

ARTICLE VI.

SEVEN FAILURES OF ULTRA-CALVINISM.

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THE Northern Presbyterian Church, just now in the throes of a dangerous revolution, is the largest branch of the largest Protestant body on our planet. It is not so large as the Methodist, if we count only in America. It is not so large as the Episcopal, if we count only in England and America. But if we count over all lands, and include all churches presbyterially governed, our reckoning will hold. So enormous an interest, just now so deranged, is worth watching, not simply if we be Presbyterians, nor solely if we be Christians, but if we be men of any school; for there are strange problems in it, and things hard to be understood, of people probably above the average of intelligence in Christendom.

These presbyterially governed men have sinned in two particulars: first, like cannel coal, they are awful for splitting up,—“Burghers” and “Anti-Burghers,” “Associate” and “Reformed,” “Free,” “United,” and “Established” making one nation, at least, provoke a smile, when their church course is talked of; and, second, they shock conscience by certain outrages on faith, which the best hearts dare not and ought not to endure; and which have wrecked truth and roused doubt in all seats under Presbyterian control. It is time that the world should understand this.

What we affirm is, that there have been seven strongholds of Presbyterian theology; I mean by that, seven successive fortresses of this hyper-calvinistic faith; and that

every one of them has bred defection; and that in a sense, not merely of driving men into a recoil antagonistic to the pious founders of the school, but revolutionary in the end to the pious revolutionists themselves; so that Dr. Martineau last year, a very determined Unitarian, cries out in a sort of mental agony, that he is unwilling to have spent his life in giving help to a body that can be dreamed of as a mere philosophy, and that if he is a Unitarian, he wishes to suppose his labor to have been for a scriptural and religious Unitarianism. Our position therefore is, that the world has tried ultra-calvinistic thought to the extent of seven successive centres of it; that that trial has ranged over four centuries; and with the punctuality of light has produced infidelity in every land where it has reigned. Is it not time that such centres should begin to suspect their system?

If men say, This thing is built of wickedness; it is but the usual wave by which one age is set up in pious teaching and which recedes the next, then I wish to rejoïn—and this is a large motive for writing—that waves are little incident to other teaching. Methodism has growth, and without such recoil. Episcopacy works harder, and goes lower down into the slums and outways of men than an age ago. It apes Rome too much, but with more power of recovery, and with more groping back to better sense, than we have ever seen in Presbyterianism. And if we look at Rome herself, or at her Eastern rival, I know no such worsenment in either, as Dr. Martineau now points at in alarm; I can find no such blood-poisoning in both, as I can find at Princeton; much as I prefer Princeton, of course, as long as it can be sheltered from itself, to anything I can find in either pope or patriarch.

Let it be understood definitely,—I charge that there is a

uniform fate came hovering into view; and then, that in seven different trials it has succumbed every time, and poisoned the air with its deadly influences. The object of this article is to ask whether seven times is not enough, and whether the seventh time, if it is not already too late, ought not to find the seventh seat of this odious mischief ready to listen to terms, and to hear the summons of Providence to find out the causes of the evil.

A very unfair way of telling what Calvinism really is, viz., the quoting of single passages, is nevertheless the very fairest way to tell why it comes to grief. Moreover it tells the remedy. If Calvinism has such enormous good as to rear the noblest specimens of men, and it seems therefore unfair to quote scatteringly, why, I beg, is that not the very way to quote, and why are not they the very passages to leave out? And why, by placing wiser ones in their place, may we not keep the good, and hope to cure the deadliness of the teaching? Let me give a specimen:—

“Those persons whom the Lord, in order that they may be the organs of his wrath and examples of his severity, has created to contumely of life and to destruction of death, those persons I say, in order that they may come duly to their end, he, one while, deprives of the faculty of hearing his word; and, another while, even by the very preaching of it, the more blinds and stupefies.”

This is Calvin himself; and let me quote further:—

“So he directs, indeed, his voice to them; but only that they may be the more deaf; he kindles light before them, but only that they may be the more blind; he propounds doc-

And again; still Calvin :—

“Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself what he would have to become of every individual of mankind; for they are not all created with similar destiny; but eternal life is fore-ordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestinated either to life or to death.”

Now, what is really the fault of this Calvinianism? Is there no predestination? It is bad philosophy and bad divinity, both, to imagine any such idea. Do we not see how cosmogonies even of the most godless kinds, lean heavily to the side of sequence? How can God sustain and not control? Can there be anything like Waterloo without predestination? Think of that dwarf Corsican changing the map of Europe, and God not in it. At any rate, suppose John Calvin had all he pleads for in the Deity except the horrid manner of it, and Calvinism could not have wrecked its seats as it has done one after the other.

If any one wants to convince himself of this, let him resort to Colonel Ingersoll. He does not attack the naked forms of predestination, but blurred and blotted copies. Look at Stuart Mill. If Calvinists would only listen, his words are real sermons. I can hardly object to them. “If, instead of the glad tidings that there exists a being in whom all the excellences which the highest human mind can conceive exist in a degree inconceivable to us, I am informed that the world is ruled by a being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what are the

to hell I will go." We do not say that this is in the highest taste, or betokens the highest moral temperament; but we do say that it is true in every syllable. It would be wicked to imagine such a God, and this is the vice of Calvin; not that he teaches predestination; materialists teach the like of that; but that it sets God to predestinating with so little morals himself; and sets him to reprobating; not that reprobation is not a sequence from predestiny, but that the *morale* of it, in the way it is put, makes it cruel. This shines out in these words from Calvin, and it shines too in Ingersoll. Ingersoll does not attack predestiny, but, in all that pile of pamphlets, only the bad morals in which such doctrines are put. There is a certain predestiny vital to any cosmogony whatever. Ingersoll does not attack that, but the moral motives out of which it professes to begin. We have looked through his papers and have found no other point of attack. As the lightning, fond of a certain mountain, strikes it in its veins of hematite every time; so Ingersoll never strikes the fact, but only the parody of the fact. Look at the assaults of Spencer. They are like all his philosophy, resting on principles in which he has been steeped in the land of his birth. Give Spencer his "first principles" (and they are exactly the reigning philosophy, which he had been bred not to challenge), and all his agnostic iconoclasm crowd in; and allow for him his Calvinistic neighborhood, and the sentence which follows, is, like Ingersoll's pamphlets, irrefragably correct. Mark him now; he has been bred up by the tincture of Calvinistic morals. I have no doubt that he would say that he seemed giving the gospel theism correctly. And yet listen:—"It is difficult to conceal repugnance to a creed which tacitly ascribes to the unknowable a love of adulation such as would be despised in a human being."

Let me seize upon this sentence, doubtless sincere in Spencer, as a type of the poison of his bringing up.

We have been longing to hear from some of the Revisers

an attack all along the line against such dreams as this. Who told Spencer that "adulation" was God's end in what he does? When such a thing as my eternal damnation has such a querl after it with the men of Westminster as, "all for the glory of his power;" when a child is to begin with the idea that "the chief end of man is to glorify God;" when the phrase "mere good pleasure" is attached to our governor, and that on terrible occasions of irremediable destinations in our case; when, as the masterful arrangement for hell, comes the general sentence, God "for his own glory hath foreordained whatsoever cometh to pass," it becomes a marvel that men, above the average of character, should assemble at Westminster; and, under the belief of something wrong, after a dangerous interval, should assemble now again for purposes of reform, and not seem to notice the question. May not predestination be a fact, and, as a mere corollary, then also preterition, but may not the outrage be in the *motive*? May not the poison really be that we have read God wrong in the affair of *character*; and that the son of a preacher, viz., Ingersoll, and the very brightest mind, viz., Spencer, are the divine Nemesis, to scourge us into the discovery, and to implore Princeton, for example, which may stand as the seventh seat, not to repeat the mistake, and, Chinese fashion, to go over the same round, and stand by Calvin in his preposterous morality?

Just here let me block one game. Excellent ministers will say, We are not standing by Calvin; we are listening to the apostle Paul. Let us speak to that very fully.

What Ingersoll thrusts at most, and what Calvinists are troubled by oftenest, is the doctrine of election. It will be certainly fair if we take that hardest doctrine and the hardest chapter of it, viz., the ninth of Romans, as an illustration of all I want to say.

the very "*preterition*" that has been stirring New York. It comes in the shape of the toughest Calvinism. Paul prepares it for the scalpel by making it absolutely tougher. He is a fair polemic, therefore. For, after quoting the verse, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated," he intensifies it all, for he says, "the children being not yet born, neither having done good nor evil that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said, The elder shall serve the younger." "What then?" says Paul. And I wish to put my finger swift upon the spot where Paul sets his pen. It is a remarkable fact. In all those presbytery debates no one stepped up to the side of Paul. One man would deny predestiny. It would have cost him his frock a decade ago. Many denied that there were reprobates; though if there are not, where are the elect? Our venerable Ex-President at Princeton would interpose a cushion of love. But, just there, *what sort of love?* All are fighting wild enough for the whole of the century to be consumed in bringing them together. While, all the while, Paul begins his apologetics by putting his hand upon the very word which, alas for us! has not yet been heard in this discussion. Listen to him, "What then? Is there *unrighteousness* with God?" Paul afterwards plunges into as much mystery as you please. He does not seem to care for that. Indeed he goes for his reassurance into a nest of Scriptures where the Deity boldly tells Moses, "I dwell in the thick darkness." He resorts to a passage where the Almighty hides Moses in a cleft of the rock, and where the moral is, "Thou canst not see my face." There is no harm in passages where God fronts us as a king, and where the verdict is, "The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable." Paul does not care for the like of that. He has long learned at the feet of Gamaliel, that the world was crowded with cruelties, which seemed to come from the hand of his Creator. This he did not care for. But he was wiser than

all our Revisers, for he instinctively turned, like Eli, to the ark, to anchor one thing firm, viz., the righteousness of God.

And if any one asks, Do not all teach that? there is just the serious part of our reply. All of the seven seats have taught just the opposite. It has been a case where natural conscience, as with Spencer and with Mill, has judged things more correctly than the highest Christians. It is a case of God's extreme patience with us. Much in the pages of Voltaire is more moral than half of Calvin; and there are men who will be high in heaven, whose eternity will celebrate the mercy of their Prince; who do him less honor in their exhibition of his traits, than Ingersoll does in much that he has written.

Calvinists have not only promoted Mill and prompted Spencer and nursed much that is wrong in the Arminian faith; they have not only stripped God of morals by not giving him *our* morals, and, therefore, quite moving him out of our sight as to the possession of any; they have not only made his end "display," and his motive "himself," and his morals to be manufactured at "his will," but they have actually read these things into the Bible, and made that exquisite book falsify its divine originals.

Ever since Colonel Ingersoll was a boy, there have been held up to him, as out of his father's house, three texts belonging to this very ninth chapter. Every one of them is a mistranslation. Extreme creeds like the Westminster, the moment they touch upon election, lay their hand upon these three; quote them first and quote them oftenest; and, strangest of all, the Revisionists, though eager for just such proof, have met these texts quoted against them, and known of their presence as almost sole proof-texts for Dort and the Articles of Concord, and have not in a single instance turned upon them as spurious; that is, as right enough in the Greek, but as utterly alien and opposite as they appear in English.

The reform, therefore, that we propose is this :—

1. That Calvinists recognize and repent their seven failures. They have followed each other in Geneva, France, Holland, London, Ireland, Boston, and let us say, Princeton. We naturally begin with Calvin. His city is anything but *his* city at the present moment. It is a living protest against him. Strangers who call themselves by his name, find it hard to light upon his burial-place. It is without a monument. And the very pulpit where he stood, gathers worshippers who protest against his beliefs, but what is more portentous, are dissatisfied with the pose in which his influence has left them, and, like Dr. Martineau, are shrinking from the length to which the recoil from them is carrying their younger men. Crossing into France, the influence has been repeated. Education has flouted Calvinism. Aristocracy has carried away its wealth. Protestantism would die out if left to what it got from Geneva, and Calvinism is striving to get back, creeping up into place again by the stepping-stone of the more illiterate and least sensible of the people. What a glorious thing it would be if the revision now agitated would embalm the splendors of Calvinism, and drop its brutishness! for the length of these cycles of health as compared with the rebound is not great enough. Better a little less truth, as in Wesleyanism or some ritual church, than such quick decay; and, above all, such deep decay, entrapping and appalling those that harsh Calvinism has driven from her teaching. Cross now into Holland; then into London; then into Ireland. Calvin simply repeats his Geneva influence. The dark wood cathedrals of the Dutch are not what they started to be; they are not homogeneously anything that even our Channing or our Dr. Peabody would like, and yet they are of lineal descent from Dort. Why not, in future missions to Holland, try to get back the ruined inheritors of Dort to a simpler and more moral Christianity? And then, over in London, what forbids us to learn from this speech of

Martineau's? In that foremost city the churches of the Confession of Faith are in every instance his churches. We know not one, contemporaneous with that creed, that is not now a stronghold against it; and if even Dr. Martineau shudders, why may not we? Presbyterianism has an account to settle for this uniform result; and when we cross over to Ireland, guilt becomes plainer. A whole synod and a brace of presbyteries have been split off by this Rehoboam-like refusal to amend. The age is hardly in its grave that saw Ulster and that saw Boston in the very gripe of the anaconda that, at the date of this writing, they feel at Saratoga. Is there no responsibility for this? and if Princeton at this very moment, in all her war paint, and in the persons of her most pious and her very most eminent men, is doing what broke off Ulster, and broke off London, and broke off Boston, may it not be a case of judicial hardness of heart? Calvinism made harsh is not by any means morality; and if it has come to that, and immoral consequences have gone into the church, we understand the frown that we are feeling, and why Princeton herself, as we wish now to state, is beginning to produce infidels. Princeton already has a progeny of deniers of the Bible and of deserters of anything like a grave eschatology; and a close student of the seven trials I have mentioned might show exactly where she, the seventh of them, is planting her feet on the road where Martineau has been found to hesitate.

2. But not only should Calvinism admit her misadventures, but now, in the second place, should compass sea and land to devise the remedy. Princeton and Harvard are really on the same track. I know no difference, except that Harvard started a century earlier. The Harvard of a century ago grasped its creed with the same death's clutch with

ness of his tongue,—all betoken the going over again the malady seven times now repeated. I know not one delegate who went to Saratoga to put forward, as Paul did, the morality of God. On the contrary, the heroic remedy of excision seems to be in the ascendant. The picture is exactly the same as in Geneva and the Hague. Young men in prominent pulpits have been denying preterition. Instead of rectifying God's *motive* in election, we are for denying it altogether. Instead of clearing the Bible of mistaken English, we are yielding its inerrancy; and instead of making God unwilling that we should perish, and mending the divine morality, we are mending at the other end, and questioning our fate as final, even if we be utterly impenitent. The terror of this thing is that it has happened every time.

Now, therefore, let me invite the eye of the well-wishers of Zion—and there are throngs of them—to the *morality of heaven*. This was Paul's impulse at once. Hardly has he ground upon the difficulty, "Esau have I hated," than he warms himself by just the one thing, "What then? Is there *unrighteousness* with God?" The seven fated seats have done just the opposite; Princeton is doing it to-day. To look at the casualties of the faith, and keep on teaching as the seven seats have invariably done; to exalt the sovereignty of God at the expense of his morals; to bring hell into close cousinship with his "mere good pleasure;" to make "God all for himself;" to make the "will of God the ground of moral obligation;" to teach the most horrible facts there are, and then add, "all for the glory of his power;" and to keep doing that when the ship has begun to grind upon the rocks, is as near craziness as anything that is going on in the intellectual

who desire the welfare of others, and love such quality itself. A close hold on this clue would lead us quite out of the labyrinth of Calvinism. Does God make everything for himself? No; for his morality. Is the will of God the ground of moral obligation? No; moral obligation is the ground of the will of God. Does God damn because he chooses to? No; not otherwise than as he chooses to do that which is positively and scrupulously his duty. Does God predestine the lost? He creates the lost, and upholds them, and keeps them in being. Moreover, as he is the maker of the whole machinery of life, the strongest talk about his predestining of it could but give us the trouble of a mystery. And this is the way the Bible speaks of it. Mystery we are invited calmly to assent to; but morality we have a right to know about. And this is just the arrangement the Bible makes for us, and this is just the provision that has been seven times wrecked by ultra-Calvinism.

3. And now, as a third step, we will take a chapter, and to make it utterly fair, we will choose the hardest chapter in the history of our difficulty, the chapter that has all the three of the great proof-texts that even unchurchly people must have seen so often of late in our newspapers; moreover the texts which Westminster, Concord, and Dort use so punctually for hyper-Calvinism, and then we will do still better in the other direction. We will screw up the morality of God to the highest point that he ever demands of men. We will say God's morality is *our* morality. Man's morality is perfect love of others, and perfect love of morality itself. Such morality as this declares that it itself is God's highest good, that to obey it is his highest end, and that as morality is a perfect benevolence and a perfect love of virtue, God's chief end in creating the universe is to make it the holiest and happiest he can possibly devise.

What a shame Calvinists, of all men, do not avail of a start like this!

Predestination, under such treatment as this, becomes the mere predetermination of what it will be moral for God to do when he comes up to the special case in its spot in the eternity. Pile on mystery after that as much as you please. God, in a certain sense, is not responsible for it. If "the Lord is righteous in all his ways;" if wisdom is "by his side a builder;" if "righteousness is his captain, and sets his steps in the way," then he is as helpless to do wrong as we are to do right, and the man that complains of predestination is complaining of truth, and God can step aside at the last and leave us to contend with morals, and show that he obeyed them, and we would not.

This leaves us to a beautiful key to our celebrated chapter. Paul stumbles upon Calvinism—Calvinism in that necessary shape that has not maligned or profaned morality. His whole chapter is to prevent that thing from happening. "What then?" he cries, "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." And then follows one of the three great mischief-making texts. It ought to correct itself by its very sound: "I will have mercy on whomsoever I will have mercy." Think of it! Paul making an offer and the very offer being to explain these difficulties of the "confession." What else can we make of it? "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated," and Paul confessing the difficulty, and then arguing in extenuation of the mystery exactly what follows! Did ever any one hear the like? It makes one sad to think that the world has lived under such a mistake so many centuries. He does not say, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whomsoever I will have mercy," but just the opposite, "I will have mercy on whomsoever I *can* have mercy." What an entire revolution in the sense! And this makes this a loving chapter, not a bitter one. And so of the rest; he does not say, "So then it is not of the willing." That would deny all the gospel. It *is* eminently "of the willing." But Paul is reverently applying this negation to

God. This great proof-text really is, "So then it is not of the willing nor of the eagerly hastening, but of the mercy-showing God." Then the last text. It is the worst of all. It has been doing blasphemous work for many a century. It is probably being quoted now all over the land. It reads, "Therefore, hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." It ought to read, "Wherefore, one man whom he has a desire after, he shows mercy to, and another man whom he hath a desire after, he hardens."

The wickedness of old translations appears worse in the sentences that follow. All that about "the potter" is not a something that the apostle adopts, but a better extreme if any extreme has to be admitted. "Say rather, O man." We must not pause upon the detail, but come at once to the greatest outrages of all. What a singular Providence that philological crookednesses should be allowed to give color to blasphemy, and that for the lifetime of Protestantism! "But if" (and we see here how Paul returns to sober argument) "God willing to show his wrath" (How vicious this seems, when the well-balanced original is, "What if God willing to *explain* the wrath"). And then (more condescendingly yet), anything but our common English, "to make his power known." The Greek never means "power." "But if God wishing to explain the wrath, and to make what is possible for him known, endured with much long suffering vessels of wrath"—not with that wicked bias "fitted for destruction," but (altogether more just), "that had fitted themselves for destruction."

Now, as this chapter is itself a great revolution if it be thus rightfully translated, we shall be pardoned if we go over it a little, and fortify the texts which would have been of themselves sufficient to prevent the decay at the great seats of Calvinistic influences.

The first text comes from Exodus. Moses, overwhelmed with the scenes of providential horror through which their

sins had brought the people, utters that memorable prayer, "If not, then blot me out of thy book," and adds to it, some time after, the petition, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." The puzzle in those back centuries is the same as that at Saratoga. God does two things for him. He has done them for us. He has filled the Bible with them. One of them is, boldly to confess that the creature never can understand the necessities of the creation; and the other is, boldly to avow that God is doing the best he can. To teach one, he hides Moses in a cleft of the rock and enacts that scene illustrative of his speech, "I dwell in the thick darkness;" and to teach the other, he utters what Paul quotes. King James has translated just such passages in a way in which if he had translated this, all would have been well. What a curious history; as though Satan stood at the door of the exegete; indifferences translated exactly right, and the vital put into English exactly wrong; this seems the champion mistake. Elisha says to the woman, "There is to be a famine; sojourn wherever thou canst sojourn," and he is allowed to say what he meant. David says, "I must go wherever I can go." But in this most vital sentence it has been delivered to us all awry. And so of the second text, one need but look at the Greek to see that all the assertions are about God. A match to it is all through the Bible. He is "not willing that any should perish." "He would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." "What could he have done more for his vineyard that he hath not done in it?" "He doth not afflict willingly."

And so of the third text. The jeer of the rabble ought to have corrected it, "Let him deliver him *if he has a desire after him.*" It is the same Greek. "One man whom he has a desire after, he shows mercy to;" and then all the mystery that remains is the common mystery among men of how they harden under the very strivings of the Almighty.

Princeton, four centuries ahead of Geneva, ought to be

able to remedy those infant blunderings. She has had centuries to learn. She has had consequences to help her into knowledge. She has had voices from seven seats, her own among the last. She is on the rim of a sceptic gulf, which she has seen open before all those others; and that with strange agreement of time. And if she simply pushes forward and plunges headlong without any distinct knowledge of any other hemisphere of earth where her experiment shall be tried, how can she clear her conscience of the worst picture of all the seven?