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## ARTICLE IV.

THE WRITINGS OF RICHARD BAXTER.<sup>1</sup>

By George P. Fisher, Resident Licentiate, Andover.

It is a remark of Mr. Hume, that John Locke was the first person who ventured openly to assert that Christian Theology is a reasonable science.<sup>2</sup> But the wary sceptic would not deny that the principle had often been tacitly assumed by the defenders of religion. Whether it had been announced before, in so formal and explicit propositions, we need not now inquire. Nor would one be competent to decide the question without a wider acquaintance with the literature of theology than Mr. Hume possessed. It is an interesting fact, however, that while Locke, a youthful scholar, was revolving the themes of those *Essays*, which have made his name forever dear to the lovers of knowledge and freedom, and soon after Chillingworth had built up his impregnable defence of the right and necessity of private judgment, against the Romish dogma of an infallible church, the Puritan divine, whose works we now review, wrote these words: "Is not faith a rational act of a rational creature? and so the understanding proceeds discursively in its production. And is not that the strongest faith, which hath the strongest reasons to prove the testimony to be valid, on which it resteth, and the clearest apprehension and use of those reasons? And the truest faith, which hath the truest reasons, truly apprehended and used?"<sup>3</sup> "The probability of most things, and the possibility of all things contained in the Scriptures, may well be discerned by reason itself, which makes their existence or futurity the more easy to be believed. Yet before the existence or futurity of anything beyond the reach of reason can be soundly believed, the testimony must be shown to be truly divine."<sup>4</sup>

These are pregnant sentences. Who, among the recent writers, has more clearly described the relation of reason to faith? Who will now have the boldness to accuse Baxter of a sinister desire to degrade revelation, by exalting reason? He felt that he could best honor the Bible, by insisting on its agreement with an enlightened

<sup>1</sup> The present Article is designed as the complement of an Article in the *Bib. Sacra* (Vol. IX. p. 135) on "The Theology of Baxter."

<sup>2</sup> Hume's Works, Vol. II. p. 434. See Locke's *Essays*, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> Works, XXII. p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 267.

intellect. And he realized the peril incurred by those who would place the Bible in antagonism to the fundamental laws of our belief. He saw that the infidel could wish for nothing better than the short-sighted concession, that the truth of Christianity cannot be established by evidence. His doctrine, which may now be familiar, had then a novel sound. The asperity with which it was assailed is indicated by the severity of his replies.<sup>1</sup>

Yet no one of his opponents received with a more hearty deference the testimony of God. He declares that he would not exchange four chapters of John's Gospel for all the books in the world. Who sought with greater industry to learn the mind of the Spirit? or studied with keener delight the pages of Inspiration? He did not overlook the moral causes which pervert the intellectual faculties. Hence he frequently points to pride and prejudice, as the causes of error, and in an able treatise exposes the "Arrogancy of Reason against Divinity." He enforces the duty of approaching the subjects of religion with an humble disposition. Such earnest and just declamation against the vices which blind the mental vision, as we find in his writings, has been an important, though unhappily not always the sole ground for the charge of infidel writers, that Christians have sought to impose their doctrine on the minds of men, without furnishing proof of its truth, and have disparaged the very faculties to which a religious system must appeal for credence. The import of these passages of Baxter, and of similar passages in kindred writers, is little different from what is expressed by Lord Bacon, when he demands a "true and genuine humiliation of the human mind," as a prerequisite for successful study. Their meaning is compressed in the aphorism of Coleridge: "there is a small chance of truth at the goal, where there

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<sup>1</sup> In a note to the "Saint's Rest," after developing his doctrine with remarkable precision, Baxter says to his opponents: "Doth not your doctrine teach men, in laying aside reason, to lay aside humanity and to become brutes? If faith and reason be so contrary as some men talk; yea, and reason so useless, then you may believe best in your sleep, and idiots, infants and madmen are the fittest to make Christians of." "By this much, judge of the ignorance and vanity of those men, who, when they read any that write of the reasonableness of the Christian religion, do presently accuse it or suspect it of Socinianism?" Works, XXII. p. 261. On the subject of Immortality, he alludes to "a sort of overwise and overdoing divines" who censured him for "appealing too much to natural light and overvaluing human reason." "They speak," he says, "against reason, even in the greatest matter which our reason is given us for. As much as I am addicted to scribbling, I can quietly dismiss this sort of men, and love their zeal, without the labor of opening their ignorance." Works, XXI. p. 415.

is not a childlike humility at the starting-point." We only claim that Baxter excels most of the writers of the Calvinistic school, in unfolding the rational sources of our belief, and in guarding his positions against the fatal inferences of the sceptic and the enthusiast. It is of course not implied that a writer whom the historians of English philosophy have deemed hardly worthy of a mention, is to be compared with the author of the *Essays on the Understanding*. Yet his striking hints, as well as sound reflections upon the mind, evince philosophical powers of no common order. While he cherished a piety not less devout than that of St. Bernard, he yet boldly affirms: "*Philosophia sacra est pars vera theologiae, religionis et pietatis.*"<sup>1</sup> In him, the inquisitive Abelard would have found a kindred spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Baxter's perception of the imperfection of language, as an instrument for conveying thought, evinces his discernment.

"My mind being thus many years immerst in studies of this nature, and having also long wearied myself in searching what Fathers and Schoolmen have said of such things before us, and my Genius abhorring confusion and equivocals, I came by many years longer study to perceive, that most of the doctrinal controversies among Protestants (that I say not in the Christian world) are far more about equivocal words than matter; and it wounded my soul to perceive what work both tyrannical and unskilful, disputing clergie-men had made these thirteen hundred years in the world." "Proud opinionators have striven partly about unrevealed or unnecessary things, but chiefly about mere ambiguous words and arbitrary human notions; and multitudes condemn and revile each other, while they mean the same things and do not know it." "And so taking verbal differences for material doth keep up most of the wretched academical and theological wars in the world."<sup>3</sup>

Impelled by his strong feeling, he exclaims: "What shadows of knowledge deceive the world, and in what useless dreams the greatest part of men, yea learned men, do spend their days: much of that which some men unweariedly study and take to be the honor of their understandings and their lives; and much of that which multitudes place their piety and hopes of salvation in, being a mere game of

<sup>1</sup> Meth. P. IV. c. 9. p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> Baxter attributes much of the obloquy which was heaped on him, to his zeal for study. "And so our hard studies and darling truth must make us owls, or reproached persons, among those reverend brethren, who are ignorant at easier rates, and who find it a far softer kind of life to think and say as the most or best esteemed do, than to purchase reproach and obloquy so dearly." Works, XVIII. p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to Cath. Theol. See also Works, XV. p. 50. XVIII. pp. 322, 258.

words and useless notions, and as truly to be called vanity and vexation, as is the rest of the vain show that most men walk in."<sup>1</sup>

Let not the reader regard these as expressions of scepticism. On the contrary, Baxter accords with Bacon, and with Descartes, whose attention to the illusions of language has been pronounced to be one of the chief merits of his philosophy.<sup>2</sup> So far from involving a sceptical feeling, such sentiments of Baxter grew out of his intense thirst for knowledge. He sought for truth, as for a hidden pearl of great price. "I have read," he says, "almost all the physics and metaphysics that I could hear of. I have wasted much of my time among loads of historians, chronologers and antiquaries; I despise none of their learning. All truth is useful."<sup>3</sup> Theology, in his view, is the comprehensive science to which all knowledge is subservient. Hence theology is to be first and always taught. Physics is a barren science, except as it brings to view the Author of nature. Metaphysics is the humble handmaid of divinity. Every form of knowledge is to take its proper place and complete the symmetry of that solid and graceful edifice, whose pinnacles point to the skies. He did not fear investigation or shrink from submitting any opinion or system to a rigorous test. No dread of the dangers of speculation deterred him from exercising his intellect upon the high themes of religion. The uneasy suspicion that a favorite doctrine has a weak foundation, instead of inducing the timorous feeling which repels inquiry, leads him to examine with a more searching scrutiny the grounds of his belief. His zeal for improvement was tempered by a healthful reverence for the past. His unwearied study of their writings proved his respect for the great scholars and theologians of the church. But it was with no servile spirit that he engaged in these studies. He lived too soon after the Reformation to give up his private judgment; and when he had formed an opinion, he was sufficiently versed in the writings of Schoolmen and Fathers not to be much disturbed by an array of names. He complains that Protestants, while they have abjured the Pope, have too often retained the evils of the Papacy, by setting the authority of a few leaders above the authority of their own minds. He complains bitterly that "when a man hath read once the opinion of the divines that are in most credit, he dare search no further, for fear of being counted a novelist or heretic, or lest he bear their curse for adding to, or taking from, the common conceits! So that divinity is become an easier study than heretofore. We are already at a ne

<sup>1</sup> Works, XVIII. p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart's Diss. on Eth. Phil. p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Works, XV. p. 16.

*plus ultra.* It seemeth vain, when we know the opinion [which] is in credit, to search any further."<sup>1</sup>

With an ardor which no misfortunes could dampen, he pored over the obscure pages of monks, perused the writings of every school, and compared them with the teachings of his own clear understanding. Those were winged hours, when he was wandering through the mazy tomes of Aquinas, or bending, till the eye grew dim, over the dark folios of Bradwardine. His beloved library is often in his thoughts, and it is one of his sad reflections at the close of life: "I must depart from the manly pleasures of my studies." "I must leave my library and turn over these pleasant books no more."<sup>2</sup>

We may here observe that the acuteness of Baxter did not wholly save him from the errors of his age. He thought that he himself had been more than once delivered from perils by miraculous interpositions. In the reality of ghosts and witchcraft, he was a devout believer. One of his last works was an attempt to prove the certainty of a world of spirits by "Unquestionable Histories of Apparitions." His sufficient apology is found in the simple fact that the laws of evidence were not then so clearly understood, as at present. Frauds could not be so easily detected. And the progress of medical science has explained, on natural principles, many phenomena, which were then inscrutable. At that time, incredulity on the subject of witchcraft was regarded as a sign of infidelity. Even Sir Matthew Hale, the ornament of learning and the pillar of justice, condemned two innocent females for this imaginary crime, and in his pious meditations mentions the transaction with complacency. Many theories were in vogue two centuries ago which the mental science of later times has dissipated. The metaphysics of original sin, by which a man is made really participant, and so literally guilty, of an action that was performed five thousand years before his birth, sound strangely to the students of Reid and Dwight. Seizing upon the

<sup>1</sup> Works, XXIII. p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> The libraries of the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century were such as a modern preacher might covet. In his record of marvellous deliverances, Baxter introduces us to his study by the narration of an amusing incident, which might have proved a tragedy. "As I sat in my study, the weight of my greatest folio books brake down three or four of the highest shelves, when I sat close under them, and they fell down on every side of me, and not one of them hit me, save one upon the arm; whereas the place, the weight and greatness of the books was such, and my head just under them, that it was a wonder they had not beaten out my brains, one of the shelves right over my head, having the six volumes of Dr. Walton's Oriental Bible, and all Austin's Works, and the Bibliotheca Patrum, and Marlorate, etc." "Reliquiae Baxterianae." P. I. p. 82.

great fact that the sin of Adam involved the certainty of the fall and condemnation of his posterity—a fact which has always been embraced by the feeling and faith of the church—Baxter adopted a common theory of explanation, that was elaborated in the darker ages, that prevailed until the philosophy of common sense was applied to the interpretation of the Bible, and still lingers to remind us of the crude speculations of a former day.<sup>1</sup> But in all his practical writings, the substantial elements of moral agency are strongly upheld. And although he preached his favorite theories about original sin, until the clamorous objectors were “as mute as fishes,” he was careful to make prominent the easy remedy which he found in the baptismal pardon and sanctification of infants.

The independence of Baxter as an inquirer, makes it important to determine his place in theology. By casual circumstances, the theological position of a man is often greatly modified. If a one-sided tendency is predominant, when he appears upon the stage, the force of reaction may drive him to an opposite extreme. And even when his own doctrine is well balanced, the vigor and constancy with which he contends against the perversion of truth in a particular direction, may give a partisan tone to his works. Hence subsequent times, and even his contemporaries, may conclude that he holds a partial view. Martin Luther, for example, while stoutly defending justification by faith, gives occasion for thoughtless or artful readers to infer that he forgot the necessity of a virtuous life. The mistake, to which we allude, is specially liable to occur, with respect to the subject of man's moral freedom, as it is related to the Divine government. According to their view of this subject, theologians have always been classified. The old problem of liberty and necessity is one which the theological student must confront at the threshold of his inquiries. Though he evade it once, its grim form reappears a hundred times. In the field of theological science, this question may be likened to the vertical stratum which goes down into the earth, only to pass under the surface and come up again after a short interval. If not in theory, yet practically, the theologian must solve the problem. There is danger that his solution may be one which loosens the tie of dependence on God, or that it may be such as weakens the feeling of moral obligation. Between these evil extremes, whole communities will sometimes vibrate. And hence many a man has been styled a Pelagian, for his strenuous and persistivè opposition to fatalism; and many a

<sup>1</sup> See *Bib. Sacra*, Vol. IX. p. 144.

man has been pronounced a fatalist, in consequence of his zealous antagonism to a doctrine of lawless freedom. He must be deemed fortunate, therefore, who appears at a time, when the speculative and practical aspects of both these extreme theories are conspicuously held up to his view. And this is the case of Baxter. He had hardly commenced his career of authorship, when there appeared a writer, of whom it has been lately said, by one most competent to judge, that "among English — among modern philosophers, he towers, a shrewd and intrepid, an original and independent thinker."<sup>1</sup> In a style so pithy and luminous as to enchain the attention, without wearying the mind, Hobbes set himself to prove the inevitable necessity of our moral choices, and to deduce with unshrinking boldness the logical consequences of his doctrine. It is vain to deny that he gets support for his leading proposition from the theologians to whom he sometimes appeals.<sup>2</sup> It is true that in his own time there were teachers of Christianity, who held a doctrine, which is really not less repugnant to religion and at war with the moral sentiments of mankind. But the consciousness of freedom to choose aright, which no sophistry can eradicate, revolted, as it always will revolt, against the theory of necessity. It was natural that in the ardor of a revolt, men should be led to deny truths of vital importance, which they hastily judged to be contrary to the known fact of moral freedom. No wonder that men were found fighting for the liberties of "indifference" and "self-determination," when they were menaced by the chains of a compulsory decree. We are not surprised to hear them assert a chimerical liberty, inconsistent with the prescience and providence of God; or even deny the preordained certainty of moral events. In his youth, Baxter eagerly entered upon the study of the intricate questions in dispute between the Arminians and Calvinists. "My genius," he says, "was inquisitive and earnestly desirous to know the truth."<sup>3</sup>

The result of his studies, which he omits no occasion to avow, was

<sup>1</sup> Sir Wm. Hamilton. Ed. of Reid, p. 890, note.

<sup>2</sup> See Hobbes's Works, Vol. V, pp. 1, 2. The only mention of Baxter which we have found in the writings of this sturdy philosopher, is in a posthumous tract, entitled "Considerations upon the reputation of T. Hobbes." He speaks of himself in the third person, and says to his clerical opponents: "It is no argument of contempt to spend upon him so many angry lines as would have furnished you with a dozen of sermons. If you had in good earnest despised him, you would have let him alone, as he does Dr. Ward, *Mr. Baxter*, Pike and others that have reviled him as you do." Hobbes's Works, Vol. IV. p. 435. Doubtless Hobbes was feared and hated, more than he was contemned.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to *Cath. Theol.*



the fixed conviction that the difference between the moderate Arminians and reasonable Calvinists was merely verbal. His sympathies were also divided. On the one hand, he approved the inflexible, God-fearing piety of the Genevan School, and the doctrines on which it was founded. On the other hand, he applauded the earnest pleas for freedom and responsibility which were put forth by the brethren of Episcopius. He could not therefore join in the indiscriminate censure of either school, but aimed to detect the ambiguity of terms and to propound statements of truth, so exact and complete as to gain the assent of the candid of all parties. He looked for a more generic formula, which should combine the fractions of truth and unfold apparently conflicting dogmas.

It is, therefore, difficult to affix to Baxter the badge of a school. Is he not one on whom such a badge would be an ungraceful ornament? Distinct as are his views of Church polity and of doctrine, yet no sect can claim him. He approached near to Presbyterianism, but he was not a Presbyterian, or an Episcopalian or an Independent. Notwithstanding that he professes to accord substantially with the Synod of Dort, he can hardly be styled a Calvinist. The only appellation, other than that of Christian, which they who insist on giving names, can attach to him, is that of Baxterian. He speaks with respect of the creeds of the church; but had he been less familiar with the history of councils and with "clergie-men's contentions," he would probably have bowed with more deference before the symbols of faith. He bestows a just encomium on the Westminster Assembly of Divines; but he did not hesitate to dissent, as well from some words of their Catechism as from some parts of their government.<sup>1</sup> Highly as he honored them, he would by no means have recognized them, or the Parliament for whom they acted, as the infallible expounders of the Christian religion to succeeding ages. He retained his place in the confidence of the nonconformist party as one of their best and ablest men. He rose to be their revered leader. Still, his independent course exposed him to much suspicion and reproach. When he is accused of departing from the received

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<sup>1</sup> See "Reliquiae Baxterianae," L. I. p. 73. Baxter wrote a preface to the Assembly's Works. It contained the following words, which the editor, Dr. Manton, took the liberty to leave out, and which Baxter publishes that he may not be misunderstood. "I hoped the Assembly intended not all in that long Confession and in those Catechisms, to be imposed as a test of Christian communion; nor to disown all that scrupled any word in it. If they had, I could not have commended it for any such use, though it be useful for the instruction of families," etc. *Reliq. Baxt. L. I.* p. 122.

opinions, his reply is often marked by what one of his friends has called "a useful acrimony in his words." It is worthy of remark, that in his treatise on self-denial, he inserted a chapter on the duty of denying ourselves the reputation of orthodoxy; "for it commonly falls out," he says, "that the thing itself and the reputation of it are inconsistent." The opposition which he met with, is owing in part to his peculiar opinions. It is in part to be ascribed to his bewildering distinctions. But it was chiefly caused by his well-meant, though fruitless efforts, to strip theology of its technical garb, and to present its truths in a new dress. Probably his main views of religious doctrine nearly resemble those which have been more consistently taught by the calm and sagacious Andrew Fuller.

The liberality of Baxter does not spring from the foolish idea that opinions are unimportant. It grows out of his deep sense of the difficulties of theology, and the supreme importance which he attaches to religious affections.<sup>1</sup> Conscious of his own faults, he is not forward to condemn those whose speculative faith is different from his own. He is ready to recognize anywhere the image of his Master. Hence he zealously opposes the enlargement of the ancient creeds. A creed, in his view, is "not a snare to catch heretics," but "a test for Christian communion." He would only require a subscription to a few cardinal truths, expressed in scriptural language.<sup>2</sup> He longed for a visible unity of pious souls, and persisted, by his writings and example, in the attempt to secure a catholic communion among Christians. His doctrine on this subject seems to be as broad as that which has been so emphatically declared by Robert Hall. In this cause, he submitted to sneers and reproaches and more cruel persecutions. There was too much truth in his bitter acknowledgment, after his ineffectual efforts to unite the two principal parties in fraternal communion: "I have turned both parties which I endeavored to part in the fray against myself." To quote his own forcible words,

<sup>1</sup> Works, XXIII. pp. 127. 140.

<sup>2</sup> "Two things have set the church on fire and been the plagues of it above one thousand years: 1. Enlarging our creed, and making more fundamentals than ever God made. 2. Composing, and so imposing our creeds and confessions in our own words and phrases. When men have learned more manners and humility than to accuse God's language as too general and obscure, as if they could mend it, and have more dread of God, and compassion on themselves, than to make those to be fundamentals and certainties which God never made so;" "then, and I think not till then, shall the church have peace about doctrinals." Works, XXII, p. 237. Baxter, however, would require of ministers a pledge not to preach against the more important doctrines of the church. And he would not dispense with creeds, as expressions of the common belief.

"he made a wedge of his bare hand, by putting it into the cleft, and both sides closing upon it to his pain."

The acrimony of Baxter's controversial style may appear to be at variance with a kindly spirit toward those who held opinions diverse from his own. But his temper was naturally irritable and his physical system was tortured with cruel diseases. He often wrote hastily, while smarting from the blow of a hostile hand. He was often assaulted by troops of dunces and wily bigots. In his apology for his "provoking writings," he quaintly remarks: "I have a strong natural inclination to speak of every subject, just as it is, and to call a spade a spade, and *verba rebus apiare*; so that the thing spoken of may be fullest known by the words; which methinks is part of our speaking truly."<sup>1</sup> With all its blemishes, his controversial style is far above that of Milton, whose gross and fierce abuse of his opponents is in singular contrast with the tone of modern disputes, where biting severity is gracefully couched under more polite phrases. Critics have censured the harshness of Baxter in his disputes with Owen. Undoubtedly he was fond of breaking a lance with the great Independent. Their controversies, which began with the first printed work of Baxter, lasted until the death of Owen. Even after this event, there appeared, in reply to the posthumous work of the latter, the "Reasons why Dr. John Owen's twelve Arguments change not Richard Baxter's Judgment." As their habits of mind are different, so is their style. If Baxter is irritated, we expect from him a downright rebuke of his opponent. Owen conceals his feeling under a placid face, while a bitter stream of satire flows through his involved sentences. Baxter tries to hew down his antagonist, Owen prefers to use the stiletto. To a casual reader, the tracts of Owen appear to be the more decorous. They abound in expressions of profound humility. But it is a self-abasement before God and not before men. He is too apt to ascribe the opinions of his opposers to the depravity of their hearts. His feeling of compassion for his antagonists is a little too prominent to consist with genuine respect. He couples expressions of love with insinuations of fatal heresy. When we hear him deplore the "fleshly minds and dark understanding" of such men as Hugo Grotius, we cannot but suspect that, in his lamentations over the vanity of human reason, he unconsciously excepts the reason of himself and his special friends. We would not, if we could, detract from the solid fame of Owen. But let Baxter have justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Orme's Baxter, p. 784.

If his plain dealing was sometimes indiscreet, let not his blunt words cause him to be depreciated in the comparison with his more learned and adroit, but not more able or charitable opponent. If he could not himself boast of discretion, he commonly inspired his adversaries with this "better part of valor," and they were loth to renew their attacks upon so dauntless and tireless a polemic.

It is to be regretted that Baxter, with his large charity, did not fully grasp the idea of religious toleration. He relied on the civil magistrate to suppress the most dangerous opinions. We look in vain through his writings for the noble spirit of freedom that glows in the *Areopagitica* of Milton. We miss the ringing note of that

— "voice whose sound was like the sea."

Indeed, the political course of Baxter is disfigured by mistakes. Skilful casuists are not the best persons to manage revolutions. Instead of fixing their eye upon the great questions at issue, and acting with prompt vigor, they waste time in arguing upon inferior points. Meanwhile they forget the demands of the hour, or cling with useless tenacity to some impracticable project. At the beginning of the contest against the king, Baxter espoused the side of the Parliament. To his credit be it said, that he never repented of the step. Believing that England was not made for the private benefit of the house of Stuart, and perceiving that this family were of a different mind, he felt the duty of resisting their dangerous usurpations. But quickly alarmed at the excesses which he might have foreseen would infallibly attend a revolutionary movement, he gave to the popular cause a reserved and inconstant support. When the interests of liberty called for a decisive blow, his cautious mind would interpose difficulties or suggest ill-timed plans of conciliation. He had inserted in the *Saint's Rest* the names of Brook, Hampden and Pym among those whom he rejoiced in the prospect of meeting in heaven. Hoping to conciliate the enemies of the Puritans, in the later editions of the work, he omitted these names; an act which won no favor and exposed him to hurtful misapprehension. He had entered the lists against Hobbes and Harrington, and at the same time vindicated the popular cause, in his work entitled "the Holy Commonwealth." Tired of the virulent attacks which were made on this treatise, in 1670 he formally recalled it, but reaffirmed many of its obnoxious principles! From his own narrative, it is clear that Cromwell understood him much better than he understood Cromwell. The Protector had the good sense to tolerate his well-meant rebukes.

While Cromwell, as Baxter frankly owns, "prudently, piously, faithfully, to his immortal honor, did exercise the government," he failed to gain the cordial support of the Presbyterian party. Baxter lived to see the dark day when two thousand excellent ministers were ejected from their pulpits by the edict of a dissolute court. He probably lived to regret the cold and distrustful manner with which he had regarded "the greatest Prince that has ever ruled England."<sup>1</sup> But his theories of government did not improve with his experience. We even find him complaining of the democratic tendencies of Hooker. His name must be added to the long list of clergymen, who have signally failed to comprehend the true province and best maxims of political society.

Having ascertained the position of Baxter, we may next advert to the practical character of his theological system. This is seen in its leading inquiry, which relates to the causes and the remedy of sin. The alienation of man from God first engaged his attention. Around this fact as a centre, the doctrines of his theology cluster.

In the first place, he endeavored to reconcile the existence of sin with the character of God. He discards all the solutions of the problem which imply that God prefers sin to holiness; since he was convinced that the logical results of such an hypothesis are fatal to religion. He assumes that free agency is possible in a creature and that man can determine the moral character of his actions. The question is then immediately suggested: Why does the Creator, who foresees that man will sin, cause or permit his existence? To this question Baxter replies that the beauty and perfection of the universe are promoted by the existence of moral beings, who are liable to abuse their powers; that if the Deity should prevent sin by destroying the powers of the agent, He would mar and injure the order of His works. It is fairly implied in the statements of Baxter that the objects of comparison and choice in the mind of the Creator, are the occurrence of sin, against His commands and influences, by the efficient agency of men, and the existence of moral agents in the system which was foreseen to be most fruitful of beneficent results. And he points to a special reason for the Divine permission of sin, which is found in the fact that God is able, in a great degree, to thwart its tendencies and render it the occasion of good. The omniscience of the Deity precludes the occurrence of an unforeseen event. Although Baxter did not penetrate the subject of moral causation so as to convey his ideas in the terms

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<sup>1</sup> Macaulay's History of England, Vol. I. p. 145.

of exact science, he yet believed that, in some way, sin may be the certain, while it is not the necessary consequence of God's agency. The Deity is the first cause of the certainty of all actual events. He thus upheld the truth of man's dependence on his Creator.<sup>1</sup>

In the second place, Baxter endeavored to reconcile the doctrines of universal atonement and personal election. Having fastened the responsibility for the existence of sin upon man alone, and shown the justice of his condemnation, he welcomes the way of deliverance through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. This work, in his view, is a provision, that is sufficient for the salvation of the human race. But a cordial acceptance of it is prescribed to every man, as a condition of his pardon and eternal life. On account of their moral perversity, men refuse to accept the condition. They resist the merciful influences of Heaven, which are bestowed on every offender. Accordingly God, by a special interposition, in consistency with their moral freedom, influences a certain number to repent and believe, and prepares them for Heaven. These, and these alone, are not selected to be recipients of peculiar blessings without wise reasons, the most of which, however, are to us unknown. Those whom He actually regenerates, He purposed in the beginning to regenerate; and hence they are called the elect.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hume thus states the old questions of Epicurus, which, he observes, "are yet unanswered."

"Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" Dial. on Nat. Rel. (Vol. II. p. 409.)

The questions of course have respect to the exclusion of evil from the system which actually exists, and not from an imaginary system. To the argument, three replies can be made. 1. The reply of those who take a sceptical position, with regard to the whole subject. It is thus stated by Hume: "Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive, except we assert that these subjects exceed all human capacity and that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them." The inconvenience of this position is, that it leaves unanswered those grave objections to the doctrine of the Divine attributes, which are derived from the existence of evil; objections which meet us at the outset of theological inquiry. If God be omnipotent, how can we prove his benevolence? 2. The reply of those who assert that God is able but not willing to prevent evil. But can the Divine benevolence be maintained in consistency with this hypothesis, without calling evil good? 3. The reply of those who affirm that the exclusion of evil by God from the best system is, *in the nature of things*, impossible; or, in other words, that the existence of the best possible system, and the efficient prevention of all evil by the act of God, are incompatible. Benevolence chooses the best system; omnipotence cannot do what, in the nature of things, is impossible to be done. To this last view the reasoning of Baxter obviously tends.

In the third place, Baxter aimed to reconcile the doctrines of personal election and the strict accountableness of unconverted men. The personal election and actual pardon of a limited number do not, according to his view, hinder the salvation of any. The invitations of the Gospel are general. The conditions of pardon are liberal. The persuasives to repentance are numerous and cogent. The goodness of God to sinners, as evinced in His works, in the arrangements of Providence, and yet more brightly in the revelation of His truth, is the theme on which Baxter is never wearied. His sense of God's love to ungrateful men pervades his practical writings and blends with his holiest meditations. In the midst of the dry waste of scholastic discussion, it gushes forth in a melodious stream to refresh the reader and to allure him onward. Baxter did not believe that the religious truth, which God expresses in manifold ways, falls powerless on the soul. He did not think that sin has eradicated conscience. Their powers of feeling are not so far palsied as to render men utterly insensible to the claims of God and the beauty of holiness. There are certain constitutional faculties of the mind, which God addresses by His truth and His Spirit, and which respond and prompt all men to do right. But we come to the question whether, in view of all this truth and with the feelings which it must excite, men can choose the path of duty. Can it be truly said of all, that God has placed salvation within the reach of their power? Baxter easily saw that most of the theological disputes in which he was engaged, finally merge themselves, for decision, in this question. He did not hesitate to render an affirmative answer. If men do what is in their power, their salvation is sure. He announces and reiterates this doctrine with thankfulness and evident satisfaction. He accepts it as a proof of the sincerity of God in the offer of forgiveness. He founds on it his glowing appeals to impenitent sinners, which in pathos and all the characteristics of pious eloquence, are unsurpassed by any similar compositions in the English language. On this truth he rests the accountability of those who refuse the invitations of the Gospel. They will not come unto Christ that they may have life. The doctrine of the voluntary wickedness of men, because it gives the certainty that they will not repent, leads to the need of those special influences of the Divine Spirit which cause the conversion of all who are elected to be saved. We are to conceive of the elective purpose of God, as formed in view of the voluntary rejection by all men of an ample provision for their salvation. It is the act of an impartial sovereign who dispenses his gifts in a way to subvert the best inter-

ests of his kingdom; who disposes all events according to His good pleasure.

In view of his discriminating statements of theological doctrine, we are at first surprised to discern the mystical vein that runs through the practical writings of Baxter. If a mystic be one who regards the feelings as direct sources of knowledge, then Baxter was not of this class, since he expressly disowns the theory.<sup>1</sup> But his fondness for calm contemplation, in which the soul may enjoy a silent and indescribable communion with God, and gain more vivid ideas of his excellence, and new assurances of his love, imparts a hue of mysticism to his devotion. He speaks with rapture of that state, where the creature, absorbed in disinterested love of the Infinite Creator, renounces and forgets himself; when, with every faculty exerted in contemplating the perfect goodness and glory of God, the soul bathes in an ocean of bliss. "God will be praised and honored," he says, "when I am dead and gone. Were I to be annihilated, this would console me now, if I lived and died in perfect love"—a sentence, conceived in the same spirit that animates the pages of Fenelon. It is significant of his mental habit that, prominent among the sceptical feelings, with which he was at times harassed, was the vague apprehension that his soul at death might lose its distinct personality, and be merged in a world-spirit. We easily see why Baxter, in his later years, found in himself some points of affinity with the Quakers, whom he had strongly opposed, and whose excesses he always discarded. We see also why he cultivated a personal intimacy with Henry More.

But Baxter was many-sided, and could quickly rouse himself from his meditative mood. This is aptly shown by the polemic pamphlet which he wrote against one Giles Firmin, who had reviewed "The Saint's Rest," in what Baxter calls "a gentle reproof for tying men too strictly to meditation." He belongs to that peculiar class of men who combine with a strong logical faculty, a fervid imagination; whose love of contemplation gives to their piety a savor of mysticism. Of this class, Jonathan Edwards may be named as an example. He is styled by Mackintosh a Calvinist and a mystic. The comprehensive greatness of his mind is shown by the fact that he could be the author both of the *Essay on the Freedom of the Will* and of the *treatise on Religious Affections*. In this class may be reckoned Pascal, who with natural powers of mind superior to those of Baxter,

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<sup>1</sup> Works, XXII. p. 179.



was fettered by the dogmas of his church, while his mental attainments were hindered by a morbid asceticism. Hence the mystical piety of Pascal grew out of his profound sense of the difficulties of religion and his refusal to yield to the despair of scepticism. It was an appeal from the doubtful voice of the intellect to the irrepressible feelings of the heart; a retreat from the demons of unbelief to a sanctuary of humble devotion. Thus a melancholy tinge pervades the *Essays* of this, in many respects, incomparable writer, which is quite in contrast with the cheerful temper of Baxter. The Puritan too was obliged to strive with terrible doubts; but with godly sincerity and humbleness of spirit, he brought them manfully before the bar of his intellect, and heard them patiently, until he saw the falsity of their pleas. Then he dismissed them with a peaceful mind. The eye of Pascal often rests mournfully upon the ruins of human nature. He seems to meditate alone, in the stillness of night, when a yet more sombre shade is cast over the shattered and prostrate columns which sadly suggest the splendor of the original structure. Baxter often dwells upon a pleasant future. He delights to meditate at the dawn, when the songs of the lark float through the air, and the morning-star shines in the east with a silvery light, the harbinger of the rising day. With that "calm consideration which doth as it were open the door between the head and the heart," he fastens his thoughts on Heaven, until he is transported at the glory and living reality of that unseen world. He soars "above the Aonian mount," and in the holy presence of the Invisible, purifies and gladdens his soul. Even the wild-flowers that bloom around him distil a fragrance, grateful to the Father, who clothes them with beauty. Like the inspired Prince of Israel, to him the heavens are articulate, and all the works of Nature echo the praises of God.

"When the sun in the spring draws near our part of the earth, how do all things congratulate its approach! The earth looks green, and casteth off her mourning habit: the trees shoot forth; the plants revive; the pretty birds, how sweetly do they sing! the face of all things smiles upon us, and all the creatures below rejoice. Beloved friends, if we would but try this life with God, and would but keep these hearts above, what a spring of joy would be within us; and all our graces be fresh and green! How would the face of our souls be changed; and all that is within us rejoice! How should we forget our winter sorrows; and withdraw our souls from our sad retirements! How early should we rise (as those birds in the spring) to sing the praise of our great Creator! O Christian, get above: believe it, that region is warmer than this below."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saint's Rest. Works, XXIII. p. 226. It will be observed that our quota-

“When thou walkest forth in the evening, look upon the stars, how they glisten, and in what number they bespangle the firmament. If in the day-time, look up to the glorious sun; view the wide expanded, encompassing heavens, and say to thyself, What glory is in the least of yonder stars; what a vast, what a bright, resplendent body hath yonder moon, and every planet! O, what an inconceivable glory hath the sun! Why, all this is nothing to the glory of heaven. Yonder sun must there be laid aside as useless, for it would not be seen for the brightness of God. I shall live above all yonder glory; yonder is but darkness to the lustre of my Father’s house. I shall be as glorious as that sun myself; yonder is but the wall of the palace-yard; as the poet saith,

‘If in heaven’s outward courts, such beauty be,  
What is the glory which the saints do see!’

So think of the rest of the creatures. This whole earth is but my Father’s footstool: this thunder is nothing to his dreadful voice: these winds are nothing to the breath of his mouth. So much wisdom and power as appeareth in all these; so much and far more greatness and goodness and loving delights, shall I enjoy in the actual fruition of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Baxter is one of the few writers who have said much of heaven without offending a sanctified taste. His heaven is one of intellectual activity, of social converse, of devout worship. He stands apart from the descanters on the invisible world, whom John Foster forcibly describes, “who make you think of a popish cathedral, and from the vulgarity of whose illuminations, you are excessively glad to escape into the solemn twilight of faith.” With him earthly objects are only the symbols of the heavenly. The heaven, which Baxter conceives, has none of the common-place arrangements and low associations which degrade the Arcana of Swedenborg to the rank of a dull fable. His visions are spiritual, and the curtain of mystery that hangs over them is never quite withdrawn. He does not lose the reverence that becomes a mortal who speaks of the mansions where immortals dwell. Although we may apply to him, in a nobler sense, the words which describe the enthusiastic Herschell—“*coelorum perrupit claustra*”—yet we cannot say that he is rash or presumptuous. For long periods, he was daily expecting his own departure from the earth. He stood on the brink of eternity, and tried to sound its unfathomable depths. In a vast temple, reared by human art, where many generations have trod, one who long gazes through the dim vistas and far upward to the spreading arches, is sensible of his own littleness,

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tions from the Saint’s Rest, are from the *unabridged* edition, and not from the edition of Mr. Fawcett.

<sup>1</sup> Saint’s Rest. Works, XXIII. p. 384.

while a feeling of awe steals over him. So when this thoughtful man is at the portal of another world, on which his eye is steadily fixed, the present moment is seen to be but a single link in an endless chain, and the things of time dwindle to insignificance. Yet he does not tremble with fear.

“O then, my soul, fear not to enter that estate, where thou shalt ever after cease thy fear. Sit down, and sadly, once a day, bethink thyself of this eternity: among all the arithmetical numbers, study the value of this infinite cipher, which though it stand for nothing, in the vulgar account, doth yet contain all our millions, as much less than a simple unit. Lay by the perplexed and contradicting chronological tables, and fix thine eye on this eternity; and the lines which remote thou couldst not follow, thou shalt see all together here concentrated. Study less those tedious volumes of history, which contain but the silent narration of dreams, and are but the pictures of the actions of shadows; and, instead of all, study thoroughly this one word ‘eternity,’ and when thou hast learned thoroughly that one word, thou wilt never look on books again. What! live, and never die? Rejoice, and ever rejoice! O, what sweet words are these, ‘never and ever’!”<sup>1</sup>

It is in passages where his pious emotions are poured out in unstudied words, that the poetical talent of Baxter is best disclosed. His metrical compositions — his volume of *Poems and Paraphrase of the Psalms* — though they have won the praise of Mr. Montgomery, are in a clumsy style of versification, which renders them of little worth to modern readers. Like Bunyan, he wrote his best poetry in prose. Unlike the wonderful *Pilgrim*, the free play of his imagination is hindered by the weight of his cumbrous learning. But it is pleasant to know that this demure Puritan loved to compose hymns, though in homely rhymes, and to while away the sleepless hours of night with gladsome songs.

The expectation of heaven has a varied influence upon different minds. Some there are whose ruling desire is to escape in safety from this life and to enter a haven of rest. If they do not flee to the desert or hide their disgust at the world within the walls of a cloister; if they do not even cherish a cynical aversion for the scenes of the present state of existence, they yet insulate themselves from the interests of our busy planet not less completely than did St. Simeon on the top of his pillar. Dwelling in communion with a few kindred souls, they submissively await their translation to a better home. There are others who mingle valiantly in the great contest

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<sup>1</sup> *Saint's Rest. Works, XXII. p. 170.*

of which the object is to break down the empire of Satan. Exulting in the virtuous strife of this mortal life, they are barely consoled on leaving the world by the promise of a celestial abode. Both these types of piety, exemplified in all the Christian ages, are shown to be imperfect when they are compared with the temper of Paul, who was "in a strait betwixt two." His aspiration to be with the Saviour was balanced by his desire to subserve the welfare of men. Deeming this life to be given for beneficent ends, he had no will to alter the divine appointments. This blending of a quenchless aspiration for a sinless and perfect state with an indomitable purpose to contend against the principalities and powers which beset the soul on her upward path, constitutes the transcendent worth of the Puritan character. Like Paul, Baxter made his hopes of heaven the spring of charitable exertions on earth. Heartily as he despised the fopperies of the world, he would have been the last man to become an anchorite. His piety, like his theology, was practical.

His broad conception of the Christian character is perhaps most fully presented in "The Saint's Rest." It is unfortunate that this remarkable work is chiefly known through a mutilated edition, which contains not a third of the original treatise, which divides sentences and shortens paragraphs, and is divested of the personal allusions, and the quaint phrases which give a charm to the work, as it came fresh from the hand of its author. It has thus in a great measure lost its dramatic interest. "An Abridgment of the Saint's Rest!" It has a harsh sound. True the work is often prolix and has many digressions, but they are the digressions of a versatile mind that is too full of thought to move on in a right line. The style may be likened to one of our expansive rivers that flows on in a sinuous course, with now a slow and now an impetuous current, and sending out broad branches to adorn the landscapes. The reader must expect to meet, here and there, a rugged steep or a dizzy height of speculation. But imbosomed in the hills there is many a shady nook where the humblest wayfarer may find welcome repose. The work is a portraiture of the author's character. It is stamped with the seriousness, the purity, the warm-hearted sympathy with men, which give impressiveness to his entire life. For the sake of doing good, he gladly gave up his desire of literary popularity. Once he thought, "that nothing should be made public but what a man had first laid out his most choice art upon." "But," he adds, "my conscience soon told me that there was too much of pride and selfishness in this." Accordingly he wrote as occasions seemed to require. The multiplicity of

his works is explained by the astonishing celerity of his mind. Lightfoot and Owen and Jeremy Taylor — each of them is a voluminous author; but Baxter has written more than they all. He humorously accounts for his prolixity “by the great distance between mens’s ears and their brains.” There was one item of truth in the vile address of Jeffries: “Richard! Richard! thou hast written books enough to load a cart.” Besides the injury to his permanent fame, there were grave evils incident to such a course. His opinions, put forth in a crude form, he was more than once compelled to explain or recall. His haste often entangled him in perplexing disputes. He sacrificed the peculiar influence which is derived from a consistent, life-long maintenance of a single system. On the other hand, his powers were drawn out by opposition. His boldness enabled him to strike a blow when a slower mind would have lost the opportunity. He won from men what more cautious writers often fail to gain, a confidence in his frankness and unswerving integrity. He demonstrated that he prized the truth above his own good name. Let those who would too severely censure Baxter, ponder these golden words: “It is too little remembered that repugnance to hypocrisy and impatience of long concealment, are the qualities of the best formed minds, and that if the publication of some doctrines proves often painful and mischievous, the habitual suppression of opinion is injurious to reason and very dangerous to sincerity.”<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the traditional formulas which may be recited and then forgotten, the religious opinions of Baxter were grasped with a lively faith. Because they had been wrought out by his own inquiries and spiritual struggles, they were living principles. Whatever imperfections in his dogmatic faith the criticism of this later time may detect, there was somewhat in it that gave him a strange power over the human heart. Well might he bear with patience the sneers of critics, while he was every week receiving letters from persons, who gratefully attributed their religious conversion to a perusal of his books. They who were alarmed at the tendency of his speculations, were compelled to acknowledge a charm in that “Call to the Unconverted,” which has reached the ears of thousands through most of the languages of Europe, and in the translation of John Elliot, as Cotton Mather relates, melted to tears an Indian prince, in the remote forests of New England. Singular was the success which attended his sermons. All his views of religion he could frankly and hopefully avow. He spoke “as a dying man to dying men.” De-

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<sup>1</sup> Sir James Mackintosh. *Eth. Phil.* p. 135.

lighting to preach the Gospel, although his polemic zeal kept him in close contest with many opponents, he never lost sight of what he regarded as the noblest of avocations. His life shows the need of qualifying the sweeping remark of Hallam on the degrading and contracting influence of religious controversy.<sup>1</sup> It proves that the effect of controversy on the disputants, materially depends on the motives which impel them to engage in debate.

Baxter's ideal of the minister, is portrayed in "The Reformed Pastor," a work which, like the "Saint's Rest," has suffered much from the scissors of editors. A description of the sacred office, so full, so graphic, and at the same time so redolent of a divine unction, cannot elsewhere be found. Other works may exhibit with more exactness the rhetorical qualities of the preacher's style; but none so well insist upon the moral traits, more essential to the true success of pulpit oratory. Some have written more ably on the dignity of the pastoral office, but none have so vividly unfolded its varied duties and opportunities. There are many passages in this work which aptly illustrate the directness and point of Baxter's style. He never loiters. He writes with an importunate earnestness which fixes the attention, if it does not force conviction.

"How few ministers do preach with all their might; or speak about everlasting joy or torment in such a manner as may make men believe that they are in good sadness. It would make a man's heart ache to see a company of dead and drowsy sinners sit under a minister, and not have a word that is likely to quicken or awaken them." "Most ministers will not so much as put out their voice, and stir up themselves to an earnest utterance. But if they do speak loud and earnestly, how few do answer it with earnestness of matter; and then the voice doth little good; the people will take it but as mere bawling, when the matter doth not correspond."<sup>2</sup>

The following passage upon ministerial pride, illustrates his heart-searching power.

"O what a companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly and subtle and insinuating enemy is this sin of pride!" "Fewer ministers would ruffle it out in the fashion in hair and habit, if it were not for the command of this tyrannical vice. And I would that were all, or the worst; but, alas, how frequently doth it go with us to our studies, and there sit with us and do our work! How oft doth it choose our subject, and more often choose our words and ornaments. God biddeth us be as plain as we can, for the informing of the ignorant, and as convincing and serious as we are able, for

<sup>1</sup> Hallam's Middle Ages, Ch. IX. p. 453.    <sup>2</sup> Works, XIV. p. 182. (unabridged Ed.)

the melting and changing of unchanged hearts; but pride standeth by and contradicteth all." "It persuadeth us to paint the window, that it may dim the light; and to speak to our people that which they cannot understand, to acquaint them that we are able to speak unprofitably. It taketh off the edge, and dulls the life of all our teachings, under the pretence of filing off the roughness, unevenness and superfluity. If we have a plain and cutting passage, it throws it away as too rustical and ungrateful." "And when pride hath made the sermon, it goes with them into the pulpit; it formeth their tone, it animateth them in the delivery; it takes them off from that which may be displeasing, how necessary soever, and setteth them in a pursuit of vain applause." "When they should ask 'what should I say and how should I say it, to please God best, and do most good,' it makes them ask, 'what shall I say and how shall I deliver it, to be thought a learned, able preacher, and to be applauded by all that hear me.' When the sermon is done, pride goeth home with them, and maketh them more eager to know whether they were applauded, than whether they did prevail for the saving change of souls! They could find it in their hearts, but for shame, to ask folks how they liked them, and to draw out their commendation. If they perceive that they are highly thought of, they rejoice, as having attained their end; but if they perceive that they are esteemed but weak or common men, they are displeased, as having missed the prize of the day."<sup>1</sup>

If "The Reformed Pastor" sharply chides the faults of the clergy, we may listen to the author's own apology: "If the ministers of England had sinned only in Latin, I would have made shift to have admonished them in Latin, or else have said nothing to them. But if they will sin in English, they must hear of it in English."<sup>2</sup>

The Reformed Pastor is valuable as a transcript of Baxter's pastoral life. None can read the account of his residence at Kidderminster, without being amazed at his Herculean labors. There was no limit to his beneficence. Besides his onerous pastoral duties, and his public duties apart from his parish, during six years he gratuitously practised medicine among his people. During this time, he was sending from the press a larger number of pages than many ministers read. The considerable pecuniary profits afforded by the immense popularity of his books, he distributed among the poor. These unremitting efforts were not made by a man in robust health, but by one who was so variously afflicted, that he gained a respectable knowledge of Therapeutics by an inductive study of his own diseases. We must go far, even back to the days of the apostles, to find the parallel of this self-denying philanthropy. The striking reformation in the character and manners of his hearers was the reward

<sup>1</sup> Works, XIV. pp. 154, 155.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. iv.

of his faithfulness. Who will wonder at his ardent friendship for his flock? Among his people at Kidderminster, he was most happy. But when he was driven away from his weeping disciples, he still preached wherever he could gather a congregation. And when the arm of civil tyranny debarred him from publicly teaching the truth, so strong was his love of souls that he addressed a few hearers, whom he could secretly gather in his own household. "He continued to preach so long," says Dr. Bates in his funeral sermon, "that the last time, he almost died in the pulpit. It would have been his joy to have been transfigured in the mount." Indeed, whenever he entered the pulpit, he appeared to have come from the converse of Moses and Elias and Jesus, to bring glad messages to the sinful, sorrowful children of men. His pallid face beamed with a radiance not of earth. His emaciated form and lustrous eye lent a supernatural life to his pictures of the invisible world. When his voice was raised to commend the Christian faith to the unbelieving, it was hard to resist the impassioned fervor of his appeal. The few printed sermons of such an orator as Baxter, give but an inadequate idea of the effect of his spoken discourses. But they still retain much of their richness of illustration and vehement energy. They prove how earnest he was to exhibit the wide difference, in character and destiny, between irreligious and regenerate men. They present, in bold relief, the characteristics of a renewed heart. They show with what urgency he pressed upon the sinner's conscience the duty of repentance. They abound in vivid descriptions of the terrors of future retribution, reminding us of certain fearful passages on the pages of Edwards. But in Baxter the intense excitement of his mind is not concealed; while in Edwards, the representations, so distinct and elaborate, are yet more impressive in consequence of the repressed emotion and determined style of the preacher. The emphasis, disproportioned though it may have been, which the most successful religious teachers have given to the motive of fear, should rebuke the fastidious taste that shrinks from using the awful imagery of Inspiration. Allusions to Satan are frequent in these, as in most of the writings of Baxter. By the Puritan mind, the Spirit of evil was felt to be an insidious and a powerful enemy. He was believed to exist in manifold forms, from the debasing shapes which he assumed in the vulgar superstitions to the colossal and sublime Demon of Milton. Not more truly did men realize the presence of God, than they realized the presence of an ever active and dangerous fiend. And this feeling is obvious in the works of our author. Yet with all their terror, his sermons



breathe a tender spirit of compassion for every innocent infirmity of human nature. They have faults of structure and style which a tyro can now detect. But if they are to be judged by their fitness to renovate the character of men, then they have a higher excellence than the bold and terse productions of South, or the learned and ornate compositions of Jeremy Taylor. And we believe that no devout man will rise from the perusal of the discourses on the "Mischiefs of Self-Ignorance and Benefits of Self-Acquaintance,"<sup>1</sup> without the persuasion that they are such sermons as Paul would approve. Will he not rise with the conviction that a race of preachers has passed away, whose places have not been supplied? Free, in a good degree, from the pedantry and the conceits of style that were fashionable in their time, the better class of Puritan divines, of whom Baxter is a representative, are doubtless among the most effective preachers the world has seen. They were called to achieve the good work which "old father Latimer" had foretold, in the flames of Oxford. Stout and zealous reformers, they used a bow which few of their successors have been able to bend.

The best reflections of Baxter during his later years, are comprised in his *Autobiography* and in the "Dying Thoughts."<sup>2</sup> The *Autobiography*<sup>3</sup> is replete with interest. This rare old folio is a daguerreotype of the author's heart. Here we have Baxter to the life. Its every page is stamped with the mark of open-hearted truthfulness. All the foibles which other men would have covered even from their own close insight, are spread out to our view. The pranks of his boyhood, the rash judgments and hasty speeches of his youth, the blunders and sins of maturer life, are plainly exposed. He was determined to deal fairly with his fellow men. And the simplicity with which he tells the story of his life, is far enough from the affected humility that is too often visible in the diaries of eminent persons. His sincerity leads him to confess with "shame" that when a boy, he has "oft gone into other men's Orchards and stolen their Fruit," and "was extremely bewitched with a Love of Romances, Fables,

<sup>1</sup> Baxter's Works, Vol. XVI.

<sup>2</sup> "Mr. Baxter's Dying Thoughts upon Philippians 1: 23, Written for his own use in the latter times of his corporal pains and weakness. 1683."

<sup>3</sup> "Reliquiæ Baxterianæ: or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the most Memorable Passages in his Life and Times. Faithfully published from his own Original Manuscript, By Matthew Sylvester." London, 1696. A copy of this curious volume may be found in the library of Harvard College. It is the basis of Mr. Orme's excellent Biography of Baxter, which was published in 1830.

and old Tales." The same feeling dictates the acknowledgment that he was "too raw a writer" when he first "meddled with Owen;" and that once being about to preach before the king, he was ashamed of his want of Academic honors, when he was obliged to decline the offer of a tippet, which he wrongly judged to be "the proper insign of a Dr. of Divinity."<sup>1</sup> No other historical personage with whom we are acquainted, has furnished us with so ample means of judging himself. The confessions of authors are proverbially insincere. If, like Gibbon, they faithfully trace the steps of their intellectual progress, they are wont to conceal the deeper experiences of the heart. The Chesterfields and Walpoles who talk of themselves with apparent freedom, veil their profound hypocrisy under a frank and careless style. How few, even of good men, scrutinize their own motives; and of these, how few who are thoroughly honest with themselves, can bear to discover to the world the darker shades of their spiritual history! Imagination, too, colors past events with deceitful hues. How else shall we account for the air of romance that often invests the personal narratives of pious men? Of all these faults, incident to a biographer of himself, Baxter must be acquitted. And yet as we follow him through the shifting scenes of his eventful life, our respect for his talents and piety deepens into an affectionate reverence. Even his grave errors appear trivial, when we consider the magnanimity with which they are confessed. His lofty virtues are seen to overshadow his faults. Whatever may be the follies of his mind, and they were many in number, the reader is compelled to recognize an intellect of eminent powers.

We feel bound to enter a protest against the extraordinary liberty which has been taken with the writings of this great divine. While Baxter is regarded by the multitude as a man of saintly piety, his intellectual traits are poorly appreciated. And this is not the only injury which has resulted from the labors of well-meaning, yet merciless editors. In their eagerness to make useful books, they have in some instances invaded the sacred rights of an author. By altering sentences and culling paragraphs, they produce a book widely different in its impression from the original production, and then claim for it the sanction of an honored name. The work which is widely circulated under the title of the "Dying Thoughts," is not the work of Baxter; but may be correctly entitled: "A Third of Baxter's Dying Thoughts, in which much that relates to himself is omitted, sentences are inverted, and strong words and homely similes to a large extent

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<sup>1</sup> *Rel. Baxt.* P. II. p. 382.

dropped, the whole selected and arranged by Mr. Benjamin Fawcett." It may be said that the usefulness of the work is promoted by abridging it (which may be fairly doubted), and that the end justifies the means. We need not now attempt to determine the few cases where important changes in the writings of an eminent author can be justified. In the present instance, it is enough to reply that this work of Baxter has a great part of its value, as a historical picture of himself and his times. To mutilate it for the purpose of giving it greater interest, is to garble history. It is like changing the costume of an old portrait of Vandyke, to accommodate it to modern fashions. But who does not prefer to read any book as it was written? And who does not agree with Mr. Macaulay, that "in works which owe much of their interest to the character and situation of the writers, the case is infinitely stronger. What man of taste and feeling can endure harmonica, *rifacimentos*, abridgments, expurgated editions?" In his later editions of the life of Johnson, Mr. Croker, profiting perhaps by the suggestion of his unsparing critic, has presented the text of Boswell, in its unbroken integrity. And one would render a grateful service, who should publish an accurate edition of Baxter's select treatises.<sup>1</sup>

The "Dying Thoughts" were composed for the spiritual benefit of the author. He gave them to the printer, only to keep the manuscript from being lost.<sup>2</sup> It is instructive to compare this, which was one of the last, with the *Saint's Rest* which was one of the first of his works. His vigorous imagination had not grown weak with his declining years. His piety, if less enthusiastic, had become deeper and more humble. Avoiding the mooted topics of theology which are somewhat prominent in the earlier work, he directs his mind to themes which have the closest relation to death. He reviews the proofs of immortality, and having calmly surveyed the blessings of this sublunary state, he brings before him the hopes of the believer and the more alluring joys of heaven. Reminiscences of his own history are interwoven with candid criticisms of his writings and conduct. Their wisdom, mingled with the subdued pathos of their tone, will secure for these meditations an exalted and a lasting place in the literature of devotion.

<sup>1</sup> A valuable edition of several practical treatises of Baxter, including the "Dying Thoughts," was published in two volumes in 1831, under the editorial supervision of Dr. Leonard Bacon of New Haven. For a graphic sketch of the *Life and Times* of our author, the reader is referred to an Article in the *Ed. Rev.*, 1839, from the pen of Sir James Stephen; or to the brief, but interesting Biography which accompanies the edition of Dr. Bacon.

<sup>2</sup> See Preface to the "Dying Thoughts." Works, XVIII.

The misfortunes which clouded the last years of Baxter would have suspended the literary labors of a less heroic man. He found himself hated and calumniated by the rulers in church and state. "Even men that had been taken for sober and religious," he says, "when they had a mind for preferment and to be taken notice of at court and by the prelates, did fall on preaching or writing against me."<sup>1</sup> His long life, his multifarious writings, were studied by mercenary writers who sought material for slander. Many of his associates, and among them Sir Matthew Hale, who had consoled him by their friendship, were dead.<sup>2</sup> The survivor of a past generation, he stood exposed to the blast, like the lonely pine that has outlived the forest which once murmured around it. He had beheld the downfall and the restoration of a dynasty. From the stormy periods of revolution he had come forth with an unspotted character. His energetic will had not yielded to temptation. With an intrepid and pious spirit he had borne heavy reverses of fortune. He had seen the great party, of which he was a resolute leader, rise until it gained the supremacy; and he had followed its sinking fortunes when it was beaten down amidst the jeers and blows of its enemies. One after another of his clerical brethren died in Newgate; and in recording the event he calmly says: "The prison, where so many are, suffocath the spirits of aged ministers; but blessed be God, that gave them so long time to preach before, at cheaper rates."<sup>3</sup> He was now hunted by the police for the crime of teaching the Gospel, his property seized, his person imprisoned and then released, only to become the victim of new persecutions. Then occurred that scene, so disgraceful to English history, when the most venerable divine in the kingdom, burdened with years and bodily maladies, was brought to

<sup>1</sup> Orme's *Life of Baxter*, p. 713.

<sup>2</sup> Hale died in 1676. Baxter looked upon his intimacy with this blameless judge, as one of the most pleasant incidents of his life. "The conference," he says, "which I had frequently with him (mostly about the immortality of the soul, and other foundation-points, and philosophical) was so edifying, that his very questions and objections did help me to more light than other men's solutions." *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, P. III. p. 46.

So great was Hale's regard for Baxter, that the Chief Justice wept with grief on hearing of his arrest. "While caressed by Wilkins, Barrow, Tillotson and Stillingfleet, the great ornaments of the Establishment, Hale kept up, as long as he could, his intimacy with the venerable leader of the Nonconformists, and, if the law had permitted, would have delighted to reap the benefit of his ministrations." *Campbell's Chief Justices*, Vol. I. p. 569. While Baxter compliments the writings of Hale, it is amusing to hear him complain of the Judge's prolixity.

<sup>3</sup> Orme's *Life*, p. 354.

the court of King's Bench and abused by the Chief Justice in language unfit to be spoken to a common thief. The demeanor of Baxter on this trying occasion did not misbecome the man who, in his youth, had fearlessly joined in the resistance to royal tyranny; who had braved the Protector when his name was a terror, and had refused the mitre of Hereford at the hand of a king. To the vituperation of Jeffries, he replied with meek dignity: "I am not concerned to answer such stuff; but am ready to produce my writings for the confutation of all this; and my life and conversation are known to many in this nation." Twenty centuries before, a moral teacher who had reached the same advanced age, was arraigned on charges equally frivolous, before an Athenian tribunal; but the heathen judges listened to the defence of Socrates. When Baxter attempted, in a Christian age and in an English court, to plead his cause, he was roughly silenced.

During these years of tumult and persecution, Baxter's pen was by no means idle. While he continued to live, he could not cease to write. A harmless, if not very meritorious work, the "Paraphrase on the New Testament," was the cause of his arraignment on the charge of sedition. Several publications attest his unabated zeal for the doctrine of "Free Grace." But one of his most interesting productions during this period, is his treatise on Knowledge and Love.<sup>1</sup> He had found at last, as he supposed, the secret source of the contentions and divisions among Christians. They grow out of a proud understanding, or out of "falsely pretended knowledge." And his object, in the first Part of the treatise, is to show the uncertain grounds of many of the dogmas which are confidently held, as well as to indicate the true principles of knowledge. In the second Part, he endeavors to prove that the ultimate end of all intellectual attainments is to implant and cultivate holy love. In the midst of his earnest argument for the wisdom of piety, he is careful to affirm that no knowledge is contemptible.

"I would put no limits to a Christian's desires and endeavors to know, but that he desire only to know useful and revealed things. Every degree of knowledge tendeth to more: and every known truth befriendeth others; and, like fire, tendeth to the spreading of our knowledge to all neighbor

<sup>1</sup> "A Treatise on Knowledge and Love Compared," etc., etc. "By Richard Baxter, who by God's blessing on long and hard studies, hath learned to know that he knoweth but little, and to suspend his judgment of uncertainties, and to take great, necessary, certain, things, for the food of his faith and comforts, and the measure of his church communion." Works, XV.

truths that are intelligible. And the want of acquaintance with some one truth among an hundred, may hinder us from knowing rightly most of the rest; or may breed an hundred errors in us. As the absence of one wheel or particle in a watch, or the ignorance of it, may put all the rest into an useless disorder."<sup>1</sup>

It is delightful to witness the serene faith, so conspicuous in the last days of Baxter. He lived to see the bigoted James driven from the realm, and the Prince of Orange firmly seated on the throne. But he has left slight notices of this revolution. His mind appears to have been absorbed in the prospect of the heavenly world which he was soon to enter. Dark clouds had gathered over the dying day, but a light, beautiful to behold, streamed through them. Indeed, the cheerful composure of Baxter through all the vicissitudes of his troublous career, is a phenomenon which they who distrust the power of the religion of Christ, will find it hard to explain. There is an eloquence in the prophetic words which preface the "Dying Thoughts." It is an eloquence, founded only on the luminous lessons of Apostles, and of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life!

"A better and glorious world is before me, into which I hope by death to be translated, whither all these three sorts of love should wrap up the desires of my ascending soul; even the love of myself, that I may be fully happy; the love of the triumphant church, Christ, angels, and glorified men, and the glory of all the universe, which I shall see; and above all, the love of the most glorious God, infinite life and light and love, the ultimate, amiable object of man's love; in whom to be perfectly pleased and delighted, and to whom to be perfectly pleasing forever, is the chief and ultimate end of me, and of the highest, wisest, and best of creatures."<sup>2</sup>

We have considered the spirit and the opinions of Baxter. What, it may be asked, is the secret of his commanding influence? Why is he still honored in his usefulness, while a thousand more cautious, more correct, possibly more wise divines are forgotten forever? It is the power of an independent thinker whose soul is unawed by the frowns of men. The very style of his utterance, so fearless and animated, betokens the vigor of his mind. Such writers originate thoughts which are instinct with vital energy. It is the power of a persevering will that in the face of obloquy presses onward with unshaken resolution. A gifted mind, it has been well said, is able, simply "by a steady and rapid movement, to impart movement to others."<sup>3</sup> It is the power of an honest man who shrinks from deceit

<sup>1</sup> Works, XV. p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> Works, XVIII. p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Taylor. "Loyola and Jesuitism," p. 108.

and scorns a mean action. As he may err in judgment, so he may blunder in his conduct; but all men know that he never will be guilty of an unworthy artifice. It is the power of a holy life to disarm hostility and to embolden the timid and wavering and to attract the homage which men are constrained to pay to a virtue that is above their own. A man, like Baxter, lives on, and his influence will extend afar, in ever widening circles, when he has long slumbered in his grave. To such is justly awarded the meed of greatness. For surely none have a better title to the epithet great, than they whose character and words, through the Divine favor, have been potent instruments for the salvation of many souls. This we say, mindful of the severe standard of Milton: "He alone is worthy of the appellation, who either does great things, or teaches how they may be done, or describes them with a suitable majesty when they have been done: but those only are great things which tend to render life more happy, which increase the innocent enjoyments and comforts of existence, or which pave the way to a state of future bliss, more permanent and more pure."<sup>1</sup>

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## ARTICLE V.

### OBSERVATIONS ON MATTHEW 24: 29—31, AND THE PARALLEL PASSAGES IN MARK AND LUKE, WITH REMARKS ON THE DOUBLE SENSE OF SCRIPTURE.

By M. Stuart, lately Prof. of Sacred Literature at Andover.

THE *literal* meaning, it is said, must be given to our Saviour's words in this passage, because the metaphorical meaning usually assigned to them would be insignificant and degrading. Let us proceed to some inquiries necessary to a right understanding of the subject to which they appertain.

(1) V. 29 (of Matt. xxiv.) says, that "*the sun shall be darkened;*" the true meaning of which is, that it will be *eclipsed*; for plainly and certainly, the expression is borrowed from an eclipse. This indeed

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<sup>1</sup> Milton's Prose Works, Philad. edit. Vol. II. p. 495.