

ARTICLE V.

A THEOLOGICAL REMINISCENCE.

BY AN OLD MINISTER.

A SAD experience in backsliding from the faith, during my Senior year at college, and for some time after, made me very glad to get back to Christ and the Church; and I naturally, and almost of necessity, accepted the teaching of the Church in which I had been born and reared. For sixty years or more, I preached the gospel, as I understood it, very sincerely and earnestly; and it is a great comfort to me now, to believe that my labors were owned and blessed of God to the edification of churches, and the salvation of precious souls. But all this time I was having my perplexities about some things connected with the gospel I was preaching. I was in the Old School branch of the Presbyterian Church. In the dear old Cumberland Valley, Pennsylvania, I had heard the Calvinistic system of theology preached and discussed from my childhood up. As held and taught in the Old School churches in that Valley, it was called the System of the Five Points. These were: 1. The total and utter depravity of mankind; 2. God's electing some to be saved for the glory of His grace, and passing by the rest, to be punished with everlasting torment for the glory of His justice; 3. His sending His Son into the world to die for the elect, and for them only; 4. His sending the Holy Spirit to regenerate and sanctify the elect; 5. The perseverance of the saints; or, the absolute certainty of every one of

the elect being saved. This was a logical system, and each one of the points was proved by texts of Scripture. I heard it said that here was a logical chain that all the powers of earth and hell could not break. It had satisfied and captured many of the strongest minds from the time of Augustine. John Calvin, with his splendid intellect, was captured by its logic. He did not know, what is well known now, that human logic cannot be applied to the deep things of God. So far as I know, Isaac Taylor, the great Christian philosopher of the nineteenth century, was the first to make it clear that our logic cannot be applied to the deep things of God. This he did in his Review of "Edwards on the Will."

Some of my younger brethren may wonder how it was possible that, with so many statements of Scripture opposed to the above logical formula, we could hold to it. Well, I will tell you how it was in my case. While I was at the Theological Seminary, a volume written by an able minister of the Church of Scotland, was republished in New York. This book, by the Rev. William Symington, was entitled "The Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ." It was recommended to us students. I purchased a copy, and found it to be well written and ably argued. In the chapter on the Extent of the Atonement the author endeavored to prove that when the Scriptures say that Christ died for all, the meaning must be that He died for all of the elect. When the inspired John says that "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world," he means for the sins of the whole world of the elect; and so of all similar statements in the Bible. For the Scriptures must be consistent. The Calvinistic system being established by Scriptural texts, being logical, and having produced the staunchest heroes of the cross in every age and

country, all statements of Scripture must be interpreted so as to harmonize with it. This plausible statement of the case satisfied me, and put me off my guard. Nevertheless, during all the years of my exclusive attention to the work of a minister, I had my mental perplexities as to the religion I was experiencing and preaching. And I never ceased to pray that I might see revealed truth more clearly, and preach nothing but the truth. The moral character of God being utterly incomprehensible to me, I made very little progress.

I had been preaching the gospel for many years, when I happened to read Dr. Chalmers's sermon on the text "God is Love." This led me to think along a line that was new to me. I began to see clearly that there was something wrong in our "Confession of Faith," and my sympathies turned toward the views entertained by our New School brethren. But I was about seventy years of age before my prayers were fully answered, and my eyes entirely opened. Gradually I began to see the truth revealed in a clearer light, and with great peace, comfort, and joy. I now saw that ritualistic Christianity, embracing the greater portion of the nominally Christian world, was one erroneous extreme; and that rationalistic Christianity, prevailing among many of the highly educated, was the other erroneous extreme, and that between these two extremes lies evangelical religion or Spiritual Christianity. This last is the religion revealed and illustrated in the "New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And it was a happy day for me when I first saw the simplicity, the excellence, the reasonableness, and the all-sufficiency of Spiritual Christianity.

About the time of my deliverance from error, a great effort was being made to revise, or to modify in some way, the "Confession of Faith" of our Church. I was deeply inter-

ested in it and did all I could in my humble way, to aid the movement. At Los Angeles in 1903, the General Assembly, of the largest Calvinist body in the world, broke in pieces, and "smashed to smithereens," the logical System of the Five Points, and that without one dissenting voice. This was done by adding to the "Confession of Faith" two new chapters — one on the Holy Spirit, and one on the Love of God and Missions; but especially by incorporating in the "Confession" a declaratory statement that the Presbyterian Church holds the doctrine of God's eternal decree in harmony with the doctrine of His love to all mankind; the gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and His readiness to bestow His grace on all who seek it; that God desires not the death of any sinner, but has provided in Christ a salvation sufficient for all, and that His decree hinders no man from accepting that offer.

The acceptance of these truths by the Presbyterian Church, as being just as true and authoritative as the Calvinistic truths, brought to an end the old and perpetual controversy between Arminians and Calvinists. There is no longer any ground for dispute.

Lord Acton, professor of history at Cambridge University, made this remark, as true as it is suggestive: "All understanding of history depends on one's understanding the forces that make it, and religious forces are the most active and the most definite." For this reason I regard the action of the Presbyterian Church in 1903 as one of the most important events of this eventful century. It has made the Presbyterian Church one of the foremost evangelistic bodies in the world. It will help to make this the great Christian century. Before every Presbyterian now lies the completed, perfect, and final revelation of the living God contained in

the New Testament, and there is nothing in the creed of the church to hinder or cramp him in the study of it.

We Presbyterians are still Calvinists; but moderate or Scriptural Calvinists. The only difference now between us and our Arminian brethren is that we emphasize God's sovereignty, and they emphasize man's freedom and responsibility. They believe in God's sovereignty, and we believe in man's freedom and responsibility. Our creed is the same. In our preaching we may differ a little. We lay the accent on God's sovereignty, His universal providence, the fallen and sinful condition of man, his entire dependence on the mercy and grace of God, and the Scriptural truths with regard to foreordination and election. These are *first truths, necessary truths*, if there be a living God, and if there be any true religion. Without these truths being known, or at least *felt*, man cannot pray to God.

There is a special reason why all evangelical Christians should lay the accent on the divine side of truth, while the human side should not be omitted. Dr. Forsyth, an eminent and able writer, representing the Independents of England, says that the trend of religious thought for the last fifty or sixty years has been to minimize God and to magnify man. This is a true saying and a very sad one.

Dr. Trumbull, editor of the *Sunday School Times*, in an address at the Moody Bible Institute, discussed the question "What is the most dangerous heresy to-day?" He declared it to be the emphasis given in the Christian Church itself "on what we do for God, instead of on what God does for us." And the *Herald and Presbyter*, in quoting the Doctor's remarks, indorses the sentiment, and says that "while Christian service is the fruit of the Gospel, there is heresy and danger in magnifying it above the Gospel." I would add

that the TRUTH about what God our Saviour has done, is doing, and has promised yet to do for sinners is what the poor, sinning, suffering, dying world, in its dire extremity, is looking and longing for.

In these days of turmoil and confusion, of anxiety and fear, of suffering and death, when men are thinking more about God, and feeling their need of God more than ever before, I hope that all evangelical Christians will endeavor in their preaching and practice to bring God back into His own, His rightful place, His supreme sovereignty in the thinking and doing of men. It will be vastly to the advantage of the Christian Church and of all mankind. Here is a good text: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

That all controversy should be at an end forever, touching those points which formerly separated us, may be learned from the following incidents. Dr. Munhall, the well-known evangelist of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the New York *Christian Advocate* of July 11, 1901, said:—

"More than twenty years ago I heard the late Dr. Daniel Curry [of the M. E. Church] deliver an address on 'Man's Free Moral Agency.' When through he added: 'But some of you ask, How about those statements in the Bible about God's sovereignty and predestination? I answer, Since they are in God's word I believe them, because they are true. And you ask, How can you reconcile them? I reply, I cannot, but I believe them!'

"Some time afterward I heard the late Prof. A. A. Hodge, of Princeton, lecture on God's sovereignty and predestination. When through, he added: 'But some of you ask, Does not the Bible teach that man is a free moral agent? I reply, It certainly does. And you ask, How can you reconcile these two apparently contradictory views? I answer, I cannot, but I believe them with all my heart, because they are both clearly taught in the word of God.'

Every true Christian will receive revealed truths hard to understand, in the same childlike spirit. For "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."