateful praises ? Is it true, that you will daily, hourly, every moment, need a fresh pardon, and the aid of all-conquering grace, till your feet shall stand on the shores of the celestial Canaan, with the harp of God in your hand, and the wreath of immortality encircling your brows ? The dust then surely becomes you. There lie, and confess your sins, and acknowledge the justice of your condemnation, and weep with ingenuous sorrow, and beg for mercy.

Unite, with fervent prayer, untiring watchfulness and diligence. To this, your innumerable inward foes, ever ready for the assault, seem continually, vehemently, irresistibly, to urge you. In such a situation, can you sleep ? Awake, for the powers of hell are near, and are eagerly pressing on to circumvent and destroy you. “ Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Let not the reality of your continual imperfection be your

excuse ; but rather let it excite you to more ardent exertions to reach the crown of life.

Be satisfied with nothing less than perpetual progress in holiness. You have but commenced the war ; there remaineth yet much land to be possessed ; go on from victory to victory, till not an inch of the promised territory shall continue in possession of the enemies of your Lord.

Persevere for a few days, and you will gain the perfect purity and bliss, after which your glowing heart aspires. No sound of clashing arms, no opposing hosts, are in heaven. Its quietude is never invaded by anxiety, or fear. Its holiness is untarnished as its pure light, and enduring as its years. Triumphant termination of conflicts and of wars ! Hasten, then blessed day, so long desired by the holy creation.

Adore the grace and faithfulness of your redeeming God. He has not only forgiven the sins of your unregenerate days, but he has borne with your renewed provocations since your conversion—your ingratitude, your coldness, your worldliness, your self-seeking, your manifold abuses of his love. Nor will he leave unfinished the work which he has begun. He will guide you by his counsel, and afterwards receive you to glory. Thus will he keep, bless, save, all the armies of the ransomed, to the praise of his glorious grace forever. What patience, what condescension, what unfainting, boundless love ! “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, for his wonderful works to the children of men.”

---

*Charles Hodge*

ART. IV.—*The General Assembly of 1842.*

THE General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, met agreeably to appointment, in the Seventh Presbyterian church, in the city of Philadelphia, on Thursday, the 19th of May, A. D. 1842, and was opened with a sermon by the Rev. R. J. Breckinridge, D. D., moderator of the last Assembly, from 2 Thess. i. 11. The number of delegates in attendance was between one hundred and forty and one hundred and fifty. The Rev. John T. Edgar, D. D., was elected moderator, and Rev. Willis Lord, temporary clerk.