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ARTICLE IV.

PRESIDENT FINNEY'S SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY IN ITS
RELATIONS TO THE SO-CALLED NEW ENGLAND
THEOLOGY.

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IF any excuse is required for an extended discussion of the system of theology¹ elaborated by the late President of Oberlin College, it will be found, we trust, mainly in the merits of the system itself. His scheme of theology and ethics is also worthy of the attention of thoughtful men, because it is so great a present factor in the theological thought of this country.

President Finney had under his personal instruction in systematic theology four hundred and seventy-five young men, the most of whom are now in active pastoral labor, and many of whom are instructors in the numerous colleges at the West. In addition, more than a thousand members of the advanced classes in the college have been thoroughly instructed in his system of moral philosophy; and, to say nothing of his general labors as a revivalist, his regular preaching to the undergraduates for forty years (from 1835 to 1875) was so surcharged with philosophy and doctrine that the eighteen thousand of that class who felt its power cannot fail to have been more or less moulded thereby. Furthermore, two editions of his *Systematic Theology* — a book of a thousand pages octavo, and selling at a high price — have been ex-

¹ "Lectures on Systematic Theology, embracing Moral Government, the Atonement, Moral and Physical Depravity, Natural, Moral, and Gracious Ability, Repentance, Faith, Justification, Sanctification, etc. By the Rev. Charles G. Finney, Professor of Theology in the Oberlin Collegiate Institute, Ohio, America. The whole work revised, enlarged, and partly re-written by the Author. Edited and revised with an Introduction by the Rev. George Redford, D.D., LL.D., of Worcester. London: William Tegg and Co. 1851. pp. xviii and 996." Our references will all be to this edition.

hausted, and are in the hands of appreciative students. If this system of thought, already so thoroughly disseminated, is fundamentally erroneous, it is worth while for religious teachers to understand its principles, that they may know how to counteract its influence. In the writer's own mind, subsidiary reasons for this paper are, to point out some minor errors in the system; to show wherein it is in special danger of being misapprehended by those accustomed to a different nomenclature from that of the author; and to illustrate the fact that great minds are likely to differ more in the words which express their ideas than in the ideas themselves.

I. *On the Purposes of God.*

In the outset, it should, and can easily, be made to appear that President Finney is distinctively Calvinistic. "The essential Calvinistic tenet is that of the divine purposes."¹ That is the shibboleth of Calvinism. It is in point to ask first, if our author pronounces this correctly, and without hesitation or timidity. The purposes of God have regard both to ends and means; his purposes are both ultimate and proximate. And

"If he [God] purpose to realize an end, he must, of course, purpose the necessary means for its accomplishment."²

"There must be some sense in which God's purposes extend to all events. This is evident from reason. His plan must, in some sense, include all actual events. He must foreknow all events by a law of necessity. This is implied in his omniscience. He must have matured and adopted his plan in view of, and with reference to, all events. He must have had some purpose or design respecting all events that he foresaw. All events transpire in consequence of his own creating agency; that is, they all result in some way, directly or indirectly, either by his design or sufferance, from his own agency. He either designedly brings them to pass, or suffers them to come to pass without interposing to prevent them. He must have known that they would occur. He must have either positively designed that they should, or, knowing that they would result from the mistakes or selfishness of his creatures, negatively designed not to prevent them. . . . He cannot be indifferent to any event. He knows all events, and must have some purpose or design respecting them."³

¹ Prof. H. B. Smith in *American Theological Review* for 1865, p. 127.

² Finney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 812.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 815.

It may be necessary to observe, at this point, that we are aiming in this Article to present the degree of philosophical consistency with which President Finney held the high doctrines of evangelical religion. It is appropriate for us, therefore, to limit ourselves to his metaphysical principles and arguments. In all cases he goes "to the law and to the testimonies" for his positive doctrines; and a large part of his volume consists in a compilation and elucidation of the passages of Scripture which set forth, imply, and illustrate those doctrines. Furthermore, that Mr. Finney did not regard his views upon the distinctive points of Calvinism to be of small importance is evident, both from the extent and vigor of his treatment of them (one hundred and fifty pages of his *Systematic Theology*, included in the "etc." of the title, being devoted to election, reprobation, divine sovereignty, purposes of God, and perseverance of saints), and from an interesting passage of his *Memoirs*, recently published.¹ It seems that during the period of his second revival labors in England Mr. Finney was invited to preach in the "Evangelical Union" churches of Scotland. The Rev. J. Kirk, with whom he labored in Edinburgh, was also editor of a religious paper, and professor in a theological school of Glasgow. This gentleman entertained the belief that Mr. Finney's views were identical with his own and with those of the theological seminary in which he was a teacher, and so represented it in his paper. Mr. Finney says that by this means he found himself in a "false position," since he did not agree with them in their peculiar views. Among other things, he remarks that they explained away in a manner to him utterly unintelligible the doctrine of election. It was largely on account of this that as soon as opportunity offered he cut short his labors with them.

But for an author's views concerning the purposes of God, we must examine the manner in which he elaborates subordinate points. We turn, therefore, to his views

¹ *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, written by himself (New York, 1876), p. 477. See pp. 455-458.

II. *On Fore-ordination.*

What is the logical order between the divine purpose and the divine foreknowledge. The Arminian says that foreknowledge precedes fore-ordination.¹ But it is clear that in this order *knowledge* is confounded with *foreknowledge*. There is a failure to discern the logical distinction between the knowledge of what in all contingencies of the divine activity *may* be, and what *will actually* be as a consequence, and upon condition, of God's determining upon a particular line of creative activity. The confusion has its origin in a failure to separate chronological from logical sequence. With truth it may be affirmed that God's foreknowledge of what he is going to do is chronologically indistinguishable from that action of his omniscience in which he discerns all the possible results of every particular form of his possible activity. But logically the purpose of God to enter upon a definite line of activity intervenes between this knowledge of what might be and the definite knowledge of what will be; for this latter is conditioned upon God's choosing a particular system. We can do no better than transfer the clear statement of President Finney.

"The question will arise, Was election in the order of nature subsequent to, or did it precede, the divine foreknowledge? The answer to this plainly is, that in the order of nature what could be wisely done must have been foreseen before it was determined what should be done. And what should be done must, in the order of nature, have preceded the knowledge of what would be done. So that in the order of nature foreknowledge of what could be wisely done preceded election, and foreknowledge of what would be done followed, or was subsequent to, election. In other words, God must have known whom he could wisely save prior, in the order of nature, to his determination to save them. But his knowing who would be saved must have been, in the order of nature, subsequent to his election or determination to save them, and dependent upon that determination."²

III. *Reprobation.*

Upon the subject of reprobation our author is careful to

¹ See Whedon on the Will, pp. 216, and 267-282.

² Systematic Theology, p. 776. Compare with these statements, those of Rev. D. T. Fiske, D.D., in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. xix. p. 415.

deny that "the purpose or decree of reprobation is the procuring cause of the destruction of reprobates."¹

"The doctrine of reprobation is not the election of a part of mankind to damnation, in the same sense that the elect unto salvation are elected to be saved. . . . Election, with those who are saved, extends not only to the end, salvation, but also to the conditions or means. . . . He [God] uses means with them with the design to sanctify and save them. But he has not elected the reprobate to wickedness, and does not use means to make them wicked, with the ultimate design to destroy them. . . . The destruction of the reprobate is . . . only an incidental and an unavoidable result. That is, God cannot wisely prevent this result."²

"He [God] regards their [reprobates] destruction as a less evil to the universe than would be such a change in the administration and arrangements of his government as would secure their salvation. Therefore, for their foreseen wickedness and perseverance in rebellion under circumstances the most favorable to their virtue and salvation in which he can wisely place them, he is resolved upon their destruction, and has already in purpose cast them off forever."³

These extracts concern so nearly the diverging points of Arminianism and Calvinism that it will be profitable to dwell upon the subject still more. We cannot do better than follow our author while he turns the question over in different lights. It is objected,

"That if God designed to make known his attributes in the salvation of the vessels of mercy, and in the destruction of the vessels of wrath, he must have designed their characters as well as their end, inasmuch as their characters are indispensable conditions of this result."⁴

Our author replies :

"That it is true that the characters of both the vessels of wrath and of mercy must have been, in some sense, purposed or designed by God. But it does not follow that he designed them both in the same sense. The character of the righteous he designed to beget or induce by his own agency ; the character of the wicked he designed to suffer him to form for himself. He doubtless designed to suffer the one, rather than to interfere in such manner and form as would prevent sin ; seeing, as he did, that, hateful as it was in itself, it could be overruled for good. The other he designed to produce, or rather induce, both on account of the pleasure

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 784.

² Systematic Theology, p. 785. See further on this general subject, pp. 831-836.

³ Systematic Theology, pp. 786, 787.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 797.

he has in holiness, and also for the sake of its bearings on the subject of it and upon the universe."¹

This view of the relation of the divine purposes to the salvation of the elect and the destruction of the non-elect was not with Mr. Finney an "esoteric" doctrine. He believed that it should be inculcated. He did not believe in lighting a candle and putting it under a bushel. For

"(a) The Scriptures that teach it are not less likely to be a snare and a stumbling-block than are the definition and explanation of the doctrine. (b) The proper statement, explanation, and defence of the doctrines of election and reprobation are important to a proper understanding of the nature and attributes of God. Again, these doctrines have often been so misstated and perverted as to make them amount to an iron system of fatalism. It is therefore all the more important that these truths should find a place in religious instruction. Let them be understood, properly stated, explained, and defended, and they can no more be a stumbling-block than the fact of God's omniscience can be so."²

IV. *Sovereignty of God.*

In regard to the doctrine of divine sovereignty, President Finney denies "that God in any instance wills or acts arbitrarily, or without good reason"; or "that he lives "wholly above law" and is "disposed to have his own will at any rate, reasonable or unreasonable." But God is a "law to himself." "The divine reason must impose law on, or prescribe law to, the divine will."

"The sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge. He consults his own intelligence only, not from any arbitrary disposition, but because his knowledge is perfect and infinite, and therefore it is safe to take counsel nowhere else. It were infinitely unreasonable and weak and wicked in God to ask leave of any being to act in conformity with his own judgment." God so disposes "of all things and events as to meet the ideas of his own reason. This he does, be it distinctly understood, without at all setting aside the freedom of moral agents. His infinite knowledge enables him to select an end and means that should consist with and include the perfect freedom of moral agents."³ God is sovereign, also, "in the sense that his will is law, whether we are able to see the reason for his commands or not, because our reason affirms that he has, and must have, good and

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 797.

² Ibid., p. 798.

³ Ibid., p. 802.

sufficient reasons for every command. We therefore need no other reason for affirming our obligation to will and to do than that God requires it." ¹ God's "end was chosen, and the means decided upon, when no being but himself existed, and of course there was no one to consult but himself. Creation and providence are only the results, and the carrying out of his plans settled from eternity." "The law of benevolence, as it existed in the divine reason, must have eternally demanded of him the very course he has taken. If infinite wisdom or knowledge is not to give law, what or who shall? If infinite benevolence shall not disclose and enforce law, what or who shall?" ²

Here, too, our author bewails the timidity with which preachers are accustomed to handle the scriptures which speak of these high themes. After proving the doctrine abundantly from the Bible, he remarks :

"Many seem afraid to think or speak of God's sovereignty, and even pass over with a very slight reading those passages of Scripture that so fully declare it. They think it unwise and dangerous to preach upon the subject, especially unless it be to deny or explain away the sovereignty of God." On the contrary, "a proper understanding of God's universal agency and sovereignty, of the perfect wisdom and benevolence of every measure of his government, providential and moral, is essential to the best improvement of all his dispensations toward us and to those around us. When it is understood that God's hand is directly or indirectly in everything that occurs, and that he is infinitely wise and good, and equally wise and good in every single dispensation, there is then a divine reasonableness and amiableness and kindness thrown like a broad mantle of infinite love over all his character, works, and ways." ³

We should always bear in mind that a thing may be providential and manifestly from God without being miraculous.

"God's sovereignty manifests itself through and by means, or second causes, and appropriate instrumentalities. God is as much a sovereign in the kingdom of nature as of grace." ⁴

The prevalent New School Calvinism is so well known that it is not necessary here, for purposes of comparison, to present quotations from other defenders of the system.

V. *Freedom of the Will.*

President Finney left no separate treatise upon the will. But a tolerably distinct idea of his views upon that intricate

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 803. ² Ibid., pp. 803, 804. ³ Ibid., p. 811.

⁴ Ibid., p. 811.

subject may be gathered from his theological system. A little later, when we come to consider his analysis of virtue, we shall discuss his most peculiar views concerning the action of the will. It will no doubt prevent some little confusion to remark here that we have, for various reasons, reversed the order of treatment pursued in his volume, and and reserved till the last his most distinctive peculiarities of argument, but which he in the natural order put first. We may perhaps thus pass from the familiar to the unfamiliar with less effort of mind. We premise, however, that Mr. Finney defended the doctrine of the simplicity of the action of the will, maintaining that every ultimate act of choice is either wholly virtuous or wholly sinful. Of this we will speak fully hereafter. We must now consider what he has to say about the determination of the will. How does he reconcile liberty with certainty? This should appear in the discussions which pertain to depravity and the perseverance of the saints.¹

VI. *Coexistence of Freedom and Certainty.*

In two conditions the actions of the human will are uniform and infallibly certain. Previous to regeneration, every moral act of the human will is a wicked act. Sin is uniform and certain without the influences of the Holy Ghost. Subsequent to regeneration and previous to death, virtuous choice is the rule and sinful choice the exception, with the assurance that through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the discipline of providence the soul shall be fully established in virtue. In the heavenly world the saints uniformly and certainly put forth virtuous choices.

Certainty is of three species² — that of absolute necessity, such as belongs to all intuitional truth; physical necessity, such as pertains to the succession of events in the physical world, where there is a necessary connection between antecedent and consequent, conditional on the original act of creation; and thirdly, moral certainty, or the certainty of liberty. This certainty of liberty is a very peculiar and

¹ See pp. 370-401, 836-901.

² See pp. 836, 837.

puzzling thing. We can make statements about it; but there is no satisfactory and adequate statement of it. Paradoxes must abound, in whatever shape we attempt to realize it to our imagination. It is a certainty which at every step runs a hazard of being otherwise than it is. It is a definite line which keeps its direction, against the possibility of changing its course at every point. The pathway of the will is through the high seas in which one could always have moved to the left when he moved to the right; yet there is not only a certain course which each will is to pursue, but God knows beforehand what that course will be. Our author does not attempt to reconcile foreknowledge with freedom, but contents himself with postulating both in the most emphatic manner. As we have seen, also, he maintains that when "viewed relatively to what he [God] would do, and what would be done and would come to pass, the divine purpose must, in the order of nature, have preceded the divine prescience."¹ In point of time, however, the purpose and the foreknowledge were "contemporaneous and co-eternal." In some way God knew what his creatures were going to do by knowing what he himself should do. The certainty of their action was thus dependent on the certainty of his own. Our author does not encumber himself with Edwards's dictum, that the "will always is as the greatest apparent good is";² nor with that other dictum, that the will always acts according to the highest motive.

It may be well for us, just here, to raise a cautionary signal, to warn the reader that he is in hazardous seas and in the latitude of very unsettled weather. When touching on the doctrine of the action of the will, the natural infirmities of language render it proper to ask for some degree of indulgence. Language is far less flexible than thought. But even human thought must confess itself unable to penetrate all the ramifications of this interminable labyrinth. If we

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 834.

² Edwards's Work in ten volumes (New York, 1870), Vol. II. pp. 20, 24, 80, et al.

utter the truth at all regarding the freedom of the will and the subjects dependent upon and connected with it, we must speak in paradoxes, and with more or less of pleonasm and tautology.

We are now where difficulties are thickest and paradoxes most abundant. If the will be free, how can its action be either uniform or foreknown. But it is frequently both. God has that freedom of will which is essential to the existence of virtue; yet we are confident, that he never puts forth any but virtuous choices. Man, likewise, is always free in his volitions; yet in all conditions, *God* can predict them. How can there be this prediction of the action which a self-determining power will initiate?

From the days of Socrates down to our own, it has been maintained that there was an equation between the motive and the action of the will. It was held by him that the will is reached through the sensibility only, and that the sensibilities being aroused by knowledge of the means of gratification, the will might be controlled by enlightenment of the mind. The dictum, that the action of the will is as the greatest apparent good, would seem to be coincident with this Socratic idea. But the Edwardeans are, in general, careful to insist that the connection between their subject and predicate is merely infallible and certain, but not necessary. The will, is as the greatest apparent good, not *must* be. In this relation of the strength of the motive to the action of the will, foundation exists for omniscience to foresee *all* the future actions of a moral agent, and for finite reason to predict the course of the will in a certain environment of motives.

That there is what Leibnitz would call a "sufficient reason" for the action of the will in every case, President Finney seems, in various passages, to hold. For example, he argues¹ the immutability of God's benevolence from the power of the motives which reside in his omniscience.

¹ "Every motive that exists lies with all its weight upon his mind, and that constantly. And as there are infinitely higher motives to benevolence

¹ *Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures* (1840), p. 78.

than to malevolence, and as these motives are fully known to and appreciated by God, we reasonably infer from this consideration that he is benevolent."

Furthermore, confidence in this foundation seems to be implied in all that is said about moral government. There is in the presentation of motives certainly a ground of probability laid concerning the will's action, else why should we ply the motives of the gospel? We should remember that probability is not a cover for chance, but for our ignorance. What is ground of probability for finite beings is ground of certainty to the infinite mind. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." It will prove interesting, not merely as a personal matter, but as shedding some light on a very abstruse subject, to partially collate the language of President Finney on the connection between the use of motives and the action of the will.

"A want of experience in the universe in regard to the nature and natural tendencies and results of sin prevented the due influence of sanctions. . . . All the developments of sin are enlarging the experience of the universe in regard to its nature and tendencies, and thus confirming the influence of moral government over virtuous minds."¹

The "universality of moral depravity" is accounted for, without involving the idea that the constitution of man is itself sinful, on the supposition that

"Sin may be the result of temptation; temptation may be universal, and of such a nature as uniformly, not necessarily, to result in sin, unless a contrary result be secured by a divine moral suasion."²

"We can predict, without the gift of prophecy, that with a constitution physically depraved, and surrounded with objects to awaken appetite, and with all the circumstances in which human beings first form their moral character, they will seek universally to gratify themselves, unless prevented by the illuminations of the Holy Spirit."³

"Free, responsible will is an adequate cause [for the universality of sin in the human race], in the presence of temptation, without the supposition of a sinful constitution."⁴

How is moral depravity to be accounted for?

"It consists, remember, in the committal of the will to the gratification

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 380.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

or indulgence of self—in the will's following, or submitting itself to be governed by, the impulses and desires of the sensibility, instead of submitting itself to the law of God revealed in the reason. This definition of the thing shows how it is to be accounted for; namely, the sensibility acts as a powerful impulse to the will, from the moment of birth, and secures the consent and activity of the will to procure its gratification before the reason is at all developed. The will is thus committed to the gratification of feeling and appetite when first the idea of moral obligation is developed. This committed state of the will is not moral depravity, and has no moral character, until the idea of moral obligation is developed. The moment this idea is developed, this committal of the will to self-indulgence must be abandoned, or it becomes selfishness or moral depravity. But as the will is already in a state of committal, and has to some extent already formed the habit of seeking to gratify feeling, and as the idea of moral obligation is at first but feebly developed, unless the Holy Spirit interferes to shed light on the soul, the will, as might be expected, retains its hold on self-gratification. Here alone moral character commences, and must commence. No one can conceive of its commencing earlier. Again, it should be remembered that the physical depravity of our race has much to do with our moral depravity. A diseased physical system renders the appetites, passions, tempers, and propensities more clamorous and despotic in their demands, and of course, constantly urging to selfishness, confirms and strengthens it. It should be distinctly remembered that physical depravity has no moral character in itself. But yet it is the source of fierce temptation to selfishness. The human sensibility is manifestly deeply physically depraved; and as sin, or moral depravity, consists in committing the will to the gratification of the sensibility, its physical depravity will mightily strengthen moral depravity. Moral depravity is then universally owing to temptation. That is, the soul is tempted to self-indulgence, and yields to the temptation; and this yielding, and not the temptation, is sin or moral depravity.”¹

“The constitution of a moral being, as a whole, when all the powers are developed, does not tend to sin, but strongly in an opposite direction, as is manifest from the fact that when reason is thoroughly developed by the Holy Spirit it is more than a match for the sensibility, and turns the heart to God. The difficulty is, that the sensibility gets the start of reason, and engages the attention in devising means of self-gratification, and thus retards, and in a great measure prevents, the development of the ideas of the reason which were designed to control the will. It is this morbid development that the Holy Spirit is given to rectify, by so forcing truth upon the attention as to secure the development of the reason. By doing this he brings the will under the influence of truth. Our senses reveal to us the objects correlated to our animal nature and propensities. The Holy

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 397.

Spirit reveals God and the spiritual world, and all that class of objects that are correlated to our higher nature, so as to give reason the control of the will."¹

In the chapter on "Perseverance of the Saints," the relation of motives to the constancy of the will's action is turned over and over in a very instructive manner. The certainty pertaining to the action of the will is called "moral certainty," as distinguished from that "of absolute necessity," and from that "of physical, but conditioned necessity." This is called moral certainty not because it is any "less certain" than the other kinds, but simply because it is conditioned upon the free actions of moral agents." The class of actions to which only "moral" certainty belongs are "contingent, in the highest sense in which anything can be contingent." The certainty

"Is not of necessity in any sense; it is only a mere certainty, or a voluntary certainty — a free certainty — a certainty that might by natural possibility, in every case, be no certainty at all. . . . God, in every instance knows how these events will be as really as if they occurred by necessity; but his foreknowledge does not affect their certainty, one way or the other. . . . All events [however] may be traced ultimately to the action of God's free-will; that is, God's free actions gave existence to the universe, with all its physical agencies and laws, so that all physical events are in some sense owing to, and result from, the actions of free-will. . . . [The actions of a finite free-will] find the occasions of their occurrence in the providential events with which moral agents are surrounded, and therefore may be traced, indirectly and more or less remotely, to the actions of the divine will."

Humanly speaking, there is utmost danger that a regenerate person will fail to persevere in holiness, i.e. there may be to our ignorance "millions of chances to one" that he will fail.

"[His actions] are contingent in such a sense, that should the means fail to be used, or should any event in the whole chain of influences connected with their occurrence be otherwise than it is, the end, or event resulting, would or might be otherwise than in fact it will be. They are, nevertheless, certain, every one of them, together with all the influences upon which each free act depends."²

The dependence of the will for its final victory, upon the

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 404.

² Ibid., pp. 836-839.

enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, is set forth in the most emphatic language.

“Who that knows himself does not understand that he never would have been converted but for the grace of God anticipating and exciting the first motions of his mind in a right direction? And what true saint does not know that such are his former habitudes, and such the circumstances of trial under which he is placed, and such the downward tendency of his own soul, on account of his physical depravity, that, although converted, he shall not persevere for an hour, except the indwelling grace and Spirit of God shall hold him up, and quicken him in the path of holiness?”¹

Neander² maintained that “it lies in the idea of evil [sin] that it is an utterly inexplicable thing, and whoever would explain it nullifies the very idea of it. It is not the limits of our knowledge which make the origin of sin something inexplicable *to us*, but it follows from the essential nature of sin as an act of free-will, that it must remain to all eternity an inexplicable fact. It can only be understood *empirically* by means of the moral self-consciousness.” A favorite theme with President Finney in the pulpit was that “Sin is Moral Insanity.”³ Yet even he, as we have seen, maintains that there is method in the sinner’s madness, and that the particular course of every person’s moral development is dependent upon the divine act by which the universe was created and is sustained. God knew what he was doing when he created the universe. It is difficult to see how such knowledge can exist except there be an infallible connection between the influence of motives, in the broad sense (including what are subjective as well as what are objective), and the action of the will. There is a paradox in the very idea we are trying to represent. We are not sure but the best way is boldly to express the paradox in words, as Edwards did in calling it a moral necessity for the will to act as it does. It is certain that orderly operations such as are implied in the very idea of the success of moral government could not be

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 877.

² History of the Planting of Christianity (Bohn, London, 1859), Vol. i. p. 424.

³ See Sermons on Gospel Themes, pp. 147-160.

the effect of chance, for chance is no cause at all and no sufficient reason for anything. God cannot be conceived as throwing up dice with any uncertainty as to the result. Nor can we escape the difficulty by abolishing time, for time will not be abolished. It is a question whether the phrase, 'God is independent of time,' can have any other meaning than that, God in knowing perfectly the scope of the secondary causes and the established certainties which he has brought into existence, sees the end from the beginning, and is thus immutable in his knowledge.

The phraseology of President Edwards is peculiarly open to criticism, from the fact that his writings were largely controversial, making it necessary to interpret his language as in antithesis to that which embodied the errors which he was opposing. The very title of his famous treatise on the will should put us on our guard. "A careful and strict enquiry into the modern prevailing notions of that freedom of will, which is supposed to be essential to moral agency, virtue and vice, reward and punishment, praise and blame." When now we find him stating that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause, we need to make "careful and strict enquiry" as to the sense in which he uses the word "cause." "For want of a better word," he took "occasion to use it in a sense which is more extensive than that in which it is sometimes used."

"I sometimes," he writes, "use the word *cause*, in this enquiry, to signify any *antecedent*, either natural or moral, positive or negative, on which an event, either a thing or the manner and circumstances of a thing, so depends that it is the ground and reason, either in whole or in part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is as it is, rather than otherwise; or, in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true, whether it has any positive influence or not."¹

The Edwardean phrases, "*moral cause*" and "*moral necessity*," seem unfortunate; but it is a misfortune for any words to fall between the upper and nether millstones of the ideas of free-will and foreknowledge. President Finney contented

¹ Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will. Part ii. Sect. iii.

himself with the phrase "*moral certainty*." But then he did not venture so far into this subject as the Edwardses. Perhaps he displayed his sagacity in not doing so. We presume, however, if the three persons had been together they would have had no difficulty in understanding each other, and would very likely have agreed upon a statement something like this: Whatever line God's creative activity were to pursue, when that was once determined upon, it would determine, or make certain, the existence of all other things in any manner dependent upon that activity. If God had chosen another plan of operations, everything subordinate would in some degree have been changed. The *knowledge* of God comprehended the details and incidents of every possible plan. The choice of a plan made his *knowledge* determinate as *fore-knowledge*. So that the actions of finite free-wills are fore-ordained as well as foreknown. The action of the will is the effect of concauses, of which the will itself supplies part, and the motives, in the large sense, supply the rest. As we have seen, neither President Finney nor President Edwards hold that a knowledge of how the will would act, derived from a knowledge of the motives, would necessarily be irreconcilable with the doctrine of responsible freedom of will. It is a mystery, but not an absurdity, that the two facts should co-exist. If we fly from this mystery by eliminating the element of time, we encounter another equally insoluble. It is as if a man escape from the jaws of a lion, and a bear meets him. President Finney, in his earlier writings, and the younger Edwards use language regarding God's relation to time which is almost identical. Thus Finney :

"Eternity, to us, means all past, present, and future duration. But to God it means only now. Duration and space, as they respect his existence, mean infinitely different things from what they do when they respect our existence. God's existence and his acts, as they respect finite existence, have relation to time and place. But as they respect his own existence, everything is *here* and *now*. With respect to all finite existences, God can say I was, I am, I shall be, do, will do; but with respect to his own existence, all that he can say is, *I am, I do.*"¹

¹ *Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures*, pp. 70, 71.

Thus Doctor Edwards (the younger) :

“ There is no succession in the divine mind ; therefore no new operations take place there. All the divine acts are equally from eternity, nor is there any *time* with God. . . . The *effects* of those divine acts do indeed all take place in time, and in a succession. If it should be said that on this supposition the effects take place, not till long after the acts by which they are produced ; I answer, they do so in our view, but not in the view of God. With him there is no time, no before nor after with respect to time ; nor has time any existence either in the divine mind or in the nature of things, independently of the minds and perceptions of creatures ; but it depends on the succession of those perceptions.”¹

VII. *Ground of Obligation.*

President Finney is believed by his pupils to have rendered substantial service to the cause of philosophy in his discussion of the “ Foundation of Moral Obligation.” His elaboration of the subject is more complete than that of any other author, and his theory incorporates what of truth there is in utilitarianism, while, at the same time, he makes obligation rest upon an intuitional basis. What advantage there is in his statements will be seen to arise from perspicuity and breadth of thought together with rare logical discrimination in the use of language. A great deal of confusion has come into the field of this discussion through the ambiguity of the word “ good.” *Good* is either ultimate or relative. If this distinction is overlooked, endless confusion will arise, and ever after this element of confusion is admitted, abundance of words will lead to anything but fulness of knowledge. *Good* is, in the nature of the case, related to the sensibility, using that word in its fullest meaning. *Ultimate* good, is the gratification of the sensibility, — in one word, happiness. *Relative* good, is that which is adapted to evoke happiness from a being possessed of a sensitivity correlated to the thing ; or is a condition of his receiving blessedness. *Ultimate* good is good *in itself*, or the realization of good. *Relative* good is good *for* something, or good in *correlation* to something else. An apple is good to the taste ; but until

¹ Edwards's Works, Vol. i. pp. 386, 387.

the apple and the organs of taste are brought in contact, the real good is hypothetical or possible only. Were there no sensibility of taste correlated to the peculiar chemical constitution of the fruit, that peculiarity would not be good for anything.

In the creation, the advent of happiness is co-incident with the appearance of sensibility in contact with its correlated objects. The idea of obligation could not arise except in beings possessed of sensibility, and in regard to beings capable of happiness or misery. The experience of personal happiness or misery, and the perception of the possibility of the existence of it at other times and places, is a logical prerequisite to the intuition of obligation. This is one of the ideas which Mr. Finney has elaborated more fully than any other author.¹

Obligation is, in the philosophical sense, limited to choice. The choice which is characteristic of true benevolence is called an *ultimate choice*, and is what in its essence constitutes true holiness; while the *refusal* to put it forth constitutes the essential attribute of sin. The central and highest law of obligation is, that *a moral being ought to choose the highest good of being in general*. This law is one of the intuitive facts of the reason. The person who puts forth that choice is a holy being. He is praiseworthy. He is an object of moral approbation. He is "good" in the sense that he has, in his measure, attained the "*summum bonum*" of moral excellence. His choice is praiseworthy in itself, without regard to the use God may make of it in the economy of the universe. In this sense of the word "choice," virtue is benevolence (*bene volens*), and love (*ἀγάπη*) is the fulfilment of the law. This choice, however, is not a mere wish, but involves an election of all the means and conditions of the highest well-being. Holiness is also something higher than a means of happiness. It is a quality of character upon which happiness must, in a moral being, be *conditioned*.

¹ See statement of President Mark Hopkins, in "The Law of Love, and Love as Law" (New York, 1869), Preface, p. 7.

“It is naturally impossible for a moral agent to be satisfied with the happiness or enjoyment of moral agents except upon condition of their holiness.”¹ This is an ultimate dictum of the reason and conscience. The holy being wills hypothetical good to all possible being. He wills actual good to all known existent holy beings. He wills actual good to unholy beings upon condition that they become holy, and that some way is devised to repair the evil of their past guilt. He wills suffering to the unholy because they deserve it, and because punishment will promote the general good. “Ultimate intention is right or wrong in itself; and no questions of utility, expediency, or tendency, have anything to do with the obligation to put forth ultimate intention.”² In the highest sense, and with regard to universal being, the “expedient” and the “right” are one. It is impossible, without a reversal of the powers and laws of moral agency, that general happiness should be connected with sin, or universal misery with holiness. “If our being were so changed that happiness were naturally connected with sin, and misery with holiness, there would of necessity be a corresponding change in the law of nature, or of moral law; in which case we should be as well satisfied as we now are. But no such change is possible, and the supposition is inadmissible.”³

Compare with this presentation President Edwards's *Disquisitions on the “Nature of True Virtue,”*⁴ and concerning “The End for which God Created the World.” But especially Dr. Samuel Hopkins's “*Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness,*”⁵ and Dr. Emmon's “*Sermon on Love the Essence of Obedience.*”⁶ The point is stated with great clearness by the latter.

“True love is universal, extending to being in general, or to God and all his creatures. . . . The primary object of true benevolence is *being*, simply considered, or a mere capacity of enjoying happiness and suffering pain.

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 95. See also, pp. 68, 69, 70, 78, etc.

² Systematic Theology, p. 123.

³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴ See Works, Vol. iii. pp. 94, 97, 129, 133, 139, 141, 153, et al.

⁵ See Works, Vol. iii.

⁶ Sermon, No. 68.

It necessarily embraces God and all sensitive natures. Though the man of true benevolence has a *peculiar complacency* in God and in all other benevolent beings, yet he *wishes well* to creatures that have no benevolence, and even to such as are incapable of all moral exercises. It is, therefore, the nature of true benevolence to run parallel with universal being, whether uncreated or created; whether rational or irrational; whether holy or unholy."¹

This view of the case avoids the errors of utilitarianism, and coincides very closely with the views of President Edwards and Dr. Samuel Hopkins.

Utilitarianism is a genus with innumerable species. The generic distinction of utilitarianism consists in the idea that the *promotion* of the good of being is the foundation of obligation. Utilitarianism may be "high" or "low" according to the conception of those who hold it. The utilitarian may be a follower either of Epicurus or of Zeno, according to his conception of what is the highest form of attainable well-being. As the example of Paley and Dr. N. W. Taylor and Mill shows, a utilitarian does not by any necessity maintain that bread and butter are the highest objects of utility. With Paley one may refine and enlarge his object of desire till it becomes nothing less than the kingdom of heaven. But in this event, while he frees himself from the charge of "*this-worldliness*," he may lay himself open all the more to that of "*other-worldliness*." As J. S. Mill has remarked :²

"The happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned." Again, "Whatever aid religion, either natural or revealed, can afford to ethical investigation, is as open to the utilitarian moralist as to any other. He can use it as the testimony of God to the usefulness or hurtfulness of any given course of action, by as good right as others can use it for the vindication of transcendental laws having no connection with usefulness or happiness."³

The intuitional philosopher would say that benevolence is *goodness in itself*, and therefore praiseworthy, whether it be good *for* anything or not. The utilitarian would say that benevolence is good *for* something, viz. the *promotion* of the

¹ Emmons's Works, Vol. iii. p. 175.

² Utilitarianism (4th ed., London, 1871), p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

general well-being, and therefore worthy of approval. Thus Dr. Taylor :

“ All the worth or value of man, or of any other moral being, consists in his capacity of happiness and of that self-active nature which qualifies him to produce happiness to other beings and to himself. All the worth or value or goodness or excellence which pertains to action on the part of a moral being, is its fitness or adaptation to produce these results. The best kind of action, therefore, on his part, is that which is exclusively and perfectly fitted to produce the highest happiness of others and his own highest happiness.¹

So far is the above passage from expressing the views of President Finney, that he is at considerable pains to refute the position there maintained. To get the points clearly before his mind the student should take particular notice of the distinction between an *ultimate* act of the will in choice, and an *executive* act of the will.

“ Ultimate choice, or the choice of an object for its own sake, or for its intrinsic value, is not an effort designed to secure or obtain that object; that is, is not put forth with any such design. When the object which the mind perceives to be intrinsically valuable (as the good of being, for example) is perceived by the mind, it cannot but choose or refuse it. Indifference in this case is naturally impossible. The mind, in such circumstances, is under a necessity of choosing one way or the other. The will must embrace or reject it. The reason affirms the obligation to choose the intrinsically valuable for its own sake, and not because choosing it will secure it. Nor does the real choice of it imply a purpose or an obligation to put forth executive acts to secure it, except upon condition that such acts are seen to be necessary and possible and calculated to secure it. Ultimate choice is not put forth with design to secure its object. It is only the will's embracing the object, or willing it for its own sake. In regard to ultimate choice the will must choose or refuse the object entirely irrespectively of the tendency of the choice to secure the object. But executive acts, be it remembered, are, and must be, put forth with design to secure their object, and of course cannot exist unless the design exist, and the design cannot exist unless the mind assumes the possibility, necessity, and utility of such efforts.”² Again, “ It is absurd to say the foundation of the obligation to choose a certain end is to be

¹ Lectures on the Moral Government of God. By Nathaniel W. Taylor, D.D., late Dwight Professor of Theology in Yale College (New York, 1859), Vol. i. p. 32; see also, pp. 19, 33, 34, 65, 66, etc. See also, Metcalf, “ The Nature, Extent, and Foundation of Moral Obligation,” pp. 22, 36, 60.

² Systematic Theology, p. 33

found, not in the value of the end itself, but in the tendency of the intention to secure the end. The tendency is valuable or otherwise as the end is valuable or otherwise. It is, and must be, the value of the end, and not the tendency of an intention to secure the end, that constitutes the foundation of the obligation to intend."¹ Still again, "A consistent utilitarian cannot conceive rightly of the nature of morality or virtue. He cannot consistently hold that virtue consists in willing the highest well-being of God and the universe as an ultimate end; or for its own sake, but must, on the contrary, confine his ideas of moral obligation to volitions and outward actions, in which there is strictly no morality, and, withal, assign an entirely false reason for these; to wit, their tendency to secure an end, rather than the value of the end which they tend to secure."²

When a little ambiguity on the part of President Edwards, in the use of the words "good" and "love," is eliminated, there does not seem to be any irreconcilable difference between him and President Finney upon this point. The former says with the latter, that "True virtue most essentially consists in *benevolence to being in general*."³ The latter could say with the former that virtue is "something *beautiful*" in itself; and both might unite in the language of Kant:

"A good will is good, not through that which it accomplishes or attains, nor through its fitness for attaining any object set before it, but solely through the volition, i.e. in itself; and, considered for itself, it is beyond comparison more highly to be prized than all which can ever be brought to pass through it to the satisfaction of any possible inclination, or, if you will, the sum of all inclinations. Though through some peculiar unpropitiousness of fate, or through scanty endowment from unkind nature, this will should altogether lack the means for carrying out its purpose; though by its greatest effort nothing should be accomplished, and there should remain only the good will (plainly not a mere empty wish, but the summoning of all means as far as they are in our power); even then would it, like a jewel, shine for itself, as something which has its full worth in itself."⁴

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 52.

² Systematic Theology, p. 122. Consult also Fairchild's Moral Philosophy, pp. 1-29.

³ See Edwards, Dissertation on the Nature of True Virtue. Cap. i. See also Dr. Samuel Hopkins, Works (Boston, 1854), Vol. i. pp. 236, 237; Vol. iii. pp. 16, 17.

⁴ "Der gute Wille ist nicht durch das, was er bewirkt, oder ausrichtet, nicht

President Finney does, indeed, maintain that there is a distinction between what is *right* in itself and what is *good* in itself.¹ He also denies that virtue is an ultimate good, but calls it a relative good of infinite value. "It is the condition of blessedness in all moral agents, and of the infinite blessedness of God, and therefore infinitely valuable."

"Holy beings delight in it for its own sake. It is morally beautiful and lovely, and the contemplation of it gives a sweet satisfaction and pleasure to the mind of a holy being. Hence we say, we love it for its own sake; and so we do if by love we mean delight. But to delight in a thing for its own sake is not the same as choosing it for its own sake." "Obedience to moral law is morally beautiful; that is, we so regard it by a law of our being, just as we regard a rose as naturally beautiful."²

We should guard ourselves against the error of supposing that benevolence is, with New School theologians, a word of narrow significance. It is a word of a very high generic meaning. By these writers it is simply the apex in a vast hierarchy of generalizations concerning virtue. It has a great variety of attributes. President Finney enumerates no less than thirty-seven. But we will not pause longer upon this part of the subject.

durch seine Tauglichkeit zu Erreichung irgend eines vorgesetzten Zweckes, sondern allein durch das Wollen, d. i. an sich, gut, und für sich selbst betrachtet, ohne Vergleich weit höher zu schätzen, als Alles, was durch ihn zu Gunsten irgend einer Neigung, ja wenn man will, der Summe aller Neigungen, um immer zu stande gebracht werden könnte. Wenn gleich durch eine besondere Ungunst des Schicksals, oder durch kärgliche Ausstattung einer stiefmütterlichen Natur, es diesem Willen gänzlich an Vermögen fehlte, seine Absicht durchzusetzen; wenn bei seiner grössten Bestrebung dennoch nichts von ihm ausgerichtet würde, und nur der gute Wille (freilich nicht etwa ein blosser Wunsch, sondern als die Aufbietung aller Mittel, so weit sie in unserer Gewalt sind) übrig bliebe; so würde er wie ein Juwel doch für sich selbst glänzen, als Etwas, das seinen vollen Werth in sich selbst hat." — Immanuel Kant's Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten und Kritik Der Praktischen Vernunft. Herausgegeben von Karl Rosenkranz (Leipzig, 1838), Vol. viii. p. 12. For similar statements, see Emmons's Works, pp. 189-199. Finney, Systematic Theology, pp. 97, 98, 933, 950, 951, 953, etc. Fairchild, Moral Philosophy p. 29.

¹ See Systematic Theology, pp. 97 and 110.

² See Systematic Theology, pp. 950, 951; see also, p. 97, etc.

VIII. *The Simplicity of Moral Action.*

The key to much misapprehension of President Finney's theology is to be found in the divergent views which are held concerning the unity of the will's action. Finney, in company with Dr. Emmons, conceived of the will as necessarily altogether holy or altogether sinful in each moment of activity. In the nature of the case, the will, if it put forth moral activity at all, cannot be indifferent in character. Like a railroad train, if it have motion, the motion must be either forwards or backwards. The velocity and momentum may be of varying degrees, but the motion must be in one direction or the other. Likewise, at each instant of activity, the momentum of the will in sinful action is in proportion to the degree of light resisted. If the will is bad at all, so far as present guilt is concerned, it is as bad as it can be; it may be worse the next instant. But if God is not chosen with all the heart, it is for a reason that is wholly sinful.

Dr. Emmons has treated this subject at length and with great cogency of logic.¹ According to him the heart "consists in nothing but moral exercises."

"We never approve or disapprove of anything in ourselves or others but free voluntary exercises; and God requires and forbids nothing but free and voluntary exercises, in his word. All that the divine law requires summarily consists in pure benevolence; and all it summarily forbids consists in pure selfishness. Benevolence is a free, voluntary exercise, and selfishness is a free, voluntary exercise; and every human heart consists in a train of free, voluntary, benevolent exercises, or in a train of free, voluntary, selfish exercises, or in a train of both benevolent and selfish exercises. A sinner's heart consists in a train of mere selfish affections; but a saint's heart consists in a train of both benevolent and selfish exercises. The best of saints are imperfectly holy in this life; and their imperfection in holiness consists in their sometimes having holy and sometimes unholy affections. Their holy and unholy affections are always distinct, and never blended together. Their holy exercises are never partly holy and partly unholy, but perfectly holy; and their unholy exercises are never partly holy, but perfectly unholy."²

¹ See Sermons, xxvi, lxxvi, and lxxvii. The first on Pa. lxxxvi. 11, entitled Prayer of Saints for Constant Holiness. The last two on Rom. vii. 18, concerning the Character of Good Men.

² Emmons's Works, Vol. iv. p. 357.

"If the hearts of saints consist altogether in moral and voluntary exercises, then they never have any more holiness than they have holy exercises. Many suppose that good men are much better than their good exercises, for when their exercises are not good, still they have a good principle, or good heart abiding in them, which is indeed the essence of all goodness. . . . Some have supposed that Christians may live days and months, and even years, in a dull, stupid, lifeless state, their principle of grace continuing, but not in proper, sensible exercises. This is both a groundless and dangerous doctrine."¹ "The breast of every Christian is a field of battle, where sometimes benevolence and sometimes selfishness gains the victory."²

Speaking of the character of good men Emmons remarks³ that

"There are but three different suppositions to be made concerning the imperfection of saints. The first is that all their moral exercises are perfectly holy, but too low and languid. The second is that all their moral exercises are partly holy and partly sinful. The third is that some of their moral exercises are perfectly holy, and some are perfectly sinful."⁴

To the first this reply is given :

"The sacred writers clearly distinguish between holy and unholy affections, but never intimate that one holy affection is more perfect than another. They represent all true love to God as *supreme*. . . . The truth is, whenever any person really loves God he loves him for what he is in himself, and consequently he loves him supremely; which is loving him as much as it is possible to love him, with his present attention to, and knowledge of, the divine character. . . . One saint may love God more than another, because one saint may have more knowledge of God than another. And so the same saint may love God more at one time than at another; . . . or, which is the same thing, he may attend to more of the divine perfections, and to more displays of those perfections at one time than at another. This is the only difference between the love of saints and the love of angels in heaven."⁵

The supposition that the imperfection of saints arises "from their moral affections being partly holy and partly sinful," is rebutted by the assertion that "it is absolutely absurd to suppose that any voluntary exercise should be partly holy and partly sinful."

"This is no more conceivable than that a volition to walk should be partly a desire to move and partly a desire to stand still." "Can the

¹ Emmons's Works, Vol. iv. pp. 366, 367.

² *Ibid.*, p. 368.

³ See Works, Vol. iii. p. 293 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

affection of love be partly love and partly hatred to God? Can the exercise of repentance be partly love and partly hatred to sin? Can the exercise of faith be partly love and partly hatred to Christ? Can the grace of submission be partly resignation and partly opposition to the will of God?"¹

The doctrine is then stated and defended that the imperfection of good men "arises from their having some sinful as well as some holy affections." In reply to the objection that such an alternation from sinfulness to holiness is not recognized by consciousness, and that therefore it is to be presumed that the good and bad exercises of imperfect saints are united and blended together, Dr. Emmons remarks:

"It has been observed in this discourse that sin and holiness are diametrically opposite affections, and cannot be united in one and the same volition. And it has been farther observed that the Scripture represents them as totally distinct exercises of heart. These considerations afford a much stronger proof that all holy affections are distinct from all unholy ones than the mere want of consciousness of this distinction affords to the contrary. We all know that our thoughts are extremely rapid in their succession. We cannot ascertain how many thoughts we have in one hour, nor even in one minute. And our affections, or volitions, may be as rapid in their succession as our thoughts; yea, it is very evident that they are too rapid for observation."²

Farther on we find Dr. Emmons saying, that saints

"Would be entirely sinless if they would only *continue* to exercise just such holy affections as they sometimes do exercise."³ "They never stand still, but always go either forward or backward in their religious course."⁴ "Their gracious exercises are not necessarily and inseparably connected with each other; and, of consequence, they may at any time be interrupted by totally sinful affections. They have no permanent source or fountain of holiness within themselves, from which a constant stream of holy affections will naturally and necessarily flow. As one holy affection will not produce another, so they are immediately dependent upon God for every holy affection. . . . Their sanctification, therefore, is precisely the same as continued regeneration."⁵

President Finney has entered at considerable length into the discussion of this so-called "impartiality" of obedience to the moral law.⁶ He maintains that the will cannot, "at

¹ Works, Vol. iii. p. 296.

² Ibid., p. 300.

³ Ibid., p. 305.

⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

⁶ See Systematic Theology, pp. 135-155.

the same time, choose opposite and conflicting ultimate ends"; and that the will cannot "honestly intend or choose an ultimate end, and yet not choose it with all the strength or intensity which is required." Five contrary suppositions are considered and disposed of; namely, 1st, "that selfishness and benevolence can co-exist in the same mind"; 2d, "that the same act or choice may have a complex character, on account of complexity in the motives which induce it"; 3d, "that an act or choice may be right or holy in kind, but deficient in intensity or degree"; 4th, "that the will or heart may be right, while the affections or emotions are wrong"; 5th, "that there may be a ruling, latent, actually-existing, holy preference or intention co-existing with opposing volitions."¹ All these suppositions are maintained to be logically incompatible with the correct view of the action of the mind in willing, and to be contrary to the Scripture; and moral character is said to be "*always wholly right or wholly wrong, and never partly right and partly wrong at the same time.*"²

To the objection that upon this view there could be no growth in grace, President Finney replies: "Growth in grace consists in two things, 1st, in stability or permanency of holy ultimate intention; 2d, in intensity or strength. As knowledge increases, Christians will naturally grow in grace in both these respects."³

The similarity between the views of President Finney upon this point and those of Dr. Emmons is so striking that farther elaboration will not be necessary.

IX. *Sanctification.*

It is absolutely essential to keep in view this position regarding the action of the mind in willing, when we consider what is supposed to be President Finney's widest departure from the ordinary orthodox statement of Calvinistic theology in New England, namely, regarding the doctrine of sanctification. With Mr. Finney, sanctification is really

¹ See *Systematic Theology*, p. 141.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

confirmation or *stability* of will — a state to be secured by the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ to the soul. The practical effect of his discussion, when understood, is to enhance one's sense of the enormity of present sin, rather than to beget a presumptuous confidence of future security, and least of all is it calculated to encourage boasting in the flesh. The two hundred pages¹ which President Finney has devoted to the offices of Christ in securing our sanctification will always remain a classic of devotional literature, and wherever known will be best appreciated by the most devout in the Christian church. To overcome the world and become confirmed in holiness, we need to know Christ in such relations as the following: King, Mediator, Paraclete, Redeemer, Justification, Judge, Repairer of the Breach, Propitiation for our sins, the Surety of a better covenant. We need to apprehend him as dying for our sins, as risen for our justification, as bearing our griefs, as the One by whose stripes we are healed, as being made sin for us, as our Prophet and Priest, as the Bread of Life, as the Water of Life, as the true God and Eternal Life, as the Husband of the soul, as the Shepherd, the Door, the true Light, the Lamb of God; and so on, to sixty-one heads. We give a single specimen of the poetic fervor with which these points are developed. It is concerning Christ as "the Truth."

"But I am aware that none but the Holy Spirit can possess the mind of the import of this assertion of Christ. It is full of mystery and darkness, and is a mere figure of speech to one unenlightened by the Holy Spirit in respect to its true spiritual import. The Holy Spirit does not reveal all the relations of Christ to the soul at once. Hence there are many to whom Christ has been revealed in some of his relations, while others are yet veiled from the view. Each distinct name and office and relation needs to be made the subject of a special and personal revelation to the soul, to meet its necessities and to confirm it in obedience under all circumstances. When Christ is revealed and apprehended as the essential, eternal, immutable truth, and the soul has embraced him as such, as he of whom all that is popularly called truth is only the reflection, as he of whom all truth in doctrine, whether of philosophy in any of its

¹ Systematic Theology, pp. 568-766.

branches or revelation in any of its departments, — I say, when the mind apprehends him as that essential truth of which all that men call truth is only the reflection, it finds a rock, a resting-place, a foundation, a stability, a reality, a power in truth of which before it had no conception. If this is unintelligible to you, I cannot help it. The Holy Spirit can explain and make you see it; I cannot. Christ is not truth in the sense of mere doctrine, nor in the sense of a teacher of true doctrine, but as the substance or essence of truth. He is that of which all truth in doctrine treats. True doctrine treats of him, but is not identical with him. Truth in doctrine is only the sign or declaration or representation of truth in essence — of living, absolute, self-existent truth in the Godhead. Truth in doctrine, or true doctrine, is a medium through which substantial or essential truth is revealed. But the doctrine or medium is no more identical with truth than light is identical with the objects which it reveals. Truth in doctrine is called light, and is to essential truth what light is to the objects which radiate or reflect it. Light coming from objects is at once the condition of their revelation and the medium through which they are revealed. So true doctrine is the condition and the means of knowing Christ, the essential truth. All truth in doctrine is only a reflection of Christ, or is a radiation upon the intelligence from Christ. When we learn this spiritually we shall learn to distinguish between doctrine and him whose radiance it is — to worship Christ as the essential truth, and not the doctrine that reveals him — to worship God, instead of the Bible. We shall then find our way through the shadow to the substance. Many, no doubt, mistake, and fall down and worship the doctrine, the preacher, the Bible, the shadow, and do not look for the ineffably glorious substance of which this bright and sparkling truth is only the sweet and mild reflection or radiation.”¹

The introduction to the lecture from which this extract is taken² enforces the following points: that in conversion “the heart or will consecrates itself and the whole being to God”; “that this is a state of disinterested benevolence”; “that all sin consists in the will’s seeking the indulgence or gratification of self” — “in the will’s yielding obedience to the propensities, instead of obeying God as his law is revealed in the reason”; “that the department of our sensibility that is related to objects of time and sense has received an enormous development, and is tremblingly alive to all its correlated objects; while, by reason of the blindness of the

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 661.

² Lecture lxiii. Systematic Theology, pp. 635. 636

mind to spiritual objects, it is scarcely developed at all in its relations to them." The soul

"Needs such discoveries of the eternal world, of the nature and guilt of sin, and of Christ the remedy of the soul, as to kill or greatly mortify lust or the appetites and passions in their relations to objects of time and sense, and thoroughly to develop the sensibility in its relations to sin and to God and to the whole circle of spiritual realities. This will greatly abate the frequency and power of temptation to self-gratification, and break up the voluntary slavery of the will. The developments of the sensibility need to be thoroughly corrected. This can only be done by the revelation to the inward man, by the Holy Spirit, of those great and solemn and overpowering realities of the 'spirit-land' that lie concealed from the eye of flesh."

It will be readily seen that with the theory of the will elaborated by Mr. Finney the question concerning sanctification resolves itself into this: Have we promise of such a development of the religious sensibilities in this life that the will shall be confirmed in holiness? There are no sources but the Bible and experience from which light can fall upon this question. All evangelical Christians agree in the belief that after death saints will be forever free from sin. Calvinists hold that through the care of God those who are once regenerated will be found at death in a state of obedience. Now, whatever may be one's theory of the will, he may hold that this permanency in holiness which is to characterize the heavenly state may be secured by divine grace before that state is reached. The doctrine must be determined by the interpretation of the Bible. As shown by President Fairchild,¹ there is a failure in much of President Finney's reasoning upon the subject, arising from the fact that a large part of the Scripture which he adduces as an argument for encouraging a hope of attaining a permanent state of holy exercises in this life, is really nothing but an argument bearing upon the duty and ability of complete present consecration. If there should be such a development of our religious sensibility as to assure future permanence in holiness, we should have no means of knowing the fact,

¹ See *Congregational Quarterly* for April 1876, pp. 256-259.

except by a special divine revelation ; for the future lies beyond the reach of consciousness. And if we had such a revelation it would not have authority outside of our own hearts ; for we should have no way of making the revelation authentic to others, except by the conformity of our future life to the present profession of assurance. The prophet would, as of old, have to be tried by the test of the fulfilment of his prophecy. Others could not make it a basis of confidence beforehand. Moreover, if it should turn out according to our professed prophetic assurance, the fulfilment would be impossible of proof, since virtue is of the heart, and not altogether of the outward life. The state of the heart is not always distinct in the consciousness, much less is the memory infallible in its record. Besides, to profess an assurance of future perfection in obedience puts the soul under such a temptation to hypocrisy in making the testimony conform with the hope, that it is doubtful if any one could endure the strain, and so the expectation would be likely to defeat itself. Mr. Finney was careful, on his own part, not to express presumptuous confidence either regarding the past or future. The concluding paragraph of his chapters upon the subject of sanctification is worthy of special note :

“ I must not fail to state what I regard as the present duty of Christians. It is to hold their will in a state of consecration to God, and to lay hold on the promises for the blessing promised in such passages as 1 Thess. v. 23, 24, ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly,’ etc. This is present duty. Let them wait on the Lord in faith for that cleansing of the whole being which they need to confirm, strengthen, settle them. All they can do, and all that God requires them to do, is to obey him from moment to moment, and to lay hold of him for the blessing of which we have been speaking, and to be assured that God will bring forth the answer in the best time and in the best manner. If you believe, the anointing that abideth will surely be secured in due time.”¹

Although it is difficult to see the advantage of concerning oneself very much about such a hope as this, yet on the other hand there is an immense advantage in retaining clear conceptions of the completeness of that present consecration,

¹ Systematic Theology, p. 765.

which is necessary for acceptance with God. The importance of emphasising this point, is well presented by Professor Morgan,¹ who has developed this portion of doctrinal theology, though not so elaborately, yet more to our satisfaction than President Finney. In the extract we give from him the reader may notice how certain doctrinal objections to the theory of the "simplicity" of the will's action are obviated; for example, the difficulty of adjusting it to the doctrine of the perseverance of saints.

"The Bible knows nothing of a 'perfect heart' which retires in its perfection somewhere into the recesses of the inward being and goes to sleep, while the members of the body are employed in adultery or murder, and the thoughts are full of pride. Nor does the Bible make the ways of God so unequal that *every sin* in one man who has never experienced the grace of God, shall incur the danger of eternal damnation, and that *no sin*, not even *murder*, in another whose sins are aggravated by the rupture of all the endearing ties of intimate filial communion and glorious discoveries, never made to his sinning brother, shall incur the danger of no severer penalty than God's fatherly displeasure and the withdrawal of the light of his countenance. . . . It is sometimes argued that the sins of persons who have been converted, do not bring them into a state of condemnation or forfeit their justification, because the discipline of the Lord is to bring them to repentance. But the true question which determines the relation of the sins of such persons to the divine wrath is, what would they incur if the perpetrators were to persist in them — or were their probation at once closed? The fact that they are brought to repentance by divine chastisements and are then forgiven, no more proves that their sins did not expose them to damnation, than the same fact proves that the unconverted who will yet be saved, have not hanging over their guilty heads the poised thunderbolts of divine indignation."²

X. Conclusion.

Since the object of this paper is mainly that of comparison, and as the space is also limited, we have for the most part avoided both a defensive and a controversial attitude, and have omitted reference to the elaborate proofs by which the author sustains his positions, — proofs drawn for the most part from the Bible. We are compelled also to leave un-

¹ See "The Holiness Acceptable to God," by Prof. John Morgan, D.D. (Oberlin, 1875), pp. 119.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

touched the author's treatment of the doctrines of atonement and of future punishment. Regarding the former of these fundamental doctrines, he defended what is called the governmental theory. Touching the latter, he was an outspoken advocate of the endless duration of future punishment.

For the reasons mentioned we have confined our comparison to those points in regard to which our author was least understood, and to those regarding which he is most in danger of being misunderstood. The life of President Finney was one of such untiring activity in the promotion of religious revivals, and he was put under such restraint by the hyper-Calvinism of his time, that the mass of his contemporaries failed to see the man in his true perspective. There was, moreover, less of originality in his views than some of his admirers are accustomed to suppose, and than some of his opponents would be glad to believe. As a theologian, he was in the main, eminently conservative. There is the least possible display of erudition in his published works. Indeed, he was far from being an omnivorous reader; yet it is evident that he was familiar with the standard authors in both philosophy and theology. While he did not feel himself competent to enter upon an independent criticism of the Scriptures in their original languages,¹ he had what was still more important, a very complete and well-balanced knowledge of them in their broader outlines of thought, which are sufficiently plain in the English translation. If he lacked some of the advantages to be derived from a microscopical examination of the original Scriptures, he was saved from that petty bondage to details, which, with so many, confuses the perspective of biblical theology.

Mr. Finney elaborated his theology about 1840, with an enthusiastic and able class of students gathered under peculiar circumstances in the back-woods of Ohio. So to speak, they together sunk an artesian well at Oberlin, and found an abundant supply of refreshing water. Analysis, however, shows that this water filtered into its subterranean channels

¹ See Memoirs, p. 5.

from New England. It would be out of our province to ask here concerning its ultimate origin. The "Western Reserve," was a "New Connecticut." Theological ideas are transported by a thousand different methods. President Finney himself was born in Connecticut. In a region where preaching is the pre-eminent influence, the language of common life becomes impregnated with its philosophical conceptions, and its forms of expression are transported with the other household furniture. The impressions of childhood are much more permanent than the memory of them. In 1827, while laboring in Utica with Rev. S. C. Aiken, Mr. Finney got hold of Edwards on Revivals, and other volumes of the same author, and read them almost constantly, and "spoke of them with rapture."¹ The first theological classes at Oberlin were largely of New England descent, and had been under New England teachers at Lane Seminary. The doctrine of the simplicity of moral action, — which as we have seen was elaborated by Emmons — was incorporated into the Oberlin theological system through the advocacy of William and Samuel D. Cochran.² If the historical relation of President Finney's theology had been more clearly apprehended and set forth by him, his views would have been regarded with much less prejudice than they encountered at the time. He probably underrated the importance of the historical method. But in their present form there is a freshness and individuality about his writings which add greatly to their value as a stimulant to thought upon the profoundest of philosophical themes. No student of philosophy or theology can afford to remain ignorant of what he has written. Indeed, it will not be surprising if the future shows, that President Finney's greatest service to the world, was that which he was most reluctant to enter upon, viz. the production of a systematic treatise on biblical theology, — a treatise in which the truths of rationalism and mysticism are equally present, and their errors avoided; and in which logic and Christian experience are equally yoked together.

¹ See Autobiography of Lyman Beecher, Vol. ii. p. 91.

² See Congregational Quarterly for April 1874 p. 947