

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE IV.

PRESIDENT FINNEY AND AN OBERLIN
THEOLOGY.

BY PROFESSOR ALBERT TEMPLE SWING.

THE limits of the present article will allow only a glance at some of the more prominent of President Finney's contributions to the historical theology of Oberlin. Professors Morgan and Cowles, and for a few years President Mahan, were valuable co-laborers with Mr. Finney. But that Oberlin may be said to have had a theology, is more especially due to the lives of Charles G. Finney and James H. Fairchild. The theology which President Fairchild has shaped and somewhat modified was propounded in its distinctive Oberlin features by President Finney.

Oberlin theology, while similar in most of its fundamental positions to the theology of New England, is not to be thought of as an offshoot of the New England theology, but as largely an independent development from its own root. What in New England had been gradually evolved from Old Calvinism through two generations of theological reformers was substantially wrought out independently of them by President Finney's rational revolt,¹ which was so closely connected with his conversion as to be practically inseparable from it. It was some of the fundamental doctrines of the same old Calvinism, which he found in the pulpit and pastor's library of his adopted town, against which as a young lawyer he turned his argumentative powers. Oberlin theology will be found to be but the bringing forth, by one man, of things new and

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 7, 42-60.

old out of the inheritance of historical Calvinism, and it is not explainable apart from that.

1. The most fundamental of President Finney's reform principles was, that human ability must be commensurate with human duty.¹ This was no metaphysical quibble, but the most vital point to be insisted on. God would be insincere if he were to command as duty what we cannot do, or to punish us for not doing what is manifestly impossible for us to do if we have no moral ability. Sinners ought to repent at once, *because they can repent if they will*. It was to him the veriest sacrilege practically to imply that God is to blame because sinners do not repent and turn to him, or that the church should make pretense of waiting his time to make them better, when all the while they were unwilling to yield themselves wholly to him.²

It is not easy for us to realize at this time how the old doctrines of Divine Sovereignty and Human Depravity, which in Luther and Calvin led with the greatest force to an utter and complete faith in the compassion of God in Jesus Christ, had come to be the most widespread excuse for not turning to God in any active way. It is also hard to understand how the correctness of a systematic creed had come to seem more important than the appalling fact of sin, or the willingness of God to save sinners. Yet there can be little question that in New England, as well as in the Middle States, the *necessity* of God's work in human salvation had been strangely emphasized, to the practical disadvantage of the fact of God's present willingness to save men. President Finney asserted from first to last that men not only could repent if they would, but that they were resisting the Holy Spirit every moment they did not repent and yield themselves unreservedly to Jesus

¹Theology (London Ed. 1851), pp. 14-16, 137.

²Memoirs, pp. 146 f., 163.

Christ. This it was which made President Finney an evangelist at the same time that it began to make him a theologian.

The fact that this preaching was at first stubbornly opposed is a proof of its timeliness. The fact that as theology it was later characterized as new Pelagianism¹ is not to be wondered at. The Princeton theologians of the day saw their own form of truth so clearly themselves that they failed to realize that the completeness of a theological system cannot always be taken as a guarantee that the gospel will be properly expressed in the use of that system. Though every statement in the old theology might technically be true, the mistake had apparently been made of supposing everything in it to be of equal practical importance. President Finney wanted a theology that should express the gospel as it must be preached, and a theology that could not be preached with consistent logic could not be in harmony with the gospel itself.

Historically then President Finney stands as one of the most earnest preachers of human ability, as well as of human need of salvation, and in his fearless logic one of the boldest of those who have taught that sin consists not in sensibilities and inclinations, but in the voluntary choices of the will. At a bound he had found himself not only abreast of, but beyond, his New England contemporaries in his new treatment of the doctrines. Nathaniel W. Taylor himself never surpassed President Finney. He became a critic of the conservatism of Edwards, who himself had given the New England movement its beginning. For weal or for woe, therefore, President Finney became one of the prominent forces in bringing in the evils or blessings of a new theology. Not only in the Middle West, but in New England and in old England, he preached it and

¹ Dr. Hodge critically reviewed the "Systematic Theology" of President Finney, in the *Princeton Review*, April, 1847, and later embodied this review in his volume of "Essays and Reviews," 1857.

taught it with all his powers of masterful reasoning. The whole movement marks an era in theological development, and one which has not yet been thoroughly analyzed and estimated. It awaits its historian, who may also need to be not only an expounder, but a prophet as well. For without question many who have been thinking of themselves as consistent followers of those early leaders have in fact cut entirely loose from the old historical moorings.

2. To be considered in connection with the above, and not separable from it, was the emphasis which President Finney always placed on reason and common sense. He could never speak complacently of the idea that the doctrines of a confession or the truths of Scripture could be taught as Christian truths if they were to appear fundamentally unreasonable. The importance of this second point cannot easily be overestimated in the attempt to understand his position as a theologian. He made very clear the place to be assigned to pure reason, that deepest inborn power of the soul which makes it not only possible but imperative to recognize the being and attributes of God,¹ if man is to become the normal being he was created to be. While it was the practical, rather than the theoretical, phases of truth which engaged his attention, yet he wished to be theoretically thorough, in order that he might be rationally practical. In the preface to his "Theology," he wrote these words, which are so characteristic of him that they could most fittingly be placed upon an entablature to his memory, "To all honest inquirers after truth I would say, Hail, my brother! Let us be thorough. Truth shall do us good."² His aim was to present the truth in such a thoroughly fundamental way as to find men. He saw the pulpit dealing mechanically with objective conceptions which were not so much analyzed as rhetorically and dogmatically laid upon the human reason. He ana-

¹ *Theology*, p. 7 f.

² *Ibid.*, p. ix.



From photograph. Act, circa 70.

lyzed his terms and wrestled with the very problems which were troubling men, or which had been dropped out of mind along with the Christian faith itself. When he demanded that everything must be settled by reason and the Bible, he meant this in no external fashion. He appealed always to the sense of Scripture as interpreted by the highest faculty in man, and he could not think of a revelation as being made in any other way. He had as little complacency with the preaching of the Bible, reason or no reason, as he had with a mere rationalistic use of reason as a sufficient guide, Bible or no Bible. In emphasizing them both, it was always with the deepest confidence, not only of their external harmony, but of their being but the subjective and objective revelation of one and the same mind.

This appeal to reason and this use of reasoning is one of the marvelous things in President Finney's theology. Human reason had been humiliated, distrusted, dreaded, while the man whom President Finney saw had very distinct and positive powers. The mere theoretical question of man's ability, however, apart from divine assistance, was of no interest to him. There was no possibility that such a question should ever to him come to be a practical one, because the very preaching of the gospel itself was to reveal the divine assistance needed, and it was very poor preaching indeed unless it should present the needed help. He used the gospel truth to aid him in laying hold of men, and always with the purpose, and generally with the result, of bringing men to lay hold of the gospel. And thus it came to be true of President Finney himself that exactly that which had saved him from becoming a rationalistic deist, had made him the most rational theologian and evangelist which America has ever produced.

This fundamental place given to reason has been characteristic of both President Finney and President Fairchild. The theology of these two men when they were

working together proved not only harmonious, but in certain respects supplementary and reciprocal. They needed each other in the days of the foundations. There can be no serious question that they will need to be kept even more closely together in the years to come. Especially will it prove true that to lose sight of the evangelistic purpose and result sought and obtained by President Finney will be to misdirect and bring into grave dangers that use of reason made by them both. It would be to reproduce the rationalization of Finney and the morals and ethics of Fairchild in such a way as to misrepresent them, and pull to pieces what these men have so magnificently built up. The evangelistic and the rational have not been two movements, but only two impulses of one and the same thing. They must remain one. We shall need to remember, therefore, that, while the religious power that has characterized the Oberlin teaching has come from them both, it is the evangelism of President Finney which will be needed to give religious warmth to our life and the old-time zeal in its expression.

3. From what has already been seen, it will be easy to understand what it was which led President Finney as a teacher of theology to begin not with gospel revelation, but with moral government and moral law. Instead of going to the Bible as to a final external authority, he began, as the Bible begins, with God. And he used the Bible as an aid to inquiry, and not the authority with which mechanically to extinguish thought. He began with the Governor of the universe as supreme, with obligation, right, law, and yet it was always the law, and right, and obligation of divine and human persons.

No theologian has placed more emphasis on moral philosophy, even here in America where natural theology has been most brought into use. Instead of beginning with the explanations of an historical confession of faith, to be

taken for granted and defended, he joins lecture to lecture in his analysis and enforcement of the divine government as moral government.¹ He seeks to lay bare no problematical essence, but makes real to the understanding the certain vital relations and attributes of Personality. How easy it would have been to have made all this mechanical instead of psychological, legalistic instead of personal, curious and not practical! But it is nothing less than a laying bare of the deepest elements of all that constitutes the realities and true values of life. What he has given us has been neither cosmology nor metaphysics, but theology, and a theology which could not only be taught in the schools, but preached in the pulpit with conviction and so as to produce conviction. His theology is psychological realism at the farthest remove from the formal and dogmatic. He reasoned with men at their best, appealing to that which is deepest and most real within themselves as well as in the universe of God. And just this was the secret of his power as a preacher and a theologian.

4. When we come to specific doctrines, we are struck not so much by his divergence from common New School teaching, as by the marvelously fresh, penetrating, and comprehensive manner of his treatment.

(1) He had no peculiar views of the Trinity; but there was something characteristic in his realistic conception of the Holy Spirit as always present with the truth. He rested upon this fact which Christ had revealed, with his whole being, and continually used it in his theology and in all his preaching. The absence of the speculative and curious is notable. He had no interest simply in spirit as spirit, nor in any fragment of a doctrine that must be confessed,² but he never lost interest in the Holy Spirit present with the truth of the gospel.³ The truth must be

¹Theology, pp. 9-318.

²*Ibid.*, p. 534 f.

³Memoirs, p. 395; Theology, p. 637.

preached and understood, and ever better understood; and in this way, and not by direct and private revelations, is it the Spirit's work to bring the fuller knowledge and power of the Saviour Jesus Christ. The Spirit is with the truth in the mind and conscience of sinner and saint alike, and He can be grieved away by man's clinging willingly and consciously to known sin. The chief thing with President Finney was not that the Holy Spirit should be believed in in some particular fashion, or in some special manner be appealed to in prayer, but simply yielded to in submission by turning from every known sin to take Jesus Christ in all the various relations in which he is presented in the gospel as the Saviour of the world and the Saviour of individuals. This was the sane and practical way in which he taught of the Holy Spirit.

(2) To him the atonement was one of the most important of all fixed, unchangeable historical facts, to be appealed to and made the source of confidence. It was that in which one could hope, because it had God back of it and his own divine purpose expressed in it. It was the pledge of his forgiving acceptance of all men on condition of repentance from every known sin and the submission of the soul to his gracious rule. It had to do with the whole Christ and not with any one act or experience of his life. It is Christ himself who "is our justification, in the sense that he carried into execution the whole scheme of redemption devised by the Godhead. To him the Scriptures everywhere direct the eyes of our faith and of our intelligence also. The Holy Spirit is represented not as glorifying himself, but as speaking of Jesus, as taking the things of Christ and showing them to his people, as glorifying Christ Jesus, as being sent by Christ, as being the spirit of Christ, as being Christ himself dwelling in the hearts of his people."¹ This is the realism into which his theology

¹ *Theology*, p. 567.

leads. The atonement is not mere work, it has to do not merely with *relations*, but with the most vital relations of *persons*. It is itself religion.

As to his conception of the necessity for atonement, we shall find the same spiritual comprehensiveness which we have noted elsewhere. Realizing the importance of the relations which rational beings must sustain to each other, and perceiving the true *moral nature* of the divine government itself, he sees the importance of *public* justice if the authority of government is to be preserved. The very conceptions of government and public justice shut out the possibility that God should deal with individuals without respect to the relations which they sustain to other rational beings. The law, of necessity, has a public bearing. To President Finney, public justice signifies "that due *administration* of law that shall secure in the highest measure which the nature of the case admits, both private and public interests, and establish the order and well-being of the universe." To suppose that God can deal with an individual as if there were no other rational beings is to treat of an hypothetical question, for no such world is to be found in existence. The only world of which we have any practical knowledge is a universe of beings. President Finney finds in Rom. iii. 24-26, the evidence that God himself admits the principle that something must be done that will fully answer as a substitute for the execution of penalty,—“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” This is President Finney’s great passage. The design of the atonement is therefore declared by him to have been to justify

God in the pardon of sin or in dispensing with the execution of law. This it is primarily and fundamentally, and not, in any sense, a commercial transaction. The atonement and the sanctions of the law are not hostile, but identical in spirit and aim.¹ The heart of the lawgiver is revealed through the precepts, sanctions, and executions of his law when it is able to beget awe on the one hand, and the most entire confidence and love on the other. Therefore, "whatsoever can as effectually reveal God, make known the hatred of sin, his love of order, his determination to support government and to promote the holiness and happiness of his creatures, as the execution of his law would do, is a full satisfaction of public justice."² Atonement therefore becomes "a most important part of *moral* government," and not an abrogation of it, and is needed "to inspire confidence in the offers and promises of pardon, and in all the promises of God to man."³ And this it can be because "God's great and disinterested love to sinners themselves and his love to the universe at large was a prime reason for the atonement." Sin afforded an opportunity for the "manifestation of forbearance, mercy, self-denial, and suffering for enemies that were within his own power, and for those from whom he could expect no equivalent in return." It furnished to them the highest motive to virtue. "If the benevolence manifested in the atonement does not subdue the selfishness of sinners, their case is hopeless." Also nothing could be more highly calculated to establish and confirm the confidence, love, and obedience of holy beings. "The atonement is a higher expression of His regard for public interest than the execution of law."

It is important, to an understanding and proper estimation of President Finney as a theologian, to remember that for him the atonement "is valuable only and just so far as

¹ *Memoirs*, p. 339. ² *Theology*, p. 332. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 335.

it reveals God, and tends to promote virtue and happiness.”¹ “Advice has moral power [in the sense of power as motive]. Precept has moral power. Sanction has moral power. But example is the highest moral influence that can be exerted by any being. . . . The example of God is the highest moral influence in the universe. . . . In the atonement, God has given us the influence of his own example, has exhibited his own love, his own compassion, his own self-denial, his own patience, his own long-suffering, under abuse from enemies. In the atonement he has exhibited all the highest and most perfect forms of virtue to the inspection of our senses, and labored, wept, suffered, bled, and died for men. This is not only the highest revelation of God that could be given to men, but is giving the whole weight of his own example in favor of all the virtues which he requires of man.”² “It completes the circle of governmental motives and is the filling up of the revelation of God.”³ “Faith in the atonement of Christ rolls a mountain weight of crushing and melting considerations upon the heart of the sinner.” “If the atonement is not believed in, it is to that mind no revelation at all, and with such a mind the gospel has no power. But the atonement tends in the highest manner to produce in the believer the spirit of entire and universal consecration to God, and shows how solid a foundation the saints have for unbroken and eternal repose and confidence in God.”⁴

It is certainly not difficult to see why Oberlin theology was never mere theology, and its doctrines never mere dogmatic or systematic doctrines. The emphasis of life, and truth, and law has never been in any merely formal, intellectual, or legal sense. All has been quivering with the love and law of the Divine Presence, and of the quickened human consciousness. And yet with President Finney personality in theology has not destroyed or swallowed up

¹Theology, p. 337. ²*Ibid.*, p. 338. ³*Ibid.*, p. 350. ⁴*Ibid.*, p. 349.

moral distinctions, but rather reinforced them as they are hardly to be found emphasized by any other theologian.

(3) From the point of advantage now gained by this fuller glance at his conception of atonement, it will be easy to understand why President Finney could not regard the justification of the sinful man as a forensic act. As to the ground of justification he denies it to faith, which is only a condition, and not the ground itself; "neither our faith, nor repentance, nor love, nor life, nor anything done by us or wrought in us, is the ground of our justification."¹ He sees the fatal danger of substituting these in the place of Christ himself. But he does not stop here. "Neither is the atonement, nor anything in the mediatorial work of Christ, the foundation of our justification in the sense of being the procuring cause."² He particularly objected to the view that it is founded in Christ's having literally suffered the exact penalty of the law for sinners, and in this sense literally purchasing their justification and eternal salvation.³ But the ground of our justification lies deep in the heart of infinite love. The atonement of Christ is the necessary condition *of safely manifesting the benevolence* of God in the justification and sanctification of sinners. A merciful disposition in the whole Godhead is the ground.⁴ Mercy would have saved without an atonement, if it had been possible to do so. We owe everything *to that merciful disposition* which performed the mediatorial work.⁵ The disinterested and infinite love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the true and only foundation of the justification and salvation of sinners. And so he turns from love in any mere ethical sense, he plays with no mere relations between persons, but he refers everything back to the persons themselves. When he says that God is love, he immediately explains even this statement by saying that

¹Theology, p. 566.

²*Ibid.*, p. 566.

³*Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 551.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 566.

God is infinitely benevolent in the sense that all he does or says or suffers, permits or omits, is for one and the same ultimate reason, viz. to promote the highest good of universal being. And in this world of beings no one could ever be uncertain as to whether President Finney thought of God as only one of them in importance. He leaves man turned, not toward the universe to struggle in the grip of moral law, but toward God himself, who is more than all else, and who loves him as Christ alone is able to reveal.

(4) The greatest anxiety about Oberlin's theology came from the so-called doctrine of Perfection, about which much was said abroad, but little, apparently, exactly known. This doctrine does not primarily have reference to the philosophical conception of the simplicity of moral action,¹ although President Finney always held that nothing is holiness at all which is less than entire obedience or supreme disinterested benevolence. If faith is weak, it is yet not sinful when those who have it confide in whatever truth they apprehend. But that sin and holiness should coexist in the same mind he considered an absurd philosophy, contrary alike to Scripture and common sense, because it overlooks that in which holiness must always consist, viz. in the ultimate choice, and in all subordinate volitions which have reference to the ultimate choice. The Christian who sins must return and do again the first works of repentance.² Repentance is made easier, yet he must repent.

But President Finney's teaching of Christian perfection in so far as he thought of himself as standing for it, came in connection with his exposition of Sanctification.³ And it must be clearly held in mind that he had to do not so much with the *actual attainment* of Sanctification as with the question whether, in view of certain great reasons, the Christian *may not reasonably hope* for its attainment in this present life. In other words, he considered the permanency

¹Theology, pp. 140-153. ²*Ibid.*, p. 557 f. ³*Ibid.*, pp. 568-766.

of Christian obedience as something more than a hopeless impossibility.¹ And therefore he threw his whole soul into the preaching of the doctrine for the very purpose of preventing hopelessness, and of stimulating earnest Christian purpose, in view of well-grounded hope. And his treatment of the doctrine, instead of unnerving the soul, mystifying the intellect, running into the deception of mere subjective feeling, served to increase the content of Christian knowledge as a necessary condition, centered the endeavor straight upon the supreme end of all Christian life, and inspired his own soul with hope and courage, so that he was called out at his best in the use of the best for the accomplishment of the best. For it must be continually remembered, that the end which President Finney sought in the doctrine was no new subjective experience for the sake of the peace of the individual soul; no ideal and supernatural state of blessedness to be bestowed by the power of God; no annihilation of temptation outside or the destruction of the natural inclinations of the flesh within.² The end to be sought in the Christian intention was nothing less than the highest good of being in general,—the supreme love of God and the equal love of neighbor.

In affirming the reasonableness of the hope that this Christian intention shall prove lasting and permanent in fidelity in the present life now, he rested in particular upon three lines of argument, which were not generally disputed, even by the New School opponents of his doctrine: 1st. The human soul has ability to do all that God lays upon it as end or duty; 2d. The individual is not expected to do this alone and unaided; 3d. The gospel does promise and exhort to just this end. These were the reasons from which he drew his proposition that the earnest Christian has a reasonable ground to hope that he may attain to stability of Christian purpose in this life. And he therefore

¹ *Theology*, p. 597.

² *Ibid.*, p. 595.

considered it one of the most dangerous of all errors for a Christian to be taught that he cannot ever expect "to cease abusing God while he lives in this world." The second point just mentioned is especially important in our present estimate of President Finney, because it shows how consistent his theology is with itself, and how safe from everything subjective and fanatical. In the assistance which the soul with its ability is to receive he makes particularly important the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Here would have been the place for subjective mysticism to display itself, if he had possessed a trace of it. His realism is, however, not subjective, but objective. He is not leading in the direction of mystic communion with the unrevealed God himself. On the contrary the Holy Spirit, as we have already seen, even when dwelling in the human soul, has a special work to do for very practical ends, a work wholly of the nature of moral influence and not of force.¹ "We need knowledge of ourselves, to which the Holy Spirit aids us,—knowledge of our past sins,—their aggravation, guilt, and dire desert; we need knowledge of our spiritual weakness, in consequence of our own natures, selfish habits, and the power of temptation; we need the light of the Holy Spirit to teach us the character of God, the nature of his government, the purity of his law, the necessity and fact of atonement; we need him to teach us our need of Christ in all his offices and natures, spiritual and governmental; we need the revelations of Christ in our own souls in all these relations, in such a way as to induce in us that appropriating faith without which Christ is not, and cannot be, our salvation."² And then President Finney proceeds to introduce, step by step, all the revealed relations in which the Scriptures have held up Christ in his historical and exalted character,—sixty-one of them in all.³ These, perceived by the intellect and made influential in the soul, President Fin-

¹ *Theology*, p. 595. ² *Ibid.*, p. 376. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 637-684.

ney declares to be the means by which God in his gospel scheme is to assist the Christian in remaining loyally true and stable in his unselfish devotion to the highest good of being in general, i.e. in his deep and unselfish love of God and man. The merely intellectual or rationalistic is just as foreign as the mystical or the sentimental. This is the marvelous in President Finney's theology.

That this teaching was misunderstood and misrepresented is a comment on the times themselves. It was, no doubt, partly due to the existence of an Antinomian Perfectionism which was seeking to make headway in Connecticut and New York. Not that there was anything in common between this and the "sanctification" of President Finney,¹ for they were as different as could well be. But anything looking like Perfectionism was feared as a disturbing element. Suspicions were finally allayed and misapprehensions removed, but it was not in a year or a decade.² It was really not till the meeting of the National Council of 1871 that Oberlin was, in the East, fully recognized on her merits. Dr. Buddington, the moderator of the council, could truthfully say, at the laying of the corner-stone of Council Hall, "We stand on the grave of buried prejudices."

In intellectual insight into the deepest realities of religion, in originality of treatment and in logical power, President Finney is to be ranked side by side with Edwards.

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 341, 343; *Theology*, p. 568 ff.

² Presbyterians in New York busied themselves to oppose Oberlin as early as 1841 (*Theology*, pp. 575-582). The misapprehension of Oberlin's teaching led the Michigan Congregationalists to move toward the establishing of a new seminary in Chicago, and in 1844 and 1845 both the Michigan Synod and the Michigan Association were appointing committees and hearing reports as to the best method of "removing the error." But, beginning with 1867, the Michigan Association has passed no less than twelve various votes of confidence in Oberlin in the very practical way of urging the completion of their Michigan Professorship in the seminary at Oberlin.

They are the two greatest American theologians. Many have surpassed President Finney in the symmetry of theological form; none, in the acuteness of original perception. None have shown such an emphasis of objectivity in theology, while so far removed from everything savoring of mere intellectualism. No one has made more of reason and intuition, while being absolutely free from the pursuit of philosophical ends, and moving completely in the sphere of the religious and personal. If, to him, love could never become a sentimentalism without law, obligation never could become a mere legalism without love. He never slighted the doctrines or ignored them. When he criticized the dogmas of others, it was never that he was pleased to knock against theology as such, but because he felt within himself the power to deepen, strengthen, and vivify a rational faith in the deeper truth behind the old statements.

The heart-warmth of the Oberlin theology and the evangelistic spirit which characterized its best Christian workers has been due to no external imitation of others, or to any mere imitation of President Finney's methods, but to a common grasping at first hand of the fresh deep conceptions of Christian truth, and hence of Christian life. None of it was for the sake of novelty, and none of it with theological vagueness. It was never the magnifying of the trifling and a spiritual blindness to the greatest things of revealed truth. He believed all the great, deep things of religion because he saw them in something of their true greatness and in their important relations. In breaking in upon the spiritual deadness which had come from a misapprehension of divine sovereignty, grace, and human ability, in which whole Christian communities seemed to lie paralyzed, he entered into a new world where God was seen in a new greatness, where men were enabled to realize as never before their true sinfulness and real weak-

ness, and where the moral and spiritual dynamic were never more vitalizing or fuller of spiritual power.

Any development of theology at Oberlin which in the future shall make living and great the deep things of reason and revelation, can but find itself drawn by an irresistible spiritual affinity to the life and thought of him who laid the broad rational foundations while giving at the same time the first full pulses of a new and vigorous religious life.