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ART. I. — *The Reformation in Hungary and Transyl-*

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*J. N. Alexander*

By the persecutions carried on against the Albigenses and Waldenses, many of these devoted people were scattered through other countries, where they became a seed of reformation. The followers of John Huss and Jerome of Prague were also numerous and widely dispersed in the eastern parts of Europe, which prepared the way for the dissemination of evangelical doctrines in these regions after the reformation commenced in Germany and Switzerland. This will in some measure account for the rapidity with which the doctrines of the reformation spread through almost every part of Christendom. It is, however, greatly to be lamented that in many places no permanent record was made of the first planting of reformed churches. Those persons who were the instruments of propagating this blessed reformation, and who were capable of writing a correct history of events, were too much occupied with their more important labours to have leisure for things of this kind: and it is generally the fact, that men do not consider the importance of transmitting passing events by means of accurate records to posterity; so that often the witnesses of important transactions in the church and state pass off the stage before the importance of

ART. III.—*Views in Theology*, by Lyman Beecher, D.D., *President of Lane Theological Seminary*. Published by request of the Synod of Cincinnati. Cincinnati: Truman and Smith. New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co. 1836. pp. 240. 12mo.

THIS work had its origin in the prosecution of Dr. Beecher upon charges of heresy, before the presbytery, and subsequently before the synod of Cincinnati. By both these bodies he was acquitted; but the synod at the same time requested him to publish, at as early a day as possible, "a concise statement of the argument and design of his sermon on native depravity, and of his views of total depravity, original sin, and regeneration, agreeably to his declaration and explanation before synod." In compliance with this request, Dr. Beecher published his *Views in Theology*, which is an enlarged and illustrated edition of the defence made upon his trial. The opinions of a man so eminent in abilities, and in station, would be matter of public interest, independent of the peculiar circumstances which, in this case, imparted to them additional importance; and we intended, therefore, at the time when his work appeared, to make it the subject of examination and remark. But this purpose was then laid aside, for reasons with which it is not necessary to trouble the public; and it is now resumed, because recent events and discussions have again broken the silence which had begun to prevail in relation to Dr. Beecher and his opinions, and rendered it important to ascertain how much ground he has really given for the doubts and suspicions which many seem to entertain. We have therefore recurred to his *Views in Theology*, in contrast with his other publications, and the result of this comparison we are about to lay before our readers.

We cannot sympathize with Dr. Beecher in the complaints which he makes that he should be called upon to defend his orthodoxy before an ecclesiastical tribunal. He speaks of "the necessity of explanation imposed on him by *unfounded accusations*;" and compares himself with "an aged merchant of long-established reputation called upon to prove his honesty by the exhibition of his books; or a physician of age and experience, to repel the suspicion of quackery by publishing an account of his cases and his practice."

We must be permitted to say, without intending any dis-

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respect to Dr. Beecher, that his comparisons seem to us very inapposite. In his analogous cases of hardship, the merchant and physician are called upon to prove that they possess qualities which the public estimation, founded on long observance of their conduct, has assigned to them. But we are not aware that Dr. Beecher has ever enjoyed the reputation of possessing views of theological truth, that were profound, well-defined, and carefully adjusted to the standards of Presbyterian orthodoxy. A reputation he has indeed had, and well has he earned it, of a man of commanding intellect, of comprehensive grasp of mind, capable of seizing upon the great features of any subject and holding them up, covered with light, to the view of others. The reputation, too, he has had of a zealous and successful preacher of the gospel. And who has called in question his substantial merit in any of these respects? Had he been arraigned for weakness of intellect, or accused in relation to any of the matters upon which his public reputation rests, we would have been ready to make common cause with him, and lift up our voices higher even than his own, in outcry upon the injustice and cruelty of the accusation. But no such charge has been made: no one within our knowledge has sought to detract aught from the reputation which Dr. Beecher has acquired; or so far questioned the justice of the public award on his behalf, as to call upon him now at an advanced stage of life to prove that he is entitled to it. His prosecution touched upon matters entirely distinct from those excellencies which public estimation has assigned to him. So far was Dr. Beecher's reputation for orthodoxy from being extensively and firmly established, as in the case of the merchant or physician which he brings forward, that, before he left New England, many were the doubts and fears entertained of him, in this respect, among those who had the best opportunities for ascertaining his opinions. If the accusations against him are so utterly groundless, if his defence of his orthodoxy be a mere gratuity, forced from him only by the unreasonable prejudices of others, it surely becomes him to explain the remarkable fact that he should have been so grievously misunderstood, not only by Dr. Wilson, but by Dr. Porter of Andover, and by many others in New England, who must be supposed capable of understanding even the subtlest discussions in theology, and who were under no bias save one that would dispose them to judge favourably of Dr. Beecher. The Doctor's writings are not ordinarily marked by obscu-

riety. On the contrary, we do not know any writer who, in general, seizes more directly or illuminates more strongly any subject which he undertakes to discuss. Why is it then that the soundness of his views on the subjects of original sin, depravity, and regeneration, were called in question before he left New England by many of his brethren who were most intimately associated with him? Had these doubts of his orthodoxy arisen in some remote region, they might be supposed to have proceeded from the misconstruction of some isolated passage in his writings, or from the erroneous reports of others upon his opinions. If the ignorant only had entertained them, we might suppose that they had been merely alarmed by some new phraseology in which Dr. Beecher was preaching familiar truths; or had they been found only among his enemies, we might conclude that prejudice had led them to torture his words into an unfavourable meaning. But these misgivings had their origin in the sphere within which he lived and laboured; among those who were most familiar with his writings, and sermons, and conversation; among men who, having been trained to theological investigation, would not be likely to mistake an old truth merely because it was presented in a new dress; and among men too who had been accustomed to respect and love Dr. Beecher, and whose minds would be slow, therefore, in taking up any opinion to his hurt. If he was misunderstood at the west because his brethren there were not able to draw the distinction, of which he is so fond, between a theological doctrine and the philosophy of that doctrine, why was he misunderstood in New England? He surely will not deny that there are men there, and men too among those who have questioned or doubted his orthodoxy, who can dive with him into any of the depths of philosophy, or ascend with him, *pari passu*, to any of its heights. Until Dr. Beecher will condescend to give some rational explanation of the origin of these doubts of his orthodoxy in New England, and the subsequent and independent origin of similar doubts at the west, we cannot but consider his complaint of "unfounded accusations" as unbecoming and slanderous. The effect of this complaint is to present his prosecutor as coming forward, in the mere gratuity of mischief, to interrupt his labours, and to distract the church with needless controversy and litigation; and it throws upon all who have expressed their doubts of his soundness, the odium of weakening that harmony and mutual confidence which ought to exist between ministers of the

same church. We cannot, therefore, suffer the assertion that the charges against him were groundless to pass unchallenged. We cannot believe that so many men, as wise and good as Dr. Beecher, would permit their confidence in him to be destroyed or weakened, unless he had been imprudent enough to give them some cause for it. And we are persuaded that Dr. Beecher would have added to his reputation if, instead of bespeaking in a tone of arrogant superiority the mercy of the court for his prosecutor,\* and maintaining his own entire blamelessness, he had frankly admitted, at least, that he had made use on some occasions of incautious and imprudent phraseology which had naturally given rise to misapprehension of his views. The blame of the interruption of ministerial confidence, as far as he is concerned, would, to be sure, have been fixed upon himself by this avowal; but there it must be fixed, whether he be willing to receive it or not; there, if we mistake not, public estimation has already fixed it; and his frank assumption of it would have done him good instead of harm.

So much ground has Dr. Beecher really given for misapprehension of his theological opinions, that it is no easy matter even now to understand what he really believes. If we had only his *Views in Theology* to consult, we could readily understand him; but when we compare certain statements of doctrine in this work with his previous writings, we are perplexed beyond measure. We find him at different times avowing directly contrary opinions on the same subject.—With an ordinary man, we should at once settle this difficulty, by saying that he had doubtless seen good reason to change his opinions, and that we must learn what his present sentiments are from the latest publication of them. But Dr. Beecher cuts us off from this explanation in his own case by assuring us, “that his doctrinal views have been unchanged from the beginning,” “that he is in doctrine what he ever was;” and we are left therefore utterly at a loss in our conjectures, whether his earlier or his later writings contain the true exposition of his present views. There are statements in these writings, which no ingenuity of explanation can reconcile,—there are discrepancies which no sophistry can bridge over,—and the perception of these, in connexion with his declaration, that he has never changed his views, has involved us in bewilderment and doubt.

\* See Defence before the Presbytery, p. 80.

That we may not be accused in our turn of bringing forward "unfounded accusations," and thus imposing upon Dr. Beecher the necessity of further explanations, we will proceed to adduce evidence of the inconsistencies and contradictions to which we have alluded. The first subject discussed in his *Views in Theology* is Natural Ability; but we shall pass this topic for the present, and commence with the more important one of Original Sin. This doctrine is universally admitted to be fundamental to the Calvinistic system. He who denies this doctrine, as taught in our confession of faith, and in the writings of the reformers, however good Christian he may be, cannot be a good Calvinist; a logical necessity is laid upon him to abandon most of the distinctive peculiarities of the Calvinistic system. If there be one doctrine which lies more broadly than any other at the base of this system, this is that doctrine; and if this be removed, the whole structure must fall. It might naturally be supposed, therefore, that every professed Calvinist would have his opinions on this subject so well settled and defined, that he would not be blown about by every wind of doctrine, or when discussing it at different times, express himself in contradictory terms. The Pelagian and Calvinistic views of the effect of the fall of man upon the race, are so luminously distinct from each other, and they touch too upon so many points of the respective systems to which they belong, that he who makes it doubtful which of these views is his own, cannot, assuredly, escape the just censure of paltering in a double sense, save under the plea of incredible ignorance. How far any of these remarks apply to the case before us, our readers will judge for themselves, after reading the extracts which we are about to adduce.

We will first exhibit the opinions which Dr. Beecher held on the subject of original sin, previous to his impeachment and trial. In his second lecture on, "The causes and remedy of scepticism," we find the following passage. "The points to which I allude, as violated by a false philosophy, are the principles of personal identity, by which the posterity of Adam are distinct from or confounded with their ancestor, and the principles of personal accountability and desert of punishment, as men are made accountable and punished for his conduct, or become liable to misery as a universal consequence. The nature of sin and holiness, considered as material qualities, or the substance of the soul, or as instincts, or as the spontaneous action of mind under moral govern-

ment, in the full possession of all the elements of accountability." It is very evident which of the opposite principles here stated the author adopts as his own. Any one who was acquainted with the theological controversies on this subject, would be led to suppose, in reading this passage, that Dr. Beecher meant to condemn, as false philosophy, the opinion that men are in any sense held responsible for the sin of Adam, or punished on account of it, and to maintain in opposition to this philosophic dogma of the dark ages, that all the sin and misery which men suffer, is merely the consequence of Adam's transgression. Now this true philosophy of Dr. Beecher would not be objected to by most Pelagians. They would admit that we are involved in misery by the fall of Adam,—one main hinge upon which the whole controversy turns is, whether this misery is punitive or not in its character. But punishment for Adam's sin, according to the apparent meaning of the above extract, is a figment of that false philosophy which has been employed for the exposition of the Calvinistic system, and which, in Dr. Beecher's deliberate opinion, "has done more to obstruct the march of Christianity, and to paralyze the saving power of the gospel, and to raise up and organize around the church the unnumbered multitude, to behold, and wonder, and despise, and perish, than all other causes beside."

In the other sentence of the passage quoted, the false philosophy of the nature of sin and holiness is that which considers them "as material qualities, or the substance of the soul, or as instincts," and he admits no alternative to this view, save that which restricts them to "the spontaneous action of mind under moral government." This is the very language of the New Haven school. The mode of stating the question leaves us in about as much doubt as to the theology of the writer, as we should feel respecting the political opinions of one who should assert that the parties to the controversy which has been for some years waged in our country, were the people on the one side, and the bank monster on the other. Whenever we see a statement of the question touching the nature of sin and holiness, which assumes that there is no intermediate ground between the theory that restricts them to acts, and that which supposes them to be physical entities infused into the mind, or created instincts of the soul, we are at no loss to name the banner under which the writer, however disguised, is doing battle upon the theological arena. It would be strange, indeed, if a Calvinist,

in enumerating the true and false theories upon this subject, should omit the only one which is consistent with the doctrine of our standards respecting the corrupt and sinful nature which we inherit from our fallen parent; and not the less strange, if in giving what he intended to be the orthodox account of this matter, he should so broadly misrepresent and caricature it, as to make it absurd and repulsive. If we were compelled to choose between making sin a material property or adjunct of the soul, or limiting it to the spontaneous action of the mind, we certainly would choose the latter, since it is impossible to state the other opinion in terms that are not self-contradictory; but we would choose it with the distinct understanding, that it compelled us to abandon the Calvinistic system. It is not, in our view, more absurd to hold that sin is a material substance, than to maintain that sin is confined to the spontaneous action of the mind, and in connexion with this, that man inherits a sinful nature.—The first proposition is absurd, because there is an essential opposition of meaning between sin and substance; the other two, in their conjunction, are no less absurd, because a nature is not in any sense an act, and, of course, by the previous definition, cannot be sinful.

Is it wonderful then, when Dr. Beecher comes forward, lisping the very shibboleth of the New Haven school, teaching that all who do not restrict the nature of sin to spontaneous acts of the mind, believe in physical depravity, that he should be considered as having abandoned the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin? Ought he to complain of his brethren because they were not willing to charge upon him the monstrous absurdity of believing that a nature is an act, and may therefore be sinful? And what shall be thought of the modesty of the man, who, having printed such sentiments, has the face to declare to the world that the accusations against him are groundless, and in the plenitude of his compassion, to beg the court before which he is tried, that they will not punish his prosecutor as a slanderer?

Our next extracts shall be taken from Dr. Beecher's sermon on the "Native Character of Man." In this sermon he makes the following assertions. "Neither a holy, nor a depraved nature are (is) possible, without understanding, conscience, and choice. To say of an accountable creature, that he is depraved by nature, is only to say, that rendered capable by his Maker of obedience, he disobeys from the commencement of his accountability." "A depraved nature can no more exist without voluntary agency and accounta-



bility, than a material nature can exist, without solidity and extension." "If, therefore, man is depraved by nature, it is a voluntary and accountable nature which is depraved, exercised in disobedience to the law of God." "Native depravity then, is a state of the affections, in a voluntary accountable creature, at variance with divine requirement, from the beginning of accountability." "The entireness of human depravity consists, therefore, in the constant, voluntary refusal of man to love the Lord his God with supreme complacency and good-will." All this seems to be sufficiently explicit. There is no obscurity to occasion a doubt as to the author's meaning. The terms used are such as are commonly employed in the discussion of this subject, and the statements are all so clear and precise, that no commentary is needed to educe or illustrate their meaning. We doubt whether the writings of the New Haven divines could furnish an equal number of sentences, which more completely deny the actual or possible existence of a depraved nature in man prior to moral action.

Of this famous sermon, Dr. Beecher has, however, given a still more famous explanation. It was written, he says, with the view of refuting the error which claims, as moral excellencies, the various amiable qualities and kindly feelings which are found in unregenerate men, and thus undermines the doctrine of man's total depravity. At least this is one account of the object he had in view in writing the sermon; for we shall presently show that he has given a different one. In refuting the error above named, he contends that as he had no occasion to speak of any thing but actual sin, all that he says should be applied only to adult man. The substance of his defence, on this ground, consists, therefore, in interpolating the words actual and adult before depravity in all the passages where it occurs. This is so extraordinary an explanation of the matter, that we feel really embarrassed to know how to deal with it. There are some things so plain that they cannot be made plainer; there are explanations and arguments sometimes adduced in the course of discussion which are so foreign to the subject that nothing can be done with them but to declare that they are impertinent. Even thus is it with this defence of Dr. Beecher; we despair of being able to illustrate its incongruity to any one who does not at once perceive it. Because the primary object of the writer was not to discuss the subject of original sin, is it therefore certain that this subject would not be incidentally

alluded to? Is it considered a sound rule of interpretation to endeavour to ascertain what was the author's main design, and then to assume that every word has strict reference to this one subject? This is, in effect, what Dr. Beecher claims on his own behalf. "The sermon," he says, "was not designed to have any reference to original sin; it spake only of the present actual condition of adult mind; the question how man came into such a state was not so much as touched." Throughout the whole of his defence of this sermon there is an assumption that no part of it includes or refers to any thing beyond his original design in writing it.\* There is no argument beyond this assumption to show that the passages objected to do not teach what they have been supposed to teach. Because he did not intend to discuss the question how man came into his present state, therefore this question was not touched, though there are the passages in which, according to the common understanding of the English language, he has not only touched it, but decided that the present condition of man is owing to his voluntary disobedience. Because he designed to prove in the sermon that all men are actual transgressors, therefore whenever he speaks of depravity we must prefix the qualifying term, adult, no matter with what confusion of grammar or sense. The design and drift of a writer ought indeed to be consulted in interpreting obscure passages, and should decide the question between two doubtful meanings. But we have never before met with any one who would carry this canon of exegesis so far as to pervert entirely the ordinary construction and force of words, for the sake of accommodating them to the one main argument of the writer. The subject of original sin is so far germane to that of actual transgression, that we should not be surprised to see it alluded to by the most logical writer upon total depravity, and in attempting therefore to discover the meaning of any passage in his discourse, we should be guided by the most obvious signification of the terms employed. And surely there can be no doubt what is the most obvious meaning of the passages we have quoted from Dr. Beecher. They are so plain, that if his explanation of them is admissi-

\* Bishop Berkley wrote a treatise, called *Siris*, which had for its professed object to make known the healing virtues of tar-water, but in the course of which he goes into a discussion of the ancient philosophy, the harmonies of the universe, the nature of virtue, &c. Allowing him the same latitude which Dr. Beecher claims, he might insist upon his right to insert tar-water before virtue wherever it occurs.

ble, we must abandon language as the means of communicating ideas, and invent some less dubious method. If a "depraved nature" means actual transgression, then black may mean white, and square may mean round, and root may mean branch, and language may be thrown aside as less explicit than dumb signs.

Let us take one of these sentences and try Dr. Beecher's explanation upon it. "Neither a holy nor depraved nature is possible without understanding, conscience, and choice." In his Defence he interprets this to mean, that "neither a holy nor depraved nature, *in respect to actual depravity*, is possible." There is no difficulty in understanding the first of these assertions. By a depraved nature in man, all the world understand that disposition or bent of mind by which he is inclined to evil, and which is the source of all actual transgression. The declaration that such a nature is impossible, without understanding, reason, and choice, can only mean that depravity cannot be affirmed of man until he has reached the period at which personal accountability commences; and this is well known to be one of the prevalent theories upon this subject; and these are the very terms in which that theory is generally announced by those who confessedly hold it. But we are utterly at a loss to divine the meaning of the phrase "a depraved nature, in respect to actual depravity." If the term actual is used in the sense of real, as opposed to imaginary, then it would seem to teach that the depravity which exists prior to moral action is only a kind of metaphysical fiction, holding the same sort of relation to the truth that the square root of a negative quantity does to a real expression in algebra. If he uses the word actual as opposed to potential, and means to distinguish between a depraved nature *in esse* and *in posse*, we must deny the correctness of the distinction. A depraved nature is itself the potential existence of actual transgression. Had it been Dr. Beecher's intention merely to teach that all actual sin is voluntary, it would have been very easy for him to have expressed this idea; but we cannot understand how the extracts which we have given can be made to convey it, however modified they may be by the expletives, actual and adult. The original garment refuses to receive these heterogeneous patches.

We have said that Dr. Beecher has given two different accounts of his object in writing this sermon. One of them we have already given, the other is contained in the following extract from his Defence: "The question was as to the

voluntariness of the depravity of an adult man. Keep this in remembrance, and then let me explain the drift of that sermon. After proving that the depravity of man is very great, I proceed in the sermon to say that it is voluntary, and this doctrine I advance in opposition to the philosophy which represents the existence of a great black pool somewhere behind the will; I don't know how big, but which continually pours out its waters of death—waters which turn the will as if it were a mill-wheel attached to some sort of patent model, which is continually working out sin. . . . . The doctrine I meant to oppose was that of a physical, natural, constitutional depravity, totally involuntary; and as instinctive as the principle which teaches a robin to build her nest, or a lion to eat flesh and not grass. Against this notion of instinctive depravity, leading men of necessity to do nothing but sin, I composed the sermon, in which I declare that the depravity of man, implied in his destitution of religion, is voluntary," &c. We have no objection to this account of the matter, save that it is inconsistent with the one previously given. If the sermon were written to counteract the notion that men are partially holy on account of their natural amiableness, it seems to us that this by-play with the black-pool and robin red-breast theories of the will is quite as foreign to the topic as a touch at original sin would have been. Dr. Beecher has, however, just as good a right to quarrel with this great big black pool, as Don Quixotte had to fight with the windmill. And if he should see fit to exercise this right, we cannot find it in our hearts to blame him; we can only express our wonder that a man of his undoubted strength should expend it in beating the air, or in creating a big black pool, and then splashing in its dirty waters only to his own defilement. Dr. Beecher is not too old to learn. He has recently discovered, to his great amazement, that the doctrine of free agency, which he had previously thought was the product of New England wisdom, has been held in all ages of the church in connexion with the Calvinistic system. Yet it was upon this very point that he was formerly in the habit of breaking out into the most copious expressions of horror over the evils produced by that false philosophy which had been employed for the exposition of Calvinism. We have no doubt that he has since sincerely repented the injustice of which he has thus been guilty towards others, and regretted the loss of his own time which, as he has now discovered, was wasted in contending with shadows. And as

he is now upon the right track, he will probably soon discover that there are other forms of that false philosophy which he has attributed to old Calvinists, that are, in truth, nothing more than the spectra of his own distempered fancy.

We cannot see how this second account of the object of the sermon sheds any light upon the passages which we have quoted from it. Let us again take one of these extracts, and see whether there is the least relevancy in the explanation. "To say of an accountable creature that he is depraved by nature, is only to say, that, rendered capable by his Maker of obedience, he disobeys from the commencement of his accountability." This, by itself, seems sufficiently plain. It is the precise account which Prof. Fitch gave of man's depravity in his sermon on the "Nature of Sin," and which has since been repeatedly given from the New Haven school. It could hardly be made more definite than it is. And we do not see that it receives the least illustration from the author's information, that his object in writing the sermon was to drain off the big black pool which some explorers have found lying back of the will, or that his aim was to describe the depravity of adult man. He speaks here of the depravity which is by nature, and, as plainly and forcibly as words can do it, he excludes from it every thing but actual disobedience.

The difficulty under which Dr. Beecher felt himself to labour in his defence, will be further perceived in the claim which he, with apparent seriousness, puts forward, that in this very sermon he does teach and establish the doctrine of original sin. And how? Why, "by proving two of the fundamental doctrines always relied on by the orthodox church, and by Edwards in particular, to prove the doctrine of original sin,—I mean the doctrine of total depravity, and the doctrine of regeneration." Verily the narrow portals of the Calvinistic platform must be widened, if all who teach total depravity and regeneration are to be therefore considered as good believers in our doctrine of original sin. Upon this principle, it would seem if a man agrees with us in any one fact or doctrine, we are to assume that he agrees with us in all our inferences from it. Dr. Taylor believes and teaches that all men are sinners, that the first moral act, and all the successive acts of every man, until he is renewed, are sinful. He has urged this point quite as strenuously as Dr. Beecher. Are we therefore to conclude that Dr. Taylor believes the doctrine of original sin as taught in our standerds? We are

astonished and grieved when we see a man of Dr. Beecher's high standing engaged in the attempt to palm off such wretched sophistry—it hardly deserves so respectable a name—upon the Presbyterian church.

Dr. Beecher further asserts, that in one of the very passages “claimed to deny original sin, he does expressly allude to and recognize its existence as a reality.” Our readers will doubtless be curious to know what he considers a recognition of this doctrine. We quote the passage which contains it. “Whatever effect, therefore, the fall of man may have had on his race, it has not had the effect to render it impossible for man to love God religiously; and whatever may be the early constitution of man, there is nothing in it, and nothing withheld from it, which renders disobedience unavoidable and obedience impossible.” There can never be any lack of believers in the doctrine of original sin, if the vague, negative allusions, “whatever effect the fall of man may have had on his race,” and, “whatever may be the early constitution of man,” are to be considered a sufficient profession of faith. Who can withhold his sympathy from Dr. Beecher, in the affliction which he must have felt, when compelled to resort to such means as this to prove his orthodoxy? There is not a Pelagian or Socinian in the land, who might not, with perfect consistency, have uttered this sentence; and he must have felt himself hard pressed before he could have been driven so far to trifle with the public, and with his own character, as to allege it in proof of his recognition of the doctrine of original sin.

We have one more extract from Dr. Beecher's writings which we shall produce in evidence of his opinions on this subject prior to his trial. We solicit special attention to this passage, since its explicitness will be seen, if examined, to preclude all evasion and subterfuge. Through some neglect or oversight, which we deeply regret, it was not produced upon his trial. Had it been, we see not how the synod could have avoided convicting Dr. Beecher of having denied the doctrine of the confession of faith upon this point. The passage occurs in the controversy in which Dr. Beecher was engaged with the editor of the *Christian Examiner*, in the year 1828.\* It is in the following words.

“The reformers also, with once accord, taught that the sin of Adam was imputed to all his posterity, and that a corrupt

\* See *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, vol. 1. p. 158.

nature descends from him to every one of his posterity, in consequence of which infants are unholy, unfit for heaven, and justly exposed to future punishment. Their opinion seems to have been, that the very substance or essence of the soul was depraved, and that the moral contamination extended alike to all its powers and faculties, insomuch that sin became a property of every man's nature, and was propagated as really as flesh and blood. . . . . Our Puritan fathers adhered to the doctrine of original sin, as consisting in the imputation of Adam's sin, and in a hereditary depravity; and this continued to be the received doctrine of the churches of New England until after the time of Edwards. He adopted the views of the reformers on the subject of original sin, as consisting in the imputation of Adam's sin, and a depraved nature transmitted by descent. But after him, this mode of stating the subject was gradually changed, until long since, the prevailing doctrine in New England has been, that men are not guilty of Adam's sin, and that depravity is not of the substance of the soul, nor an inherent or physical quality, but is wholly voluntary, and consists in the transgression of the law, in such circumstances as constitutes accountability and desert of punishment."

Here at least, if never before, Dr. Beecher, to use one of his own expressions, is "fairly out," upon the subject of original sin. It is impossible to read this passage, and then doubt what his opinions were at the time he wrote it. Will he pretend that he was merely giving what was the prevalent doctrine in New England, and not stating his own views? The connexion in which this passage occurs precludes such a plea. The controversy which he was waging, was occasioned by a note to his sermon on the Moral Government of God, in which he had denied that the Calvinistic scheme involved the opinion that infants are damned. The editor of the *Christian Examiner* replied to this note; and Dr. Beecher, in his letter to him complains bitterly, that in maintaining his argument that Calvinists hold the offensive opinion in question, he makes use of exploded representations on the subject of original sin, instead of taking those which he knew were then generally adopted in New England. Dr. Beecher, therefore, was certainly guilty of duplicity in seeking to obtain for himself, what he deemed the benefit of these modified views of original sin, if he did not really hold them. But there is no doubt, there can be none, that he is here stating his own opinions. Were there any, it would be re-

moved by the following passage, which is found in close connexion with the one above quoted. "The pamphlets and treatises on this subject were written, and the subject settled before my recollection. But I have read them, and have searched the scriptures, and have, from the beginning, accommodated my phraseology to opinions which had been adopted as the result of an investigation which commenced more than seventy years ago, and has been settled more than fifty years." Dr. Beecher here declares, that the opinions which he had just presented, on the subject of original sin, were his own, that he had adopted them after careful study, and that he had preached them from the beginning.

Will he urge that he is here speaking of actual, or adult depravity? We should feel that we were unjust towards Dr. Beecher, in intimating the possibility of his resort to such grounds of defence, were it not for the specimen which he has already given of his wonderful capabilities in this line. But all the changes which he can ring upon the words, actual and adult, will not help him here. He is, in this part of his letter, professedly giving what he deems the true view of original sin, in opposition to the old Calvinistic doctrine, from which his adversary had drawn some of his arguments. It is then of infants, not adults, that he is writing;—it is of a depraved nature, existing prior to moral action, in distinction from whatever it is that he means by "a depraved nature, in respect to actual depravity."

Assuming what cannot be questioned, that this passage contains Dr. Beecher's views of original sin, it suggests several very obvious reflections. We see that Dr. Beecher, here, as in his other writings, misrepresents and caricatures the orthodox doctrine, that doctrine which he admits was generally held from the time of the reformation until after Edwards. After stating correctly the doctrine which they taught, he adds his own version of it in these words, "that the very substance or essence of the soul was depraved." And in giving an account of the change which had taken place in the mode of stating the subject, he makes the negative part of it to consist in the denial "that men are guilty of Adam's sin, and that depravity is of the substance of the soul, or an inherent or physical quality." This, then, was the doctrine which had been previously taught by Edwards, and his predecessors. But he otherwise represents their doctrine as teaching that "a corrupt nature descends from Adam



to every one of his posterity," or that "original sin consists in the imputation of Adam's sin, and in a hereditary depravity," or "a depraved nature transmitted by descent." Let it then be distinctly marked, and held in remembrance, that when Dr. Beecher rails at physical depravity, he means hereditary depravity;—when he attacks the opinion that the substance or essence of the soul is depraved, his shafts are levelled against the doctrine of a corrupt nature descending from Adam to his posterity. We have often been much perplexed in the attempt to understand what is meant by certain men, when they declaim against physical depravity, material sin, &c.; and we have sometimes been uncharitable enough to think that they had no meaning at all, and made use of these phrases merely to round a sentence or point an antithesis. But Dr. Beecher makes his meaning sufficiently plain. He uses physical depravity, and a depraved nature transmitted by descent, as convertible phrases;—and he leaves no halting place between the theory that depravity consists in a voluntary action, and that which makes it a physical quality. If this is done ignorantly,—if Dr. Beecher is really unable to perceive the difference between the orthodox doctrine of a corrupt nature, and that of a moral depravity in the physical structure of the soul, then he ought certainly to lay aside the office and the air of an instructor of his brethren in theology. But if the misrepresentation is made wilfully, we will venture to recommend to him the same discipline which he once advised in a similar case, the careful study of the ninth commandment. We are willing, however, in the present instance, to endure the pain of this evil report of our opinions, and even feel grateful to Dr. Beecher on account of it, because of the key which it furnishes to the passages in which he fulminates against physical depravity, and those who hold and teach it.

We were moreover struck, while reading this passage, with the wonderful similarity between its statements, and those already quoted from the sermon on the Native Character of Man. It is truly surprising that there should be such a strong likeness, a perfect identity indeed, between the two, when we consider that in the one he is describing actual depravity, or adult depravity, or a depraved nature in respect to actual depravity, and in the other, that depravity which belongs to original sin. Speaking of a depraved nature in respect to actual depravity, he says, "if, therefore, man is depraved by nature, it is a voluntary and accountable

nature which is depraved, exercised in disobedience to the law of God;"—and speaking of a depraved nature in respect to original sin, he says, "depravity is wholly voluntary, and consists in the transgression of the law in such circumstances as constitutes accountability and desert of punishment." We may surely be pardoned the natural error of supposing, that in these sentences he was describing the same thing. Especially do we think we may be forgiven this offence, when it is further observed that he uses the same phrases, native depravity, depraved nature, &c., in the one case to denote actual depravity, and in the other that which is not actual. And yet further would we plead in extenuation of our error, that Dr. Beecher informs us in this letter, that the views which it presents of original sin were those which he had held from the beginning, and to which he had always accommodated his phraseology. What, then, could have been more natural than for us to suppose, when we found in this letter a certain assertion made respecting "native depravity," and then found the same assertion respecting "native depravity," in a sermon written previously, that they both had reference to the same thing. If we have, indeed, erred in this supposition, we must pronounce it hazardous to attempt to interpret any production of Dr. Beecher, until he has first been tried for it, and had an opportunity to put in his explanation and defence.

Our last remark upon this exposition of the doctrine of original sin is, that the author himself cannot have the hardihood to deny that it is in direct conflict with the confession of faith. He expressly rejects the doctrine, whatever it was, which had been taught by the reformers, the Puritan fathers of New England, and by Edwards, and it has never been denied or doubted that the doctrine which they taught is that of our confession. He denies that men are guilty of Adam's sin, and thus rejects the doctrine of imputation. He asserts that all depravity is voluntary, and consists in the transgression of the law, discarding, as plainly as language can do it, the doctrine of a depraved nature transmitted from Adam to his posterity. Yet this doctrine, thus discredited, and contemptuously given over to the tender mercies of his Socinian adversary, is the doctrine of our standards. He does not simply modify the orthodox mode of stating this doctrine, he altogether rejects the doctrine itself. In a passage following the one we have given, he says, "These (the New England divines), while they disclaim the language held by Calvin

and Edwards on the subject of imputation, do, in accordance with the Bible and the reformers, teach that there is a connexion of some kind between the sin of Adam and the universal, voluntary, and entire depravity of his posterity; so that it is in consequence of Adam's sin that all mankind do sin voluntarily, as early as they are capable of accountability and moral action." This restriction of the whole matter to "a connexion of some kind" between Adam and his posterity, in consequence of which they all sin voluntarily as soon as they become capable of moral action, does more than discard our mode of representing the doctrine of original sin, as consisting in the imputation of Adam's sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of man's whole nature. By denying that we are in any sense guilty of Adam's sin, and rejecting the idea of a corrupt nature transmitted by descent, while it confines all depravity to actual transgression, it removes the whole ground of distinction between original and actual sin. It is mere quibbling, or something worse, to retain the phrase, when every thing that could be meant by it has been rejected. Besides actual transgression, Dr. Beecher teaches that there is nothing but "a connexion of some kind" existing between Adam and his posterity. But he certainly cannot contend for the absurdity of applying the term original sin to this connexion. Sin denotes something in the subject, not out of him. The phrase cannot be applied to the connexion itself, nor are we at liberty to affix it to the effect of this connexion upon the subjects of it, for this, he assures us, is actual transgression, not original sin. He believes that accountability does not "commence from the womb," and that the time when it does commence "is not and cannot be exactly known to any but the eye of God." Previous to this period, upon his theory, nothing more can be affirmed of the infant than that, in consequence of the sin of Adam, it is certain that it will sin voluntarily, as soon as it becomes capable of moral action. This is the utmost extent to which his doctrine can carry us; and what more gross misapplication of language is possible than to term this undefined connexion with Adam, or the certainty arising from it that the being will actually sin, original sin. This phrase should, in fairness, be thrown aside, if there can be no depravity or sin without "a transgression of the law under such circumstances as constitute accountability and desert of punishment." We should despair of being able to construct a categorical denial

Those who are acquainted with the controversies to which the subject of original sin has given rise, will at once perceive how explicitly this confession meets and rejects every error that has at any time prevailed. We have never seen, within the same compass, so close and strict a statement of the doctrine, one which so fully yielded all that the orthodox demand, and so carefully guarded against every thing to which they object. We do not believe that there is upon record a Calvinistic statement of this doctrine, which adds any thing which is not included in the view that Dr. Beecher here presents as his own. It would have been entirely satisfactory, therefore, and we should have rejoiced in it beyond measure, if in connexion with this profession of his faith, he had made a recantation of his former errors. Or we would have been satisfied with the virtual recantation, implied in this profession, if he had not seen fit to accompany it with the express declaration, "such, on the subject of original sin, are the views which I have always held and taught since I have been in the ministry." Again, he says, "my doctrinal opinions have been unchanged from the beginning." And yet again, "in doctrine I am what I have ever been." These declarations are the source of our perplexity and our misgivings. Here he declares, that ever since he has been in the ministry he has held and taught, "that original sin descends from Adam to his posterity, by ordinary generation," or, as he again expresses it in another passage, that "it descends from Adam, by natural generation to all his race." But in his letter to the editor of the *Christian Examiner*, he informs us, that he has from the beginning adopted those opinions of original sin which reject the idea presented by the reformers, "of a depraved nature, transmitted by descent." Here he professes to believe, "that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity;" in his letter he states his opinion to be, "that men are not guilty of Adam's sin." Here he affirms that "it (original sin) is involuntary;"\* in his letter he declares that there is no depravity save that which is "wholly voluntary." Here he teaches that infants are guilty, before they rise to personal accountability, and deserving God's wrath and curse; in his letter he tells us that there is no depravity or guilt, but that which arises from "the transgression of the law under such circumstances as constitute accountability and desert of punishment." Here he says of original sin, that "it is denominated by Edwards,

\* See *Views in Theology*, p. 193.

and justly, an exceedingly evil and depraved nature;"\* in his letter he declares that he has always repudiated the views and language of Edwards upon this subject.

Here is contradiction palpable and broad. The two views presented by Dr. Beecher in his earlier and his later publications, belong to two entirely different, two opposite systems. They have no common points of resemblance, and the same man can no more hold the two simultaneously in his faith, than he can believe both in the Ptolemaic and the Copernican system of the universe. Yet Dr. Beecher assures us again and again that he has never changed in doctrine; that he has always taught that native depravity is voluntary, and always taught that native depravity is involuntary. We know not which way to turn for a solution of this paradox. We are unwilling to believe that Dr. Beecher is so obtuse in his perception of truth, that he does not see the wide and bridgeless gulf between these two systems. We are reluctant, too, to believe that pride or false shame would keep him from acknowledging a change in his views, if himself conscious that such a change had taken place. And we would fain avoid the belief that in his orthodox professions, he uses words and terms in a different sense from that which he knows others will attach to them, thus reserving to himself the liberty of retreat, under the shelter of the esoteric sense, to his former views, whenever the days of trial for heresy shall have passed by. We can conceive no other solution, save that which is afforded by one of these hypotheses;—but we are unwilling to choose between them, and will leave our readers, after this exhibition of the facts and the difficulties of the case, to form their own conclusion.

We regret, most sincerely and deeply, the result of our examination into Dr. Beecher's opinions. It is painful to bring forward such charges as are implied in the exhibition we have made, against one whom we are constrained on so many accounts to admire and respect. But truth and justice are superior in their claims to personal considerations; and we have felt, that under the peculiar circumstances of the case, they required this exposure at our hands.

The only other topic which we intended to make the subject of extended comment, is the theory which Dr. Beecher gives of the will, in his discussion of Natural Ability. But we have already occupied so much space that we must defer our remarks on this point to a future number.

\* See Views, p. 194.