

THE  
BIBLICAL REPERTORY AND THEOLOGICAL  
REVIEW.

FOR OCTOBER 1830.

---

---

THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN AS HELD BY  
THE CHURCH, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE  
REFORMATION.

Although, as has been shown in a former article, the Pelagian doctrines respecting original sin were condemned by councils and popes, yet the heresy was not soon extinguished; but was in whole or in part adopted by many learned and ingenious men. To many, the opinions of Augustine appeared harsh, and hardly reconcilable with moral agency and human accountableness. They, therefore, endeavoured to strike out a middle course between the rigid doctrines of Augustine and the unscriptural opinions of Pelagius. This led to the adoption of an intermediate system, which obtained the denomination of semi-Pelagianism; and as these views seem to have been generally received about Marseilles, in the south of France, the abettors of this theory were very commonly called *Massilienses*. Augustine entered also into this controversy, and carried on a correspondence on the subject with Prosper and Hilary, two learned men of that region; the former of whom ardently opposed the semi-Pelagians, while the latter was inclined to favour them. By degrees, however, the public attention was called off from this subject. The darkness and confusion produced by the incursion of the northern bar-

Strobel, and Faber. But after all these attempts, some of the letters already in print, and a multitude of those which exist in manuscript, have been entirely overlooked. De Wette appears to have done all that was possible in order to furnish a complete work, examining the archives of Weimar, the libraries of the universities, and other public and private collections, thus bringing to light more than a hundred epistles before unknown. He has had recourse to the most unexceptionable sources, consulting the autographs or the earliest impressions, in every case, and scrupulously noting the different readings of the text. The letters had so frequently been translated from German into Latin, and *vice versa*, that it became important to determine the original language in which each was written, which has been carefully done, and the ancient orthography and phraseology have been restored.

This work is so arranged as to constitute a copious journal of Luther's life. Each volume is prefaced with a chronological table of the principal events of the period to which it belongs. The strict order of time has been observed in the relative position, and each letter is preceded by a brief but comprehensive introduction and sketch of its contents. The volumes are moreover enriched with a likeness of the reformer, engraved after the portrait by Kranach, his contemporary and friend, and numerous facsimiles of his hand-writing.

---

#### REVIEW.

1. *Memoirs of John Frederic Oberlin, Pastor of Waldbach, in the Ban de la Roche. Compiled from authentic sources, chiefly in French and German.* London, 1829. Pp. 352, 5 plates.
2. *The Life of John Frederic Oberlin, Pastor of Waldbach, in the Ban de la Roche. Compiled for the American Sunday School Union, and revised by the Committee of Publication.* Philadelphia, 1830. Pp. 140, 2 lithographic plates.

We are surprised that the abridgment of these "Memoirs," issued by the American Sunday School Union, should be the

only form in which the volume has been republished in this country. The biography of one of the earliest pioneers of the religious enterprise of the age has certainly more than ordinary claims upon the attention of the Christian community. As a stirring proof of what may be effected by the well-directed efforts of a single individual, this narrative speaks loudly to the pastors of every church, who are commonly more disposed to lament over the inadequacy of their powers to their opportunities, than to apportion their energies to the exigence of the times; who, whilst they long for the mission of more labourers into the harvest-field, are apt to neglect to do with their might, whatever lies to their hand.

The original Memoirs are compiled by an anonymous female, from several small narratives in French and German, not known in this country, and from some original papers communicated to her. These authorities and documents are well arranged and connected, and the style of the author, with some inconsiderable exceptions, is quite appropriate and interesting.

The region which the name of Oberlin has drawn from obscurity, is a canton that originally belonged to Germany, and lies buried in the mountains of the north-east border of France, between Alsace and Lorraine. The French call it the Ban de la Roche; their German neighbours the Steinthal. It contains only about nine thousand acres, and is divided into two parishes, the one Rothau, the other comprising the five hamlets of Foudai, Belmont, Waldbach, Bellefosse and Zolbach, the inhabitants of which are almost exclusively of the Lutheran denomination.

Waldbach, the most central village, stands on the Champ de Feu, supposed to have been a volcanic mountain, which is separated from the Vosges range by a deep valley, and rises to the height of three thousand six hundred feet above the sea. The village is about half way up the mountain. The site of the whole district is represented to be highly romantic, though wild and insulated. The summits of the mountain remain covered with snow for a large portion of the year, whilst the valleys, which alone can be cultivated to any advantage, enjoy an Italian atmosphere. The population, so late as 1750, were in a state of comparative barbarism. Secluded in their rude recess from the polished countries adjacent, and deprived of communication by the want of roads, they appear to have surrendered themselves to sloth and ignorance, frequently suf-

fering for want of sustenance on account of their repugnance to agricultural or other labour, and rapidly degenerating to the lowest grade of humanity. They had indeed a minister among them, who, it is probable, was not much above the common level, as it is mentioned that he had been twenty years without a Bible, and his parishioners had no other idea of the volume than that it was "a large book that contained the word of God." Under these circumstances it was of little avail to them, that by the decree which incorporated the district with the kingdom of France, liberty of conscience was guaranteed to them, and the privilege of professing their original Protestant faith: a license, however, of which they afterwards enjoyed the full blessing.

In the year 1750, Mr Stouber, a Lutheran clergyman, undertook the civilization of this forsaken community. It does not appear whence he came, or by what authority, but we conclude he was a voluntary missionary from Strasburg, which lies within a few miles. He found the principal school under the care of a superannuated swine-herd, who professed to teach "nothing," confessing that he "knew nothing himself." The office of schoolmaster, indeed, had fallen into such disesteem, that those who were best qualified for the station, that is, the few who could name the letters, disdained the employment as ignoble. Stouber overcame their scruples by an ingenious expedient. He abolished the illfavoured title of schoolmaster; and instituted that of *messieurs les régents*. By the adoption of this euphemism, instructors, such as they were, were obtained, school-houses were erected, and the parents were prevailed upon to send their children, though at first they viewed the elementary syllables as cabalistic symbols. Their progress, under the supervision of the pastor, was so self-recommendatory, that the elder children, and even some of the parents, emulated their progress, and Stouber was encouraged to establish an adult school, which was taught during part of Sunday, and in the evenings of winter. He cut fifty French Bibles into one hundred and fifty portions, which he bound and distributed. They were received with incredulity and distrust, but soon were generally perused, and found their way into many Roman Catholic families. Stouber was beginning to reap the reward of his labours, when, in 1756, he was removed to another parish; in four years, however, he obeyed a powerful impulse which summoned him back from a comfortable living to the wilderness of the Steinthal, and to the great joy of the villages re-

sumed his office. In 1764 he lost his wife, at the age of twenty; three years afterwards he was called to a church at Strasburg, and upon accepting the invitation, prevailed upon Mr Oberlin to become his successor.

John F. Oberlin was born at Strasburg, of a very respectable family, on the 31st of August 1740. He was one of nine children, who were carefully and well educated by their father himself. Several instances of a very early display of the generosity, philanthropy and amiableness of his disposition are given, which indicate an unusual bent to the law of kindness. He was religiously instructed by his pious mother, and became the subject of conviction in his childhood. These impressions were confirmed by attendance upon the preaching of a Dr Lorentz at Strasburg, after he had become a member of the theological class in the university. At the age of twenty he entered into a formal covenant, on the plan, and nearly in the words, of that recommended by Dr Doddridge in the "Rise and Progress," and solemnly renewed the engagement ten years afterwards, at Waldbach. After his ordination he served seven years as tutor in the family of a distinguished surgeon, where he acquired considerable knowledge of medicine, which he turned to good account in his after-life.

Oberlin had agreed to accept a chaplainship in the French army when he was urged by Mr Stouber to take his place in the Ban. He acceded to his solicitations and removed to Waldbach in March 1767, being then in the 27th year of his age. The condition in which he found his parish, improved as it had been during the ineumbency of his predecessor, is thus described by the biographer.

"They were alike destitute of the means of mental and social intercourse; they spoke a rude *patois*, resembling the Lorraine dialect, and the medium of no external information; they were entirely secluded from the neighbouring districts by the want of roads, which, owing to the devastation of war and decays of population, had been so totally lost, that the only mode of communication, from the bulk of the parish to the neighbouring towns, was across the river Bruehe, a stream thirty feet wide, by stepping-stones, and in winter along its bed; the husbandmen were destitute of the most necessary agricultural implements, and had no means of procuring them; the provisions springing from the soil were not sufficient to maintain even a scanty population; and a feudal service, more fatal than sterile land and ungenial climate, constantly depressed and irritated their spirits."

He saw the necessity of becoming their civil as well as spiritual leader, and of directing their attention to secure the commonest blessings of social life. His plans were unacceptable to the idle and ignorant part of his people, some of whom even resolved upon personal violence in resisting them. Their designs were only frustrated by his courage and decision, and the conspirators became the foremost of his coadjutors.

In 1768 Oberlin married a young lady of Strasburg, to whose judgment and co-operation he was much indebted in his subsequent enterprises. In his matrimonial, as in all his other projects, he deferred to the will of Providence, and acted only upon what he supposed to be a direct intimation of the Divine will. But his biographer, we are inclined to believe, has done him some injustice in ascribing his conduct, on some previous occasions of the kind, to expectations of interference, which are certainly unwarrantable.

The first active project devised by the new pastor was the cutting of a road to communicate with the main road to Strasburg, by means of which a vent might be found for the commodities of the peasants, and a general intercourse encouraged. The people heard the proposal with amazement, and made every plea to avoid conscription in such an impossible enterprise as it seemed. "Let all" said the undaunted reformer in concluding his proposal of the scheme in a general meeting, "let all who feel the importance of my proposition, come and work with me," throwing at the same time a pick-axe over his shoulder and proceeding to the designated spot. The example was stronger than all his arguments, and he soon had an efficient force.

"He presently assigned to each individual an allotted post, selected for himself and a faithful servant the most difficult and dangerous places; and, regardless of the thorns by which his hands were torn, and of the loose stones by which they were occasionally bruised, went to work with the greatest diligence and enthusiasm. The emulation awakened by his conduct quickly spread through the whole parish. The increased number of hands rendered an increased number of implements necessary; he procured them from Strasburg; expenses accumulated; he interested his distant friends, and, through their assistance, funds were obtained; walls were erected to support the earth, which appeared ready to give way; mountain torrents, which had hitherto inundated the meadows, were diverted into courses, or received into beds sufficient to contain them; perseverance, in short, triumphed over difficulties, and, at the commencement of the year 1770, a

communication was opened with Strasburg, by means of the new road, and a neat wooden bridge thrown across the river. This bridge still bears the name of '*Le Pont de Charitè.*' "

He established, simultaneously with these works, a depository of tools and agricultural implements, to be lent in emergency. He sent the most suitable boys to Strasburg to be instructed in the various useful trades, who on their return exercised their handicrafts and taught their own apprentices. Under his advice and direction they improved their dwellings, which had been generally miserable cabins, hewn out of the rocks or sunk in the mountains. Agriculture had shared the fate of the other arts, and scarcely sufficient ground was cultivated to supply the wants of the population. With his usual tact, Oberlin, instead of inviting new opposition from his parishioners by proposing the systematic tillage of the soil, resolved to give them visible proof of its advantages. With his own hands, assisted by a single servant, he planted in his garden, through which lay a path continually used by the public, and in a soil notorious for its poverty, nurseries of trees, which, under his scientific culture, soon attained a flourishing condition, beyond what had ever been seen in that barren region. The taste was soon diffused; orchards and gardens in time surrounded the cottages, and the face of the country assumed a new aspect. Various grasses and vegetables were introduced by him, and the soil by proper process brought to a fertility which long disuse had diminished. He finally formed an agricultural society, on an extensive and useful plan.

By dint of persevering zeal he succeeded in establishing a school in each of the villages. In promoting his schemes, Oberlin had to encounter every discouragement which the ignorant prejudices of his people could offer; but so soon as the difficulties of the beginning were overcome, he received their hearty concurrence. With funds entirely insufficient for the purpose, he undertook, as a direct act of faith, the erection of suitable school-houses.

"He was convinced," as he often said, "that if he asked for any thing with faith, and it was really right that the thing should take place, it would infallibly be granted to his prayers. When, indeed, are our plans more likely to succeed, than when we enter upon them in humble and simple dependence upon God, whose blessing alone can render them successful?"

Having succeeded in erecting the buildings, the people came

forward voluntarily to assume the expense of conducting the schools.

But his system of education was not yet complete. Whilst the greater portion of the young population were occupied as pupils in the common schools, or preparing to become teachers, the smaller children were left at large. Struck with the waste of time which was thus suffered, he hit upon the expedient of establishing *infant schools*, which became the model of those instituted in Paris, and now in Great Britain and this country. At his own expense he organized an infant school in each commune, appointing two conductresses for each, to instruct the little pupils (who were from the ages of two to eight) in elementary education, and to sew, knit, &c. Their amusements consisted in listening to the recitation of scripture incidents, or illustrations of natural history, accompanied with pictures, in lessons of geography from maps, and singing moral and religious songs. The teachers were particularly careful to correct the barbarous *patois* which they learned from their parents—a tongue more similar to the French language of the twelfth century than to the modern idiom. Whilst the more immediate instruction was delegated to intelligent teachers, Oberlin superintended all the schools, reserving as his peculiar province their religious tuition. In order to do this more effectually, he founded *Sunday schools*, to be held at each village in rotation, where the children assembled at the church to sing the hymns and recite the religious lessons they had committed during the week, and receive the advice of their “dear papa,” the common appellation by which he was addressed by his parishioners. A meeting of all the schools was held weekly at Waldbach, where the systems pursued by the different teachers could be estimated by comparing the proficiency of the pupils.

Oberlin was now enabled to maintain and extend his plans by pecuniary assistance, received from his friends in Strasburg. He accordingly established a library for the children, and a book-society for the adults, had some rudimental works printed for their exclusive use, made a collection of indigenous plants, purchased philosophical apparatus, founded prizes for the emulation of the scholars, wrote and published a useful almanac, &c. The children of twelve or fifteen years of age were taught the principles of agriculture and botany, to domesticate plants, and copy them from nature. The parents



now willingly consented to pay a certain sum for the support of the schools. The children were early taught the duty of contributing their share to the public good; and to impress this upon their minds, they were required, at a certain age, to produce a certificate that they had planted two young trees in a spot laid out for the purpose. In these and all other duties they were urged to act with a supreme regard to religious motives. The example and doctrine of the pastor, in the smallest circumstances, constantly pointed to this; and it is mentioned that he would take a stone out of the road on the principle of love to his neighbour.

In 1782 Oberlin established a religious association under the name of the "Christian Society," the members of which (one hundred and thirty in number) met for prayer, religious conversation and charitable devices. For their use he drew up a number of heads and matters for reflection, and rules for conduct. The opposition to this society, by those to whom its exercises were not congenial, threatened to create so unfortunate a division in the parish, that he felt compelled to dissolve it, after an existence of eighteen months, but not without issuing an address on the occasion, defending its excellence, earnestly urging its opponents to repentance, and requiring that a copy of the rules should be suspended in every cottage. Among these rules was one that every member should, on the first Monday of every month, make the success of missionaries the special object of their prayers; which was in long anticipation of the monthly concert of prayer. There was also the following direction:

"Besides habitual 'watching unto prayer,' every individual, if he be able, shall prostrate himself in mind and body, every Sunday and Wednesday, at five o'clock in the evening, to ask of God, in the name of Jesus Christ—

"1. That every member of this society may be saved, with all his household, and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"2. Every member shall add to the list all the friends of God of his acquaintance, and pray for them.

"3. Every member shall include in his prayer all the children of God, in general, upon all the earth, of whatever religion they may be, supplicating that they may be united more and more in Christ Jesus.

"4. Every member shall pray that the kingdom of Satan may be at length destroyed, and that the kingdom of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be fully and generally established among the innumerable Pagans, Turks, Jews, and nominal Christians.

“5. Every member shall pray for school-masters, superiors, and pious magistrates, of whatever name or rank they may be.

“6. For faithful pastors, and male and female labourers in the vineyard of the Lord Jesus, who, being themselves devoted to his service, desire, above all things, to bring many other souls to him.

“7. For the youth, that God may preserve them from the seducing influence of bad example, and lead them to the knowledge of our gracious Redeemer.

“Every Saturday evening all the members shall ask God to bless the preaching of his Holy Word on the morrow.”

In 1784 an overwhelming affliction befel the pastor in the sudden decease of his amiable wife, leaving him with seven children. To this, after the first uncontrollable anguish, he offered the most exemplary resignation. It had been the subject of his prayers that the interval between their deaths should be short, and it now became one of his most cherished desires “that the world in which God would re-unite him to his beloved wife would soon open to him.” He had experienced all his life, he says in one of his papers, “a desire, occasionally a very strong one, to die, owing, in some degree, to the consciousness of my moral infirmities, and of my frequent derelictions.” “Millions of times,” he says again, “have I besought God to enable me to surrender myself with entire and filial submission to his will, either to live or to die: and to bring me into such a state of resignation, as neither to wish, nor to say, nor to do, nor to undertake any thing, but what He, who alone is wise and good, sees to be best.” That he knew how to estimate properly the influence of affliction on the heart of a Christian is evident from the subjoined illustration, contained in a letter written to a lady suffering under several successive bereavements:

“I have before me two stones, which are in imitation of precious stones. They are both perfectly alike in colour; they are of the same water, clear, pure, and clean; yet there is a marked difference between them, as to their lustre and brilliancy. One has a dazzling brightness, while the other is dull, so that the eye passes over it, and derives no pleasure from the sight. What can be the reason of such a difference? It is this. The one is cut but in a few *facets*; the other has ten times as many. These *facets* are produced by a very violent operation! it is requisite to cut, to smooth, and polish. Had these stones been endued with life, so as to have been capable of feeling what they underwent, the one which has received eighty *facets* would have thought itself very unhappy, and would have envied the fate of the other, which, having received but eight, had un-

dergone but a tenth part of its sufferings. Nevertheless, the operation being over, it is done for ever: the difference between the two stones always remains strongly marked; that which has suffered but little, is entirely eclipsed by the other, which alone is held in estimation, and attracts attention. May not this serve to explain the saying of our Saviour, whose words always bear some reference to eternity: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted?' Blessed, whether we contemplate them apart, or in comparison with those who have not passed through so many trials. Oh! that we were always able to cast ourselves into his arms, like little children—to draw near to him, like helpless lambs—and ever to ask of him, patience, resignation, an entire surrender to his will; faith, trust, and a heartfelt obedience to the commands which he gives to those who are willing to be his disciples. 'The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.'—Isa. xxv. 8."

The care of his family now devolved on Louisa Schepler, a pious orphan, who had been eight years a member of his household, and one of the most active and useful of the infant school conductresses, in which service she had impaired her health by unsparing exposure to the severity of the winters. The spiritual and practical piety of this woman, her life of active and modest usefulness, and her sacrifices in the cause of religious philanthropy, render her name worthy of record in company with the most venerated characters in female biography. The same eulogy may be bestowed on several others of her sex in the Steinthal, whose lives furnish models of female usefulness.

The subjoined extract from the journal of a French gentleman who visited Waldbach in 1793, furnishes an interesting picture of the pastor at home:

"During the space of nearly thirty years, in which Mr Oberlin has been Christian pastor of this canton, he has completely changed it. The language is, from an unintelligible *patois*, altered into pure French; the manners of the people, without degenerating, are civilized; and ignorance is banished without injuring the simplicity of their character. Many of the women belonging to his parishes, trained for the purpose under his parental care and instruction, (and called *conductrices*,) assist him in his occupations. They teach reading, writing, and the elements of geography, in the different villages where they reside; and through their medium the children are instructed in many necessary things, but, above all, have the seeds of religion and morality sown in their hearts. The excellence of these schools is so well established and appreciated, that girls of the middle ranks are sent to him from distant parts, and the

title of a scholar of pastor Oberlin is no less than a testimonial of piety, cleverness, and gentle manners. His countenance is open, affectionate, and friendly, and bears a strong impress of benevolence. His conversation is easy, flowing, and full of imagination, yet always adapted to the capacity of those to whom he is speaking. In the evening we accompanied him a league on his way back to Waldbach. We had a wooded hill to ascend; the sun was just setting, and it was a beautiful evening. 'What sweet thoughts and pious sentiments you have uttered, during this interesting walk,' said Mr Oberlin, in a tone of confidence; for he considered us as friends to religion, and servants of God. Our hearts were indeed in unison; and he related to us the circumstances of his past life, and spoke of his views and ideas, and the fear and love of God, in a most touching manner. Sometimes we stood still to admire the beauties of nature, and at others to listen with earnest attention to his impressive discourse. One moment was particularly affecting; when, stopping about half way up the hill, he answered in the softest tone to our question—'Ja ich bin glücklich,' ('yes, I *am* happy.') These words are seldom uttered by an inhabitant of this world, and they were so delightful from the mouth of one who is a stranger to all the favours of fortune—to all the allurements of luxury—and who knows no other joys than those which religion and benevolence impart, that we longed to live like him, that we might also participate in the same happiness.

"The moon rose in all her majesty, and night drew on, before we recollected that the time to return was approaching; when pastor Oberlin exclaimed, 'If five years are necessary to bring a ray of light from Sirius to this world, though travelling at the rate of twelve millions of milés in a minute, how much swifter must the communications of spirits be! (Dan. ix. 21.) What is so swift as thought?' and he then imaged to us the facility with which he apprehended we should approach one another in a future state.

"The following morning we set off to return the visit which he had paid us on the preceding day. We found the worthy pastor in his morning gown; it was plain, but whole and clean. He was just on the point of concluding a lecture; his pupils had, like their master, something soft, indeed almost heavenly, in their look.

"The house stands well, and has, from the garden side, a romantic view; in every part of it that kind of *elegance*, which is the result of order and cleanliness, prevails. The furniture is simple; yet it suggests to you that you are in the residence of no ordinary man; the walls are covered with maps, drawings and vignettes, and texts of scripture are written over all the doors. That above the dining-room door is, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' And over the others

are texts enjoining love to God and our neighbour. The good man implicitly follows the divine command to write them over the door-posts\*. On our first entrance he gave us, each, as a welcome, a printed text, 'Abide in me, and I in you,' 'Seek those things which are above,' &c. His study is a peculiar room, and contains rather a well-chosen, than numerous, selection of books in French and German, chiefly for youth. The walls are covered with engravings, portraits of eminent characters, plates of insects and animals, and coloured drawings of minerals and precious stones; it is, in short, literally papered with useful pictures relative to natural history and other interesting subjects.

"The dinner commenced with a blessing. His children, two maids, and a girl who receives her instruction there, were at the table; there was a remarkable expression of softness in all their countenances.

"Oberlin has a peculiarly happy method of improving occurrences, under the form of similies; and we are mistaken in supposing him a mystic. 'The gospel,' said he, 'is my standard. I should be afraid of trusting myself alone without it.' He then related to us many of the difficulties he had to encounter, and the sacrifices he had to make, at the commencement of his career in the Ban de la Roche. 'But now,' continued he, checking himself, 'let me observe, it is as great a fault to talk of our own virtues as of the faults of others.'

"It is surprising to witness the sound sense, refinement, and superiority of mind, evinced by these simple peasants; the very servants are well-educated, and are clothed with that child-like spirit, which is one of the truest tests of real religion. One of them, who is a widow, made many good remarks to us on the duties of married life. 'In order to introduce and preserve domestic peace,' said she, 'let us turn to Him who is peace.'

'I am writing this at his table, whilst he is busy preparing leather gloves for his peasant children. His family are around him, engaged in their different avocations; his eldest son, Frederic, is giving a lesson to some of the little ones, in which amusement and instruction are judiciously blended; and *cher papa*, without desisting from his employment, frequently puts in a word. He took me this morning into his work-shop, where there is a turner's lathe, a press, a complete set of carpenter's tools, also a printing-press, and one for book-binding. I assisted him in colouring a quire of paper, which is intended for covers of school-books. He gives

---

\* See Deut. vi. 6, 7, 8, 9, and xi. 18, 19, 20.

scarcely any thing to his people but what has been, in some measure, prepared by his own or his children's hands.

"He will never leave this place. A much better living was once offered to him—'No,' said he, 'I have been ten years learning every head in my parish, and obtaining an inventory of their moral, intellectual and domestic wants; I have laid my plan. I must have ten years to carry it into execution, and the ten following to correct their faults and vices.'

"Pastor Oberlin is too modest and generous not to bear testimony to the worth of his predecessor, who had begun to clear this wilderness, and to raise the superstructure, which he has so beautifully completed.

"Yesterday, I found him encircled by four or five families who had been burnt out of their houses; he was dividing amongst them articles of clothing, meat, assignats, books, knives, thimbles, and coloured pictures for the children, whom he placed in a row according to their ages, and then left them to take what they preferred. The most perfect equality reigns in his house; children, servants, boarders, are all treated alike; their places at table change, that each in turn may sit next to him, with the exceptions of Louisa, his housekeeper, who of course presides, and his two maids, who sit at the bottom of the table. As it is his custom to salute every member of his family, night and morning, these two little maids come very respectfully curtseying to him, and he always gives them his hand and inquires after their health, or wishes them good night. All are happy, and appear to owe much of their happiness to him. They seem to be ready to sacrifice their lives to save his. The following reply was made by one of his domestics, on his questioning her about her downcast looks during some trivial indisposition: 'I fear, dear papa, there will be no servants in heaven, and that I shall lose the happiness of waiting upon you.'

"Oberlin appears to be looking forward to his eternal home with holy confidence and joyful hope."

The biographer adds:

"The following are specimens of the texts referred to in the preceding letter. They were printed by Oberlin himself. He always kept a large supply of them, and distributed thousands and tens of thousands of them to his friends and visitors, often writing a few appropriate words on the back of the paper, or some short sentence expressive of his affectionate remembrance.

"Ma mère et mes frères sont ceux qui écoutent la parole de Dieu, et la mettent en pratique.—Luc. viii. 21.

"Et veillons les uns sur les autres, afin de nous exciter à la charité, et aux bonnes œuvres.—Hébreux x. 24.

“ Sometimes, instead of a text a few verses were inscribed on the cards.

“ Mon Dieu ! pour être heureux !  
 Tu me mis sur la terre.  
 Tu sais bien mieux que moi,  
 Quels sont mes vrais besoins ;  
 Le cœur de ton enfant  
 S'en rapporte à tes soins ;  
 Donne moi les vertus,  
 Qu'il me faut pour te plaire.”

“ Oberlin's house was, as the writer of the preceding letter remarks, literally papered with pictures, inscriptions, verses from the Bible, and directions for missionary and other prayers; and on the door of one of them the Moravian text-book was fastened. The inscription placed on that of another will give some idea of the cordial and warm reception with which he always greeted his visitors, and formed, indeed, throughout, the law by which they were governed :—

“ ‘ Constante bonté.  
 Douceur ferme.  
 Charité mâle et inaltérable. ’ ”

In 1793 he lost his eldest son in one of the first battles of the French revolution. The religious persecutions attendant upon that event did not extend to the Ban, but the people suffered from the general stagnation of business and the horrors of the times. Oberlin now declined to receive a stated salary, or contribution to the support of the various public institutions, leaving it to those who could afford it to bring to him whatever sums they could spare. The usual pastoral fees he had always refused. “ My people,” he used to say, “ are born, married and buried, free of expense, as far as their clergyman is concerned.” To supply the deficiency thus created he undertook the tutorship of ten or twelve pupils, the sons of foreigners; and he spared a large part of his revenue from this source for the good of the parish. He punctually devoted three tithes of all his receipts to benevolent uses: sharing them amongst the various objects of religious charity and education which required his care. Nor did he confine his liberality to his own limits; he sold the whole of his plate, with the exception of a single spoon, and contributed the proceeds to the French Missionary Society: a cause which had always his warmest support, and in which he at one time would have engaged, by coming to Pennsylvania as a missionary, had

not our revolutionary war prevented his departure. A description of the treatment of slaves in the West Indies so strongly affected his sympathy, that he abandoned for ever the use of sugar and coffee. The following record is a striking instance of his scrupulousness and illimitable benevolence:

“When the assignats lost their value, he feared that this would bring a curse upon France, and diminish the confidence that the people ought to have in the government. Convinced that it behoved every individual to use his utmost endeavours, as far as his influence or means extended, to prevent such a calamity, (leaving it to God to bless the example,) he made a public sale every year of agricultural implements and other useful articles amongst his parishioners, or rather offered them in exchange for assignats. By this means he managed to redeem, in the space of twenty-five years, all the assignats of the Ban de la Roche, and of some of its environs.

“I possess one of these assignats purchased by Oberlin. It is dated Waldbach, May 9, 1798, and has this superscription upon it in his own handwriting:

“Ainsi graces à Dieu ma nation est encore déchargée d’une manière honnête de cette obligation de 125 francs.’

“He gave texts of scripture, as a receipt for the assignats, and generally wrote on the back of the card:—‘Assignat de ——— reçu de M. le ministre O.’ with the date.”

We are compelled to pass over the interesting details the biography affords of the active and extensive operations of the Christian charity of this remarkable man and his parishioners, who were now excited to join him in all his undertakings. In the care of orphan children, the establishment of a Bible society, of associations to lend and read the Bible to the destitute and ignorant, his exertions were earnestly seconded by them; and thus encouraged, his plans ramified into every scheme of good which his heart could suggest. In the first, second and eleventh Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society his services are honourably mentioned, and some interesting letters of his published.

Oberlin had now attained the age of seventy, and was revered as a patriarch by his people. The population had increased from eighty or one hundred families, to three thousand souls. The children kept his birth-day as a festival, and brought him garlands of flowers to testify their affection. His visits were received with honest pride, whilst his unassuming manners removed all constraint, but maintained his personal dignity. The general control of the affairs of the population was cheerfully submitted to him as their rightful head, and his



authority was undisputed, in whatever capacity he employed it. His children were now capable of assisting him: one son was pastor of Rothau; another had entered upon his theological studies; a daughter was married to the Rev. Mr Graff, who, in 1813, removed to Waldbach; another to the Rev. Mr Rauscher, of Barr; and a third to the Rev. Mr Witz, of Colmar. The arts of riband-weaving, straw-platting, dyeing, and cotton-spinning were introduced with the comforts and refinements of civilization, whilst the primitive simplicity of rural manners and innocence was remarkably preserved.

The happiness of the "dear papa" was greatly promoted by the termination of a law-suit respecting a right to the forests, which had been pending for more than eighty years between the peasantry of the Ban and the demesne-lords. This suit had been a source of continual grief to Oberlin's heart, and in his characteristic style, he had for many years this prayer affixed to one of his doors:

"O Gott, erbarme dich des Steinthals, und mache dem prozess ein ende." [Oh God! have mercy on the Steinthal, and put an end to the law-suit.]

By his urgent pleas to his people, and the influence of his pacific disposition upon the prefect of the province, he at length succeeded, in 1813, in bringing the parties to an accommodation. The day on which this was consummated he declared to be one of the happiest of his life. In 1818 the Royal Agricultural Society of Paris, on motion of count de Neufchateau, honoured Oberlin with a gold medal, in acknowledgment of the services he had rendered to the agriculture of the kingdom, and in testimony of their veneration for his character. The decoration of the legion of honour had already been conferred on him by Louis XVIII. These distinctions were wholly spontaneous and unexpected. To his person all but his fellow-citizens and visitors were strangers, as he never went far from his settlement, and did not see Paris in the course of his life.

We must refer to the volume for numerous interesting anecdotes of this remarkable personage, as well as for copious accounts of his domestic and pastoral habits, as furnished from the journals and letters of some of the visitors who were attracted to his seclusion by the fame of his character. We have also to omit any reference to some of the more conspicuous inhabitants and coadjutors in the work of reformation, notices of whom abound in the pages of the interesting narrative. With

respect to the doctrinal opinions of Oberlin, we copy the statement of the biographer:

“ In most of his religious tenets, Oberlin was strictly orthodox and evangelical. The main doctrine that seemed to occupy his whole mind, was that God was his Father.—‘ *Our Father,*’ as he would not unfrequently say, ‘ and thus we may *always* feel Him.’ The doctrine of sanctification also held a high place in his creed, though, in his discourses, he principally dwelt upon the freeness of the gospel, the willingness of Christ to receive all who come to him in sincerity of heart, the blessed efficacy of prayer, and the absolute necessity of divine grace.

“ It may here be considered necessary, for the sake of biographical faithfulness, to observe, that upon some points he certainly held very fanciful and unwarranted notions, more particularly upon those relative to a future state. In the interpretation of John xiv. 2, for example, (‘ In my Father’s house are many mansions,’) he considered that there was an exact relation between our state here and the very mansion we should enter hereafter ; and this relation, or proportion of happiness, he seemed to himself to have so accurately ascertained, by the help of types drawn from different parts of the Temple, beginning with the outer court of the sanctuary and ending with the Holy of Holies, and from expressions denoting the state of the redeemed in the Book of Revelations, as to be able to draw a map of the other world; and this map he printed and hung up in his church. He also held the doctrine of an intermediate state, which he supposed to be one of continual improvement, and likewise believed that we shall become progressively holy in heaven. He seemed to hope that the passage, 1 Cor. xv. 28, where it is said that ‘ all things’ shall be subjected unto the Almighty, and the Son also himself shall be subjected, ‘ that God may be all in all, ’ might include not only the little flock of Christ’s immediate followers, but, ultimately, at some almost indefinite period, through the boundless mercy of God, and the blood of Jesus, which was shed for the sins of the *whole* world, all the race of mankind. And he was strengthened in this belief by understanding in another than the ordinary sense, that as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive. It is needless to say of these doctrines that they are fanciful and mistaken, and not to be defended by an accurate application of scripture. But, whatever hold they had upon Oberlin’s mind, they appeared very little in his preaching, and did not at all interfere with the plainest statement of the doctrine of justification by faith in the merits of our Redeemer, and sanctification by his Spirit, and of the absolute necessity of both the one and the other to meetness for the heavenly inheritance.

“ Oberlin was accustomed to preach very alarmingly on the judg-

ment to come, and the punishment of the wicked; though, at the same time, he held out the fatherly love of God to every returning sinner, who would seek him through Jesus Christ. These last mentioned doctrines may be said to have constituted the leading features of his ministry. He had a remarkable reverence for the Bible, and especially for the Books of Moses, and the Gospels. He was led to adopt many of the laws of Moses, because, he said, although the ceremonial law is rejected, the object of that law, the glory of God and the good of man, remains, and therefore the law itself ought to be retained. The subjoined note marks a number of passages from the laws of Moses, which Oberlin adopted, and which he applied with great force and interest in his own conduct, and in his instructions to his people\*.”

Of his preaching we have the following account:

“In his sermons, Oberlin was simple, energetic, and affectionate, continually speaking to his people under the appellation of ‘*mes chers amis*.’ He appeared to study a colloquial plainness, interspersing his discourses with images and allusions, which, had they been addressed to a more refined audience, might have been deemed homely, but which were particularly adapted to the capacities and wants of his secluded villagers. He would frequently introduce biographical anecdotes of persons distinguished for their piety; and the boundless field of nature furnished him with striking illustrations to explain spiritual things. But the Bible itself, ‘*la chere Bible*,’ as he exclaimed with tears of gratitude a short time before his last illness, was the grand source of all his instructions. It formed the

---

\* *Alms*. Deut. xiv. 28, &c. xv. 7. Mat. iii. 10.

*Prevention of Dangers*. Deut. xxii. 8. Exod. xxi. 33.

*Strangers*. Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 33, 34. xxiv. 22. Num. xv. 14. Deut. x. 18, 19. xxiv. 14, 19. xxvi. 12. xxvii. 19.

*Also for Strangers*. Exod. xii. 19. Num. ix. 14.

*Solomon appointed a court for Strangers*: 2 Chron. vi. 32. This court the avarice of the Jews suffered to become a market, and from this market Jesus drove the buyers and sellers.

*Fertility*. To make a country fertile, it must be guarded from bad seasons, dearth and famine. Lev. xxvi. 3, 14. Deut. xi. 13, 16. Mal. iii. 10.

*Politeness*. Rom. xii. 10. 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

*To protect ourselves from the evil of war*. Lev. xxv. 18, 19. Deut. xxxiii. 28, 29. Prov. i. 33.

*Doctors*. Exod. xv. 26. 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

*Law-suit*. Matt. v. 39, 40.

*First fruits*. Exod. xxii. 29. Deut. xv. 19.

*Payment*. Lev. xix. 13. Deut. xxiv. 14. Jer. xxii. 13. Rom. xiii. 8. Mat. v. 25.

*Health*. Exod. xv. 26. Mal. iv. 2.

*Prolonged life*. Deut. iv. 40. v. 32, 33. vi. 2. xi. 9. xvii. 20. xxx. 17, 18. xxx. 20. xxxii. 46, 47.

study of his life, and, as he said, constituted his own consolation under all trials, the source of his strength, and the ruling principle of his actions:—how, then, could he do less than to recommend it to others? He was in the habit of citing very largely from it, from the conviction that the simple exposition of the Word of God was the best means of efficaciously interesting his flock. His sermons were almost always composed with the greatest care; and when unable, for want of time, to write them out at length, he made at least a tolerably full outline. In general, he committed them scrupulously to memory, but in the pulpit he did not confine himself to the precise words, and would indeed sometimes change the subject altogether, if he saw that another was apparently better suited to the circumstances of his auditory.”

The biographer furnishes a few specimens of his discourses. One is taken from a sermon preached in Waldbach the day after the decease of his son Henry, which occurred in 1817. The text was John v. 24; the last words of which (“from death unto life !”) were frequently repeated by him in his expiring moments. The style is eminently plain, but animated and eloquent. He recited the sonnet of Drelincourt:

“Le voici le beau jour, le jour tant désiré.”

Another extract is given from a sermon preached two years afterwards, when nearly eighty years old, in which he illustrates, in a very lively manner, the analogy between the changes of insects through the chrysalis state to forms of beauty and splendour, and that of the human body and soul, incorporating however some fancies which go beyond “what is written.”

Besides his Sunday and catechetical schools, and prayer meetings,

“Every Friday Oberlin conducted a service in German, for the benefit of those inhabitants of the vicinity to whom that language was more familiar than the French. His congregation on a Sunday consisted, on an average, of six hundred persons, but on a Friday of two hundred; and Oberlin, laying aside all form, seemed on such occasions more like a grandfather surrounded by his children and grandchildren, to whom he was giving suitable admonition and instruction, than the minister of an extensive parish. In order that no time might be lost, he used to make his female hearers knit stockings during the service, not indeed for themselves or their families, but for their poorer neighbours, as he believed that this charitable employment need not distract their attention, nor interrupt that devotional spirit which generally pervaded the Friday evening assemblies. When he had pursued for half an hour the train of his reflec-

tions upon the portion of scripture which he had just been reading, he would often say to them, "Well, my children, are you not tired? Have you not had enough? Tell me, my friends." To which inquiry his parishioners generally would reply, 'No, papa, go on;— we should like to hear a little more,' though on some occasions, with characteristic frankness, the answer was, "Assez, nous pensons, pour une fois;" and the good old man would leave off in the midst of his discourse, or wait a little, and presently resume it, putting the same question again at intervals, until he saw that the attention of his congregation began to flag, or until they, perceiving that he spoke with less ease, would thank him for the things he had said, and beg him to conclude.

"Oberlin's tolerance," says a clergyman who visited him, "was almost unbounded. He administered the sacrament to Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists at the same time, and because they would not eat the same bread, he had, on the plate, bread of different kinds, wafer, leavened and unleavened. In every thing the same spirit appeared: and it extended not only to his Catholic, but also to his Jewish neighbours, and made him many friends among them all."

He was in the habit of addressing circulars and addresses to his parishioners, either on such topics as were not appropriate to the pulpit, or making direct appeals to their consciences in regard to particular duties. This was sometimes done in the form of questions, to which they were expected to return exact answers. He was regular in his pastoral visits, and kept private memoranda of the moral and spiritual state of individuals, that he might be better able to adapt his conversation and preaching to their wants.

The infirmities of age at length made their inroads on the frame of the good father, and he was obliged to surrender the active duties of the charge to Mr Graff, his son-in-law. In his retirement he employed himself in unremitting prayers for his flock, and that no one might be omitted, he used in the morning to take the baptismal register, and at stated intervals pray separately for each there recorded, as well as for the community at large. Several essays, found after his decease, are supposed to have been written at this period: amongst which was a refutation of Cicero "De Senectute." On Sunday, the 28th May 1826, he was seized with his fatal illness. The symptoms were so violent, that he had but little opportunity of expressing the feelings of his heart in the prospect of dissolution. He was often heard to exclaim, "Lord Jesus, take me speedily! nevertheless, *thy* will be done!" After he had lost the use of his speech, and his extremities had become lifeless, he recovered strength enough to remove his cap, join his hands,

and raise his eyes to heaven, "his countenance beaming with faith, joy and love." He died on the 1st of June. We must leave untouched the pathetic recital of the sensation created by this event, of his interment, and a more particular view of his character and talents. The following is his own estimation of himself:

"A strange compound of contradictory qualities. I do not yet exactly know what I am to make of myself. I am intelligent, and yet possessed of very limited powers: prudent and more politic than my fellow-clergymen; but also very apt to blunder, especially when in the least excited. I am firm, yet of a yielding disposition; and both of these, in certain cases, to a great degree. I am not only daring, but actually courageous; whilst, at the same time, I am often in secret very cowardly. I am very upright and sincere, yet also very complaisant to men, and in a degree, therefore, insincere. I am a German and a Frenchman; noble, generous, ready to render service, faithful, very grateful, deeply affected by the least benefit or kindness, which is ever after engraven on my heart; and yet again flighty and indifferent. I am irritable to a formidable degree. He who treats me generously soon gains the ascendancy over me; but opposition creates in me an astonishing degree of firmness, especially in matters of conscience. I have a lively imagination, but no memory, properly speaking. The histories which I have taken pains to impress on my mind remain with me, but dates and the names of persons I often forget the next day, notwithstanding all the pains I have taken to remember them. I used to speak Latin fluently and even elegantly; but now I cannot utter three or four words together. I make selections from books, and instruct others in some branch of science for a long time; but a few years after, my scholars, even if they know nothing more than what I taught them, may in their turn become my teachers, and the books from which I made extracts (with the exception of those of a certain description) appear wholly new to me.

"I habitually work my way through my studies till I obtain clear ideas; but if I wish to penetrate deeper, every thing vanishes before me. I have a great talent for removing difficulties in order to render every thing smooth and easy to myself, and to every body else. I am so extremely sensitive, tender, and compassionate, that I can find neither words nor expressions corresponding to my feelings, so that the latter almost overpower me, and occasion me acute pain. I am always busy and industrious, but also fond of ease and indolence. I am generally quick in resolving, and equally so in executing. I have a peculiar esteem for the female sex. I am a very great admirer of painting, music, and poetry, and yet I have no skill in any of them. Mechanics, natural history, and so forth, constitute

my favourite studies. I am very fond of regularity, and of arranging and classifying, but my weak memory, added to constant employment, renders it difficult to me. I am given to planning and scheming, and yet endeavour, in my peculiar way, to do things in the best manner.

“I am a genuine soldier, but I was more so before my bodily powers were so much weakened ; I was formerly anxious to be the foremost in danger, and the firmest in pain, but have now lost that desire. From my childhood I have felt a longing and preponderating desire for a higher state of existence, and therefore a wish for death. I am the greatest admirer of military order and subordination, not however in a spirit of slavery, but of that noble affectionate attachment which compels the coward to show courage, and the disorderly to be punctual. I feel no obstinacy or disinclination to yield to strong internal conviction, but on the other hand a fervent heart-felt joy in yielding to both great and small, high and low, gentlemen and peasants, children and servants, and thence a willingness to listen and an inclination to suffer myself, if possible, to be convinced. But when I feel no conviction I can never think of yielding. I am humorous, and a little witty or satirical, but without intentional malice.”

The little work which we have named in the second place, at the head of this article, is a comprehensive abridgment of the various accounts which have been given in France and England of this distinguished man. Much judgment is manifested in the selection and arrangement of facts, and the reader will find in its contents all the leading events and prominent characteristics of its revered subject. Being primarily designed for the Sunday School Library, it combines brevity and perspicuity with chasteness and propriety of style and diction. It is compendious, simple and unornamented. We have seldom laid down a biographical memoir with more lively sentiments of interest and surprise. A more forcible exemplification could not be presented of the power with which the exertions of a single benevolent individual are invested. It is truly observed of Oberlin by the compiler, “that he seems to have been led by moral instinct, to originate, in his secluded parish, all the great plans of modern religious enterprise, which many years and many minds have slowly brought into existence in more favoured parts of Chistendom.”

It is our hearty desire, that the American Sunday School Union may receive ample encouragement in the laudable undertaking of diffusing such works, from able pens, through our whole community.