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On Revivals of Religion:

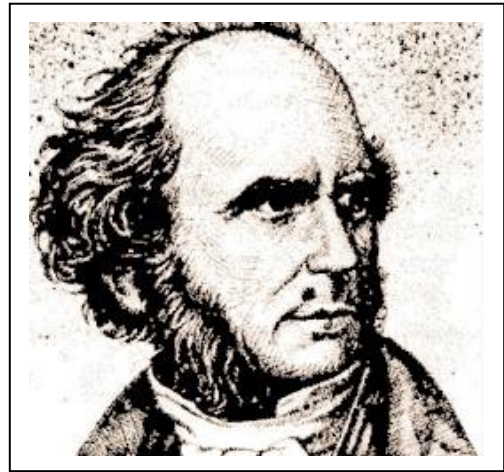
Review of Charles Finney—Part One

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On Revivals of Religion: Review of Charles Finney (Originally published in 1835, in review of the following works: *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, by Charles G. Finney; *Sermons on Various Subjects*, by Rev. C. G. Finney.)

We congratulate the friends of truth and order on the appearance of these publications. We have never had any doubt what would be the decision of the public mind respecting the new divinity and new-measure system of our day, if its distinctive features could be brought out to the light and exposed to general observation. History warrants us in cherishing this our confidence. The truth is, that this system contains but little that is new. It is mainly, if not entirely, composed of exploded errors and condemned heresies. The church has already once and again pronounced judgment upon it; and



we have no doubt therefore, that the same sentence of condemnation will be repeated by the Presbyterian church of the present day, whenever the case is fairly presented for decision. The chief reason why the condemnation of this system has at all lingered, is that its true character has not been generally known. Its advocates, when charged with teaching certain obnoxious doctrines, and, in their religious meetings, violating the sobrieties of good sense as well as of Christian order, have evaded or denied the charge, and complained piteously of misrepresentation. Much has been done to blind the minds of those who were not able to bear the things they had to say, to the undisguised character of the doctrines they have taught in the lecture room and the chapel. We rejoice, therefore, in the publication of Mr. Finney's sermons and lectures. The public can now learn what the new system is, from the exposition of one of its chief promoters. He has stated his own case, and out of his own mouth may he now be justified or condemned.

The lectures on revivals were delivered by Mr. Finney to his congregation in Chatham Street Chapel, during the last winter. They were first published from week to week, in the columns of the New York Evangelist, from reports furnished by the editor of that

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paper. They were subsequently collected, and after having been submitted to the author for correction, published in a volume. The work, we perceive, has already reached a fifth edition. Much diligence is employed in efforts to give it an extended circulation. It is recommended as a suitable book for Sabbath school libraries; and no pains are spared to spread it abroad through the length and breadth of the land. Its friends evidently have a strong persuasion of its extraordinary merits. Their zeal for its circulation proves that they consider it a fair and able exposition of the new system.

The sermons appear to be a monthly publication. We have obtained seven of them, which are all, we presume, that have yet been published. They discuss the several topics, "Sinners bound to change their own hearts," "How to change your heart," "Traditions of the Elders," "Total Depravity," "Why Sinners hate God," and, "God cannot please Sinners." These sermons, with the lectures on revivals, give a pretty full exhibition of Mr. Finney's peculiar views. If we may judge from the tiresome degree of repetition in these productions, the perpetual recurrence of the same ideas, phrases, and illustrations, we should suppose that he can have nothing new to say; nothing, at all events, that would materially add to, or modify, what he has already said. We may consider ourselves fairly in possession of his system. To the interpretation of that system we shall now proceed, having it less for our object to refute, than merely to exhibit its peculiarities. We shall endeavor to gather up the plain, obvious meaning of Mr. Finney's statements, taking it for granted, that there is no hidden, esoteric sense attached to them.

FINNEY'S STYLE

Of the literary merit of these productions we have but little to say. The reporter deprecates, or rather defies all criticism upon their style, affirming that the critic "will undoubtedly lose his labour." No doubt he will, so far as the amendment of the author is concerned. But the reformation of an offending author is not the sole object of criticism. The reporter himself (the Rev. Mr. Leavitt) says of Mr. Finney's language, that it is "colloquial and Saxon." Words are but relative in their meaning. What kind of "colloquies" the Rev. Mr. Leavitt may have been used to, we do not pretend to know; but for ourselves we must say, that we desire never to have a part, either as speakers or hearers, in any colloquy where such language is current, as Mr. Finney often permits himself to employ. If his other epithet, Saxon, means simply, not English, we have no objection to it. For, surely it has not often fallen to our lot to read a book, in which the proprieties of grammar as well as the decencies of taste were so often and so needlessly violated; and in which so much that may not inappropriately be termed slang was introduced. But we have higher objects before us than detailed criticism upon Mr. Finney's style. We should not have made any allusion to it, but that we deemed it worth

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a passing notice, as forming part and parcel of the coarse, radical spirit of the whole system.

DOCTRINES OF FINNEY'S SYSTEM

We proceed to examine, in the first place, the doctrines of this new system. Mr. Finney does not pretend to teach a slightly modified form of old doctrine. He is far from claiming substantial agreement with the wise and good among the orthodox of the past and present generation. On the contrary, there is a very peculiar self-isolation about him. Through all his writings there is found an ill concealed claim to be considered as one called and anointed of God, to do a singular and great work. There is scarcely a recognition of any fellow-laborers in the same field with him. One might suppose indeed, that he considered himself the residuary legatee of all the prophetic and apostolical authority that has ever been in the world, so arrogantly does he assume all knowledge to himself, so loftily does he arraign and rebuke all other ministers of the gospel. He stands alone in the midst of abounding degeneracy, the only one who has not bowed the knee to Baal. The whole world is wrong, and he proposes to set them right. Ministers and professors of religion have hitherto been ignorant what truths should be taught to promote revivals of religion, and he offers to impart to them infallible information.

It is true, in his preface, he disclaims all pretensions to infallibility; but in his lectures, he more than once substantially assumes it. He tells his hearers, in relation to promoting revivals, "If you will go on to do as I say, the results will be just as certain as they are when the farmer breaks up a fallow field, and mellows it, and sows his grain." He speaks repeatedly of the "endless train of fooleries," the "absurdities," the "nonsense," which, up to his time, have been taught both in private and from the pulpit. He declares, "there is only here and there a minister who knows how to probe the church," etc. "This is a point where almost all ministers fail." "When I entered the ministry so much had been said about the doctrine of election and sovereignty, that I found it was the universal hiding place, both of sinners and the church, that they could not do anything, or could not obey the gospel. And wherever I went, I found it necessary to demolish these refuges of lies." "There is and has been for ages, a striking defect in exhibiting this most important subject." "For many centuries but little of the real gospel has been preached." "The truth is, that very little of the gospel has come out upon the world, for these hundreds of years, without being clogged and obscured by false theology." What can be more evident than that Mr. Finney considers himself a great reformer? He comes forth with the avowed purpose of clearing away the errors by which the true gospel has been so overlaid as to destroy its efficiency. He comes to declare new truths, as well as to unfold new methods of presenting them to the mind.

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THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

The first of these new doctrines to which we call the attention of our readers, has relation to the government of God. It will be remembered that a few years since, Dr. Taylor, with some other divines, publicly announced and defended the proposition, that God could not prevent the introduction of sin in a moral system. At least he was very generally, if not universally, understood to teach this proposition. And it is strange, if not actually unprecedented, that a writer of an honest and sound mind, understanding the language he employs, and having it for his serious purpose to convey to his readers certain important information, should be misunderstood as to the main purport of his message by those best qualified, from education and otherwise, to comprehend it.

But Dr. Taylor did complain that he was misunderstood. He insisted that he did not intend to teach that God could not prevent the existence of moral evil, but only that it is impossible to prove that he could prevent it. His object was to unsettle belief in all existing theories upon this subject, and then to substitute this negative one in their place; in other words, to inculcate absolute scepticism upon this point. This is the ground now occupied by the New Haven divines. We fear, therefore, that they will be alarmed by the position which Mr. Finney has taken. He has evidently neglected, since his return from his foreign tour, to post up his knowledge. He has not acquainted himself with the improvements made during his absence. He teaches, without any qualification, the doctrine which the New Haven school was at first understood to teach. He complains that sinners "take it for granted that the two governments which God exercises over the universe, moral and providential, might have been so administered as to have produced universal holiness throughout the universe." This, he says, is a "gratuitous and wicked assumption." It is wicked, then, to believe that God could have produced universal holiness.

Mr. Finney further adds, "There is no reason to doubt that God so administers his providential government, as to produce upon the whole, the highest and most salutary practicable influence in favor of holiness." This sentiment, it is true, is susceptible of a correct interpretation through the ambiguity of the word practicable. But another quotation will make it evident that he means this word to include nothing more than the resisting power of the human will. "The sanction of his law are absolutely infinite: In them he has embodied and held forth the highest possible motive to obedience." "It is vain to talk of his omnipotence preventing sin: if infinite motive will not prevent it, it cannot be prevented under a moral government; and to maintain the contrary is absurd and a contradiction." A more explicit and confident statement of this doctrine could hardly be given. It is absurd and contradictory to maintain that God could have prevented the introduction of sin into our world. The only semblance of an argument which Mr. Finney urges in support of this opinion is, "that mind must be governed by

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moral power, while matter is governed by physical power." "If to govern mind were the same as to govern matter, if to sway the intellectual world were accomplished by the same power that sways the physical universe, then indeed it would be just from the physical omnipotence of God, and from the existence of sin, to infer that God prefers its existence to holiness in its stead." Again he says, "To Maintain that the physical omnipotence of God can prevent sin is to talk nonsense."

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We see not the least ground for this distinction between the moral and physical power of God; nor do we believe that Mr. Finney himself can attach any definite meaning to his favorite phrase, "physical omnipotence." By the omnipotence of God we understand a power to do anything without those hindrances and restrictions by which we and all created beings are beset. It must be the same power which sways the intellectual and physical universe, unless we are to make as many different species of power as there are objects upon which it may be exerted. This distinction, however, were it well founded, would avail Mr. Finney nothing in defence of his position. The power of God, by whatever name called, can be limited in its exercise only by the laws which he has himself immutably fixed. The power of the Creator was without any limit; the power of the Governor labors under no other restrictions than the ordinances of the Creator have imposed upon it. It is often said that God cannot achieve impossibilities, such as to make a body exist in several places at the same time. All such limitations of the divine power are found in those relations and properties of things which he has himself established. A body cannot be made to exist in several places at once, for if it could it would no longer be a body. So in the nature of man we may trace certain properties and laws, which lay a similar restriction, if so it may be called, upon the exercise of the divine power. God cannot make a sinner happy, while he continues a sinner, for he has already so made man that his happiness must come to him as the consequence of the right action of his powers, and he would cease to be man if this law of his nature were altered. Now is there any similar restriction in the nature of moral agency? Does it enter into our notion of a moral agent, and go to make up the definition of one, that he cannot be subjected to any other influence than of motive? Suppose that God should, in some inscrutable way, so act upon his will as to dispose it to yield to the influence of motive, would such action make him cease to be a moral agent? If not, we have no right to deny the power of God to effect it. It is impossible to conceive that his power can be restrained by anything exterior to himself. The only bounds beyond which it cannot pass must be those that have been established by his own nature, or his previous acts. Unless he has so made moral agents that it is a contradiction in terms to assert that they can be influenced in any other way than by motive, it is in the highest degree unwarrantable and presumptuous to deny that God can act upon them by other means. But a moral agent, while possessed of the necessary faculties, and not forced to act contrary to his will, or to will contrary to his prevailing inclinations and desires, remains a moral agent still. Would, then, the

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operation of any other influence than that of motive upon him, destroy his liberty of action or his freedom of will? Certainly not. And as certainly no man can deny that God can influence men as he pleases without thereby denying his omnipotence. A more groundless, gratuitous assumption could not well be found, than Mr. Finney has made in asserting that it is impossible for God to affect his moral subjects in any other way than by motive.

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Let it be observed that we use the word motive, as Mr. Finney himself has evidently used it, to denote simply the objective considerations presented to the mind as they are in themselves, without taking into account the state of the mind in relation to those considerations. This is the only sense of the word in which it can be at all maintained that "infinite motives" have been urged upon man for the prevention of sin and the promotion of holy obedience. If the state of the mind, which always determines the apparent qualities of the object, be included, as it generally is, in the term motive, then it is not true that the mind could resist "infinite motives." In this sense of the word it is self-evident that the will must always be determined by the strongest motive. An "infinite motive," by which can be meant only a motive infinitely strong, or stronger than any other we can conceive of, would of course prevail and carry the will with it. Then it would be just to infer, from infinite motives having been presented to bear man onward in the paths of holy obedience, that God had done all that he could to prevent sin. And then too it would be impossible that any sin could exist, or that sin could ever have entered our world.

GOD HAS DONE ALL HE COULD TO PREVENT SIN

But granting, what we have shown to be the gratuitous assumption, that God cannot influence men in any other way than by the objective presentation of truth to the mind, Mr. Finney has given us no reasons for adopting the opinion that, "He has done all that the nature of the case admitted to prevent the existence of sin," while we can see many reasons which forbid us to receive it. The state of the question, as we are now about to put it, in conformity with Mr. Finney's representation, does indeed involve the three gratuitous assumptions, that God could not have made man a moral agent and yet give him a greater degree of susceptibility of impression from the truth than he now possesses; that man being as he is, God could not have devised any external considerations to affect him, in addition to those which are actually placed before his mind; and lastly, that man and the truth both being as they are, God cannot reach and move the mind of man in any other way than by the truth. These are by no means axioms, and Mr. Finney would be sadly perplexed in the attempt to prove any one of them. But, for the sake of showing that even with these bold and barefaced assumptions he cannot maintain the position, we will admit them all. Man could not have been a moral agent had he been more yielding to the truth than he now is. "Infinite motives" to obedience have been provided; by

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which, as we have already shown, can be meant only that all the truth which could possibly affect the human mind has been revealed to it. And thirdly, man cannot be moved but by the truth.

The “nature of the case” being supposed to demand all these admission, does it still follow that God has done all that he could to prevent the existence of sin? Mr. Finney himself shall answer this question. His theory of the nature of divine influence is, that the Spirit “gets and keeps the attention of the mind,” “He pours the exhortation (of the preacher) home”, He keeps the truth, which would else have been suffered to slip away, “in warm contact with the mind.” Here is of course the admission, and we are glad he is willing to concede so much power to his Maker, that God can gain the attention of the mind, and keep before it and in contact with it, any or all of the “infinite motives” which he has provided to deter from sin. Connect this admission with another class of passages, in which Mr. Finney teaches that, “When an object is before the mind, the corresponding emotion will rise,” and who does not see in the resulting consequence a glaring inconsistency with the doctrine that God has done all that he can to prevent the existence of sin?

To make this more plain, we will take the case of Adam’s transgression, of which Mr. Finney has, out of its connection with the subject we are now discussing, given us the rationale.

“Adam,” he says, “was perfectly holy, but not infinitely so. As his preference for God was not infinitely strong, it was possible that it might be changed, and we have the melancholy fact written in characters that cannot be misunderstood, on every side of us, that an occasion occurred on which he actually changed it. Satan, in the person of the serpent, presented a temptation of a very peculiar character. It was addressed to the constitutional appetites of both soul and body, to the appetite for food in the body, and for knowledge in the mind. These appetites were constitutional; they were not in themselves sinful, but their unlawful indulgence was sin.”

The temptation in this case was the motive addressed to Adam’s constitutional appetites. The reason why this motive prevailed was, that it was kept before the mind to the exclusion of adverse considerations. The emotions of desire towards the forbidden fruit were not unlawful until they had become sufficiently strong to lead Adam to violate the command of his Maker. If, then, just at the point of unlawfulness, the attention of Adam’s mind had been diverted from the forbidden fruit to the consideration of God’s excellency and his command, “the corresponding emotion” would have arisen, and he would not have sinned. But the Spirit has power to “get and keep the attention of the mind.” Certainly then he could have directed the attention of Adam’s mind to those known truths, though at the moment unthought of, which would have excited the

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“corresponding emotions” of reverence for God, and preserved him thus in holy obedience.

But though Mr. Finney holds forth the views here given of the Spirit’s agency in presenting truth to the mind, it would evidently be a great relief to his theological scheme if he were fairly rid of the doctrine of divine influence. The influence of the Holy Spirit comes in only by the way, if we may so speak, in his account of the sinner’s regeneration and conversion. We will cast away this doctrine, therefore, — we will grant him even more than he dares to ask, and still his position is untenable, that God has done all that he can do to prevent the existence of sin. Before he can demand our assent to this proposition, he must prove, in the case already presented, that God could not have prevented the entrance of Satan into the garden. Admitting that the volitions of Satan were beyond the control of his Maker, he must investigate the relation of spirit to space, and prove that it was impossible for God to have erected physical barriers over which this mighty fiend could have passed. He must show that it was impossible for God so to have arranged merely providential circumstances, that our first parents should have been kept out of the way of the tempter, or that the force of the temptation should have been at all diminished. Until he has proved all this, and then proved that his three assumptions, which we have pointed out, are true, we must prefer the “absurdity” and “nonsense” of rejecting his doctrine, to the wisdom of receiving it.

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DOCTRINE

The argument thus far has been a direct one, and we should not fear to leave it as it now stands. But we cannot refrain from adverting to some of the consequences of the doctrine we have been examining. If God has done all that he can to prevent the existence of sin, and has not succeeded in his efforts, then must he have been disappointed. If he cannot control at pleasure the subjects of his moral kingdom, then must he be continually and unavoidably subject to grief from the failure of his plans. Instead of working all things according to his good pleasure, he can do only what the nature of the case will permit, — that is, what his creatures will allow him to do. He in whose hands are the hearts of all men, and who turns them as the rivers of waters are turned, is thus made a petitioner at the hands of his subjects for permission to execute his plans and purposes.

Accordingly we find Mr. Finney using such language as this: “God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them before he can lead them to obey.” He speaks of a “state of things, in which it is impossible for God or man to promote religion but by powerful excitements.” And of course there may be states of things in which neither by excitements nor by any other means will God be able to effect the results he desires. Then may we rightly teach, as

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some at least of our modern reformers have taught, that God, thwarted in his wishes and plans by the obstinacy of the human will, is literally grieved by the perverse conduct of men; and sinners may properly be exhorted as they have been to forsake their sins from compassion for their suffering maker! It is a sufficient condemnation of any doctrine that it leads by an immediate and direct inference to so appalling a result as this.

We know of nothing which ought more deeply to pain and shock the pious mind. If the perverseness of man has been able in one instance to prevent God from accomplishing what he preferred, then may it in any instance obstruct the working of his preferences. Where then, is the infinite and immutable blessedness of the Deity? We cannot contemplate this doctrine, thus carried out into its lawful consequences, without unspeakable horror and dismay. The blessedness of the Deity! What pious mind has not been accustomed to find in it the chief source of its own joy? Who does not habitually turn from the disquieting troubles and scenes of misery that distress him here, to “drink of the river of God’s pleasures?!” Who can bear the thought that the infinitely holy and benevolent God should be less than infinitely happy? We see not how any heart that loves God can feel happy itself, unless it believes him to be, as he deserves to be, infinitely blessed. Nor can we find any security for the felicity of the creature but in the perfect and unchangeable felicity of the Creator. If God, therefore, is as this doctrine represents him, unable to produce states of things which he prefers, and if his benevolent feelings are thus continually exposed to grief from obstructions to their operation, the voice of wailing and despair should break forth from all his moral subjects. We can see, indeed, but little to decide our choice between such a God as this and no God.

Another consequence of this doctrine is that God cannot confirm angels and saints in holiness. If he could not prevent the introduction of sin into our world, we see not upon what principles we are entitled to affirm that he can prevent its re-introduction into heaven. We see not how he can at any time hinder that standard of rebellion from being yet once more uplifted among the bright and joyous throng that now cast their crowns at his feet. We are perfectly aware of the answer which Mr. Finney will make to this objection. He will contend that the additional motives furnished by the introduction of sin, such as the visible and dreadful punishment of the sinner, and the display of the divine character thereby afforded, are sufficient to enable God by the use of them, together with the means and appliances previously existing, to confirm holy beings in holiness. Now, independently of other insuperable objections to this as a sufficient reply, how does it consist with that other part of the scheme, that “infinite motives” had been already arrayed against the introduction of sin? If these motives were infinite, then no addition could possibly be made to them. We leave Mr. Finney to reconcile this contradiction, or to admit that we have no reason to expect that the gates of heaven will be barred against sin.

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This doctrine also takes away from the sinner all just ground for the dread of everlasting punishment. Its advocates, we know, have contended that it is the only position from which Universalism can be effectively assailed. But if, when man was tempted to sin by so insignificant a motive as the forbidden fruit, while “infinite motives” were drawing him back, God could not prevent him from yielding, it must surely be impossible for him to prevent the sinner in the other world from obeying the impulse of infinite motives which, more strongly there than here, will urge him to holiness. The sinner, then, may dismiss his apprehensions of the everlasting experience of the miseries of a wicked heart. If God could not prevent Adam from sinning, under the influence of a small motive, there is no reason to fear that he can prevent any inhabitant of hell from becoming holy, under the influence of infinite motives.

We have dwelt upon this subject at greater length than was at first intended. Our excuse is, that the question at issue is a very serious and important one, and the views of it presented by Mr. Finney seem to be so dishonoring to the character of God, as well as subversive of some of the most important truths of religion, that they should be carefully examined. Had our object been simply to criticize, Mr. Finney might have been more briefly despatched. There is in his pages a surpassingly rich treasure of contradictions, which might at every turn have furnished us with an argumentum ad hominem, had we been disposed to avail ourselves of it. But we have felt that the matter in hand was of too grave and weighty an import to be thus managed.

NATURE OF SIN, DEPRAVITY, AND REGENERATION

We invite the attention of our readers, in the next place, to Mr. Finney’s views of the nature of sin, depravity and regeneration. He contends that all sin consists in acts, and assures us that those who teach otherwise are guilty of “tempting the Holy Ghost,” and of a “stupid, not to say willful perversion of the Word of God.” He deems it absurd beyond expression to suppose that there can be a sinful disposition prior to sinful acts; nay, he solemnly affirms that “millions upon millions have gone down to hell,” in consequence of the doctrine of what he is pleased to call “physical depravity” having been so extensively taught. He seldom approaches this subject without breaking out in some such paroxysm as the following: “O the darkness and confusion, and utter nonsense of that view of depravity which exhibits it as something lying back, and the cause of all actual transgression!”

Our readers will soon be able to judge for themselves whether Mr. Finney has cleared away any of the darkness which rests upon this subject.

In the prosecution of our inquiries into the nature of sin, two questions very naturally present themselves for decision; first, whether there can exist anything like what has been

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called disposition, distinct from mental acts; and secondly, whether, if such an attribute of mind can and does exist, it may be said to possess any moral character. Mr. Finney, with much convulsive violence of language, continually denies that there can be any such thing as a mental disposition, in the sense in which we have used the word. He employs the term, it is true, but he says he means by it a mental act, and that it is nonsensical to attach to it any other meaning. His arguments against the possibility of the existence of mental dispositions, apart from mental acts, may be briefly dispatched; for we do not reckon among the arguments his violent outcries of darkness, confusion, absurdity, nonsense, doctrine of devils, etc., nor his assertions that God himself cannot lead the sinner to repentance without first dispossessing him of the erroneous notion that his nature as well as his conduct needs to be changed. All the arguments on the point now before us, that lie scattered through his many pages, may be reduced to two.

It is impossible, he contends, to conceive of the existence of a disposition of mind; and again, if there be a disposition distinct from the faculties and acts of the mind, it must form a part of the substance of the mind, and hence follow physical depravity and physical regeneration with all their horrid train of evils. When he asserts the impossibility of conceiving of a disposition of mind, we suppose he means that it is impossible to frame an image of it, or form a picture in which this disposition shall stand visible to the mind's eye. It is only in this sense that his assertion is true. It is true that we cannot form such a conception of a mental disposition, but we will not insult the common sense of our readers by attempting to prove that this is no argument against its existence.

The other argument on which Mr. Finney relies to prove the non-existence of any disposition of mind, is that if there is any such thing it must form a part of the substance of the mind, it must be incorporated with the very substance of our being, with many other phrases of like import. Hence he charges those who teach that there are such dispositions, and that they possess a moral character, with teaching physical depravity, and representing "God as an infinite tyrant." He avers, in a great variety of forms, that their preaching has a direct and legitimate tendency to lull the sinner in his security, to make men of sense turn away in disgust from such absurd exhibitions of the Gospel, and to people hell with inhabitants. These are grave charges; and as, if substantiated, they would affect the fair fame and destroy the usefulness of nine-tenths of the ministers of the church to which Mr. Finney belongs, so, if groundless, Mr. Finney must be regarded as a slanderer of his brethren, guilty and odious in proportion to the enormity of the unsustained charges against them.

In one respect at least Mr. Finney is guilty of bringing false accusations against his brethren. He continually represents them as holding and teaching all his own inferences from their doctrines. This is more than uncharitable; it is calumnious. He has a perfect

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right to develop the absurdities of what he calls physical depravity, and present them as so many reasons for rejecting any doctrine which can be proved to result in such consequences; but he has no right to endeavor to cast the reproach of teaching these inferred absurdities upon men who have uniformly, and if more decently yet not less strongly than himself, disclaimed them. But we contend that these absurdities do not lawfully flow from the doctrine that the mind has tastes and dispositions distinct from its faculties and acts. It is easy to show, in contradiction to Mr. Finney, that it may possess such attributes, which nevertheless will not form any part of the substance of the mind. Nay, we can make Mr. Finney himself prove it.

In one of his sermons, where he has lost sight for a brief space of physical depravity, he speaks on this wise: "Love, when existing in the form of volition, is a simple preference of the mind for God and the things or religion to everything else. This preference may and often does exist in the mind, so entirely separate from what is termed emotion or feeling, that we may be entirely insensible to its existence. But although its existence may not be a matter of consciousness by being felt, yet its influence over our conduct will be such, as that the fact of its existence will in this way be made manifest." Here is a state of mind recognized, which Mr. Finney, with an utter confusion of the proprieties of language, chooses to call love existing in the form of volition, but which we call a disposition. But by whatever name or phrase it may be designated, it is not a faculty of the mind; it is not the object of consciousness, has no sensible existence, and cannot therefore in any proper sense be called an act of the mind, nor yet does it form any part of the substance of the mind. It is not without an object (what it is will be presently seen) that Mr. Finney makes so queer a use of the term volition in the above quotation; but the insertion of this word does not alter the bearing of the passage upon the point now in question. His subsequent qualifications show that he is describing something different from an act of the mind: and the single question now before us is, whether there can be in the mind any disposition distinct from its acts, and comprising within it tendencies and influences towards a certain course of action, which yet does not form a part of the substance of the mind. The passage quoted is clear and explicit, as far as this question is concerned. Let us hope, then, that we shall hear no more from Mr. Finney on the subject of physical depravity; or at least that when he next chooses to harangue his people on this favorite topic, he will have the candor, the plain, homespun honesty, to tell them that there is not a single minister in the Presbyterian church who teaches the odious doctrine, or anything that legitimately leads to it; but that he has brought this man of straw before them to show them how quickly he can demolish it. We have a great aversion to this Nero-like way of tying up Christians in the skins of wild beasts that the dogs may devour them.

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But it will be said, that the dispositions which have been shown to exist in the mind are formed by the mind itself, in the voluntary exercise of its powers; such would not be the case with a disposition existing prior to all action. This is true, but it is not of the least moment in settling the question of the physical? character of the disposition. If a disposition may be produced by the mind itself, which so far from being itself an act makes its existence known only by its influence, and which yet is not incorporated with the substance of our being, nor entitled to the epithet physical, then such a disposition might inhere in the mind prior to all mental action, without possessing a physical character. There is not the least relevancy or force, therefore, in the argument commonly and chiefly relied upon, that if there be such antecedent disposition, it must be physical. The only plausible argument that can be urged here, is, that experience shows us what is the formative law of our disposition, that these are always generated by the minds own action; and it is absurd therefore to suppose that any disposition can exist in the mind anterior to all action. The conclusion to which this argument arrives is wider than the premises. Its fallacy, and it is an obvious one, lies in extending a law, generalized from observation upon the mind's action, to a case in which by hypothesis the mind has never yet acted, and to which, of course, the law can have no application. There is here a fallacy of the same nature as would be involved in a process of reasoning like this: All our observation proves to us that no tree can be produced but by calling into action the germinative power of its seed. The seed must be planted in a fitting soil, and be subjected to a certain class of influences; it must decay and then send forth the tender shrub, which, in its trunk, must be sustained by appropriate nourishment; and years must elapse before the tree will lift its tall head to the skies. No man has ever seen a tree produced by any other means, and the nature of things is such that a tree cannot be produced in any other way. Therefore, no tree could have originally come into being but through the same process. The error in reasoning is here apparent, nor is it less so in the case which this was intended to illustrate.

Here again it will be urged, and at first sight the objection may seem to gather force from the illustration we have just employed, that if there are any such antecedent disposition as we are contending for, formed previous to any action of the mind, it must be the direct effect of creative power; and if it possesses any moral character, and we shall offer some reasons for believing it does, then God is the immediate author of sin. This is the form in which this objection is always put by Mr. Finney and others, and we have therefore adopted it, although it assumes what has been shown to be untrue, that a disposition of mind, in the sense in which we use the term, implies the idea either of a physical entity or a spiritual substance. It does not and cannot include any such idea, and can in no case be considered, therefore, as the effect of creative power. But does it follow that a primitive disposition, such as we speak of, must be the direct product of the agency of the Deity? Is it not evident, in the contrary, that this is only one out of a infinite number of modes in

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which it may possibly have been produced? The first tree might have been called into being by the power of God, and sprung up in an instant, complete in all its proportions; but it might also have been produced in an endless number of ways, through the operation of some law, different, of course, from the existing law of vegetable production, but requiring as much time for the completion of its process, and removing its final result to any assignable distance from the direct interference of divine agency. So is it possible too, that a primitive disposition of mind may be produced in an infinite number of ways; and the mode of its formation may be such that it cannot be considered the effect of the divine power in any other sense than that in which all the movements and action both of matter and mind throughout the universe, are said to be of God.

We think we have now shown that there are such states of mind as have been designated by the term disposition; that a disposition of mind may exist anterior to all mental action; that this disposition does not form any part of the substance of the mind; and that it is not necessary to suppose that God is the author of it, in any other sense than that in which he is the author of all we feel and do.

THE MORAL CHARACTER OF MENTAL DISPOSITION

We come now to discuss the question of the moral character of mental disposition. Mr. Finney, with his accustomed violence and lavish abuse of those who teach a different doctrine, denies that a disposition of mind, granting its existence, could possess any moral character. Most of his arguments on this point have been already dispatched by our preliminary discussion. If it is true that a disposition is sinful, then sin is a substance, instead of a quality of action. Then, too, God is the author of sin, and he is an infinite tyrant, since he damns man for being what he made him. This sentence comprises within it the substance of most that wears the semblance of argument in what Mr. Finney has said on this subject; and how perfectly futile this is has been made sufficiently apparent.

He argues from the text, "Sin is a transgression of the law," that sin attaches only to acts, and cannot be predicated of a disposition. As well might he argue from the assertion, man is a creature of sensation, that he possessed no powers of reflection. Until he can show, what indeed he has asserted very dogmatically, but of which he has offered no proof, that this text was meant to be a strict definition of sin, it will not serve his purpose.

The only other arguments worthy of notice, which Mr. Finney adduces in support of his position, that all sin consists in acts, are drawn from the considerations that "voluntariness is indispensable to moral character."

There is undoubtedly a sense in which it is true, that nothing can be sinful which is not voluntary. And in this sense of the word all our dispositions are voluntary. There are two

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meanings attached to the word will. It sometimes denotes the single faculty of mind, called will; and sometimes all the active powers of the mind, all its desires, inclinations and affections. This double meaning has proved a great snare to Mr. Finney. He either never made the distinction, or perpetually loses sight of it, and hence is often inconsistent with himself. In seeking to exhibit the meaning which he prevalently attaches to the words will, voluntary, etc., we shall have occasion to present to our readers a very singular theory of morals.

“Nothing,” he says, “can be sinful or holy, which is not directly or indirectly under the control of the will.” But over our emotion “the will has no direct influence, and can only bring them into existence through the medium of the attention. Feelings or emotions are dependent upon thought, and arise spontaneously in the mind when the thoughts are intensely occupied with their corresponding objects. Thought is under the direct control of the will. We can direct our attention and meditations to any subject, and the corresponding emotions will spontaneously arise in the mind. Thus our feelings are only indirectly under the control of the will. They are sinful or holy only as they are thus indirectly bidden into existence by the will. Men often complain that they cannot control their feelings; they form overwhelming attachments which they say they cannot control. They receive injuries, their anger rises, they profess they cannot help it. Now while the attention is occupied with dwelling upon the beloved object in the one case, the emotions of which they complain will exist of course; and if the emotion is disapproved by the judgment and conscience, the subject must be dismissed from the thoughts, and the attention directed to some other subject, as the only possible way of ridding themselves of the emotion. So in the other case, the subject of the injury must be dismissed, and their thoughts occupied with other considerations, or emotions of hatred will continue to fester and rankle in their minds.”

Again, in another place, he says, “If a man voluntarily places himself under such circumstances as to call wicked emotions into exercise, he is entirely responsible for them. If he places himself under circumstances where virtuous emotions are called forth, he is praiseworthy in the exercise of them, precisely in proportion to his voluntariness in bringing his mind into circumstances to cause their existence.” Again, he says, “If he (a real Christian) has voluntarily placed himself under these circumstances of temptation, he is responsible for these emotions of opposition to God rankling in his heart.” We might quote pages of similar remarks.

These passages would afford ground for comment on Mr. Finney’s philosophy. He shows himself here, as on all occasions when he ventures upon the field of mental science, a perfect novice. But we are chiefly concerned with the theological bearings of the passages quoted. It is evident that Mr. Finney here uses the words will, voluntarily, etc., in their

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restricted sense; and hence we have the dangerous theory of morals, that nothing can possess a moral character which is not under the control of the volitions of the mind. But our emotions cannot be thus controlled. They rise spontaneously in the mind, they must exist when the thoughts are occupied with the objects appropriate to their production. Hence all our emotions, affections and passions, according to Mr. Finney, possess a moral character only in consequence of the power which the mind has, by an act of will, to change the object of thought, and thus introduce a different class of feelings.

Now, we might object to this view of the matter, that the will does not possess the power here attributed to it. Our trains of thought are in some degree subject to our volitions; but the will has by no means an absolute control over the attention of the mind. Attention is generally indeed but another name for the interesting character of the ideas to which the mind is attending, and is no more directly subject therefore to the bidding of the will, than is the state of mind which imparts its interest to the present object of thought. The grounds and the force of this objection will be evident to anyone who will reflect upon states of mind which he has been in, when his whole soul was so absorbed in the contemplation of some subject, that all his efforts to break away from the scenes which riveted his attention, only served to break for a moment their fascinating power. But we will waive this objection, not because it is not sufficiently strong to be fatal to Mr. Finney's theory, but because it lies aside from our present course.

IMPOSSIBLE FOR EMOTIONS TO POSSESS MORAL CHARACTER

A still more serious objection is, that upon this theory it is impossible that our emotions should possess any moral character. If they are moral, "only as they are indirectly bidden into existence by the will," then they cannot be moral at all. If it is necessary to go back to the act of will which introduced the object, in view of which these emotions necessarily arise, to find their moral character, then upon no just grounds can morality be predicated of them. If a man has put out his eyes, he cannot justly be accounted guilty for not being able to read, nor for any of the consequences which result from his blindness. These consequences, if he could have foreseen them, do indeed accumulate the greater guilt upon the act of putting out his eyes; but that act is all for which he is fairly responsible. So in the other case, it is upon the act of the will which brought the mind into contact with the objects, which of necessity awakened its emotion, that we must charge all the responsibility. All the virtue and vice, the holiness and sin of which we are capable, must lie solely in the manner of managing the power of attention. He is a perfect man whose mind is so trained that it takes up whatever subject of meditation the will enjoins; and he is a sinful man, whose mind, without a direct volition to that effect, reverts, as if by instinct, to holy themes and heavenly meditations, and adheres to them even though the will should endeavor to force it away. All the foundations of morality and religion are

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virtually swept away by this theory. If its assumptions are true, we should discard all motives and means now employed to promote virtue. As it makes all moral excellence reside in the readiness and skill with which the power of attention is managed, the most efficient means for the promotion of virtue, beyond all comparison, would be the study of the mathematics. Such are the ridiculous extremes to which Mr. Finney is driven in carrying out his doctrine, that all sin consists in acts.

It can hardly be maintained that we have caricatured his doctrine, or run it out beyond its intrinsic tendency. For if, as he says, a man is praiseworthy or blamable in the exercise of his emotions, only because he has placed himself under circumstances where these emotions are called forth, then it is plainly unjust to charge responsibility upon anything else than the act of placing himself under the circumstances.

But without charging upon his theory anything beyond what he has developed as its admitted consequences, who does not see upon the face of his own statements absurdity enough to condemn any doctrine which necessarily involves it? A man is responsible for his emotions, he says, only when he has voluntarily brought himself under such circumstances as to call them into existence. Let us suppose then, two men, brought without any direct agency of their own under the same set of circumstances. We will imagine them taken by force and placed in a grog shop, filled with trippers quaffing the maddening drink, and uttering blasphemies that might make "the cheek of darkness pale." Emotions are at once awakened in both the spectators. The desires of the one go forth over the scene; he takes pleasure in those who do such things; he longs to drink and curse with them; he knows that this is wrong, and endeavors to change the subject of meditation, but his sympathy with the scene before him is so strong that his thoughts will not be torn away from it, and his mind continues filled with emotions partaking of its hideous character. The heart of the other instantly revolts at the scene. Every time he hears the name of God blasphemed, he thinks of the goodness and glory of the being thus dishonored, and while wondering that others can be blind to his excellency, the liveliest feelings of adoration and gratitude are awakened in his heart. Now, according to Mr. Finney, there is no moral difference between these men; they are not responsible for emotions thus awakened. The one has not sinned, nor is the other praiseworthy. This is no consequence deduced from something else that he has said. It is a case put in strict accordance with his explicit statements. Such is the monstrous absurdity to which he is driven, by denying that the state of mind which would, under the circumstances above supposed, have disposed one of the spectators to descend and mingle in the filth and wickedness of the scene, and the other, to rise from it to heaven in his holy desires and emotions, does of itself possess a moral character.

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Another illustration of the absurdities in which he has involved himself, is furnished by his declaration, that man is praiseworthy in the exercise of his emotions, "precisely in proportion to his voluntariness, in bringing his mind into circumstances to cause their existence." Mr. Finney's common method of expressing the incomprehensibility of anything is by saying, "It is all algebra;" and we must really doubt whether he knows the meaning of the term proportion. For upon his principles, the ration between the merit or the demerit of any two actions whatever, must be a ratio of equality. Voluntariness, in his sense of the word, does not admit of degrees. The will either acts or it does not, to bring the man under the peculiar circumstances. There are no degrees in its consent or refusal; and of course there can be no degrees in moral worth, or in guilt. If two men have each received the same injury, and each by an act of will directed the attention of the mind to the injury and him who committed it, then they are equally guilty for their feelings of hatred, however much those feelings may differ in strength. There can be no difference of degree in the moral demerit of their emotions, although the one should hate his adversary enough to work him some slight injury in return, and the other hate him so much that nothing less than the murder of his victim will satisfy his thirst for vengeance. The two men were equally voluntary in bringing their minds under the circumstances which awaken their emotions, and must of necessity, according to Mr. Finney's canon of morality, be equally guilty.

There is indeed another class of passages in Mr. Finney's writings, in which he brings forward a further criterion of morality. He says, "When the will is decided by the voice of conscience, or a regard to right, its decisions are virtuous." The change of preference, or the decision of the will, which takes place in regeneration, must be made, "because to act thus is right." The will must decide "to obey God, to serve him, to honor him, and promote his glory, because it is reasonable, and right, and just." It is the rightness of the duty that must influence the mind if it would act virtuously." And again, "When a man is fully determined to obey God, because it is right that he should obey God, I call that principle." In these passages, and there are many more like them, he seems to resolve all virtue into rectitude. It is evident why he does so, for he is thus enabled to require a mental decision, and act of the mind, in relation to the rectitude of any emotion or action, in order to constitute it virtuous; and thus defend his position that morality can attach only to acts. He has here fallen into the mistake, however, of making the invariable quality of an action the motive to its performance. It is true that all virtuous actions are right, but it does not follow from this that their rectitude must be the motive to the performance of them. If this is so, then the child, who in all things honors his parent, does not act virtuously unless each act of obedience is preceded by a mental decision that it is right for him to obey. Mr. Finney desired to take ground which would enable him to deny that there is anything of the nature of holiness in the Christian's emotions of love to God,

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when prompted by his disposition to love him; but he has evidently assumed an untenable position.

We could easily bring forward more errors into which he has been betrayed in carrying out his false doctrine, that morality can be predicated only of acts. But we have surely presented enough. And this exposure renders it unnecessary that we should repeat what have been so often produced and never refuted, the positive arguments for believing that our dispositions, or states of heart, including the original disposition by which we are biassed to evil, possess a moral character, and are the proximate sources of all the good and evil in our conduct. Some of Mr. Finney's pretended arguments against this opinion we have not answered, simply because they are so puerile, that, though we made the effort, we could not condescend to notice them. All of them that had the least plausibility we have shown to be without any real force. And if any man can reject this opinion on account of the difficulties with which it is still encumbered, and adopt the monstrosities connected with Mr. Finney's rival doctrine, we must think that he strains at a gnat and swallows a camel.

NATURAL DEPRAVITY

As might have been expected from what has already been said, Mr. Finney denies that there is any such thing as natural depravity. His views on this subject are easily exhibited. We might describe them all, indeed, in a single phrase, by saying, that they are neither more nor less than the old Pelagian notions. "This state of mind," he says, describing the commencement of sin in a child, "is entirely the result of temptation to selfishness, arising out of the circumstances under which the child comes into being." "If it be asked how it happens that children universally adopt the principle of selfishness, unless their nature is sinful? I answer, that they adopt this principle of self-gratification, or selfishness, because they possess human nature, and come into being under the peculiar circumstances in which all the children of Adam are born since the fall." "The cause of outbreking sin is not to be found in a sinful constitution or nature, but in a wrong original choice." "The only sense in which sin is natural to man is, that it is natural for the mind to be influenced in its individual exercises by a supreme preference or choice of any object."

On reading this last extraordinary declaration, the text of an inspired apostle came to mind, in which he assures us, that we are "by nature children of wrath." If both those declarations are true, we have the curious result that we are children of wrath, not because we are sinners, but because we are so made as to be influenced by a supreme choice! But texts of Scripture are as nothing in Mr. Finney's way. He makes them mean

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more or less, stretches or curtails them, just as occasion requires. His system is a perfect Procrustean bed, to which the Bible, no less than all things else, must be fitted.

An illustration of this is found in his manner of dealing with the passage, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This text would seem, at first sight, to present a very serious obstacle to his views. And what does he do with it? He first gravely proves that it does not mean "the substance of a conceived fetus is sin!" He then jumps to the conclusion, "All that can be possibly meant by this and similar passages is, that we were always sinners from the commencement of our moral existence, from the earliest moment of the exercise of moral agency." That is, when David and the other sacred writers make these strong assertions, they only mean to inform us, that the moment we adopt the principle of supreme selfishness as our rule of action, we do wrong; or, in other words, that just as soon as we begin to sin, we sin! May we not well say, that he has a marvellous faculty for making a text mean anything, or nothing, as suits his purpose?

Another illustration of this is furnished by his interpretation of the text, "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The carnal mind, he says, means a minding of the flesh, a voluntary action of the mind, a choice that is supremely selfish. While men act upon the principle of supreme selfishness, obedience is impossible. This, he says, is the reason why the carnal mind, or the minding of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Wonderful discovery! So the apostle, in this passage, meant nothing more than the stale truism, that a man cannot be sinful and holy at the same time, — that he cannot, in the same act, transgress the law and render obedience to it.

Pelagians have always found a difficulty in reconciling their theory with the salvation of infants by the grace of Jesus Christ. Pelagius himself was sorely pressed on this point. Infants are in no way answerable for the sin of Adam, or otherwise evilly affected by it than that it brings them into circumstances of temptation, and they have no sin of nature; how then can they be subjects of pardon? What interest can they have in the atonement of the Saviour? Let us see how Mr. Finney disposes of this difficulty.

"Had it not been for the contemplated atonement, Adam and Eve would have been sent to hell at once, and never have had any posterity. The race could never have existed. . . . Now every infant owes its very existence to the grace of God in Jesus Christ; and if it dies previous to actual transgression, it is just as absolutely indebted to Christ for eternal life as if it had been the greatest sinner on earth." We have no words to express our aversion to this egregious trifling with sacred subjects. The Bible teaches us that all of our race who are saved are redeemed from sin; that they are saved, not born, by virtue of the atonement of Jesus Christ. And when we ask Mr. Finney how this can be reconciled with his theory

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that there is nothing connected with infants that can be atoned for, he very gravely tells us that they owe their BIRTH to the grace of God!

He does not tell us why he baptizes infants. We do not know, indeed, whether he ever administers this ordinance to children previous to the supposed commencement of moral action. Certainly, upon his principles, it could have no meaning. He rejects, with utter scorn and ridicule, the idea that in regeneration and sanctification there takes place anything that can be properly symbolized by “the washing off of some defilement.” The water of baptism then, to whomsoever this rite be applied, cannot have any emblematical meaning; and the apostle committed a rhetorical error, to say the least of it, when he wrote, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified.” But with what propriety this ordinance can be administered to children, who, having never actually transgressed, are not sinners, who are just what they ought to be, we cannot conceive. Surely consistency requires Mr. Finney to assign infant baptism a place among those hated abominations, upon which he so much dwells, that the “traditions of the elders” have introduced into the church.

EXISTENCE OF SIN

We shall not undertake to show in detail the inadequacy of Mr. Finney’s theory to account for the sin there is in the world. This has often been done. And it still remains perfectly inexplicable why, if men come into the world with just such a nature as they ought to have, prone no more to evil than to good, and are surrounded at the same time with “infinite motives” to holiness, and “circumstances” that tempt them to sin, that they should all, with one accord, obey the force of the finite circumstances rather than the infinite motives. If this IS the state of the case, we might naturally expect all mankind to become holy, excepting here and there some luckless one, who, not having sufficient skill so to manage the attention of his mind as to keep before it the infinite motives to holiness, would fall into sin. Here too we might ask, what has become of the doctrine that God has done all that he could to prevent the present degree of sin? If he can so influence some men, after their hearts are set in them to do evil, that they shall become holy, could he not have induced them, at the first, to choose holiness instead of sin?

We cannot pass from this part of our subject without developing one of the many singular results afforded by the comparison of different parts of Mr. Finney’s writings. The one we are now about to present is so very peculiar that we solicit for it special attention. He rejects the common doctrine of depravity, because it makes man a sinner by necessity — it makes God the author of sin — it is a constitutional or physical depravity, and leads to physical regeneration, etc. He frequently blows off the superfluous excitement produced in his mind by this view of depravity, in sentences like the following:

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“That God has made men sinners, incapable of serving him — suspended their salvation upon impossible conditions — made it indispensable that they should have a physical regeneration, and then damns them for being sinners, and for not complying with these impossible conditions — monstrous! blasphemous! Believe this who can!”

Now let us see how he gets rid of this physical necessity, which he falsely but uniformly charges upon the common opinions respecting depravity. According to his theory, the cause of men becoming sinners is to be found in their possessing human nature, and coming into being under circumstances of temptation — in adaptation between certain motives which tempt to undue self-gratification, and the innocent constitutional propensities of human nature. But in one of his lectures, where he is endeavoring to persuade his hearers to use the appropriate means for promoting a revival, and presenting on that account such truths and in such forms as seem to him most stirring, he says: “Probably the law connecting cause and effect is more undeviating in spiritual than in natural things, and so there are fewer exceptions, as I have before said. The paramount importance of spiritual things makes it reasonable that it should be so.”

In the use of means for promoting revivals, he says again: “The effect is more certain to follow,” than in use of means to raise a crop of grain. Now, upon his system, the efficiency of all means for promoting revivals may be traced up ultimately to the tendency of eternal motives to influence the mind. We have here, then, the position, distinctly involved, that motives, when properly presented, when so presented as to produce their appropriate effect, operate by a surer law than any of the physical laws of matter. The effect of the proper presentation of a motive to the mind is more certain, and of course more inevitable, than that the blade of wheat should spring from the planted seed, or a heavy body fall to the ground. Now he will not deny that the motives to sin, which meet man soon after his entrance into the world, are thus adequately presented; for the sad proof of it is found in the uniform production of their effect. That effect must of course be inevitable, beyond any idea of necessity that we can form from the operation of physical laws.

REGENERATION

From the parts of his scheme already presented, our readers will be able to anticipate Mr. Finney’s theory of regeneration. The change which takes place in regeneration he, of course, represents as a change in the mind’s method of acting. As it originally chose sin instead of holiness, so a new habit consists in choosing holiness instead of sin. The idea that there is imparted to the heart a new relish for spiritual objects, or that any new principle is implanted, he rejects; to teach this, he says, is to teach physical religion, which has been the great source of infidelity in the church. “It is true,” he says, “the constitution

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of the mind must be suited to the nature of the outward influence or motive; and there must be such an adaptation of the mind to the motive, and of the motive to the mind, as is calculated to produce any desired action of the mind. But it is absurd to say that this constitutional adaptation must be a holy principle, or taste, or craving after obedience to God. All holiness in God, angels, or men, must be voluntary, or it is not holiness. To call anything that is a part of the mind or body, holy — to speak of a holy substance, unless in a figurative sense, is to talk nonsense.”

We remark here, in passing, that this is the uniform style in which Mr. Finney caricatures the opinions from which he dissents. From one form of statement he habitually passes to another, as completely synonymous, which has not the remotest resemblance to it. He assumes here that a principle, or taste, cannot be voluntary, whereas it cannot but be voluntary, in the only sense in which voluntariness is essential to moral character; and also that it must be a substance, or form a part of the mind or body — an assumption than which nothing can be more groundless and absurd. He adds, “The necessary adaptation of the outward motive to the mind, and the mind to the motive, lies in the powers of moral agency, which every human being possesses.”

Understanding, conscience, and the power of choice, he supposes, are all that is needful to enable man to receive the truth of God, and act under its influence. There is nothing new in all this. It is at least as old as the fifth century. It has been broached repeatedly since the days of Pelagius, and as often shown, by arguments that have not yet been refuted, to be utterly inadequate to account for the facts of the case. We have indeed its radical unsoundness fully exposed to us by the apostle Paul, where he declares, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” This passage of Scripture will bear no interpretation which does not place it in irreconcilable contradiction with Mr. Finney’s theory. He generally asserts that the sinner knows all the truth that is necessary to induce him to make himself a new heart, and that the only reason why it fails to produce this effect is because he will not consider the truth.

We say generally, because here, as in everything else, Mr. Finney is inconsistent with himself. At one time he talks thus: “It is indeed the pressing of truth upon the sinner’s consideration that induces him to turn. But it is not true that he is ignorant of these truths before he thus considers them. He knows that he must die — that he is a sinner — that God is right, and he is wrong,” etc. But again, when he is seeking to make an impression upon the sinner, he assures us that “the idea that the careless sinner is an intellectual believer is absurd — the man that does not feel, nor act at all, on the subject of religion, is an infidel, let his professions be what they may.” But we will leave him to explain how an infidel can be said to know that to be true, which he does not believe to be true.

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The uniform tenor of his representations, when treating of the subject of regeneration, is that the sinner wilfully refuses to consider known truths, and, on that account alone, has not a new heart. The apostle, on the contrary, declares the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them. We presume that no one but Mr. Finney himself can doubt to which of these authorities we should bow.

If the testimony of the apostle needed any confirmation, we might find it abundantly in human experience. Every man knows that his perception of moral truths depends upon the state of his heart. It is matter of familiar experience, that truths which sometimes affect us scarcely at all, will, at another time, act so powerfully as to break up all the fountains of feeling within us. And this difference is not owing to the greater or less degree of consideration bestowed upon the truth; — we may think of it as profoundly in the one case as in the other. Who has not felt that a familiar truth, occurring to the mind in the same terms with which it has often before been clothed, will suddenly display a hitherto unseen richness of meaning, which at once wakes up all the feelings of the heart? What is it that can thus modify our powers of moral perception but the state of the mind? And how can we expect, then, that the spiritual truths of God's holy word should produce their appropriate effect upon the mind of the sinner, who is destitute not only of any fellowship with those truths, but of the disposition of heart by which their meaning is discerned? We cannot understand how the unrenewed heart, if as Mr. Finney says, "hates God with moral hatred," can even understand the real meaning of the truth, God is love; or feel that this truth is a motive for subduing its hatred. Nor are we able to see how any of those considerations most frequently presented in the sacred Scriptures can prevail with the sinner, and produce upon him their appropriate effect, unless his mind is illuminated, his heart renewed, by the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Mr. Finney's own pages will furnish us with evidences that he himself considers the mind as needing some further adaptation to the motives of the Bible, than the powers of moral agency. This evidence is found in the fact that the motives which he most frequently and importunately urges, are not those which are commonly employed in the sacred Scriptures. He seems to have a kind of instinct of the insufficiency of the considerations presented by the inspired writers, to answer his purpose. The most common form in which he sets forth the change that takes place in regeneration, is that of a change in the choice of a Supreme Ruler. He divides the world into two great political parties, the one with God, the other with Satan, at its head.

When a man makes for himself a new heart, he changes sides in politics, — he gives up the service of Satan, and submits to the government of God. The great duty which he urges upon the sinner is unconditional submission to God. This duty, as presented by him, is very rarely intended to include submission to the terms of salvation revealed in

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the gospel, — it is a submission to God as the great creator and ruler of the world, — the God of providence rather than of grace.

Now it will at once occur to every reader of the Bible, that this is not the duty which the sacred writers most frequently urge upon the sinner. They call upon men to repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But Mr. Finney says, "It is generally in point, and a safe and suitable direction to tell a sinner to repent." Marvellous! That he should consider it generally, but not always safe to tell a sinner to do that which the apostles, with great uniformity, tell him to do. The other part of the apostolic exhortation to sinners, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," he seems to think, should no longer be given in any case save where an individual is unwilling to admit that Christ is the Messiah of God. This exhortation he considers as exclusively suitable to the days of the apostles, "when the minds of the people were agitated mainly on the question, whether Jesus was the true Messiah." "They bore down," he says, "on this point, because here was where the Spirit of God was striving with them, and consequently, this would probably be the first thing a person would do on submitting to God." He does indeed number among the directions to be given to sinners, that "they should be told to believe the gospel;" but he explains this to mean nothing more than "that trust or confidence in the Scriptures that leads the individual to act as if they were true." Of that specific act of faith in which the soul apprehends the Lord Jesus as its Saviour, and receives pardon and justification, he seems not to have the least idea. The sole value of repentance or faith, he finds in the manifestation which they afford of the heart's willingness to submit to the authority of God. "Whatever point," he says, "is taken hold of between God and the sinner, when he yields that he is converted. When he yields one point to God's authority, he yields all."

This is evidently another gospel. The apostles urge all men to believe in the Saviour because faith is in itself a proper and a most important duty, — but Mr. Finney deems it of no importance, save as it manifests submission to the authority of the Great Ruler, and thinks it unsuitable to urge it upon any sinner therefore, unless it is one whose heart has assumed a hostile attitude towards the claims of Jesus Christ to be the true Messiah. How widely, indeed, does this differ from the gospel revealed to us from heaven, which places faith at the head of human duties, teaching us that it is the instrumental cause of our forgiveness, that it unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ, and is the mediate source of all our spiritual strength!

As the duty presented by Mr. Finney to the sinner's mind is different from that commonly urged in the Bible, so does he employ different motives to induce compliance. The chief motive upon which he relies is, that it is right to acknowledge God and submit to him as our Great Ruler. We can now see another reason why he assumed the strange position upon which we have already commented, that "It is the rightness of a duty that must

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influence the mind if it would act virtuously." Man in his natural state can be made to see that it is right for him to submit to God, but he cannot be made to perceive His moral glory, or to feel that his character is lovely. As he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, Mr. Finney is therefore driven to the necessity of seeking other things which he can receive. He endeavors, by developing the useful tendency of the principles of the divine government in contrast with the injurious influence of selfishness, to produce a conviction in the sinner's mind that it is right for God to reign; and upon this conviction he relies to induce the sinner to change his voluntary preference, and submit to the righteous rule of his creator.

In one of his sermons, after describing to the sinner how he must change his heart, he goes through a kind of rehearsal of the performance. He begs the sinner to give him his attention while he places before him "such considerations as are best calculated to induce the state of mind which constitutes a change of heart." In presenting these best considerations, he dwells upon "the unreasonableness and hatefulness of selfishness," "the reasonableness and utility of benevolence," "the reasons why God should govern the universe," etc. His remarks upon these topics are protracted through ten or twelve octavo pages, in the whole of which, about as many lines are devoted to a frigid allusion to the justice and mercy displayed in the atonement of Jesus Christ.

In a previous passage of the same sermon he says, "The offer of reconciliation annihilates the influence of despair, and gives to conscience its utmost power." He seems here to limit the efficacy of the gospel, to its opening the way for the operation of existing motives upon the heart of man. And his practice is certainly consistent with this low view of the gospel. The considerations which he brings forward, as best adapted to induce the sinner to change his heart, are almost exclusively such as are furnished by natural religion. We hear next to nothing of the grace and glory of God as they shine in the face of Jesus Christ, of the wondrous love of a dying Saviour, of the demerit of sin as illustrated by his death, or of the guilt of the sinner in remaining insensible to the motives which address him from Calvary. Our Saviour intimates that all other sin is comparatively lost in the sin of rejecting Him; and the apostles refer to the neglect of the "great salvation" provided for man, as presenting the most odious form of human guilt. To the life and death of Jesus Christ, indeed, do they continually recur for the illustration and enforcement of all human duties. They make known nothing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. This is the great central source of light and heat. Whatever may be the point of departure, how uniformly do they carry us to the Cross, and bid us thence look at the character of God, and the duty of man.

But when Mr. Finney professedly addresses himself to the task of presenting the considerations best adapted to move the heart of the sinner, he thinks he can find a better

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point of view. He takes his stand amidst the wonders of creation; he finds in the character there developed, and the relations there established between man and his Maker, the right and the duty of God to govern, and man's obligations to obey, — "the reasonableness and utility of virtue, — the unreasonableness, guilt, and evil of sin;" — hence he charges the sinner with having "set his unsanctified feet upon the principles of eternal righteousness, lifted up his hands against the throne of the Almighty, set at naught the authority of God and the rights of man!" We do not deny the validity of these considerations, upon which he chiefly dwells; but we do deny that the truths involved in them are the peculiar truths of the gospel, or that they are those which the apostles deemed best adapted to become "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation." Throughout his whole system indeed, it is painful to see how small a space is allotted to the Cross of Christ. Often where it might be expected to stand forth conspicuous, it seems to be, of set design, excluded.

In this same sermon, when defending the reasonableness of the "conditions of the gospel," he tells the sinner that faith is reasonable, because "nothing but faith in what God tells him, can influence him to take the path that leads to heaven." The faith of which he here speaks is a "condition of the gospel," and yet he represents it in no other light than as a general belief in the truth of God's word; and justifies its requirement solely on the ground of its tendency to make man holy. There is no hint of that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, so often mentioned in the Scriptures, by which the soul commits itself to Him as its Saviour, and becomes a partaker of the benefits of his redemption, — no allusion to the reasonableness of this condition, on the ground of its rendering to God all the glory of our salvation. We see not how any pious mind, accustomed to look to Jesus Christ for all its strength and joy and glory, can pass through this new system, without being constrained at every step to cry out, "Ye have taken away my Lord, and I know not where ye have laid Him."

Another illustration, trifling it is true, when compared with the one we have just presented, but yet worthy of notice, of the difficulty under which Mr. Finney labors, in carrying out his views of regeneration, is found in the necessity which is laid upon him of violating the established meaning of words. A new heart is a new act. In regeneration no principle is implanted in the mind, but the beginning and end of the process is in a new act; and consequently the process of the divine life in the soul of man is a series of acts, — there is no growth of anything which lays the foundation of those acts and disposes to the performance of them. He not only believes this to be true, but thinks it vastly important that others should be convinced of its truth. The world has hitherto been ignorant of the true nature of religion and the method of its progress in the heart. He expresses his doubt whether one professor of religion out of ten in the city of New York, if asked what sanctification is, could give a right answer. They would speak of it, "as if it

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were a sort of washing off of some defilement," — or they would represent it as the growth of some principle, or germ, or seed, or sprout, implanted in the soul. "But sanctification," he says, "is obedience." Of course, to sanctify must mean to obey; and to be sanctified is to be obeyed. Now we charitably hope that Mr. Finney has underrated the number of those who could give a right answer to this question; for we presume that more than nine out of ten of the professors of religion in New York have been at school, and can read a dictionary, if not the Bible and the catechisms of their church, and surely not one, thus qualified, could ever think of giving his definition of sanctification.

We have already exposed the insufficiency of Mr. Finney's theory; and in testimony thereof have adduced his own departure, in carrying out his theory, from the instructions and motives developed in the gospel. He thus evidently betrays his own conviction that the duties which the apostles commonly urge upon the impenitent are not consistent with his scheme; and that the motives they present are of such a nature as to require a corresponding disposition of heart. The force of the objections we have brought forward, is not at all diminished by the different form in which he sometimes states his doctrine of the new heart. He has a class of passages in which he represents the spiritual heart, as "That deep-seated, but voluntary preference of the mind which lies back of all its other voluntary affections and emotions, and from which they take their character." If by "preference," be meant such an inclination as he has elsewhere described under that name, which is not an object of consciousness, and makes itself known only by its influence over our acts; and by its being "deep-seated," that is, seated in the will itself, using the term in its larger sense, and for that reason entitled to the epithet "voluntary," we should have no objection to this account of the matter. This is precisely our idea of a disposition. But this is not his act of the mind. It still remains then for him to show how the mind can be induced to prefer the glory of God, as the supreme end of pursuit, when it is blind to that glory, and if we may credit the apostle, in such a state, that until renewed, it cannot know it.

Another difficulty, too, is started by the passage we have just quoted from him. It seems that we are to look back from every other voluntary affection and emotion of mind to this "deep-seated preference," to find their moral character. But as this preference is itself but a voluntary exercise of mind, and differs from its other voluntary exercises only by being more deep-seated, it would seem that we ought to look back to something else for its moral character. It is impossible for us to imagine how one voluntary exercise of mind can possess a moral character, independent of the subjective motives which prompted it, while all other affections and emotions are good or evil only through their connection with this one. Is it not wonderful that with such beams in his own eye, he should be endeavoring to pluck out motes from the eyes of others!

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MAN CAN REGENERATE HIMSELF

Mr. Finney asserts the perfect, unqualified ability of man to regenerate himself. It is easier, indeed, he says, for him to comply with the commands of God than to reject them. He tells his congregation that they "might with much more propriety ask, when the meeting is dismissed, how they should go home, than to ask how they should change their hearts." He declares that they who teach the sinner that he is unable to repent and believe without the aid of the Holy Spirit, insult his understanding and mock his hopes, — they utter a libel upon Almighty God, — they make God an infinite tyrant, — they lead the sinner very consistently to justify himself, — if what they say is true, the sinner ought to hate God, and so should all other beings hate him, as some have humorously and truly said, they preach, "You can and you can't, you shall and you shan't, you will and you won't, you'll be damn'd if you do, you'll be damn'd if you don't."

It has been reserved, we imagine, for the refined and delicate taste of Mr. Finney, to discover the humor of this miserable doggerel. He is obviously much delighted with it, and, like all his other good things, has worked it up more than once. We hope the next compiler of the beauties of American poetry will pay a due deference to his commendation, and assign a conspicuous place to this precious morceau.

Most professors of religion, he says, pray for sinners, that God would enable them to repent. Such prayers he declares to be an insult to God. He thinks it a great error to tell the sinner to pray for a new heart, or to pray for the Holy Ghost to show him his sins. "Some persons," he says, "seem to suppose that the Spirit is employed to give the sinner power, — that he is unable to obey God without the Spirit's agency. I confess I am alarmed when I hear such declarations as these; and were it not that I suppose there is a sense in which a man's heart may be better than his head, I should feel bound to maintain that persons holding this sentiment were not Christians at all."

We have certainly never met with a more singularly extravagant and unfortunate declaration than the one last quoted. Who are the persons who have held and taught this sentiment, so inconsistent with Christianity? Why, at the head of the list stand our Saviour and his apostles. "No man," said Christ, "can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And the apostles refer continually to the absolute dependence of man upon God for the necessary strength to perform his duties aright. Not one of those holy men felt that he was of himself "sufficient for these things." Their uniform feeling seems to have been, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." Mr. Finney not only believes that we can do all things without any strength from Christ, but he makes this one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The apostles exhorted men to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and they prayed for those to whom

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they wrote, that the Lord would strengthen them with might by his Spirit, that he would make them perfect, establish, strengthen, settle them. But Mr. Finney says, to pray that God would help the sinner to repent, is an insult to God; as if God had commanded the sinner to do what he cannot do. Now the Christian has at least as much ability to be perfectly holy as the sinner has to repent. God commands Christians to be perfect, and of course, when the apostles prayed that the Lord would strengthen them and make them perfect, they prayed "as if God had commanded the Christian to do what he cannot do." These prayers, then, uttered under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, must have been "an insult to God!"

Mr. Finney cannot relieve the character of his reckless, irreverent assertions, by saying that the sacred writers meant to represent nothing more than the unwillingness of the sinner to do his duty. Beyond all dispute they represent this unwillingness under the form of an inability, and it is against those who describe it by precisely equivalent terms that Mr. F. raves with such infuriate bitterness. There is a question here, not between him and us, but between him and the apostles, whether they employed proper and safe language in describing the moral condition of man and the nature of his dependence on divine aid.

He may perhaps say that the language employed by the apostles was perfectly proper at that time, but as their statements have been perverted and become the source of ruinous errors, it is now necessary to employ more explicit and guarded language. We suppose this will be the nature of his defence, as he distinctly takes the ground that it will not answer to preach the same class of truths, or to exhibit them in the same manner, in any two ages of the Church, or in any two places. At each time and place the sinner is entrenched behind his own peculiar errors, and the preacher must be careful not to present any truth which he can so pervert as to fortify himself in his refuges of lies. But is it true that any such change can take place, from age to age, in the natural character or the accidental circumstances of man, as to call for any important change in the matter or manner of religious instruction? What error has ever existed that does not find its refutation in some revealed truth? It is a very dangerous principle to admit, that we are at liberty to omit such truths of the Bible as we deem unsuitable to existing emergencies, and to exhibit others in a very different light from that in which they are left by inspired writers. It virtually suspends the whole of the divine revelation upon the discretion and wisdom of man. But if true, it has no application to the case now before us. There is no evidence that the perversion of the truth which Mr. F. thinks can only be met by varying the manner in which the apostles represent man's dependence, is a modern error. On the contrary, it is undeniable that this very error prevailed in the days of the apostles. Paul met with the same objections that are now current, drawn from the divine sovereignty and human dependence; and how does he refute them? By a flat denial that man is unable

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of himself to do his duty? Or by a modification, a softening down of his previous statements? No, he re-asserts the perverted doctrines in the face of the objections raised against them. He does not, nor does any one of the sacred writer, affirm in a single instance that the sinner is able to obey the divine commands. Not a text of Scripture can be found in which this is declared, while a multitude can be produced which explicitly, and in so many words deny it. Will Mr. F. say that the apostles urged upon men obedience to the divine commands, and thus virtually declared their ability to obey? Then why does he not declare it in the same virtual manner? The same reasons existed then as now for a direct assertion of the sinner's ability, and yet it was in no case made. Why, then, should he make it now, and dwell upon it, and magnify it into an important, nay, an essential part of the gospel, so that he who disbelieves it cannot be a Christian at all?

But it is not true that in urging the commands of God, the sacred writers teach the entire and independent ability of man to obey. Mr. Finney does not pretend to bring forward a single passage of Scripture in which his doctrine is directly taught; he finds it proved in no other way than by his own inferences from such commands as, "Make to yourself a new heart," "My son, give me thy heart." His brief argument for human ability is, God commands man to obey, therefore he can obey. He does not even allude to the distinction often taken between natural and moral ability. He teaches broadly without any qualification whatever, that a divine command implies the possession of all the ability necessary to obedience. Obligation and ability, he says, must be commensurate. And how does he prove the truth of this last proposition? In no other way than by repeating, times without number, that to teach otherwise makes God an infinite tyrant. But the Bible does not inform us that there is any tyranny in God's commanding men to do what they cannot do. It teaches us directly the contrary, by making known the duty of man to receive the things of the Spirit of God, while it at the same time declares, that without divine assistance he cannot receive or know them. He must refer, then, for the truth of this maxim, to our natural sense of justice.

We might object to this reference of a case already so clearly decided by a higher authority; but we have no fear that there will be found here any discrepance between the teachings of revelation and the testimony of man's conscience, if the latter be rightly interpreted. Our natural sense of justice does indeed teach us that no obligation can rest upon man to perform any duty for which he has not the necessary facilities; and that he is not responsible for failure in anything which he was willing to do, but was hindered in the execution by causes beyond his control. When appointed to such cases as these, there is a self-evidence belonging to the maxim in question which places its truth beyond all dispute. Mr. Finney's mistake lies in extending it to cases which lie altogether beyond the limits within which it was generalized. We deny that the common sense of mankind has ever required that we should possess the ability to change our inclinations, as the

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condition of our responsibility for their exercise. To illustrate this, let us suppose the case of a man under the influence of any dominant passion. Before he has long indulged this passion, it would be comparatively easy for him to relinquish it. As he gives way to its impulses, however, its power over him increases, until at length it binds in complete subjection to itself all the other affections of his nature. At each step of its progress the difficulty of subduing it is increased; and yet who will deny that the sin of cherishing is accurately proportioned to this difficulty? The law of continuity, which has place in moral reasoning, as well as in that "algebra" which is to Mr. F. the symbol of incomprehensibility, would teach us hence to infer that the guilt is greatest when the difficulty is greatest, and that the former has its highest form of aggravation in the insurmountable character of the latter.

The language of the whole world is framed in recognition of this truth. We speak familiarly of the difficulty which men find in changing their inclinations, without ever conceiving that we thereby lessen their obligation; nay, we consider the cup of their guilt full to the brim, when they have so destroyed their ability to become virtuous, that we may properly say of them, "They cannot cease to do evil, and learn to do well." When a paramount inclination, like a strong man armed, has taken possession of the heart, and, with a despotism peculiar to itself, banished all but its own ideas and emotions, how can it be dispossessed? Will it yield to a volition of the mind? We all know it will not, and Mr. Finney himself admits it.

He says that our affections will not obey the bidding of the will, — we cannot summon or dismiss them by a volition. This admission is fatal to him. The mind, he says, can operate upon its inclinations and affections only by changing the object of thought; and this change it certainly cannot effect in a moment. When any strong inclination is in exercise, the mind has an attraction for those ideas and considerations which tend to sustain and increase its present emotions, while it repels all others to an unseen distance, and some little time at least is necessary before it can succeed in calling up and keeping before it those objects of thought which may introduce a different class of feelings. Upon his own account of the matter, no man can, in an instant, change a strong inclination. And yet if that inclination is an evil one, the obligation to an immediate change is evident. What, then, has become of the maxim that obligation and ability are commensurate? The sinner who perceives the opposition of the divine government to his selfish plans, and whose heart is on that account filled with emotions of hatred towards God, cannot instantly, if at all, turn his mind to such views of the divine character as will inspire him with love. And yet the duty of immediate, instant submission is very evident. We see, then, that power is not the exact measure of obligation.

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One instance of the failure of the truth of this maxim is as good as a thousand, since one is enough to destroy its generality, and leave the arguments for the inability of the sinner standing in all their force, unless they can be overthrown by considerations drawn from other sources. We do utterly deny that the sinner is able, in the sense which Mr. Finney contends for, to obey the divine commands. In proof of this we say that he is dead in trespasses and in sins, and as the dead man is insensible to all things, so is he to those objects which, if rightly perceived, would be adapted to kindle within him holy desires and affections. Until renewed, he cannot know the things which he must know before he can discharge his duty. And the arguments which we urge from reason and Scripture in defence of these views, are not touched by the assertion that obligation and ability must be commensurate with each other. We have already produced one instance in which, upon Mr. Finney's own admission, this maxim fails to be true: and we are now about to bring forward another, in which he virtually confesses that it is never true when the affections and inclinations of the heart are in question.

In explaining why there can be no repentance in hell, he says, when a man's "reputation is so completely gone that he has no hope of retrieving it, in this state of despair there is no possibility of reclaiming him; no motive can reach him and call forth an effort to redeem his character." Now, in view of this admission, let it be true that obligation and ability are commensurate, and what is the consequence? Why, that when a man has become so vicious as to ruin his reputation, when he has reached such a confirmed state of iniquity that he himself and all others despair of his ever becoming virtuous, when he has severed the last link that bound him to humanity, and is floating loose from his species, a demon or a brute, then is he released from all accountability! Mr. Finney adds, that in hell "the sinner will be in despair, and while in despair it is a moral impossibility to turn his heart to God." But will he deny that the sinner in hell is under any less obligation to love God, on account of this admitted impossibility of loving Him? Betraying, as he here does, his knowledge of the limitations to which his favorite standard of obligation is subject, we should suspect him of a set design to deceive, when he uses it so often in its broad, unqualified sense, and takes his stand upon it to thunder out his furious anathemas against others, had he not furnished us, through all his writings, with such abundant evidence of his incapacity to take into view more than a very small part of one subject at the same time.

With the exposure of the error involved in his position, that God cannot consistently command man to do that which he cannot perform, we shall take our leave of this part of the subject, for he has not brought forward the semblance of an argument in favor of the sinner's ability to regenerate himself, which does not directly involve the universal truth of this erroneous maxim. ((For a full discussion of the Inability of the Sinner, see Biblical Repertory for 1831, p. 360, or Princeton Essays, Series First.))

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DIVINE INFLUENCE

We have already occupied so much space, that we cannot exhibit as fully as we would wish, Mr. Finney's views of the doctrine of divine influence. His theory on this subject is expressed in the following extract.

"The work of the Holy Spirit does not consist merely in giving instruction, but in compelling him to consider truths which he already knows, — to think upon his ways and turn to the Lord. He urges upon his attention and consideration those motives which he hates to consider and feel the weight of." Again he says, "It is indeed the pressing of truth upon the sinner's consideration that induces him to turn."

It will be at once perceived that he limits the agency of the Holy Spirit, in the regeneration of the sinner, to the simple presentation of truth to the mind. Said we not truly, that the influence of the Holy Spirit comes in here only by the way? It is strictly parenthetical, and has about as much fitness and meaning, in connection with the rest of his scheme, as "the grace of God" has in the REX, DEI GRATIA, on the disk of a Spanish dollar. He maintains that the truth of God, if adequately considered, would convert the sinner; and that he has a perfect and independent power to keep that truth before his mind. Surely, then, the agency of the Spirit is superfluous. It is a new cause introduced to account for the production of an effect for which we already have an adequate cause. But though he has, inconsistently we think, retained the doctrine of divine influence, he has so modified it that it has but few, if any, points of resemblance with the scriptural representations of this subject.

His common method of illustrating the nature of the Spirit's agency is by a reference to the manner in which a lawyer persuades a jury, or an orator sways his audience. The Spirit merely presents the truth, and the moral suasion of the truth regenerates the sinner, or rather induces him to regenerate himself. It is not thus that the Scriptures represent it. What mind can read his frequent illustration of an advocate persuading his hearers, and then pass to the scriptural one, of a power that raises from death unto life, without feeling that the agencies which can be properly set forth under such dissimilar symbols must be specifically and widely different from each other? If he has given us the correct account of the divine agency exerted in the salvation of man, then it cannot be denied the language of the sacred writers, on this subject, is most delusively extravagant.

He does sometimes describe the Spirit as forcing the truth home with tremendous power, — pouring the expostulation home, — keeping the truth in warm contact with the mind, — gathering up a world of motive, and pouring it in upon the soul in a focal blaze. Of these and similar expressions, the "warm contact," and the "focal blaze," seem to be his favorites, as he has most frequently repeated them. They are but the rays with which he

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seeks to conceal from his own view and that of others, his meagre skeleton of a Scriptural truth. He seems to resort to these expressions because he feels the inaptness and poverty of his plain statements. But it is as bad to lose one's self in a fog of metaphor, as in that "fog of metaphysics" which he so much dreads. His "close contact," and "warm contact," and "focal blaze," and "Pouring home," mean nothing more than that the Spirit presents the truth to the mind. However the form of expression may be varied, this exhausts the subject of his interference. He does nothing to awaken the attention any further than the truth which he offers awakens it; nothing to arouse the feelings, — nothing to make the scales fall from the eye of the mind that it may perceive the truth, — nothing to change the disposition of the heart so that it may love the truth and feel its constraining influence. Mr. Finney expressly and warmly excludes any direct operation of the Spirit upon the mind or heart. To suppose any such agency, he says with an irreverence of which we hope but few could be guilty, is to suppose a "physical scuffling" between the Holy Spirit and the sinner! As the Spirit awakens no inclination of the heart to go forth and embrace the truth, the warm contact with the mind, into which he brings it, can refer only to its continuous presentation. When the truth is placed before the mind, and the attention is fixed, the contact is complete, and cannot be rendered any closer or warmer but by the instrumentality of the affections, upon which Mr. F. asserts the Spirit exerts no agency. We have already shown the utter inadequacy of this account of the mode of regeneration. Whether the truth remains for a short or a long time, in cold or in warm contact with the unrenewed heart, it will feel in the considerations before it no sufficient motive for loving God.

It will be seen from Mr. F.'s account of the Spirit's influence, that the agency which he exerts in the regeneration of the sinner is the same in kind as that exerted by the preacher. Both call his attention to the truth, and neither of them does anything beyond this. If you go to a drunkard, and urge upon him the motives which should induce him to abandon his cups, you have done for him precisely what the Holy Spirit does for the sinner in his regeneration. The preacher, upon this scheme, has the same right that God has to assume to himself the glory of the sinner's salvation. Indeed Mr. F. fully admits this in answering the objection that his view of the subject "takes the work out of God's hands, and robs him of his glory." His defence is, that the glory belongs to God, inasmuch as he caused the sinner to act. And mark the meaning and force of his illustration: "If a man," he says, "had made up his mind to take his own life, and you should, by taking the greatest pains and at great expense, prevail upon him to desist, would you deserve no credit for the influences you exerted in the case?" Is it not amazing that any man with the Bible in his hands, and professing to love its sacred truths, could divide, as this passage fully does, the glory of the sinner's salvation between God and man, ascribing the work in the same sense to the Holy Spirit and the preacher, and distributing to each a similar need of praise!

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Mr. Finney seems to have a great objection to the peaching of the doctrine of divine influence in any manner. There was a tract published in New York entitled Regeneration is the effect of Divine Power. He twice declares that, "The very title to this tract is a stumbling block." He says that, "While the sinner's attention is directed to the subject of the Spirit's influences, his submission is impossible;" and that if the apostles on the day of Pentecost had gone off to drag in such subjects as dependence upon the Holy Spirit, it is manifest that not one of their hearers would have been converted. "The doctrine of election and divine sovereignty," he asserts, "has nothing to do with the sinner's duty, — it belongs to the government of God." And in another place he says, "To preach doctrines in an abstract way, and not in reference to practice, is absurd." As the doctrine of divine sovereignty then has nothing to do with the sinner's duty, we suppose that he intends that it should not be preached at all. Thus does he distort, thus would he conceal from view, a doctrine which runs through the whole Bible, is incorporated with all its revelation, and is the basement principle of so many emotions and actions!

It is obvious why he is thus hostile to divine sovereignty. This doctrine he thinks is calculated to keep men easy in their sins. If they are dependent upon God, they will be led to wait for his action upon them before they begin to act. No doubt the truth may be thus perverted. But is not his doctrine greatly more liable to perversion? He teaches the sinner that he has all the requisite power to convert himself. What more natural than for the sinner to say, "I love my sins, and therefore as I can at any moment forsake them and make myself holy, I will continue to indulge myself?" It is worthy of remark, that when Mr. Finney is exposing, in one of his most moving paragraphs, the unfitness of a deathbed as a place for repentance, he alludes only to the difficulty of thinking and keeping the mind in warm and distressing contact with the truth, during the agonies of dissolution. He does not refer in the most distant manner to the danger that the sinner, justly abandoned of God, may be unable on that account to change his heart. Is there no danger, too, that the sinner, so repeatedly assured that God would be an infinite tyrant if he had commanded him to do what he cannot do, should find in his own experience that he cannot of himself make a new heart, and thus be led to condemn the justice of the divine requirements? May he not also very consistently say to his instructor, 'It is at least as easy for you to be perfectly holy as it is for me to repent. I retort upon you your charges that I am a wicked rebel, and that my heart has been case-hardened in the fires of hell. Physician, heal thyself. If it is easier for me to love God than to hate him, it is easier for you to be perfect than to remain imperfect. It is easier indeed for you to be holy, even as your Father in heaven is holy, than it is for you to walk home; to do the latter requires that you should both be willing and exert the proper muscular action, but to do the former only requires you to be willing. You must be the wickedest being in the universe, then, to refuse to perform a duty so obvious and so easy.'

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We here dismiss this subject for the present. As we have occupied ourselves with Mr. Finney's doctrines, we have been led to seek them chiefly in his Sermons, from which most of our extracts have been taken. We propose in our next number to examine his Lectures more particularly, and develop the measures and the spirit of this new system. As we have shown that its doctrines are not those of the Bible, so will it be seen that its spirit is anything rather than the spirit of Christianity.

We have not shown the discrepancies between Mr. Finney's doctrines, and the standards of the church to which he belongs. This would be holding a light to the sun. It is too evident to need elucidation, that on all the subjects which we have gone over, his opinions are diametrically opposed to the standards of the Presbyterian Church, which he has solemnly adopted. Many of the very expressions and forms of stating these doctrines upon which he pours out his profane ridicule, are found in the Confession of Faith. Why then does he remain in the church?

He will hold up to the detesting of his people a man who refuses to pay his subscription to the Oneida Institute, because he conscientiously believes that institution is doing more harm than good, asserting that he is not honest, and more than insinuating that he cannot go to heaven. And can he see no moral dishonesty in remaining in a church, whose standards of faith he has adopted, only to deny and ridicule them? It is a remarkable fact that this man, thus incorrect in his doctrinal views, thus dishonest in his continuance in a church whose standards he disbelieves and condemns, should have been appointed a professor of theology to assist in training up ministers for our churches. The trustees of Oberlin Institute had, to be sure, a perfect right to appoint him; but it seems to us very remarkable that they should have selected him, and rather more so that he should have felt willing to undertake the office of an instructor in theology. We suppose, however, that his object was to show the church the way in which her ministers should be trained. We give him credit for his good intentions. He declares it to be a solemn fact, that there is a great defect in the present mode of educating ministers, and that the training they receive in our colleges and seminaries does not fit them for their work. He assures his readers that all the professors in our theological seminaries are unfit for their office; some of them are getting back towards second childhood, and ought to resign; and none of them are such men as are needed in these days. Now is it not very kind in Mr. Finney, when the church is thus destitute of men who can adequately instruct her ministers, to step forward and take the office upon himself? No doubt the whole Presbyterian church ought to break forth in rejoicings. But we confess we would rather he should make the experiment of his ability in this line out of our church. He will, doubtless, think this very unkind and ungrateful, but we cannot help it. We tender him our thanks for the substantial service he has done the church by exposing the naked deformities of the New Divinity. He can render her still another, and in rendering it perform only his plain duty,

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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.

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