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## OBERLIN PERFECTIONISM

### I. THE MEN AND THE BEGINNINGS.

Oberlin College<sup>1</sup> had its origin in what seemed a wild dream that formed itself in 1832 in the mind of John J. Shipherd, home-missionary pastor of the little Presbyterian church in the village of Elyria, Ohio. As the scheme floated before his imagination, it was perhaps not very dissimilar to one of those communistic enterprises which were springing up throughout the country in the wake of the excitement aroused by Robert Owen. To that extent Shipherd may be accounted a brother spirit to John H. Noyes. But he had not the courage of conviction, to call it by no harsher name, which drove Noyes on in his reckless course. When he came to draw up the Oberlin "Covenant," he faltered. He provided only that "we will hold and manage our estates personally, but pledge as perfect a community of interest as though we held a community of property." By so narrow a margin Oberlin appears to have escaped becoming a decent Oneida Community: or rather, we should say, by so narrow a margin Oberlin appears to have escaped the early end which has befallen all communistic enterprises which wish to be decent; for communism and decency cannot exist together.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from this one point, the persistency of Shipherd's

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: J. H. Fairchild, *Oberlin, Its Origin, Progress and Results*, 1871, and *Oberlin, the Colony and the College*, 1883; W. G. Ballantyne, *Oberlin Jubilee, 1833-1883*, 1884; D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, 1898, pp. 87 ff. for some account of Shipherd's communistic leaning.

purpose and the energy of his will were incapable of faltering. By the end of 1833, he had some nine square miles of virgin forest in hand; the beginnings of a colony already settled on it, pledged to high thinking and hard living (not only no alcohol or tobacco, but also no coffee, no tea, no condiments); a large boarding-school building erected; efficient teachers at work in it, and a body of pupils, which numbered forty-four by the end of the session, gathered at their feet. There was of course only an "Academy" at first. But Shipherd's plan embraced also from the beginning a "College" and a "Theological Seminary"; and already early in 1834, there was a Board of Trustees in being, operating under a charter, couched in broad terms, which spoke of an "Oberlin Collegiate Institute." And by the autumn of that year there was a freshman class ready to enter at the opening of the next session (in the spring) "the collegiate department" of this Institute. Summer was term-time at Oberlin, winter vacation. Late in November, accordingly, Shipherd started out, armed with a commission from the Board of Trustees to obtain the means to make the step forward now become necessary. What he sought was money and a President. But like Saul, seeking the asses, he found much that he was not looking for. He found a whole Theological Seminary,—President, professors, pupils and endowment—all complete; and he brought it all back with him to Oberlin in the spring of 1835.

Shipherd always contended that he was supernaturally guided in this quest. And Asa Mahan, the President whom he found, fully agreed with him. Up to the end of his long life, Mahan constantly insisted that he was supernaturally called to the Presidency of Oberlin College, not in the providential sense in which this phrase is ordinarily employed, but with as immediate a supernaturalism as that with which Saul or David was designated king over Israel.<sup>3</sup> Shipherd, having money and a President to find, naturally should have gone east where money and Presidents were to be found.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Asa Mahan, *Autobiography*, 1881, p. 190.

But he discovered himself going south instead. "An irresistible impression" drove him without any clear intelligence justifying his action, in the wrong direction. So he reached Cincinnati instead of New York, and found—Mahan; who, everybody in Cincinnati told him, was the very person he was seeking. He thought so too; and with the more confidence that he could see now that he had been divinely guided to him. Mahan had a whole Theological Seminary ready for removal to Oberlin. There had been an abolitionist organization among the students of Lane Theological Seminary, which the Trustees of that Institution had endeavored to suppress. The result was that the students had withdrawn from the Seminary, practically in a body; and, housed near by, were endeavoring to continue their theological education independently, with only the aid of John Morgan, who had been tutor in the preparatory department at Lane and had withdrawn with the students. Mahan had been the single member of the Board of Trustees who had taken the students' part; and he now proposed that they, with Morgan, should go with him to Oberlin, thus completing at a stroke the three-storied structure proposed for that institution.

Excited by these bewildering occurrences, Shipherd, taking Mahan with him, proceeded east to complete his mission. He now, however, no longer sought money and a President, but money and a Professor of Theology. The office was offered on the way to Theodore G. Weld, the young abolitionist agitator, who had had much to do with the students' revolt at Lane and who was their idol. He pointed them rather to Charles G. Finney; and to Finney, then pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle Congregationalist Church, New York, accordingly they went. They found him depressed in body and spirit, with a feeling that the bow of his strength was broken and his evangelistic days were over;<sup>4</sup> and quite ready to listen to their proposal if only the

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<sup>4</sup> Preface to his *Sermons on Important Subjects* (1834) 1836, p. iv: "My health has been such as to render it probable that I shall never

necessary financial provision could be made. This was managed with the help of his friend, Arthur Tappan, who was always ready to multiply good works. One condition, however, was made by all—Tappan and Finney and Mahan and the Lane students alike. There was to be no color line drawn at Oberlin. The whole enterprise was near to wrecking on this condition. It was only with the greatest difficulty and in the end by a majority of only one vote, and that on an ambiguously worded resolution, that the Trustees were brought to comply with it. It was however thus complied with; and so Shipherd was able to bring his Theological Seminary to Oberlin in the spring of 1835.

The end of woes, however, was not yet. The New York backers of the enterprise failed; and it found itself plunged into the greatest financial straits. The students who had come from Lane proved a little difficult—some of them perhaps quite impossible—as from their antecedents it was to be anticipated they would.<sup>5</sup> His colleagues found Mahan himself something more than a little difficult.<sup>6</sup> Finney

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be able to labor as an evangelist again." Preface to his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), 2d ed. 1835, p. iii: "I am now a Pastor, and have not sufficient health to labor as an Evangelist."

<sup>5</sup> When Asa Mahan, *Autobiography*, p. 231, speaks of the lugubrious tone of their Christianity, some discount may properly be made on account of his natural zeal against a "miserable-sinner Christianity." Though they were "from among the brightest converts" of the great revivals, he says, "their common experience was represented in the words: 'Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord?'" Speaking of their tone of mind while still at Lane (pp. 239 ff.), he says: "Several of the most talented among them" refused to go to church saying they could "derive no benefit from the discourses of Dr. Beecher or any other pastor in the city." "They understood the whole subject." They did go to chapel, "and there listened to one of the feeblest preachers I ever knew," and openly said that feeble as they were, his sermons were as useful to them as any others in the city could be. "Of those young men," he remarks, "every one, so far as I could learn, afterwards made shipwreck of the faith. Only one or two of them entered the ministry at all, and they soon left it, under the influence of some of the absurdities that then obtained."

<sup>6</sup> D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, 1898, p. 40: "Certain faults and infirmities of his wrought not a little damage." Again, p. 244 f.: "His spirit was radical, positive and aggressive, and while he made

bristled with eccentricities.<sup>7</sup> Fads were exaggerated into fanaticisms, foibles into gospels. There were some who, worn out with the wrangle, left—"in a very unhappy frame," as the historian says.<sup>8</sup> Most stayed on, and rasped along. Meanwhile Finney and Mahan, with the valuable assistance of John Morgan and Henry Cowles—who completed the theological faculty—were preaching, with the greatest power and effect, the duty, the privilege, the possibility of a holy walk. The circumstances in which they found themselves imposed this particular topic upon them as, in a very distinct sense, their peculiar message; and they delivered it with great elaboration and persistency. As they pressed on in their more and more intensified exhortations, it came about that they were preaching just the duty and attainability of a life of perfect holiness, though they themselves had not faced the fact.

It required to be forced on their recognition by pressure from without. This came in the summer and autumn of 1836 as the second year of the Theological Seminary was drawing to a close. Under the exhortations of their preceptors the students perceived that precisely what was required of them was perfection. They put the question; and at length—though not until the ensuing winter—received the affirmative answer. We are assisting here at the birth of Oberlin Perfectionism. Once born, it proved a very vigorous and very exacting child. Its exposition and de-

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many warm friends and admirers, others not a few were stirred to disfavor and antagonism. . . . Certain serious defects attended his career, which in particular his associates in the faculty found it increasingly difficult to endure. After long forbearance and as a last resort it was determined to draw up a paper setting forth the facts in the case, to be signed by all and presented to the Trustees."

<sup>7</sup> For example, Leonard, as cited, p. 35: "With the advent of Mr. Finney it began to be taught that a strict Graham diet was the only one either hygienic or truly Christian, while meat and all condiments were to be eschewed." Compare pp. 209 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard, as cited, pp. 35, 261, 442. J. P. Cowles is alluded to, whose views, we are told, "were at some points so opposed to those of his associates, and who felt constrained to speak and act just as he felt, that his resignation was requested." He left Oberlin in 1839.

fence absorbed a very large part of the energies of the staff of theological instructors. It was Mahan who took the lead and made himself first and last its chief expounder. Finney, however, was first on the field. Spending the winter of 1836-1837 in New York, as was his custom during his early years at Oberlin, and preaching there a series of *Lectures to Professing Christians*—his new engrossment—he preached two of them on “Christian Perfection,” the first public proclamation of Oberlin Perfectionism. A semi-monthly newspaper—*The Oberlin Evangelist*—the first number of which appeared on the first of January, 1839, was established under the editorship of Henry Cowles, for the main purpose of propagating the new doctrine. In it there were at once printed certain articles on the all-absorbing topic, out of which books by Finney, Mahan and Cowles were soon gathered together.<sup>9</sup> Wherever Oberlin was heard of, it was Oberlin Perfectionism which was heard of first.<sup>10</sup>

The Oberlin Professors, we see, did not bring perfectionism to Oberlin. They brought an ultraistic temper<sup>11</sup> and the “New Divinity.” And the “New Divinity,” here too, as it had previously done in Central and Western New York, begot perfectionism out of its own loins. Oberlin was only an extension of Western New York into the wilds of Northern Ohio, and it repeated in its religious history, as it reproduced in its mental quality, the characteristic

<sup>9</sup> An address of Mahan’s published in the first number, was utilized as the core of a small book by him, called *Christian Perfection* (early in 1839), which at once became the chief vehicle of the doctrine.

<sup>10</sup> Asa Mahan, *Autobiography*, p. 261: “The college early became, principally through its President and Professor of Theology, the visible representative of the doctrine of the Higher Life.”

<sup>11</sup> What was understood at the time by the phrase “religious ultraism,” then very current, may be conveniently read in an admirable printed sermon of W. B. Sprague’s bearing that title (Albany, 1835). Cf. also D. R. Goodwin, “On Religious Ultraism,” in *The Literary and Theological Review*, vol. III, 1836, pp. 56-66, completed by “Radical Opinions,” same journal, pp. 253-265.

features of its stock. John Morgan<sup>12</sup> and Henry Cowles,<sup>13</sup> were not Western New York men. But they had both fallen under influences of the same general character, the one in contact with Lyman Beecher at Cincinnati, the other under the instruction of N. W. Taylor at Yale; and had received the same stamp. The situation was dominated in any case, however, by Finney and Mahan, both Western New York men, both "New Divinity" men, and both men of aggressive spirit and radical temper. Their previous lives, though springing out of the same soil, had run on very different lines, and it is rather remarkable to see them converge at Oberlin in a common end.

The details of Finney's early life which are current seem to rest altogether on his own recollections. He does not profess that these were complete, and there is some reason to suspect that they were not always altogether accurate. The main facts which he gives us<sup>14</sup> are that he was born in Warren, Litchfield Co., Connecticut, August 29, 1792; that two years afterwards the family removed to Brothertown, Oneida Co., New York; whence, however, while Finney was still so young a child that he retained no recollection of it, they were compelled, by the settlement of certain tribes of Indians there, to move to Hanover (subsequently renamed Kirkland), then a part of the large township of Paris, in the same county. There the boy grew up and went to school, until he was about sixteen years of age (Finney says he does not remember the exact date), when the family moved again,—to Henderson, Jefferson Co., New York, a

<sup>12</sup> Born at Cork, Ireland, 1802; graduated at Williams College, 1826; taught at New York: Preparatory School Teacher at Lane. Cf. Calvin Durfee, *Williams Biographical Annals*, 1871, p. 429.

<sup>13</sup> Born at Norfolk, Connecticut, 1803; graduated at Yale College, 1826, and Divinity School, 1829; pastor for seven years in Northern Ohio. Cf. D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, pp. 279 ff.; *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia*, and *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, *sub nom.*

<sup>14</sup> *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney, written by Himself*, 1876, pp. 4 ff.; P. H. Fowler, *Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism within the Bounds of the Synod of Central New York*, 1877, p. 258.

hamlet a little south of Sackett's Harbor. At this new home he taught school for something like four years. Then, when he was "about twenty years old," or "soon after he was twenty years of age," he went back to his ancestral home, Warren, Connecticut, and spent some four years there and in New Jersey, in study and teaching. Returning thence to his parents, he soon afterward entered the law-office of Benjamin Wright at Adams, New York, and began the study of law. This, he says, was in 1818.

It is a little difficult to form a vivid picture of the actual life of the boy within this framework. It was a raw frontier life; and there seem to have been few cultural and no religious ameliorations afforded him by his home associations. There may be some reason to believe that his father, like Lyman Beecher's, pursued the trade of a blacksmith;<sup>15</sup> and it is certain that the household, like that in which Beecher was bred, was without church connections.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Finney not only represents the household as without religion, but broadens out the representation until the impression is conveyed that no "religious privileges were accessible to him in the community." This is a, perhaps not unnatural, exaggeration. Looking back upon his youth, barren of religious impressions, he transferred to his surroundings much that belonged only to himself, and thus transmuted his fault into his misfortune. Even in the frontier districts in which he lived not only Christian people but Christian churches could be found by those who desired to be associated with them; and not only unlettered itinerants and absurd exhorters but also learned ministers and faithful pastors could be met with by those who sought

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<sup>15</sup> David W. Bartlett, in the sketch of Finney in his *Modern Agitators, or Pen-Portraits of Living American Reformers*, 1855, p. 152, says that as a boy Finney "found considerable time to wield the sledge at his father's anvil," taking thus "his first lesson in moulding the hot iron to a desired shape." His authority for the statement is not given.

<sup>16</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 4: "My parents were neither of them professors of religion, and I believe among our neighbors there were very few religious people." Compare Lyman Beecher's *Autobiography*, edited by Charles Beecher, vol. I, p. 78.



them out. The particular region in which Finney's boyhood was spent was indeed peculiarly well supplied with opportunities for religious culture. Clinton was but a short two-miles away, and Clinton was already a center of religious influence. There seems also to have been an organized religious society in his own hamlet with so excellent a minister as P. V. Bogue at the head of it.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty with Finney's early religious training was not that he lacked opportunity but that he lacked desire for it.

Things naturally were different when the family left this favored region (about 1808) and made a new home for itself in the backwoods of Jefferson County. There was

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<sup>17</sup> See the "Journal of the Rev. John Taylor, on a Mission through the Mohawk and Black River Country, in the year 1802," printed in E. B. O'Callaghan, *The Documentary History of the State of New York*, vol. II, 1850, p. 1112. "Most of the churches in this part of the world are on the presbyterian plan. The church at Clinton, is, however, congregational. Mr. Norton has a church containing 240 members and this people is considered to be the most harmonious, regular, and pious of any in the northern part of the State of New York. In this town, or rather parish, is an academy, which is in a flourishing state. A Mr. Porter, an excellent character, and a preacher, is precentor. They have one usher, and about 60 scholars. This institution promises fair to be of great service to this part of the country. Piety is very much encouraged in it and some young gentlemen have become preachers who have received education in it. There are in the town a few Universalists, and one small Baptist church, but not a sufficient number to have any influence. In the Society of Paris, of which Clinton is a part, Mr. Steele is pastor; he is said to be a good and reputable man—he has a respectable congregation. In Hanover, a society of Paris, Mr. Bogue is Pastor." Cf. Fowler, as cited, p. 180. The church at Clinton was organized in 1791 by Jonathan Edwards the younger; Asahel Strong Norton was installed pastor of it in 1793 "and remained there for forty years, upheld by grace and the support of an unwavering faithfulness, an unerring judgment, an unspoiled character, and a blameless life" (Fowler, p. 90). For a biographical sketch of Bogue see Fowler, pp. 464, f. After a successful ministry at Winchester, Conn. (from 1791), he was employed in New York by the Missionary Society of Connecticut (from 1798), "and then accepted a call to Hanover, (now Kirkland) Oneida County, where he was equally successful for a number of years, and after that took charge of a church at Vernon Center." This appears to extend Bogue's pastorate at Kirkland through most of Finney's residence there.

practically no settled ministry at that time in this region;<sup>18</sup> and the young school-teacher passed some four years here without easy access to the stated means of grace. Returning thence to civilization and religious privileges he was able to sit, however, Sabbath after Sabbath, in the choir-gallery of good Peter Starr's church at Warren, Connecticut, unmoved to any spiritual response by his pastor's faithful preaching.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile changes were taking place in Jefferson County. A revival had swept through that region in 1815.<sup>20</sup> Settled churches were being established. A Presbyterian church at Sackett's Harbor which in 1816 had called to its pastorate Edward Finley Snowden, a man of the highest quality, was formally organized in the early months of 1817.<sup>21</sup> A Congregationalist Church, soon to become Presbyterian, was organized at Adams.<sup>22</sup> When Finney returned to his father's house in 1816, or somewhat later, it was no longer to a community in which the stated means of grace were inaccessible, and no longer to a household to which the grace of God was a stranger. A brother

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<sup>18</sup> Fowler, as cited, p. 180: "That region also suffered long for the want of means of grace. A minister who visited it in 1816, relates: 'To the north as far as the St. Lawrence and east to Champlain, there are probably not six gospel ministers'—an extent of country including the quarter of the State of New York. . . . And a little later, a missionary writes, 'we could not hear of any minister in the St. Lawrence country, and there are very few on the Black River.'"

<sup>19</sup> *Memoirs*, pp. 6 f.: G. Frederick Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> For biographical notice of Snowden, see Fowler, pp. 647 f., and J. F. Hageman, *History of Princeton and its Institutions*, 1879, vol. ii, p. 94 ff. Cf. W. B. Sprague, *Annals*, vol. iii, p. 341. He was dismissed by the Presbytery of Oneida, to take charge of the church at Sackett's Harbor in 1816 but the formal organization of the church did not take place until Feb. 17, 1817.

<sup>22</sup> In the *Minutes* of the Presbyterian General Assssembly for 1819 these two churches stand side by side in the Presbytery of St. Lawrence: Sackett's Harbour, Samuel F. Snowden, and Adams North Congregational Church, Edward W. Rosseter. We quote from the *Minutes* of 1819, since there are no statistical tables in those of the immediately preceding years.

had given himself to God during his absence.<sup>23</sup> If he himself still knew nothing of the grace of God, that could only be because he did not wish to know anything of it. We are glad to be told that he was not in any sense vicious:<sup>24</sup> he was, however, in every sense godless. It was not that he had no contact with religion. If he had not a praying mother, he had a praying sweetheart who did not cease to bear him on her heart before God;<sup>25</sup> and it is obvious from his own narrative that he was repeatedly more or less affected by the religious appeal. If he did not know God it was because he refused to have God in his knowledge. He was not ignorant of Christianity; he was, as a contemporary puts it "a great opposer of the Church before his conversion."<sup>26</sup> Or, as the historian phrases it, "he was without godliness and with the spirit of a sceptic and scoffer."<sup>27</sup>

When Finney, yielding to the persuasions of his invalid mother who wished him to remain near her, gave up his

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<sup>23</sup> In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Ed. of 1851, p. 429, Finney relates this incident: "I well recollect, when far from home, and while an impenitent sinner, I received a letter from my youngest brother, informing me that he was converted to God. He, if he was converted, was, as I supposed, the first and only member of the family who then had a hope of salvation. I was at the time, and both before and after, one of the most careless of sinners, and yet on receiving this intelligence, I actually wept for joy and gratitude that one of so prayerless a family was likely to be saved."

<sup>24</sup> Hiram Mead, *The Congregational Quarterly*, January 1877, p. 3: "It is a remarkable fact, which he has not thought worthy of notice, that in spite of his lack of religious advantages, he never became reckless or vicious. As a young man, he was spirited, and, no doubt, sometimes rough and hilarious; but, considering his associations, he was exceptionally conscientious and high-minded."

<sup>25</sup> G. F. Wright, as cited, p. 37, tells us that Finney's sweetheart, (her home was at Whitestown, only a few miles from Kirkland) "had been deeply interested in praying for Finney's conversion in the days of his impenitence."

<sup>26</sup> E. H. Snowden in the *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine*, May 1838, p. 236. Snowden (son of S. F. Snowden, mentioned above) had been a pastor at Brownsville where he says both Finney and Burchard had labored—disastrously to the church. Cf. Finney's *Memoirs*, p. 111ff.

<sup>27</sup> D. L. Leonard, *Story of Oberlin*, p. 128.

purpose of further pursuing his literary education, and entered the law-office of Benjamin Wright (afterwards Wright and Wardwell) at Adams, in 1818 (he was then twenty-six years old), he seemed to have come to his own. He was peculiarly endowed for the work of an advocate, and we are not surprised to learn that he loved his profession and was successful in its practice from the very first. An indelible impression was left upon his mind by his legal studies, and his habits of thought and modes of public speech were fixed for life during the four short years of his practice at the bar. He was not to be left, however, to the peaceful prosecution of his chosen profession. He was already suffering under a certain amount of religious uneasiness; and the circumstances of his life in Adams did not permit him to escape from the daily appeal of religion to him. Religion had always been within his reach—the difference was only comparative. “Up to this time,”<sup>28</sup> he says, “I had never enjoyed *what might be called* religious privileges”: “I had never lived in a praying community *except* during the period when I was attending the high school in New England”: “At Adams, for the first time, I sat *statedly, for a length of time*, under an educated ministry:” “I had never, until this time, lived where I could attend a *stated* prayermeeting.” The qualifications, which have been thrown up to attention by italicizing them, deserve the most marked emphasis. It is only by regarding them that we obtain a view of the true state of the case. What happened to Finney at Adams was that he was no longer permitted to neglect religion. The young pastor of the Presbyterian church there, George W. Gale, was a man of force and a pastor of parts. He never permitted this fine young lawyer, who was scoffing at religion, but was clearly not easy in his mind about it, to escape beyond its influence. He made him leader of the choir and so secured his constant attendance at the church. He was in the habit, Finney naïvely says, “of dropping in at our office frequently and seemed anxious to know what impression

<sup>28</sup> *Memoirs*, pp. 6 ff.

his sermons had made on my mind,"—apparently not dreaming that that was not vanity on Gale's part, but good pastoral work. Finney found himself going not merely to church but to prayer-meeting. He says in his old age that he does not recollect having ever attended a prayer-meeting before: and now he wished to do so, partly from curiosity, and partly from an uneasiness of mind on the subject which he could not well define.<sup>29</sup> He got a Bible, the first he had ever owned; and took to reading it, at first under cover of interest in Biblical law, but soon with deeper concern. He did not easily yield; he was a harsh critic of his pastor's sermons and of the prayers of Christians. But Gale's zeal did not flag; and we may be sure he saw clearly enough the signs of the coming end.

Precisely how the end came, we are not quite sure. Finney tells us that he "was brought face to face with the question whether he would accept Christ."<sup>30</sup> On a Sabbath evening in the autumn of 1821, he says, "I made up my mind that I would settle the question of my soul's salvation at once."<sup>31</sup> So closely is his account confined to his own subjective experiences that the reader is tempted to suppose that there were no objective occurrences by which they were brought about. In point of fact Finney's conversion took place in a great revival; and it was currently supposed that his final step was the result of the exhortations of Jedediah Burchard.<sup>32</sup> Ever since his return to the West he had been

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<sup>29</sup> Tract on *Prevailing Prayer*.

<sup>30</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> P. 12.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Joseph I. Foot (*Literary and Theological Review*, March, 1828, p. 70) when speaking of the fanatical teaching of John Truair, continues: "Over the field where Truair had recently sown the seeds, the Rev. J. Burchard soon passed, whose subsequent labors in the vicinity are said to have brought forth the Rev. C. G. Finney." A more favorable opinion of Truair is expressed by Fowler, as cited, pp. 644 ff., and as favorable an account of Burchard as could be given may be found in the same work, pp. 278 ff. Burchard was at the time still a layman, resident at Sackett's Harbor, and zealously holding lay services there and at Adams.

living in the presence of revival conditions. The revival of 1815 already mentioned as sweeping over this region, had been followed by others without intermission. Sixty-five converts were added to the little church at Adams in 1819, at the opening of Gale's ministry there. Seventy were added to the church at Sackett's Harbor in 1820. In 1821 the whole region was stirred to its depths; from eight hundred to a thousand converts were reported from Jefferson County—no fewer than seventy or eighty from Finney's home hamlet, Henderson. In Adams itself one of the churches received forty-four new members and the other sixty or seventy.<sup>33</sup> It was in these stirring scenes that Finney's conversion took place. He gives us a very detailed account of his experiences in it.<sup>34</sup> The most notable feature of these experiences is their supernaturalism; a supernaturalism not wholly in keeping with his strenuous subsequent insistence on the "make yourself a new heart" of the "New Divinity"; there is imbedded in them a most poignant experience of express inability.<sup>35</sup> The account of them, written in his old age, is more or less adjusted to his subsequent modes of thought,<sup>36</sup> and closes with a couple of odd paragraphs in which he "improves" his conversion by rep-

<sup>33</sup> Fowler, as cited, p. 190, drawing the details from *The Utica Christian Repository*, of the time. The general fact is safeguarded by the report of the Presbytery of St. Lawrence itself, which mentions revivals as occurring at Watertown, Sackett's Harbor, Adams, first and second, Lorraine, and Rodman.

<sup>34</sup> *Memoirs*, chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> Lyman H. Atwater, *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, Oct. 1876, p. 706 remarks on this, while G. F. Wright, p. 9 seeks to explain it away.

<sup>36</sup> G. F. Wright, as cited, p. 6, speaking of interpreting Finney's conversion says: "The difficulty of such an interpretation is also somewhat increased by the fact that, in the *Memoirs* by himself, Finney has accompanied his narrative by numerous doctrinal disquisitions, in which those familiar with the controversies of the time readily detect the results of subsequent years of reflection interjecting their later theology in the narrative of early experience." "It is extremely improbable," he declares, "that the theological system defended in his later life burst upon his mind at the outset in such complete form as his own narrative would imply."

resenting it as impressing then and there indelibly on his mind his later doctrines of justification *in foro conscientiae* rather than *in foro Dei*, and of its issue in sinlessness. "I could not feel a sense of guilt or condemnation, by any effort that I could make; my sins were gone; and I do not think I felt any more sense of guilt than if I had never sinned. . . . I felt myself justified by faith; and, so far as I could see, I was in a state in which I did not sin. Instead of feeling that I was sinning all the time, my heart was so full of love that it overflowed—I could not feel that I was sinning against God, nor could I recover the least sense of guilt for my past sins."<sup>37</sup> He adds: "Of this experience I said nothing that I recollect, at the time, to anybody; that is, of this experience of justification."

Finney emerged from his conversion a new man: the "sceptic and scoffer" had become the believer and zealous propagandist. His devotion to the legal profession fell away at once with his old man; he assumed immediately the new profession of bringing men to Christ. A judicial case on which he was engaged came up for trial the morning after his conversion. "I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead His cause and I cannot plead yours," he said to his astonished client. And at once he went out on the streets to compel them to come in. It is not possible to obtain a connected view of his activities during the two years between the outstanding dates of his conversion in the autumn of 1821 and his licensure by the Presbytery of St. Lawrence on Dec. 30, 1823. His biographer says that "about as much mystery hangs over the first year and a half of Finney's life subsequent to his conversion as that which shrouds the corresponding period of the apostle Paul's renewed life."<sup>38</sup> The comparison, to be sure, is not very apt; but it is true that although we know many details of Finney's activities during this period and its general character is clear, our knowledge of it remains confused.

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<sup>37</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 23; cf. 18.

<sup>38</sup> G. F. Wright, as cited, p. 19.

The account Finney gives of himself after his conversion loses itself in unordered details; and his dates give us no guidance, being all wrong. He makes it perfectly plain, however, that he at once gave himself to active Christian work, which centered in the church at Adams, but reached out also at least to his old home at Henderson; there he had the happiness of bringing his parents to Christ. From another account,<sup>39</sup> we learn that he "actively engaged in the same schoolhouse labors" which were being carried on by Jedediah Burchard, as a layworker, from his center at Sackett's Harbor.

In the midst of these activities, he was taken under the care of Presbytery of St. Lawrence with a view to the gospel ministry, at a meeting held at Adams, June 25, 1823, and was "directed to pursue his studies under the direction of Rev. Messrs. Gale and Boardman."<sup>40</sup> It would not have been easy to find better men for this service.<sup>41</sup> They were both men of sufficient learning, great force of character, and skill in dealing with men. The whole work apparently, however, fell into the hands of Gale, who was also Finney's pastor,<sup>42</sup> and with whom he was already in consultation. There was no mental sympathy between the two young men—Gale was now in his thirty-fourth year and Finney in his thirty-first: each was conscious of native power, and was tenacious of his opinions; and the so-called instruction appears to have degenerated into a constant wrangle. Finney brought to Gale the unordered Pelagianism of the man in the street, strengthened and sharpened by the habits

<sup>39</sup> Fowler, as cited, p. 190.

<sup>40</sup> Fowler, p. 258; G. F. Wright, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> There are biographical sketches of both in Alfred Nevin's *Encyclopaedia of the Presbyterian Church*, 1834, *sub nomm.*, and in Fowler, as cited, pp. 190, 467 and 552 respectively. For Gale see also Martha F. Webster, *Seventy-five Significant Years; The Story of Knox College, 1837-1912, 1912*, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 46: "They appointed my pastor to superintend my studies." On p. 140 accordingly he calls Gale simply, "my theological teacher," and on p. 153, with meticulous care, explains that Gale had "by direction of the Presbytery attended somewhat to my theological studies."



of thought picked up in the law-courts; and he used Gale merely as an anvil on which to beat his own views into shape. His attitude at first was one of mere denial; he rejected with decision, not to say violence, the evangelical system which Gale sought to inculcate. The positive construction naturally came more slowly. "My views took on a positive type but slowly. At first I found myself unable to receive his peculiar views; and then gradually formed views of my own in opposition to them, which appeared to me to be unequivocally taught in the Bible."<sup>43</sup> We do not know when his views were fully formed. When they were, they had run into the mold of the "New Divinity" in the special form in which it was being taught at the moment in New Haven. There are some who think this result purely accidental: Finney, a great original thinker, reproduced for himself without any connection with him whatever, what N. W. Taylor was teaching with such revolutionary effect in New Haven.<sup>44</sup> So far as the fundamental principle and general substance of his thought are concerned no doubt this is the true account to give of its origin. Pelagianism, unfortunately, does not wait to be imported from New Haven, and does not require inculcating—it is the instinctive thought of the natural man. But Finney's thought ran not merely into the general mold of Pelagianism, but into the special mold of the particular mode of stating Pelagianism which had been worked out by N. W. Taylor. The historian of New England Theology feels compelled therefore to say that "independent as it was, and vigorously as its author had impressed upon it the marks of his own pronounced individuality," Finney's theology "may be dismissed in the one word 'Taylorism.'"<sup>45</sup> There were "vari-

<sup>43</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> For example, A. T. Swing, *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1900, 465: "What in New England had been gradually evolved from Old Calvinism through two generations of theological reformers was substantially wrought out independently of them by President Finney's rational revolt (*Memoirs*, pp. 7, 42-60), which was so closely connected with his conversion as to be practically inseparable from it."

<sup>45</sup> Frank H. Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology*, 1907, p. 467.

ous underground currents," he says,<sup>46</sup> which "set from New Haven westward, and some of them bore theological ideas into the region where Finney was." We do not need, however, to raise question as to the channels of communication by which Taylorism was brought to Finney. Intercourse between Connecticut and Western New York was constant; Finney received part of his education in Connecticut and his was the common case; all the ministers of his acquaintance were trained in the east and came from the east and maintained connection with the east; and Taylorism was, at the moment, the vogue. What we need more particularly to ask ourselves is only, how far at this early date Finney's views had crystallized into distinctly Taylorite shape. According to his own representation in his *Memoirs* they had already done so, at least in general, at the opening of his ministry; and certainly we cannot trace any other type of teaching in any account we have of his work. We know no other Finney than the Taylorite Finney.

On the 30th of December 1823, only six months after he had been taken under the care of the Presbytery, Finney was licensed to preach the Gospel at a meeting of the Presbytery of St. Lawrence held at Adams. He tells us that the Presbytery dealt gently with him and avoided raising questions on which he differed from it. Having now become a minister, he entered at once upon his ministerial labors in the northern part of Jefferson County—Evans Mills and Antwerp—as a missionary in the employment of the Female Missionary Society of the Western District of New York. As such a man naturally would be, he was successful in his labors from the start. He was ordained on his field, July 1, 1824, at a meeting of the Presbytery at Evans Mills; and seems to have contemplated settling at that place in a permanent pastorate. He was drawn off, however, into further evangelistic labors, and prosecuted them unbrokenly in Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties up to the autumn of 1825. During these two years he

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<sup>46</sup> P. 453.

lived the ordinary life of a frontier missionary, witnessing the same kinds of incidents—some of them bizarre enough—making the common experiences, but reaping more than ordinarily rich a harvest. According to his representations the matter of his preaching was constantly the “New Divinity”—pressed on his hearers with the pungency of expression, extremity of statement, and polemical vehemence, which belonged to his natural temperament.

This period was brought to a close, and the greatest episode of Finney’s life inaugurated, by an unforeseen occurrence. He visited the Synod of Utica, of which he was a member, in October 1825,<sup>47</sup> and on beginning his return journey home was waylaid by G. W. Gale, his “theological teacher,” as he calls him here,<sup>48</sup> and induced to turn aside to preach at Western. Gale had been compelled by ill health to resign his charge at Adams in 1823, shortly before Finney left that place, and was now engaged on a farm at Western in laying the foundations of what was to be an eminently successful and indeed famous Manual Labor Institution, the parent of many less successful similar ventures. This preaching at Western broadened out into seven years (1825-1832) of probably the most spectacular revival activity the country has ever witnessed. That Finney felt himself to have taken a decisive step forward in entering upon this work,—to have advanced to a new stage in his career—may be indicated by his transferring his presbyterial membership from the presbytery of St. Lawrence to that of Oneida.<sup>49</sup> He had turned his back on frontier work: henceforth his labors lay in the towns and cities of this rich and populous region, with their established churches

<sup>47</sup> G. F. Wright, as cited, p. 46, erroneously says “October 1826.” Fowler, as cited, p. 202, says “the last of September, 1825.” Finney himself (*Memoirs* p. 140) says it was in October.

<sup>48</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> In the *Minutes of the General Assembly*, for 1825, Finney is listed as a W. C. of the Presbytery of St. Lawrence. In the *Minutes* for 1828, he is listed as a W. C. of the Presbytery of Oneida. These lists were at that time printed only every three years: there are none therefore for 1826 and 1827.

and organized religious activities,—and beyond. In his *Memoirs* he marks the transition by pausing to note that “at this place commenced that series of revivals, afterward called ‘The Western Revivals.’” Lyman Beecher calls them by the more designative name of “the Oneida denunciatory revivals.”<sup>50</sup> They may have owed the feature which won them this designation, and much else about them that brought them into disrepute, in part at least to the circumstance that they were an invasion of the backwoods into civilization. Here was this young man, but two years a minister, but four a Christian, with no traditions of refinement behind him, and no experience of preaching save as a frontier missionary, suddenly leading an assault upon the churches. He was naturally extravagant in his assertions, imperious and harsh in his bearing, relying more on harrowing men’s feelings than on melting them with tender appeal. “Force,” says the judicious observer whom we are here drawing upon—“force was his factor, and ‘breaking down’ his process.”<sup>51</sup> And in exercising this force he did not shrink from denunciations which bordered on the defamatory, or from the free use of language which can be characterized no otherwise than as coarse and irreverent.

All this was no doubt to be expected in the circumstances; and it was to be expected also no doubt that Finney should give himself of set purpose to stir up a commotion; and, having the assistance of a band of able coadjutors, that he should succeed in doing so to an incredible extent. The whole region was stricken with religious excitement, and nothing was permitted to stand in the way of fanning this excitement into ever hotter flames. Parishes were invaded without invitation, churches divided, opposing ministers “broken down,” or even driven from their pulpits, the people everywhere set and kept on edge. Finney was under no illusions as to the nature of this excitement or as to its dangers. He did not confound it with a movement of grace

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<sup>50</sup> *Autobiography*, Edited by Charles Beecher, vol. ii, p. 345.

<sup>51</sup> Fowler, as cited, p. 264.

It was only an instrument which he used to attract popular attention to the business he had in hand. It served him in other words as a means of "advance publicity." "It seems sometimes to be indispensable," he says,<sup>52</sup> that a high degree of excitement should prevail for a time, to arrest public and individual attention, and to draw people off from other pursuits to attend to the concerns of their souls." This function served, the excitement is so little of further value that it becomes noxious; it now draws the mind off from the religion to prepare the way for which it is invoked, and if it were long continued, "in the high degree in which it is often witnessed," it could end in nothing but insanity. Nevertheless Finney permitted himself to play with this fire; and it is a question whether his chief work in this region consisted in much else than in kindling it. Certainly the characteristic feature of these "Western Revivals" lies in the immensity of the religious excitement engendered by them; and it is matter of discussion until to-day whether their chief results are not summed up in this effect. That many souls were born again and became ultimately the support and stay of the churches of the region, nobody doubts. As little does anybody doubt that grave evils also resulted, the effects of which have been overcome only with difficulty and through the lapse of time. There is room for difference only in the relative estimate placed on these two opposite effects.

One reason why many were converted in these revivals was that there were very many to be converted; and the character of this large unconverted multitude accounts, no doubt, in part also for their accessibility to a revival of this type. The churches were in a depressed state and this meant both an abnormally low condition of Christian life within them, and an abnormally large mass of indifference or worse without them: an abnormal reaction was to be expected, and was indeed inevitable. Asa Mahan tells us,<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Views of Sanctification*, 1840, p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Autobiography*, 1881, p. 221.

that, observing these things, he had formed the distinct impression, before the revival came, that they must have a great and general revival of religion, or the churches would soon become extinct. "My reasons for this conviction," says he, "were two-fold: the general and embittered opposition to religion itself, and the appalling neglect of religious services, on the part of the unconverted, outside the churches, on the one hand; and the utter worldliness and indifference to the interests of souls and the cause of religion itself on the part of professors of Christianity, on the other." "No one," he adds, "not personally acquainted with the facts as they were can conceive how appalling these two aspects of the moral and religious state of the community then appeared." The harvest was ripe and waiting for the sickle. It must be borne in mind, also, that a very large proportion of those swept into the churches by the excitement of the revival were not really converted, as their subsequent history only too clearly proved. Joseph Ives Foot, writing in 1838, is constrained to say:<sup>54</sup> "During ten years hundreds and perhaps thousands were annually reported to be converted on all hands; but now it is admitted, that his (Finney's) real converts are comparatively few. It is declared even by himself that 'the great body of them are a disgrace to religion;' as a consequence of their defections, practical evils, great, terrible, and innumerable, are in various quarters rushing in on the Church."

It is very true that Finney could not conceal the instability of his converts from himself. Later he found a reason for it. It was because he had brought them only into traditional Christianity, and not into perfectionism. "While I inculcated the common views," he says,<sup>55</sup> meaning the common views as to an as yet imperfect sanctification, "I was often instrumental in bringing Christians under

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<sup>54</sup> *Literary and Theological Review*, March 1838, p. 39. For Foot see W. B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. iv, 1858, pp. 669 ff., and the *Memoir* by his brother, George Foot, mentioned by Sprague.

<sup>55</sup> *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, ed. 1851, p. 619.

great conviction and into a state of temporary repentance and faith"—it is thus that he speaks of his entire evangelistic work up to 1836!—"but," he continues, "falling short of urging them up to a point where they would become so acquainted with Christ as to abide in Him, they would soon relapse again into their former state. I seldom saw, and can now understand that I had no reason to expect to see, under the instruction that I then gave, such a state of religious principle, understanding and confirmed walking with God, among Christians as I have seen since the change in my views and instructions." There lies in this passage an affecting acknowledgment of the failure of his early evangelistic labors to produce permanent results. One of the odd things connected with it, however, is that Finney fancies that, had he preached perfectionism, the effect might have been different—meaning that the perfectionism of his converts would have protected them from sinning. In point of fact, though he did not himself preach perfectionism, his preaching made perfectionists, as more than one witness testifies;<sup>56</sup> and his preaching of perfectionism could scarcely have done more than that. Yet the results were as we have seen. Jedediah Burchard roundly asserts that all revivals produce a crop of perfectionists, having in mind of course, the type of revival known to him. Finney does not go as far as that, but is willing to allow that revivals—again of course revivals such as he fomented—are commonly accompanied by a certain amount of what he would call fanaticism. In a tract written in his old age, called *Hindrances to Revivals*, he declares that he has sel-

<sup>56</sup> Take for example the following words of Joseph I. Foot (*Literary and Theological Review*, March 1838, p. 70): "These doctrines with a corresponding system of measures were driven like a hurricane through the churches. . . . Hundreds and thousands . . . were led to believe themselves converted, and were immediately driven into the church. . . . Many of his (Finney's) spiritual progeny, under the abilities of his system [that is, under his teaching of a Pelagian ability of will], and the several influences which acted upon them, soon manifested their fatherhood [Pelagian] and declared themselves to be perfect. . . ."

dom seen a revival in which a bitter, denunciatory, fault-finding spirit did not make its appearance sooner or later, and that to a considerable extent. His account of this phenomenon is that when the Spirit of God is poured out on a people, Satan pours himself out on them too.

The phenomenon, however, will admit of another explanation, especially when we learn that in propagating these revivals everything was bent to the production of the excited state of feeling that was aimed at, and all ordinary Christian duties were in abeyance—absorbed in the one duty of exaltation of feeling. Thus, for example, Josephus Brockway<sup>57</sup> tells us that it was noted by all during the revival excitement at Troy in 1826-7, that the whole charitable work of the churches fell away and even the Sabbath Schools were neglected: all manifestations of Christian love stopped: there was nothing, he says, but “a machine put in motion by violence and carried on by power.” Even the Bible was thrust aside. “For a long time, during the high state of feeling,” he writes,<sup>58</sup> “(when, indeed, feeling was made a substitute for every Christian duty), the Bible must not be introduced at all, into any social meeting, from one month’s end to another. And while the exhortation was often reiterated, ‘Come, brethren, pray now, but don’t make any *cold* prayers,’ it was evidently held, although I do not say it was publicly expressed, that reading of the Bible was too cold a business for a Revival spirit. No time must be wasted in reading or singing, but the whole uninterruptedly devoted to praying with this faith and particularity, so vastly important.” We are witnessing here a sustained effort to push excited feeling on to the breaking point.

To the breaking point, of course, it came, all over the region which the revivals covered; and despite those who had been brought into a sure hope of eternal life—absolutely a large number, let us believe—the last stage of the region as such was worse than the first. It is the calm judgment

<sup>57</sup> *A Delineation of the Characteristic Features of a Revival of Religion in Troy in 1826 and 1827*, 1827, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



of a man of affairs and of letters, seeking to put on record an observed social and religious phenomenon, which we have in the following statement of facts by the editor of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*:<sup>59</sup> "Look at the present condition of the churches of Western New York, which have become in truth 'a people scattered and peeled.' The time has not come to write the ecclesiastical history of the past ten years. And yet somebody should chronicle the facts now, lest in after times the truth, however correctly it may be preserved by tradition, should not be believed. . . . The writer entertains no doubt that many true conversions have occurred under the system to which he is referring. But as with the ground over which the lightning has gone, scorching and withering every green thing, years may pass away before the arid waste of the church will be grown over by the living herbage." If any corroboration of this testimony were needed, it would be supplied by that of the workers in these revivals themselves. James Boyle writes to Finney himself December 25, 1834:<sup>60</sup> "Let us look over the fields where you and others and myself have labored as revival ministers, and what is now their moral state? What was their state within three months after we left them? I have visited and revisited many of these fields, and groaned in spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal, contentious state into which the churches had fallen—and fallen very soon after our first departure from among them." No more powerful testimony is borne, however, than that of Asa Mahan, who tells us—to put it briefly—that everyone who was concerned in these revivals suffered a sad subsequent lapse: the people were left like a dead coal which could not be reignited; the pastors were shorn of all their spiritual power; and the evangelists—"among them all," he says, "and I was personally acquainted with

<sup>59</sup> William L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures*, 1835, pp. 314 ff. The "system" to which Colonel Stone is referring is the revival system in practice in Western and Central New York. For Stone, see *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, *sub nom.*

<sup>60</sup> Cited in the *Literary and Theological Review*, March 1838, p. 66.

nearly every one of them,—I cannot recall a single man, brother Finney and Father Nash excepted, who did not after a few years lose his unction and become equally disqualified for the office of evangelist and that of pastor.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus the great “Western Revivals” ran out into disaster. Although it belongs to Finney’s earlier missionary labors it is a typical instance of their effects which Ebenezer Hazard Snowden gives us from his own parish. “Both Mr. Finney and Mr. Burchard,” he says, “made special efforts in Brownsville, where I was afterward settled. Mr. Wells, the pastor, who was before beloved by every man, woman and child, was as a result obliged to give up his charge about the time Mr. Finney was there. Such a course was pursued as exasperated a great portion of the respectable members of the congregation, and they immediately set up an Episcopal church which they have attended ever since.”<sup>62</sup> As a consequence of such occurrences Finney’s ministrations became no longer acceptable, and his preaching no longer effective in the very region in which he had once swayed men like a wind among the reeds. Over and over again, when he proposed to revisit one of the churches, delegations were sent him or other means used, to prevent what was thought of as an affliction. P. H. Fowler<sup>63</sup> quite uninten-

<sup>61</sup> *Autobiography*, 1881, pp. 227 f.

<sup>62</sup> *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine*, May 1838, pp. 236 f. —Snowden adds about Burchard: “Mr. Burchard’s meeting there was equally disastrous in its results. He assumed the airs of a commander and would turn off about so many every day, and announce those to be converted. Some of those who thus became members never entered the church afterward. Some became perfectionists, and of the remainder, many were expelled. One of the elders remarked to me, that the church lost much of its vitality at that time.” Snowden, born in 1799, brought up in Oneida Co., graduated at Hamilton College, 1818, admitted to the bar at Utica, joined his father’s church at Sackett’s Harbor about the time Finney was joining the church at the neighboring town of Adams: he was pastor at Brownsville in 1836-7. See the *Biographical Catalogue of Princeton Theological Seminary*, 1909, *sub nom.* p. 56; and especially the *Necrological Report, presented to the Alumni Association, Princeton Theological Seminary, May 7, 1895*, 1895, pp. 294 f.

<sup>63</sup> As cited, p. 284.

tentionally supplies us with a pungent instance of the decay of Finney's acceptability as a preacher in this region, of which he was himself cognizant. Finney came back in 1855 to Rome, the scene of one of his greatest triumphs in 1826.<sup>64</sup> Now, however, his preaching elicited no response. He has himself told us of it,<sup>65</sup> and attributes what seemed to him the otherwise inexplicable coldness of his reception, to the fault of the pastor. This Fowler declares to have been very erroneous and very unjust. He himself ascribes it to a change in fashions in preaching. Finney preached, he says, just as he did in 1826, with the same ability, earnestness, force. But this kind of preaching was *passé*—and "his old friends in Utica, where considerable religious interest existed, deemed it unwise to invite him there." This kind of preaching was not *passé*, however, in other regions. It was still capable of oppressing men's souls elsewhere. But not again here—even after a generation had passed by these burnt children had no liking for the fire.

The offence of Finney's preaching attached both to its manner and to its matter; and it attached not to his preaching only but to his whole manner of conducting revivals, and not to his person only but to the whole bevy of assistants who gathered around him in prosecuting them.<sup>65a</sup> It be-

<sup>64</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 434.

<sup>65a</sup> Marquis L. Worden, (in J. Hepworth Dixon's *Spiritual Wives*, vol. ii, p. 82) tells us who some of these were: "Revivals prevailed in the neighborhood and region about Manlius, and through the country, in which the New Measure Evangelists, such as Luther Myrick, Horatio Foote, and James Boyle led the way." How Foote preached we shall let Josephus Brockway (*A Delineation*, etc., 1827, pp. 57 f.) tell us. He is speaking of his preaching in the Troy revivals, 1826-7. "I went to Mr. Foote, a would-be minister, who was no small occasion of offence and dispute, nor ought I, perhaps, to be delicate in saying, he was no improper object of contempt. He preached what some called a sermon, in which he attempted to show that no man could get to heaven without living a perfect life. I went to him with objections to his sermon, showing them to Elder Cushman as I went. One of his positions was, 'That man's hope ain't worth a groat that isn't founded on obedience.'—To which I objected, that man's hope is good for nothing that is not founded on the merits of

longed to the movement itself and constituted its characteristic. We have seen Lyman Beecher using the epithet "denunciatory" in describing these revivals, and it may provisionally serve as well as another word to intimate their peculiarity. It was as if the day of judgment had come and the instruments of vengeance were abroad, with whips of scorpions, lashing the people into the Kingdom of God. Everywhere, naturally, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth. The denunciation indulged in was constant and unmeasured. It was not confined to the preaching: denunciatory praying was practiced as diligently as denunciatory preaching. Diverted from their ostensible purpose as petitions to the Almighty, prayers were employed merely as means of exciting the audience. Sometimes the effect aimed at can only be characterized as direct hysteria. At others, usurping the place of preaching, the prayer became an assault on the hearer; and that not merely with a more or less general reference, but, under the protection of the form of petition, with a particularizing of the precise individual intended and a detailed description of his faults, which would scarcely have been tolerated in preaching.

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Christ, and evinced by obedience. Another of his statements was, 'Sinners never can be saved, and whoever has preached that sinners can be saved, has preached what is not true.' To which I objected that Christ came to save sinners, and there was none in our world to be saved, but sinners. . . ." Foote's teaching is of course just Pelagian Perfectionalism in its purity—and it was preached in the Troy revival as part of its official presentation. Finney has the grace, it is true, to be a little ashamed of it; but he will not repudiate it. "In the midst of the revival," he writes in his *Memoirs*, (p. 204), "it became necessary that I should leave Troy for a week or two, and visit my friends at Whitesboro. While I was gone, Rev. Horatio Foote was invited by Dr. Beman to preach. I do not know how often he preached; but this I recollect, that he gave great offence to the disaffected members of the church. He bore down upon them with the most scorching discourses, so I learned." He wishes to roll the responsibility of inviting Foote over on Beman; but he himself endorses him. Foote appears in the *Minutes of the General Assembly* from 1825, when he is a Licentiate of the Presbytery of Cayuga, to 1854, when he is a stated supply at Redford and resides at Ripley, Ohio. He disappears from the *Minutes* without ever having held a settled pastorate.

People were "prayed at" rather than "prayed for," with the mind obviously set more on moving them than on moving God.<sup>66</sup>

We are observing here only one item in a system of practices which formed the characteristic feature of these revivals, and which soon came to be known collectively as "the new measures."<sup>67</sup> These "new measures" of course were much spoken against; but all opposition to them was sternly stamped out. There was no more highly esteemed minister in this region than William Raymond Weeks, who was at the time serving the Congregationalist Church at Paris Hill.<sup>68</sup> A Pastoral Letter issued by the ministers of the Oneida Association of which he was a member, warning the members of the churches under its care against the new practices, was composed by him;<sup>69</sup> and naturally also, in writing to his friends in the east, he expressed with some decision (for that belonged to his character) his opinion of the evils he saw being thus thrust upon the people. As a

<sup>66</sup> Asahel Nettleton (*Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton on the "New Measures" in conducting Revivals of Religion*, 1828, p. 35) gives the following as the substance of what had been communicated to him on this subject by men on the ground. "There are various errors in the mode of conducting revivals in this region, which ought to be distinctly pointed out. That on the prayer of faith. The talking to God as a man talks to his neighbor is truly shocking—telling the Lord a long story about A. or B., and apparently with no other intent than to produce a kind of stage effect upon the individual in question, or upon the audience generally. This mouthing of words, these deep and hollow tones, all indicate that the person is speaking into the ears of man and not of God. I say nothing of the petitions often presented; but the awful irreverence of the manner!"—On the "particularity" used with reference to individuals in public prayer, see Brockway, as cited, p. 22 ff.

<sup>67</sup> Sprague, *Annals* etc., vol. iv, pp. 473 f.: "His situation was now rendered very unpleasant by the introduction of what were technically called the 'new measures' in connection with revivals of religion: and he therefore removed. . . ."

<sup>68</sup> Biographical notice in W. B. Sprague, *Annals*, etc. vol. iv, pp. 473 ff.; P. H. Fowler, as cited, pp. 673 ff., 85, 261, 274; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, *sub nom.*

<sup>69</sup> *Pastoral Letter of the Ministers of the Oneida Association to the Churches under their care, on the Subject of Revivals of Religion*. 1827.

result not only was he driven in the end out of his pulpit, but his memory has been sedulously defamed ever since. Fifty years after, Finney was still speaking with undeserved contempt of him,<sup>70</sup> and he and Henry Davis,<sup>71</sup> President at the time of Hamilton College—whose crime also was “opposition to the revivals”—seem to be the only ones among the multitude of ministers who have worked in Central New York discussed by P. H. Fowler in his history, whom he has dealt with with obvious injustice. The Pastoral Letter which was the head and front of Weeks’ offending, is not only a perfectly inoffensive but an eminently judicious document, expressed in entirely temperate language. It is absolutely free from personalities, and equally free from rasping particularizing. Framed in general terms, it merely enumerates the kinds of practices, which may possibly be met with in revivals of religion, that lovers of God and their own souls would do well to avoid. It might be read through without divining that it was directed against any particular movement: and one would suppose that its serious and quiet cautions would be accepted by all as an excellent road-book for the wayfarer through a troubled land. That the participants in “the Western Revivals” were quick to declare that their own portrait was depicted may cause us some surprise; and more, that their resentment was occasioned not by their looking upon the portrait drawn as a caricature of them, but by the painter’s intimation that he himself considered it ugly. We clearly have, in this calm enumeration of things to be avoided in revivals, a trustworthy outline sketch of how “the Western Revivals” were being carried on.

The phrase “new measures” soon however, acquired a sense of rather narrower compass, in which it embraced only those of the new practices which might be conceived as means employed to produce the effect sought.<sup>72</sup> As these

<sup>70</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> Biographical notice in Sprague, as cited, p. 244 ff.; Fowler, as cited, pp. 505 ff.; Appleton, as cited, *sub nom.*

<sup>72</sup> Besides the *Pastoral Letter of the Onondaga Association* and the

came to be more fully known, they astonished, distressed, appalled the friends of revivals everywhere; and most of all, as was natural, those who felt themselves to stand in particularly close connection with the churches of Central New York—such as the clergy of Connecticut. Asahel Nettleton, the most esteemed “revival minister” of the day, took the lead in an effort to abate the evil.<sup>73</sup> Others—notably Lyman Beecher,<sup>74</sup>—joined themselves to him. Many—Griffin, Porter, Nott, Tucker, Cornelius—visited Troy where Finney was then holding revival services, that they might observe “the new measures” for themselves. They came away more shocked than before. Letters were written.<sup>75</sup> And finally a conference was arranged—“the New Lebanon Convention,” held July 18-26, 1827—in which the “Eastern brethren” endeavored to bring their “Western brethren” to reason.<sup>76</sup> The attempt was in vain;

*Letters of Drs. Beecher and Nettleton*, consult on “the New Measures” especially: Andrew Reed and James Matheson; *A Narrative of a Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales*, 1835, vol. II, pp. i, ff. (by Reed); C. Hodge, *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*, Oct. 1825, pp. 601-607; Albert B. Dod, *Ibid*, pp. 626-674; and J. W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, 1843. Finney tells us (*Memoirs*, p. 288) that he made little or no use of “the Anxious Seat” until the Rochester Revivals of 1831. G. F. Wright (pp. 100 ff.), while properly recognizing its use as falling in with Finney’s dogmatic scheme, errs in supposing that the opposition to it turned on a notion in the minds of Finney’s opponents that “there was little natural connection between the means used for the persuasion of men and their conversion.” A simple reading of their discussions will show that their objections turned on quite other considerations.

<sup>73</sup> See Bennet Tyler, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Asahel Nettleton, D.D.*, 1844, chapter xii, (p. 248-270), “His opposition to the new measures.”

<sup>74</sup> See *Autobiography*, edited by his son, Charles Beecher, 1865, vol. ii, ch. 12: “New Measures,” pp. 89-108.

<sup>75</sup> See especially, *Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and the Rev. Mr. Nettleton, on the “New Measures” in conducting Revivals of Religion; with a Review of a Sermon by Novanglus*, 1828.

<sup>76</sup> Finney gives an account of the New Lebanon Convention from his point of view in the sixteenth chapter of his *Memoirs* (pp. 202 ff.); G. F. Wright devotes to it a chapter in his *Life of Finney* (pp. 39 ff.). It will be found described from their point of view in the *Lives of Nettleton and Beecher*, as referred to above.

and the fundamental reason why it was in vain is not difficult to discern. The axe was not laid to the root of the tree. The "new measures" were not arbitrary practices due to nothing but a coarse and depraved taste, the correction of which might be easily managed and need work no great change in principle. They belonged to the very essence of the revival as conceived by its promoters. It was in them that its heart expressed itself. They were in a word the natural and inevitable effect of the doctrine on which the revival was based. For what was new in this revival was not merely the particular "measures" by which it was prosecuted—that might be a merely surface phenomenon—but the particular doctrine on which it was founded, of which the measures employed were only the manifestation. This was a Pelagian revival. That was its peculiarity: and everything else connected with it was merely the expression of this.

That it was "the new measures" rather than the Pelagianism of the "Western Revivals" which in the first instance at least offended the Eastern brethren is no doubt due in part to the general fact that it is always external things which first meet the eye. The external things in this instance were shocking in themselves; and their rooting in a doctrinal cause was often felt but vaguely or not at all. Pelagianizing modes of thought, derived from the same general source from which Finney had himself drunk—the "New Divinity" taught at New Haven,—were moreover widely diffused among the New England clergy themselves. Men of this type of thinking might be offended by Finney's practices on general grounds, but could scarcely be expected, for that very reason, to assign them as to their cause to a doctrine common to his and their own thinking. And that the more that there were as yet no adequate means of ascertaining what the doctrinal basis of Finney's preaching was. Only his actual hearers were in any real sense informed of his teaching. When a little later he began to publish lectures and sermons the scales fell from men's



eyes. The discerning had no difficulty then in seeing the correlation between his practices and his doctrines, or in clearly understanding that the phenomena of his revivals which gave most offence were merely the natural consequences of the fundamental fact that they were Pelagian revivals.

Accordingly Albert B. Dod is found writing:<sup>77</sup> "We recollect that it was matter of surprise to many, when the conjunction took place between the coarse, bustling fanaticism of the New Measures and the refined intellectual abstractions of the New Divinity. It was a union between Mars and Minerva,—unnatural and boding no good to the church. But our readers will have observed that there is a close and logical connection between Mr. Finney's theology and his measures. The demand created for the one by the other and the mutual assistance which they render are so evident, that we will spend no time in the explanation of them." And Charles Hodge:<sup>78</sup> "That the new measures and the new divinity should have formed an intimate alliance can surprise no one aware of their natural affinity. . . . No better method could be devised to secure the adoption of the new doctrines than the introduction of the new measures. The attempt has accordingly been made. The cold, Pelagian system of the new divinity has been attached to the engine of fanaticism." These writers, it will be observed, do not assert that such practices as are summed up in the "new measures" may not exist—have not existed—apart from a determinate Pelagian system: what they affirm is that it is in such practices that a Pelagian system naturally expresses itself if it seeks to become aggressively evangelistic, and that in them we may perceive the Pelagian system running out into its appropriate methods. Joseph Ives Foot describes Finney's revivals therefore frankly from this point of view.<sup>79</sup> "These doctrines, with a correspond-

<sup>77</sup> *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*, October 1835, p. 656.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 614.

<sup>79</sup> *The Literary and Theological Review*, March 1838, p. 70, article

ing system of measures, were driven like a hurricane through the churches. To resist this operation was to resist God. Conscientious Christians gave place till they should see what it was. Timorous ones were attached to his triumphal car, while the bold and the ignorant seized the reins and the whip; and hundreds and thousands under these various influences, were led to believe themselves converted and were immediately driven into the church. These services were called revivals; and thus the very name of the operations of divine grace was brought under suspicion." It is from the same point of view that Charles D. Pigeon writes with a somewhat broader reference:<sup>80</sup> "We look upon the course of Mr. Finney as particularly instructive. He of all others has taught the New Haven theology in its greatest purity and has ventured to push the principle to its legitimate results. Those parts of New York which have been the scene of his labors are giving and will long continue to give the most instructive lessons as to the nature of that system of doctrine and its influence on individual character and religious institutions." And it is still from the same point of view that Samuel J. Baird places at the head of the very instructive chapter in which he gives an account of "the Western Revivals" the descriptive title of "Practical Pelagianism," and brings the chapter to a close with these words:<sup>81</sup> "Such were the fruits, widely realized in Western New York, from the New Haven theology. They were its legitimate and proper results. The good taste, common sense and piety of many of the disciples of that school may revolt from these exhibitions, and pause before adopting them in their full development. But the practical system of Finney, Burchard, Myrick and their compeers was deduced from the theology of New Haven, by a logic which no ingenuity can evade."

It will not have escaped observation that the writers we entitled, "Influence of Pelagianism on the Theological Course of Rev. C. G. Finney, developed in his Sermons and Lectures."

<sup>80</sup> *The Literary and Theological Review*, March 1838, p. 70.

<sup>81</sup> *A History of the New School*, 1868, pp. 217-234.

have last quoted assume that "the Western Revivals" were already generally understood to have been far from successful, as judged by their ultimate fruits. That indeed was the case. We have already seen that Finney himself came in the end to a recognition of this unhappy fact. It will cause no surprise that he should become wearied with this unfruitful work. Already in 1832 he was looking back upon this portion of his career as a closed page of doubtful success, and was consciously seeking a new phase of activity. He was yet to do a great deal of evangelistic work; but, although he threw the circle of his labors wider and wider, even across the seas, he thought of himself as no longer an evangelist—he had become a pastor.<sup>82</sup> His own account of the change is as follows.<sup>83</sup> "I had become fatigued, as I had labored about ten years as an evangelist, without anything more than a few days or weeks of rest during the whole period. . . . We had three children, and I could not well take my family with me, while laboring as an evangelist. My strength, too, had become a good deal exhausted; and on praying and looking the matter over, I concluded that I would accept the call from the Second Free Church and labor, for a time at least, in New York." By this action Finney became a part of a movement then making in the Presbyterian churches of New York to reach the people by the establishment of "free" churches, that is, churches with no pew-rentals and otherwise adapted to attract and hold the unchurched masses.<sup>83a</sup> In this way he gave to his pastorate a genuinely evangelistic character.

The church over which he was settled was a Presbyterian church, and Finney had always been a Presbyterian. It was in the Presbyterian Church that he was converted, licensed,

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<sup>82</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 94: "I have been a pastor now for many years, ever since 1832." How completely Finney felt he had broken with his past we have already seen (above p. 3 and note 4).

<sup>83</sup> Pp. 318 f.

<sup>83a</sup> An interesting "History of the Free Churches in the City of New York," by one of the prime movers in their establishment, Louis Tappan, may be read in the appendix to Reed and Matheson's *Narrative of a Visit to the American Churches*, etc. 1835, Vol. II, 341-353.

ordained; it was under its authorization that he had pursued his whole work as an evangelist, and the region in which he had pursued his chief revivalistic enterprises was a distinctively Presbyterian region: and now he was settled as pastor over a Presbyterian church. But Finney was nothing less than a Presbyterian. The church of which he was pastor—as were all the Free Presbyterian Churches—was under the care of the Third Presbytery of New York, an “elective-affinity” Presbytery, as little Presbyterian as anything could be which was willing to bear the name. Still, there was friction over matters of discipline and the like; and Finney felt uncomfortable in his harness. His friends accordingly built a new church for him—the “Broadway Tabernacle”—which they organized as a Congregationalist church. Of this church he took charge in the autumn of 1834. He did not take his dismissal from the Presbytery, however, until the spring of 1836, after he had been at Oberlin for a year, and was on the point of returning thither for his second session.<sup>84</sup> What led him thus tardily to sever his connection with a church with which he had so little in common we can only conjecture. Perhaps the process of writing his theological lectures at Oberlin quickened his consciousness both as to the significance of matters of faith in church relations and as to the complete dissonance of his own beliefs with those of the Presbyterian Church of which he was still an accredited teacher.

He had not been left without pointed reminders of the falseness of the position which he occupied. So soon as his *Sermons on Various Subjects* (1834) and *Lectures on Re-*

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<sup>84</sup> The records of the Third Presbytery of New York concerning Finney's case tell that, “on the 14th of February 1832 the Second Free Church (Chatham Street Chapel), composed chiefly of members from the First Free Church, was organized, and on the 28th of September the Rev. Charles G. Finney was installed pastor. . . . On the 2d of March, 1836, Dr. Finney was released” (S. D. Alexander, *The Presbytery of New York, 1738 to 1888*, 1887, p. 107). This Second Free Church became a Congregationalist Church June 13, 1836, and Asa Mahan tells us (*Autobiography*, pp. 227) that Finney's immediate successor in the pulpit made shipwreck of his faith.

*revivals of Religion* (1835) had been published this had become glaring and created an open scandal. He was called upon publicly to withdraw from a church in which he was so patently out of place. Albert B. Dod, for example, in July 1835, closes his review of his *Sermons* with an expression of thanks to him "for the substantial service he has done the church" in them, "by exposing the naked deformity of the New Divinity," and then adds: "He can render her still another service, and in rendering it perform only his plain duty, by leaving her communion and finding one within which he can preach and publish his opinions without making war upon the standards in which he has solemnly professed his faith."<sup>85</sup> In closing, in the following October, his review of the *Lectures on Revivals*, Dod returns to the subject and insists on Finney's duty to leave the church. "It is an instructive illustration of the fact that fanaticism debilitates the conscience," he now says,<sup>86</sup> "that this man can doubt the piety of any one who uses coffee, and call him a *cheat* who sends a letter to another, on his own business, without paying the postage, when he remains, apparently without remorse, with the sin of broken vows upon him. In this position we leave him before the public. Nor will we withdraw our charges against him, until he goes out from among us, for he is not of us." We know nothing, of course, of the effect of such challenges on Finney's action; but it is to be noted that he withdrew from the Church immediately (within six months) after they were made. Perhaps it should be added as illustrating the lightness with which Finney regarded the obligations of his doctrinal professions, that, according to his own account, he had originally incurred those obligations without informing himself of what he was committing himself to. In describing his licensure,<sup>87</sup> he records: "Unexpectedly to myself they asked me if I received the confession of faith of the Presbyterian church. I had not examined it,—that is, the large work containing

<sup>85</sup> *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*, July 1835, p. 527.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1835, p. 674.

<sup>87</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 51.

the catechism and confession. This had made no part of my study. I replied that I received it for substance of doctrine, so far as I understood it. But I spoke in a way that plainly implied, I think, that I did not pretend to know much about it. However, I answered honestly, as I understood it at the time." Amid the curiously interlaced qualifications and explanations of this statement, it only emerges that Finney was not unaware of the character of his action. Under its cover, he for a dozen years flouted the doctrines he had been placed by it under obligation to propagate.

During all these dozen years Finney had been a wanderer on the face of the earth, doing the work of an evangelist. Even during the four years of his stay in New York, he did not stay in New York. He had accepted the pastorate offered to him there as a means toward securing a more settled mode of existence; and in impaired health and depression of spirits he was obviously still longing for peace and a quiet life. It was in this mood that the proposal to go to Oberlin found him; and it was in this mood that he accepted it. He was in the prime of life, and the event shows that his amazing vigor was unimpaired. His real career was indeed just opening before him; forty years remained to him in which he was "Oberlin's central spiritual force and most eminent representative."<sup>88</sup> The pulpit, the lecture hall, the press, were now the instruments with which he wrought, and with all alike he wrought with the hand of a master-workman. It is possible, to be sure, to exaggerate here. "In intellectual insight into the deepest realities of religion, in originality of treatment and in logical power,"

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<sup>88</sup> D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, 1898, p. 60, cf. p. 278 f.: "Beyond comparison his was the chief personal force upon the colonial tract. The pulpit was the throne from which Sunday after Sunday, for more than a generation, he swayed vast audiences. . . . For forty years his lectures on theology were given, and in addition, 1852-1858, he filled the chair of intellectual and moral philosophy. For fifteen years, 1851-1865,, he was Oberlin's executive head. . . . Through his sermons, lectures and letters published in *The (Oberlin) Evangelist*, and elsewhere, a vast influence was wielded. Some of his books sold literally by the hundred thousand."

writes Albert Temple Swing,<sup>89</sup> "President Finney is to be ranked side by side with Edwards: they are the two greatest American theologians." This is only one of those provincial judgments which Oliver Wendell Holmes satirizes when he says that every village has, somewhere on its lawns, the biggest tree in the world. We must manage to see over the rim of the dell within the limits of which our experiences are wrought out. But certainly it must be recognized that Finney was "the greatest mind and the regulating force in the development of Oberlin theology."<sup>90</sup> He was blessed with coadjutors of a high order of talent. But it was to him that, above all others, Oberlin owed the measure of greatness which it achieved.

The contrast between the pictures of the religious conditions obtaining in Central and Western New York during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, received from the accounts which Finney and Asa Mahan respectively give of their early years, is nothing less than startling. The two lives ran on very closely parallel lines. Both men spent their early boyhood in Oneida County—in hamlets only a few miles distant from one another. The later youth of both was passed in the wilder West. Yet the religious conditions in which the two grew up are described by them very differently. All the religious advantages which Finney represents himself as lacking, Mahan represents himself as possessing. He was born and bred in a pious household, and surrounded on all sides by religious influences. His father, to be sure, was not, in his son's judgment at least, a thoroughly consecrated man. But his mother was a deeply religious woman with an aura of devoutness hanging always about her. It was a Bible-reading, praying family, in which the religious books that to Finney were inaccessible lay always at hand. The Church was at the door, and the ministrations of the sanctuary were constantly enjoyed: if there was formal preaching only an alternate Sabbaths,

<sup>89</sup> *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, July, 1901, p. 480 f.

<sup>90</sup> Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology*, 1907, p. 453.

service was held every Sabbath; and when sermons were not preached by ministers, they were read by laymen. The house was the resort of itinerant ministers, and the whole neighborhood was full of Christian people ready to give Christian succor. One rubs his eyes and wonders if this can be the same country-side in which Finney found little that pretended to be religious, and nothing that pretended to be religious that was not also absurd. To such an extent, it seems, does varying personality color the aspect of surroundings, and even by a process of selection mould them into harmony with itself.

Mahan was a few years Finney's junior, and, although he found his way into the ministry at a somewhat younger age than Finney, he had had a shorter—and a far less stirring and notable—ministerial experience than Finney, when they came together at Oberlin. He was born November 9, 1799,<sup>91</sup> at Vernon, Oneida County, New York, a hamlet some sixteen miles west of Utica and about half that distance from Kirkland, Finney's boyhood home, with which it had easy communication over the famous "Genesee Turnpike."<sup>92</sup> Here he was bred in what he calls<sup>93</sup> " 'the strictest sect' of the Calvinistic faith," and was surrounded both in his home and in the church life into which he was carried as a matter of course, with constant religious influences. These had no more effect upon him, however, than that he grew up a boy of good habits and excellent character. When he was about twelve years of age the family removed to the West—to Orangeville, Wyoming County, four miles from Warren and some forty miles southwest of Rochester. The change of residence, however, brought no essential change

<sup>91</sup> So Mahan himself repeatedly says (e.g. *Out of Darkness into Light*, 1874, p. 1; *Autobiography*, 1881, p. 1). On the other hand the Encyclopaedias (*Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia*, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*) uniformly give the date as 1800.

<sup>92</sup> For this turnpike and its significance see in O'Callaghan's *Documentary History of the State of New York*, vol. II, p. 1142, 1165 f. For the state of things west of Utica in 1792, see p. 1131.

<sup>93</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 9.



in the boy's inner life or his external carriage. He lived in his new home, too, as a member of a religious household would be expected to live, taking part in all the religious activities of the community; but withal, he was still destitute of religious experiences of his own. He was known, however, as a young man of sterling character and irreproachable conduct. And so it came about, that when his own schooling was completed, he was "on account of his well-known attainments and moral reputation,"<sup>94</sup> "selected to teach school in one of the most Christian, moral and intelligent districts in all the region round." Here, when he had entered by a few months into his eighteenth year (1816), he was led during the progress of a revival, to give his heart to God.<sup>95</sup> His conversion, as he describes it, was as distinctively supernaturalistic as Finney's: "if not miraculous, yet altogether supernatural," is the somewhat odd phrase with which he describes it, drawing at the same time a parallel between it and that of Colonel Gardiner, understood by him to be the result of a miraculous intervention.<sup>96</sup> He represents himself<sup>97</sup> as praying that he 'might be kept from ever returning to that state of alienation from God in which his life had been spent' hitherto. And, "I had no sooner pronounced these words," he says, "when I was consciously encircled 'in the everlasting arms.'" This was a prayer for "perseverance" and it seems to be implied that it was granted and that a pledge was given him of its granting, in a tangible response.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> P. 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 50.

<sup>97</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, pp. 1-13.

<sup>98</sup> On p. 28 however he seems to assign his attainment of assurance of "perseverance" to a somewhat later, though apparently not greatly later, date: "At length I attained to a full assurance that I was not only then an accepted servant of Christ, but should have grace to continue such even unto the end. In this assurance I have done service for Christ up to this period. Not a stain of doubt rests upon my mind that I am His for eternity." On this basis he rejects the "moment by moment" teaching of most Higher Life teachers and declares that according to Scripture we are "to exercise present faith" both for "present" and for "future sanctification."

Whatever else may be said of this, it was not, any more than Finney's, a conversion according to the Pelagianizing prescriptions of the "New Divinity."

For some months after his conversion, Mahan tells us,<sup>99</sup> his "spiritual state was rather of a *negative* than *positive* character"; by which he appears to mean that his thoughts were rather on the privileges that his new relation to God had brought him than on service. That, however, was soon corrected; and he gave himself with diligence not only to prepare himself for the ministry but to improve his opportunities to bring souls to Christ. In consequence, not only did he have trophies to show, in the favorable situation in which he was at the time, but having removed for his next winter's teaching to a very ungodly neighborhood, he built up a church there of from thirty to fifty members.<sup>99a</sup> As years passed on, however, he lost the "inward peace and joy in God which his first love had induced,"<sup>100</sup> and passed into a condition which he speaks of as "twilight," and in which he continued for no less than eighteen years—in fact up to his discovery of "perfection" as the proper state of the Christian, at Oberlin, in 1836. "Twilight" is merely his name, accordingly, for the condition of the "ordinary Christian." He does not think of denying that this "semi-twilight of a semi-faith" is a "genuine form of Christian experience," as genuine a form of it as "the sunlight" itself.<sup>101</sup> In both states alike he had sin, and understood that every deliberate sin committed deserved death. But the two states were characterized by different "sentiments and expectations" with reference to sin.<sup>102</sup> In the one he expected to sin: in the other he had no expectation of sinning. And, he adds,<sup>103</sup> "in each, my experience fully accorded with my faith"—a sentence which contradictorily to the preceding

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<sup>99</sup> P. 18.

<sup>99a</sup> P. 20.

<sup>100</sup> P. 90.

<sup>101</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 281; cf. *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 98.

<sup>102</sup> P. 284.

<sup>103</sup> P. 285.

statement, seems to assert the enjoyment in the later state of actual "perfection." It was "in the twilight" then that he lived out his life up to his great experience at Oberlin. He soon set his heart, however, on the ministry and began active preparation for it. There were two years of preparatory study; then four years at Hamilton College from which he was graduated in 1824; and then three years at Andover Seminary, from which he was graduated in 1827. Henry Davis was President of Hamilton College during his time; at Andover he came under the instruction of Leonard Woods and Moses Stuart—from the latter of whom he learned at least how to deal with the seventh chapter of Romans so that it would interpose no obstacle to his later theories. He paints the general conditions at Andover in almost as dark colors as John Humphrey Noyes does a few years later. He does not hint at any improprieties of conduct: "There was nothing morally impure about it." But he found no great spirituality: "Never was I in an atmosphere less morally and spiritually vitalizing than that which encircled me during those three years."<sup>104</sup>

Leaving Andover, he became a candidate under the charge of the Presbytery of Oneida, occupying himself meanwhile in "agencies and miscellaneous ministerial duties," as he puts it.<sup>105</sup> Soon, however, he found himself back in the West, and "commenced work in the city of Rochester, with the expectation of organizing a new church there."<sup>106</sup> "Just as the organization was being effected," however, he "was suddenly stricken down by an attack of inflammatory rheumatism in both knees and ankles and his left wrist." He was taken to his father's house in Orangeville, ("where," says he, "my youth had been spent"); but even in his illness he could not be idle. He found the church there in a most deplorable state.<sup>107</sup> He

<sup>104</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 144.

<sup>105</sup> P. 155.

<sup>106</sup> P. 167.

<sup>107</sup> This was probably in 1828. The church at Orangeville after a period of vacancy had enjoyed the service of a Stated Supply in 1826,

caused himself to be carried to it Sunday after Sunday in a chair, and preached from the chair "for about three months." The result was a revival in which he had the happiness of seeing his own father brought to Christ. "Among the converts was my aged father. He had professed religion from my childhood, but was manifestly a total stranger to the grace of God."<sup>108</sup> When he was able to undertake regular work again, he became "pastor-elect of the Congregational church at Pittsford, near Rochester,"<sup>109</sup> and duly appears in the Minutes of the General Assembly for 1830 as a member of the Presbytery of Rochester and pastor at Pittsford.<sup>110</sup> His tenure of this charge was, however, very brief. He had already left it in time to be reported to the General Assembly of 1831 as without charge; and by August 1831 he had removed to Cincinnati to take the oversight of a new venture, called then the Sixth Presbyterian Church, but soon afterward to become the Vine Street Congregationalist Church. He "commenced his labors with this church," he tells us,<sup>111</sup> "on August 29th, 1831 and resigned May 1, 1835"—serving it therefore somewhat less than four years. The church consisted at the beginning of only sixteen members "who lived in the city and worshipped with us"; but towards the end of his stay with it, it was largely increased: seventy-four were added on examination in 1834, and in the course of eight months' time upwards of a hundred. Throughout the whole period of Mahan's stay with it, it worshiped in a hired hall, "and," he adds, "a  
and was vacant again in 1827 and 1828, obtaining a Stated Supply in 1829 (*General Assembly Minutes*, pp. 63, 182, 284, 460).

<sup>108</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 168.

<sup>109</sup> Pittsford, Monroe Co., N. Y., eight miles southeast of Rochester.

<sup>110</sup> His record in the *Minutes* runs thus: 1829 (his first appearance), candidate of the Presbytery of Oneida; 1830, pastor at Pittsford, Presbytery of Rochester; 1831, W. C. Presbytery of Rochester; 1832, S. S. Sixth Church at Cincinnati; 1833, W. C. of the Presbytery of Cincinnati (the Sixth church vacant); 1834, S. S. Sixth Church, to which are assigned 134 members—the only statistics of the church's membership in the entries; 1835, Asa Mahan's name no longer appears, and Herman Norton is given as pastor of the Sixth Church.

<sup>111</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 163.

very plain one at that." He was never really settled over it as its pastor, and even his service to it as "stated supply" does not seem to have been uninterrupted.<sup>112</sup>

These details have been recited in order that the extent and nature of Mahan's ministerial experience before going to Oberlin in 1835 may be estimated. From his graduation at Andover in 1827 to his arrival at Oberlin some eight years had elapsed, but little more than half of these had been spent in the actual care of a church, and for barely a single year had he sustained the office of pastor. In determining the value of his experiences, such work as he did at Rochester in gathering together the nucleus of a church, and at Orangeville in leading a revival movement, must not be underestimated. Immediately on settling in Cincinnati, also, he was elected a Trustee and a member of the Prudential Board of Lane Seminary, and this brought him into active participation in the broader work of the church; and indeed thrust him at once into the focus of the most hotly debated national question of the day—that which concerned slavery. With it all it must be said, however, that his ministerial experience had been exceedingly small and very narrow.

Meanwhile he had not maintained intact the faith in which he was bred. That was, he tells us—speaking of course from the New England point of view,<sup>113</sup>—"the straitest sect' of the Calvinistic faith." From the very beginning of his personal religious life, however, this hereditary Calvinism had begun to crumble. Of the imputation of Adam's sin,<sup>114</sup> he declares that "subsequently to his conversion, he never for a moment entertained that sentiment"; and he adds<sup>115</sup> that he "quite early" adopted the "universal atonement."<sup>116</sup> In a broader statement, he informs us that

<sup>112</sup> In the *Minutes* of 1833 Mahan is listed as without charge and the church as vacant.

<sup>113</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 320.

<sup>114</sup> P. 199.

<sup>115</sup> P. 200.

<sup>116</sup> In later life he distinguished between *three* opinions on the ex-

from the commencement of his ministry he "rejected the Old School and Hopkinsian theories, and adopted and became a zealous advocate of that of divine efficiency." Perhaps his drift had not gone much further than this when he went to Oberlin. His going to Oberlin marks, however, the beginning of a completer revolution in his faith, a revolution which he represents, in a statement which defines it by the widest limits, as carrying him "from the extreme bounds of Calvinism"—that is the way he expressed the faith in which he had been bred—"to the quite opposite pole of the evangelical faith"—which is his description of his ultimate point of view.<sup>117</sup> This ultimate point of view he describes again as "the antipodes of all the peculiarities of the Calvinistic faith."<sup>118</sup> His mind here is chiefly on the question of liberty and ability, and, accordingly, he expresses elsewhere the revolution in faith which he suffered as "changing fundamentally his life-long and fondly cherished beliefs, and repudiating utterly the doctrine of necessity and adopting that of liberty."<sup>119</sup> What he means is that he rejected the whole conception of natural and moral inability and adopted in its stead a doctrine of plenary ability;<sup>120</sup> or, to put it more sharply, that he now took up with the notion that obligation is limited by ability, a notion which, he rightly says, compelled an entire reconstruction of his theology.<sup>121</sup> It seems to be clear

tent of the Atonement, e.g., *Christian Perfection* (1839) p. 26 f.:—(1) *Limited Atonement*, "Christ died for a part only of the human race—the elect," (2) *General Atonement*,—"Christ died for no individuals of our race in particular, but for all in general," (3) *Special atonement*, "Christ died for everyone in particular"—so much for each that it might seem to him that it was for him alone that he died. It is the third that Mahan makes his own. But he modified it so as to escape universal salvation by saying that although Christ died for each, he avails only for those who accept him. We do not get the full flavor of this fervent individualism of Christ's death until we recall that the theory of atonement held is the Rectoral!

<sup>117</sup> *Autobiography*, p. viii.

<sup>118</sup> P. 320.

<sup>119</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 204.

<sup>120</sup> Pp. 203-4.

<sup>121</sup> P. 214.

enough that this fundamental step was already taken before going to Oberlin; so that he began his work there, like Finney and his other colleagues, as a zealous preacher of the "New Divinity." There is no reason to doubt therefore the accuracy of James H. Fairchild's representation,<sup>122</sup> that all the "founders" of Oberlin, including John J. Shepherd, and not only Finney, but Mahan and Morgan and Cowles, held to "New School views," in the sense that they insisted upon "the doctrine of human ability." "These men," he says, and obviously very truly, "were all earnest preachers of human ability, and the personal, voluntary responsibility of the sinner for everything about him that can be reckoned as sin."

It is Fairchild also who reminds us<sup>123</sup> that the gathering of a body of such men as these in a place like Oberlin, necessarily concentrated the immense personal power which they represented, specifically on the cultivation of the spiritual life. Out in the wide world their energies had been intensely directed to the conversion of sinners: here, in this narrow sphere, where "there was only here and there a sinner to be converted," they were naturally diverted to the perfecting of the saints. Men were set to the intensive cultivation of their Christian life; and the preachers pressed upon them with all the insistence that had been employed in the whirlwind revivals from which they had come, the duties of examining themselves whether they were in Christ and of immediate completion of their entire consecration to His service. "It was not a rare thing," says Fairchild, "for a large portion of the congregation, after a searching sermon by Prof. Finney or Pres. Mahan, to rise up in acknowledgment that they had reason to apprehend that they were deceived as to their Christian character; and to express their determination not to rest until their feet were established upon the Rock." It is almost incredible that the preachers did not realize from the beginning that what they were demanding from their hearers was sheer perfection;

<sup>122</sup> *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, p. 237.

<sup>123</sup> As cited, p. 238.

and that what they were preaching was mere perfectionism. Perfection was men's duty, and all that was duty was practicable—for obligation and ability are co-extensive. But we must remember that these were somewhat reckless men, who made it a virtue not to count costs; and who were accustomed to tear every passion to tatters and to lash every dawning emotion into excesses with unmeasured invective; pursuing their conceived ends without regard to the inevitable consequences of the means employed. There is no reason why we should not believe them when they tell us that they were unaware that they were demanding perfection of their hearers as an achievable duty, until their eyes were opened to it by their hearers themselves. One of the odd circumstances connected with the situation was that Finney and Mahan knew perfectly well what perfectionism was. They had lived with it in Central and Western New York: their companions in their evangelistic work there had preached it in their presence: their followers had often rushed headlong into it. They themselves had kept their skirts free from it; partly, no doubt, because of their engrossment with the prior matter of conversion; more, no doubt, because of the mystical and antinomian form taken by "the New York Perfectionism," which was abhorrent to them as preachers of righteousness. But they could not help knowing that perfectionism lay at their door; and yet they drove on, preaching an essential perfectionism without, they say, being aware of it.

Perfectionism lay at their door even in the literal, physical sense. Oberlin was not so isolated as to be insensible to what was going on in Central and Western New York, or even in its own immediate neighborhood, in the Western Reserve of Ohio. Its settlers were recruited from the class in which "New York Perfectionism" was prevalent; and they did not shed their memories or break off their lines of communication when they came to Oberlin. The students of theology, to whom the appeals of the preachers were most frequently addressed, were themselves the products—Mahan



says the best products—of “The Western Revivals,” and could not fail to be familiar with their constant accompaniments. Even if we lacked direct evidence of contact, therefore, we could not assume that Oberlin perfectionism arose wholly apart from connection with the wide-spread perfectionist movement which preceded it. In point of fact direct evidence is not lacking. We know that, in the quarters in which perfectionist tendencies first showed themselves at Oberlin, not only was the earlier movement known, but the Putney literature was read and an impulse derived from it to repeat the experiences described in it. It served, for instance, “to raise the question of obligation as to the degree of holiness which Christians might obtain,”<sup>124</sup> in the summer of 1836 (the second session of the Theological Seminary), for a body of young men associated in a missionary society and earnestly engaged upon their spiritual culture in preparation for their prospective work. They rejected with decision the antinomian features of the teaching they found in this literature; but, under its influence, they advanced, along the lines of the “New Divinity” common to it and themselves, to a full conviction of the duty and possibility of completely putting away sin. A fervid consecration meeting was held by them, in which they solemnly bound themselves not to grieve their Master by any further sinning. “They left the meeting”—so one of their number records,<sup>125</sup>—“feeling that they were pledged to a life of entire obedience, chiefly from the side of duty—the obligation and the possibility of it.” Very naturally, and very truly, a report went around that “the missionary society had all become Perfectionists.” We gather that the step they had taken met, for the moment, with but imperfect—certainly not with universal—sympathy, although it was the only logical outcome of the searching preaching to which they were listening day by day. It was a straw, however, showing which way the wind was blowing; and by the time

<sup>124</sup> Fairchild, as cited, pp. 238-239.

<sup>125</sup> We are quoting from D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin*, p. 238.

the session then in progress ended, the wind was blowing a gale.

The preaching itself was growing ever more fervid and insistent. Mahan represents himself as burdened in spirit over the low state of Christian living, and earnestly seeking light on the great problem of Christian attainment. One day, he visited one of his associates, and they together sought guidance in the Word. The conversation turned on the passage, "The love of Christ constraineth us." "While thus employed,"<sup>126</sup> he says, "my heart leaped up in ecstasy indescribable, with the exclamation, 'I have found it.'" What he had found was that Christ is all in all. "All in all; for in Him is to be had not merely our justification, but also our sanctification: the one is as truly a gift of grace, as exclusively a work of God, as the other, and is to be had on the same condition."<sup>127</sup> "The highway of holiness was now for the first time distinct in my mind . . . ." We may perhaps express what he found in the two words, "Jesus only." In Him, he perceived, we obtain all we need; and we must go to Him for it all, and receive it all by a direct act of faith. He had known hitherto what to do when a sinner asked, What shall I do to be saved? He would say, Go to Christ in faith. But he had not known that precisely the same answer is to be given to the believer who wishes to be delivered from his low plane of living. He had been accustomed to instruct such "to confess their sins, put them away, renew their purpose of obedience, and go forward with a fixed resolution to do the entire will of God."<sup>128</sup> He now saw that that was "a fundamental mistake." We are not only to be justified by the faith of Christ; but to be sanctified also by 'the faith that is in Him.'" We cannot be justified by faith, and be sanctified by "resolves": "we must cease wholly from man and from ourselves, and trust Christ universally." Along with this new light on Christ as all in all, he now saw also the necessity

<sup>126</sup> *Christian Perfection* (1839) ed. 7, 1844, pp. 181 ff.

<sup>127</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 322 f.

<sup>128</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 140.

of the work of the Spirit. And he considers it remarkable that "the doctrine of Christ as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption' and the 'promise of the Spirit,' as the great central truth of the Gospel," should have been presented to his mind at one and the same time."<sup>129</sup> Of course, however, they necessarily go together because they are only two aspects of the supernaturalness of salvation.

For exactly what happened to Mahan in this great experience—this experience which he always looked back upon as pivotal for his life,—was the rediscovery of the supernaturalness of salvation. In this aspect of it, it was a reaction from the emphasis which, as a preacher of the "New Divinity," he had been placing on "ability," and a return to what he calls "universal" dependence on the grace of Christ. He says himself<sup>130</sup> that the teaching stands in contrast with his talk, "in his ignorance," of "human ability to do all that is required of us," and with the consequent "trust he had put in his own resolutions." This seems a confession that in teaching according to the formulas of the "New Divinity" he had been walking in a Pelagian path: and, so far as there was now a reaction from that bad way of thinking, he had turned his face to the light, and ceasing from self-sufficiency had put his dependence in God. This reaction, most commendable in itself, was nevertheless, as actually experienced by him, at once insufficient and excessive. He still reserved faith entirely to man; he wished to exclude human effort only from the walk in Christ. And like all Christians of his class he could not conceive of truly concursive activities. He operated with an unconditioned either—or: either works or grace; either effort or trust. As he had formerly allowed no place for faith in sanctification, so now he did not wish to allow any place for effort in sanctification. He seems not to be able to understand that we must both "work and pray," as the popular maxim puts it;

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<sup>129</sup> P. 147.

<sup>130</sup> P. 141.

both believe and labor; he wishes us to "cast all the responsibility" on Christ after a fashion which smacks more of mysticism than the Gospel.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile the reader is filled with amazement that this discovery of the supernaturalness of salvation should have seemed something new to Mahan. Bred in "the straitest sect" of Calvinism, did he have to wait for this moment to learn that Christ is all in all; that in Him we have by faith all that we can need; that He is made to us sanctification as well as justification—yes, all that is included in redemption?

Naturally this great discovery did not remain inoperative in Mahan's life. In the act of so learning Christ, he so experienced Christ,—and this constituted his "second conversion," in which he seemed to himself to rise into a higher plane of Christian living, and passed, as he loves to express it, from "twilight" into the full light of Christian experience. It is interesting to observe, as he explicitly tells us, that when he communicated his new experience to Finney, it found a ready welcome with him, and was repeated in his experience. "When my associate, then Professor Finney," he relates in one characteristic account,<sup>132</sup> "became aware of the great truth that, by being 'baptized with the Holy Ghost,' we can 'be filled with all the fulness of God,' he of course sought that baptism with all his heart and soul, and very soon obtained what he sought." Finney also received therefore at this time "the second blessing"; and not Finney only; the doctrine, the experience, was contagious. Of course it was carried at once also into the preaching and gave it an added insistence, an increased ardor. These men and their preaching—whatever they or it had been before—now became definitely perfectionist, though that was not

<sup>131</sup> In his *Autobiography*, pp. 286 ff., he tells us that the great difference between the two points of view which had been successive in his life turned on sanctification. In the one justification is held to be by faith, while sanctification is by hard labor; in the other both justification and sanctification are purely of faith, both are wrought by God alone and when we claim either by faith—"our responsibility is at an end."

<sup>132</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 180.

yet recognized. Mahan explains their position by the use of the contrasting adverbs "theoretically" and "practically."<sup>133</sup> They had become "practically" perfectionists, he says, but not yet "theoretically" so. By this he does not seem to mean here primarily that they had become perfect and did not yet know it—although it is not clear that that too does not lie in his meaning—but that they had adopted and were preaching perfectionist doctrine, but had not yet come to see clearly that this was what they had done. The way he expresses it at large is this: "The redemption of Christ was then presented to my mind as full and perfect redemption. I felt that in Christ I was 'complete,' that in Him every demand of my being was met, and perfectly met. In this light I presented Him to others." But it was only "by subsequent reflection that I became aware that the principles which I had practically adopted necessarily involved the doctrine of Christian perfection." We are not now concerned with the defects of Mahan's logical processes. The discovery of the supernaturalness of salvation does not involve exclusion of the consumption of time in the realization of all that is included in it. But we have now merely to note that this was not perceived; and accordingly what Mahan and his colleagues had come to believe and were now fervidly preaching was the possibility and duty of the immediate enjoyment of all that Christ had bought for His people, at least in the spiritual sphere, without remainder. That is perfectionism.

With the leaven of perfectionism already working among the students and preaching of this character proceeding with ever increasing insistence, the end might easily have been foreseen. During the autumn of 1836 a series of revival meetings were held at Oberlin, by which the whole community, citizens and students, was profoundly moved. At most of these Mahan was the preacher; and at one of them, held just after the close of the academic session, he preached a powerful sermon, enforcing with great urgency

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<sup>133</sup> *Biblical Repertory*, October 1840, p. 425-6.

the topic now always in his heart and on his lips, the duty of a higher consecration. A young man in the audience, just graduated from the theological department,—Serenio Wright Streeter was his name,<sup>134</sup>—rose and asked with solemn earnestness that his religious instructors, Finney and Mahan, would tell him plainly to what extent he might hope to be delivered from sinning; whether he could expect to receive really entire sanctification on faith. “When we look to Christ for sanctification,” he asked,<sup>135</sup> “what degree of sanctification may we expect from Him? May we look to Him to be sanctified wholly or not?” “I do not recollect that I was ever so shocked and confounded at any question before or since,” says Mahan.<sup>136</sup> “I felt for the moment that the work of Christ among us would be marred, and the mass of minds around us rush into Perfectionism.” An answer, definite and decided, could not be avoided; but it could be postponed—especially as the end of the session had arrived which brought with it the time for the scattering of both teachers and taught. No answer was attempted, therefore, at the moment, but a promise was given that the matter would be carefully canvassed and an answer returned in due season.

Thus the Oberlin teachers were compelled fairly to face the question of Perfectionism. They gave themselves diligently to its solution. Finney was accustomed at this time to spend the winter—vacation-time at Oberlin—in New York, preaching in the “Broadway Tabernacle.” On this occasion Mahan accompanied him. They explored the Scriptures together; and, says Mahan,<sup>137</sup> “after looking carefully at

<sup>134</sup> See *General Catalogue of Oberlin Seminary*, 1898, *sub nom.* He was graduated with the first theological class that was graduated and ordained at Oberlin October 10, 1836.

<sup>135</sup> Mahan, *Christian Perfection*, p. 188. The exact form of the question is given differently in the various reports, but the substance always remains the same. Cf. Mahan's *Autobiography*, p. 323; Fairchild, as cited, pp. 239 f.; Wright, *Life of Finney*, p. 204; Leonard, as cited, pp. 236 ff.

<sup>136</sup> *Christian Perfection*, p. 188.

<sup>137</sup> *Christian Perfection*, p. 189.

the testimony of Scripture, in respect to the provisions and promises of divine grace, we were constrained to admit, that but one answer to the above question could be given from the Bible; and the greatest wonder to me is, that I have been a 'master of Israel' and have never before 'known these things.' " But they did not confine themselves to the appeal to Scripture. They sought guidance also from those who had been perfectionists before them. It was naturally on the Methodists that their glance was first cast and lingered longest—for were not the Methodists the type of evangelical perfectionists? Finney found their idea of sanctification unacceptable, because it seemed to him "to relate almost entirely to states of sensibility," and he elsewhere<sup>138</sup> declares with decision that their notion that less is required of us under the Gospel than was required under the law is inadmissible. Nevertheless, he pronounced Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*—the acquaintance of which he made at this time—though marred by some expressions (he thinks merely expressions) to which he should object, "an admirable book," which he wishes every member of his church would read.<sup>139</sup> By the side of Wesley's *Christian Perfection* he places the *Memoirs of James Brainerd Taylor*—which he also hopes "every Christian will get and study." He had read the most of it he says, "three times within a few months." This same collocation of Wesley and Taylor meets us also incidentally in a passage of Mahan's: he speaks of "such men as John Wesley and James B. Taylor, who believed that by the grace of Christ applied to 'cleanse them from all sin,' they had 'been made perfect in love.' "

What is odd about this is that it was just these two books which John Humphrey Noyes read in the autumn of 1834—two years earlier—when he was making his way also to perfectionism. And Finney repeats the same gossip which Noyes repeats, to the effect that Taylor's biographers

<sup>138</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 340.

<sup>139</sup> *Lectures to Professing Christians*, ed. 1880, pp. 358 f.

had suppressed the most perfectionistic passages in his letters. We have seen that perfectionism did not show itself among the students of Oberlin apart from influences derived from the earlier perfectionism of New York, or apart specifically from the teachings of J. H. Noyes. It was much more a matter of course that Finney and Mahan did not arrive at their perfectionism in ignorance of these prior movements. We are scarcely prepared, however, for the emphasis which they seem to place on their knowledge of them; or for what seems very much like a tendency to apologize in part at least for them. "I have read their publications," says Finney,<sup>140</sup> "I have had some knowledge of them as individuals." He cannot give assent to "many of their views"; he repudiates the imputation to him of their "peculiarities;" especially he turns with reprobation from their "antinomianism." But he adds at once that they are not all antinomians,—“some of their leading men” are not; and although “there are still a number of important points of difference between them and the orthodox church,” the points of agreement are very numerous.<sup>141</sup> Similarly Mahan sees in all the perfectionist movements of the recent past a divine preparation for what was to come in them; and adopting them, along with the Methodists, as their own, adds:<sup>142</sup> “Some outside the Methodist denomination had ‘entered into rest’ before we did.” It is not merely misery that loves company; and the desire to discover precedents is ordinarily strong enough to lead us to take them where we can find them. It is meanwhile clear enough that Finney’s and Mahan’s sense of solidarity with perfectionists as such was strong. It was strongest, of course, with the Methodists, from whom they derived most—among other things the terms by which they expressed their new doctrine. “The terms by which we designate it,” says Mahan,<sup>143</sup> “were those by which it had been presented since the times of

<sup>140</sup> P. 346.

<sup>141</sup> *Views of Sanctification*, 1840, pp. 134 ff.

<sup>142</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, 1875, p. 195.

<sup>143</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 367.



Wesley and Fletcher, namely, Christian Perfection, Entire Sanctification, and Full Salvation." The *thing* expressed by these terms they would not admit they got from the Methodists. What they offered they got direct from the Scriptures,—though this affirmation naturally can be overpressed. "I gave myself earnestly," says Finney,<sup>144</sup> "to search the Scriptures and to read whatever came to hand upon the subject, until my mind was satisfied that an altogether higher and more stable form of Christian life was attainable and was the privilege of the Christian. . . . I was satisfied that the doctrine of sanctification in this life, and entire sanctification, in the sense that it was the privilege of Christians to live without known sin, was a doctrine taught in the Bible, and that abundant means are provided for the securing of that attainment." The doctrine thus described as derived from the Scriptures has in any case somewhat close affinities with the Methodist doctrine.<sup>145</sup>

No sooner was the Oberlin doctrine of perfection conceived than it was published. Finney was the first to publish it. He was in New York during the winter months of 1836-1837 for the purpose of preaching in the "Broadway Tabernacle." Preoccupied with the subject of the Christian walk, he delivered to his congregation a series of *Lectures to Professing Christians*, which were printed as they were delivered in the *New York Evangelist*, and soon afterward (1837) were gathered into a volume.<sup>146</sup> Two of these lectures were devoted to the subject of "Christian Perfection." In this first exposition of Oberlin perfectionism there are naturally seen lying in the background all the characteristic traits of Finney's theological thinking.

<sup>144</sup> *Memoirs*, pp. 340 f.

<sup>145</sup> The Methodist books were very diligently read, not only the fundamental treatises of Wesley and Fletcher, but such biographies as those of Hester Ann Rogers and William Carvosso (cf. J. S. Fairchild, *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, p. 242); and the Methodist commentators—particularly Adam Clarke—were very much deferred to (cf. Finney, *Views of Sanctification*). Along with them the support of other perfectionists like Robert Barclay, was welcomed.

<sup>146</sup> *Lectures to Professing Christians* (1837) Oberlin, 1880.

All virtue consists in disinterested benevolence; nothing is sinful but voluntary action; we have no obligation beyond our ability—we can do all that we ought to do, and what, for any reason whatever, we cannot do, we no longer, in any sense whatever, ought to do: it is such conceptions as these which form the substructure. On this basis a perfectionism is developed which already bears the fundamental character that ever afterwards marked the Oberlin doctrine. What is taught is a perfection that consists in complete righteousness, but in righteousness which is adjusted to fluctuating ability. Enoch Pond, in reviewing the lectures, rejoices to find that the perfection taught—in contrast with the Wesleyan doctrine of a so-called “evangelical perfection”—requires the perfect fulfilment of the law of God.<sup>147</sup> But, as W. E. Boardman—discriminating later the “Oberlinian” from the Wesleyan doctrine—points out, what is really distinctive of “Oberlinian” perfection is the “view of the claims of the law as graduated to the sinner’s ability.”<sup>148</sup> This teaching is already here. But the more fundamental idea that perfection is the fulfilment of the law is more dwelt upon. The lectures are thus given the aspect of insisting on perfect righteousness, and point is given to this insistence by an open polemic against the Wesleyan conception. “No part of the obligation of the law is discharged,” it is said:<sup>149</sup> “the Gospel holds those under it to the same holiness as those under the law.” The definition of Christian Perfection is given crisply as “perfect obedience to the law of God;” and this is explained as requiring that “we should do neither more nor less than the law of God prescribes.” “This,” it is added,<sup>150</sup> “is being, morally, just as perfect as God.”

When Finney undertakes to show that this perfection is attainable in this life, his argument runs on the familiar

<sup>147</sup> *The Biblical Repository*, January 1839, pp. 44 ff.

<sup>148</sup> *The Higher Christian Life*, 1859, p. 41.

<sup>149</sup> P. 342.

<sup>150</sup> P. 341.

lines.<sup>151</sup> He pleads that God wills our perfection; that all the promises and prophecies of God respecting our sanctification have perfect sanctification in view; that this is the great blessing promised throughout the Bible; and the very object for which the Holy Spirit is given. Every one of these propositions is true; and none of them is to the point. The whole point at issue concerns the process by which the believer is made perfect; or perhaps we would better say, whether it is by a process that he is made perfect. Avoiding the hinge of the argument, Finney endeavors to impale his readers on dilemmas. "If it is not a practicable duty to be perfectly holy in this world, then it will follow that the devil has so completely accomplished his design of corrupting mankind, that Jesus Christ is at fault, and has no way to sanctify His people but by taking them out of the world." "If perfect sanctification is not attainable in this world it must be either from a want of motives in the Gospel, or a want of sufficient power in the Spirit of God." It would be a poor reader indeed who did not perceive at once that such dilemmas could be applied equally to every evil with which man is afflicted—disease, death, the uncompleted salvation of the world. If it is not a practicable thing to be perfectly well in this world, then Jesus Christ has been vanquished by the Devil and has no way to make His people well except by taking them out of the world. If freedom from death is not attainable in this world, then it must be due to want of sufficient power in the Spirit of God. If the world does not become at once the pure Kingdom of God in which only righteousness dwells, then we must infer either a want of sufficient motives in the Gospel or a want of sufficient power in the Son of God. There have been people who reasoned thus: the point of interest now is, that it was not otherwise that Finney reasoned—and that accounts for many things besides his perfectionism. It is a simple matter of fact that the effects of redemption, in the individual and in the world at large, are realized, not

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<sup>151</sup> Pp. 346 ff.

all at once, but through a long process: and that their complete enjoyment lies only "at the end."

A certain lack of logical coherence is discernable in other features of these lectures also. Finney was too good a Pelagian readily to homologate Quietistic conceptions: it is not for the Pelagian to say, "Cast thy dreadful doing down:" doing is with him rather the beginning, and middle, and end of all things. Yet we have already seen Mahan imbuing him with his newly-found notion (borrowed ultimately from the Wesleyans) that sanctification is to be attained immediately by an act of faith, and indeed also with his mystical Quietistic explanation of how this sanctification is brought about by faith. We noted at the time that it was interesting to observe this, and the interest seems to us to be enhanced when we observe the doctrine enunciated—so far as it is enunciated—in the context of these lectures. Finney the Pelagian denies that Christ in His Spirit can work on man otherwise than by bringing motives to action to bear on him—in a word by persuading him himself to act. Whatever man does, then, in the way of obeying the law—perfect obedience to which constitutes his perfection—he must himself do: it cannot be done for him or in him or through him by another; no other can affect him otherwise than by presenting motives to action to him. We should like to know then exactly what Finney means when he rebukes those who seek sanctification "by their own resolutions and works, their feelings and prayers, their endeavors and activity, instead of taking right hold of Christ by faith, for sanctification, as they do for justification."<sup>152</sup> What he says is that we may—must—attain to sanctification—or, as entire sanctification is meant, to perfection, that perfection which is perfect obedience to the law of God—immediately by an act of faith, without any resolution or effort on our part to obey the law, or apparently, any activity on our part in obeying it. "Faith," he says, "will bring Christ right into the soul and fill it with the

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<sup>152</sup> P. 362.

same spirit"—note the small s—"that breathes through Himself." We greatly wonder how "faith" does all this, and note only that it is faith that does it, not Christ: Christ supplies only the model to which faith conforms us. For light on this dark question, however, we shall have to go elsewhere.

Finney's inconcinity is not occasional merely but constant. Take another instance.<sup>158</sup> He is arguing that the power of habit need not inhibit perfection, since it does not inhibit conversion. The power of habit is a thing that may be overcome. As he argues this point, however, he raises in our minds a previous question—the question whether God can save at all. The answer he supplies is Yes, sometimes; and sometimes, no—at least "consistently with His wisdom," a phrase which does not vacate but only locates His inability. Of man in his natural state we must recognize, he says, that "selfishness has the entire control of the mind, and the habits of sin are wholly unbroken." And this condition of course presents an obstacle to salvation—an obstacle, he says, "so great, in all cases, that no power but that of the Holy Ghost can overcome it." It is indeed, he adds, "so great in many instances, that God Himself cannot, consistently with His wisdom, use the means necessary to convert the soul." Men then, it seems, may be so set in their wickedness that no "power"—the term is misleading; God uses no power in the transaction except the power of persuasion—which God, being wise, is willing to use upon them will avail for their salvation. Finney says this is the actual case "in many instances." These men, clearly, then, are unsalvable. God, so long as he remains the wise God, cannot save men so sunk in sin. We have thus reached the astonishing conclusion that men may be too sinful to be saved. They are saved, or they are not saved, according to their determination in sin. Moderately sinful souls can be saved, very sinful souls are beyond the possibilities of salvation. This no doubt is good Pelagian doctrine: it is

<sup>158</sup> P. 283.

not Paul's doctrine or Christ's. We are surprised to find it here where Finney had started out to prove that evil habits cannot inhibit the attainment of perfection, because they do not inhibit the attainment of conversion. We have ended by proving that "in many instances" they can and do inhibit the attainment of conversion; and that, whether we are converted or not does not depend therefore on God who in many cases is helpless in the face of our sinfulness, but on the degree of our sinfulness.

In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*,<sup>154</sup> Finney makes the following remarks concerning the lectures we have been considering. "These lectures were soon spread before thousands of readers. Whatever was thought of them, I heard not a word of objection from any quarter. If any was made, it did not, to my recollection, come to my knowledge." He is often inexact in his historical statements; and perhaps we should not wonder that he is inexact here too. In point of fact the lectures received the normal attention of reviewers; and it is difficult to believe that the strictures made on them were not at the time brought to the author's attention. *The Christian Spectator*, the organ of Finney's own party, gives them, it is true, only passing mention. But this passing mention is not without its significance. Its object is apparently to read Finney a lecture, as the *enfant terrible* of the "New Divinity" party, and to serve notice on him that he was expected to keep within the bounds and to content himself with repeating the shibboleths appointed for him. "On the subject of *Christian Perfection*" we read,<sup>155</sup> "we think Mr. Finney is not always sufficiently guarded, and though we do not believe he means anything more than we should fully admit,—the possibility and duty of obedience to God in all things commanded—yet we fear he may be liable to misconstruction and injure the consciences of many weak but pious persons." The note of irritation here is unmistakable: in the sequence of

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<sup>154</sup> Ed. I, vol. ii, 1847, p. 170; ed. 2, 1851, p. 571.

<sup>155</sup> *Christian Spectator*, June 1837, p. 342.

obligation, ability, actualization, could not Finney, like the rest of them, be satisfied with the first two without pushing on inconsiderately to the third? So far then from there having been no word of objection to the teaching of the lectures spoken from any quarter, they were objected to from all quarters. And, naturally, the reviewers "from the other side" did not content themselves with passing mention but subjected them to reasoned criticism. This was done, for example, by Joseph Ives Foot in a trenchant article in the *Literary and Theological Review*,<sup>156</sup> which was given the uncompromising title of "Influence of Pelagianism on the Theological Course of Rev. C. G. Finney, developed in his Sermons and Lectures." It was done also by Enoch Pond in a prudent article published in *The Biblical Repository*.<sup>157</sup> And although it was not done in a subsequent article on current works on Perfectionism published in the same journal by N. S. Folsom,<sup>158</sup> it was made plain that that was only because the writer considered that it had been already sufficiently done by Pond. Pond as a good New Englander goes so far with Finney that he is glad to allow "the attainableness" of perfection by the Christian, or, as he phrases it, "its metaphysical attainableness;" but like the *Christian Spectator* he wishes to stop right there and deny that it is ever "attained actually." On the ground of the current New England doctrine, which postulated "natural ability" for all that can be required, the whole question reduced itself thus for him to one of mere fact, and he argues it on that understanding.

Princeton.

B. B. WARFIELD.

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<sup>156</sup> March 1838, pp. 38 ff. See particularly pp. 52 ff.

<sup>157</sup> January 1839, pp. 44 ff.

<sup>158</sup> July 1839, p. 143.

# The Princeton Theological Review

APRIL, 1921

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## “SMOOTH STONES OUT OF THE BROOK”

The object of this article is to be helpful to a very numerous class, whom the writer regards as well worthy of the deep interest, and anxious efforts, of all who revere “the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the only rule to direct us, how we may glorify and enjoy Him.” The class referred to is the great host of youthful inquirers and labourers, in our various churches—our Sabbath School teachers, our Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations, our Guilds, our Bible Classes, and so on—who, with a supreme desire to glorify God aright, are often inexpressibly perplexed by the contemptuous rejection of those views of the Grand Old Book, which their fathers have taught them to hold fast, and to rejoice in. We hold that there is scarcely any task which is of more vital concern to the pastor and to the Christian teacher, than that of establishing the faith of Christian people, *and especially of the children of the Church*, in the absolute authority of the Bible. Is the Old Testament an honest, and a reputable production? Or is it little else than a tissue of most unreliable asseverations? Did divine direction lead the writers, “by divers portions, and in divers manners,” to give us a “sure testimony”? Or, did men, of whose very names and existence we are uninformed, multiply the most daring fabrications, and yet get them immediately welcomed, and gloried in, as the very truth of God? No wonder if, both at home and abroad, such an issue arouses a most painful interest. If the Bible we preach from can be exposed as a cheat, small wonder if our churches empty, and if the wail of the foreign missionary comes home to us, that his appeals are derided.



## OBERLIN PERFECTIONISM

### II. MAHAN'S TYPE OF TEACHING

We have given more space to the earliest presentation of the Oberlin doctrine of perfection than it intrinsically deserves. This, partly, because it was its first presentation; but more because, despite its brevity and the colloquial looseness of its language, it was in more than a temporal sense the forerunner of a whole group of others which shortly followed it. For nearly two years, it is true, it stood alone. Then, at the opening of 1839, *The Oberlin Evangelist* was founded to be, above everything else, the organ of the doctrine. And early in 1839 the book was published which has the best right of all to be considered the representative statement of the Oberlin doctrine at this stage of its development. This is Mahan's *Christian Perfection*.<sup>1</sup> The nucleus of this book was a sermon first preached in Oberlin and afterwards widely published and especially printed by request in *The New York Evangelist* (in November 1838).<sup>2</sup> The "series of discourses" of which it professes to be further made up were delivered in the Marlboro Chapel, Boston, where Mahan was supplying the pulpit dur-

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<sup>1</sup> *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection; with other Kindred Subjects, illustrated and confirmed in a series of discourses designed to throw light on the way of holiness, 1839.* We cite it always from the seventh edition, 1844, but the pagination of all editions after the first is the same.

<sup>2</sup> On this sermon, see D. L. Leonard, *The Story of Oberlin, 1898.* p. 253: "In September (1838) President Mahan gave his famous perfection address before the Oberlin Society of Inquiry, which was printed the next month in the [*Ohio*] *Observer* (published at Hudson) filling ten columns, and a month later still appeared in the first issue of *The Oberlin Evangelist* [January 1839], and about the same time also in the leading Eastern papers. The Hudson organ invited its readers to peruse the same and send on the results of their thinking. Which thing they did so abundantly that for a long period well-nigh every number is redolent of reviews and refutations." Hudson was the seat of the rival Western Reserve College.

ing the illness of the pastor.<sup>3</sup> The book ran through many editions and enjoyed a very wide circulation.<sup>4</sup> During the same year Henry Cowles' little booklet on *The Holiness of Christians in the Present Life* was reprinted "with some revision" from *The Oberlin Evangelist*; and in 1840 the much more considerable volume by Finney, entitled *Views of Sanctification* was reproduced from the same journal. A pamphlet by Charles Fitch, pastor of the Free Presbyterian Church at Newark, New Jersey, bearing the same title as Finney's volume—*Views of Sanctification*—preceded that volume by a year (1839). It deserves to be included in this group of writings, because, although its author was not connected with Oberlin, he teaches the same doctrine as the Oberlin writers; and although he does this perhaps more attractively than they do themselves, he does it obviously in immediate dependence on them.<sup>5</sup> All this group of writings not only teach the same doctrine, but

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<sup>3</sup> Compare N. S. Folsom, "Review of Mahan on Christian Perfection," in *The Biblical Repository* for July 1839, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> The tenth edition was published in 1849. We have seen no later.

<sup>5</sup> Fitch's pamphlet was occasioned by an inquiry into his teaching instituted by his Presbytery, which resulted in asking him to withdraw from its fellowship (cf. Leonard, as cited, p. 256). Along with it should be cited: "*An Appeal, together with a Brief Account of the Sentiments of Five Members of the Free Presbyterian Church of Newark, New Jersey, termed by their Opponents Modern Perfectionists*, Newark, 1840—although the perfectionism of the writers of this pamphlet is more of the New York variety. Fitch's pamphlet was answered by William R. Weeks: *A Letter to the Rev. Charles Fitch on his Views of Sanctification*, 1840; and it is supposed to be included (along with Mahan's and Finney's writings) in the basis of Leonard Wood's discussion, "The Doctrine of Perfection" in the January and April numbers for 1841 of *The Biblical Repository*. Fitch was the youngest son of Ebenezer Fitch, first President of Williams College, and there is a very brief notice of him in C. Durfee's *Williams' Biographical Annals*, 1871, p. 387. He was born in 1799; was graduated from Williams College in 1818; studied at Princeton Theological Seminary, 1818-1821. An outline of his life may be found in the *Princeton Biographical Catalogue*, 1909, p. 40. He appears to have been as extreme in his views on the Second Advent as in those on Sanctification.

teach it after the same fashion, employing common definitions, a common logical method, the same supporting Scriptures, expounded on the same principles and applied with the same argumentative peculiarities; there has clearly been the closest collusion between them. Each writer has an individuality of his own, of course, and shows it in his use of the common material. But this does not abate the essential oneness of their conception and mode of presentation. They all obviously come from one mint; and there seems good reason to believe that the dominant influence producing this uniformity was Mahan's. It is only fair to speak of this phase of Oberlin perfectionism, therefore, as the period of the ascendancy of Mahan's thought.

At this stage of its development, Oberlin perfectionism would not be inaptly described as Wesleyan perfectionism grafted on the stock of the New Divinity—Wesleyan perfectionism so far modified as to adjust it to the paradigms of the New Divinity. As the New Divinity was primarily an ethical scheme and Wesleyan perfectionism primarily a religious doctrine, this process might be not unjustly described as so far a process of "religionizing" the New Divinity. Mahan took the lead in this work. That was the significance of his rediscovery of the supernaturalness of salvation as already described; of his conjoint vision of Christ as the soul's all in all and of the Spirit who baptizes the soul with power; of his suspension of everything on the simple act of faith. This was no ephemeral enthusiasm with him. It was a profound spiritual revolution which reversed all the currents of his being and determined the course of his subsequent life. From this time to the end of his life, a half a century later, he knew nothing but the twin doctrines he acquired in this moving religious experience—the doctrines of Christian Perfection and the Baptism of the Spirit; and he gave himself to their exposition and propagation with an unwearied constancy which his readers may be tempted sometimes to think wearisome per-

sistency.<sup>6</sup> He infected his colleagues with these doctrines; but they never took the place in their theology which they did in his. In the succeeding adjustments it became thus his function to emphasize the new doctrines to the utmost; it was the function of Finney, say, on the other hand, to see that in the engrafting of the new doctrines on the stock of the New Divinity the concepts of the New Divinity suffered no loss. This brings about a certain difference in tone—not exactly in teaching—between the two writers. Mahan's *Christian Perfection* and Finney's *Views of Sanctification* teach the same general doctrine, and they teach it with the same clearness of conviction. But in the one the main interest has shifted from the New Divinity to Perfectionism—though the concepts of the New Divinity are not abandoned; in the other it remains with the New Divinity—though the concepts brought in by Perfectionism are welcomed. Perhaps it would be too much to say that the emphasis differs: what differs is not so much the emphasis as the concernment, and that seems to be rooted less in a difference in the convictions than in the temperament of the two writers.

The perfectionism of this stage of Oberlin Perfectionism, as we have said, is fundamentally Wesleyan. It was not merely the "terms" which were retained from the Wesleyan doctrine, as Mahan tells us; but so far the thing.<sup>7</sup> What

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<sup>6</sup> In his *Autobiography*, 1881, p. 321, he says that for the forty-six years preceding that date, the one theme of his life had been "the two great doctrines" of Christian Perfection and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. This is only one of many such statements; and the fact asserted is absolutely true—the *Autobiography* itself, for example, shows him to have been simply possessed by these two ideas.

<sup>7</sup> Mahan finds it possible, therefore, when speaking in general terms, to describe his doctrine in language derived from Wesley. When telling us in the opening discourse of his *Christian Perfection* what the thing is of which he is to speak he says: "It is, in the language of Mr. Wesley, 'in one view, purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all the heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind that

was taught was the immediate attainment of entire sanctification by a special act of faith directed to this end. Justification was presupposed as already enjoyed. There were accordingly two kinds of Christians, a lower kind who had received only justification, and a higher kind who had received also sanctification. This is all Wesleyan, although, of course, it is not all that is Wesleyan.<sup>8</sup> When this doctrine was transferred into a New Divinity setting, the primary effort was to adjust to the new setting the conception of the content of the perfection thus attained. The New Divinity was a Pelagian scheme; a scheme of ethics; it was therefore essentially legalistic and could not conceive of perfection otherwise than as perfect obedience to law—the law of God. It could not homologate therefore the Wesleyan idea of an “evangelical obedience,” graciously accepted of believers in lieu of the “legal obedience” they were not in a position to render. Of anything else, as constituting perfection, than complete obedience to the law of God, the Oberlin men would hear nothing. But they had their own way of reaching the same relaxing result

was in Christ Jesus, enabling us to walk as He walked. It is a circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, from all inward, as well as outward, pollution. It is the renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.’” This is the loose language of metaphor: but it indicates a conscious as well as real connection with Wesley.

<sup>8</sup> Despite the dependence of the Oberlin doctrine of Perfection on the Wesleyans, the remarks of S. B. Canfield, *An Exposition of the Peculiarities and Tendencies of Oberlin Perfectionism*, 1840, p. 83, are perfectly just: —“The Wesleyan doctrine of ‘Christian Perfection’ is not only different in itself from the Oberlin theory, but held in connection with different views of native depravity—of the heart—of moral agency—of the nature of sanctification. . . . Those Methodists who have been at the pains to analyze the Oberlin system regard it as differing very widely from their own. A writer in *The Christian Advocate and Journal* of June 19, (1840) after making various strictures on the Oberlin theory, says: ‘It is not the Arminian theory. It is Pelagian Perfectionism, and the truth will suffer loss if we permit the public to be misled by the supposition that their theory and ours is the same.’”

which the Wesleyans had reached. They defined the content of the law, obedience to which constitutes perfection, as just "love"; and although this language meant with them something different from what it meant with the Wesleyans, it is not clear that they were able to give it any greater ethical content. Supposing them successful, however, in pouring into the concept of love, objectively, the whole content of righteousness ideally viewed, they did not in any case require this content for the love by which a man is made perfect. To be perfect, he does not require to love as God loves—in whose love all righteousness is embraced—or as the angels love, or as Adam loved, or even as any better man than he loves. He only requires to love as he himself, being what he is, and in the condition in which he finds himself, can love. If he loves all he can love in his present condition, he is perfect. No matter how he came into his present condition; suppose if you will that he came into it by a long course of vice, or by some supreme act of vice, it makes no difference. His obligation is limited by his ability; we cannot say, he ought to do more than he can do; if he does all he can do, he has no further obligation, he is perfect. The moral idiot—Finney does not hesitate to say it—is as perfect as God is: being a moral idiot, he has no moral obligation; when he has done nothing at all he has done all that he ought to do: he is perfect.<sup>9</sup> God Himself cannot do more than all He ought

<sup>9</sup>In a long note, pp. 12ff of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney notes some grave objections which had been brought against his doctrine; among others this one,—that "the more ignorant and debilitated a person is, the less the law would require of him"; so that he could extinguish his obligation by committing violence upon himself, and through his wickedness become perfectly holy—that is completely observant of all that is required of him. This assault does not lead Finney in any way to modify his doctrine; and indeed he could not modify it, seeing that it is a mere corollary of his fundamental doctrine of moral accountability. "God so completely levels his claims to the present capacity of every human being, however young or old, however maimed, debilitated, or idiotic," he reiterates, "as, to use the language or sentiment of Prof. Hickok, of Auburn Seminary,

to do; and when He has done all He ought to do, He is no more perfect than the moral idiot is—although what He has done is to fulfill all that is ideally righteous and the moral idiot has done nothing.

In this conception the law of God, complete obedience to which is perfection, is made a sliding scale.<sup>10</sup> It is not that uttered in my hearing, that 'if it were possible to create a *moral pigmy*, the law requires of him nothing more than to use whatever of strength he has, in the service and for the glory of God.' It is quite clear that Finney is entangled here in some ambiguities. He very properly distinguishes between a fault and the effects of a fault. But there is a further ambiguity latent in the conception of "demoralization," which leads him astray. He treats the term as implying that "to demoralize" is to make *unmoral*, not *immoral*: and so supposes that we cease to be moral agents in proportion as we become wicked. The source of his difficulty lies in his doctrine of "natural ability," which leads him to scale down obligation to fit decreasing ability. "If a man should annihilate himself," he asks, "would not he thereby set aside his moral obligation to obey God? Should he make himself an idiot would he not thereby *annihilate his moral agency*?" "The truth is," he answers himself, "that for the time being, a man may destroy his moral agency by rendering himself a lunatic or an idiot; and while this lunacy or idiocy continues, obedience to God is naturally impossible, and therefore not required." A moral agent cannot annihilate himself; neither can he annihilate his moral agency. He exists everlastingly and so long as he exists he is a moral agent, possessing a moral character and acting in accordance with it. If his moral character is bad, it inhibits good action, but does not in the least lessen obligation to it. If the wickedness becomes absolute the inhibition to good action becomes absolute; but the obligation to good remains absolute also. When J. L. Wilson said in the course of Lyman Beecher's trial that "moral obligation does not require any ability whatever," the phraseology may be open to objection, but the thing intended is true. The fact is that Finney and his fellows did not believe in moral agents; they believed in moral volitions.

<sup>10</sup> George Duffield (Finney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 979) tellingly arraigns Finney's teaching "that moral law requires nothing more than honesty of intention," and "that sincerity or honesty of intention is moral perfection" (so Finney explicitly, pp. 138, 295). "By this rule," says Duffield, Finney's teaching "graduates the claims of the law of God, so as to make it a most convenient sliding scale, which adapts itself to the ignorance and weakness of men. It unduly perverts men's notions of that high and absolute perfection which the law demands, and makes moral perfection a variant quantity, changing continually, not only in different persons but in the same individual.

perfect rule, which as the Greeks say, like a straight-edge, straight itself, measures both the straight and the crooked; but a flexible line which follows the inequalities of the surface on which it is laid, not molding it, but molded by it. Obligation here is interpreted in terms of ability with the result that each man becomes a law to himself, creating his own law; while the objective law of God, the standard of holiness in all, is annulled, and there are as many laws, as many standards of holiness, as there are moral beings. To object on this basis to the Wesleyan doctrine of "evangelical obedience" on the ground that it supposes a relaxation of the universal obligation of the law, is fatuous. There is no such thing as a universal obligation of the law to be relaxed; or indeed as a universal law, binding on all alike, to create a universal obligation. Each man's obligation is exhausted in the law which his own ability creates for him; and as soon as the Wesleyans remind us that in their view "evangelical obedience" is accepted primarily because it alone is within the capacity of men to render—"legal obedience" being beyond their power—the Oberlin objector is dumb; that is just his own doctrine. Except for this—that, not content with this general adjustment of the requirements of the law to the moral capacity of sinful men, he pushes the principle to such an extreme as to adjust them in detail to the moral capacity of each individual sinner, all the way down to moral idiocy; with the effect of making our sin the excuse for our sin, until we may cease to be sinners altogether by simply becoming sinful enough. Of course he does not really believe this. If he had really believed it, we should not have found Finney troubling to

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It reasons as follows, namely: Moral law respects intention only. Honesty of intention, or sincerity, is moral perfection. But light, or knowledge of the ultimate end, is the condition of moral obligation. Consequently the degree of obligation must equal the mind's honest estimate of the value of the end. Thus, to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, means nothing more than 'that the thoughts shall be expended in exact accordance with the mind's honest judgment of what is at every moment the best economy for God.'



argue—as we have found him arguing<sup>11</sup>— that the ingrained habit of evil need not inhibit the attainment of perfection—that would be a matter of course; or that men may become so wicked that they cannot be saved—that would be absurd. He would only have needed to point out that the acquisition of unconquerable habits of evil, by progressively destroying obligation, renders perfection ever easier of acquisition by constantly reducing the content of the perfection to be acquired; and that one of the surest roads to salvation is therefore to become incurably wicked.

One of the most striking features of these earlier presentations of the Oberlin doctrine—though not of them only—is the strenuousness with which they insist that they are not arguing for the “actual attainment” of “entire sanctification,” “perfection,” but only for its “attainability.” An unpleasant impression is sometimes produced that an attempt is being made to escape from the real question at issue by a logical trick. The contention made this impression on its New England critics, and called out from them, from that point of view, somewhat sharp words of rebuke. Nobody, they say, doubts the attainability of perfection; the only question in dispute is whether it is ever attained. We have already seen this position taken up by Enoch Pond in criticising Finney’s *Lectures to Professing Christians*. “The question between us,” he says,<sup>12</sup> “is simply one of *fact*. The Perfectionist asserts, not only that Christians *ought* to be perfect in the present life, but that they *are* so;—not only that perfection is metaphysically attainable, but that, in frequent instances, it is *actually attained*.” N. S. Folsom, in reviewing Mahan’s *Christian Perfection* goes so far as to express a sense of outrage at the impression, created by his mode of stating the question, that none but the Oberlin men believe in “the attainableness of entire sanctification in this life.” This doctrine, he asserts, is, on the contrary, admitted on all hands. The editor

<sup>11</sup> *Lectures to Professing Christians*, p. 313.

<sup>12</sup> *The Biblical Repository*, January 1839, p. 47.

of the *New York Evangelist* in remarking on Mahan's primary perfectionist sermon, when it was first printed in that journal, allows it; Enoch Pond has just expressed his agreement with it. At the basis of every exhortation to be holy, lies "the metaphysical truth that perfection in holiness is attainable." To give the impression that anybody doubts this, is not to argue fairly; it is to play the sophist.<sup>13</sup> Leonard Woods, in his comprehensive discussion of the Oberlin arguments up to the date of his writing, echoes this protest.<sup>14</sup> He and his friends, he declares, hold as decidedly as Mahan does—he takes Mahan as his example—"that, in the common acceptance of the term, complete holiness is *attainable* in the present life." "When we assert that a thing is *attainable*, or *may* be attained," he explains, "our meaning is, that a proper use of means will secure it; that we shall obtain it if we do as we ought; and that if we fail of acquiring it, truth will require us to say that we *might* have obtained it, and that our failure was owing altogether to our own fault. There surely is not included in the assertion of the attainableness of anything the assertion that we have done all we ought and therefore have actually attained it; attainability and actual attainment are different things and the proof of the one has no tendency to prove the other." Whatever was the purpose of the Oberlin men, then, in their insistence that they were contending not for the actual attainment but only for the attainability of perfection, it actually had the controversial value to them that it threw their New England opponents into confusion.

The ultimate ground of this confusion cannot, however, be laid at the door of the manner in which the Oberlin men preferred to frame their argument. It lay in the ambiguities of the New England doctrine of "natural ability." Accordingly W. D. Snodgrass<sup>15</sup> very properly criticizes Woods' use of language in representing perfection as "at-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1839, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1841, pp. 174ff.

<sup>15</sup> *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification*, 1841, pp. 30ff.

tainable," only never "attained." This language is founded on the current New England distinction between "natural" and "moral" ability; and is intended to assert that we are commanded to be perfect, that full provision for our perfection is made, that it is our duty to be perfect, and that there is no reason why we are not perfect except that we will not strive to be perfect with the energy requisite to attain it. This is supposed to be justly expressed by saying that perfection is attainable, but will never actually be attained. Perhaps the words may bear that sense. It is not their natural sense. Snodgrass very justly says that to say that perfection is attainable is just to say that it is practicable for us to be perfect; and yet those who employ this language fully recognize that it is not practicable for us to be perfect. Say that nothing but a "will not" stands in the way. This "will not" is a fixed, an unvarying, incorrigible will not. It is really a "can not"; and a perfection to which we cannot attain is not an attainable perfection. He might have added that Woods himself knew perfectly well that the "will not" affirmed in the case is really a "can not."<sup>16</sup> If he denies a "natural inability," he confesses a "moral inability," an inability which "results from moral causes"; and he is unable to deny that this is a real inability.<sup>17</sup> God, he

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<sup>16</sup> *Biblical Repository*, October 1840, pp. 474ff.

<sup>17</sup> The situation among the parties dividing theological thought in New England is vividly brought before us in a letter of Lyman Beecher's to N. W. Taylor of April 25, 1835, printed in Beecher's *Autobiography* (Vol. II, p. 344). The New Divinity represented by Beecher and Taylor (as by Finney and Mahan) denied all inability, and all "physical" operation of God, and confined the divine operation in man to suasion: the older school (Woods, Tyler, Nettleton) drew back and in one way or another affirmed these things. Beecher declares that what lay "at the foundation of revolt in Woods, Tyler and Nettleton" was "the doctrine of a physical operation of God's decrees, and of physical regeneration—in short of moral government by direct omnipotence." This, he says, tends to go back to the "natural inability of the Old Calvinism in the Emmons and Burton form." On the other hand he deprecates preaching free-agency in a form which "avails to save by its own actual sufficiency, without the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost is to be necessary but is permitted to act only sua-

himself says, with the emphasis of italics, "*cannot lie*"; "the unrenewed sinner *cannot* call forth the affection of love to God, and so be subject to His law." Assuredly he is right, then, in saying that there is an important sense in which men "cannot obey" God; and if he contends at the same time that there is also an important sense in which they *can* obey God, we will not fail to observe that he is compelled to allow that their moral inability to obey "prevents obedience as certainly and as effectively as a natural impossibility could." In these circumstances it would seem to be eminently misleading to speak of things as attainable, on the ground of "natural ability," the attainment of which is inhibited by "moral inability."

Let us remind ourselves moreover that the matters which fall under discussion here are of the order of what the Bible calls "things of the Spirit," things which are not to be had at all except as imparted by the Holy Ghost; and that it is therefore peculiarly infelicitous to speak of them as "attainable," merely on the ground of "natural ability." In so speaking of them, we seem gravely in danger of forgetting the dreadful evil of sin as the corruption of our whole nature, and the absolute need of the Spirit's free action in recovering us from this corruption. The unregenerate man cannot believe; the regenerate man cannot be perfect; because these things are not the proper product of their efforts in any case but are conferred by the Spirit, and by the Spirit alone. It is good to see Mahan in some degree recognizing this fundamental fact; and indeed founding one branch of his argument upon it. It is not enough, however, to say that perfection is attainable only "through the Spirit." Mahan says that, and then goes on to give it the Pelagianizing turn that the believer nevertheless "actively, inducing men to save themselves by a free agency quite capable of doing all the saving, if only it can be persuaded to do it. Man is naughty and requires correction—not reconstruction of nature, but correction of manners; he is perfectly able to behave properly if he will; it is inducements alone that he needs. This in a nutshell is the whole New Divinity System.

tains" perfection, by employing the Spirit to do this work for him. The Scriptures do not thus subordinate the Spirit's action to that of man; they do not think of the gifts of the Spirit as "attained," but as "conferred." Snodgrass is incapable of such a *bêtise* and rightly emphasizes the supernatural nature of sanctification, as of regeneration, and of salvation at large. We do not sanctify ourselves by our own power; we do not even sanctify ourselves by using the Spirit as the instrument by which alone we can accomplish this great result. It is God who sanctifies us; and our activities are consequent at every step on His, not His on ours. Though he fails to rise to the height of the Scriptural supernaturalness of sanctification, however, Mahan's reference of it to the Holy Spirit, acting at the behest of man, nevertheless recognizes the supernaturalness of the actual process of the sanctifying work; and enables us to see what he and (so far as they shared his views) his colleagues meant when they spoke of the attainableness of perfection. They were not thinking in terms of "natural ability"; they were prepared to assert that the so-called "natural ability" of the New England divines is no ability at all. They were not arguing for a "metaphysical attainability" of perfection; they were talking religion, not metaphysics. They were clear, to be sure, that any perfection which should ever be achieved by any man must be achieved through his "natural ability," that is to say through the action of those powers which belong to him as a moral being and are inseparable from him as a moral agent; but they were equally clear that no man of himself would ever employ those powers with the energy, and diligence and singleness of purpose requisite to reach the high goal of perfection, and that therefore actual perfection is the product of the Spirit of God. They had no interest in affirming and arguing the "attainability" of perfection in the sense in which their New England critics took the phrase. They were as free as those critics were to declare that that "attainability" did not infer attainment, and was a barren notion unillustrated

by a single case of attainment under it. What they were interested in affirming was that God in His grace had made provision in the Gospel of His Son and the baptism of the Spirit to transmute that natural "will not" which, despite the so-called "natural ability" results in every child of man in a real "can not," into a glorious "can." What they were concerned to assert was a real practicable "attainability" due to the provisions of God's grace which placed within the reach of every believer at his option an actualized perfection. And the establishment of this attainability rightly seemed to them a much greater fact than the establishment of the actual attainment of perfection by these or those. They did not fail to assert this actual attainment of perfection. Perhaps the establishment of the attainability of perfection would have been difficult had there been no "samples" to adduce. But they sought to keep the evidence for actual attainment in the subordinate position of an additional argument for its attainability. If it has been actually attained, it will be hard to deny that it is attainable.

There is a noticeable difference among the several Oberlin writers in the relative interest they show in the different elements which enter into their common teaching. Finney, to whom the New Divinity was the Gospel, dwelt proportionately more fully on the conception of "natural ability," which constituted the basis on which any and all holiness must be built. Mahan, who had come to see the Gospel in the supernaturalness of salvation, naturally threw the stress of his discussion on it. Henry Cowles writes with such brevity as to discourage seeking to ascertain the niceties of his particular way of looking at the common doctrine. It is perhaps enough to note that he states it with some sharpness of outline. The vital question to which he addresses himself, he declares to be, not "whether any man on earth has ever attained absolute and confirmed perfection," but "has God given us such moral powers and made such provisions in Providence and Grace for our aid, that real death to sin, victory over the world, and living by faith

in constant obedience to all the known will of God, are objects of rational effort, the duty and privilege of Christians."<sup>18</sup> There are many loose ends left in this statement and the matter is not bettered when a little later,<sup>19</sup> repeating it, he proceeds to reduce the notion of perfection which he is ready to affirm to be attainable. It is no heavenly perfection, but an earthly one, including "such service and obedience as man is able to render in his present state." On this purely relative holiness he lays the greatest stress, and brings his discussion to a close, accordingly, by remarking that his object in writing is to express his full conviction that "God has made provision for the attainment in this life of all the holiness which the present state admits of." That says so little that it practically says nothing at all. God has only made provision for the attainment of this holiness: He does not secure its attainment—that is left to us. And the holiness attainable is only what "the present state admits of." That might be said of the devils in hell. The only point of interest is, not whether we may attain "all the holiness our present state admits of"—that might be no holiness at all. It is whether we may be *holy*.

To these propositions little more than hinted at by Cowles, Finney gives the definiteness of dogmatic statement. When he comes, in his *Views of Sanctification*, to the point where he discusses the attainableness of "entire sanctification,"<sup>20</sup> he lays down the fundamental proposition "that entire and permanent sanctification is attainable in this life." This he at once pronounces "self-evident"—on the ground of "natural ability." "To deny this," he affirms, "is to deny that a man is able to do as well as he can." And, he declares, "the language of the law" bears out the assertion, because, in requiring us to love the Lord our God with all *our* heart, and the rest, it levels "its claims to the capacity of the subject, however great or small." If

<sup>18</sup> *Holiness of Christians*, 1840, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> P. 14ff.

<sup>20</sup> Pp. 59ff.

there were a moral pigmy, he would be required to love God up to his pigmy strength. If we morally mutilate ourselves, we may no doubt be answerable for doing it; but having thus reduced our powers, we would have lessened our responsibility to the law, and could be entirely sanctified on this lower ground. "An angel is bound to exercise an angel's strength; a man the strength of a man; and a child the strength of a child." "Now," he sums up, "as entire sanctification consists in perfect obedience to the law of God; and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have; it is of course forever settled that a state of entire and permanent sanctification is attainable in this life on the ground of natural ability." This he says is New School doctrine and necessary New School doctrine. Ability limits obligation, hence there is no obligation where there is no ability—hence (it is but an identical proposition) it is possible for every man to do all that is required of him (not all that may be required of another man); and that is to be perfect. After all this exploitation of "natural ability," however, Finney turns and says that we have on this line of reasoning arrived at only an abstract possibility. Whether this abstract possibility is ever realized in fact, must be the subject of further inquiry. A second proposition is therefore laid down.<sup>21</sup> It is this: "The provisions of grace are such as to render the actual attainment of entire and permanent sanctification the object of reasonable pursuit." This proposition he transmutes into the question, "Is this state attainable as a matter of fact before death; and if so, when in this life may we expect to attain it?"—and submits the inquiry to the arbitrament of the Scriptures. Thus even Finney suspends the actual attainment of entire sanctification on grace, not nature; and seeks the evidence for it therefore in Scripture.

The vigor with which the Oberlin men asserted that they were primarily interested in the attainability, not in the actual attainment, of perfection, not only led to misunder-

<sup>21</sup> P. 61.



standing, but sometimes, it must be acknowledged, has an odd appearance in itself. To the man in the street the affirmation of the attainability of perfection seems to derive all its value from the promise it holds out for its actual attainment. And it is very clear that the Oberlin men were not contending for the barren attainability of the New Divinity, unillustrated by examples of attainment and indeed incapable of being so illustrated. Theirs is an attainability, they said, which can be realized in fact; and which, they affirmed, had been, is, and will be realized in numerous cases in fact. What they affirmed was, not that we must posit merely an inoperative attainability in order to ground accountability for the universal non-attainment of perfection; but that we must assert an operative attainability which realizes itself constantly in attainment. They have advanced here beyond the New Divinity; and they have it chiefly at heart to validate their difference from it, which becomes the main matter at issue precisely because it carries with it the affirmation of attainment as its corollary. The Oberlin men thought themselves to have laid their hands on a factor in the problem, which, as they said, had been neglected by the New Divinity, and which, in their view, transformed the barren "attainability" which served no other purpose than to ground accountability, into an operative "attainability" of possible and ready accomplishment.

This new factor was nothing less than the factor of grace. The New Divinity, they said, operated with "natural ability" only; and, as obligation is, as it taught, limited by ability, was bound to affirm that the perfection required of man is "attainable" by him; otherwise he would not be obligated by it, and would be perfect, that is, all that he could be required to be, without it. But this "attainability" is only the postulate of accountability and affirms only that man could be perfect if he would, leaving the undoubted fact that he will not be untouched,—and in strict logic this will not ought to be expressed in terms of can not. In

point of fact, man, standing in the conditions in which he finds himself, with an ingrained disposition to evil governing his conduct, can not be perfect, despite all the underlying "natural ability" to be perfect which can be ascribed to him. You may prefer to say that this "cannot" is only a "certainly will not," but this choice of soft words to express it does not alter the hard fact.

Now, the Oberlin men were altogether willing to say that *this* attainability never passes into attainment. This was not the attainability for which they were contending and which they looked upon as the issue at stake. Mahan says plainly enough, one would think,<sup>22</sup> that "our natural ability may exist in all its fulness, with the absolute certainty that no attainment in holiness will be made." "This is a fact," he adds, "true of all fallen spirits, and of all mankind, in the absence of the influence of the grace of the gospel." There is, he says, another kind of "attainability," however, over and above that grounded in "natural ability," and that is what they are contending for, and the appearance of logomachy given to their reasoning by their opponents rests on neglect to note this fact. They are contending for a real, concrete, and not merely a theoretical, abstract attainability; not common to all men, but peculiar to those under "the influence of the gospel." The opponents of the Oberlin teaching have uniformly assumed that there were but two parts to the question brought into debate. Is perfect holiness attainable? Is it actually attained? As both parties agreed in an affirmative answer to the first question, they declared the only issue concerned the second. Stop, said the Oberlin men; the first question is ambiguous and hides in it two separate ones, on one of which we are agreed and on the other not. And the question hidden in it, on which we are not agreed, is the crux of the whole matter. What do you mean by saying that perfect holiness is attainable? Do you mean that we have "natural ability" to obtain it if we will—though most certainly we will not? Or do

<sup>22</sup> *Biblical Repository*, Oct. 1840, p. 410.

you mean that perfection has now in the gospel been brought by the grace of God within our practicable reach, and relying on that grace we may in the power of Christ through His Spirit actually attain it? There are in point of fact, says Mahan at this place,<sup>23</sup> three, not two questions raised: "(1) What is the natural ability of man? or, have men natural ability to yield perfect obedience to the command of God? . . . (2) Are we authorized, in view of the provisions and promises of divine grace, together with the other teachings of inspiration, to expect to attain to a state of perfect holiness in this life? (3) Do the Scriptures teach us that any *have attained*, or *will attain* to a state of entire sanctification in this life?" The opponents of the Oberlin doctrine, he now adds, overlook entirely the second question, "in respect to which we are at issue."

It is precisely on this second question, however, that the Oberlin men lay the whole stress of the argument, says Mahan. "Everything is said as a means to one end—the determination of the great question: To what degree of holiness do the Scriptures authorize us to *expect* to attain in this life? That which is practicable to us on the ground of natural ability is in one sense attainable. That which is rendered practicable, not on the ground of natural ability, but by the provisions of divine grace, is attainable in a different and higher sense of the term. It is in the last sense that the term is used by me." The reaction here from the Pelagianizing conceptions which ruled the New Divinity we have already called attention to, but it is good to dwell on it. An appeal is made from nature to grace.<sup>24</sup> An at-

<sup>23</sup> P. 410.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Woods, *The Biblical Repository*, January 1841, p. 140, says: "I am glad to see, that, as Mr. Mahan has come to entertain more exalted views of the gracious provisions of the gospel for the sanctification of believers, he has ceased to give such prominence, as he formerly did, to the ability, or free will, of man, and has expressly renounced it, as furnishing any ground of hope for sinners or any spring of holiness to Christians, and has been brought to rely wholly on the grace of Christ, and to look to Him, for the whole of salva-

tempt is made to ground a doctrine of perfection in the great fact that grace overcomes the disabilities of nature, and to point to the sufficiency in Christ for what "natural ability" cannot do. Thus the debate is carried away from the natural powers of men, to the provisions of the gospel, and becomes at once a purely Biblical one. Do the Scriptures represent God in Christ as providing for the immediate sanctification of his people? That becomes the sole question of real interest, and as such the Oberlin men treat it. It would be inexplicable, of course, if such provision has been made, that it should be illustrated by no single example. It becomes important therefore to show that there have been, are and will be perfect saints in this world. But this takes the secondary place of illustration and verification.<sup>25</sup> The main matter remains the witness of Scripture

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tion." There is overstatement here. Mahan renounced human free will only as the *immediate* ground of hope and source of holiness in the Christian. He retained it as the *ultimate* ground of our hope and source of our holiness; for he suspended the action of the Spirit on our faith, not our faith on the action of the Spirit. He remained fundamentally therefore Pelagian.

<sup>25</sup> They betray a tendency indeed to underestimate its importance. They do, it is true, argue at length that many have been perfect—Paul, John, Isaiah, and perhaps, on the basis of Rev. xiv. 4, 5, 144,000 and certainly an indefinite number of souls of the Old and New Covenants (Mahan, *Christian Perfection*, pp. 37ff.; Finney, *Systematic Theology*, 1851, ch. 61). But Mahan explains that the Oberlin people did not concern themselves so much with "mere personal attainments" (the "mere" should be noted) as with the "revealed privileges of the Sons of God." "The question of what attainment we have made," he explains (*Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 360) "lies wholly between our consciences and our God. The question, what are our revealed privileges, is to be settled not by an appeal to the conscious, or visible attainments of any individuals, but wholly and exclusively by reference to the Law and the Testimony." Though arguing that many had been wholly sanctified, Finney did not in 1837 (*Lectures to Professing Christians*, p. 358) claim to be himself wholly sanctified: "I do not myself now profess to have attained perfect sanctification." In 1840 (*Views of Sanctification*, p. 9) he even seems to deprecate anyone making such a profession, though apparently only on the ground that such a profession would be sure to be misunderstood. "Nothing is more clear than that in the present vague unsettled views of the church

to the gracious purpose of God. And the whole matter being thus referred to the Scriptures, the Oberlin men adduce the provisions made in the Gospel for the attainment of perfection, the promises of perfection given to Christians, the commands to them to be perfect, the prayers for their perfection which are recorded, and the like,—a very impressive showing, which beyond question proves what Mahan, indeed, declares it is solely intended to prove,—that Christians are to seek after perfection “with the expectation of obtaining it.” The mistake that Mahan makes lies in his supposing that this means that perfection may be attained by any Christian, at any time, all at once; that it lies at the disposal of Christians, to be had for the taking; and not rather that it may be and is attainable only through so long a curriculum of preparation that a lifetime may well be none too long for its accomplishment. We are to seek it with the expectation of attaining it; he that seeks it will certainly find it; but the attainment is a great task—and it delays its coming. The attainment of perfection in other words, is not an act but a work: and this is the real point of difference between the parties to the debate—whether the perfection which is provided for, promised, commanded, urged to, is a gift received all at once, or an attainment acquired through a long-continued effort. That it is supernatural, not natural, in its origin and nature was a great discovery for the Oberlin men to make in the Pelagianizing atmosphere in which they were immersed. But its supernatural origin and nature do not in the least prejudice the question whether it comes all at once or only as the final crown of a life of “working out our salvation in fear and trembling.” We are brought here, however, to perceive the important part played in the early Oberlin scheme by

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upon this question, no individual could set up a claim to having attained this state without being a stumbling block to the church.” In a later section he says that he would be in danger of being a stumbling block to himself. Is perfection then a gift both difficult to verify and perilous to possess?

the doctrines of "Sanctification by faith," and the "Baptism of the Holy Ghost."

It appears that the whole body of the Oberlin teachers of perfection were entirely at one, from the start, in declaring that sanctification is by faith. Time was required, however, to bring them into even measurable harmony in their conceptions of how faith brings about this sanctification which is to be had only "by" it. Finney himself seems inclined at first to represent faith as the immediate producing cause of sanctification. No doubt his fundamentally Pelagian type of thinking was peculiarly embarrassing to him when he came to deal with a thing like faith, which, in its very nature, looks outward from self and seeks something from another. Even in his early teaching faith is the indispensable condition, he would say, of the "reception of Christ," "the eternal life," "the holiness of the soul." But at this early stage of his teaching this language seems merely the repetition of a shibboleth. There seems no particular reason why "Christ" should be "received," and certainly no reason why "the holiness of the soul" should wait for His "reception." For faith, according to Finney, is itself a holy exercise, both in kind and degree all the confidence of the heart, working by love, that God does or can require. That is to say, like all other holy exercises, it is a perfectly holy exercise; and, as there is nothing about us, morally considered, but our exercises, in exercising faith we are perfectly holy. We are already therefore perfectly holy before Christ is received, who is nevertheless designated "the holiness of the soul." And as S. B. Canfield<sup>26</sup> pertinently asks, if we may previously to the reception of "the holiness of the soul," put forth one holy exercise, and that one perfectly holy, why may we not put forth two, or three, or ten thousand? If we may enter into perfection without Christ, why may we not abide in it without Christ? The fact seems to be that Finney's fundamentally Pelagian mode of

<sup>26</sup> *An Exposition of the Peculiarities, Difficulties and Tendencies of Oberlin Perfectionism*, p. 45.

thinking, already run to seed in his doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action,"—the origin of which it is customary (apparently erroneously) to date in 1841,—has betrayed him here into a conception of man which makes him sufficient for himself, and leaves no need for either Christ or the Holy Spirit to make him perfect. The doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit appear thus as only ornamental superstructures to the system. How he employs them as such may be illustrated by a remark like this: "Faith would instantly sanctify your heart, sanctify all your doings and render them, in Christ Jesus, acceptable to God."<sup>27</sup> What is the effect of the insertion of the words "in Christ Jesus?" If our heart and all our doings are already sanctified, are they not already acceptable to God? "They are," remarks Canfield,<sup>28</sup> "by his supposition as free from moral defilement as Christ's own doings." Since faith "instantly" sanctifies our heart and all our doings, *ex opere operato*, what place is left for the sanctifying Christ? The instantaneousness of the sanctifying action of faith, is much insisted on and should not be passed by unmarked.<sup>29</sup> If you will only believe, says Finney, "this will at once bring you into entire sanctification."<sup>30</sup> The exercise of faith is manifested holiness; holiness is not a subsequent result flowing from faith—it and faith are the same thing. "Let it be distinctly noted, then," Canfield comments,<sup>31</sup> "that accord-

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Canfield from *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Vol. I, p. 19. This seems to carry the notion back to 1839.

<sup>28</sup> P. 45.

<sup>29</sup> In *Views of Sanctification*, 1840, pp. 168f, Finney says: "Full faith in the word and promises of God naturally and certainly and immediately, produces a state of entire sanctification." "This result is instantaneous on the exercise of faith and in this sense sanctification is an instantaneous work." "The sense in which I use the term sanctification," he says in this context, "includes all that is implied in perfect obedience to the law of God." Immediately on exercising faith we have kept the whole law of God.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. also *The Oberlin Evangelist*, vol. II, p. 57, referred to by Canfield.

<sup>31</sup> P. 47.

ing to the principles of 'Oberlin Perfectionism,' entire sanctification is conditioned on previous perfection. To *become* sinlessly perfect, you must go to the Saviour already perfect." It cannot even be said that, though we make ourselves perfect, we must depend on Christ to keep us perfect. He does not, according to "Oberlin Perfectionism," keep us perfect—we may fall. And if we continue perfect that is because we preserve our faith: permanent entire sanctification is conditioned on permanent faith, just as simple entire sanctification is conditioned on simple faith. We must keep ourselves perfect as a condition of Christ's keeping us perfect. "Permanent entire sanctification is conditioned (according to this view) *on itself!* You shall be perfect as long as you shall continue to be perfect."<sup>32</sup>

Approaching the subject in another passage from a different angle—in the midst of a long description (there are thirty-five numbered affirmations) of what entire sanctification is not<sup>33</sup>—Finney tells us that "entire sanctification does not imply the same degree of faith" in everybody. It does not, for example, imply the same degree of faith in us, sinners, "that might have been exercised but for our ignorance and past sin." It requires a lower degree of faith to make a sinner perfectly holy than is required to make a saint perfectly holy: and the worse sinners we are the lower is the degree of faith that is required to make us perfectly holy. It does not resolve this paradox to observe that Finney is obviously confusing here the degree of faith exercised, and the amount of knowledge which is possessed of the object on which faith rests. What he really means to say, however, is that the less knowledge we have of God and divine things, the less faith is required of us that we may be perfect. The proposition on which he relies for support runs: "We cannot believe anything about God of which we have no knowledge," and therefore, "entire sanctification implies nothing more than the heart's faith and

<sup>32</sup> Canfield, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> *Views of Sanctification*, p. 29.



confidence in all the truth that is perceived by the intellect." The deflecting influence here is derived from his doctrine that as obligation is limited by ability, he who does all he can (being what he is) is as perfect as God Himself. On this ground he declares that: "Perfection in a heathen would imply much less faith than in a Christian. Perfection in an adult would imply much more and greater faith than in an infant. And perfection in an angel would imply much greater faith than in a man, just in proportion that he knows more of God than man." Our attention is attracted for the moment by the suggestion that Perfection is conceivable in a heathen. This is not a slip. Finney fully means it. "The heathen," he explains, "are not under obligation to believe in Christ and thousands of other things of which they have no knowledge." Not being under obligation to believe in Christ, of course they can be perfect without believing in Him. If they have "heart's faith or confidence in all the truth that is perceived by their intellect," they will not be kept from being perfect by lack of faith in Christ of whom they have no knowledge. Perfection clearly is not conceived as the product of Christ in the heart and life of him who believes in Him. It is not Christ but faith that makes us perfect, and it apparently does not much matter what the object is on which the faith rests. The faith of a fetich-worshipper (provided it embraces all he knows) is as efficacious to produce perfection in him as the faith of a John or a Paul. We see how loosely Finney sits to the fundamental proposition for which, under Mahan's influence, he argues, that the effective attainability of perfection is a gift of God in the provisions of the gospel.

All this leaves us quite in the dark as to how faith sanctifies us. That faith sanctifies us wholly, and that instantaneously on our exercising it, quite independently of what we believe, whether much or little (so only it be all we know), we are told with some emphasis. But we are not told how faith does this extraordinary thing. Henry Cowles offers

himself to us for this time of need.<sup>34</sup> He has a chapter on "the Bible doctrine concerning faith as a means of holiness," in which he describes in a very attractive way the sufficiency and richness of the provision in Christ for the believer's sanctification. But he does not deal with the matter exhaustively, and what he omits is unfortunately the gist of the matter. He does not tell us that it is by faith that we are united with Christ, and, having received forgiveness of sin and a title to eternal life, are granted the Holy Spirit as a power within us, not ourselves, making for righteousness. He deals in his next chapter with the work of the Spirit as Sanctifier; and does not there mention the reception of Him as a result of our faith. But though he does not give an exhaustive account of the part played by faith in our sanctification, what he does say is true and important, and errs only by defect—although it is by a great defect. There is a two-fold function ascribed to faith in our sanctification. Through it we obtain true and vivid views of what Jesus is—and are sanctified "by the influence of His character contemplated." And by it we "turn to Him for His aid in the divine life," and so take "the attitude of suppliants and recipients at His feet—and He does sustain us." If the concluding clause here seems to promise relief from the bald Pelagianizing of the rest, we are the more disappointed to discover that promise unfulfilled in a later passage. We *walk* by faith, we there read; we *live* by faith; and " 'the life I now live in the flesh, I live,' not by self-moved holy impulses, but 'by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' " The unnecessary opposition of "self-moved holy impulses," and "faith" may seem to point to a mystical doctrine of the indwelling Christ superseding our activities. But no—Cowles explains thus: "My belief that the Son of God did thus love me, and give Himself for me, works love in my soul, and constrains me to live to Him who thus lived and even died for me." There is nothing supernatural about it, then, at

<sup>34</sup> *Holiness in Christians*. 1840, pp. 39ff, 90ff.

all. "Christ lives in me by faith," means only that a belief in Christ lives in me; and it is not Christ but this belief which is the dynamic of my activities. Accordingly Cowles proceeds at once to say that what Paul teaches is that "Christ lived within him," "*in this sense, viz.:* his belief of certain great truths in respect to Christ, through the Spirit impressing these truths upon his heart [we wish we knew how he supposes the Spirit to do this!], constrains him to live wholly for Christ." "Love of Christ, produced through the Spirit [how?], by believing these things, now reigns in his soul and controls his life." Has not the phrase, "through the Spirit" an awkward appearance here? Somehow, we know not how, it was in some way, we know not in what way, "through the Spirit," that the love of Christ was produced "by believing these things"; and this love which we have to Christ constrains us to follow after Him. Pelagius himself could scarcely have said less.

That some such ideas as these were present to the mind of Finney also seems to be implied in a passage in the *Lectures on Systematic Theology*.<sup>35</sup> His fundamental contention here as always, is that the state of sanctification "is to be attained by faith alone." "Both justification and sanctification," he says, "are by faith alone"—meaning that both are surely enjoyed by the believer, but that each is attained by an act of faith of its own. He is no longer prepared to assert, however, that the faith by which sanctification is attained is itself the immediately producing cause of sanctification. On the contrary he proceeds to guard against that notion. "But let me by no means be understood," he writes, "as teaching sanctification by faith, as distinct from and opposed to sanctification by the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of Christ, or, which is the same thing, by Christ our Sanctification, living and reigning in the heart." Again and with even more precision of statement: "Faith is rather the instrument or condition, than the efficient agent that induces

<sup>35</sup> Ed. 1851, pp. 635ff. The passage occurs also in the first edition, 1847.

a state of personal and permanent sanctification. Faith simply receives Christ as King, to live and reign in the soul. It is Christ in the exercise of His different offices, and appropriated in his different relations to the wants of the soul, by faith, who secures our sanctification." This assertion is the direct contradiction of what we have formerly seen Finney affirming. In the former affirmations, faith was the immediately producing cause of our sanctification. In this it only entrusts the production of our sanctification to Christ, and Christ Himself undertakes and carries through the work of our sanctification. How He does it is explained in the following words: "This He does by divine discoveries to the soul of His divine perfections and fulness. The condition of these discoveries is faith and obedience." Our sanctification, secured by faith and obedience, is wrought by Christ, whose offices in working it are the precise thing that we secure by faith and obedience.

We ought not to neglect to notice the intrusion of the words "and obedience" into this statement. It is unexpected—and unauthorized. We had just been told that "the state of sanctification is attained by faith alone." We are now told that it is secured by "faith and obedience." We had just heard faith alone designated the "condition" of our sanctification. We now hear that its "condition" is "faith and obedience." And we are a little puzzled to understand how obedience can be the condition of obedience—for sanctification in Finney's definition of it is nothing but obedience. We are again very near to saying: We can become holy by becoming holy. All this, however, by the way. The main affirmation here is that the way in which Christ, who it is that sanctifies us, sanctifies us is—by making discoveries to the soul of His divine perfections and fulness. The real efficient agent of our sanctification is then no more Christ than faith; one is as little the "condition or instrument" of it as the other: the immediate, effective cause of our sanctification is the vision of the glory of Christ granted

the soul. We are told, it is true, that Christ lives and reigns in the souls of those who receive Him by faith, and, living and reigning in them, exercises His different offices there: but nothing is meant beyond His making Himself known to these souls in His glory, and in His relations to the soul's varied wants. And nothing happens until the soul, moved by this great vision into action, sanctifies itself. Christ does nothing to it except make Himself known to it. We are sanctified by revelation, not by renewal: Christ brings instruction, not power. The efficiency of the inducement here particularly intimated is now argued<sup>36</sup> on the ground that man, as sinner, is the victim of a one-sided development of his sensibilities. He is lopsided. All he needs is that the spiritual world should be revealed and made real to him. This can be done only by the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. What we need in order to become entirely sanctified may be summed up in three things. We must have "natural ability" to do the whole will of God—and that we all have. We must have sufficient knowledge to reveal to us our whole duty—and that also we all have, because nothing is duty until we know it as such. But we must have also "sufficient knowledge or light," "to reveal to us clearly the way or means of overcoming any and every difficulty or temptation that lies in our way." This "is proffered to us upon condition that we receive the Holy Spirit, who offers Himself as an indwelling light and guide, and who is received by simple faith." Our sanctification is here conditioned on faith in the Holy Spirit and is wrought by Him as "light and guide"—we need only to have the way pointed out, we are quite competent of ourselves to walk in it. There is a long list of the functions of the Holy Spirit as "light and guide": nothing is intimated but various forms of "knowledge."

There is an appearance at a little later point,<sup>37</sup> it is true, that something more may be acknowledged. "The Holy

<sup>36</sup> Pp. 636ff.

<sup>37</sup> P. 644.

Spirit sanctifies us," we are here told, "only by revealing Christ to us as our sanctification. He does not speak of Himself, but takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us." It is Christ who is our real Sanctifier, or rather our Sanctification. And Finney proceeds now to magnify Him in this office. He does not, to be sure, admit that Christ "does something to the soul that enables it to stand and persevere in holiness in its own strength"; "He does not change the structure of the soul." This language is only Finney's customary way of denying that Christ does what He Himself says He does—make the tree good that the fruit may be good. In point of fact Christ does precisely what is intended to be denied here. He does do something to the soul that enables it to stand and persevere in holiness in its own strength,—though not all at once. The sanctified Christian will do holiness in his own strength in the same sense that a holy angel does—or that the sun attracts the earth in its own strength, or that it is with its own sweetness that honey is sweet. But sanctified Christians in this full sense do not exist on earth; and no creature of God is independent of Him, in whom we all live and move and have our being. What Finney means is to reject altogether all "physical" sanctification; although "physical sanctification" is of course all the sanctification that is real sanctification. Permit him, however, to repudiate that, and he seems willing to go pretty far—if we can speak of anything as far which falls short of that. Christ, he says, "watches over the soul"—but that is sufficiently external. He also, however, he says, "works in it to will and to do continually"—and now we begin to take notice. This is less, to be sure, than that transforming of the soul's ethical character which the Scriptures ascribe to Him; but it appears at least to imply control. It seems to ascribe to Christ not merely a plying of the soul with motives, but a determining of its action under these motives. And when we read: "He rules in and reigns over the soul," "in so high a sense, that He, as it were, develops His own holiness in us,"—we

are almost ready to rejoice with trembling. We do not quite know what the words "develops His own holiness in us" are intended to mean; as indeed Finney himself did not, as the qualifying "as it were" seems to imply. The words may bear the perfectly good sense that Christ produces in us a holiness just like His own. They may become, however, a rather crass mystical suggestion, as if Christ transferred His holiness to us or shared it with us. And there is other mystical language employed in the context. We read of His "swallowing us up, enfolding, if I may so say, our wills and our souls in His." What is it to have not only our wills but our very souls "swallowed up," "enfolding" in Christ's? Our souls swallowed up in His soul, enfolding in His soul! This language, however, is not only qualified by the inserted "if I may so say," suggesting that it is not really meant, but is incorporated into a sentence which wholly empties it of the meaning that it might seem naturally to carry. What is said is, that Christ "*as it were* so swallows us up, so enfolds, *if I may so say*, our wills and souls in His, *that we are willingly led captive by Him.*" We drop at once from the mystical heights, and discover that all that is intended is that "we will and do as He wills within us"—that is, obey Him. And having started to drop, we drop still lower when we read the next sentence, which reduces again the working in us to will and to do to a mere matter of inducement: "He charms the will into a universal bending to His will." Control has become only a "charming." And now comes the end: "He becomes our sanctification only in so far forth as we are revealed to ourselves and He revealed to us, and as we receive Him and put Him on." "What! has it come to this!"—we borrow this exclamation from Finney with our apologies—that after all the apparent promise of a real sanctifying operation in us—after all the even mystical language employed to describe it—we have nothing left in our hands but "revelation"? Christ reveals us to ourselves and Himself to us; and then, we, induced by this revelation, "re-

ceive Him," and "put Him on." What Christ gives is revelation; we do the rest.

Despite all this elaborate relegation of the whole sanctifying work to ourselves, Finney continues strenuously to insist that sanctification is by faith alone; as truly so as justification. His meaning apparently is that the "revelation" under the inducement of which we sanctify ourselves, is secured by faith, so that ultimately it is through faith that we are sanctified. He is willing to allow accordingly one difference between the relation of justification and sanctification respectively to their procuring acts of faith. Both are "brought about by grace through faith"; but "it is true, indeed, that in our justification our own agency is not concerned, while in our sanctification it is."<sup>38</sup> This somewhat notable admission of the part played by our own activities in the process of sanctification, need not be, but is, a recognition of sanctification as self-wrought. It affirms therefore a very great difference in the relations of justification and sanctification to their respective procuring acts of faith. In the one case faith secures from God a decree of justification. In the other faith secures from God only inducements under which we sanctify ourselves. Meanwhile Finney speaks now and again in very misleading language of the relation of sanctification to works "of law." Whatever is said to an inquirer, he says on one occasion,<sup>39</sup> "that does not clearly convey the truth that both justification and sanctification are by faith, without works of law, is law and not gospel." There can, of course, be no such things as sanctification "without works of law." In Finney's own phrase, sanctification is just "obedience, for the time being, to the moral law." How can "obedience to law" take place "without works of law?" Justification can be "without works of law" because justification is not law-keeping on our own part, but acceptance of us as righteous by God: and when it is said to be without "works

<sup>38</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Ed. 1851, p. 745.

<sup>39</sup> P. 631.



of law," what is meant is that the ground of our acceptance as righteous is found not in our own obedience to the law, but in that of another rested on by us in faith. When, on the other hand, it is said that sanctification is by faith "without works of law,"—that, to speak frankly, is mere nonsense. The phrase might have meaning if what was intended were that, as sanctification is an issue of justification, and justification is by faith without works of law, we obtain our sanctification ultimately by faith "without works of law." That is true; but what we obtain in sanctification is just "works of law"—for sanctification is, as Finney rightly tells us, obedience to the moral law. This obedience to the moral law, now, cannot possibly be, in any case, the immediate effect of faith. We do not obey by faith, but by works. Faith by its very nature, rests on something outside of ourselves; obedience is the product of something which works within us. Another's righteousness can form the basis of our pardon; another's righteousness cannot form the content of our holiness. Another can supply the ground of our acceptance with God: another cannot supply our personal conformity to the requirements of the law. We may entrust our sanctification to another, just as we entrust our justification to another. We do. But the effect is wrought differently in the two cases: in the one case without us and in the other within us. And unless we are willing to admit that Christ works in us, conforming us to the law, we cannot speak of sanctification as by faith: and even in that case we cannot speak of it as "without works of law." It is not secured by "works of law," but it consists of "works of law," apart from which it does not exist.

Into this closed circle of Pelagian conceptions Mahan breaks with his assertion of the supernaturalness of salvation. It is as an assertion of the supernaturalness of the whole of salvation, that he understands the declaration that our sanctification as well as our justification is by faith, by faith alone. Faith, in its very nature, is a commitment, an entrusting to another; and its results must be brought about

therefore by the action of this other. Sanctification by faith is thus only another way of saying sanctification by Christ through His Spirit, on whom it is that faith rests. This is the precise contradictory of sanctification by our own activities, and it is only paltering in a double sense, according to Mahan, to explain that Christ, through His Spirit, sanctifies us, by presenting the motives to sanctification to us so strongly as to call out our self-activities effectively to that end. The motives which induce us to commit our sanctification to Christ would induce us to sanctify ourselves if that were possible to us under the mere influence of motives: in point of fact they do induce us to sanctify ourselves, in the only way in which we can sanctify ourselves, namely by committing our sanctification to Christ. The committal of our sanctification to Christ in faith is a confession that we cannot sanctify ourselves; and the prescription of this method of sanctification by the Scriptures is their testimony that we cannot sanctify ourselves. The main facts in the case accordingly are that we are incapable of sanctifying ourselves, and that it is precisely because we are incapable of sanctifying ourselves that sanctification is by faith, that is to say, by Christ in response to the commitment of it to Him. Here we have the foundation of Mahan's reasoning. Some of the corollaries which he draws from it are, that because this sanctification is wrought by Christ alone, it may be and is immediate, instantaneous and complete. His perfectionism is thus distinctively a supernatural perfectionism. Christ's people may be perfect, precisely because it is Christ the Lord who makes them perfect, and not they themselves.

There are some passages in Mahan's *Christian Perfection* which seem to imply that Christ's sanctifying work<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Both Mahan and Finney sometimes use the word "work" of sanctification in contrast with "act," used of justification, apparently out of mere reminiscence of this distinction of usage in the Shorter Catechism, but not reproducing that distinction. They mean by "work" to distinguish sanctification as a production, from justification which is only an action. Cf. *e.g.* Mahan, *Autobiography*, pp. 292f.

is conceived by him as accomplished simultaneously with the act of justification and in response to the same exercise of faith by which justification is obtained. In one of these,<sup>41</sup> he represents it as "the grand mistake into which "the mass of Christians appear to have fallen, in regard to the gospel of Christ," that they expect "to obtain *justification*, and not, at the same time, and to the same extent, *sanctification*, by faith in Christ." Attention is naturally attracted, first of all to the phrase "to the same extent"—a mode of speech repeated elsewhere, as, for instance, in the sentence:<sup>42</sup> "If Christ should justify, and not to the same extent sanctify His people, He would save them *in*, and not *from* their sin." It seems at first sight to be implied that justification like sanctification is a progressive work, and that the two proceed *pari passu*, and therefore always coëxist in the same measure: we are always sanctified just so far as we are justified and cannot be justified beyond the measure in which we are sanctified.<sup>43</sup> Closer scrutiny makes it clear, however, that this is not Mahan's meaning. He is not insisting that justification must be as progressive as sanctification; but, just the contrary, that sanctification must be as instantaneously complete as justification. He means to say that it is absurd to suppose that we are completely justified all at once—as we certainly are—and not to suppose that we are completely sanctified at the same time: and it is as wicked as it is absurd, since then we should be asserting that we are saved *in* and not *from* our sins.

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<sup>41</sup> P. 106.

<sup>42</sup> P. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Canfield as cited, pp. 52ff., does not fail to put his finger on the passages in Mahan's *Christian Perfection* (pp. 27, 123 of ed. 1839), in which he insists that Christ must sanctify His people "to the same extent" that He justifies them. He rightly points out that it is absurd to speak of a gradual or incomplete justification. He expounds Mahan's teaching, however, as that "complete justification and entire sanctification are simultaneous,—that justification is not complete until sanctification is entire,"—and that no one can be an heir of eternal life unless he is entirely sanctified. Only the perfectly sanctified can say: There is, therefore, now no condemnation.

This, however, is all the more strongly to assert the absolute coëtaneousness of justification and sanctification in its completeness; and compels us not only to give its full validity to the phrase "at the same time," but to throw a strong emphasis upon it. Justification and sanctification in its completeness are thus affirmed in the most uncompromising way to take place together.

It is of course true that it is by one and the same act of faith that we receive Christ both as our justification and as our sanctification, and that we cannot have Him as the one without having Him as the other: we cannot take Him in one of his offices as our Mediator, and reject Him in another. Had that been Mahan's assertion he would have been only repeating an elementary teaching of the universal Reformed faith. When he asserts, however, that by this single act of faith we not only obtain both justification and sanctification, but obtain them both at once in their utmost completeness, he asserts more than either the Reformed faith or his own better judgment permits. On the ground here taken, if the believer be not perfectly sanctified from the very moment of his justification, that is, of his believing, he is, in the sense here conveyed, saved *in* his sin. If he has a single sin remaining, and that the tiniest that a sin can be and yet remain a sin—he is saved *in* his sin. What is really declared then is that every believer is perfect, in the sense that he is freed from all sin from the moment of his believing. That carries with it the consequence that no one is a believer—that no one is justified—that no one is saved in any sense, to whom there clings a single, even the tiniest sin. Christ's salvation is *from* sin and never *in* sin. Now Mahan does not in the least believe that. He is only for the moment caught in the meshes of his own chop-logic, and is reasoning on a submerged premise, assumed not only without but against proof—that sanctification takes place all at once and occupies no time. If sanctification occupies time, then it does not follow that because sins still occur in a Christian's life, he is not in Him who saves *from* sin

and not *in* sin; it follows only that his salvation *from* sin is not yet completed. At the moment Mahan is commenting on Rom. viii 3, 4—"that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." "To have this righteousness fulfilled in us," he comments, "implies that it be *perfectly accomplished in us*, or that we are brought into *perfect conformity to the moral rectitude required by the law*. This is declared to be one of the great objects of Christ's death." Nothing truer could be said. But then he adds: "Such conformity, then, is practicable to the Christian, or Christ failed to accomplish one of the prime purposes of his redemption." And at once the submerged premise confuses the reasoning and vitiates the conclusion. Both too little and too much is said. It is too little to say that perfect conformity to the moral rectitude required by the law is practicable to the Christian. It is assured to him. He not only may have it; he certainly will have it. There is no question of Christ's failing to accomplish this prime purpose of His redemption. It will be accomplished. But too much is said when it is implied that the Christian can enjoy this prime purpose of redemption, in its absolute completeness, at any moment he wishes, without regard to its nature, or the method—the laws if you will—of its conference. This is a blessing in the conference of which time is consumed; and it is not to be had without the expenditure of time-consuming effort. To suggest that the Christian is warranted in concluding that Christ has failed to accomplish one of the prime purposes of His redemption, if he finds himself *not yet* in possession of this blessing in its fullest extent, is a sad piece of reasoning. To intimate that we may have all that Christ has purchased for us, in all its fulness, all at once, at the moment of believing, is not merely to confound all human experience, but to go beyond what Mahan has found it possible to believe himself. For after all, Mahan does not believe what he here asserts—that all who believe in Christ are immediately in that act of faith both perfectly justified and perfectly sanctified.

One indication that he does not believe it may be found in passages, lying side by side with those just quoted, in which he develops a conception of the relation of faith to the blessings obtained by it, which is quite incongruous to what he here asserts. In one of these<sup>44</sup> he is discussing the difference between perfect and imperfect faith. This he finds not in a difference in the degree of confidence the two exhibit—as if trust and distrust were mixed in them in different proportions—but in the breadth of their reference. “In consequence of ignorance of the perfect fulness of Christ’s redemption in all respects,” we may be found reposing “confidence in one, and not in every, feature of Christ’s character as a Savior.” Our confidence in Him may be full confidence, from the intensive point of view, but far from full from the extensive point of view. We entrust to Him utterly what we entrust to Him, but we do not entrust to Him all we ought to entrust to Him. The illustration given is precisely this: “The mind . . . may repose full confidence in Christ as a justifying, but not as a *sanctifying* Savior.” We may then receive justification and not sanctification. These two are not necessary concomitants, the inseparable co-products of one act of faith. They are severally products of different acts of faith and are sought and enjoyed each for itself. There is indeed a wider implication behind this—that we seek by faith and receive the several benefits which Christ bestows on His people one by one, as we appeal to Him for each. And behind that lies the deeper implication still that salvation is not a unit, but may be broken up into fragments and granted piecemeal; and therefore also may be enjoyed by this or that individual only in this or that part. He that has only partial faith, that is to say faith for only part of the things which are to be had in Christ, may be saved only in part, that is, may receive only part of salvation. We may be justified, for example, and not sanctified. One would like to know what the state of such a man is. Being justified, his sins are all

<sup>44</sup> *Christian Perfection*, p. 114.

pardoned; he is accepted in God's sight; and the reward of eternal life is given him. We suppose this means, in common parlance, that he will "go to heaven." And indeed, where else would one go, against whom the law of God brings no charge, and for whom it bears witness that he is righteous? But not having been sacrificed, he must go to heaven a corrupt and polluted, though not guilty, wretch. And we are brought up short by the fundamental principle that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

It is of course in part a defective view of justification itself which produces these remarkable results. Corruption is the very penalty of sin from which we are freed in justification; holiness is the very reward which is granted us in justification. It is therefore absurd to suppose that sanctification can fail where justification has taken place. Sanctification is but the execution of the justifying decree. For it to fail would be for the acquitted person not to be released in accordance with his acquittal. It is equally absurd to speak of a special "sanctifying faith" adjoined to "justifying faith"; "justifying faith" itself necessarily brings sanctification, because justification necessarily issues in sanctification—as the chains are necessarily knocked off of the limbs of the acquitted man. The Scriptures require of us not faiths but faith. Mahan, on the other hand, is very much inclined to make a hobby of the notion that we must have a special faith for every particular benefit received of Christ. "Perfect faith," he asserts,<sup>45</sup> "is a full and unshaken confidence in Christ, as in all respects, at all times, and in every condition, a full and perfect Savior, a Savior able and willing to meet every possible demand of our being." That is true, and well-said: that is in its nature the faith which every Christian has and lives by. But must all the sides and aspects of Christ's saving activities be explicated in our knowledge or else we do not get them? Does our enjoyment of them absolutely depend on our explication of them in our knowledge and the direction of our

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<sup>45</sup> As cited, 114.

faith to each and every of them separately? That is the tendency of Mahan's treatment of the matter. We must not go to Christ, he tells us,<sup>46</sup> as a Savior in general, expecting him to save us from our sins. We must take our sins to Him one by one. "From our sins Christ does not and cannot save us, unless by faith we thus"—that is distributively—"appropriate the provisions of His redemption." So strongly is the notion of the exercise of faith distributively pressed, that Mahan is even ready to say,<sup>47</sup> that no blessing will be received—for example the blessing of sanctification—if it be applied for in a general way. This is the reason, he says, that "Christians apply to Christ for sanctification, etc., almost without success. Their object is commonly general and undefined, and nothing specific is presented." We must come to Christ with a specific need in our hearts and one of His specific promises in our hands, and do this over and over again, until we work through all our needs and all His promises. We seem far enough away, in this presentation of the way of life, from the notion asserted in the passages formerly adduced, that perfect sanctification accompanies justification as its inseparable concomitant, else Christ would save us *in*, not *from* our sins: that we must in other words at once on believing be saved *from all* our sins on pain of implicating Christ in their continuance.

However Mahan may have endeavored to conciliate for himself such conflicting lines of thought, he emerges into the open with the clear and firm conviction that justification and sanctification are two distinct and separable benefits to be sought and obtained by two distinct and separable acts of faith. This is already apparent in the full exposition which he gives us of the theoretical foundation of his doctrine of perfection, in the fourth discourse of his *Christian Perfection*.<sup>48</sup> He speaks freely here of our being

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<sup>46</sup> P. 134.

<sup>47</sup> P. 157.

<sup>48</sup> Pp. 77ff.



made perfect by divine grace,—even of our being made perfect by the indwelling Christ—after a fashion which seems to bear a more mystical than Pelagian implication. But the two tendencies are not to him irreconcilable. Everything is made to depend on the human will; and man may therefore be said to work out his own perfection. But it appears that he does this not directly but indirectly,—by handing it over to grace or to the indwelling Christ to work it out for him. Accordingly Christ is represented as saying to the believer, “I will secure you in a state of perfect and perpetual obedience to every command of God, and in the full and constant fruition of His presence and love”; and as promising, “All this will I do in perfect consistency with the full and uninterrupted exercise of your own free agency.”<sup>49</sup> What the believer is to do is “to make a full surrender” of himself to Christ. This includes “an actual reception of Christ, and reliance upon Him for all these blessings, in all their fulness,—a surrender of his whole being to Him, that He may accomplish in him all the ‘exceeding great and precious promises’ of the new covenant.”<sup>50</sup> And we are told that “when this is done—when there is that full and implicit reliance upon Christ for the entire fulfillment of all that He has promised,—He becomes directly responsible for our full and complete redemption.” By a complete surrender to Him we voluntarily put ourselves into His hands, and He thereafter assumes “all the responsibility.”<sup>51</sup> “Christ is now present in your heart, and ready

<sup>49</sup> P. 78.

<sup>50</sup> P. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Canfield, pp. 67ff., adduces this statement of Mahan’s and analogous ones of Finney’s, and remarks that it is involved, of course, that we can never sin again. If Christ becomes “directly responsible for our full and complete redemption”—is “pledged,” “to produce in us perfect and perpetual obedience,”—to “sanctify us wholly, and preserve our whole spirit, soul, and body, blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (in the sense Mahan put on these words)—how can we possibly sin again? Yet Mahan within four pages can write: “We can ‘abide in Christ,’ and thus bring forth the fruit required of us. If by unbelief we separate ourselves from Christ, we

to confer all this purity and blessedness upon you, if you can believe that He is able and willing to do it for you, and will cast your entire being upon His faithfulness."<sup>52</sup> "If . . ." It is all primarily in our hands and rests on our will. But when we have met that "if," then it is all in Christ's hands and He will do it all. "We learn" hence, Mahan explains,<sup>53</sup> "how to understand and apply such declarations of Scripture as the following—'Wash you, make you clean'; 'Make ye yourselves a new heart and a new spirit'; 'Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,' etc." "The common impression seems to be," he says, "that men are required to do all this, in the exercise of their own unaided powers; and because the sinner fails to comply, grace comes in, and supplies the condition in the case of Christians." That is not his view. His view is that grace is always standing ready to do the work, if only we will draw on it for it. We are not required to do it ourselves; we are required to do it by means of grace, which is put at our disposal for the purpose. The fountain, whose waters cleanse from sin, is set open: it is our business to descend into it and wash. "The sinner is able to make to himself a 'new heart and a new spirit,' because he can instantly avail himself of proffered grace." It is really his own act: *facit per alium, facit per se*. Grace is but the instrument he uses to accomplish his result. "He does literally 'make to himself a new heart and a new spirit,' when he yields himself to the influence of that grace. The power to cleanse from sin lies in the blood and grace of Christ; and hence, when the sinner 'purifies himself by obeying the truth through the spirit,' the glory of his salvation belongs, not to him, but to Christ."<sup>54</sup> The validity of this inference is more than questionable: Christ in this view

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of necessity descend, under the weight of our own guilt and depravity, down the sides of the pit, into the eternal sepulchre" (p. 92).

<sup>52</sup> P. 90.

<sup>53</sup> P. 91.

<sup>54</sup> P. 92.

is but the instrument with which the sinner works. Meanwhile, however, it is made very plain that Christ and Christ only does or can do the work; and as the application is expressly made to the work of sanctification, the immediate supernaturalness of sanctification and its direct dependence on faith and faith alone are clearly asserted. "Herein also lies the ability of the creature to obey the commands of God, addressed to us as redeemed sinners . . . We can 'abide in Christ,' and thus bring forth the fruit required of us."<sup>55</sup> The way we bear fruit is to apply to Christ for it.

We may perhaps be advanced in apprehending Mahan's conception by attending to a passage in which he undertakes to discriminate between what he calls the antinomian, the legal and the evangelical spirits. The antinomian spirit, he says, looks to Christ for justification now, and satisfied with that, does not bother itself at all about sanctification. The legal spirit has two forms. In its extremest form—the form in which it appears in the ancient Pharisee and "modern moralist,"—it seeks both to justify and to sanctify itself by its own efforts. In its milder form it looks to Christ for justification and depends on its own efforts for sanctification. The evangelical spirit looks to Christ for both justification and sanctification through faith alone. He differentiates himself here from the antinomian through his zeal for sanctification: he is concerned for personal holiness and earnestly seeks it. He differentiates himself on the other hand from the "legalist," by the means he uses to obtain this longed-for holiness. The "legalist" seeks it "by personal efforts;" he seeks it "by faith." This is as much as to say that the "legalist" seeks it in himself and expects to draw it out of himself by strenuous strivings; while Mahan seeks it in Christ and expects to receive it from Christ on faith. We do not stop to point out the injustice of setting sanctification by effort and sanctification by faith in mutually exclusive opposition to one another. If there be any who, having looked to Christ for their justi-

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<sup>55</sup> P. 94.

fication, then expect to sanctify themselves altogether apart from Christ, they present in their own persons a very odd contradiction. How can they, united to Christ by faith, act in their attempts to be holy, altogether out of relation with Christ, into union with whom they have come? Their efforts to be holy are themselves part of the sanctifying effects of the faith by which they are united with Christ—not all of it nor even the main part of it, but a part of it. Effort and faith cannot in themselves be set in crass opposition to one another, as if where the one is the other cannot be. They rather go together in a matter like sanctification which consists in large part of action. But that is not the matter which it concerns us most at the moment to take note of. The matter for us to note now is that by setting himself in opposition to those who “expect sanctification from personal effort,” and by the very inconsiderateness of this opposition, it is made the clearer that Mahan thinks of himself as teaching that sanctification is obtained not at all by “personal effort,” but by faith alone, and is the work of Christ exclusively, into which no other work of man enters except faith alone.<sup>56</sup>

In a later writing,<sup>57</sup> Mahan tells us explicitly that, when

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<sup>56</sup> This is of course a Quietistic attitude. John Woodbridge (*Theological Essays Reprinted from the Princeton Review*, 1846, p. 413f.) deals admirably with Mahan's Quietism. The illustrative passages quoted from Mahan (*Christian Perfection*, pp. 189, 190, 191) are excellently chosen and the comments are telling (p. 414). “It is manifest from the inspired volume that we are to come to Christ, not for the purpose of saving ourselves the trouble of a personal warfare, but that we may engage in such a warfare with good motives, with becoming zeal, with persevering energy, and with success . . . When Christ works in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure, it is that, sustained, quickened by his power, we may work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” “Yet, after all,” he continues, “it is not intended by the writers to whom we refer, to ascribe all holiness to divine agency. Their meaning appears to be, that Christ will sanctify us wholly if we look to him for such a blessing: yet there is no provision in their system to secure the act of looking itself. Man begins to turn, and God completes the sanctification of man.”

<sup>57</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, 1875, p. 37.

he was first converted, he "knew Christ well in the sphere of justification, or pardon of sin, but knew nothing of Him in that of our sanctification, and had never heard of Him as 'the Son of God who baptizes with the Holy Ghost.'" "Of the idea of the life of faith and of the life revealed in the words, 'I in thee, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in me,' I was as ignorant as an unborn babe." If we were compelled to take these words in their general, ordinary meaning, the statement made in them would be sheerly incredible. Mahan intends them only in the sense of his own special doctrines of sanctification and the baptism of the Spirit. In that case they amount only to saying that he had not yet elaborated his peculiar views on the subject, when he was first converted—as how should he? He therefore proceeds to plead that young converts should be taught at once that entire sanctification is to be had immediately from Christ on going to Him for it,—just as full justification has been had. His meaning is, that they should not be permitted uselessly to expend their strength in seeking to hew out sanctification for themselves, when the only way in which it can be obtained is from Christ by faith alone. A very striking enforcement of this counsel is found in a passage in his *Autobiography*<sup>58</sup> in which he sharply criticizes Finney's methods of dealing with converts "before he learned the way of the Lord more perfectly." He wished "to induce among believers *permanence* in the Divine life." But he knew no way to do it, it is said, except to insist on "the renunciation of sin, consecration to Christ, and purpose of obedience." He worked along this line with the utmost zeal and to the permanent injury of his converts. Years afterward, his converts at the Chatham Street Chapel, New York, had "never recovered from the internal weakness and exhaustion which had resulted from the terrible discipline through which Mr. Finney had carried them." "And this," Mahan adds, "was all the good which had resulted from his efforts." The same method, he says, had

<sup>58</sup> P. 246.

the same effect on Finney's first pupils at Oberlin. He was prescribing effort: the only right way is the way of faith.

It should be carefully noted that it is involved in these criticisms that, in Mahan's view, sanctification is not merely not by effort but by faith, but also not by the act of faith by which justification is received, but by a subsequent act of faith all its own. He is speaking of those already converted, and of their sanctification as a subsequent transaction. This is not a matter of little concern to him. He is insistent that sanctification follows conversion. He is found indeed sharply inveighing against those who say that all Christians have received "the baptism of the Holy Ghost" at the time of their conversion, and in doing so makes it plain enough that "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," which with him is a condition of the influx of the grace that sanctifies the soul, is a distinct and subsequent endowment to converting grace. He repels the accusation that, as we have received this baptism at conversion, there is "no such promise as you speak of, in reserve for us now." He insists that no matter what they once received, Christians are obviously in sore need of such an endowment now. He argues formally that Christ "makes prior obedience the express condition of this reception of the Comforter"—with the meaning that it must therefore be not an initial gift but one that comes in the course of Christian living. He declares directly that "inspiration speaks expressly of two classes of converted persons—of the one class as 'spiritual,' and the other as 'yet carnal'—the one as made, and the other as not yet made, 'perfect in love,'—the one as having, the other as not having 'fellowship' with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ—the one as having received, and the other as not having received, the Holy Ghost since they believed,—and of the 'joy' of the one class as being, and of the other as not being, 'full.'"<sup>59</sup>

There is a passage in the *Autobiography*<sup>60</sup> in which Ma-

<sup>59</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, 1875, pp. 317f.

<sup>60</sup> Pp. 292ff.

han's doctrine of sanctification is set forth in quite a systematic form, and which may well serve therefore as a norm for the interpretation of more scattered expositions. "Sanctification," we here read, "is a gift of grace in the same sense, and attainable on the same condition, that justification is. Justification is an *act* of God, an act by which our sins are remitted, and we restored to a legal standing before Him, as if we had never sinned. Sanctification, on the other hand, is a *work*<sup>61</sup> wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, 'a renewing of the Holy Ghost,' by which 'the body of sin is destroyed,' that is, evil dispositions and tendencies are 'taken out of our flesh,' and we are made 'partakers of the Divine nature.' We have no more direct and immediate agency in sanctification than we have in justification. Each with equal exclusiveness is, I repeat, a gift of grace, and each is vouchsafed on the same condition as the other . . . To comply with the condition is our part of the transaction. The condition being complied with, our responsibility in the matter is at an end." Having cited Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27, he proceeds: "Three great blessings in all fulness, are here specifically promised: namely, full and perfect cleansing from all sinful dispositions, tendencies and habits; and equally full and perfect renewal, 'the gift of a new spirit,' and 'a heart of flesh,' in the place of a heart of stone which 'had been taken out of the flesh'; and the 'gift of the Holy Ghost,' by whose indwelling the believer is 'endued with power' for every good word and work, and perfected in his obedience to God's statutes and judgments." Here is a complete negative and positive explication of what sanctification is. Negatively, everything sinful is eradicated from the believer—including every sinful disability he may be supposed to have. Positively, holiness is infused into him, carrying with it power to every good word and work. "Every item" of this transformation "is the exclusive work of God." Our part in sanctification is "to come to God by Jesus

<sup>61</sup> For Mahan's use of the term, see Note No. 40.

Christ, to have these things done for us.”<sup>62</sup> “Sanctification and justification, being both in common, and with the same exclusiveness, gifts of God, the one is just as instantaneous as the other.”<sup>63</sup> The Scriptures do indeed speak of “growth in grace,” but that is “quite another thing” from a process of becoming holy: it is the expansion and development of the already holy person. “First, the healing, restoration to health or sanctification; then growth, ‘growth in grace,’ ”—a growth this, that is not merely progressive but eternal. The note struck here is the note of a supernatural, instantaneous, entire transformation—a transformation which is “total” not only in the extensive sense but in the intensive sense. For one of the most notable features of it is the emphasis with which it is declared that the transformation is a transformation of nature and not merely of activities. “The body of sin is destroyed”; and that is defined as meaning that “evil dispositions and tendencies are taken out of our flesh”: a “full and perfect cleansing is made from all sinful dispositions, tendencies and habits.” A new heart is placed within us: and we are made “partakers of the Divine nature.” A work like this cannot well be called other than “physical.”

It is important to observe that the “physical” salvation which is thus taught is strictly reserved for the second stage of salvation, and is a result of the second conversion. There is a curious passage in *Out of Darkness into Light*<sup>64</sup> in which this is explained to us. Here it is taught that, when we have been “through the Spirit convicted of sin, and have exercised genuine repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” strange to say, nothing has been wrought in us by His Spirit. We have taken up a new attitude, and that is all. We have done our duty—exercised repentance and faith,—and that is the whole of it. God responds to this repentance and faith, it is true, by

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<sup>62</sup> P. 294.

<sup>63</sup> P. 294.

<sup>64</sup> Pp. 270ff.



granting us pardon: but that takes place outside of us, and remains outside of us—we remain ourselves precisely as before. “As far as his *voluntary* activities are concerned,” Mahan remarks, the believer “is now in a state of supreme obedience to the will of God.” But he adds: “His old propensities, dispositions, temper, and tendencies, however, remain as they were, and remain to war against this newborn purpose of obedience.” Nothing has happened to the believer in himself: he has turned to God, but this has brought no change to his inner self. If left in this condition,—and Mahan says the majority of believers are left in this condition—the believer cannot sustain himself in his newly assumed attitude. He lapses from his first love, lives on a low plane, falls, and falls again. There is apparently attributed to him a power to retain the faith he has conceived; but, being left to himself, he can retain it only with a feeble hold. What we wonder at is that he can be supposed to retain it at all. “Open and gross immoralities excepted,” we read,<sup>65</sup> “the convert carries with him into the Christian life the same propensities, dispositions, and temper that he had before his conversion, and these, when strongly excited, overcome him as they did before.” The convert in his own strength can avoid open and gross immoralities; but, nothing having happened to him within, he is unable to resist the impulses which arise from his unaffected “old man.” It is a curious condition this, and one cannot see that there can be attributed to it anything that can justly be thought of as a state of salvation. We are told that the believer has escaped the penalties due to his sins—is a pardoned man: but he remains in precisely the same inward condition in which he was before. He is still in the condition of the natural man seeking to reform himself.

But now a second step can be taken. Christ may be apprehended “as the Mediator of the New Covenant”—to employ a favorite phrase of Mahan’s; that is, the convert

<sup>65</sup> P. 271.

may seek and obtain from Christ "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," and thus receive the Spirit for "the work of universal renovation." The Spirit now takes away the heart of stone and gives the convert a heart of flesh,—a new heart and a new spirit; writes the law in his inward parts—and the rest. This is "an all-cleansing, all-renovating, and all-vitalizing process," and, in contrast with "the washing of regeneration," is called "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The convert is now, his old man being crucified, imbued with a new "divine nature," and "filled with the Holy Ghost." The old propensities, dispositions, tempers and lusts are gone; and the Christian is free. "What a melancholy reflection it is," Mahan exclaims,<sup>66</sup> "that most believers advance no further in the Christian life than 'the washing of regeneration,' are ignorant of Christ as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and, consequently have no experience of 'the renewing of the Holy Ghost.'" Is it not a more melancholy reflection still that a Christian teacher can so cut Christ's great salvation up into sections as to imagine that a sinner can sincerely repent of his sins, and cast himself in faith on Christ for salvation—and then not receive it? According to Mahan this is the condition in which most Christians find themselves. Their salvation has been wholly intermitted after the first step.

We see that one of the things which Mahan has greatly at heart, in urging to this second step, is that the Christian may be relieved from his old evil propensities and thus be freer to fight, in the Christian warfare, against external enemies. Up to the reception of "the second blessing" the old evil propensities remain and are the constant source of sin. It is useless to strive against them—we cannot eradicate them: though, as we have just seen, we can do what seems on the whole not a little in the way of repressing their worst movements, and Mahan accordingly characterizes this condition as one, not of darkness, but of "twilight." He is not counselling, however, inert acceptance of

<sup>66</sup> P. 273.

them; he is only recommending rightly directed efforts—we must strive not ourselves to conquer them, but to obtain their eradication at the hands of Christ. In one of the passages in which he describes most fully what he means by this,<sup>67</sup> he is speaking directly of “religious joy,” but he expressly makes the attainment to this “religious joy” rest on the same principles as the attainment of holiness,<sup>68</sup> and we may use the description of the method of the attainment of the one therefore equally well of the attainment of the other. We can have it, he says, only on the condition “that with all sincerity, earnestness, and tireless perseverance, ‘God shall for this be inquired of by you to do it for you.’” This is one of the phrases which he loves to repeat; and the enforcement of the duty inculcated by it he makes one of his chief concerns. If we wish any blessing we must inquire of the Lord for it, and we must do this with all strenuousness. “When you are told,” then, he explains, “not to make any effort to banish your cares or sorrows, or to induce religious peace or joy, you receive wise advice.” These things do not come “at the bidding of our wills, but at the bidding of Christ.” We must strive after them—but we must strive after them from the hands of Christ. It is wrong, then, “when inquirers are told, as they frequently are, not to think anything about their feelings, not to give themselves any concern about them one way or the other.” The truth is<sup>69</sup> “that our emotions as well as our moral states”—it is here that our own interest for the moment focuses—“should be the objects of reflection, faith and prayer. The divine direction is this:—‘Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God’ . . . The promises pertaining to our peace are as really the objects of faith and prayer as those pertaining to our justification and sanctification.” Striving thus in the right

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<sup>67</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, pp. 329ff.

<sup>68</sup> P. 344.

<sup>69</sup> P. 344.

way, we may be rid of our evil propensities, rid of them not in part, or merely in their activities, but altogether. Mahan knows, for he has tried it. "As a witness for Christ," he says,<sup>70</sup> "I would say that, were there a perfect oblivion of the facts of my life, prior to the time when thus I knew my Saviour, I should not from present experiences, ever suspect that those old dispositions, which once tyrannized over me, had ever existed." And one of the things that render it important to be rid of them is that then we are free to contend against external temptations with no traitor in the camp. For though perfected now, we are not free from temptations. And we shall need to strive against them with all our might.

At this point in the discussion Mahan introduces a warning against what he represents as an extreme position taken up by some in his own camp, which surprises us very much.<sup>71</sup> "There is much said," he says, "about receiving Christ as our present sanctification" which must be accepted with caution. If we have nothing in view but salvation from actual sin—we may, of course, expect immediate relief on believing. But "when we inquire of Him, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, to do for us all that is promised in that covenant, the case is different." And the difference in the case apparently consists in this—we must leave the fulfillment of all that for which we believe to God's own good time and way. We may, like the disciples, have to tarry for "the promise of the Spirit." After all, then, entire sanctification is not the immediate and complete response to faith. It may come gradually, in instalments. We may expect "salvation from actual sin" at once. But "heart-searching may precede the final cleansing, searching for God with all the heart must precede the finding of Him, and waiting and praying may precede, we cannot tell how long, the baptism of power." There is an appearance of excessive analysis here. Salvation from actual sin, final

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<sup>70</sup> P. 275.

<sup>71</sup> Pp. 277ff.

cleansing, finding of God, baptism of power,—and there are others. There is for example the distinction which is at once made between the “presence” of Christ in the heart and His “manifestation” there. It seems that Christ may dwell in us, and yet dwell there after some otiose fashion—not occupying Himself with us. We obtain His indwelling by faith: His manifestation of Himself within us awaits His own pleasure. The effort seems to be to safeguard to some degree the divine sovereignty. When we do our part, that does not compel His doing His part—at least, at once: He will do it, no fear as to that; but He will do it when and as He will. “Faith on our part does not of itself give us rest. The rest of faith is what Christ gives ‘after we have believed.’” *Gives*—an emphasis is laid on this. We do not by faith take it: Christ gives it. We must conceive then, it seems, of our second act of faith as securing for us the indwelling of Christ, who brings, of course, His benefits with Him; and then of His conferring these benefits one by one at His own discretion, but always in response, we infer from other passages already cited, to acts of faith claiming them. This notion of the indwelling Christ forms apparently the culmination of Mahan’s conception of the saving process. At the end of his book, *Out of Darkness into Light*,<sup>72</sup> he has a chapter on “Christ in us, and Christ for us,” a phrase in which, he thinks, the whole gospel is summed up. He declines<sup>73</sup> to explain the “sense” and “form” in which “Christ dwells and lives in believers,” on the ground that no one who has not experienced it can understand it. He outlines, however, some of the blessings which this indwelling brings. We shall, possessing it, have union, fellowship, and intercommunion with Him, in kind the same as obtains between Christ and the Father. “Christ will so completely control and determine our mental and moral states and activities, and so completely transform our whole moral character after His own image, that the

<sup>72</sup> Pp. 327ff.

<sup>73</sup> Pp. 332f.

Father will love us as He does Christ"—that is, of course, with the love of complacency, since we are then perfect; our love to Christ "will, in our measure, be rendered as perfect as His to us;" "our content under all the allotments of Providence" will be as perfect as His; our peace and joy as constant and full; and our love for our fellow-Christians "will be the same in kind as that which exists between Christ and the Father"—and the like. In a word, although we cannot tell what the indwelling of Christ is, we know it by its effects; and these effects are so described as to show that we are by it assimilated to Christ. By His dwelling within us Christ makes us like Himself.

Now, there are two conditions of obtaining this high gift. The first of these is that "through faith in Christ, in the varied relations in which He is for us, as a Saviour from sin, we must be brought into a state of full present consecration to Christ, and obedience to His commandments." We must, in other words, receive Christ in all that He is "for us." We must already be loving Christ and keeping his words; Christ will not make His abode in any but loving hearts and obedient spirits. Certainly this seems to say that the indwelling Christ does not make us "perfect," but finds us "perfect." The second condition is that we must have already received the "Comforter," "to enlarge our capacities to receive Christ and the Father." That is to say not only is perfection but also what Mahan calls "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" presupposed. "Christ and the Father," we are told, "can dwell within us but upon the condition that the Spirit shall first 'strengthen us with might in the inner man'; shall 'take the things of Christ and show them unto us,' and shall 'show us plainly of the Father.'" "Remember," we are told more broadly, "that the promise can be fulfilled in your experience but upon the condition that you shall love and obey Christ as the disciples did; and 'the Holy Ghost shall fall upon you as He did upon them at the beginning.'" It is clear from a

passage like this that to Mahan the twin pillars on which the highest structure of salvation rests are "perfection" and "the baptism of the Spirit"; and these, we will remember, he repeatedly tells us are the great doctrines to the promulgation of which he gave his life.

In the earliest of his perfectionist books,—the *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* of 1839—the doctrine of the "Baptism of the Spirit" is not developed. The last of the discourses included in the book, however, deals with the work of the Spirit in sanctification under the caption of "The Divine Teacher," and this caption fairly conveys the conception of the mode of His sanctifying work which is presented in the discussion. He is directly described in it as "enlightening the intellect, and carrying on the work of sanctification, by the presentation of truth to the mind." And again we are told<sup>74</sup> that "the Spirit sanctifies by presenting Christ to the mind in such a manner, that we are transformed into His image." These phrases are so external that it is necessary to remind ourselves that it is the work of the indwelling Spirit which is spoken of. He is spoken of in such a fashion as to imply that His presence in the heart is conceived as a supernatural fact, and His action as a supernatural action. But His action is spoken of exclusively as of the nature of "enlightening"; it is as "the divine teacher" alone that he is presented. It appears to be intended distinctly to deny that the mode of His action is of the nature of what is called "physical," and to confine its effects to such as are wrought by the truth. We are left, however, in darkness as to how the indwelling Spirit is thought to enlighten the mind, or, as that is here explained, to present truth or to present Christ to the mind. It does not seem to be meant that the Spirit reveals new truth to the mind, or reveals to it the old truths afresh. His action does not appear to be conceived as, in the strict sense revelatory, but rather as in its nature clarifying and enforcing: he gives clearness and force and effectiveness to

<sup>74</sup> P. 172.

the things of Christ. He makes Christ, in all that Christ is as our sanctification, vivid and impressive to us. What puzzles us is how He does it. Surely not by an effect on the truth itself with which He deals; or on Christ Himself whom He presents. Must not His operation terminate on the mind itself, affecting it in such a manner that it sees the truth in a new light and the Christ in His preciousness, and goes out to and embraces it and Him? And what is that but a "physical" effect? In subsequent discussions this ambiguity is left still imperfectly resolved. In the opening pages of *Out of Darkness into Light*,<sup>75</sup> for example; we read this sentence: "According to the express teaching of inspiration we know, and can know, divine truth in none of its forms but through a divine insight imparted to us through the Spirit." This is of course true, and would call for no remark except in a writer of this type. In such a one, it leaves us wondering how this insight can be thought to be imparted, especially when we read further and learn that all knowledge imparted thus by the Spirit is absolute knowledge. We may have beliefs of greater or less degrees of "conscious certainty" with "the teaching of the Spirit"; but when He illuminates the soul, we have not *beliefs* but *knowledge*, and that in the form of absolute knowledge.<sup>76</sup> On the basis of the religious psychology prevalent at Oberlin, it is exceedingly difficult to understand what the process of illumination can be which produces this effect. It seems to involve the assumption of an effect wrought by the Spirit on the man himself, that is on his heart, which cannot be called anything but "physical," and that seems to demand such a "physis" for man as is susceptible to such an operation. Mahan goes on to say<sup>77</sup> that by an action of the Spirit he "was himself made absolutely conscious that God had pardoned and accepted him." "I was as absolutely—I could not tell how—assured of this, as

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<sup>75</sup> 1875, P. 5.

<sup>76</sup> P. 7.

<sup>77</sup> P. 17.



I was that I existed at all." That is a familiar mode of speech among mystical perfectionists, and is called by Mahan "the witness of the Spirit." It seems to be represented as merely an ungrounded conviction; the ground of it is assumed to be the Spirit; and the guarantee of this assumption appears to be merely the absoluteness of the conviction. So explained, it falls within the category of revelations, and we observe Mahan, on a later page,<sup>78</sup> laying claim to special supernatural experiences which fall in nothing short of particular revelations. In this he but followed in the steps of those "New York Perfectionists" from whom he seeks fundamentally to separate himself, and of whom such experiences were characteristic. Perhaps we ought to state here also that the fanaticism of "faith cure"—"prayer cure," Mahan calls it,<sup>79</sup>—was fully shared by both him and Finney.

The special doctrine of "the Baptism of the Spirit," under that name, seems to have been given vogue among the Oberlin coterie first by John Morgan, who published in *The Oberlin Quarterly* for 1845, two essays on "The Holiness Acceptable to God," and "The Gift of the Holy Ghost," respectively.<sup>80</sup> The latter of these works out the doctrine substantially as subsequently taught at Oberlin, with great clearness and force of presentation.<sup>81</sup> Mahan's first formal discussion of it appears in his book bearing that title, which was not published until 1870.<sup>82</sup> The doctrine is set forth

<sup>78</sup> P. 229.

<sup>79</sup> Pp. 288ff., where a number of typical instances are described.

<sup>80</sup> Subsequently reprinted at Oberlin, 1875.

<sup>81</sup> See the excellent accounts of Morgan's discourse by James H. Fairchild, *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, p. 353, and Frank H. Foster, *Genetic History*, p. 456.

<sup>82</sup> In his *Autobiography*, p. 150, Mahan speaks of this book with a certain amount of pride. "Every discourse in that book," he says, "two or three of the last excepted, was prepared and delivered as a part of a regular course of theological lectures to a class of theological students, and was sent to the publisher just as prepared and delivered." He says the delivery of the lectures produced a revival in the institution, Adrian College, Michigan, of which he was then President. His

in outline in the opening pages of the volume. First a very welcome and no doubt much needed testimony is borne to the fact "that whenever any of the leading characteristics of 'the new man' are referred to in the Bible, they are specifically represented as induced by the indwelling presence, special agency and influence of the Holy Ghost."<sup>83</sup> This is true and important—the most important fact in the premises; we are sanctified by the Spirit whom God has given to dwell in us, and otherwise not. But next it is affirmed, as if it were equally true and equally important, that this gift of the spirit for our sanctification is an after-gift, granted to believers subsequently to their becoming believers. "The indwelling Spirit in our hearts is distinctly revealed as promised to us, and given to us AFTER [emphasis his] we have through His converting power 'repented of sin, and believed in Christ.'" There is a sense, of course, in which it is to be said that the work of the indwelling Spirit in sanctifying the soul, follows upon His act in regenerating it, by which we are converted, and, being converted, are justified. But this is not what Mahan means; he is not analyzing the unitary salvation into its distinguishable stages but dividing it into separable parts. Consequently he goes on<sup>84</sup> to affirm as the third element in his doctrine, that "the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit, 'the baptism of the Holy Ghost,' are, according to the express teachings of inspiration, to be sought and received by faith in God's word of promise, on the part of the believer, *after* he has believed; just as pardon and eternal life are to be sought by the sinner *prior* to justification." That is to say, the gift of the Spirit is not a result of justification, inseparably involved in it, but an independent gift to be obtained by an independent act of faith. The sinner

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latest exposition of the doctrine (which pervades all his later writings) will be found in the *Autobiography*, pp. 353ff. It does not differ from that in *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*.

<sup>83</sup> Pp. 10ff.

<sup>84</sup> *Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, pp. 13ff.

seeks pardon and eternal life *prior* to his justification, by one act of faith; he then *after* his justification seeks the gift of the Spirit by another, similar but distinct act of faith. "If this promise is not embraced by faith, the gift, 'the sealing and earnest of the Spirit,' will not be vouchsafed." We believe for justification and get it; and if we are content with that, we get that alone. But the way is open to us, to believe for the baptism of the Spirit, too, and if we do so, we get that, too. If we do not take this second step we shall remain merely justified and shall not receive the Spirit. A very inadequate conception of justification of course underlies this notion. Mahan identifies it here with "pardon and eternal life," but is obviously thinking of "pardon," as merely, in the most limited and external sense, relief from penalty incurred, and of "eternal life" as merely the extension of this relief indefinitely. Even so, however, it is difficult to understand how he can imagine that this benefit can be received and continue to be enjoyed alone. Is it conceivable that a child of God, pardoned all his sin, can remain just as he was before his pardon; can abide forever an unchanged sinner?

It cannot be said that it is made overly clear precisely what are the effects of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. This is apparently partly because these effects are conceived very comprehensively—as bringing for example blessings personal to the individual who receives it, and also blessings through him to others; as including thus both the gift of holiness, and that of power. In one passage, for example, the effects of the baptism are described thus:<sup>85</sup> "Now the special mission of the Spirit is to take truth in all its forms—truth as revealed in both Testaments—and to render it most effective for our sanctification, consolation, fulness of joy, and through us for the sanctification and edification of the church and the salvation of men." He who has received this baptism is accordingly marked out from other men, especially, by these two characteristics—he is holy,

<sup>85</sup> P. 77.

and he has power with men for the conversion of their souls and the establishment of them in holiness. It makes men on their own part perfect and in their Christian relations a source of perfection for others. Mahan is very much interested in the second of these effects: the baptism of the Holy Ghost is a baptism with power and conveys to its recipients a mysterious effectiveness in the propagation of the gospel and the winning of souls. We are naturally most interested in the former of them; the baptism of the Holy Ghost is the *rationale* of perfection, the efficient cause of our "entire sanctification."<sup>86</sup> There is a curious passage<sup>87</sup> in which it is likened to a kind of divine house-cleaning of the soul. Just as the housewife in her annual house-cleaning brings to light much dust and dirt that have been hidden from sight, and all seems in confusion and disorder, though this very confusion and disorder is but the preparation for universal order and purity: so, we are told, the Holy Spirit as He takes possession of the heart often discloses forms of internal corruption, "secret faults," evil tendencies and habits, emotive insensibilities unsuspected before—though this is only preparatory to the enduement of power. Perhaps in comparing the baptism of the Spirit specifically to the housewife's "annual housecleaning," Mahan drops a hint that it is not conceived as a process which is done once for all, but as one which may be repeated. Elsewhere, somewhat surprisingly, he seems to intimate this. At least we read of its being "renewed,"

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<sup>86</sup> In *Out of Darkness into Life*, p. 315, Mahan remarks that the mistake, as it seemed to him of very many who teach the doctrine of the higher life, "is in the fact that they do not set forth as the inevitable condition of entering into and continuing in that life, that we must receive 'the promise of the Spirit in our hearts.'" This at least fixes Mahan's conception of the relation of the Baptism of the Spirit to perfection—it is its "condition." At the bottom of this contention there lies a healthful supernaturalism. Our faith does not itself work the miracle of the Christian life: that is wrought by God the Holy Ghost. There may be something left to be desired when we inquire after the manner of His working this effect.

<sup>87</sup> P. 118.

“often renewed,”—perhaps, however, here in the sense of relaying rather than reënaction.<sup>88</sup> He certainly teaches that after we have received it we may lose it again,<sup>89</sup> and that leaves the way open for its “renewal” in the strictest sense. “With the Spirit in our hearts,” he says, and he means it of this supernatural gift received in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, “we need not sin, but we may sin. We may even ‘grieve’ or ‘quench’ the Holy Spirit of God.” He instances men who, having had this great gift, have lost it: “who have attained the highest forms of the Higher Life,” and “afterwards ‘made shipwreck of the faith.’” He warns us that it is possible that Christ may, for our sins, “take our part out of the Book of Life.”

Perhaps it ought to be explicitly stated that Mahan does not think of God ever bestowing this great gift of the baptism of the Spirit spontaneously. It must be obtained by us. What God does is merely to put it within our reach. It depends on us, then, whether we obtain it. “All who receive this baptism,” he says,<sup>90</sup> “do so in consequence of a previous compliance with the conditions on which God has promised the blessing.” He must be inquired of by believers to do it for them. He never grants it unless He is inquired of with all the heart and all the soul. We must previously be keeping his word and preparing the way for his coming; and, then, seek it with all the heart. Mahan’s supernaturalism thus rests on a very express naturalism. We must take the initiative; and indeed it sometimes looks as if we must do much more—as if we must first have the blessing that we may get the blessing, as if we must be perfect in order to acquire perfection. At any rate, it is clear that God never blesses any except those who first “agonize” for the blessing. It is an indispensable prerequisite to the reception of the Baptism of the Spirit, we are told, that the mind be “brought to realize a deep, inner want, ‘an aching void within,’—a soul-necessity which must

<sup>88</sup> P. 102.

<sup>89</sup> Pp. 124, 127, 128.

<sup>90</sup> P. 111.

be met."<sup>91</sup> "Our Methodist brethren," it is added, "formerly denominated this state, being convicted for sanctification."

It is an inconvenience to Mahan that he has to depend for the Scriptural ground of his doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit on passages which teach that the Spirit is given to all believers. He is compelled to transmute this into the very different representation that He is at the disposal of all believers. "While all that believe become thereby entitled to this provision," he says,<sup>92</sup> "its fulfillment is sought by faith, after we have believed; just as pardon is to be sought in conversion." "The promise," he elaborates the comparison, "is just as absolute in the one case as in the other. There is nothing which God so desires to bestow upon sinners as pardon, and with it eternal life. There is no gift he is more willing to bestow upon believers than the divine baptism." Only, God does not say that all sinners have pardon and eternal life; that this is the characteristic of sinners that they have pardon and eternal life. And He does say that all believers have the Spirit; that it is their very characteristic that they have the Spirit. Only those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God: "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

There are, to be sure, the charismatic passages, and perhaps the most amusing instance of the inconvenience which the Scriptures he is compelled to depend upon occasion Mahan, is afforded by one of these—Acts xix. 2ff. This is so much the main passage on which he relies in proof of his cardinal contention that the baptism of the Spirit is a subsequent benefit, sought and received by a special act of faith, "after we believe," that he weaves it into the statement of his doctrine with an iteration that becomes irksome. We have already met with more than one instance of the emphatic employment which he makes of it. It has of course no bearing on the subject in any case; for its

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<sup>91</sup> P. 96.

<sup>92</sup> P. 51.

reference is to the charismatic and not to the sanctifying Spirit. But Mahan, although protesting<sup>93</sup> against confounding the two things, finds himself compelled to draw the primary support for his doctrine of the sanctifying Spirit from the charismatic passages—Acts xix. 1-6, viii. 14-17; x. 44-47.<sup>94</sup> The point now made, however, is that even when thus perverted from its real reference and violently applied to the sanctifying Spirit, the passage in question is so far from serving Mahan's purpose that it bears precisely the contrary meaning to that which he attributes to it. So eager is he in his employment of it that he adduces it even in the preface to his book on *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*,<sup>95</sup> with the emphasis of italics: "Paul put this important question to certain believers, when he first met them, to wit: 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost *since* ye believed?' Does not the question imply that the promise of the Spirit awaits the believer *after* conversion?" And of course, when he comes formally to expound his doctrine,<sup>96</sup> he exploits the same passage: "We learn that the gift of the Spirit was not expected *in* but *after* conversion: 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost *since* ye believed?'" It would be a curious speculation to inquire into the effect it would have had on his constructions, had Mahan learned that what Paul really said was, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" At all events, since the wrong doctrine not only seeks support from the wrong reading of the text, but to a very extraordinary degree is dependent on it and apparently is even largely derived from it, it is a pity that Mahan did not look beyond the language of the Authorized English Version in seeking the meaning of the text. It is true that he did not have the Revised Version to set him right. But he had his Greek Testament; and he had his Alford, whom he repeatedly quotes when it serves his occasion—but not on this occasion. His Alford would have

<sup>93</sup> P. 113.

<sup>94</sup> Chapter 3.

<sup>95</sup> P. iv.

<sup>96</sup> Pp. 37ff.

told him that "the aorist should be faithfully rendered: not as E. V., 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' but '*Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye became believers?*'" Indeed Alford would even have argued the question for him, pointing out that not only the grammar but also the sense of the passage requires this rendering. The matter is made the more absurd that Eph. i. 13, which is not a charismatic passage, is repeatedly quoted<sup>97</sup> in support of Acts xix. 2ff. and is stumbled over in the same fashion. From it is extracted, indeed, such nonsense as this:—"When we believe we set to our seal that God is true; when God gives us the Spirit God sets His seal to us: but unfortunately the two do not go together; we may give our seal to God long before He vouchsafes His to us." What the Apostle really says is of course, that we were sealed "on believing"—intimating that the sealing occurred at once on our believing, and that it occurs, therefore to all that believe. The sealing of the Spirit belongs according to their very nature as such, to all Christians. It is not a special privilege granted after a while to some; but at once to all. Alford would have set Mahan right here, too. He renders the passage: "in whom, on your believing, ye were sealed," and remarks that "the use of the aorist marks the time when the act of believing first took place."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Pp. 38, 40, 113.

<sup>98</sup> Similarly H. C. G. Moule, *Ephesian Studies*, 1900, p. 35: "*In whom also, on believing, you were sealed with the Spirit of the Promise, the Holy One; the gifts and power of the Paraclete were made yours at once on your union with the Christ of God.*" He adds, to be sure, in a note: "Those gracious gifts may indeed need the believer's constantly advancing *use*, and his growing discovery of what they are. But in covenant provision they are *his at once* 'in Christ.'" This, however, does not affect the testimony of this passage against the "second blessing."

[The articles in this series were completed [by Dr. Warfield some months before his death; the last two will appear in the July and October issues respectively.]



# The Princeton Theological Review

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BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD,  
D.D., LL.D., LITT.D.

A MEMORIAL ADDRESS\*

Princeton Theological Seminary is walking today in the shadow of an eclipse which in various degrees of visibility has been observed, I doubt not, throughout the greater part of the Christian world. Men may agree with Dr. Warfield or they may differ from him, but they must recognize his unswerving fidelity to what he believed to be the truth. Students of theology in whatever Christian communions they may be found must recognize him as an earnest co-worker in defending the authority and contents of the New Testament and in vindicating the central doctrines of our common Christianity. Nothing but ignorance of his exact scholarship, wide learning, varied writings, and the masterly way in which he did his work should prevent them from uniting with us today in the statement that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel.

## I

I remember the shock which passed through this community when word went out that Dr. A. A. Hodge was dead. He had succeeded his father as his father had succeeded Dr. Archibald Alexander in the Chair of Systematic Theology. Less learned than his father, he was a man of greater genius. He was a deductive theologian. While giving proper regard to the exegetical support in behalf of each doctrine of the New Testament, the fact that it was the obvious and necessary consequence of another doctrine

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## OBERLIN PERFECTIONISM

### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OBERLIN TEACHING

When we have obtained some insight into Mahan's doctrines of "Christian Perfection," and "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," we have already seen into the heart of his theology. It is on these things that he most constantly and strenuously dwelt in his religious instruction. There were other elements of his teaching, however,—not altogether unconnected with these, and therefore not altogether untouched in what has preceded—to which we must give some particular attention if we would know Mahan in his peculiarity as a religious teacher, and especially in his distinction from his colleagues at Oberlin. He makes no secret that there were some things in which he differed from Finney, although, very naturally, he minimizes their importance. They were not things, he tells us in a curious passage,<sup>1</sup> in which perfectly sanctified people may not differ without fault. Paul and Barnabas differed in some things, he says, and "on a very few questions in Moral Philosophy and Theology, Brother Finney and myself have arrived at opposite conclusions." "Yet each," he adds, "has the same assurance as before, that the other is 'full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost.'" "We differ just where minds under the influence of the purest integrity, and the highest form of divine illumination, are liable to differ." It would almost seem as if it were a virtue to differ on these things. One of the things on which they thus faultlessly differed, was the ground of moral obligation; which does not strike us as an unimportant matter. Mahan represented at Oberlin what Finney calls by the ugly name of "rightarianism." We are glad that the thing is not as bad as the name. It means, indeed, just that Mahan defended at Oberlin intuitive morality against Finney's teleological system—which is no morality at all. Effects of this difference naturally

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<sup>1</sup> *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, pp. 124 f.

are traceable throughout the whole range of their teaching. Another matter of difference between them, far from unimportant whether in itself or in its results, has already been incidentally touched upon. This is the morality of our dispositions and propensities. Finney denied that any moral character attached to the affectional movements as such; only the will and its volitions are properly speaking moral. In asserting the contrary Mahan necessarily gave a totally different complexion to his doctrine of sin and of salvation from sin.

No more than Finney did he, to be sure, acknowledge any doctrine of "original sin." Sin, says he,<sup>2</sup> is "exclusively a *personal* matter, a state of the inner man, a form of voluntary moral activity." The soul becomes sinful, "not from necessity, but from choice." We derive no sin from our ancestry, near or remote; and we have no form or degree of merit or demerit which does not attach to us personally and to no one else but us. "Personal criminality" and nothing else is sin to us. But however we have become sinful, we are all entirely sinful. All sin consists in alienation and estrangement from God, His character, His will, and the law of duty; and this alienation and estrangement from all the claims of God and of His moral law, affects all our moral movements. In all forms of our moral activity, whether externally right or wrong, this estrangement is total. "No moral act of our unregenerate life is prompted by that motive and intent which renders such act morally virtuous, or such that the conscience of God can regard, or ought to regard, as an act of obedience to the divine will and law of duty." Surely this positive fact of universal sinfulness in all our moral activities cannot be given negative statement otherwise than in terms of inability to good. Mahan will not go so far as that. But he allows that though we may see the good and approve it, we cannot do it. There is always "a total failure 'to *do* that which is good,'—the good to do which there is a readiness

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<sup>2</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, pp. 14 ff.

to will.”<sup>3</sup> He avoids the word “inability,” but he is compelled to recognize some sort of a “human impotence” to good; a “self-impotence,” a “total self-impotence.” He even rebukes the preachers of the revival of the early thirties for their purely Pelagian teaching on ability; this was, he says,<sup>4</sup> “a leading cause of the ultimate decline of those revivals.” It was a better teaching, to be sure, he declares, than the old New England doctrine of a so-called “natural ability” wholly neutralized by a “moral inability”—which left no ability at all. But in reacting from this the revivalists reacted too far and left no disability at all.

It is plain matter of fact, however, that we are dependent on God’s grace for holy choices, or, at least, for holy executions. “We are free agents: but the freedom which we and all creatures possess is a dependent one. . . . Light and grace are provided and rendered available; by availing ourselves of these ‘we may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.’ We are free to avail, or not to avail, ourselves of this light and grace. Refusing or neglecting to do this, we have no available power for anything but sin.” “We have no available power”; what is that but inability? An inability overcome, indeed, by “light and grace”; but how overcome by “light and grace”? Mahan says they are “made available.” But he does not tell us how their being “made available” overcomes our previous inability “for anything but sin.” Surely the mere proffering of them to us cannot overcome this inability. What Mahan tells us is, however, just that. He tells us that we have power to accept or reject proffered grace as we will; but naturally no power to perform without grace what can be performed only with grace. Grace is the instrument for working certain effects: we must use it if we wish those effects. But what enables us, who are unable to use it—for we can do nothing but sin and to use grace surely is no sin—to use it although we are unable to do so? Mahan is silent. Or rather he deserts his doctrine of inability to good, and sub-

<sup>3</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 104 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 244.

stitutes for it a doctrine of absolute ability—but with it a complementary doctrine of right instrumentation. We are perfectly able to do what is right—to love God, to serve Him, to be perfect; but of course we are not able to do any of these things except we use the proper instruments for their performance. We are perfectly able to cut down a tree, but not with our finger nails; we are perfectly able to drive a spike home, but not with our naked fists. If we will consent to use an axe and hammer, we can easily perform these tasks. Mahan very truly says: “Teaching the doctrine of ability as an absolute power, tends to induce, not faith in God and His grace, but self-assurance, self-dependence, and the pride of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness.” He wishes then to teach something else than “ability as an absolute power.” He apparently supposes that he is teaching ability dependent for its exercise on grace. He is not. He is teaching grace dependent for its operation on ability. We use grace, not grace us. The whole truth is that Mahan has raised the problem of ability and inability, and then—has dodged it. He has left us with man on our hands “impotent” to good: and as he has not made it quite plain to us why he is impotent to good, so he has not given us any ground whatever to believe, that, being impotent to good, he is quite able at his option to avail himself of God’s proffered grace and by it work all good. Clearly these problems can find no solution except in the frank postulation on the one hand of the sinfulness of human nature disabling it for good, and on the other of recreative grace recovering it to good.

When he comes to deal with the doctrine of salvation from sin, Mahan gets still deeper into his problem. He is no longer able to escape ascribing to unregenerate man a sinful “nature” which determines his actions; or to the saving Spirit a “physical” effect on this nature by which it is made good and the proximate source of our renewed activities. When God takes the stony heart out of our flesh and gives us a heart of flesh, he says,<sup>5</sup> what is really meant is

<sup>5</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, pp. 267 f.

“a fundamental change and a renewal of our propensities.” “We are,” he says, “by nature ‘children of wrath,’ ‘prone to evil as the sparks fly upward.’” When God makes the change He promises, “we have ‘a new heart,’ and ‘a new spirit,’ ‘a divine nature,’ which impels us to love and obedience, just as our old nature impelled us to sin.” Referring to the “works of the flesh,” of Gal. v. 19 ff., he remarks that “behind all these forms of sin, ‘works of the flesh,’ lie certain propensities, dispositions and tempers, which, when touched by corresponding temptations, set on fire burning and ‘warring lusts,’ and evil passions, and these induce the sins and crimes above described.” “These old propensities, dispositions and tempers, are taken away, and in their stead, new ones are given,” and “under our renovated propensities, and new dispositions, tendencies and tempers, or ‘divine nature,’ it becomes just as easy and natural for us to bear ‘the fruits of the Spirit’ as it was, under our old ones, to work ‘the works of the flesh.’” The subject is pursued and similar phraseology repeated indefinitely. “‘By nature,’” we read,<sup>6</sup> “—that is under the influence of our old nature, or propensities, dispositions, and tempers,—we are ‘children of wrath,’ and ‘bring forth fruit unto death.’ Under the dispositions, tempers, and tendencies of our new or ‘divine nature,’ we are just as naturally ‘children of God,’ and have our fruit unto holiness.” We are to reckon ourselves dead unto sin, “because ‘our old man,’ our old propensities, dispositions, and tempers, is crucified, ‘put to death,’ with Him, that the ‘body of sin,’ our old and evil nature, ‘might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.’” While the old nature remains, we are told, we cannot help sinning; similarly when the new nature is given we cannot help being holy. Sometimes, it is true, a note of “may” rather than “must” is struck. “Because that, through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, ‘the body of sin,’ our old and evil propensities, ‘may be destroyed,’ or ‘the old man may be crucified’ with

<sup>6</sup> P. 268.

Him, and we may 'through the law of the Spirit of Christ Jesus,' be 'made free from the law of sin and death,' we should indeed cease to 'live after the flesh,' should be 'not in the flesh but in the Spirit,' and should 'reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin but alive under God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'" But this phraseology appears to be preserved only for purposes of exhortation, and its apparent suggestion that the effect lies in our own power is fully corrected when the speech takes a didactic form. "Such language," we read,<sup>7</sup> "implies more than this, that his old propensities, 'the body of sin,' 'the old man' is yet living and warring in the soul, but, by the grace of Christ, are held in subjection. Mere subjection is not death. What the Apostle undeniably intended to teach is this: that his propensities, dispositions, and temper had been so renovated that the world, with its affections and lusts, had no more power over him than they have over the dead. Christ, on the other hand, lived in him, and occupied all his affections, and held undisputed control over all his activities." This certainly suggests a "physical" change wrought in us by the Spirit of God, by which our governing dispositions are changed: and that as certainly implies that we are governed by our dispositions, whether evil or good.

At an earlier point,<sup>8</sup> discussing the phrase "divine nature" in 2 Pet. i. 4, Mahan remarks: "The words 'the divine nature' imply, as all will admit, not only the holiness and blessedness of the divine mind, but also that divine *disposition* or nature in God which induces His holiness and blessedness. For us to become possessed of this 'divine nature' implies not only present holiness and blessedness such as God possesses, but a divine disposition in us, a new and divine nature, which induces and prompts to holiness, just as God's nature prompts Him to the same. In our old or unrenewed state, we not only sinned, but had a nature or disposition which prompted us to sin. In Christ we not

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<sup>7</sup> P. 270.

<sup>8</sup> P. 128.

only obey the divine will, but receive from Him as the Mediator of the New Covenant, a new or 'divine nature,' which prompts us to purity and obedience, just as our old disposition prompted us to sin." A tendency appears here to think of the new nature imparted to us as if it were a separate entity implanted within us: and this is identified with the Holy Spirit whose coming into our hearts brings "the disposition" of Christ with Him. In commenting on the words: "God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts," the phrase is employed: "the *Spirit*, or disposition, of His Son." This corresponds to a mystical tendency which shows itself elsewhere in Mahan's writings and forms a connecting link between him and the "New York Perfectionists" who preceded him. Apart from the suggestion of this special conception of the nature of the "new nature" imparted to us, however, there appears to be here a real recognition of the existence in us of a substrate of our activities, having moral quality itself, and so conditioning our moral activities as to determine their moral quality. "We are not only saved from the actual sins that are in the world," we read, "but the evil propensities and tempers, 'the law in our members,' which induces sin, are taken from us." This certainly seems to posit a law in our members, underlying and determining our activities. We receive, we read again, "not only deliverance from sinning, but 'the death of the old man,' or"—as it is now explained—"the crucifixion of all those tempers and dispositions which induce sin." There are, then, permanent tendencies in us, which determine our activities to be sinful. On the positive side, we receive "new and divine tendencies which naturally induce the opposite virtues,"—"not only actual obedience to the divine will but 'a divine nature' which prompts to and constrains obedience in all its forms." Are we not to give validity to the phrases "*naturally* induce," "*constrains*" here? And then it is added in a general summary: "It is as much the nature of 'the new man,' on the prompting of his new and divine tendencies, to be pure in heart and life,



as it was that of 'the old man' to 'obey the law of sin.' Surely a "physical" corruption, and a "physical" holiness, and a physical change from the one to the other is taught here.

This teaching forms the foundation for Mahan's doctrine of the "sanctification of the sensibility," to which we have already had occasion to advert, and which was a peculiarity of his teaching among his fellows. James H. Fairchild<sup>9</sup> very properly tells us that it appears "to involve a supernatural and almost mechanical action upon our human nature, restoring it to its normal state before the fall,—all, however, in response to our faith." The words, "All, however, in response to our faith," mark the limits beyond which Mahan would not go in ascribing salvation to God; and, with that, the gross inconsistency of his thinking. For, as we have seen, he ascribes to the evil dispositions which constitute the "old man" just as much determining power over our activities, making them evil, as he ascribes to the good dispositions constituting our new man, making our activities good. And yet he supposes that while still under the dominance of the "old man" we may at will turn to Christ in saving faith. More: immediately upon the heels of his exposition of the determining effects on conduct of our "propensities, dispositions, temper and tendencies,"<sup>10</sup> he speaks of the man who has believed for pardon but not yet for holiness, being "as far as his *voluntary* activities are concerned in a state of supreme obedience to the will of God," while yet (since the "physical" change comes only with the "second blessing") all these "old propensities, dispositions, tempers and tendencies" remain as they were and remain at war against this new-born purpose of obedience. If validity be given to the preceding exposition, this is nonsense: if validity be given to this assertion, that exposition is without significance. Whatever Mahan teaches as to a supernatural action on the human soul of the Spirit of God

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<sup>9</sup> *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, pp. 241 f.

<sup>10</sup> *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 271.

—an action which Fairchild looks upon as “almost mechanical,”—he has no intention whatever of suspending human salvation on anything else than human volition; a volition which at bottom he conceives as acting in complete independence of any as well subjective as objective determinants. Mahan’s whole discussion of “the sanctification of the sensibility,” therefore, with its suggestions of controlling dispositions lying behind our activities and of a consequent “physical” change in our sanctification, must be looked upon as a mere tendency of thought running athwart his most fundamental convictions and capable therefore of having validity given to it only so far as it can be made consistent with a doctrine of the will, and of the dependence of salvation on the will, with which it is in essential disharmony.

Fairchild, in his notice of this excursion of Mahan’s thought, proceeds to tell us how Finney stood in the matter. “President Finney,” he says, “while not disclaiming this idea entirely, and sometimes presenting facts and experiences which were in harmony with it, insisted more upon the moral power of Gospel truth upon the believer’s heart. He found deliverance from temptation and from the power of sin in the news which the Spirit gives of Christ. The truth as it is in Jesus was to him the power of God unto salvation. ‘Sanctify us through the truth’ was the burden of his prayer and of his teaching; and this was the prevalent idea with the other leaders of thought here.” That is to say Finney dallied a little with the idea of “the baptism of the Spirit,” but did not really adopt it; he continued to confine the work of the Spirit to illumination and to deny all recreative functions to Him: He is our Guide, not our Regenerator. There is nothing strange in Finney’s failure to assimilate this idea: what is surprising is that he could dally with it even for a moment. That he did do so is probably only an illustration of that hospitality which he was ever showing to the notions of his colleagues, by which he was led to assimilate them as far as his fundamental teaching permitted him to do so, without, however, ever

really modifying his fundamental teaching to accommodate them. A striking instance of how he dealt with them, apparently adopting them with heartiness and really transforming them into the image of his own thought, is afforded by his treatment of this very doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, at a dramatic moment of his own life. Mahan's book bearing that title was published in 1870. The National Council of Congregationalist Churches met at Oberlin in 1871, and, making much of Finney in his hale old age (he was in his eightieth year), invited him to address it. He did so, and, on request, continued his discussion on the following Sabbath. The subject he chose to speak on was the Baptism of the Holy Ghost; and his treatment of the theme ran on the lines laid down in Mahan's recently published book. He followed up his address with some letters printed in *The Independent*, and afterwards put into tract form. In the first of these (called *Power from on High*) he outlines the doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit for power, as he had outlined it at the Council; and it might almost have been simply transcribed from Mahan. This baptism of the Holy Ghost, he declares, is the indispensable condition of performing the work given us by Christ to do; Christ has expressly promised it to the whole Church; the condition of receiving it is to continue in prayer and supplication until we receive it; it is not to be confounded with the peace which comes to the justified state—it is not peace but power; Christ gives peace but promises power—and we must not rest in conversion but go on to this second blessing which is at our disposal. A second letter now followed, in which the doctrine is given a somewhat new turn. The blessing conferred on the Apostles at Pentecost by the baptism of the Spirit is first reduced to "the power to fasten *saving impressions* upon the minds of men," the power "to *savingly impress* men." And then in his effort to define precisely what this power consists in, Finney comes to this:—"It was God speaking in and through them. It was a power from on high—God in

them making a saving impression upon those to whom they spoke." And then he still further teaches that the power was not conferred at Pentecost alone, and not alone on the Apostles. It is still conferred: he himself has received it. He has often converted men by so chance a word that he had no remembrance of having spoken it, or even by a mere look. He illustrates this with anecdotes from his own life, such as are found in the *Memoirs* which he had recently completed. It is a sufficiently odd doctrine which he here enunciates, a kind of new Lutheranism with the evangelist substituted for the Word. The Holy Ghost is represented, not, as in the Reformed doctrine, as accompanying the word preached *extrinsecus accedens*—"the Lord opened Lydia's heart," "Paul may plant and Apollos water, the Lord gives the increase"; and not as in the Lutheran doctrine as intrinsic in the Word spoken, acting out from the Word on the heart of the hearer; but as intrinsic in the evangelist speaking. By a mere gaze, without a word spoken, Finney says he reduced a whole room-full of factory girls to hysteria. As the Lutheran says God in the Word works a saving impression, Finney says God in the preacher works a saving impression. Not the Word, but the preacher is the power of God unto salvation. The evangelist has become a Sacrament. The letters were continued after an interval. There was another descriptive one (*The Enduement of the Spirit*) in which the anecdote of the preaching in "Sodom" related in the *Memoirs* is repeated. Then there was one called *Power from on High: who may Expect the Enduement?* in which he explains that "all Christians by virtue of their relation to Christ, may ask to receive the enduement of power to win souls to Him," adding that it comes "after their first faith," and as an "instantaneous" gift. In another, *Is It a Hard Saying?* he defends his assertion that those without this power are disqualified for office in the Church. And finally, *Enduement for Power from on High* considers the conditions upon which this enduement of power can be obtained. It is

a pathetic sight to observe the aged Finney after a long life of insistence that it is only by the power of truth that men can be brought to Christ, clothing at the end the evangelist himself with supernatural powers and representing him as fitted for his functions only by the possession of these supernatural powers. It is an odd instance of the invention of a supernaturally endowed priesthood to mediate between God and man, when God is not permitted Himself to act immediately on the heart; and it seems to bear witness to a deep-lying conviction in the human soul that its salvation will not be accomplished without a supernatural intervention somewhere. The pragmatic refutation of the Pelagian construction of salvation is not a mean one. It will not work; and no one really believes that it will work. The supernaturalism thrown out at the window is very apt to creep back through some chink or other.

The form given to the Oberlin doctrine of perfection in the first stage of its development did not remain its permanent form. It was distinctly taught in essentially this form, it is true, throughout his long life, by Asa Mahan, to whose influence apparently the first shaping of the doctrine was mainly due. And Henry Cowles seems never to have advanced much beyond this mode of conceiving it. But it was not long before, in its general apprehension, it suffered a sea-change which gave it a totally new character. This was due to the dominating place given in Oberlin thinking, from 1841 on, to what is called the doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action." This was not a new doctrine. It lay, as corollary, too near to the teleological ethics inherited by Oberlin from the New England theology, for it not to have had attention drawn to it before. Frank H. Foster has shown that it is very clearly alluded to in certain arguments of Nathaniel Emmons,<sup>11</sup> and indeed that it was already more than hinted at by Samuel Hopkins: "Every moral action is either perfectly holy or perfectly sinful."<sup>12</sup> It was a settled presupposition of Finney's

<sup>11</sup> *Genetic History*, &c. pp. 463 f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

thought from at least the beginning of 1839, although he recalls a time when he had not yet recognized it.<sup>13</sup> But it seems to have been left to two of the theological students at Oberlin of the class of 1842, to bring it out of comparative neglect, announce it as of primary importance, enforce it by extended reasoning, and make it a determining factor in Oberlin thinking.

It is interesting to observe the part taken by the students at Oberlin in formulating its doctrine of perfection. We have already seen that, had the students not intervened, the Oberlin professors might never have discovered that they were in fact teaching a doctrine of perfection. And we see them intervening here again to bring into full recognition and use a fundamental principle of Oberlin thinking which appeared to be in danger of being neglected. In neither instance was there a new discovery made. In both instances

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<sup>13</sup> See above, p. 145. John C. Lord, *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, April 1841, pp. 238 ff. expounds the doctrine on the basis of a passage from *The Oberlin Evangelist*, vol. I (1839), p. 42, where Finney says that he was himself formerly of the opinion that an "exercise might be put forth in view of several motives, or partake of the complex character of the motives that produced it," but is now persuaded that "this philosophy is false." His present view is expressed thus: "It seems to be a very general opinion, that there is such a thing as imperfect obedience to God; (i.e.) as it respects one and the same act; but I cannot see how an imperfect obedience, relating to one and the same act, can be possible. *Imperfect obedience!* what can be meant by this, but *disobedient obedience!* or *sinful holiness*. Now, to decide the character of any act, we are to bring it into the light of the law of God; if agreeable to the law, it is obedience—it is right—*wholly right*. If it is in *any respect* different from what the law of God requires, it is wrong—*wholly wrong*." Lord's own summary of Finney's teaching is admirable: "He admits that obedience may be imperfect in respect to its constancy, but never in regard to degree; and insists that if a Christian, at any given moment, has any holiness, it must be perfect both in kind and degree, and the individual of course, for the time being, wholly sanctified. The whole scope of the argument amounts to this: that the soul is nothing but its exercises; that there are no permanent dispositions; that character is what the exercises of the individual, at any given moment, may happen to be; and that these fluctuating states are always perfect for good or evil, both in kind and degree."

what we are called upon to observe is the fresh young minds of the students, in working on the material given to them, throwing up into clear view elements of necessary implication which were being left by their teachers out of sight. Finney, writing in 1847, felicitates himself on the method of instruction pursued at Oberlin, by which the students were made fellow workers with the teachers; and handsomely acknowledges the benefit he had received from his students' activity. "I owe not a little to my classes," he says,<sup>14</sup> "for I have availed myself to the utmost of the learning and sagacity and talent of every member of my classes in pushing my investigations." The particular members of his classes to whose sagacity he owes not indeed his knowledge of the doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action," but its elevation to the commanding place it at once took in Oberlin thinking, were two brothers, Samuel D. and William Cochran.

It was William Cochran, a brilliant young man who afterwards served a few years as a professor at Oberlin, until cut off by an untimely death in 1847, who brought the subject into public discussion. This he did in an address delivered before the Society of Inquiry in the spring of 1841 and repeated the following autumn, at Commencement, before the Society of Alumni. Permanency was given to this address by its publication in *The Oberlin Evangelist*,<sup>15</sup> and Cochran afterwards developed his views at greater length in the pages of *The Oberlin Quarterly Review*.<sup>16</sup> From this time on the doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action" became a characteristic feature of Oberlin theology. The leading instructors and preachers of the time, with "the possible exception of Henry Cowles" embraced it at once; and "especially by the consistent and unvarying advocacy of President Fairchild" it was propa-

<sup>14</sup> *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 1847, p. v.

<sup>15</sup> For 1842, pp. 32 ff., 41 ff. An abstract of the address and an estimate of its teaching are given by Foster, *Genetic History*, &c. pp. 459 ff.

<sup>16</sup> See in general Fairchild, *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, pp. 247 ff.

gated through a succeeding generation as the only genuine Oberlin teaching.<sup>17</sup>

The essence of this doctrine is briefly explained by Fairchild as follows: "The doctrine maintains the impossibility of a divided heart in moral action. The sinner, in his sin, is utterly destitute of righteousness, and the good man, in his obedience, is completely, entirely obedient: sin on the one side and obedience on the other belonging only to voluntary states. The division of the will between the two contradictory moral attitudes of sin and holiness is a metaphysical impossibility." The ethical theory underlying the doctrine is here thrown into emphasis. The man is dissolved into a series of volitions. Each volition is isolated and looked at apart: and being treated as a bare volition, it is said not to be capable of a composite character. Volitions are either good or bad; and that is the end of it. But beyond the volition no man is recognized: the volition is the man, and what the volition is at any moment that the man is. As volitions are either good or bad, so then the man is. The morally grey is eliminated: only black and white are allowed to be possible. Every man is either as bad or as good as he can be in the circumstances in which he stands for the moment. There can therefore be no such thing as a partially sanctified believer; and the whole conception of progressive sanctification is excluded. "They allege," says John C. Lord, accurately,<sup>18</sup> "that there is no such thing as imperfect believers, and, of course, that there is no such thing as being sanctified in part." Over against the general doctrine of the churches which denies the existence of perfect holiness, this doctrine sets the denial of

<sup>17</sup> We are summarizing the accounts of Fairchild and Foster, as cited. The final words are justified by such a turn of phrase as this, from the pen of Fairchild (p. 249): "The idea of rising from a partial to a complete obedience, from imperfect to perfect faith and love, in the sense in which these are voluntary and responsible acts or states to be required of men, is *incompatible with the idea of simplicity of moral action, and hence is not admissible in the Oberlin Theology.*" The italics are ours.

<sup>18</sup> As cited, p. 238.



the possibility of imperfect holiness. You are either perfectly holy, or you have no holiness at all. Holiness is a thing that does not admit of abscission and division. The idea is generalized into the proposition that "holiness must be supreme in degree to have the character of holiness at all,"—a proposition which might appear to mean that a little sin neutralizes any amount of holiness, but no amount of holiness can affect the quality of existing sin at all, except that the very conception of progressive holiness is excluded. The Church at any given moment is therefore not made up of redeemed sinners in various stages of perfection, but of perfectly holy and perfectly wicked people standing side by side. The two classes are not stable but may be, in the individuals which compose them, continually changing places. The perfectly holy may, and do, become at any moment the perfectly wicked: the perfectly wicked may, and do, become at any moment, the perfectly holy. The average of the mass may yield a result that looks like the partly sanctified Christian as commonly conceived. But the "average Christian" has no real existence, and the average of the mass is obtained by finding the shifting center of gravity of a mass composed actually, in varying proportions, of perfectly holy and perfectly wicked men as units. There is no room here, therefore, for two classes of Christians, with a "second conversion" lying between them. To be a Christian at all is to be perfect: and the concern of the Christian is not to grow more perfect, but to maintain the perfection which belongs to him as a Christian and in which, not into which, he grows. What, then, he seeks after is not holiness—he has that. Nor more holiness than he has—if he has any he has all. What he seeks after is "establishment." Holiness cannot be imperfect in degree: but it can be and is imperfect in "constancy." The doctrine has been called "the pendulum theory of moral action." It supposes the man to oscillate between perfect goodness and perfect badness, and denies to him any abiding, permanent character.<sup>19</sup> To one observing the current of an

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Foster, as cited, p. 460, and the quotation from Cochran there. Cf. also Lord, as cited, p. 239.

individual life, it may bear—as the church at large does—the aspect of the manifestation of an imperfectly sanctified nature. This is illusion: it is due to the mingling in our observation of successive states of perfect goodness and perfect badness. They do not co-exist, but alternate. The one task of the Christian is to attain a state in which the fluctuation ceases and he is permanently established in holiness.<sup>20</sup> When that state is attained we are not merely “entirely” sanctified—that we had been, at intervals, all along,—but “permanently” sanctified. That is the goal of all Christian progress—to cease from falling and remain steadily what all Christians ought to be, and indeed what all Christians are—whenever they are Christians.

The interpolation of this doctrine, as a controlling factor, into Oberlin thinking had the effect of antiquating the doctrine of perfection as previously taught at Oberlin. Cowles, it is true, simply permitted all he had written to stand as it was written—*litera scripta manet*. Morgan had not hitherto put his hand to the subject, and his hands were free to take up the new doctrine and work out from it as his starting point. To Mahan and Finney, who had written copiously in the earlier sense, the task was set, to adjust their even more copious later discussions to the new point of view. Mahan's method was to accept the new doctrine of course—and to pass by it with averted face on the other side of the road. The phraseology by which Fairchild describes his relation to it is carefully chosen and is the more significant because of its apparent colorlessness. “His later writings,” he says,<sup>21</sup> “are intended to harmonize with the doctrine.” They do not do so. It remains with him an unassimilated element of thought. Finney, on the contrary, to whom the doctrine was no stranger, entered upon the

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<sup>20</sup> Fairchild, as cited, p. 249: “The work required in Christian progress is . . . establishment of Christian character, and more and more complete deliverance from these interruptions of obedience—an obedience more and more constant until it becomes permanent and suffers no interruption.”

<sup>21</sup> As cited, p. 254.

task of adjustment to it *con amore*. In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*—the most extended and systematic of his writings—he has made the notion of “the simplicity of moral action” the fundamental principle of his doctrine of salvation, and as a consequence teaches, in point of fact, the perfection of all Christians from the inception of faith in them onward. This necessitates not only a readjustment of the whole trend of his *Views of Sanctification*, which he largely incorporates into the new work, but a reconstruction of his entire treatment of the way of salvation, every stage in which requires radical alteration to fit it in with the new point of view. The doctrine of sanctification to which an inordinate formal place in the systematic arrangement is already given, nevertheless actually overflows even these ample bounds and swallows up the space allowed to the other saving operations. The doctrine of salvation becomes almost nothing indeed but a doctrine of sanctification. One of the results of this is that when the formal treatment of sanctification is reached, despite the copiousness with which it is dealt with, little is left to be said of it. In this exigency the term is retained and its meaning altered. “Entire sanctification” no longer stands as the end of the saving process, as the final goal towards which the Christians’ heart yearns. That having become the characteristic of all believers from the moment of conversion, the term “sanctification” as the designation of one stage of salvation and that the most elaborately treated of all, has lost its content. As it must add something to what Christians already possess, and as all Christians—whenever they are Christians—possess “entire sanctification,” “sanctification” comes to mean “permanent sanctification.” “Sanctification,” says Finney, in a vain attempt to deal with the embarrassing situation,<sup>22</sup> as he enters upon his discussion of “sanctification,” “may be entire in two senses: (1) In the sense of present full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and (2) in the sense of continued, abiding consecra-

<sup>22</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 1881, p. 595. Cf. Fairchild, as cited, p. 256.

tion or obedience to God. Entire sanctification when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification, or of entire consecration to God. In this discussion, then, I shall use the term 'entire sanctification' to designate a state of confirmed and entire consecration of soul, and spirit, or of the whole being to God." As much as to say: All believers being from the very fact that they are believers entirely sanctified from the first moment of their believing, on receiving this great new gift of sanctification . . . will, now just stay sanctified. The goal that is set before Christians accordingly ceases to be to become entirely sanctified—that they already are if Christians at all—but to make their entire sanctification no longer fluctuating but permanent. Fairchild thinks<sup>23</sup> that Finney has not been able to maintain his new attitude on the subject in discussion, without some lapses into his earlier point of view. That would be both natural and unimportant; and the instances adduced by Fairchild appear fairly to bear out the suggestion. But it is the new attitude which dominates the entire system of doctrine—if this can be spoken of as a new attitude for Finney and not rather a reversion to an older attitude lying behind that exhibited in what we may perhaps call his Mahan period.<sup>24</sup> And it is this new attitude which dominated the subsequent thought of Oberlin, so long as Oberlin remained Perfectionist in its thought. The older point of view which it supplanted was now thought to be not quite an Oberlin point of view; and so far as it continued to exist in Oberlin—"in limited circles" we are told,—was "sustained, not by the Oberlin theology or the Oberlin teaching or preaching, but by the writings and periodicals and

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<sup>23</sup> As cited, pp. 256 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Fairchild's opinion (p. 259) is different. He thinks Finney has not only not "adjusted his views of sanctification to the accepted doctrine as to the nature of moral action," but that "the treatise, in almost all its features, belongs to a system of theology maintaining mixed action." Finney is not an eminently consistent writer and in the matter of "the simplicity of moral action," Fairchild is very exigent.

teachings introduced from abroad, especially of the Wesleyan school."<sup>25</sup> To the Wesleyan period of Oberlin perfectionism there succeeded, then, from 1841 on, a period of very distinctively Oberlin perfectionism. And the characteristic feature of this new Oberlin perfectionism is that it is the product of the conception known as "the simplicity of moral action."

Finney formally expounds his conception of "the simplicity of moral action" in a chapter in the *Lectures on Systematic Theology*.<sup>26</sup> He takes his start from the contention that all moral character resides in the ultimate choice; and as this ultimate choice dominates all subordinate choices, volitions and acts, it dominates the whole life. The moral character of the ultimate choice thus gives its moral character to the entire life. As now the ultimate choice is simple and its moral character is simple, a man must be morally just what his ultimate choice is morally. That ultimate choice must be wholly moral or wholly immoral; entirely holy or entirely sinful. A man must be therefore altogether holy or altogether sinful; there are no gradations, no intermixtures, no intermediations. Every man is therefore at any given moment perfectly sinful or perfectly holy.<sup>27</sup> If his ultimate end is selfishness, he is perfectly sinful; if his ultimate end is benevolence, he is perfectly holy. There is no third condition. "Sin and holiness, then, both consist in supreme, ultimate, and opposite choices or intentions, and cannot, by any possibility, coëxist."<sup>28</sup> It is not intended that our holiness, or sinfulness, is as great as, in other circumstances than those in which we exist, it might be. It is only intended that it is complete and entire and as great as in our actual circumstances it can be. The holiness of God cannot be attained by a man; nor that of an angel; nor

<sup>25</sup> Fairchild, as cited, p. 259.

<sup>26</sup> Edition 1, vol. I, 1846, pp. 150 ff.; edition 2, 1857, pp. 135 ff. We quote from the latter.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. p. 286 (also p. 294, 296): "Moral agents are at all times either as holy or as sinful as with their knowledge, they can be."

<sup>28</sup> P. 241.

can even that of a man better placed be attained by one in lower circumstances. What holiness, or sin, is in anyone, is determined by his knowledge, by "the perceived value" of the objects of his choice. "The true spirit of the requirement of the moral law is this—that every moral being shall choose every interest according to its value as perceived by the mind."<sup>29</sup> "The fact is that the obligation of any moral being must be graduated by his knowledge. If therefore his intention be equal in its intensity to his views or knowledge of the real or relative value of different objects, it is right. It is up to the full measure of his obligation."<sup>30</sup> A man may thus be entirely holy extensively—that is, conformed to the law as known to him, or willing things according to their respective values as perceived by him—without being very holy intensively. He is, being such, altogether holy.

This is, obviously, only one way of lowering the demands of the law. Indeed, in one aspect, there can scarcely be said to be any such thing as the law in the case. Law is replaced by benevolence, and is fulfilled by willing the good of being as an ultimate end, chosen for its own sake. It is taught that all subordinate ends, and the executive volitions which secure them, not only ought to be, but must be and will be, determined by this ultimate end. So long as we really will the good of being as our ultimate end, we *cannot* make subordinate choices which are means to other ends. A law of mental nature gives dominion to our ultimate end. Having once adopted this ultimate end, our lives in all their details are absolutely determined by it. The mechanism of moral action makes that inevitable. We therefore would seem to need no law. Our ultimate choice of the good of being becomes a law which governs all our activities. It would seem to follow also that we cannot sin. Does not the mechanism of moral action determine that—working back from the ultimate choice of the good of being to the subordinate choices and executive volitions

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<sup>29</sup> P. 140.

<sup>30</sup> P. 144.

and their execution in acts? But Finney falters here.<sup>31</sup> We cannot sin so long as our ultimate choice of the good of being remains unchanged.<sup>32</sup> But we may change that, and in many cases we do change that. And then we not only can sin and do sin, but must sin and do nothing but sin. We have ceased to be perfectly holy and become perfectly sinful. So long as our ultimate end remains the good of being, our whole life in all its activities is determined by it. We are entirely holy. So soon as our ultimate end ceases to be the good of being and becomes our own selfish gratification, our whole life in all its activities is determined by it. We are entirely sinful. This is the doctrine of the simplicity of moral action as conceived by Finney.

It will be perceived at once that what we called the characterizing features of the older form of Oberlin perfectionism in point of fact persist in this new construction. Perfection is still conceived as full obedience to the moral law. And full obedience to the moral law is still measured not by the objective content of the law, but by the subjective ability of the agent. It is still taught with all emphasis that a man is perfect who does all he can do, being what he is; with the disabilities belonging, we would say, to his present moral state; they would say to his present condition

<sup>31</sup> See below p. 278, and note.

<sup>32</sup> In his *Systematic Theology*, 1851, p. 261 Finney says: "The carnal heart or mind cannot but sin. . . . The new or regenerate heart cannot sin." He explains the latter statement thus: "While benevolence remains, the mind's whole activity springs from it as from a fountain,"—and appeals to "Make the tree good," &c. In that case we need to ask, How, then, can benevolence help remaining? If while it remains all our activity springs from it as from a fountain, how can it be transmuted into its contradictory? We cannot sin so long as it remains, and it remains so long as we do not sin—for have we not sinned, and sinned the master sin of all sin, when we have ceased to make benevolence our ultimate end? We can change our master motive only by changing our ultimate end, and surely we cannot change our ultimate end under its own controlling influence which extends over all our voluntary activity. We must sin while benevolence remains in order to rid ourselves of the benevolence under the control of which we cannot sin. So far as appears, then, the regenerate can never sin again.

of ignorance and weakness; and in the circumstances with which he is surrounded.<sup>33</sup> Beyond this narrow area of fundamental agreement, however, all is contradiction. This state of perfection in which the whole law of God is obeyed—so far as the agent, being what he is and as he is, can obey it—is no longer conceived as the culminating attainment of the Christian, to be reached, not by all Christians, but by some only, the *élite* of the Christian body, separated from the crowd precisely by this great attainment. It is conceived as the primary condition of all other Christian attainments, presupposed in every step of Christian living, and therefore the common possession of all Christians, without which no man is a Christian at all. We are no longer supposed to become perfect by being Christians, and pushing our Christianity to its limits; we become Christians by being perfect and it is only through the gate of perfection that we can enter Christianity at all. All Christians are then perfect: one is not more perfect than another: *ex vi verbi* an imperfect Christian is no Christian at all. There are therefore not two classes of Christians, the merely justified and the justified and sanctified also: no one is justified who is not also sanctified. Sanctification is not a sequence of justification, but its condition; and therefore precedes it. We are not justified in order that we may be sanctified, but sanctified in order that we may be justified.

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<sup>33</sup> To the objection that by his doctrine the standard of holiness is lowered to the level of our own experience, Finney (*Systematic Theology*, p. 748) has the honesty to reply that it is quite true that in his opinion the standard of holiness has commonly been set too high. Much of the difficulty, he says, "has arisen out of a comparison of the lives of the saints with a standard entirely above that which the law of God does or can demand of persons in all respects in our circumstances,"—"or indeed," he adds, "of any moral agent whatever." Cf. p. 516. The main difference between the Oberlin men and Christians at large turns on this contention. The Oberlin men insist that Christians may be perfect and demand that they shall be. Yet the actual holiness attained does not differ from that attained by the "common Christian." They call this attainment perfection: the others do not: their standard reaches no higher than this, that of the others stretches illimitably beyond.



There are only two classes of men, saints and sinners; and the difference between these classes is "radical, fundamental and complete." There is no room for a third class between them partaking of characteristics of both. The sinner has nothing of the saint about him; the saint nothing of the sinner. The saint is dead to sin and alive to God; and "the Bible often speaks in such language as almost to compel us to understand it as denying that the saints sin at all; or to conclude that sinning at all proves that one is not a saint."<sup>34</sup> Is there not some faltering in that "almost"? Justification, we are told, is conditioned by sanctification, and implies complete sanctification,—for God cannot accept as righteous one who is only "almost" righteous. According to the doctrine taught accordingly, all saints are entirely sanctified, are perfect, and do not sin. If they sin, that does not prove so much that they have not been saints, as that they are saints no longer. They may sin, but on sinning they cease to be saints. There are no remainders of sin in any Christian therefore to be eradicated. He is already on becoming a Christian all that he ought to be. Perfection lies behind him, not before. What lies before is only his establishment in his perfection that he may no longer fall from it; that and a growth in outlook which carries with it a corresponding growth in obligation and its fulfilment. Perfect however he already is, perfect for his present out-

<sup>34</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 1851, p. 439, cf. p. 846. On p. 470, Finney reverts to his definition of a saint, and having quoted I John ii. 3, 4; iii. 10; v. 1-4, remarks that "these passages understood and pressed to the letter, would not only teach that all regenerate souls overcome and live without sin, but also that sin is impossible to them." He declines so to press them and takes as their spirit "that to overcome sin is the rule with every one who is born of God, and that sin is only the exception; that the regenerate habitually live without sin, and fall into sin only at intervals so few and far between that in strong language, it may be said in truth that they do not sin." "If at any time he be overcome, it is only to rise again." This is faltering indeed: it is flatly in the face of Finney's elaborately explained doctrine of regeneration with the underlying doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action." This requires him to say that the saintliness acquired in regeneration is incompatible with sinning and is lost by sinning.

look and according to his present obligations; and more than perfect he cannot become.

It is obvious that one of the chief tasks which devolved on the advocates of this new form of Oberlin perfectionism was the validation of the assumption that only those who are perfect can have any standing whatever in the sight of God. This task was undertaken from the Biblical point of view by John Morgan, who devoted to it the first of the two essays he published in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review* for 1845—the essay to which he gave the title of “The Holiness Acceptable to God.” This essay was so highly esteemed by Finney that he incorporated it as a whole in his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*,<sup>35</sup>—thus making it a part of his own argument in support of the contention that “sanctification is the condition of justification.” By this contention, he says, “the following things are intended. (1) That present, full, and entire consecration of heart and life to God and His service is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance with God. (2) That the penitent soul remains justified no longer than this full-hearted consecration continues.”<sup>36</sup> It will no doubt be observed that Finney replaces here the term “sanctification” of the original statement, by its synonym, “consecration.” This is a frequent interchange of terms with him and has no significance for the matter in hand. By sanctification he means, under either designation, just “full obedience to the known law of God.”<sup>37</sup> Morgan himself

<sup>35</sup> Volume II, 1847, pp. 108-155. We cite the essay from these pages. Finney omitted it from his second edition, 1851.

<sup>36</sup> Edition I, 1847, p. 107, immediately preceding the insertion of Morgan's essay: ed. 2, 1851, p. 557.

<sup>37</sup> The caption of the section in which this statement occurs in ed. I, p. 106 reads: “Sanctification is another condition of justification.” This is expanded in ed. 2, p. 555, without change of meaning, into: “Present sanctification, in the sense of full consecration to God, is another condition, not ground, of justification.” He is only endeavoring to maintain his formal definition of sanctification as “a state of consecration to God” (ed. 2, p. 594), “exactly synonymous or identical with a state of obedience in conformity to the law of God” (ed. I,

puts the question which he undertakes to answer thus: "Is any degree of holiness acceptable to God, which, for the time being, falls short of full obedience to the divine law?"<sup>38</sup> and phrases his answer in the equally uncompromising terms: "Nothing short of present entire conformity to the divine law is accepted by God."<sup>39</sup> In employing the phrases "acceptable to God," "accepted by God," he is not speaking abstractly of what we might suppose to be generally pleasing to God; but with perfect definiteness of the specific act which is commonly called justification—of what God requires in order to that special act of accepting man as righteous in His sight. In order more clearly to explain his meaning, he uses accordingly such language as "the holiness enjoined as a condition of justification before God";<sup>40</sup> "the supposition that the entire subjugation of sin is indispensable to justification."<sup>41</sup> The ultimate foundation of the essay is denial of imputed righteousness, and with it, of course, of the vicarious obedience of Christ; and the discovery of the righteousness on the ground of which God accepts man as righteous, in man himself. The contention made is that God demands a perfect righteousness and man provides it: the situation thus created being eased only by defining benevolently what perfect righteousness requires in each stage of human moral development. Although, however, justification is very definitely in mind, the discussion is framed so as to cover a wider field, and what is sought is declared to be the determination of the

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p. 200). "Sanctification," says he more at large (ed. 2, p. 595), "consists in the will's devoting or consecrating itself and the whole being, all we are and have, so far as powers, susceptibilities, possessions are under the control of the will, or, which is the same thing, to the highest interests of God and of being. Sanctification, then, is nothing more nor less than entire obedience, for the time being, to the moral law." It is sanctification, so conceived, which is affirmed to be the condition of justification.

<sup>38</sup> P. 108.

<sup>39</sup> P. 137.

<sup>40</sup> P. 113.

<sup>41</sup> P. 129.

degree of holiness which alone is acceptable to God,—at the moment of justification of course, but also continuously thereafter. “We put the question into the most general form,” we read, “intending it to apply to both the accepted holiness of the new-born soul and the holiness of the most mature Christian.” We cannot be accepted by God without this holiness; neither, having been accepted by Him, can we remain accepted save this holiness be maintained. It is supposed that those accepted by God in justification may not remain acceptable to Him, and may therefore fall out of that acceptance which is justification—to which they can be restored again only by becoming again acceptable. Only the perfect are acceptable to God; if we lose our perfection we lose our acceptance; but a recovery of perfection recovers also acceptance. The two things, perfection and acceptance, go together, and are inseparable.

On the basis of this exposition Morgan now asserts that texts of Scripture which prove or appear to prove that converted persons sometimes sin, in no way embarrass his doctrine.<sup>42</sup> Of course, if converted persons sin, they are no longer acceptable to God. They must cease to sin to become again acceptable to Him. He admits that it would be fatal to his view, “if it could be made out that the Scriptures represent the saints as constantly sinning.” He can allow for a passing back and forward between saintliness and sinfulness; which would be a passing in and out of acceptability, and in and out of that actual acceptance which is justification. But he cannot allow that one who sins can continue acceptable to God, or accepted by Him, that is, justified. No one can be accepted by God who has not ceased to sin; and no one can remain accepted by God except as he continues without sin. It is no refutation of this contention, Morgan says, to show that Christians sometimes sin: it can be refuted only by showing that they are always sinful: sinful, of course, with a voluntary sinfulness, since there is no sinfulness which is not voluntary. “The

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<sup>42</sup> P. 137.

language of the law plainly shows that it concerns itself with nothing else than the voluntary inward state or actions of man." "Nor is there any depravity, corruption, bias, evil nature, or anything else of whatever name, with which it is offended or displeased, in man or devil, except the voluntary exclusion of love, or the indulgence of its opposite. Disobedience on the one hand, and obedience on the other, are the only moral entities known to the Scriptures, or of which the law of God takes the least cognizance. It demands nothing but cordial obedience—it forbids nothing but cordial disobedience."<sup>43</sup> This cordial obedience is perfection and less than this cannot be accepted by God. "Is it the Bible doctrine, that if a man will put away the greater part of his sin, God will, for Christ's sake, pardon him the whole?" No; the Scripture always conjoin *repentance* with remission, and repentance is nothing but abandonment, and remission cannot be broader than abandonment. To suppose otherwise would be to make Christ "the enemy of the law and the minister of sin."<sup>44</sup>

This teaching, Morgan now says,<sup>45</sup> is not justification by works. It is "gratuitous justification by faith,"—because our righteousness on the ground of which alone we are, or can be, acceptable to God—and therefore are accepted by Him—lays no ground in right for a claim upon Him for pardon of our *past* sins. Finney seeks the same result by merely drawing a distinction between condition and ground. Our righteousness is the condition, not the ground of the pardon of our past sins, and acceptance with God. The ground of our pardon is to be sought only in the pure clemency of God: but God exercises this clemency only on the condition that we shall perfectly obey His law. If we will perfectly obey His law, we become acceptable to Him, and He will graciously pardon our past sins. Not our future sins: if we commit any future sins we lose our standing

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<sup>43</sup> P. 112.

<sup>44</sup> P. 152.

<sup>45</sup> P. 153.

in His favor and can recover it again only by again becoming perfectly obedient to His law, when these new sins, now become past sins, will also be pardoned. Our acceptance with God thus, now and always, is conditioned upon, though not grounded in, our complete obedience to the law.

Whether this distinction between ground and condition can be made to serve the purpose for which Finney invokes it, may admit of some question. Finney lays great stress upon it. There is but one "ground" or "fundamental reason," he says,<sup>46</sup> of our justification; and that is "the disinterested and infinite love of God." But there are many "conditions," that is to say *sine-qua-nons*, without which justification cannot take place; "men are not justified for these things, but they cannot be justified without them." This is understood by George Duffield—and Finney says with substantial accuracy—to mean that these are not things which must be performed in order to entitle us to justification, but only invariable "concomitants" of our justification.<sup>47</sup> In this sense Finney represents the atonement of Christ, repentance, faith in the atonement, sanctification, to be "conditions" of justification. He puts them on the same line: one of them is no more a ground, one of them is no less a condition, of justification than the others. He distinguishes, it is true, between present and future justification, but does not "conditionate" the one on repentance and faith and the other on sanctification; but the one on "present" repentance and faith and sanctification, and the other on "future" repentance and faith and sanctification. Justification and sanctification are thus no doubt made invariable concomitants. But does "concomitance" fully express their relation to one another? If it did, it would seem that sanctification would be as much "conditioned" on justification as justification on sanctification. But Finney is not only explicit but emphatic to the contrary. It is to him only an error of "some theologians" "to make justi-

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<sup>46</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 1851, p. 983 f.

<sup>47</sup> P. 984.

fication a condition of sanctification, instead of making sanctification a condition of justification."<sup>48</sup> You can have sanctification without justification, but not justification without sanctification. This is a very one-sided concomitance, and means that the relation of sanctification to justification is not that of real concomitance, but of causal condition. Finney, it is true, denies with all energy that it is the proper "ground" of justification. "I think I may safely say," says he,<sup>49</sup> "that I never for a moment, at any period of my Christian life, held that man's own obedience or righteousness was the ground of his justification before God. I always held and strenuously maintained the direct opposite to this." Quite so. According to his own definition of terms, there is but one "ground or fundamental reason" of justification—that is God's ineffable love. And we all proclaim, of course, with one voice, that out of the love of God alone comes that movement of His grace, the outcome of which is our justification. Only one "ground," then, in this sense. But there are "conditions," says Finney, in the absence of which God's love does not issue in justification, and which are therefore the proper grounds of His love manifesting itself in this particular mode of action. Finney says emphatically that there are four such "conditions." He clearly does not mean merely that justification is always found in company with these four things. He means that it occurs only in sequence to these four things. No atonement, no justification; but not in the same sense no justification, no atonement. No repentance and faith, no justification; but not in the same sense, no justification, no repentance and faith. No sanctification, no justification; but not in the same sense no justification, no sanctification. There is a relation here of precedence and sequence; of cause and consequence. Justification depends on these things, its occurrence is suspended on them; as they do not depend on it, their occurrence is not suspended on it. And

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<sup>48</sup> P. 554.

<sup>49</sup> P. 984.

that carries with it that justification depends on, is suspended on, "man's own obedience and righteousness."

It is instructive to observe what Finney asseverates that he "holds, and expressly teaches," that the grounds of justification are *not*, set as they are in contrast with the one thing, the love of God, which he declares that the ground of justification is. The ground of justification he asseverates is not (1) the obedience of Christ for us; (2) our own obedience either to the law or to the gospel; (3) the atonement of Christ; (4) anything in the mediatorial work of Christ; (5) the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is not anything that either Christ or we have done; and it is not anything that we have done or have become under the operations of the Spirit. It is solely the divine benevolence. The Atonement, from the point of view of the Rectoral theory, which Finney teaches, naturally has no adaptation to serve immediately as the ground of any act of God. Its only immediate effect is to bring men to repentance and faith; and thus the entire work of Christ is reduced to inducing men to repent and believe. It is not so clear, however, that the repentance and faith to which men are thus brought, together with their resultant obedience, do not constitute the proper ground of their justification in this scheme. No doubt "the fundamental reason" of justification lies in the love of God: nothing is required, in this scheme, to enable the benevolent God to forgive sin,—it flows spontaneously out of His benevolence alone. But the benevolent God is not free to act on this scheme out of His benevolence alone. He has tied Himself up with governmental obligations. The love of God cannot fulfil itself in the actual justification of sinners, therefore, consistently with his governmental obligations, except in the case of those who have been brought by the Atonement (serving the purposes here of punishment) to repentance and faith, with the consequent amendment of life which is sanctification. This "reformation of life" is obviously in such a sense the "condition" of justification that it may properly be



called its ground. It is not the ground of God's impulse to justify, but it is the ground of God's actually justifying, the sinner. In it the manifestation of His love to this or that particular sinner is grounded. It is the ground of justification in the same sense in which the righteousness of Christ—active and passive—is in the Reformation doctrine of justification, namely, that in view of which God pardons the sins of those whom He justifies and accepts as righteous in His sight. When Finney strenuously argues that God can accept as righteous no one who is not intrinsically righteous, it cannot be denied that he teaches a work-salvation, and has put man's own righteousness in the place occupied in the Reformation doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ.

Finney, it must be confessed, exhibits no desire to conceal from himself the seriousness of his departure from the Reformation teaching in his doctrine of justification. One of the reasons for his constant insistence that the righteousness of man—no less than the atoning work of Christ—is only a condition, not the ground, of justification, is to escape from all implication of a forensic doctrine of justification. He fairly rages against this forensic doctrine. "Now," he exclaims of it,<sup>50</sup> "this is certainly 'another gospel' from the one I am inculcating. It is not a difference merely upon some speculative or theoretic point. It is a point fundamental to the gospel of salvation if any one can be." It is with full consciousness, therefore, that he ranges himself over against the doctrine of the Reformation, as teaching "another gospel." And the precise point on which his opposition turns is that the Reformation doctrine, by interposing an imputation of the righteousness of Christ as the ground on which the sinner is accepted as righteous, does not require perfect intrinsic righteousness as the condition precedent of justification. This he cries out against as a doctrine of justification "in sin." "It certainly cannot be true," he declares,<sup>51</sup> "that God accepts and justifies

<sup>50</sup> P. 558.

<sup>51</sup> Ed. 1, vol. II, p. 107; ed. 2, p. 557.

the sinner in his sins. I may safely challenge the world for either reason or Scripture to support the doctrine of justification in sin, in any degree of present rebellion against God. The Bible everywhere represents justified persons as sanctified, and always expressly conditionates justification on sanctification, in the sense of present obedience to God." "Present, full and entire consecration of heart and life to God, and to His service," he says again,<sup>52</sup> "is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance with God"; and "the penitent soul remains justified no longer than the full-hearted consecration continues." At an earlier point<sup>53</sup> he lays down the proposition that God cannot in any sense "justify one who does not yield a present and full obedience to the moral law," and, pouring scorn on any "method of justification" which does not presuppose such an obedience, exclaims,<sup>54</sup> "What good can result to God, or the sinner, or to the universe by this pardoning and justifying an unsanctified soul?" "If what has been said is true," he then remarks,<sup>55</sup> "we see that the Church has fallen into a great and ruinous mistake, in supposing that a state of present sinlessness is a very rare, if not impossible, attainment in this life. If the doctrine of this lecture be true, it follows that the very beginning of true religion in the soul, implies the renunciation of all sin. Sin ceases when holiness begins." And he closes with an invective against those who object to such as "teach that God justifies no one, but upon condition of present sinlessness"—than which we could have no more precise assertion that justification proceeds on the presupposition of sinlessness. The attainment of sinlessness with Finney is the first, not the last step of the religious life.

It certainly required some temerity for Finney to "challenge the world" to adduce any Scripture to support what he calls "the doctrine of justification in sin, in any degree

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Pp. 157 ff.

<sup>54</sup> P. 160.

<sup>55</sup> P. 164.

of present rebellion against God.”<sup>56</sup> Paul might seem to have written a great part of his epistles expressly to provide materials for meeting this challenge. One wonders how such language could have been employed by one who had in mind, say, Rom. iii. 21 ff, which is quoted in this very connection. For it is Paul’s direct object in this passage to show that men, being incapable of justification from the point of view of their relation to law-works,—Finney’s “entire conformity to law”—are nevertheless graciously justified by God, in view of what Christ has done in their behalf—which is clearly an assertion of the substitution and imputation which Finney rejects with repugnance. Precisely what Paul says in the cardinal verses (23, 24) is that “all”—a very emphatic “all,” declaring what is true of all believers without exception—that “all have sinned—the view-point being taken from their present state as believers,—“all have sinned and know themselves to be without the approbation of God”—the present tense, middle voice, declaring a lack of which they were conscious—“and are therefore justified freely, by His grace, by means of the ransoming which is in Christ Jesus”—the ransoming wrought out in Christ Jesus being the means by which it has been brought about that God can proceed to justify sinners, conscious of their sin, gratuitously; the idea of the gratuitousness of the justification receiving the emphasis of repetition: “freely, by His grace.” It is distinctly asserted here that those justified are sinners, and are conscious of standing as such under the condemnation of God at the moment when they are justified; that their justification is not in any sense in accordance with their deserving, but is very distinctly gratuitous, and proceeds from the grace of God alone; and that God can act in this gracious fashion toward them only because he has laid a foundation for it in the ransoming which He has wrought out in Christ. And the Apostle declares that this is true of all who are justified, without exception. In the most explicit language he has

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<sup>56</sup> P. 557.

just declared that no flesh shall be justified by law-works—that if it is a question of presenting ourselves before God “in entire conformity to the law,” every mouth is stopped and the whole world stands under the condemnation of God (iii. 19); and that the only hope of men accordingly lies in the provision by God of a righteousness which is apart from law, and is received through faith in Christ. And now he says that, having provided this righteousness in Christ, God, in view of it, justifies gratuitously those incapable of justification on their own account, that is to say, just sinners. If this is not a justification “in sin”—or as Finney expresses it somewhat more fully, “while yet at least in some degree of sin”—it would be hard to say what is. Another mode of speech employed by Finney is, “while personally in the commission of sin.” As with him “all sin is sinning,” and there is no sin conceivable except the “personal commission of sin,” all these phrases are completely synonymous with him, and what he contends for is the complete cessation of sinning on the part of the person about to be justified. There being no such thing as “constitutional depravity,” this leaves him perfectly holy. And it is Finney’s contention that it is only he who is in this condition, a condition of “personal, present holiness,” in the sense of course of “entire conformity to the law,”—for there is no constitutional holiness, either—who can be justified. We must have ceased to sin—and that means we must be sinless—before we can be justified. We are pronounced righteous, because we are personally righteous. We are looked upon as in entire conformity to the law, because we are in entire conformity to the law. This is the precise contradiction of Paul’s teaching, according to which we have no righteousness of our own,—a righteousness which is of law—but only a righteousness which is by faith in Christ, a righteousness which comes from God on faith (Phil. iii. 9).

It ought not to pass without explicit mention—although it has repeatedly been incidentally adverted to already—

that Finney makes not only sanctification—entire conformity to the moral law—but also perseverance a condition of justification. “Perseverance in faith and obedience, or in consecration to God,” he says,<sup>57</sup> “is also an unalterable condition of justification, or of pardon and acceptance with God.” He means, of course, that it is a condition “not of present, but of final or ultimate acceptance and salvation.” Thus instead of looking upon perseverance as dependent on justification, he looks upon the continuance of justification as dependent on perseverance. In the Biblical doctrine the sinner, being justified, receives the Spirit of holiness, through whose prevalent operations he perseveres to the end. According to Finney the justified person remains justified so long as he perseveres in the obedience which is the condition of his justification. In the Biblical view it is God, in Finney’s it is man, who determines the issue: the whole standpoint assumed by Finney is that of a God responsive to human actions, rather than that of a man operated upon by divine grace. Justification is made, therefore, to follow and depend upon “present full obedience,” “entire sanctification,” “moral perfection,” and to endure only so long as they endure. We have accordingly such amazing forms of speech as these: The Christian “is justified no further than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys”; “When the Christian sins, he must repent and do his first works or he will perish.” On every sin the Christian is condemned and must incur the penalty of the law of God,—that is to say, the Christian on every sin falls out of justification, comes back under the condemnation of the broken law, and must begin the saving process over again, *de novo*. Such passages as Rom, v. 1, 9, viii. 1, 31 ff. have had no influence on this theory whatever. The Christian, having been justified, is not at peace with God; he is not assured that, having been justified by Christ’s blood, he will certainly be saved from the wrath by Him; he does not know that, since he is in Christ Jesus, there is no possible

<sup>57</sup> P. 558.

condemnation for him, and nothing can snatch him from his Saviour's hands. The point of view exploited carries with it, as George Duffield points out,<sup>58</sup> an odd confusion between the categories of punishment and chastisement. In the place of the dispensation of painful discipline in which the Christian, in his lapses, is represented by Scripture as living, Finney subjects him, on every lapse, to the ultimate penalties of the outraged law. He sees nothing between the perfect obedience due to God and the absolute rejection of the divine authority in high-handed disobedience; between the perfect child of God and God's declared enemy: an imperfect Christian becomes a contradiction in terms; for so soon as the Christian becomes imperfect he ceases to be a Christian,—he has fallen from grace, returned to the world, and requires to do his first works over again. In attempting to reply to these strictures of Duffield's, Finney says nothing to the purpose. He only plays with the words pardon and penalty, justification and condemnation. How can Christians be pardoned once for all, and yet their emerging sins still need pardoning—or do they not need pardoning? If a Christian commits a sin,—is not that sin condemnable and condemned? If a sinning Christian suffers an infliction due to his sin, is not that a penalty? What is the use of playing with words? Use any words you choose, and it remains true—at least in the opinion of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (xii. 7 ff.)—that there are grievous inflictions which come from a Father's hands and prove that we are not outcasts but sons: which do not argue therefore our condemnation but our acceptance.

The closing paragraph of Finney's lecture on Justification<sup>59</sup> is given the form of a detached "Remark." Its purpose is to show that what he calls the "old school view of justification" is a necessary result of the "old school view" of depravity: that given the one, and the other, by necessary steps, must follow. "Constitutional depravity or sinfulness

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<sup>58</sup> Pp. 985 f.

<sup>59</sup> P. 507.

being once assumed, physical regeneration, physical sanctification, physical divine influence, imputed righteousness and justification while personally in the commission of sin, follow of course." This is all very true. Granted the Augustinian doctrine of sin and the Augustinian soteriology becomes a necessity, if sinners are to be saved. Our interest in it for the moment arises from the evidence it affords that Finney was perfectly well aware that his own series of opposing doctrines constituted a concatenated system, rooted in his denial of innate depravity. Out of his Pelagian doctrine of sin he had been compelled to construct a whole corresponding soteriology, and he was perfectly aware that it stood contradictorily over against the Augustinian at every point. Rejecting "constitutional depravity," that is to say, a sinfulness which goes deeper than the act and affects the "nature" itself, he has no need of any "physical" regeneration, sanctification, divine influence, and accordingly rejects them too: and as there is no reason why the sinner who is a sinner only in act and is endowed with an inalienable plenary ability to do all that he is under obligation to do, should not under the motives brought to bear on him in the gospel, cease sinning at will, and do righteousness, so there is no need of a righteousness of Christ to supply his lack; and none is provided and none imputed—the sinner's acceptance with God hangs solely on his own self-wrought righteousness.

There is a single sentence on another page into which Finney compresses one of the most systematic of his statements of his doctrine of justification, especially in its relation to the work of Christ. It will repay us to consider its phraseology closely. This is it:<sup>60</sup> "In consideration of Christ's having by His death for sinners secured the subjects of the Divine government against a misconception of His character and designs, God does, upon the further conditions of a repentance and faith, that imply a renunciation of their rebellion and a return to obedience to His laws,

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<sup>60</sup> P. 562.

freely pardon past sin, and restore the penitent and believing sinner to favour, as if he had not sinned, while he remains penitent and believing, subject, however, to condemnation and eternal death, unless he holds the beginning of his confidence stedfast unto the end." According to this statement justification consists in pardon and acceptance, and is obtained by repentance and faith. This repentance and faith is defined as such a repentance and faith as imply the sinner's renunciation of his rebellion and return to obedience to God's laws—a manifest meiosis in which the word "imply" must be read, in accordance with the entire extended discussion, in a high sense. From all that appears this pregnantly conceived faith and repentance is the sinner's own work and is so completely in his own power that, as he has himself provided it, so he can himself withdraw it; and his continuance in the pardon and acceptance which he obtains by it depends absolutely on his maintenance of it. All that Christ has to do with the whole transaction is that by his death he secures "the subjects of the Divine government against a misconception of God's character and designs," and thus so far protects them against expecting relief in impossible ways. His work is given thus purely the character of revelation, and is directed to and affects of course man alone. It can affect the action of God only through the effect which it produces on men's mental attitude. It is therefore really not Christ's work but the attitude of men brought about by it, to which God has respect in pardoning and accepting sinners. Because Christ has secured men against a fatal misconception of God's character and designs, God can pardon and accept sinners—provided that they reform. From all that appears Christ's work has nothing more to do with bringing about their reformation than it has to do with God's pardon and acceptance of them on their reformation. Their reformation is presented only as a second condition, and we may add the only proper condition, of their pardon and acceptance. All that Christ has done is to secure them against walking in



wrong paths and that only by making known to them that there are wrong paths. That they walk in the right path is their own doing. If they do, God then pardons and accepts them—for as long as they do.

The theory of the Atonement briefly indicated here is of course the common Rectoral theory, presented, not in its best form, it is true, but yet in its essentials as it is commonly presented by its advocates. How it lay in Finney's mind may be learned in its outlines from such a statement as this:<sup>61</sup> "The Godhead desired to save sinners, but could not safely do so without danger to the universe, unless something was done to satisfy public, not retributive justice. The atonement was resorted to as a means of reconciling forgiveness with the wholesome administration of justice." In the extended discussions, however, something is done to mitigate the arbitrariness of the transaction thus baldly outlined. An attempt is made to show that the provision of an atonement was incumbent on God as the moral governor of the world. A more sustained attempt is made to show that in view of this atonement it is incumbent on God to forgive reformed sinners and receive them into His favor. And some attempt is made to show that the atonement is the producing cause of that reformation, which is the condition of God's pardon of sinners and reception of them into His favor.

"In establishing the government of the universe," Finney tells us,<sup>62</sup> "God had given the pledge, both implicitly and expressly, that He would regard the public interests, and, by a due administration of the law, secure and promote, as far as possible, public and individual happiness." This pledging of Himself to observe public justice in the administration of the universe, did not, it is true, commit Him directly to the provision of an atonement. Public justice requires directly only an even-handed administration of rewards and punishments. Yet, as "an atonement would

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<sup>61</sup> P. 550.

<sup>62</sup> P. 326.

more fully meet the necessities of government, and act as a more efficient preventive of sin, and a more powerful promotive of holiness, than the infliction of the legal penalty would do,"<sup>63</sup> it may be fairly thought that its provision was incumbent on a God, seeking under His governmental pledge "the highest good of His public."<sup>64</sup> What is here called an atonement is anything which "will as fully evince the lawgiver's regard for His law, His determination to support it, His abhorrence of all violations of its precepts, and withal guard as effectively against the inference, that violators of the precept might expect to escape with impunity, as the execution of the penalty would do."<sup>65</sup> Whatever will do this will "as effectively secure public interests" and therefore "as fully satisfy public justice," as the infliction of their proper penalties on offenders; and such an atonement having been offered, "public justice now demands that the execution of the penalty shall be dispensed with by extending pardon to the criminal."<sup>66</sup> The pardon of the offender thus becomes incumbent on God. Finney indeed inserts a condition—a very necessary condition—in his fuller statements, and thus avoids making it incumbent on God to pardon all offenders. This condition is—the repentance of the offender. "When these conditions are fulfilled, *and the sinner has returned to obedience*, public justice not only admits, but absolutely demands, that penalty shall be set aside by extending pardon to the offender. The offender still deserves to be punished, and upon the principles of retributive justice, might be punished according to his deserts. But the public good admits and requires that upon the above conditions he should live, and hence, public justice, in compliance with the public interests, and the spirit of the law of love, spares and pardons him."

How the fulfilment of this condition is brought about is left somewhat at loose ends. It is usual with the advocates

<sup>63</sup> P. 326.

<sup>64</sup> P. 320.

<sup>65</sup> P. 321.

<sup>66</sup> P. 320.

of the Rectoral scheme to link the work of Christ so closely with the reformation of men, as to constitute this its direct aim and effect, and indeed, to speak exactly, the atoning act itself. Finney does not appear to do this. He does, to be sure, argue that the atonement tends to produce this amendment of life,—although he chooses to call it a condition only of the pardon and acceptance which results, and not their immediate ground. It presents overpowering motives to repentance, he says,<sup>67</sup> and “the highest possible motive to virtue”; and it is the great and only means of sanctifying sinners.” But he does not appear to give the same systematic place to this effect of the atonement that is given to it by most advocates of the Rectoral theory. The reformation of the sinner, which with him, too, really constitutes the atoning act, seems to be thought of by him, at least relatively, independently of the work of Christ. When accomplished, the sinner, reformed though still guilty, is accepted as righteous in God’s sight. This “entire consecration of the heart to God in view of all that the atonement signifies” is the same thing as what is called by Finney the sinner’s regeneration, explained as consisting in a change of ultimate choice, accomplished, under the merely persuasive influence of the Spirit, by his own free will.

An impression is left in the mind of the reader by Finney’s exposition of the relations of retribution and public justice that God is supposed, on assuming the duties of governor of the world, to have been compelled to subordinate—as many less absolute governors have been compelled to do,—the law of absolute right to the demands of public interest; and does not attempt to administer the universe on any higher principle than the general “public good,” meanwhile closing his ears altogether to the absolute imperative of pure conscience. It may be admitted that in the elaborate discrimination which is drawn out between “retributive justice” and “public justice,” it is fairly shown that what is called “public justice” does not demand so strict

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<sup>67</sup> Pp. 326, 335, 333.

a regard to abstract right and wrong as does "retributive justice"; and therefore that God if He were acting merely on the principle of "public justice" need not be supposed to be meticulously careful of the absolutely right. But that God in His moral government of the world proceeds solely on this "public justice" and has regard only to "public interest," it need not be said, Finney has not shown in the least. Even though it may be said that "public justice" demands only so and so, it by no means follows that God who is the governor of the world will be governed solely by that consideration. To say that "sin deserves punishment, —and must be punished—it is right *per se* and therefore forgiveness is wrong *per se*," Finney rather plaintively declares, "sets aside the plan of salvation."<sup>68</sup> It does set aside the "plan of salvation" as conceived by him; a plan of salvation which has no place in it for expiation of sin, and supposes that God is looking around for a plausible excuse for forgiving all sin, the social effect of which can be neutralized. But it is the one basis of the plan of salvation of the Bible, the heart of the heart of which is expiation, and which represents God as sheerly unable to forgive sin on any other ground whatever.

*Princeton.*

B. B. WARFIELD.

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<sup>68</sup> P. 934.

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## APOCALYPSES AND THE DATE OF DANIEL

Apocalypse means revelation. In Biblical literature and the literature connected with it, there is a large number of books either in part or in whole of an apocalyptic character, either real or assumed, in which there purports to be unveiled before us the secrets of the past, the present, or the future, which could not have been learned by mere human insight or foresight. The preliminary question, and perhaps the more important question, to be answered before we consider the specific case of Daniel, is therefore, whether such a thing as a revelation has taken place, or at least whether it is possible. Every one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and also every one who believes in the claims of the prophets of the Old Testament, must believe both in the possibility and the fact of such a thing as revelation by God to man. It is to such, and such only, that the discussion in this article is addressed, and we shall discuss in their proper place whether there is anything in the revelations contained in Daniel either in form or in character and content which renders it impossible to believe in the possibility or in the actuality of their having been made in the 6th century B. C.

The necessity of entering upon this discussion arises, not from the fact that their predictive character is denied by those who reject the Theistic system, but because in its most essential features it is impugned by many who profess their belief that "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past unto the fathers and the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The objections to Daniel to which attention is called will be stated, then, in the words of Professor Charles, profes-

## OBERLIN PERFECTIONISM

### IV. THE THEOLOGY OF CHARLES G. FINNEY.

The elements of Finney's conception of the Plan of Salvation are given, in a very succinct form, in a summary of what he speaks of as the "provisions of grace."<sup>1</sup> "God," says he, "foresaw that all mankind would fall into a state of total alienation from Him and His government. He also foresaw that, by the wisest arrangement, He could secure the return and salvation of a part of mankind. He resolved to do so, and 'chose them to eternal salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.'" Nothing is said of why God created a race the apostacy of which he foresaw;<sup>2</sup> or of what hindered His making an arrangement by which most of the apostates, or all of them, would be saved;<sup>3</sup> or of whether the part of mankind which He chose to salvation was a definite or indefinite part.<sup>4</sup> So far as this representation goes, God's entire action is determined by His creatures: He finds Himself (in His foresight) with an apostate race on His hands; an apostate race of whom He can "wisely"—a "wisely" which in Finney's scheme means ultimately "benevolently"—save only a part; and His choice of the part He will save is determined immediately by them and not Himself.

Now comes a description of God's mode of action under His decree of salvation. This action is summed up in the institution of a system of means to effect the end in view—"that is," says Finney, "with design to effect it." These means are the law, the atonement and mediatorial work of Christ, the publication of the Gospel and God's providential and moral government,—and also "the gift and agency

<sup>1</sup> P. 693.

<sup>2</sup> In point of fact Finney followed New Haven here; see G. F. Wright, as cited, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> It emerges in the end that Finney considers that it would have required God to change the government He had instituted as the wisest.

<sup>4</sup> It was in Finney's view a definite part, foreseen as those who could be saved under the wisest government.

of the Holy Spirit." Of "the gift and agency of the Holy Spirit," it is said that it is "to excite in them," that is in the part of mankind chosen to salvation, "desire, and to work in them to will and to do, in so far as to secure in them the fulfillment of the promises." This is followed by the assertion that grace has made sufficient provision to make the salvation of all men possible—a statement which, as we shall see, is on this scheme somewhat barren—and that of a portion of mankind certain: and this is followed by the declaration that all who have the Gospel are without excuse, if they are not saved,—another barren statement on this scheme. And now we get at the gist of the matter. "Grace," we read (*italics ours*), "has made the salvation of every human being secure, who can be *persuaded*, by all the influences which God can *wisely* bring to bear upon him, to accept the offers of salvation." The words which we have italicized are key words in Finney's scheme of salvation. *Persuasion*—all that God does looking to the salvation of men is confined in its mode to persuasion. *Wisely*—the governing notion in all God's saving activities is uniformly represented as derived from His wisdom. *Accept*—the determining factor in man's salvation is his own acceptance. In this whole statement the greatest care is expended in making it clear that all that God does toward saving men is directed to inducing the objects of salvation to save themselves. What He does, it is affirmed, is effective to the end in the case of those whose salvation He conceives it "wise" to "secure."<sup>5</sup> But so far it is left obscure what

<sup>5</sup> We are somewhat surprised to find that Finney should have hesitated and vacillated over "Perseverance," in the face of the clearness of this teaching, and of the corresponding representation of "permanent sanctification" as attainable, as the culminating attainment of Christian living (see, for instance, the tract *How to Win Souls: There is nothing in the Bible "more expressly promised in this life than permanent sanctification"*: we may fall away from regeneration, which is entire sanctification, but not from this permanent sanctification to which we are sealed: "remember this is a blessing that we receive *after* that we believe"). He tells us, however, (p. 843) that he did do so, although on the pressure of Scripture he finally accepts the doctrine, and, indeed

the principle is on which the objects of salvation, the salvation of whom He judges it wise to secure, are determined—foresight, or election.

When we turn to the lecture on election, we quickly learn that Finney's doctrine of election is just—Congruism. There are two varieties of Congruism, an Augustinian and an Anti-Augustinian. The Anti-Augustinian variety supposes that the same grace is given to all men alike, but is effective or not effective to salvation according as the hearts of men are "congruous" to it. In this variety there is no place for election, except on foresight of the salvability of men. The Augustinian variety supposes that God, respecting the free will of men, approaches them, just as in the other variety, with "suasive grace" only; but Himself adapts this grace so wisely to the hearts of those whom He has sovereignly selected to save, that they yield freely to its persuasion and are saved. In this variety election is the cause of salvation. Finney may superficially appear to be seeking some intermediate ground between these two ordinary varieties of Congruism: but in point of fact what he presents is, with some variation of form, a curiously complete reproduction of the Molinist scheme. According to him election proceeds on the foresight of salvability; but he does not suppose that the same grace is given to all men alike—although all receive "sufficient grace"—but that God employs in each case whatever grace it seems to Him wise to employ in order to accomplish His end. Those that are salvable—that is, those that are salvable under the wise government which He has established—He secures the salvation of. Those who, under this wise government, are not salvable, He leaves in their sins. Those whose salvation He

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gives it an exceptionally full treatment. His rejection of a "physical" regeneration seemed to him to remove one of the grounds for inferring it; and his rejection of what he calls a "perpetual" justification removes another. He is thrown back thus on the Scriptural declarations supported by the general doctrines of election and the initiative of grace—doctrines to which he gives a purer expression here (where he needs them) than in the residue of his system.



undertakes to secure, because they are salvable under the wise government He has established, He brings to salvation by suasive influences of grace, adapted in each case to their special needs, and therefore certain to be effective. These are the elect. Obviously they are elected on the ground of their salvability—under the wise government which God has established. There is no sovereignty exhibited in their election itself, except in the sense that God might have left them also in their sin; if He were to save any, these were the only ones He could save—under the wise government established by Him. The only place in the whole transaction in which any real sovereignty is shown, lies in God's having established the particular government which He has established, and which determines who are salvable and who not. The particular government which has been established has not been arbitrarily established. It is determined by its wisdom. It is the wisest possible government for God's end—which is the good of being. Seeking the good of being, this is the government which an all-wise God must establish. Its establishment, however, divides men into two classes—the salvable and the unsalvable under the conditions of this wisest government. Here it is that election is determined. God elects to salvation all those who are salvable under this wise government. Any sovereignty which may appear in this election is derived wholly from the sovereignty of the choice of the wisest government to establish. That determined, everything else is determined with it: those that are salvable; those that, on foresight of their salvability, are elected to be saved; the manner of grace by which they are brought to salvation. Proximately their election is on foresight of salvability; only ultimately can it be called sovereign—that is through the sovereignty of the choice of the wisest government to establish.

The determining characteristic of the elect on this view, we presume, is that, in nature, character, situation, circumstances,—in their totality, considered in all relations—the salvation of just these and none others serves as means to

God's ultimate supreme end—the good of being. Not merely the salvation of some rather than others, but the salvation of just these same rather than any others, subserves this end. “The best system of means for securing the great end of benevolence, included the election of just those who were elected, and no others. . . . The highest good demanded it.” A slightly different turn is given to this statement, when it is said: “The fact that the wisest and best system of government would secure the salvation of those who are elected, must have been a *condition* of their being elected.” What is suggested by this is, that the reason, or one of the reasons, why just those who are elected are elected, is that they, and not others, would be saved under the system of government which God had in mind to establish. He was bound to elect those and not others—or else alter the system of government He had it in mind to establish, under which none others could be saved: and He cannot alter this system of government because it is the wisest and best system. This brings us back to the point of view which we began,—that the real reason of the election of the elect is their salvability, that is, under the system of government established by God as the wisest. God elects those whom He *can* save, and leaves unelected those whom He *cannot* save, consistently with the system of government which He has determined to establish as the wisest and best. And this seems strongly to suggest that there is an intrinsic difference between the objects of election and others, determining their different treatment.

The dominating place which Finney gives to the idea of wisdom in his construction will scarcely have passed unobserved. God saves all He can wisely save: the particular ones He saves are those whom alone He can wisely save. Here is rather a full statement:<sup>6</sup> “I suppose that God bestows on men unequal measures of gracious influence, but that in this there is nothing arbitrary; that, on the contrary, He sees the wisest and best reasons for this; that being in

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<sup>6</sup> P. 778.

justice under obligation to *none*, He exercises His own benevolent discretion in bestowing on all as much gracious influence as He sees to be upon the whole wise and good, and enough to throw the entire responsibility of their damnation upon them if they are lost.<sup>7</sup> But on some He foresaw that He could wisely bestow a sufficient measure of gracious influence to secure their voluntary yielding, and upon others He could not bestow enough in fact to secure this result." The upshot is that God elects all that it is wise for Him to elect; and as He elects them both to grace and glory, He saves all that it is wise for Him to save. The ground of His election of just them is that there is something in them or in their relations to His system of government of the world, which makes it wise to save them; and this is not true of the others. He does for those others too all that it is wise for Him to do, and He "has no right to do more for them than He does do, all things considered." What He does for either never passes beyond mere suasion: everything depends therefore at every step on the free movement of their will. "The elect were chosen to eternal life," we read,<sup>8</sup> "upon condition that God foresaw that in the perfect exercise of their freedom, they could be induced to repent and embrace the gospel." If there is not asserted here election on the foresight of faith, there is asserted election on the foresight of the possibility of faith: on foreseeing that they can be induced to believe, they are elected to life, and the inducements provided. It is foreseen that the non-elect cannot be induced to believe—at least wisely—and inducements to believe are not wasted on them.

It appears that Finney wishes to make it appear that

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<sup>7</sup> This is one of those numerous clauses which meet us in Finney's discussions which have no meaning whatever in his scheme of thought, and are thrown in therefore merely for effect. In his scheme of thought, the entire responsibility for their damnation lies upon the lost in any case,—even if no gracious influences at all work on them. They have plenary ability in any case to meet all their obligations, and are fully responsible for their failure to do so.

<sup>8</sup> P. 780.

election is in some sense the cause of salvation. But he is hampered by his preconceptions. He wishes to deny that election is "arbitrary." He wishes to represent salvation as depending on the "voluntary" action of men. In order to protect this "voluntariness" of salvation, he wishes to confine all of God's saving operations within the category of persuasion. And above all and governing all he wishes to make benevolence the one spring of the divine action. The ultimate result is that, representing God as ordering the universe for the one end of the production of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, he finds himself teaching that men are left to perish solely for the enhancement of the happiness of others. Reprobation is a thorny subject to handle in any case; but in Finney's handling of it its thorniness is greatly increased. He is compelled to confess of the reprobate, that "God knows that His creating them, together with His providential dispensations, will be the occasion, not the cause, of their sin and consequent destruction." Of course, God's foreknowledge of these results when he created the reprobate, necessarily involves them also in His comprehensive intention; but equally of course the sin and destruction of the reprobate were not His ultimate end in their creation. But neither are the holiness and salvation of the elect the ultimate end of God in His dealing with them. In both cases alike His supreme ultimate end lies beyond. What God has determining regard to in His dealing with both alike, says Finney, is the wise ordering of His government. He would prefer the salvation of the reprobate, if—but only if—they could be saved consistently with the wise government He has ordained. But, says Finney,<sup>9</sup> "He regards their destruction as a less evil to the universe, than would be such a change in the administration and arrangement of His government as would secure their salvation." They are sacrificed thus to the good of the universe, and perish not because justice demands that they perish, but because it is better for others—surely not

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<sup>9</sup> Pp. 786 f.

for themselves—that they perish. This is a result of Finney's teleological ethics. And it is here that the benevolence scheme is most severely strained. It was benevolent in God, says Finney,<sup>10</sup> to create men who were destined to reprobation, because, "if He foresaw that, upon the whole, He could secure such an amount of virtue and happiness by means of moral government as to more than counterbalance the sin and misery of those who would be lost, then certainly it was a dictate of benevolence to create them." We may possibly be able to bow before reasoning which is directed to show that our reprobation is the unavoidable condition of the attainment of an end high and holy enough to justify any individual evils which are incurred in its achievement,—say, the vindication of the right, the preservation of the divine integrity, the manifestation of God's righteousness, the enhancement of His glory. But it is not so easy to acquiesce when we are told that we must be miserable that others may be happy. If the happiness of being is the end to which everything is to give way, it is difficult to see why we should be excluded from our share of it. Surely at all events we must see the note of moral necessity, and not that of a mere governmental expediency, in the transaction before we can readily embrace it as just.

The ultimate reason why the entire action of God in salvation is confined by Finney to persuasion lies in his conviction that nothing more is needed,—or, indeed, is possible. For the most deeply lying of all the assumptions which govern his thinking is that of the plenary ability of man. It is customary with him to assert this assumption in the form that obligation is limited by ability; that we are able to do all that we are under obligation to do; that nothing which we cannot do lies within the range of our duty.<sup>11</sup> He himself

<sup>10</sup> P. 790.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *The Princeton Review*, April 1847, p. 244, says that "it is merely a doctrine of philosophers, not of common people" that "I ought, therefore I can." Every unsophisticated heart and especially every heart burdened with a sense of sin says rather, "I ought to be able, but I am not." He cites Julius Müller's reply to Kant, in *Lehre von der Sünde*, vol. II, p. 116.

represents this as the fundamental principle of his teaching—"that obligation implies ability in the sense that it is possible for man to be all that he is under an obligation to be; that, by willing, he can directly or indirectly do all that God requires him to do."<sup>12</sup> He thus relegates to a position subordinate and subsidiary to the primary fact of plenary ability even his ethical principle that moral value attaches in strictness only to the supreme ultimate intention, which gives its moral character to all else; and with it, his more fundamental ethical principle still that moral quality attaches only to deliberate acts of will. The ability which he thus ascribes to man as his inalienable possession is not merely that so-called "natural ability" which the New England divines were accustomed to accord to him, and which only recognized his possession of the natural powers by which obedience could be rendered were it not inhibited by man's moral condition. He means, on the contrary, that man has by his natural constitution as a free agent the inalienable power to obey God perfectly. "This ability," he says,<sup>13</sup> "is called a natural ability, because it belongs to man as a moral agent in the sense that without it he could not be a proper subject of command, of reward, of punishment. That is, without this liberty or ability, he could not be a moral agent, and a proper subject of moral government." "Moral agency," says he again,<sup>14</sup> "implies free agency. Free agency implies liberty of will. Liberty of will implies ability of will." And this ability of will extends "so far as the sphere of moral agency extends." The "ability to obey God" which Finney ascribes to man always and everywhere is thus, without any ifs and ands about it, just "the possession of power

<sup>12</sup> P. 925. Accordingly A. T. Swing, *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1900, p. 486 f., says: "The most fundamental of President Finney's reform principles was, that human ability must be commensurate with human duty." This, he says, dominated not only his thinking but his practice: "Sinners ought to respond at once, *because they can repent if they will.*" "Historically then President Finney stands as one of the most earnest preachers of human ability"—surpassing even N. W. Taylor in this.

<sup>13</sup> P. 484.

<sup>14</sup> P. 924.

adequate to the performance of that which is required."<sup>15</sup> In possession of this inalienable ability man's salvation requires and admits of no other divine operation than persuasion.

It is a great concession from this point of view, indeed, to allow that it requires persuasion. Finney does allow this; and this is his sole concession to the supernaturalism of salvation. "From the beginning," he says,<sup>16</sup> "men universally and voluntarily consecrate their powers to the gratification of self, and therefore they will not, unless they are divinely persuaded by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, in any case, turn and consecrate their powers to the service of God." They will not; he will not admit that they cannot. He seems, indeed, almost inclined at times to declare that one not a Christian who supposes that "a man is unable to obey God without the Spirit's agency."<sup>17</sup> The assertion of ability to obey God without the Spirit's agency is express. "The question in debate is not whether men do, in any case, use the powers of nature in the manner that God requires, without the influence of the Holy Spirit, but whether they are naturally able to use them."<sup>18</sup> But along with the strong assertion of their ability to do it, is an equally strong assertion of their universal unwillingness to do it, on the ground of which is erected an assertion of the necessity of the influence of the Spirit for salvation. "I admit and maintain", says Finney,<sup>19</sup> "that regeneration is always induced and effected by the personal agency of the Holy Spirit." "It is agreed," he says again,<sup>20</sup> "that all who are converted, sanctified and saved, are converted, sanctified and saved by God's own agency; that is, God saves them by securing, by His own agency, their personal and individual holiness." The mode of the divine agency in securing these effects, however,

<sup>15</sup> P. 500.

<sup>16</sup> P. 502.

<sup>17</sup> *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> *Systematic Theology*, p. 501.

<sup>19</sup> P. 422.

<sup>20</sup> P. 767.

is purely suasive. We are saved "by free grace, drawing and securing the concurrence of free will,"<sup>21</sup>—a formula which, so far as the words go, might have a good meaning; but not in the sense which Finney puts on them, for in Finney's sense "drawing" means just teaching. Referring to John vi. 44, he says:<sup>22</sup> "As the Father teaches by the Holy Spirit, Christ's plain teaching, in the passage under consideration, is that no man can come to Him, except he be specially enlightened by the Holy Spirit." Beyond the presentation of motives to action he will not permit the Spirit to go in the way of securing man's salvation. "The power which God exerts in the conversion of the soul," he says,<sup>23</sup> "is moral power." "It is that kind of power," he proceeds in explanation, "by which a statesman sways the mind of a senate, or by which an advocate moves and bows the heart of a jury." "All God's influence in converting men," he says again,<sup>24</sup> "is moral influence; He persuades them by His Word and Spirit." And then he adds, "If men will not yield to *persuasion* they must be lost"; and phrases his conclusion thus: "Sinners can go to hell in spite of God." It is certain, he declares in another place,<sup>25</sup> "that men are able to resist the utmost influence that the truth can exert upon them, and therefore have ability to defeat the wisest, most benevolent and most powerful exertions which the Holy Spirit can make to effect their sanctification." They can resist the divine influence designed to save them because it is only of the nature of persuasion. But the same ability which is adequate to resisting it, is adequate also to following it; and if it "secures" their salvation, it is only by this, their free following of it. "The fact is," says Finney,<sup>26</sup> "the

<sup>21</sup> P. 757.

<sup>22</sup> P. 547.

<sup>23</sup> *Sermons on Important Subjects*, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Evangelist*, August 25, 1835, quoted in the *Literary and Theological Magazine*, March 1836, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Oberlin Evangelist*, Lect. 21, p. 193, quoted by John C. Lord, *Princeton Review*, April 1891, p. 234; cf. John Woodbridge, *Princeton Review*, 1842, p. 410.

<sup>26</sup> *Sermons on Important Subjects*, pp. 20, 38.



actual turning is the sinner's own act"; "the sinner that minds the flesh, can change his mind and mind God." In all this Finney was but repeating the teachings of the New Divinity of which this very conception is declared by Lyman Beecher to have been the core. "Our doctrine," says he,<sup>27</sup> describing the essence of the Taylorite contention, "was that God governs men by motive and not by force." "Edwards," he adds, "did not come up to that fair and square. Bellamy did not, and in fact nobody did until Taylor and I did." Finney did also—"fair and square."

This construction of "the way of life," simple with true Pelagian simplicity, is nevertheless complicated with some serious difficulties. It deals throughout with a will to which the "power to the contrary" is passionately vindicated; and yet at two several points it asserts a certainty in the determination of the will which appears to be on this ground inexplicable. How shall we account for the asserted fact that the will, inalienably able to turn at its option from its sins to God, in point of fact never does and never will so turn, except under the persuasive action of the Holy Spirit? A universal will-not, like this, has a very strong appearance of a can-not. A condition in which a particular effect follows with absolute certainty, at least suggests the existence of a causal relation; and the assertion of the equal possibility of a contrary effect, unsupported by a single example, bears the appearance of lacking foundation. And when now we are told that this contrary effect, unexampled otherwise, nevertheless follows with invariable certainty, whenever the persuasive action of the Holy Spirit is exerted to that end,—how can we help suspecting that the action of the Spirit in question is something more than persuasive? Let it be borne in mind that all the elect without exception are brought to God by the persuasive action of the Spirit, although many of them, it is affirmed, are much more difficult to convert than many of the non-elect would be; while on the other hand the non-elect are without exception, despite all

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<sup>27</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. II, pp. 56-7.

the suasive influences which may be expended on them, left in their sins. Surely the action of the Spirit on the elect has the appearance of having a character more causal in nature than is expressed by the term persuasion. A persuasion which is invariably effective has at least as remarkable an appearance as the uncaused unanimity of action which it alone breaks, and which, it is affirmed, it alone can break. It is at least an arresting phenomenon that the human will, inalienably endowed with an equal power to either part, should exhibit in its historical manifestation two such instances of absolute certainty of action to one part—in one instance affecting the whole mass of mankind without exception, and in the other the whole body of those set upon by the Spirit with a view to their salvation. If this illustrates “the sovereign power of the agent,” “the proper causality of moral agents,” “the power of self-determination,”<sup>28</sup> in

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<sup>28</sup> *Systematic Theology*, p. 494. On p. 410 the phrase “the will or agent” drops from Finney’s pen. He identifies the will with the agent, and that accounts for his misunderstanding of Edwards (p. 489) as if Edwards argued that it is the motive and not the agent which is the cause of voluntary action. He conceives of the motive as always “objective,” intruding into the mind from without and determining the will, not as the mind itself, that is the agent, in a given state of preference. “Edwards,” says he (p. 491) “assumes that no agent whatever, not even God Himself, possessed a power of self-determination. That the will of God, and of all moral agents, is determined, not by themselves, but by an objective motive.” Leave out the word “objective” and remember that the motive is just the present self and see what becomes of that statement. Self-determination with Finney, means arbitrary self-determination, independent of or in contradiction of the present preference, which is what other people mean by motive. How far he was prepared to go, we may see from a remark he makes in the course of his reply to George Duffield (p. 970). Duffield had written as follows: “His own glorious nature, His own infinitely exalted excellence, and not anything conceivably existing apart from, independent and irrespective of God, is that which determines His will.” The actual meaning of that sentence is that God is self-determining or a free agent. Finney, however, comments as follows: “What does the Doctor mean? Does he mean that God is a necessary as opposed to a free agent? That His will is necessarily determined by His self-existent nature? If He means this, what virtue is there in God? His nature is self-existent . . . God is not praiseworthy for having this nature, but for the voluntary use, or

the sense put on these phrases—entirely satisfactory in themselves—by Finney and his New Divinity colleagues, we do not see that anything may be said to be illustrated by anything. It speaks volumes meanwhile for the strength of Finney's conviction that man is quite able to save himself and point of fact actually does, in every instance of his salvation, save himself, that he maintained it in the face of such broad facts of experience to the contrary. How can man be affirmed to be fully able and altogether competent to an act never performed by any man whatever, except under an action of the Spirit under which he invariably performs it?

Of course this extravagant assertion of plenary ability is correlated with Finney's doctrine of sin. Naturally he scouts the very idea of "original sin," whether in its broader or narrower application. There is no imputation; no transmitted corruption of heart. Indeed, there is no heart to be corrupted: "heart" with Finney means just "will."<sup>29</sup> All sin is sinning,—and sinning is a purely personal business. It would not be quite exact to say that Finney permits to Adam no influence whatever on the moral life of his descendants. He is willing to allow that they may have received a certain amount of moral injury through the physical deterioration that has come to them by evil inheritance.

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exercise of it." This comment invites remark at more than one point. It is enough for the moment to say that it would be difficult more pointedly to assert that the will is entirely independent of the nature,—something which uses the nature, by which the nature is exercised, not the instrument of the nature's self-expression.

<sup>29</sup> The course of reasoning by which Finney arrives at the conclusion that "the heart" in the Bible usage, "when represented as possessing moral character," means just a volition (p. 409), affords a very good example of his method. Its substance is that this must be so, since nothing but volitions possess moral character: "The very idea of moral character implies and suggests the idea of a free action or intention." It is plain, therefore, that in its Biblical usage, the heart "can be nothing else than the supreme ultimate intention of the soul." And it is equally plain that "regeneration" which in its Biblical usage, is a radical change of the heart, is "a radical change of the ultimate intention"—that and nothing else.

He even suggests that could this physical deterioration be corrected—say through a wise diatetic system—the sin into which they have fallen partly through its influence might in a generation or two disappear too.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless physical deterioration and moral depravity are different things, different in kind, and must not be confused with one another. The one we may receive from our progenitors, the other can be produced only by our own moral action. It is true that in point of fact all of us suffer from moral depravity, all of us without exception. Moral depravity is with Finney as universal a fact as it is with the Augustinian doctrine. “Subsequent to the commencement of moral agency, and previous to regeneration, the moral depravity of mankind is universal.”<sup>31</sup> And it is no less “total” than universal; it manifests itself in the entirety of humanity “without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue.”<sup>32</sup> All men without exception are morally depraved through and through. It will repay us to attend to Finney’s account of the origin and nature of this universal total moral depravity, with which mankind is afflicted.

It will have already been observed that it is denied of the first stages of infancy. It accordingly does not belong to mankind as such, as at present existing in the world; it is not a racial affair. It is picked up for himself by each individual in the process of living. An infant when he comes into the world, is just a little animal. He has no moral nature. If he died, he dies as the brutes die; and

<sup>30</sup> It was a matter of course that S. B. Canfield, *An Exposition, &c.*, 1841, pp. 23 ff., should fall foul of Finney’s amazing representation that by “the flesh” the Scriptures mean bodily appetites, and that therefore the flesh may be overcome by physiological reform, under the influence of which we may look forward to a time in a few—very few—generations when “the human body may be nearly, if not entirely, restored to its primitive physical perfection”—and so “the flesh” will cease from troubling us. Canfield slyly remarks that the works which Paul enumerates as works of the flesh, in great part, “exist in a far greater degree in fallen spirits than among men,”—and the fallen spirits have no bodies!

<sup>31</sup> P. 374.

<sup>32</sup> P. 375.

his death argues no more than the death of a brute argues.<sup>33</sup> "Previous to moral agency, infants are no more subjects of moral government than brutes are"; that is to say, apparently, they cannot be moved to action through inducements addressed to their moral judgment. "Therefore, their sufferings and death are to be accounted for as are those of brutes, namely by ascribing them to physical interference with the laws of life and health." We suppose this is the proximate cause of the sufferings and death of adults also; but Finney appears to think that, in saying it of infants, he is denying that sin has anything to do with their dying—despite Rom. v. 12. He has as much trouble with their salvation as with their dying. He wishes to find a place for them in the grace of Christ;<sup>34</sup> but it is not easy to do so, since, Paul being witness, it was to save sinners that Christ came into the world,—and they are not sinners. And does not Finney himself say:<sup>35</sup> "The fact that Christ died in the stead and behalf of sinners, proves that God regarded them not as unfortunate, but as universally and altogether without excuse"? No doubt, in saying this he had adults only in mind,—but, is it not a proposition of universal validity, and, then, how can infants be partakers of this grace of Christ? Is it not true, as Augustine urged to Finney's prototype, that in this view, Jesus cannot be "Jesus" to infants, because "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for it is He that shall save His people from their sins"? Finney is reduced to arguing that if Christ does not save them from "a sinful constitution," He does save them "from circumstances which would certainly result in their becoming sinners, if not snatched from them." A kindly proleptic salvation, it seems, may at least be theirs. But, very naturally, he does not seem wholly satisfied with this. He adds in a tone which may appear a little petulant: "All that can justly be said . . . is, that if infants are saved at all, which I suppose they are,

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<sup>33</sup> P. 388.

<sup>34</sup> P. 390.

<sup>35</sup> P. 393.

they are rescued by the benevolence of God from circumstances that would result in certain and eternal death and by grace made heirs of eternal life. But after all, it is useless to speculate about the character and destiny of those who are confessedly not moral agents. The benevolence of God will take care of them. . . ." That sounds like very cold comfort to sorrowing parents. And in view of the fact that half of the human race die in infancy, it offers a trying puzzle to the philosophical thinker. And can we acquiesce without protest, when we are told that infants are "confessedly not moral agents"? Perhaps if we press the word "agents"—but let us substitute "beings." Are infants not moral beings? Does a man cease to be a moral being every time he goes to sleep? Are we moral beings only when we are acting, but become unmoral and only brutes whenever we are quiescent? We are told with extended explication how the infant picks up sin in the course of living: it is connected, we see, with its picking up a moral nature, too, in the course of living,—though how it accomplishes this greater feat, we are not so explicitly told. At all events this is Finney's doctrine: infants are at first just little animals; after a while they pick up a moral nature; at that very moment they pick up sin also. Thus all men become depraved from the very first moment when moral agency begins with them.

Adam has nothing to do with it,—despite Rom. v. 12 ff. No, not quite that. Adam has something to do with it, but nothing decisive. What happens is this. These little brutes of babies, like other brutes, of course follow their impulses. These, being constitutional, have no moral quality. Following them, the babies form habits of action in accordance with their impulses. This action has no moral quality. But one fair day the babies awake to moral values, and then their whole habitual activity at once becomes sin. Their new knowledge comes too late to save them from this sin. Their habits of action are too strong to be reversed by it. They are inevitably persisted in, and thus the poor babies become totally depraved because of habits

formed before they knew any better. What Adam has to do with it is this—because Adam sinned, and because all after Adam have sinned,—they all would inevitably have sinned whether Adam had sinned or not—the physical nature inherited by babies is to a certain extent disordered, and this makes their impulse to self-gratification perhaps somewhat more clamant than otherwise it would have been.<sup>36</sup> In any case this impulse would have been strong enough to carry the day against the new ethical knowledge which comes to them when they become moral agents. But perhaps because of Adam's sinning—and because of the sinning of all since Adam,—it carries the day, not with more certainty—it would certainly have carried it anyhow—but with a more energetic effect than it otherwise would have done. Here is the way Finney himself puts it:<sup>37</sup> “The sensibility acts as a powerful impulse to the will, from the moment of birth, and secures the consent and activity of the will to procure its gratification before the reason is at all developed. The will is thus committed to the gratification of feeling and appetite, when first the idea of moral obligation is developed. This committed state of the will is not moral depravity; and has no moral character, until the idea of moral obligation is developed. The moment this idea is developed, this committal of the will to self-indulgence must be abandoned, or it becomes selfishness or moral depravity. But as the will is already in a state of committal, and has, to some extent, already formed the habit of seeking to gratify feeling, and as the idea of moral obligation is at first but feebly developed, unless the Holy Spirit intervenes to shed light on the soul, the will, as might be expected, retains its hold on self-gratification.” And again:—“A dis-

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<sup>36</sup> *Systematic Theology*, p. 381: “We can predict, without the gift of prophecy, that, with a constitution physically depraved, and surrounded with objects to awaken appetite, and with all the circumstances in which human beings first form their moral character, they will seek universally to gratify themselves unless prevented by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>37</sup> P. 397.

eased physical system renders the appetites, passions, tempers, and propensities more clamorous and despotic in their demands, and of course constantly urging to selfishness, confirms and strengthens it. It should be distinctly remembered that physical depravity has no moral character in itself. But yet it is a source of fierce temptation to selfishness. The human sensibility is manifestly, deeply physically depraved; and as sin, or moral depravity, consists in committing the will to the gratification of the sensibility, its physical depravity will mightily strengthen moral depravity. Moral depravity is, then, universally owing to temptation."

We have here of course only the familiar construction of the old *Rationalismus Vulgaris*; and no more here than there is the implication of God in bringing the human race into a condition of universal depravity escaped. It was God, no doubt, who made the human race after such a fashion that its selfish impulses should get the start of its reason in the development of the child, who should therefore be hopelessly committed to sin before it knew any better. We are told of Lyman Beecher,<sup>38</sup> that "in commenting on the sentiment or opinion, which seeks to account for the fact that everyone sins, not by alleging natural depravity, but by saying that 'the appetites and passions are developed faster than reason; that is, in the nature of things which *God* has constituted, the appetites and passions *necessarily* obtain the ascen-

<sup>38</sup> Autobiography, vol. II, p. 373. Nevertheless this view is taught not only by Finney but also by Beecher's friend, N. W. Taylor (*Christian Spectator*, June 1829, p. 366). A child, says Taylor, enters the world with a variety of neutral appetites and desires. These are rapidly developed, and each advancing month brings them new objects of gratification. "Self-indulgence becomes the master principle in the soul of every child long before it can understand that this self-indulgence will ever interfere with the rights or entrench on the happiness of others. Thus by repetition is the force of constitutional propensities accumulating a bias towards self-gratification, which becomes incredibly strong before a knowledge of duty of a sense of right and wrong can possibly have entered the mind." Under the influence of this bias, the child, when at length the commencement of moral agency arrives, sins with a uniform certainty as great "as if the hand of Omnipotence were laid upon the child to secure the result."



dency over reason,' Dr. Beecher said, 'It is by this theory as if God had placed a man in a boat with a crow-bar for an oar, and then sent a storm on him. Is the man to be blamed if in such a case he is drowned?' " All that is accomplished by this explanation of how it comes about that man is morally depraved, is that God and not man is made inexcusable for it. God betrays mankind into depravity wholly arbitrarily, with no excuse, not to say justification, for His act. All that can be said is that this is the way God has chosen to make man. No reason is assigned, none is assignable, for His making him in such a manner that he must at the first dawn of moral agency become totally and hopelessly depraved. If any one supposes that an exoneration for God is supplied in the circumstance that He does not directly create depravity in the human heart, but produces it only indirectly, through the operation of the laws of human development which He has ordained, we are happy to say that Finney is above such a subterfuge. He knows perfectly well that the maxim *facit per alium facit per se* is as valid here as elsewhere. "To represent the human constitution as sinful," he argues,<sup>39</sup> "is to represent God, who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin. To say that God is not the direct former of the constitution, but that sin is conveyed by natural generation from Adam, who made himself sinful, is only to remove the objection one step further back, but not to obviate it; for God established the physical laws that of necessity bring this about." Well, God established the physical laws which bring it about that every child of man becomes totally depraved at the first dawn of moral agency, and, according to Finney, he did it arbitrarily, and in full knowledge of the effect and therefore with the intention that that effect should follow. On the other hand, though God is supposed in the doctrine Finney is criticizing to have attached the communication of sinfulness to Adam's posterity descended from him by ordinary generation, He is not represented as having done

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<sup>39</sup> P. 391.

so arbitrarily but in a judicial sentence; so that a ground is assigned for His act and a ground in right—and Finney has not shown that this ground did not exist, or that existing, it was not a compelling ground in right. What Finney does is merely to substitute another account of universal sinfulness for this one,—the Rationalistic account for the Augustinian one—and in doing so, to use a coarse expression, to jump from the frying pan into the fire. He leaves God equally responsible for human depravity, and deprives Him of all justification for attaching it to man. We do not assert that the Rationalistic account of human depravity which Finney exploits must necessarily leave God without justification for inflicting it upon man. It might conceivably be presented merely as an attempt to explain the manner in which man actually acquired a depravity to which he has been justly condemned on account of the sin of his first parents. It would still be open to fatal objections, but no longer to this one—that it represents God as arbitrarily creating the human race after a fashion which made it inevitable that every member of it should fall into hopeless moral depravity—at the first dawn of moral agency,—as if the kind of humanity which he desired, intended and provided was a totally depraved humanity. But Finney does not set his theory forward as indicating the manner in which God brings a deserved punishment upon a guilty race. He energetically denies that the race on which this depravity is brought is a guilty race, or that it can be conceived as a punishment. He presents it as the account of how the human race—in all the length and breadth of it—becomes in the first instance sinful, in any sense of that word. And his object is to represent it as becoming so voluntarily—with a voluntariness, which, although embracing every individual of the race, is repeated in each individual's case in the completest isolation of distinct personal action.

A tendency is exhibited at times to neglect this more elaborate explanation of universal depravity, and to represent it as sufficiently accounted for by the formula of freedom

plus temptation. All men are free agents, and all men are tempted; therefore all men sin. The formula is obviously inoperative in this crude form of its statement, unless free agency is supposed to carry with it, *per se*, helplessness in the face of temptation, and always to succumb to temptation if it is addressed to it in an enticing form. Finney is near to this crude form of statement when he writes:<sup>40</sup> "Sin may be the result of temptation; temptation may be universal, and of such a nature as uniformly, not necessarily, to result in sin, unless a contrary result be secured by a Divine moral suasion." He is still near it when he writes:<sup>41</sup> "Sin may be, and must be, an abuse of free-agency; and this may be accounted for, as we shall see, by ascribing it to the universality of temptation, and does not at all imply a sinful constitution. . . . For a responsible will is an adequate cause in the presence of temptation without the supposition of a sinful constitution, as has been demonstrated in the case of Adam and the angels. . . . It is said that no motive to sin could be a motive or a temptation, if there were not a sinful taste, relish, or appetite inherent in the constitution, to which the temptation or motive is addressed. . . . To this I reply,—Suppose this objection be applied to the sin of Adam and the angels. Can we not account for Eve's eating the fruit, without supposing that she had a craving for sin?" Finney has permitted it to slip from his mind as he wrote that the problem he has in hand is to offer an account not of individuals sinning, but of the universality of sin. Free agency plus temptation may account for the possibility of sin, and may lay a basis for an account of the actual occurrence of sinning in this or that case. It will not account for universal sinning. For that, nothing less than a universal bias to sin will supply an adequate account. That is the meaning of the statement which Finney quotes in order to repel, but so quotes as to empty it of its meaning. Probably no one of those whom Finney had in mind ever intended to

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<sup>40</sup> P. 380.

<sup>41</sup> P. 387.

say just that "no motive to sin could be a motive or a temptation, if there were not a sinful taste, relish, or appetite inherent in the constitution, to which the temptation is addressed." What was intended to be said was, no doubt, that no motive to sin can be a temptation with universal—that is, invariable—effect, unless there is something in those tempted which constitutes a bias to sin. That is true; and one of the proofs that it is true is, that Finney, abandoning the simple formula of free-agency plus temptation, is himself compelled in the end to assume a bias to sin in order to account for the universality of sin. The child, he teaches,—that little brute—must be supposed to have acquired habits of action which his moral sense, so soon as moral agency dawns in him, pronounces to be sinful, if we are to account for his universally succumbing to solicitations to what he now perceives to be sin. He has acquired a bias to what is objectively sinful, before he faces temptations to these very things, now by his newly obtained knowledge of right and wrong, become also subjectively sinful. That is Finney's account of universal sin. It posits a bias to sin as distinct as that posited by the Augustinians. The difference is that the Augustinians posit a bias brought by every man into the world with him; Finney a bias created invariably for himself by every man in his first essays at living.

Finney's repulsion of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin does not turn, then, on its attributing a bias to evil, to man, as at present constituted. He himself attributes total depravity to man from the first moment of his becoming a free agent, and that is the same as to say from the first moment of his becoming man. It turns in the first instance on the tracing by the Augustinians of the bias to evil back to Adam—despite his own recognition of an effect of Adam's fall, through "physical depravity," on humanity, increasing its liability to sin. And it turns secondly on the nature of the depravity attributed by the Augustinians to man. Finney will not hear of the predication of moral depravity to anything but "violations of moral law and the free

volitions by which these violations are perpetuated.”<sup>42</sup> “All sin,” he declares,<sup>43</sup> “is actual, and no other than actual transgression can be sin..” He knows and will know nothing therefore of a sinful “nature,” or “constitution” as he likes to call it, embodying his argument in a word. It is his psychology which is at fault. The soul, to him, consists of its substance and its acts; there is nothing more, and there is room for nothing more—fore such things, for example, as permanent, though separable, dispositions. “We deny,” he says,<sup>44</sup> “that the human constitution is morally depraved . . . because it is impossible that sin should be a quality of the substance of soul or body. It is, and must be, a quality of choice or intention, and not of substance.” He will not allow that *tertium datur*. If sin, he declares,<sup>45</sup> “be anything, it must be either substance or action.” He will allow no other than these two categories. His psychology compels him thus to reject any and every doctrine which appears to him to imply anything permanent in the soul, permanently affecting its actions, except the bare soul itself. He therefore constantly speaks as if the Augustinians thought of the sinfulness of the soul as a modification of the soul itself in its very substance, or else as the addition of another substance to the soul; as if, in a word, they were all Flacians. To him on the contrary, everything which is not the substance of the soul is one of its acts; and as he cannot attribute sinfulness to the soul itself, he therefore confines all sin to actual sinning. The tree is not good and its fruit good: we are to be content with the good fruits. The agent is lost in his acts, and the practical result is pure activism. The question comes to be, Is the man good or bad, or only his acts? Leonard Woods, in a passage characterized by great force and simplicity of language, at once points out and determines the exact issue. “Holiness or un-

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<sup>42</sup> P. 372.

<sup>43</sup> P. 395.

<sup>44</sup> P. 391.

<sup>45</sup> P. 392.

holiness," says he,<sup>46</sup> "belongs primarily and essentially to *man* himself, as an intelligent moral being, and to his *actions* secondarily and consequentially. . . . The connection between the character of the actions and the character of the agent is invariable. Take an unrenewed sinner. . . . It is necessary that he shall be born again. *He*, the *man*, must be created anew; and if he is created anew, it will be *unto good works*,—not the *good works* must be created, he remaining unchanged; but that *he* must be created anew, and then, as a matter of course, good works will be performed. . . . To say that regeneration *consists* in good moral exercises, that is, in loving God and obeying His commands, seems to me an abuse of language. It is as unphilosophical and strange as to say that the birth of a child consists in his breathing, or that the creation of the sun consists in its shining."

The affiliations of Finney's notion here are obviously with that Pelagianizing doctrine of concupiscence which infested the Middle Ages and was transmitted by them to the Roman Church. It differs from that doctrine at this point only in its completer Pelagianism. Like it, it conceives of man as persisting, under whatever curse it may allow the fall to have brought upon him, *in puris naturalibus*; and, in order to sustain this position, it denies moral character to all the movements of the human soul, deliberate volitions in view of moral inducements alone excepted. It was natural that the attention alike of Finney in sustaining and of his critics in assailing this contention was focused in the first instance on its bearing on those affectional movements—love, hate, malice, compassionateness—in the manifestations of which the man in the street is prone to see moral character especially exhibited. Having the courage of his convictions, Finney boldly proclaimed these affectional movements without any moral character whatever; and thus fell into a body of startling paradoxes which made him the easy mark of ridicule. John Woodbridge expounds his teaching in the

<sup>46</sup> *Works*, 1851, pp. 537 f.

following fashion:<sup>47</sup> “‘Concupiscence’ is reduced to the blameless, though, when they become excessive, somewhat dangerous cravings of physical appetite. Supreme self-love is declared to be an essential characteristic of intelligent moral agency, against which there is no law; which is the spring of all virtue as well as vice; and to which no more blame can be attached than to the pulsations of the heart, or the vibrations of a pendulum. Affections, as such, have no character, they are but the innocent susceptibilities of our nature, and their most violent workings are innocent, except so far as they are produced or modified by a previous deliberate act of will. In all other cases, they are passive emotions, like the involuntary impressions made upon the brain by the bodily senses. It follows, on this principle, that love to God and hatred of Him are equally indifferent things; and that they become praiseworthy or criminal, solely in consequence of their connection with some previous purpose of the mind.” What the moral man above everything has to do, is, recognizing the purely “constitutional” nature of his affectional movements, to abstract himself from them altogether, and to determine all his activities by voluntary choices made in view of the perception of the supreme intrinsic value of the good of being. To be governed in any action whatever by our constitutional affections, whatever they may be—whether what in the common estimation would be called wicked or what in that estimation would be called good, alike—is in view of the supreme obligation that rests upon us to direct our activities to the one end of the good of being, no longer merely unmoral but in the highest degree immoral. It is preferring self-gratification to that benevolence which is the sum of virtue. There is no more telling page in Charles Hodge’s very telling review of the first volume of Finney’s *Lectures on Systematic Theology*,<sup>48</sup> than that in which he develops the consequences of this

<sup>47</sup> *Theological Essays Reprinted from the Princeton Review*, 1846, p. 436.

<sup>48</sup> *Princeton Review*, April 1, 1847, pp. 268 f.

position. "The sin does not lie," in Finney's view, he reminds us, "in the nature of the feeling, but in the will's being determined by any feeling." "It matters not what kind of desire it is," Finney declares, "if it is desire that determines the will, that is selfishness," and therefore, "the choice of anything because it is desired is selfishness and sin." "Mr. Finney is beautifully consistent in all this," comments Hodge, "and in the consequences which of necessity flow from his doctrine. He admits that if a man pays his debts from a sense of justice or feeling of conscientiousness, he is therein and therefore just as wicked as if he stole a horse. Or if a man preaches the gospel from a desire to glorify God and benefit his fellow men, he is just as wicked for so doing as a pirate. We may safely challenge Hurtado de Mendoza, Sanchez, or Molina to beat that." The illustrations which Hodge employs in this extract are not his, but Finney's own;<sup>49</sup> and they may help to indicate to us the thoroughness with which he cleansed our affectional movements from all moral character. Pure will plus external inducement—which may be in the way of temptation to evil, or may be in the way of incitement to good—that is all that comes into consideration in our moral judgments.

One of the gains which Finney felt himself to obtain from his denial of all "constitutional depravity," was that there was nothing left in man after his "conversion" which could

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<sup>49</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 1851, p. 266: "He may be prevented" from committing commercial injustice, "by a constitutional or phrenological consciousness or sense of justice. But this is only a feeling of sensibility, and if restrained only by this, he is just as absolutely selfish, as if he had stolen a horse in obedience to acquisitiveness." So, page 295: "If the selfish man were to preach the gospel, it would be only because upon the whole it was most pleasing or gratifying to himself, and not at all for the sake of the good of being as an end. If he should become a pirate, it would be for exactly the same reason. . . . Whichever course he takes . . . it must involve the same degree of guilt." By the "selfish man" in these extracts, there is not meant a man unusually selfish: "selfishness" is only the mark in Finney's nomenclature of the imperfect, as "benevolence" is of the perfect man. To act on selfish motives means with him to act on any other motives than the good of being as supreme end.



act as *fomes peccati*, and sway his volitions sin-ward. He was perfectly free to admit that we must begin by denying the sinfulness of "concupiscence," if we are to end by affirming "entire sanctification." "Those persons," he says, "who maintain the sinfulness of the constitutional appetites, must of course deny that man can ever be entirely sanctified in this life." From this point of view also, he is eager to show "not only that sanctification implies merely 'present obedience,' 'right volitions now,' and produces 'no change of our nature so that we become good in ourselves,' but that there is nothing 'in us,' antecedent to moral action, operating as the occasion of sinful exercises, which *needs* to be eradicated or *changed* in order to our being in a state of entire sanctification"; and "to *refute* the doctrine that, apart from present transgressions, 'there might be that in a person which would lay the foundation for his sinning at a future time.'"<sup>50</sup> If there is nothing in us from which we need to be saved except our "commitment to self-gratification as the end of our being," and nothing to be in us to which we are to be saved except a like "commitment to the good of being as the end of our being," it is easier to believe that the passage from the one to the other—being only a passage from one purpose to another—may be made absolutely at once; must be made, indeed, if made at all, absolutely at once. It is according to Finney, thus, only our purpose which "needs to be radically changed." What we call a "wicked heart" is only a purpose; what we call a "good heart" is only a purpose; and therefore Joseph I. Foot calls this theology "the heartless theology"—the theology, that is, which goes no deeper in its conception of salvation than a simple change of purpose, which conceives that all that happens to a man when he is saved, absolutely all that happens to him, is a change of purpose. A change of purpose is, naturally, an act of our own, and Finney therefore not only identifies regeneration and conversion, but polemicizes

<sup>50</sup> The quotation is from Canfield, *Exposition*, &c., pp. 17 f.

against all attempts to erect a distinction between them.<sup>51</sup> We regenerate ourselves: only the man himself "can change his choice," and if he will not do it, "it is impossible that it should be changed"—"neither God nor any other being can regenerate him, if he will not turn."<sup>52</sup> It is we ourselves then who make ourselves holy, and that at a stroke. For regeneration "implies an entire present change of moral character, a change from entire sinfulness to entire holiness"<sup>53</sup>—"a present entire obedience to God."<sup>54</sup> After this it is only a question of maintenance,—of the maintenance of that "radical change of ultimate intention," that change from a selfish ultimate choice to benevolent ultimate choice, which we may call indifferently repentance,<sup>55</sup> or faith,<sup>56</sup> or conversion, or regeneration, or sanctification.

It is quite clear that what Finney gives us is less a theology than a system of morals. God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character. All virtue, all holiness, is made to consist in an ethical determination of will. "What is virtue?" he asks, and answers: "It consists in consecration to the right end; to the end to which God is consecrated."<sup>57</sup> And "all holiness," he defines,<sup>58</sup> "consists in the right exercise of our own will or agency." The supreme ultimate end to which in the right exercise of our will we must direct ourselves, if we would be virtuous or holy—these things are one,—is the good of being. God is of course included in this being, but only as part of the whole

<sup>51</sup> P. 408.

<sup>52</sup> P. 413.

<sup>53</sup> P. 413.

<sup>54</sup> P. 994.

<sup>55</sup> P. 593: Repentance "implies a return to full obedience to the moral law"; "regeneration and repentance consist in the heart's return to full obedience, for the time being, to this law."

<sup>56</sup> P. 537: "Present evangelical faith implies a state of present sinlessness. . . . Its existence in the heart must be inconsistent with present sin there. Faith is an attitude of the will, and is wholly incompatible with present rebellion of the will against Christ."

<sup>57</sup> P. 46.

<sup>58</sup> P. 693.

—Being—to which our benevolent purpose is directed. And He is just as much subject to this universal ethical law as we are. He too must make the good of being His supreme ultimate end, on pain of becoming, as we would in like circumstances become, instead of as holy as He can be, as wicked as He can be. We are all, He and we, members of one ethical body, governed by one ethical law, and pursuing a common ethical course. But since the same law governs God and us, it is clear that we are dealing with pure ethics, not religion. God has no religion. And since this ethical law sets the good of being, interpreted as happiness, as distinguished from our own happiness, described as self-gratification, or selfishness, as the supreme ultimate end, the choosing of which includes all virtue,—God cannot be held to be the sole or even the chief object included under the term, “Being,” the good of which is our supreme ultimate end. For God at least to choose His own good—or happiness—solely or chiefly as His supreme ultimate end,—would not that be that selfishness which is declared to constitute us as wicked as we can be, instead of as holy as we can be? Finney constantly employs the double phrase, “God and the universe” as the synonym of Being in this reference; and we may think it possible that he wished the two elements in the composite idea to be distributed differently in our case and in God’s—that in our case it should be God along with the universe, in God’s, the universe along of course with Himself—as even we include ourselves in the Being whose good we seek. But can we even imagine God taking this subordinate place in His own eyes, attributing “greater intrinsic value”—which Finney says is the reason why we are to seek the happiness of the universe above our own—to the universe than to His own all glorious Being? Must not His own glory be to Him also, as it must be to us, His supreme ultimate end? We said that God might be eliminated entirely from Finney’s ethical theory without injury

to it: are we not prepared now to say that He might be eliminated from it with some advantage to it?<sup>59</sup>

"True religion," says Finney, in one of his numerous brief summaries of his general views,<sup>60</sup> "consists in benevolence, or in heart obedience to God." This identification of "benevolence" and "obedience" does not appear obvious to the uninstructed mind and requires some explication. Finney discovers the intermediating idea in the following consideration. "It," that is, religion, "consists essentially in the will's being yielded to the will of God,"—that is, no doubt, in "obedience." But he continues epexegetically: "in embracing the same end that He embraces"—and this adoption of His end as our end (how that sounds like Albrecht Ritschl!) may possibly be considered "benevolence." We read on: "and yielding implicit obedience to Him in all our lives, or in our efforts to secure that end." "This," he now adds, "constitutes the essence of all true religion." In that case the essence of religion is obedience; and it can be benevolence only as obedience may be construed as rendered, not because it is due, but out of good will; as if we obeyed God, not because He is God, whom to obey is our primary obligation, but because we are good and glad to subject ourselves to another for His pleasing. Religion being obedience, it is distinctly a matter of will, and also of conduct, the product of will. Voluntary subjection is its form, although the form of this subjection is described as the adoption of the Divine end as our own and the prosecution of it (always under the Divine prescription) with all our might. The adoption of the end of God as our end, and obedience to the will of God,

<sup>59</sup> G. F. Wright devotes an article in *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, April 1876, pp. 381 ff., to "Dr. Hodge's Misrepresentations of President Finney's *System of Theology*"—referring only to the remarks on Finney made by Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*. The first of his complaints is that Hodge in one way or another represents Finney as "putting the universe in the place of God." Hodge of course does not mean that Finney makes this substitution expressly, but only virtually. We think that is not an unfair state of the logical results of some elements of his system.

<sup>60</sup> P. 716.

are not quite the same conception: they are assimilated to one another by the requirement that we shall prosecute this end when adopted in implicit obedience to the Divine prescription. Clearly this is a religion of law, and the heart of it is obedience: and these are ethical conceptions. Having thus made religion to consist "essentially in yielding the will to God in implicit obedience,"—that is, an affair of will—Finney now represents the emotional life of the religious man as, not a part, but merely a consequence of his religion. "The feelings or affections, or the involuntary emotions, are rather a consequence, than, strictly speaking, a part of true religion." Faith itself can be thought of as "an essential element of true religion," only because it is "not an involuntary but a voluntary state of mind"; that is, an act of will. Religion is thus conceived as through and through an affair of the will. "It should never be forgotten," we read,<sup>61</sup> "that all true religion consists in voluntary states of mind, and that the true and only way to attain to true religion, is to look at and understand the exact thing to be done, and then to put forth at once the voluntary exercise required."<sup>62</sup>

In the preface of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney declares<sup>63</sup> that the subject of the book is "mind in its relation to moral law," and that what he has said on "Moral Law," and on the "Foundation of Moral Obligation" is the key to the whole. This remark seems to have a narrower reference as it appears in the first edition of the *Lectures*, but clearly it refers to the whole treatise as it is repeated in the second. It may be taken as revealing Finney's own consciousness of the essentially ethical character of his treatise. It is a system of teleological ethics which he presents to us; or, to be more precise, we may perhaps say in modern phraseology, that it is a system of hedonistic as

<sup>61</sup> P. 630.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Walter E. C. Wright, *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1900, p. 431: "The religion of Oberlin from the first, was intensely ethical; it concerned actions far more than feelings."

<sup>63</sup> Edition I, vol. I, 1846, p. 5; edition 2, 1857, pp. VIII-IX.

distinguished from eudaemonistic ethics, that is to say a system in which "happiness" rather than "welfare"—although of course the two ideas readily run into one another—is the ethical end, the ultimate object to be achieved by action and conduct, the standard and final criterion of what ought to be,—by their tendency to achieve which therefore the ethical character of actions is to be estimated. Of course it is not "individualistic" hedonism which Finney teaches, nor even merely "altruistic," to continue to use the phraseology of the modern schools, but "universalistic." The doctrine which he inculcates is that moral conduct consists in actions directed towards the happiness of all sentient being; from which it follows, to put it briefly, that happiness is the chief good and benevolence the comprehensive virtue, and actions are good or bad according as they do or do not manifest the one and promote the other.<sup>64</sup> If we ask what has become of the "right," in the sense of the morally excellent, conceived as good *per se*, it can only be said that it has dropped out of sight altogether. The "good" has become the "happiness"—or the "welfare"—of the whole body of sentient beings; and the "right" that which tends to this. We cannot define "happiness,"—or "welfare,"—so as to include the idea of the "right," except at the cost of self-contradiction. If there is any such thing as the "right" *per se*, then the right is not what tends to an end, conceived as the supreme good, but just the end itself: we cannot say that the right is what tends to the right. Thus all obligation is reduced strictly to the single obligation to choose the good of being as our supreme ultimate end. The ground of obligation is accordingly declared to be that in this ultimate end which makes it incumbent on us to choose it, namely its intrinsic value to being. "The ground of obligation," says Finney<sup>65</sup> "is that reason, or consideration, intrinsic in, or be-

<sup>64</sup> Finney is even able to say (*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 951): "Were it not for the relation that virtue is seen to sustain to happiness in general, no moral agent would conceive of it as valuable."

<sup>65</sup> P. 42.

longing to, the nature of an object which necessitates the rational affirmation, that it ought to be chosen for its own sake." There is some appearance of logomachy in this reasoning. We choose the good of being as our ultimate end: the ground of our choice of it is that it is worth choosing; that in it which makes it worth choosing is the ground of our obligation to choose it. We do not seem to be told how we know that the good of being, in the sense of its happiness, is the supremely valuable thing in the universe. That is "a first truth of reason." Finney's polemic against what he calls barbarously, "rightarianism"<sup>68</sup> is very sharp. He takes us back to the primary sense of the word "right" and seeks to reduce even the connotation of the word itself to the "fit, suitable, agreeable to the nature and relation of moral agents." This representation, however, is only partially correct, although there is of course a sense in which right and wrong express what is straight and what is crooked. "Right" has the form of a past participle, and it is not overpressing its suggestion to say that it expresses not so much the straight as the straightened: behind it lies the idea of rule, regulation, government: it is cognate not only with regular but regal,—in short it expresses "conformed to rule," with a subaudition of authority. The atmosphere out of which it comes is that of theism, not of naturalism; and the righteous man is accordingly not the man whose conduct is suitable to his nature but the man whose conduct is in accordance with law. The ethics of right is accordingly justly spoken of as "authoritative morality," the ethics which imposes itself as obligatory *per se*, and not merely on the ground of expediency calculated from its tendency to an end presumed to be a good, supposedly the supreme good. The right is not a means to something else conceived of as the supreme good, but is itself the supreme good imposed on us as our duty by an adequate authority.

This seems to Finney fundamentally wrong, and he endeavors to reduce it to absurdity. "If the rightarian be the

<sup>68</sup> Pp. 54 ff.

true theory," he reasons,<sup>67</sup> "then disinterested benevolence is sin. According to this scheme, the right, that is the good of being, is the end to, and for, which God and all moral agents ought to live. According to this theory, disinterested benevolence can never be duty, can never be right, but always and necessarily wrong. . . . If moral agents ought to will the right for the sake of the right, or will good, not for the sake of the good, but for the sake of the relation of rightness existing between the choice and the good, then to will the good for its own sake is sin. It is not willing the right end. It is willing the good and not the right as an ultimate end. These are opposing theories. Both cannot be true. Which is the right to will, the good for its own sake, or the right? Let universal reason decide." Undoubtedly these are opposing theories; and universal conscience might well be left to decide whether we should will the good because it is right to do so, or will the right because it tends to a good result. And in this lies the answer to the over-strained logic which Finney is plying. That we are to do the right because it is right, and not because of any tendency we perceive in it to advance the good of the universe, by no means makes the practice of "disinterested benevolence" a sin. It may be right to will the good for its own sake. But, you cry out, you cannot will the good because it is right and for its own sake at the same time. Why not, if it is right to will the good for its own sake? The universal ground of moral obligation is that we must do right. The particular ground of this special obligation lies in the value of the object chosen. The value of the object chosen—but, mind you, its *moral* value—indicates the rightness of its choice. The category of the right is not an empty category, it has content: the notion is not a purely formal one, it is concrete. One of the things which is right is benevolence. When we choose benevolence as a rule of life we do right; and it is a very twisted logic which declares that he who chooses benevolence as a rule of life

<sup>67</sup> P. 57.



must do wrong—because he ought to choose right as his rule of life. He ought. That is the very reason why he ought to choose benevolence as his rule of life. It is right.

Finney having endeavored to reduce "Rightarianism" to absurdity Charles Hodge is doubtless justified in retorting with a happier attempt on his part to reduce Finney's teleological ethics to absurdity.<sup>68</sup> He says it belongs to the same mintage with Jesuit "intentionalism"—"the means are justified by the end"—and recommends Pascal's *Provincial Letters* as a good book to be read at Oberlin. When stated in an abstract form the observation made by Hodge is so immediately obvious, as not to require argument for its justification. It is the very essence of a system of teleological ethics that the means acquire all the moral quality which they possess from their relation as means to their end. It was the taunt that this involved, as truly as Jesuit "intentionalism," the contention that it is right to do evil that good may come, which stung Finney to his unavailing answer.<sup>69</sup> The point of the comparison lies in the principle common to both Jesuit "intentionalism" and Finney's teleological ethics that "whatever proceeds from right intention is right." From this the Jesuits proceeded to infer that it is therefore right to do evil that good may come. Can Finney escape the same inference? Everybody, of course, understands that a right intention is necessary to the rightness of any action. The point raised is whether that is all that is necessary. Is it true that if your intention is right, your action is right? This is the Jesuit doctrine: the rightness of the intention makes the action right. It is Finney's doctrine also. Does he not teach that all that makes any conduct right is the end to which it is directed? What Hodge wishes to carry home to the mind is that this is really a vicious principle: everywhere and in all applications vicious. While the rightness of the intention is essential to the rightness of the action, it does not of itself make the

<sup>68</sup> *Princeton Review*, April 1847, p. 261 ff.

<sup>69</sup> *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 929 ff.

action right. The "matter" of the action, as the Schoolmen express it, must be right, too. The act must be right for "the matter" of it, as well as in the intention of it. Intrinsically good ends must be sought by intrinsically good means: neither does the good end make an evil means good, nor does a good means make the evil end good. Francis of Assisi had a good end in view when he gave alms: he wished to relieve distress. When he stole the money from his master's till to give the alms, he used bad means for his good end. The goodness of the end does not sanctify the means. The goodness of the end, in point of fact, never transmits its goodness to the means used to attain it. And this destroys at once all schemes of teleological ethics.

In reply to Hodge, Finney says a great deal which is wholly ineffective because not to the point. The one thing which he says to the point is that in his system the choice of the end includes in it the choice of the means. There is but one system of means which is adapted to achieve the good of being. This system of means and its appropriate end are bound together in an indissoluble unity. To choose the end is at the same time, and by the same act, to choose this system of means. We cannot do anything we will and call that a means to that end. We must do just the things which are the real means to that end, in order to secure it. The rightness of these means is given to them by their inherent relation as means to this supreme ultimate end, to which they are related as its only means. It is their inherent relation to the end with which they form one system which makes them right; and the only definition that can be given of them is that they are the fit means to the supreme ultimate end, chosen for its own sake and organically related as the supreme good to the fit means for securing it. The effect of this representation is to shift the whole matter from the subjective to the objective sphere. It amounts to saying that he acts rightly who does the things which in point of fact tend to the supreme good, not he whose actions are governed by the intention of subserving the good of God

and the universe. And in thus shifting the matter from the subjective to the objective sphere, the whole character of the scheme is altered. It is no longer the supreme ultimate intention which gives its moral quality to all subordinate choices and executive volitions—which is the very essence of Finney's morals—but the intrinsically good end which cannot be secured except by the intrinsically good means in organic union with it. The good end is no longer conceived as making the means chosen to secure it good; it is conceived as related to a system of means which are themselves good and which form with the end a good system. Finney is obviously floundering here. In his system things—whether means or other things—are not good in themselves: they receive their goodness for their relation—as means or otherwise—to the supreme ultimate end, which is defined as the good of being. He cannot subintroduce here an attribution of intrinsic goodness to them: what makes these means good is in his system solely their relation as means to the supreme ultimate end. He can, no doubt objectify the whole system of ends and means, and bid us conceive them—the end as the final term and all the means leading to it—as an objective entity which as a whole is good; a whole made up of its constituent parts all of which are good, standing off in a sort of conceptual reality to our contemplation. And he can then say, See, there is the end; and see, here are the means leading up to it,—appropriate means, good as the end itself is good; and see, he that chooses the end must choose with it the whole concatenated system of means and ends; they cannot be separated; they form one whole. But, doing so, he is merely objectifying for the sake of visualizing it, a system which is really subjective: no such objective system exists, in his view, in fact. He deceives himself, if he imagines that he thus gives the means in his system any actually independent goodness, and can properly speak of them as “good as the end itself is good.” They seem thus good only as they stand in this objectified system, which is a purely mental construction. Out of this

objectified system they have no goodness: they acquire goodness only by being brought into, and as they are brought into each man's actual subjective system. It remains true that any means, any whatever, which are brought into a system of means looking towards the indicated end, is in Finney's view made good by its relation as means to this end. That is intrinsic to any system of teleological ethics. And that is "intentionalism." What he teaches is, not that our good intention cannot be secured unless we employ good means, but that our good intention makes the means requisite for securing it good.

As the end of his long life drew near, Finney published a tract—called the *Psychology of Righteousness*—in which he repeats in popular language the teaching of his lifetime, thus certifying us that it remains his teaching to the very end. Here he propounds afresh his fundamental ethical theory and erects on its basis anew his Pelagian doctrine of salvation. Righteousness here too is discovered only in our ultimate choice, from which all the righteousness of subordinate choices, volitions, actions derives. And our ultimate choice is righteous only when it is the choice of the good of universal being. "The moral quality, then, of unselfish benevolence is righteousness, or moral rightness." "This ultimate, immanent, supreme preference is the holy heart of a moral agent. Out of it proceeds, directly or indirectly, the whole moral or spiritual life of the individual." A sinner is *ex vi verbi* a selfish moral agent: how can he attain to the righteousness which consists in his contradictory, in universal benevolence? Why, of course, by a change in his ultimate choice. "The first righteous act possible to an unregenerate sinner is to change his heart, or the supreme preference of his soul." If this is the first act, it is also the last,—for it is the whole thing. The only thing that has moral character is the ultimate choice, and, the ultimate choice having become benevolence, the sinner has wholly ceased to be a sinner, and become altogether righteous. This great change is effected by the sinner "taking

such a view of the character and claims of God" as to induce him to renounce his self-seeking spirit and come into "sympathy with God." You see, nothing but better knowledge is required; better knowledge leads to a better life. The ministrations of the Holy Ghost are, to be sure, not excluded; but the whole work of the Spirit is reduced to the mode of illumination. All that the Spirit does is to give the sinner a better view of the claims of God. "A sinner attains, then, to righteousness only through the teaching and inspiration of the Holy Spirit." "It is by the truths of the gospel that the Holy Spirit induces this change in sinful man." "This revelation of divine love, when powerfully sent home by the Holy Spirit, is an effectual calling." The effect of the change thus brought about is that the sinner ceases to be a sinner, and becomes, at once on the change taking place, perfect. "A truly regenerate soul cannot live a sinful life." "The new heart does not, cannot sin. This John in his first epistle expressly affirms. A benevolent, supreme ultimate choice cannot produce selfish subordinate choices or volitions." A perfectionism is asserted here of every true Christian, from the inception of his Christianity; a perfectionism resting absolutely on the sinner's own ultimate choice.

But now we are told, to our astonishment, that this perfect Christian may *backslide*. How he manages it remains unexplained, if "the new heart does not, cannot sin," as John is said to teach,—if the benevolent supreme ultimate choice which he has made cannot produce selfish subordinate choices or volitions. Finney, however, asserts it and argues it. If the change wrought in the sinner, he says, "were a physical one, or a change in the very nature of the sinner," this backsliding would indeed be impossible. But as nothing has happened to the sinner himself—as he has only been induced by better knowledge, to change his ultimate supreme purpose,—there is no reason why he may not change it back again. This is of course making himself again a new heart—this time a bad one, as Adam and Eve did. Indeed, a

man "may change his heart back and forth." Otherwise "a sinner could not be required to make to himself a new heart, nor could a Christian sin after regeneration." When a man has backslidden, there is nothing for him but to begin afresh and do his first work over again. In point of fact he has not "backslidden" but apostatized. And now to make the appearance of contradiction complete, we are told that "righteousness is sustained in the soul by the indwelling of Christ through faith, and in no other way"; and "purposes or resolutions" are spoken of which are "not self-originated"; but are due to the Spirit of Christ. Fortunately this antimony, left unresolved in this brief popular tract, is abundantly resolved in Finney's earlier and more extended writings. In these writings all that is good in the whole sphere of Christian activity is ascribed without reserve both to the indwelling Christ and to the human agent; and the antimony is resolved by the explanation that the action of the Spirit of Christ is purely suasive and the whole execution is the work of man himself in his active powers.

Take the following passages together. "It"—that is the doctrine of entire sanctification—"ascribes the whole of salvation and sanctification, from first to last, not only till the soul is sanctified, but at every moment while it remains in that state, to the indwelling Spirit and influence and grace of Christ. A state of entire sanctification can never be attained . . . by any works of law, or works of any kind, performed in your own strength, irrespective of the grace of God. By this I do not mean, that were you disposed to exert your natural powers aright, you would not at once obey the law in the exercise of your own natural strength, and continue to do so. But I do mean, that as you are wholly indisposed to use your natural powers aright, without the grace of God, no efforts that you will actually make in your own strength, or independent of His grace, will ever result in your entire sanctification."<sup>70</sup> "By the assertion that the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ, is received by faith to

<sup>70</sup> *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 629.

reign in the heart, it is intended, that He is actually trusted in, or submitted to, by faith, and His influence suffered to control us. He does not guide or control us by irresistible power or force, but faith confides the guidance of our souls to Him. Faith receives and confides in Him, and consents to be governed and directed by Him. As His influence is moral, and not physical, it is plain that He can influence us no further than we trust or confide in Him."<sup>71</sup> "The Holy Spirit controls, directs and sanctifies the soul, not by a physical influence, nor by impulses, nor by impressions made on the sensibility, but by enlightening and convincing the intellect, and then quickening the conscience."<sup>72</sup> Everything that the Spirit does for us is thus reduced to enlightenment; everything we receive from Him to knowledge. We are exhorted, it is true, to renounce our own strength and rely on, draw on, live by the strength of Christ. But the term "strength" here is only a figure of speech. When an attempt is made to explain what precisely is meant by such exhortations,<sup>73</sup> what we are told is that in the first place they are not meant "in the antinomian, do-nothing, sit-still sense" of the words. "It is not to sit down and do nothing," leaving it to Christ to do it for us. This is, so far so good. But it is not so well said when we hear next, that what we are to do is to "lean on Christ, as a helpless man would lean on the arm or shoulder of a strong man, to be borne about in some benevolent enterprise." A kind of coöperation is depicted here which makes Christ merely our helper. The intention is to exploit our "natural ability," and accordingly we read soon: "This renunciation of his own strength is not a denial of natural ability. . . . It is a complete recognition of his ability, were he disposed, to do all that God requires of him." "Strength" then is distinctly the wrong word to use in this connection. We do not need Christ's strength: we have enough of our own. We need from Christ only an

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<sup>71</sup> P. 306.

<sup>72</sup> P. 307.

<sup>73</sup> P. 667.

adequate inducement to use our own strength aright. We have "been too long the slaves of lust ever to assert or to maintain our spiritual supremacy, as the masters, instead of the slaves of appetite"; and we need help in asserting ourselves. The idea of strength here intrudes again and we read that "the will or heart is so weak in the presence of temptation, that there is no hope of its maintaining its integrity unsupported by Christ, and it must therefore renounce its dependence on its own strength and cast itself on Christ. We cannot forget, however, that Christ acts on the "will or heart" only by instruction. And even here the conception continues to be only that of the use of Christ to supplement defects. The illustration employed is that of a lame man with his crutches. Christ is the believer's crutches; and we are exhorted to make these crutches, that is Christ, so much ours that we use them instinctively and can no more forget them when we essay to walk than we can forget our own feet. This is what it is to walk in Christ.

More illuminating still is a passage<sup>74</sup> in which Finney is attempting to discriminate his view of "the means and conditions of sanctification" from that of the "New Divinity"—from which he felt himself to have come out, or to have been thrust out. The New Divinity, he notes, like himself, rejects "the doctrine of constitutional moral depravity"—that is, of "original sin"—and consequently the doctrine "of physical regeneration and sanctification"—that is of "making the tree good" rather than the fruit only. But, having rejected these doctrines, its adherents, says he, have unfortunately lost sight of Christ our sanctification also. They accordingly "have fallen into a self-righteous view of sanctification, and have held that sanctification is effected by works, or by forming holy habits." Over against this very reprehensible drift of doctrine—a drift, let us say frankly, very natural in the adherents of the New Divinity—Finney wishes to reassert our dependence on Christ for sanctification. The precise thing he asserts is that sanctification is

<sup>74</sup> P. 684.



by faith as opposed to works. And then he explains: "That is, faith receives Christ in all His offices, and in all the fulness of His relation to the soul; and Christ, when received, works in the soul to will and to do of all His good pleasure, not by a physical, but by a moral or persuasive working." He cannot assert that Christ works in the soul without adding this limitation! It is in point of fact the key to his entire teaching. It too is the assertion that since Christ's only working in the soul is suasive in character, the sanctification of the soul is effected by itself. So that the only conceivable distinction between the rejected view of the New Divinity and Finney's own must be thought to lie in the answer to the question whether the works, done in both views alike by the soul itself and only by the soul itself, are done under persuasion from Christ or not. "Observe," says Finney now: "He influences the will." That is all that Christ does: He influences the will. "This," Finney continues, "must be a moral influence; if its"—that is the will's—"actings are intelligent and free, as they must be to be holy." "That is, if He influences the will to obey God, it must be by a divine moral suasion."

Is there, really, anything, then, which distinguishes this view of the relation of sanctification in Christ from that ascribed to the New Divinity? Nothing. For the New Divinity did not at all deny that the soul was influenced in its sanctifying walk by the persuasions of the Holy Spirit. That was rather one of its contentions, the only rag of Christian doctrine it had left at this point to cover its nakedness.<sup>75</sup> With all Finney's devout references to the indwelling Christ, dependence on the strength of Christ, and the like, he means nothing more. The only even apparent distinction between the two views lies in Finney's calling his view a sanctification "by faith," and setting it over against the other as a sanctification "by effort." And as he expounds his view, that is a distinction without a difference. He now goes on to say, however, after his chosen fashion of speech, that the

<sup>75</sup> See above note.

soul, never in any instance obeys God "in a spiritual and true sense," "except it be thus influenced by the indwelling Spirit of Christ." And he hints that when we receive Christ in any relation, He is full and perfect in that relation,—so that, we suppose, if we receive Him for sanctification, we are perfectly sanctified. This, however, is thrown in incidentally. The main thing in this exhortation is the staring Pelagianism of the whole construction. We believe in Christ for our sanctification; He then acts persuasively in our souls for sanctification; under this persuasion we act holily; that is our sanctification. It is all a sanctification of acts. We are not ourselves cleansed; but then there is no need of cleansing us, since we were never ourselves unclean. We were only a bundle of constitutional appetites, passions, and propensities, innocent in themselves, which we have been misusing through a bad will. What needs correcting is only this bad will into a good one. And the appropriate, the only, instrument for the correction of our willing is persuasion. Moved by this persuasion we "make ourselves a good heart"—we "change our mind," as the phrase goes—and that is the whole of it. It is to this that Finney reduces Christianity. And as this ready making for ourselves a new heart, makes us a perfectly holy heart, it is with this ease and despatch that according to Finney's form of perfectionism we become perfect. That is in brief the final form which Oberlin perfectionism took.

The preaching of perfectionism with such energy and persistency by men of such intellectual force and pulpit power as Mahan and Finney and their coadjutors, of course had its effect. Oberlin naturally—college and community—became a perfectionist center. The majority of the students, perhaps also the majority of the inhabitants, were more or less deeply moved by the propaganda: many definitely adopted the new teaching and endeavored both to live it themselves and to communicate it to others. The surrounding country, especially that most closely affiliated with Oberlin in its general type of thinking—the Western Reserve of

Ohio, and to the east, Western and Central New York, to the west Michigan and the North Western country—became so far infected that scattered groups of “Oberlin perfectionists” appeared here and there through it.<sup>75a</sup> The aggressions of the Oberlin propaganda, the threat of a wider extension of its teachings, the nature of the doctrine itself, naturally called out intense opposition. The whole region affected became the scene of violent controversy. The local periodical press of course reflected the state of feeling of the several communities. And soon the ecclesiastical courts were drawn into the debate. Presbyterian Presbyteries and Congregationalist Associations vied with one another in reasoned condemnations of the new doctrine. One of the remarkable circumstances connected with these official condemnations was, that as they came largely from the region of Finney’s, and to a less extent of Mahan’s, early ministry and revivalistic triumphs, or from regions bound closely to it by ties of common blood and feeling, they were often penned by men who had been associated with them or had at least strongly sympathized with them, in their work hitherto. They were being wounded, they complained, in the house of their friends. S. C. Aiken, who had been a pastor at Utica during Finney’s great revival there and one of his chief supporters during the whole course of his revival campaigns in Central New York, was a signatory along with its actual author, S. B. Canfield, of the able refutation of Oberlin Perfectionism put out by the Presbytery of Cleveland in 1841. N. S. S. Beman, with whose collaboration Finney’s remarkable revival at Troy had been carried on, was the actual author of the uncompromising refutation put out in the same year by the Presbytery of Troy. George Duffield prepared the *Warning against Error*, meaning

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<sup>75a</sup> Cf. P. H. Fowler, *Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism within the Bounds of the Synod of Central New York*, 1877, p. 137: “‘Oberlin Perfectionism’ had considerable currency for a time, and Chenango and Cortland and other Presbyteries condemned it, and Onandaga Presbytery published an able refutation of it.”

Finney's system of teaching, which was sent forth by the Presbytery of Detroit in 1847, with the approval of the Synod of Michigan; and perhaps we may add here, although it was a private publication, that Lyman Beecher printed about 1844 a letter against Perfectionism, which was thought important enough for John Morgan to answer it in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review*.<sup>76</sup> In the fateful year of 1841, the Presbyteries of Huron and Grand River in the Western Reserve, and of Richland near by, also passed condemnatory actions: and decided action in the same sense was taken soon afterward by the New York Presbyteries of Chenango, Cortland, Onondaga, Rochester. Further afield the Presbytery of Newark had been led to early action, and soon the Presbytery of North River; and it was not long before the Synods of New York and New Jersey<sup>77</sup> and of Genesee were compelled by appeals to act in the same sense. Similar action was taken by the General Association of Connecticut in 1841, by the General Association of New York in 1844, by the Genesee Association in 1844, by the Fox River Congregational Union of Illinois in 1845. The Cleveland Convention in 1844, and the Michigan City Convention of 1846 were organized on an anti-Oberlin basis; and in 1848 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions discharged two missionaries in Siam for

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<sup>76</sup> A letter of Beecher's printed in his *Autobiography*, vol. II, p. 435, bearing on Perfectionism and showing no sympathy with it, may be consulted. It is interesting to observe that Beecher's son George appears to have shown, apparently in 1836, some leanings to perfectionism (*Autobiography*, vol. III, p. 411 ff.).

<sup>77</sup> Leonard as cited, p. 256. Cf. Asa Mahan, *Out of Darkness into Light*, p. 191, where we are told that "the Presbytery of Poughkeepsie, by a special order from the Synod of New York, deposed from the ministry two of its members, Messrs. Hill and Belden, for no other cause than the one fact that they had embraced the Oberlin error." Leonard puts the incident in 1843; Mahan dates it vaguely as somewhere about 1845: 1843 seems to be right and the Presbytery was, as Leonard gives it, North River. On the incident see further, R. Wheaton, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer*, 1881, pp. 588 ff., and for Henry Belden, see the *Biographical Catalogue of Princeton Theological Seminary*, 1909, p. 128. For William Hill, *Ibid.*, p. 70.

holding the Oberlin doctrines. Oberlin very naturally felt itself persecuted, and its historian designates the conflict into which it was drawn as its "baptism of fire."<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, at Oberlin itself the doctrine was making a history which began with enthusiastic acceptance, and passed forward rapidly into indifference and decay. The originators of the doctrine never lost their hold upon it or their zeal for it. Finney was still teaching it up to the end of his long life (died 1875), the whole of which was spent at Oberlin. Mahan, whose connection with Oberlin was severed in 1850, after an unfortunate venture at Cleveland (1853-1854) and a more successful one at Adrian, Michigan (1855-1871), had yet fifteen years or so to spend in England in active propaganda for his favorite doctrine (died 1889). But the vogue of the doctrine at Oberlin was not very long-lived. James H. Fairchild gives us a very illuminating sketch of its fortunes there.<sup>79</sup> "The visible impulse of the movement," he says, "to a great extent expended itself with the first few years." Men sought and found with decreasing frequency the special experiences—"the blessing," "the second conversion,"—which were connected with it as first preached. Those who went out to preach "under the influence of this fresh experience" came ultimately to permit it to drop into the background. "So far as I am informed," says Fairchild, "not one among them all continued for any length of time to be recognized as a preacher of these special views." They did not repudiate their former views; but they found that "they could preach the truth as it is in Jesus more effectively than by giving to their doctrine the odor of perfection, or the higher life." Whatever their motive was, they ceased to be propagandists of perfectionism. A similar decay of interest in the doctrine was working itself out at Oberlin itself. Confidence "in the style of Christian culture, including a special experience, which the

<sup>78</sup> D. L. Leonard, as cited, pp. 242 ff. The facts recited above are drawn from Leonard, pp. 258 ff.

<sup>79</sup> *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1876, pp. 244 ff.

movement introduced" grew progressively less clear and firm. This special experience—the "blessing"—was not found to be always associated with an advance in Christian attainment and character. On the contrary, it was observed that those who obtained it were apt to be among the less balanced characters of the community. Others who had not sought or found the experiences were not obviously less earnest and effective in Christian work than those who had enjoyed them. Thus the peculiar ideas and experiences connected with the "entire sanctification" movement gradually lost their appeal. Fairchild does not mention them, but there were also scandals to accentuate the decreasing sense of the value of the doctrine. The most shocking of them was probably the lamentable fall from virtue in 1842 of H. C. Taylor, "who had held prominent stations in both church and business affairs, had been a leader in 'moral reform' (social purity), and had also been numbered among the 'sanctified.'"<sup>80</sup>

A tendency has developed itself among recent Oberlin writers, as for example, D. L. Leonard,<sup>81</sup> to represent the whole history of Oberlin perfectionism as only a temporary aberration which befell the institution in its early days. Leonard speaks of "the perfection episode," and is happy to say it is altogether a matter of the past. Oberlin has heard nothing of it for years and years,—for a generation, he says, writing in 1898. He even goes so far as to suggest that Perfectionism was never anything more than a "foible" at Oberlin; a "foible" like its early tendency to Grahamism, and its manual laborism and its temporary misprision of the classics. It may be condoned in those early leaders as their other foibles were condoned; it was a product of the earnestness of their purpose and of the strong determination of their high characters to holy living. Experience has shown, however, that it was a delusion. There were those who received "the blessing" and could not keep it; lapsing speedily into

<sup>80</sup> D. L. Leonard, as cited, p. 261 f., cf. p. 38.

<sup>81</sup> As cited, pp. 236-241.

their old "earthy" conditions. There were those who had it, and did not seem to have profited anything by it. It was not "the best, the truest-hearted, the most reliable disciples" who had it; they might on the contrary be "the weak-minded, the shallow, the merely sentimental." This has been the experience at Oberlin, according to Leonard. Leonard writes confessedly under the influence of Fairchild, and can scarcely be taken as bearing independent witness to anything beyond the attitude toward its early perfectionism which modern Oberlin takes. Changes have befallen Oberlin. The modern Oberlin is not the old Oberlin, and it is not merely the perfectionism of the past that has faded away.

But if, as we are told, its early perfectionism has left no trace of itself at Oberlin, that cannot be said of it elsewhere. There are great religious movements still in existence in which its influence still makes itself felt. Finney's doctrine of "the simplicity of moral action" continued to be enthusiastically taught even by his successor in the Presidency, J. H. Fairchild, although Fairchild found a way—not a very convincing way—to separate it from the "perfectionism" with which it was inseparably bound up by Finney. Mahan's life-long propaganda of the earlier form of Oberlin perfectionism was not barren of fruit. The "Higher Life Movement" which swept over the English-speaking world—and across the narrow seas into the Continent of Europe—in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, was not without traits which derived from Oberlin. And Mahan lived to stand by the side of Pearsall Smith at the great Oxford Convention of 1874, and to become with him a factor in the inauguration of the great "Keswick Movement," which has brought down much of the spirit and many of the forms of teaching of Oberlin perfectionism to our own day. If Oberlin Perfectionism is dead, it has found its grave not in the abyss of non-existence, but in the Higher Life Movement, the Keswick Movement, the Victorious Life Movement, and other kindred forms of perfectionist teaching. They are its abiding monuments. Perhaps as the old Egyptian monarchs, in taking over the structures of

their predecessors, endeavored to obliterate the signatures of those from whom they had inherited them, these later movements would be glad to have us forget the sources out of which they have sprung. But as the names of the earlier Egyptian kings may still be read even in their defaced cartouches, so the name of Oberlin may still be read stamped on movements which do not acknowledge its parentage, but which have not been able to escape altogether from its impress.<sup>82</sup>

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