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THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

DR. NATHANIEL TAYLOR.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM W. WOODWORTH, D.D., BERLIN, CONN.

DR. TAYLOR AS A PREACHER.

THE first time I remember seeing Dr. Taylor was far back in my boyhood. I was then living with an uncle in Durham, working as a small boy could upon a farm. One Sabbath, as I dimly remember, a stranger of comely form, and of grand and musical voice, and of earnestness of manner unwonted in that place, occupied the pulpit. His text was short, and easy for even a small boy to carry away—only the three words of Pilate's question to Jesus, "What is truth?" Of course the sermon was far above the comprehension of a boy who had not yet entered his teens. But I remember hearing my uncle and others speak of it enthusiastically as "*deep*." I afterwards heard him preach this sermon, I think, more than once. It is printed in the volume on "Revealed Theology" which was published after his death by his sons-in-law, Drs. Porter and Buckingham. It gives a condensed and comprehensive outline of his views on the principal doctrines of the gospel, considered in their practical relations and bearings. Dr. Ray Palmer tells us,

that "a distinguished Scotch gentleman, who, in passing through New Haven, chanced to hear this sermon, characterized it, in a work which he published after his return, as the ablest sermon he heard in America."

It was in the year 1831 that I first heard Dr. Taylor with anything like an appreciation of his greatness and his power as a preacher; and even then I was too young and immature to begin to measure him. I was a lad of seventeen, an apprentice learning a trade in Bridgeport, with only such an education as a studious boy who loved his books could pick up by attending three or four months in a year the common schools of Connecticut. But I had just begun to take a personal interest in religion. It was a year more marked by revival power than any other year I have known; probably than any other year of this century. In such scenes Dr. Taylor was in his element. He had been a pastor ten years before he became a theological professor. His ministry had been one of very marked success in winning souls for Christ; and he was sought for, perhaps more than any other preacher in the state, to assist pastors, in various places, in the revivals of that marvellous year, and the years that preceded and followed it. I heard many preachers then, and they preached with great power; but none of them—except, perhaps, Joel Parker, then a young man preaching in the city of New York—impressed me as did Dr. Taylor. I remember some of the sermons with which he used then to sway great congregations, as the trees of the forest are swayed by God's mighty wind; or at least I remember their texts: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;" "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance;" "Whosoever putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of God." From that time till I left the seminary, ten years later, I had frequent opportunities of hearing him; and, as a rule, I availed myself of these opportunities. As I now look back to those early days, it seems to me that, all unconsciously, I modelled

my preaching after his more than after that of any of the other preachers whom I then heard; falling, of course, at an immense distance behind my model.

If I could bring before my readers this preacher as I saw him and heard him in the prime of his marvellous powers, they would see rising before them a man of medium size, of well-knit, symmetrical form, and unsurpassed manly beauty. His dark, lustrous, kindly eye; his intelligent, benignant face, showing in every line the marks not of benevolence only, but of fixed purpose and of definite aim; that "lofty dome of thought," surpassing in height and massiveness almost every other head which I have ever seen; that firm, erect position; that entire aspect of his which seems befitting the messenger of God to men,—all these are full of promise. He begins to speak. His voice has a strange deep melody, reminding one at times of an organ's richest notes. He has not many gestures; but they are forcible, and full of meaning. Occasionally they seem as if meant to drive a nail or a spike home to its place so securely that it can neither be removed or loosened. There it is, and there it must remain forever. In a few well-chosen words, definite and precise, our preacher states and explains his subject. We see that *this* is his theme, that he is going to preach of *this*, and nothing else. He has no use for shotguns, scattering his ammunition in every direction. He is aiming his rifle, or rather his columbiad, with fatal effect. He goes on with his argument, proving his proposition with remorseless logic. We see that, if we admit his premises, there is no escape from his conclusion. We must stop at the beginning or go with him to the end. Then comes the tremendous appeal to the conscience; the demand of God, presented in fitting terms and tones by God's messenger, for the submission and obedience of His creatures. None of the preachers of that time, except Rev. Charles G. Finney, surpassed or equalled Dr. Taylor in appeals to the conscience, and in earnest, imperative demands, that sinners should instantly forsake their sins, and turn to God. None of the preachers of *these* times, so far

as I know, approaches him in this excellence. These appeals to the conscience were reinforced by appeals to all the deeper sensibilities of the sinner, to his love of happiness and to his dread of the just terrors of an angry God. And then, as if God were beseeching men by him, he brings the whole force of his own compassion, and the tenderness of his sanctified nature, to bear on the sinners before him, to urge them to be reconciled to God.

The following sentences are from the close of his published sermons on "Election :—" " You will come to the judgment with the remorseful conviction, that God, with more than a Father's love, sought your salvation. You will remember that when he revealed his purpose to save some, by his grace, from going down to ruin by their own choice ; when he told you that he did all he wisely could to save you, that *you* never devoted one week, or day, or even hour of your probation to this great concern ; never made one honest effort to give your heart to him in love ; were never for one moment willing that the Son of God should save you, but met and requited all his love, and entreaties, and grace, his blood, his agonies, his death, his authority, his pity, his wrath—met them all with firm, unyielding desperate resistance. Oh, what must it be to stand at God's judgment-seat, with such upbraidings riving the conscience, and thundering in the soul the sentence of doom !

" And are there not those in this assembly whom such an appearance at the final bar awaits ? My soul can weep in secret places for you. I could fall at your feet and with tears entreat you. For whose perdition is certain, who will lie down in the devouring fire, if not some of you who remain stupid in your sins ? Reflect, ye who are thus wasting your probation, how long you have lived in sin, what means of grace and salvation you have perverted ; reflect how you have persevered in sin amid the outpourings of God's Spirit ; how you have stood aside from the peculiar influences of such seasons, and defeated all the efforts of eternal love and mercy to save you. . . . Now say, my dear friends, are

there no reasons to fear that you will never see life? . . . There may at least be one such. Fellow-sinner, it may be you. I fear it; and with trembling and compassion, and love for your never dying soul, I call on you to sleep no longer. Take, O take, the hope which God's purpose of grace imparts, for he may yet save; and take also its terrors; and flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life. From such an attempt there is hope. Set yourself to it, then, as a work to be done before another sun shall rise; yea, this hour, this moment. Cheer the dark hours that shall intervene before another morning, by reconciliation with God and hope in his mercy. Oh, the blessed hope that now beams upon you from the counsels of eternal grace; the glad assurance that even now you may become a child and heir of God! But venture on in the way of determined sin, and what can you hope for? In that path stands death with which you have made no covenant; on that way an angry God pours only the darkness, and the tempest, and the fire of his indignation; ay, at the next step a reprobating God may meet you, saying, 'He is joined to his idols, let him alone.'"

The effect of such preaching was to awaken men to thoughtfulness, and to rouse their consciences and sometimes their opposition. He used to tell of preaching men out of the meeting-house; but in many cases they returned with changed feelings towards the preacher, and towards the God whose claims the preacher presented with such urgency of logic and of feeling. No man could rest quietly in sin who listened from Sabbath to Sabbath to his appeals. One Monday morning, as he was passing a drug-store in New Haven, a company of gentlemen who were gathered there called him in, and told him that they were there to obtain plasters "to cure the sores of sermon burns which he had given them the day before." This was but banter. But he inflicted wounds by the sword of the Spirit which could not be cured or alleviated by banter. He had in his congregation

a lawyer, belonging intellectually and socially to the very highest circle of New Haven society, who thought himself, if not a Christian now, yet in a fair way to become a Christian. He was a son of distinguished Christian parents, and descended from a long line of Christian ancestry. He was moral and upright; no man was more so. He was a regular attendant on the Sabbath services. He read the Scriptures and read prayers in his family. The preacher stripped from his heart its disguises, showed him the worthlessness of his self-righteousness on which he was relying. Disturbed and distressed, and more than half-offended, he came to his pastor with complaint, and received such advice as led him to Christ for salvation, and he became afterwards a distinguished preacher. This was but one instance of many. Dr. Taylor, as I have been told, was once preaching in Farmington in a time of revival. Among his hearers was a man of high standing in the community, who came in from curiosity to hear the distinguished preacher. Seating himself in the front seat of the gallery, opposite the pulpit, he fixed his eyes on the ambassador of God, at first only desirous to hear what such a preacher had to say. The text was, "Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." The hearer was soon made to feel that he had a personal interest in the theme. He looked and listened, and thought and felt, and purposed, never taking his eyes from the preacher till the last word was spoken; but before that word was spoken he was a changed man, a new creature in Christ Jesus. I have heard of other similar cases under the preaching of Dr. Taylor. I suppose they occur more or less frequently under the preaching of most or all men who preach the gospel, as we all ought to preach it, with clearness and power, and with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. But Dr. Taylor's ministry was marked not only by isolated cases of conversion, but also by great revivals of religion;—revivals, still, quiet, mighty, in which men the most intelligent and influential, were hopefully converted to God.

DR. TAYLOR AS A THEOLOGICAL PROFESSOR.

He was called to the Dwight Professorship in the Yale Theological Seminary in 1822, when he was thirty-six years of age, and after he had been pastor of the First Church in New Haven for ten years, and he continued to occupy that chair till his death in March, 1858. During this time, nearly seven hundred young men enjoyed the benefit of his instructions. Let us go back fifty years, and enter his lecture-room. He is in his chair, at the appointed moment, with twenty-five or thirty young men before him. He begins with a short prayer for light and guidance. He is delivering one of his lectures on Moral Government. We shall need to be thoroughly awake to follow him. Men who have passed from the bar to the pulpit have said that the conflicts of the court-room required less tension of the faculties than listening to one of Dr. Taylor's lectures. He begins with clear and well-guarded definitions. As he goes on, he makes nice distinctions. We must note these well. If we lose one of them we shall get into confusion by and by. He proceeds with his rigid logic and the majestic roll of his eloquence. He answers every objection which you have thought of, and some perhaps that you never would have thought of. He has no respect for nonsense, however venerable, or sustained by great names; and brushes it scornfully out of his path. He has no respect for authority, simply *as* authority, unless it is backed up by reason and Scripture. For *these* he has the profoundest respect. No man bows more reverently before the *dicta* of the sacred volume than he: no man is more solicitous to ascertain the exact import of its teachings. He believes that, rightly understood, it never contradicts the unperverted reason of mankind, that the gospel commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He has a sublime faith in the truth which *he* has thought out and wrought out by the toil of his own mind. He sees it clearly, and wonders that every one else does not see it as clearly as he does. He means that you shall so see, if his earnestness and

his burning logic can make you. He quotes Edwards, perhaps to confirm some statement of his own; perhaps to modify, to correct, or to dispute some statement of that great writer. He quotes Bishop Butler in the same way. These two writers are the ones whom he has studied most, to whom he owes most, and to whom he most often refers. At length, after our minds have been stretched to their utmost tension for an hour, he closes with a peroration which gathers up in one luminous focus the truths he has been discussing. A few minutes, perhaps five, of "Miltonic," eloquence, hold us in breathless silence; and then come in conversational tones the words, "I will hear you now."

To get the full benefit of this lecture, we must spend another hour, possibly two hours, here. The doctor is plied with questions, some wise, some not so wise. Whether they are wise or unwise, if they evince a sincere desire to learn, if they are not manifestly captious, he hears them all patiently, and answers them patiently, and generally conclusively. It is here that he shows one of the secrets of his power over young men. He *loves* young men. He loves their frankness, their freshness of thought, their spirit of inquiry. He loves to help them out of their difficulties. He loves to set them forward in the way of right thinking. There is much animated discussion; for the Doctor loves discussion, when its end and its aim is to elicit truth. He speaks many very earnest words, almost never a reproving word, yet he can be severe if the occasion calls for it, if a student seems to be captious and wilfully unreasonable. One day, a student whose self-confidence far outran his wisdom seemed to be trying to perplex him by a multitude of questions, most of which were irrelevant. The subject under discussion was the meaning of words, as shown by the context. The student at length asked, "What sense is there in what Solomon says, 'Answer not a fool according to his folly,' and then in the next verse, 'Answer a fool according to his folly'?" The answer came from the Doctor quick as thought, with an electric flash of his dark eye,

“There is a great deal of sense in what he says in the preceding verse, ‘A rod for the fool’s back.’” Incidents like this were very rare. One of his colleagues,¹ speaking soon after his death, says: “When offended, he spoke out his rebuke on the instant, in blunt terms. But here the matter ended. No animosity lingered in his mind. This he appeared desirous to indicate by his marked kindness afterwards to any person who had incurred his censure. Not long ago, he mentioned to me that the day before, he had reproved one of his class with more severity perhaps than the case required, expressing at the same time his grief, and adding that he had been kept awake a great part of the night by the thought that Christ would not have spoken so.” A teacher who with such powers of intellect combined such a spirit, could not fail to gain an almost unbounded influence over his pupils.

Dr. Taylor’s theology took its shape in part from his own personal experience. His convictions of sin were deep and thorough. He saw in himself and felt the immense evil of sin and its terrible power over the human soul. Then came those awful questionings which so often visit thoughtful minds in regard to the relations which God sustains to sin: Is God in any sense or degree responsible for it? Did he introduce it for the sake of gaining greater glory to himself by overruling it? Does he, can he, sustain any relations to it but those of ceaseless and everlasting antagonism? Are we to charge God with the blame, or any part of the blame, of our sins, or must we take the whole blame of it ourselves? The struggling mind of young Taylor wants to find a way out from his questionings, which shall leave the character of God untarnished. He wants to throw the whole blame of this terrible evil on the creature. For the worst of all things possible to be thought of would be a blot or a stain on the purity or the sincerity of God. At length, after long struggles, he sees, or thinks he sees, with unutterable joy, his way out of the darkness. I have heard him speak of these struggles,

¹Professor Fisher’s Memorial Sermon.

and of the relief which came to him in reading, in the parable of the tares, "An enemy hath done this." This was as a lightning flash of truth on the thick darkness of his soul. I think I do not err in saying that in this personal experience, in these painful struggles of an inquiring spirit, we find the germ of that theology which has been characterized² as "a symmetrical system, compact and complete, ascending from the first axiom of mental science to the topmost doctrines of revelation."

What was thus born of his personal experience was nourished in its growth by his experience as a pastor. For ten years he had been studying, in order to apply to practice the best methods to answer the excuses of sinners and to lead them to submission to God. It is a great mistake to suppose that he was actuated simply or mainly by a love of speculation in his researches into the depths of theology. He had, indeed, a mind, fitted by nature for speculative inquiries and moved in that direction by its natural tendencies. But his aim in his inquiries was wholly practical. His search was for a theology that could be preached, and that would commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He believed that the gospel, rightly understood and rightly preached, would awaken no revolt from man's inherent sense of justice and right, or from his unperverted reason. Man in his selfishness and sin might be angered by its threatenings and its appeals, but he could be made to see that in all its features it is holy and just and good. And the main, we may say the sole, effort of this theologian was to construct a system of theology which should make men see that, in all their sinfulness and rebellion against God, he is wholly in the right, and they wholly in the wrong; to make them feel their responsibility, and press them to instant submission. In this he was following in the line of the great New England theologians who had preceded him. This was the aim of the Edwardses, father and son; of Hopkins, of Smalley, of Bellamy, of Em-

²Professor Fisher.

mons, of Dwight, Taylor's instructor and intimate friend, who loved his young pupil as a father loves a favorite son. Taylor was heir to the thinking of these great men. The younger Edwards speaks exultingly of the "improvements in theology" which his father had made. None of the successors of Edwards equalled him in his mighty reach and grasp of thought; but they all added something to the improvements which their great leader had made. Taylor, as I said, was heir to the thinking of these great men; and it was a rich inheritance; and he availed himself of the wealth thus laid at his feet. No man of his generation was better acquainted than he with the works of the great theological masters of New England, and none made more or better use of them. But he thought they left room for further improvements, and why should he not make such improvements, if he could, and in so doing give more practical power to theology?

The dominating thought in Dr. Taylor's theology was that God is conducting a perfect moral government over his intelligent creation. This thought certainly was not new with him. It runs through the Old Testament and the New. It is involved in every command of God, in every threatening of punishment for disobedience and every promise of reward for obedience, in every assertion of his kingship, in every reference to his throne, in every allusion to the final judgment of men in righteousness, in the phrase, so often used, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven; and in the second and third petitions of the Lord's prayer, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done," as well as in the fifth, "forgive us our debts." The idea of the fatherhood of God, of which so much is said at the present day, is no whit more prominent and pervasive in the New Testament than is the idea of the moral government of God. It was impossible that any theologian worthy of the name, could have wholly overlooked this great thought. Especially, had it not been overlooked in the writings of the New England theologians from the elder Edwards on-

wards. The peculiarity of Dr. Taylor was that he elaborated this subject more completely than any writer that had preceded him ; that he kept it always in the foreground ; that it shaped all his thinking, guided all his studies ; that he made it the formative principle of his theology, the centre of his system, and the test by which he tried every other system, and every doctrine and every principle which claimed admission to his own. If it could not stand this test, it was rejected or modified till it could. No matter how old a doctrine was, or how well supported by the authority of great names, if it seemed to him to be opposed to what he regarded as the true principles of moral government, it was set aside as unworthy of a place among theological verities.

To this subject of moral government he devoted thirty-five lectures, which were published soon after his death. Of these, eight discuss the question, "What is a perfect moral government?" fourteen show what is known concerning God's moral government from the light of nature ; the last four of these fourteen are an application of the argument from nature to prove that Christianity is from God ; in thirteen lectures the government of God as exhibited in revelation is discussed. These lectures were grand to listen to, but, as published, they are by no means easy reading. We miss the music of the voice, the earnestness of the manner, the emphasis which fixed attention on the important words or phrases. The style is adapted to the spoken lecture, rather than to the printed page ; and it is probable that very few ever will explore thoroughly this rich mine of thought and avail themselves of its hidden treasures.

Dr. Taylor thus defines a perfect moral government. It is "the influence of the authority, or of the rightful authority, of a moral governor on moral beings, designed so to control their action as to secure the great end of action on their part, through the medium of law." The only subjects of moral government are moral beings, or beings capable of moral action, capable of choosing the right and rejecting the

wrong. At the head of such a government must be a moral Governor, whose aim shall be to secure the best possible action on the part of his subjects, and to do this by the influence of his rightful authority, and through the medium of law, with its righteous precepts and its sanctions of reward and penalty. The character of a perfect moral Governor must be one of perfect benevolence ; the action which he must require of his subjects must be perfectly benevolent action ; the sanctions by which he must enforce his law must be such as shall show his displeasure at their disobedience, and his approbation of their obedience. It is only voluntary benevolence which his law must require, and this is the best possible kind of action ; and it is only voluntary selfishness which the law must forbid, and this is the worst possible kind of action. The sanctions of his law are the necessary proofs of the benevolence of the Lawgiver, for without them he cannot adequately show that he is himself in favor of the right action which the law requires, and against the wrong action which it forbids. The precepts of his law must express his unqualified preference, in any and in every case, of the actions which he requires to those which he forbids ; and the sanctions of his law express the strength of that preference, and of the benevolence which leads him to give and to sustain his law.

Dr. Taylor emphasized, as of prime importance, the element of *authority* in moral government. This he says, "is a government by authority whose influence and energy lie in this, 'Thus saith the Eternal King.'" Law in his view is the commanding will of a person, who, by his character and attributes, has the right to reign, and by his position is morally bound to reign, and who throws the entire weight of his personal and official influence in favor of right character and conduct. It is the authority of perfect wisdom and goodness, using all possible influences on moral beings to secure the ends at which such wisdom and goodness must ever be aiming. "God," it has been said, "does not care for moral government ; he cares for souls." Dr. Taylor

would have replied, "He cares for moral government because he cares for souls." It was one of his favorite ideas, often and emphatically reiterated, that, without the conception of God as a moral governor, it is impossible to prove his benevolence, and that the sanctions of his law, no less than its precepts, are expressions of his goodness. Of course he taught that God's government over this world is administered under an economy of grace, and labored to show that the Christian economy, "with its design to reform and to reward sinful beings," is consistent with the eternal principles on which moral government is based.

CONTROVERSY WITH DR. TYLER.

In September, 1828, he preached the *Concio ad Clerum* in the chapel of Yale College. The sermon was soon after printed. It became historical and made history. Its text was, "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." The doctrine which he drew from it was, "*the entire moral depravity of man is by nature.*" He proposes to show, first, in what the entire moral depravity of man consists. He says, in general, that it is "the entire sinfulness of the moral character of men—that state of the mind or head to which guilt and the desert of wrath pertain." He has already explained that "to be children of wrath is to possess the character which deserves punishment." He goes on to show, negatively, that "this depravity does not consist in any essential attribute or property of the soul, not in anything created in man by his Maker—nor does it consist in a sinful nature, which men have corrupted by being *one* with Adam, and by *acting in his act*—nor does it consist in any *constitutional* propensities of our nature, nor in any disposition nor *tendency to sin* which is the cause of all sin." He then asks again, "What is this moral depravity for which man deserves the wrath of God?" His answer is, "It is man's own act, consisting in a free choice of some object rather than God as his chief good,—or a free preference of the world and of worldly good, to the will and glory of

God." In other words, his doctrine is that no man has any *moral* depravity, any depravity for which God as a moral governor can punish him, until *he sins* by his own choice of something beside God as his chief good. Of course, he regards this preference as immanent—as a *state* of the will and heart.

Having thus explained his meaning, Dr. Taylor proceeds to show that the moral depravity of mankind is *by nature*. By this he means that, "such is their nature, that they will sin and only sin in all the appropriate circumstances of their being." He does not mean that their nature is itself sinful, nor that it is the *physical* or *efficient* cause of their sinning; but only the occasion or reason of their sinning. In proof of his proposition he appeals to the text and to other passages of Scripture; to the fact that the Scriptures teach the universal necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; and that they expressly declare the inefficiency of all truth and motive, of all that which is called *moral suasion*. He appeals also to human consciousness and to facts.

He closes his sermon with remarks:—

1. "It is consistent with the doctrine of this discourse that infants should be saved through the redemption of Christ."

2. "That sin or guilt pertains exclusively to voluntary action is the true principle of orthodoxy."

3. "The view of sin or moral depravity maintained in this discourse cannot justly be ascribed to mental perversion or to any sinister or selfish design."

4. "The universal depravity of mankind is not inconsistent with the moral perfection of God."

5. "We see the importance of this view of man's depravity, compared with any other in its bearing on the preaching of the gospel."

"Finally, I cannot conclude without remarking how fearful are the condition and prospects of the sinner."

The sermon was polemic in its tone, and it was to be expected that, in the existing state of theological thought, such

a sermon would call forth replies. It shows at least this one thing, that the charge sometimes brought against Dr. Taylor, that he was trying to introduce doctrines which he had not the manliness and the sincerity to avow, was without the shadow of a foundation. If there has ever been a man who was open and well-nigh reckless in the avowal of what he believed to be true, Dr. Taylor was the man. There was no deceit or trickery about him. The Rev. Joseph Harvey, then pastor of the church in Westchester, Conn., afterwards, Dr. Harvey of Thompsonville, published an elaborate and able reply to this sermon in March, 1829, in which he pushed the principles avowed by Dr. Taylor to what he thought to be their legitimate results. This was the beginning of a public discussion which lasted for years, and convulsed, and at times seemed to threaten to divide, the churches of Connecticut. In the first volume of *The Quarterly Christian Spectator* in 1829, Dr. Taylor published a series of articles on "The Means of Regeneration." These articles, taken in connection with the *concio*, called Dr. Bennet Tyler into the field. He was at that time pastor of the church in Portland, Maine, to which Dr. Edward Payson of sainted memory had formerly ministered. He had been for fourteen years pastor of a church in Southbury in Connecticut, and then for six years President of Dartmouth College. In all these positions, he had shown himself to be a workman that needed not to be ashamed. He was three years older than Dr. Taylor—a native, like him, of the hill country of Western Connecticut. They had been personal friends. Indeed, during part of their college course they were classmates. Each respected, and had reason to respect, the character and talents of the other. Both loved the truth, and sought honestly to find and to defend it. Both loved the cause of Christ, and prayed and toiled and fought to promote it. Both had been eminent as preachers, and eminently successful in winning souls. Both had been trained in the New England theology, and both accepted its leading teachings. But Dr. Taylor's mind was more adventurous and progressive; Dr. Tyler's, more cautious

and conservative. Dr. Tyler saw, or thought he saw, in Dr. Taylor's positions reason for alarm, and most conscientiously and earnestly threw himself into the breach. He was no mean antagonist. His mind was logical; he was keen to see the joints in his adversary's armor; his style was simple, lucid, and strong. He published his "Strictures on Dr. Taylor's articles on the Means of Regeneration" in December, 1829. From that time for four years, till near the close of the year 1833, the theological warfare went on between these two combatants, each earnest to find and to establish the truth. Other writers entered the lists. Two noticeable anonymous pamphlets appeared, which were with good reason attributed to Dr. Harvey. In 1830, Dr. Woods of Andover published his "Letters to Dr. Taylor" on the origin of evil. On the other side, Professor Goodrich wrote some articles for the *Christian Spectator*, and Dr. Fitch two very noteworthy ones on "Predestination and Election," and on "The Divine Permission of Sin."

THEODICY.

In traversing the fields of theological inquiry, Dr. Taylor met, as every man who traverses these fields with the least care must meet, the ever recurring problem of theology,—the existence of evil, of sin and of suffering, in the dominions of a holy and benevolent, and at the same time Almighty God. It is a problem which the best minds of the race have tried to solve. The inability to solve it has driven some to atheism. The genius of Leibnitz had grappled with the question; and he had published a Theodicy, in which he, with great ingenuity, elaborates the hypothesis that of all possible worlds this is the best. Sometimes he reasons as if it were best *because* of the evil that is in it, and sometimes as if it were best *notwithstanding* the evil that is in it; and does not seem always to see clearly the difference between these two modes of explanation. The New England divines had grappled with the problem from the time of Edwards

onwards, but with the same confusion of thought. The general mode of solving the problem was by reasoning that more good comes to the universe, more glory to God, more happiness to his kingdom, through means of the evil which he permitted, than he could have secured without it. This was distinctly the doctrine of Bellamy's four very elaborate and eloquent sermons—famous in their day—on "The Wisdom in the Remission of Sin." Dr. Stephen West, one of the disciples of Edwards and one of the ablest expounders of his teaching, formulated this idea in the memorable phrase, "Sin is the necessary means of the greatest good." Dr. Taylor strenuously denied and combatted this proposition in all its shades of meaning. He held that sin in itself, and in all its tendencies, is only evil; and that God did not permit the existence of sin because, in any instance, or for any reason, he preferred it to holiness in its stead. When it was urged that in itself considered God preferred holiness to sin, but all things considered he preferred sin to holiness in all cases where the sin takes place, Dr. Taylor replied that in itself considered, and all things considered, in every possible point of view in which sin and holiness can be compared, God prefers the holiness to the sin. This he proved by the fact, along with other arguments, that God had, as a moral Governor, commanded the holiness and forbidden the sin. Whence, then, came the evil? How happens it that sin abounds, if God does not want it? Why does he permit it? Why did he not prevent the entrance of the evil which he does not want? Dr. Taylor's reply was that, for aught that any man can prove, sin is, so far as God's power of prevention is concerned, necessarily incidental to the existence of a *moral system*, a system that shall include moral agents with their capacities for holiness and bliss, and their powers of moral agency. A moral agent is, by definition, a creature that *can do wrong*. A universe of moral agents is a universe of beings, each one of whom is endowed by nature with the power to do wrong. Who shall prove, that if God creates a universe of such agents, some of them will not do

wrong, in face of all he can do to prevent it? To the objection that this limits the power of God, it is replied, first, that the objection comes with an ill grace from those who teach that *God could not get as much good for his kingdom without sin as with it*; and secondly, that this is a matter to which power, *simply* and *by itself*, has no relation. It no more limits God's power, to say that he cannot create moral agents without the power to do wrong, than it does to say that he cannot make triangles, the three interior angles of which shall not be equal to two right-angles. To the objection that God *has kept* many moral agents from sinning, the reply is that this does not prove that he could so keep all, and for all eternity. It may be that the change in the system of means and influences which would be necessary to keep from sin those who *do* sin would result in the fall of many more, and in far-reaching disaster. It may be that God, foreseeing that, if he created a universe of minds, to be governed by moral laws and sanctions, the storm of ruin would somewhere sweep over it, determined to ride himself on the tempest, and so to guide it in its course that it should do the least possible evil, and that its results could be best overruled for good. This attempt of Dr. Taylor to construct a theodicy will not be regarded by many as eminently successful; but I think it will bear a favorable comparison with any other attempt in the same line that has ever been made. It at least enables him to answer the scoffing sceptic who asked, "Why, if there be a God of almighty power and of infinite benevolence, does he allow sin, and consequently misery to riot in his dominions?" by asking in return, "Can you prove that a universe containing moral agents with their liabilities to sin, and their boundless capacities for holiness and bliss, is not better than a universe containing no such agents? and can you prove that in such a universe, ruled, as it must be, by moral laws and their sanctions, it will not be inevitable that sin shall enter somewhere with its blight and its damning curse? God does not want the sin; but he does

want the universe of responsible minds into which sin has intruded against his commands and his wishes."

MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

The point at which Dr. Taylor's teachings seem most vulnerable is what has been called the "self-love, or the desire of happiness, theory." He used such language as this, "that self-love, or the desire of happiness, is the primary cause or reason of all moral action, or of all acts of choice which fix supremely on any object." The language is, to say the least of it, unfortunate and misleading. It is liable to be understood to mean that every man *may* and *must* make his own happiness his ultimate and *only object* in every choice he makes, and every act he does; that if he loves God, consecrates himself to the service of God and the good of man, he is only seeking his own happiness thereby; and that the supreme love for God which his law requires differs from supreme selfishness only in name. It was so understood by many and with no conscious unfairness. But such was not Dr. Taylor's meaning. He disclaimed this interpretation of his language. No one could listen intelligently to his lectures without perceiving that such could not be his meaning. He taught emphatically that the selfish preference in man was the very essence of his sin. He meant only that when man chooses, he must be moved thereto by some awakened desire in the mind which he aims to gratify by his choice; that every motive that is presented from without must, in order to become a motive, appeal to something within the mind which can be moved by it, and that this awakened desire is the *subjective motive*, the motive within the mind, that leads to choice. He meant, in other words, what Edwards meant when he said, that "if nothing could be *pleasing* or *displeasing*, *agreeable* or *disagreeable* to a man, then he could incline to nothing and will nothing;" or again, he said he meant only what Edwards meant in his celebrated *dictum*. that "the will is as the greatest apparent good." Dr. Taylor drew a broad and just line of distinction

between that constitutional love of happiness which belongs to our nature by the will of our Creator—which he has mingled imperishably with the elements of our being, and which lies back of all moral choice and action—and that selfishness which consists in the preference of our own personal interests and pleasures to the will of God, and the well-being of our fellow-men. The one is constitutional and involuntary, due to the Author of our being, and of itself destitute of moral character; the other is voluntary—the immanent volition of a sinful, fallen soul—the very *essence of sin*, and the source from which the sinful acts of man's daily life proceed. This distinction was too often overlooked by Dr. Taylor's opponents, and so far they did him injustice. At the same time, I do not think that the foundation which he laid for moral action was broad enough. I do not think that the desire of personal happiness is the *only ultimate* ground of appeal which motives from without can find in the nature of man. Nor do I believe the kindred doctrine, on which Doctor Taylor expended so much strength, that the idea of right is in its last analysis resolvable into a tendency to produce the greatest amount of happiness. I believe, indeed, that God does appeal, and that it is right for us to appeal, to the love of happiness in man; but he appeals also to the sense of duty. He has so made us that we feel as truly, if not as forcibly, and sometimes quite as forcibly, an appeal to this sense of duty as an appeal to the desire for happiness; and that we feel and know that righteousness, holiness, is a good as real and ultimate as happiness. The greatest *apparent good* before the mind of man when he chooses is not always either his own happiness or the highest happiness of the universe. The idea of happiness, our own or that of others, may be out of sight altogether in those great and comprehensive choices in which destiny is changed for eternity.

THE PLACE OF HIS THEOLOGY.

In the progress of theological thought the New School of one generation becomes the Old School of the next. If

Dr. Taylor were living now, and held the same doctrines which he taught in his lifetime, he would be ranked by many among the ultra-orthodox. He held the doctrine of one infinite, personal, and perfect God, Creator, Upholder, and Ruler of all things. He held the doctrine of the trinity of God, of the real deity and the real humanity of Christ, of the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit. He held, and held with a firm grasp, the doctrines of the entire sinfulness of man by nature, occasioned by the fall of our first parents; of the regeneration of all who are saved by the direct action of the Holy Spirit on their minds; of the perseverance of the saints; of the sovereignty of God; and of his personal election of all those who believe unto eternal life. He held, with a grasp not less firm, the doctrine of the vicarious atonement made for all men by the work, especially the sufferings and death, of Jesus Christ; of justification by faith in Christ; of sanctification by the Holy Spirit; of probation for man limited by his earthly lifetime; of the day of final judgment, and its issues in the endless blessedness of the righteous, and the endless punishment of the wicked. No man in his time, or at any time, held these doctrines with a firmer grasp than he. But he had his own methods of defending some of these doctrines; and because his methods differed from theirs, some of his brethren thought he was undermining the truths which it was the labor of his life to explain and to defend. Some of his methods have been adopted, and with manifest advantage, by multitudes who were, and by multitudes more who were not, his pupils.

One or two brief narratives will illustrate one phase of Dr. Taylor's character, and perhaps prove otherwise instructive. In the year 1826, the Third Church in New Haven was formed. For four years Dr. Taylor preached for the new church, and acted virtually as its pastor. The first settled pastor was in substantial sympathy with his views. His pastorate was short. The church chose for its second pastor the Rev. Elisha L. Cleaveland, a young man of decided piety

and ability. He soon showed a very marked hostility to the teaching of Dr. Taylor. A division of the church followed. The majority adhered to their pastor; and leaving their old home in Chapel Street, worshipped for a time in Saunders' Hall, and then in the chapel of the First Church; and at length built a new house of worship in Court Street. If I am not greatly mistaken, a large part of the money for building that house was subscribed outside of New Haven, by earnest Christian men and women who were alarmed at the progress of Taylorism. It was understood by every one that that church stood in New Haven as the bulwark of the old faith, and to resist the heretical theology taught in the seminary not many rods away, and preached in all the other Congregational pulpits in the city. On the evening of the day of the dedication of the new house, Dr. John Woodbridge, one of the most violent of Dr. Taylor's opposers, preached there a sermon from the text, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit to himself." The discourse from beginning to end was aimed (as it seemed to me when I heard it, wildly and blindly, but no less with deadly intent) at Dr. Taylor, who was present to hear it. After a few years, the church erected a new house of worship in Church Street, fronting the Green. In the later years of Dr. Taylor's life, he often attended this church, and frequently expressed his delight in the preaching and Sabbath services of Dr. Cleaveland. Neither of these two divines had changed his theological views. Both stood firmly where they had stood in former years. This fact, I think, shows the broad Christian sympathy and catholicity of Dr. Taylor. He could recognize Christian worth wherever he saw it; and he loved the gospel of Christ whoever might preach it. It is worth noting, as the finale of a history of strife, that lately, after a separate existence of more than forty years, the Third Church and the North Church of New Haven voted a few years since to unite. Forty years ago, these two churches represented what by some were deemed to be opposite poles of the theological belief. Now, without

conscious change of faith on either side, without either party giving up anything, small or great, deemed valuable, they come together, and like "kindred drops are melted into one." Are our theological differences, the differences I mean of men that hold fast to the cardinal principles of the Christian faith, so important as they seem to be in the heat of conflict?

Probably no man did more to extend and to intensify the opposition to Dr. Taylor than Dr. Asahel Nettleton. The two had been fast friends in earlier days. They had labored together in scenes of thrilling interest. More than once, while Taylor was pastor in New Haven, Nettleton had spent weeks with him, helping him in most effective revival work. But when Dr. Taylor published his views, Dr. Nettleton thought he saw in them the seeds of infinite mischief; and with characteristic conscientiousness and zeal set himself to arouse and to organize hostility to the teaching of his old friend. That Dr. Taylor keenly felt this, we know. He would not have been human if he had not felt it. But he felt it with the loving forgiving spirit of a Christian. He lost neither his respect nor his affection for one who had labored so wisely and successfully in winning souls. Dr. Atwater of Princeton relates the following: "Dr. Taylor once said to me, that the best sermons were not those elaborate, ornate, and splendid productions, popularly styled great sermons; but those simple and vivid presentations of saving truth, that go straightest and deepest into the hearts and consciences of men—and that Asahel Nettleton (one of his most staunch adversaries in theological controversy) and Moses Stuart were the most powerful preachers, according to this standard, whom he had known. He then proceeded to illustrate his meaning by a graphic description of a sermon of each."

In 1844 Dr. Nettleton was lying on his death-bed in East Windsor. Dr. Taylor felt moved by the feelings of his old friendship to go there, and visit him; and when they met, "Taylor fell weeping on Nettleton's neck and kissed him." The memory of past days was revived. Nothing was said

about theological differences. Two days later Nettleton wrote to Taylor, thanking him for his visit and his sympathy, and saying, among other things:³

“I need not tell you that I love you. You know I have ever loved you. You know also that I have been grieved and distressed that you should have adopted and publicly maintained sentiments which I cannot but regard as eminently dangerous to the souls of men. I impeach not your motives. I judge not your heart.” After a few sentences more in the same strain, in which he expresses the hope that his friend’s experience is better than his theology, Dr. Nettleton closes his letter thus: “Farewell, my brother. We shall soon meet at the judgment-seat of Christ. God grant that we may meet in heaven.

Your affectionate friend and brother,

ASAHEL NETTLETON.”

Dr. Taylor died March 10th, 1858, in the seventy-second year of his age.⁴ “As he felt himself nearing the unseen world, his firm reliance was on the grace of God in Christ. A few days before his death, he called his wife to his bedside, and said, “ ‘ I shall not be with you long ; and when I am called to go, I want you should be very calm and quiet and *to let me go* ; and the widow’s God will be your God.’ ” After his mind had begun to wander, his thoughts were on the great truths of the gospel, and on the glories of the heavenly world ; and he frequently, as if half-unconscious, repeated the stanza :—

See Salem’s golden spires
In beauteous prospect rise
And brighter crowns than angels wear
That sparkle through the skies.

He passed away a little after midnight and so quietly that his attendants thought him sleeping when he died, and one of them remarking that he slept longer and more quietly

³For the whole letter see Dr. Tyler’s Memoir of Nettleton, pp. 299, 300.

⁴Dr. Dutton’s Memorial Sermon, pp. 23, 24.

than usual, went to him, and found that the spirit had departed." On the 14th of the following May, the ablest of his opponents, Dr. Bennet Tyler, followed him into the light where men see no longer in a mirror darkly, and where that which is in part is done away.

Dr. Taylor has been called ⁵ "the last of the great masters in the distinctive theology of New England," meaning by the great masters "those who have contributed to the progress of thought by more exact definitions and distinctions in theology." Of these the list is not a long one. It begins with Edwards, the greatest of them all, and one of the greatest and purest minds that have thought and written on this planet of ours. He was also the greatest innovator of them all on the accepted faith of the churches of his times. Following him, and pushing further than he the results of his thinking, and in some instances into divergent and opposing lines of thought, were Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards, the younger, John Smalley, Nathaniel Emmons, Asa Burton, Nathaniel W. Taylor. The last was by no means the least. Each of them taught what was called in his day the New Divinity; and each of them, along with much that has been dropped as unworthy to be carried on into the future, contributed something to the progress of thought, and to the better understanding of the relations of men to God. If I would name all who have been earnest and successful defenders and teachers of the New England Theology in its various phases, I would enlarge the list by many illustrious names; such as, Joseph Bellamy, Stephen West, Samuel Spring, Timothy Dwight, Edward Dorr Griffin, Leonard Woods, Bennet Tyler, Enoch Pond, and others scarcely less noteworthy. But now no man, unless he is a very old man, will call himself a Hopkinsian or an Emmonsite, a Taylorite or a Tylerite. Few, if any now living, would to-day style themselves Edwardeans. New topics have forced themselves on the attention of divines. Yet the toil and the thinking of those mighty thinkers were not in vain. The

⁵Dr. Bacon's Memorial Sermon, p. 8.

results of their labors are felt to-day by various schools of theology, and will be felt all through the future in the onward march of thought towards the perfect knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The theology of our times is becoming more and more Christo-centric. That it is so in New England is due largely to the genius of one man, very unlike Dr. Taylor in the structure of his mind, but resembling him closely in his love and his eager and daring pursuit of truth. Whatever may have been the demerits of the teaching of Horace Bushnell, it had this great merit, that it turned the theological thought of New England into new channels, that it compelled our theological thinkers to look more closely and more earnestly at the person and the work of Christ—the central themes of the glorious gospel of the Blessed God.