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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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APRIL, 1902.

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ART. I.—ON THE COURSE OF PROTESTANT  
THEOLOGY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

III.

IT is a striking fact that the Protestant theology of the sixteenth century both began and ended in strict theories of predestination. The first attempt at a comprehensive treatment of theology from the point of view of the Reformation was Melanchthon's "*Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum*," which was published in 1521. The treatise which was the predominant exposition of the Reformed theology at the close of the century was Calvin's "*Institutio Christianæ Religionis*." The severe doctrine of Calvin on the subject of predestination is notorious; but it should be remembered that the teaching of Melanchthon in the first edition of his work was not less severe. The history of that work is in great measure the history of theology in the German Protestant Churches up to the time of Melanchthon's death in 1560. It passed through a great number of editions, and remained for at least half a century the great text-book of theology for the Protestant Churches; but it underwent during that time various important changes at the hands of its author. Originally, in 1521, it was a little work occupying less than 200 modern octavo pages, and it corresponded exactly to its second title, "*Hypotyposes Theologicæ*," or Theological Outlines. Melanchthon was then a young man, only twenty-four years old; and that he should have produced at that age a comprehensive review of the revived theology, which took its place at once as its most satisfactory statement, affords a wonderful illustration alike of his genius and of the profound impression made upon him by Luther, after little more than three years of that Reformer's public activity.

But the book derives a special interest from the fact that its successive stages mark the gradual development of the Reformed theology and of Melanchthon's teaching. In its earliest form—that of 1521—the Reformed teaching is exhibited in its first vivid, and in some respects immature, if not crude, elements; and it was enlarged and modified as the Reformed theology was developed and extended in scope, and as Melanchthon's own thoughts grew more mature and well balanced. In its final form it is one of the most instructive, comprehensive, and moderate treatises to be found in the literature of the Protestant Churches, and is comparable only to Calvin's "Institutes." But it is in many respects more interesting in its first form, in which the thoughts out of which the great movement of the Reformation sprang may be seen forming, as it were, in the minds of its authors. Now, as has been said, it is remarkable that this treatise commences with as strong a statement of the dependence of all things on Divine predestination as is found in the great treatise of Calvin. It lays down, at the very outset, that "since all things which happen necessarily happen according to Divine predestination, there is no liberty of our will."<sup>1</sup> Melanchthon was not a man of a stern dogmatic nature like Calvin, nor a man who approached questions with the intense vehemence of Luther. What, we must ask, is the reason why he should thus anticipate, at the commencement of the century, the characteristic teaching with which it ended?

The answer is apparent from this very treatise, and it casts a light upon the general bearing of the doctrines of predestination, which gives them at once a more intelligible and a more human character, than when we approach them simply from the side of theological philosophy. Melanchthon explains that the great purpose of his book is to give assistance in apprehending the practical, as distinct from the speculative, doctrines of Christianity. He enumerates the chief heads of theology as follows: God; Unity and Trinity; Creation; Man and Man's Powers; Sin; the Fruits of Sin, and Vices; Punishments; the Law; Promises; Regeneration by Christ; Grace; the Fruits of Grace; Faith; Hope; Charity; Predestination; Sacramental Signs; the Condition of Man; Magistrates; Bishops; Condemnation; Bliss. It may be noticed that in this enumeration predestination is one of the latter topics mentioned; but the main principles respecting it are laid down from the outset, and form the starting-point. Melanchthon goes on to say that there is

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<sup>1</sup> *Die Loci Communes*, Philipp Melanths in ihrer Urgestalt herausgegeben und erläutert von G. L. Plitt. Erlangen, 1864: p. 109.

no occasion for him to spend much labour upon those supreme questions respecting God, His Unity and Trinity, the mystery of Creation, and the mode of the Incarnation. The scholastic theologians, he says, have been discussing them for centuries, and he does not know what practical benefit has been gained. "Have they not," he asks, "as St. Paul says, 'become vain in their imaginations,' while they have been trifling all their lives about universals, formalities, connotations, and I know not what other inane words and expressions?" But, he says, "as to the other *loci*, respecting the power of sin, the law and grace, I do not know how a man can expect to be called a Christian who is ignorant of them. For it is from these that Christ is properly known, if at least the true knowledge of Christ is to know His benefits, and not, as the Schoolmen teach, to know His natures and the modes of His Incarnation. Unless you know for what purpose He assumed our flesh and was nailed to the cross, what benefit will it be to know of His history? . . . St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans"—on which Melanchthon had been giving lectures, which were the germ of this treatise—"when he wrote a compendium of Christian doctrine, did not philosophize about the mysteries of the Trinity, about the mode of the Incarnation, about active and passive creation. What is it that he treats of? Certainly of the law, of sin, of grace, which are the topics on which alone a knowledge of Christ depends."

This was the first impulse of the Reformed teaching—to make theology human, to bring it home to men's business and bosoms, and to explain its bearing on their lives and their practical necessities. Accordingly, with this brief introduction, Melanchthon goes on at once, and before everything else, to the question of human powers, and consequently of free will: "*De hominis viribus, adeoque de libero arbitrio.*" That was the first practical question which had to be considered by a teacher who wanted to bring home to men the nature of the Gospel and the benefits which it offered. It is remarkable that this is precisely the order in which, some ten years later, Melanchthon explained the teaching of the Reformed Church in the formal statement he drew up for presentation to the Emperor Charles V., and which, under the name of the Augsburg Confession, became the cardinal Protestant symbol. In that Confession the first article is *De Deo*, declaring the acceptance by the Reformers of the Nicene faith; and the very next—the second—is *De Peccato Originis*, which says that all men who, after the fall of Adam, are naturally engendered are born "with sin—that is, without fear of God, without trust towards God, and with concupiscence"; and it denies that men can be justified before

God by the natural powers of reason. That Confession, however, is content to state this as a fact, without considering its cause. The characteristic of the teaching of the "Loci Communes" is that it traces the cause of this fact to the Divine predestination, and rests it upon that foundation. "Liberty," says Melanchthon, "is the power to act or not to act, the power to act in one way or another; and the question is: Has the will this liberty, and how far?" The answer is that "Since all things which happen, necessarily happen according to Divine predestination, there can be no liberty of our will," and the discussion is concluded with the following four statements:

"If you regard the human will in reference to predestination, there is no liberty either in external or internal works; but all things happen according to Divine determination.

"If you consider the will in reference to external acts, there appears, in the judgment of nature, to be a certain liberty.

"If you consider the will in reference to the affections and passions, there is clearly no liberty, even in the judgment of nature;

"And when the affections and passions have begun to rage and burn within us, they cannot be restrained from breaking forth."

Now, as has been said, as Melanchthon grew more mature and moderate, he became content to assert the fact of the corruption of the human will, without ascribing that corruption thus absolutely to Divine decrees. But what it is important to observe is that the purpose with which the idea of predestination is introduced is to afford some explanation of the helplessness of man's will, and of the hopelessness of his condition by nature. It is introduced, that is, for a practical purpose, and arises out of the contemplation of moral and religious weakness. Melanchthon and those who felt with him found themselves, according to their bitter experience, in a condition of spiritual feebleness and moral corruption. That unhappy state seemed to them a part of the present constitution of things, and they could only attribute it to Divine ordination. The argument is the same in Luther's characteristic treatise, "De Servo Arbitrio," which he wrote three years after the first publication of Melanchthon's "Loci," in answer to the treatise of Erasmus, "De libero Arbitrio." He, similarly, in asserting the servitude of the will, lays down the principle that all things which happen, even if they seem to us to happen under conditions of mutability and contingency, nevertheless really come to pass necessarily and immutably, if we look to the will of God. He says that God works all things in all things and is alone free, and from hence it follows irre-

sistibly that there is no freedom in the human will. "Hoc fulmine et sternitur et conteritur penitus Liberum Arbitrium." The will of man is ever determined and led by some other. Luther even compares it to a beast of burden, which is ridden either by God or by the devil. Now, we may again observe in this treatise that the motive, from which this extreme theory starts, is that of illustrating and confirming the fact of the free grace of God, and the complete incapacity of the human will to work or do anything of its own initiative, in matters which pertain to salvation. Luther himself describes this as the purpose of his treatise. He, too, with further reflection and experience, ceased to assert predestination in this extreme form, and the Lutheran Church, in the "Formula Concordiæ," finally determined the matter in a sense which is closely parallel to our own Article on the subject. But what it remains important and instructive for us to observe is, that the ideas of predestination took their rise in the sense of human feebleness and incapacity for good.

It will be found that it has been so throughout Church history. It is St. Augustine who was the first great representative of predestinarian teaching, and how did he arrive at it? His teaching arose out of his controversy with Pelagius on free will. The error of Pelagius arose from his very goodness in a moral sense. He did not realize the weakness of human nature, and thought that it had natural powers still left to it which were capable of doing good. As Luthardt has remarked, it was by no moral levity that the course of Pelagius's thought was prompted, but, on the contrary, by a certain moral earnestness. He was aiming at a moral reform of life, and was vindicating the monkish efforts at self-discipline, charity, poverty, and the like, and he thought Augustine was cutting the sinews of such moral endeavours. But Augustine, in a terrible experience, had realized the utter weakness of human nature, and felt that it was solely by the grace of God, and not by any moral efforts of his own, that he had been delivered. But if, as he felt, his salvation had been entirely God's work, he could not but go on to ask why it was that he had been saved from his own evil, and not others; why should grace be effectual in some cases and not in all? There seemed no answer to this question except in the absolute power and will of God, which works irresistibly in some cases and not in others. Melancthon and Luther were but following precisely the reasoning and the experience of Augustine, in passing from a sense of human helplessness, and of the absolute dependence of the Christian on the grace of God, to the conclusion that God's will is supreme, and that all things are predestinated by Him.

There is a striking passage in Coleridge's "Aids to Reflection," a work particularly instructive on this and the cognate subjects, in which this train of thought is illustrated with great force and beauty. It is in his comment on his Second Aphorism on Spiritual Religion. He begins by observing that "no impartial person, competently acquainted with the history of the Reformation, and the works of the earlier Protestant divines, at home and abroad, even to the close of Elizabeth's reign, will deny that the doctrines of Calvin on redemption and the natural state of fallen man are in all essential points the same as those of Luther, Zwinglius and the first Reformers collectively." Then, after some discussion of the philosophical problems involved, he goes on to consider the case of a man who has reason to believe, from his spiritual experience, that he has received the grace of God, and is "on the right road to the life promised under these conditions." "Now," he says, "I dare assert that no such man, however fervent his charity and however deep his humility may be, can peruse the records of history with a reflecting spirit, or look round the world with an observant eye, and not find himself compelled to admit that *all men are not* on the right road. He cannot help judging that even in Christian countries many—a fearful many—have not their faces turned towards it. This, then, is a mere matter of fact. Now comes the question. Shall the believer, who thus hopes on the appointed grounds of hope, attribute this distinction exclusively to his own resolves and strivings—or, if not exclusively, yet primarily and principally? Shall he refer the first movements and preparations to his own will and understanding, and bottom his claim to the promises on his own comparative excellence? If not, if no man dare take this honour to himself, to whom shall he assign it, if not to that Being in whom the promise originated, and on whom its fulfilment depends? If he stop here, who shall blame him? By what argument shall his reasoning be invalidated, which might not be urged with equal force against any essential difference between obedient and disobedient, Christian and worldling—that would not imply that both sorts alike are, in the sight of God, the sons of God by adoption?"

In these observations of Coleridge it will be found, perhaps, that we have the secret of the earnest discussions with which the sixteenth century is occupied respecting the relations between free will and grace, liberty and predestination—the so-called Synergistic controversies, or those which concern the question of the mutual relations and actions of the human will and the Spirit of God in the conversion and salvation of men. They are controversies which arose out of the moral and religious experience of the men of that day, and they are

the expression, less of their thoughts, than of their spiritual struggles.

This is indeed a characteristic of all controversies respecting subjects of this class—those which relate to the moral nature of man—which it is essential to bear in mind, if they are to be at all adequately apprehended. Respecting such controversies, it may well be doubted whether they ever will be, or, rather, whether they ever can be, settled. They are not controversies respecting abstract or eternal truths, like those respecting mathematics, on the one hand, or those respecting the attributes of God, on the other. They are controversies respecting matters of human experience, and the premises from which men argue vary with that experience. Pelagius sees one side of that experience; St. Augustine sees another; and neither can quite appreciate the facts which his antagonist has in view. So, in the century we are considering, Erasmus is arguing from the point of view of the experience of a successful and somewhat cold-blooded scholar, who is looking at the human will from an abstract and philosophical point of observation. Luther was arguing from the point of view of a man immersed from his youth up in intense moral and spiritual struggles, sensible of the tremendous temptations against which he has to contend, and feeling that, if God be not for him, if he be not chosen by God and upheld by God, he has no hope of victory and deliverance.

It may be a question in this controversy on which side is the best philosophy; but there can be little question on which side is the best experience. As Coleridge puts the case in his comments in the "Aids to Reflection" on a passage from Bishop Jeremy Taylor on Original Sin: "What less than disease can we call a necessity of error and a predisposition to sin and sickness? Taylor, indeed, asserts that though perfect obedience became incomparably more difficult" (after Adam's fall) "it was not, however, absolutely impossible. Yet he himself admits that the contrary was universal—that, of the countless millions of Adam's posterity, not a single individual ever realized or approached to the realization of this possibility; and (if my memory does not deceive me) Taylor himself has elsewhere exposed—and, if he has not, yet common-sense will do it for him—the sophistry in asserting of a whole what may be true of the whole, but is in fact true only of each of its component parts. Anyone may snap a horsehair; therefore anyone may perform the same feat with the horse's tail. On a level floor (on the hardened sand, for instance, of a sea-beach) I chalk two parallel straight lines, with a width of eight inches. It is possible for a man, with a bandage

over his eyes, to keep within the path for two or three paces; therefore it is possible for him to walk blindfold for two or three leagues without a single deviation! And this possibility would suffice to acquit me of injustice, though I had placed man-traps within an inch of one line, and knew that there were pitfalls and deep wells beside the other!"

In short, in proportion to the depth of men's moral and spiritual struggle, in proportion to the intensity with which they apprehend the height of the Divine righteousness and the Divine ideal, must there arise in them a sense of the utter feebleness of their own powers, of the weakness and servitude of their wills, and of their absolute dependence on Divine grace and the Divine will. They are driven to that sense of utter incapacity, and of entire dependence upon God, which St. Paul expresses so forcibly in the Epistle to the Romans. But, unfortunately, they are almost always impelled, as Melancthon, Luther, and Calvin were, to step beyond that practical statement of their experience, and to speculate on the ultimate philosophical, or metaphysical, causes of their condition; and then their moral conclusions become entangled in the meshes of a speculative and uncertain philosophy. As Coleridge, again, says, after the first of the two passages just quoted:

"If the self-examinant will abandon this position, and exchange the safe circle of religion and practical reason for the shifting sand-wastes and *mirages* of speculative theology; if, instead of seeking after the marks of Election in himself, he undertakes to determine the ground and origin, the possibility and mode of Election itself in relation to God—in this case, and whether he does it for the satisfaction of curiosity, or from the ambition of answering those who would call God Himself to account, why and by what right certain souls were born in Africa instead of England," and similar problems, "in this case, I say, we can only regret that the inquirer had not been better instructed in the nature, the bounds, the true purposes and proper objects of his intellectual faculties, and that he had not previously asked himself, by what appropriate sense, or organ of knowledge, he hoped to secure an insight into a nature which was neither an object of his senses, nor a part of his self-consciousness; and so leave himself to ward off shadowy spears with the shadow of a shield, and to retaliate the nonsense of blasphemy with the *abracadabra* of presumption. He that will fly without wings must fly in his dreams: and till he awakes will not find out that to fly in a dream is but to dream of flying."

Those observations of Coleridge are an admirable com-

mentary alike on the strength and on the weakness of the predestinarian theories of the Reformers. Only let us remember that, when men are in the thick of a mortal struggle for great spiritual and moral truths, they naturally lay hands on any weapon that is within their grasp; and that they are almost forced to become philosophers and speculative theologians, against their will, if they are to maintain what they feel to be the most vital moral truths, against the assaults that are made on them from all sides.

There is, however, a special aspect of Calvin's doctrine of predestination which deserves distinct recognition, and which distinguishes it, in great measure, from those of Luther and Melancthon. There does not seem evidence that Calvin was drawn into his theory by such intense moral experience as we have traced in Augustine, Luther, and others, and there seems to be another impulse operating in him. He is a man with a profound sense of the necessity of law and government. His conversion, he says, was sudden; and as soon as he is converted and convinced of the truth of the Reformed theology, his dominant idea is that of obedience to the will of God. It has been said of him that obedience was the watchword of his life. He is the Protestant Loyola; and as Loyola taught that every Jesuit should be as a staff in the hand of his superior, so Calvin's idea was that every Christian should be at the absolute command of God—as, in fact, every man really is, whether consciously or not. God is regarded by him, not so much in the character of a Father, which is Luther's favourite conception, but as a Lord and Judge. He is the Lord of lords, who, according to His unrestricted will, disposes of the destinies of men. Accordingly, in considering the relation of God to the world, the emphasis is laid upon the power of God, and the relation of men to Him is pre-eminently that of obedience.

Calvin's work at Geneva is to realize this aspect of Christianity and of the Church. Luther leaves the utmost possible amount of freedom to the renewed and sanctified will. "Christian Liberty"—the title of Luther's most beautiful and least controversial work—is also the watchword of his practical conception of the Church. He would have as much liberty as possible, within the bounds of Christian life and love. But Calvin's conception was that of a strictly regulated life. "Under his influence Geneva is transformed into a theocracy. The Church lays down the rules and regulations for faith and life, and the State enforces them. . . . Amusements are forbidden; the very discipline of the family is brought under control; attendance at church and Communion at stated times are made obli-

gatory.”<sup>1</sup> No doubt Calvin rendered a great service to the Protestant cause at a critical juncture by thus insisting, even with this exaggeration, upon the necessity of discipline and order in the Christian life. But by that inevitable tendency by which men transfer, in some degree, their own image and similitude to their conception of God, so Calvin conceives of the world as regulated by definite and immutable Divine decrees. All is determined by God beforehand, all is regulated by precise decisions; and the place and fate of every individual has been assigned to him. Carried to this speculative length, it was an exaggeration which provoked a dangerous reaction; yet we have only to look to our sister Church in Scotland in order to see that such a view exhibits a real side of human experience, and has worked out magnificent results. Human nature disregards, in practice, the extreme points in such theories and systems, and assimilates their excellences. It may be, as Calvin himself confessed, a *horribile decretum* that some men are everlastingly predestinated to damnation, as others are to salvation. In some cases such a doctrine leads men to the desperation of which our article speaks; but the great mass of men instinctively disregard the supposition that they themselves may be among the condemned. They hope for the best for themselves; and then there remain for them only the grand and fortifying elements of the system. There remains for them the spectacle of a firm, holy, unbending law, to which they must conform if they are to be in harmony with the truth and reality of things. There remain for them those conceptions of the eternities, the infinities, the immutabilities of life, which Carlyle, for instance, brought out of his Scottish training and habits, though he discarded their Christian form. Calvin was to the men of his day something of what Carlyle was, though in so different a shape, to the last generation of Englishmen. He deepened immeasurably their sense of the eternal and unalterable realities of life, and impressed upon them the absolute necessity of conformity with the will of God. Had not such a proclamation of universal predestination and immutable law been combined with the more gracious message of the Gospel, it would have been intolerable to the feebleness of human nature. But, with whatever inconsistencies, it was in fact combined with that message; and men and women learned, at one and the same time, their insignificance amidst the vast and eternal system of decrees and laws with which they were surrounded, and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Thomasius' Dogmengeschichte*, ed. Seeberg, vol. ii., p. 639; edit. 1889.

the grace of God, by which they were saved from the effects of such crushing and awful powers.

It is hoped that even these slight sketches of the vast and profound subjects, with which the theology of the sixteenth century was occupied, may have served to illustrate the intense human interest by which that theology was prompted and animated. Whatever the cause may be, something in that century stirred human nature to its very depths, threw up to the surface all its struggling forces, and challenged the theologians of the day to interpret them and to bring them into order. To some thoughtful readers<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, at the end of the sixteenth century, has seemed an isolated phenomenon, concerned only with the passions and affections of human nature, and standing calmly aloof from the controversies of his day. But it may be, on the other hand, that he is but the final illustration of the whole character of the century—a century in which human nature, too long confined in the swathing-bands of medieval discipline and philosophy, cast them aside, burst into the realities of the great world of man and nature, asked itself what they meant, what nature meant, what God meant, what Christ was, not to theologians, but to common men and women; not to theological virtues and vices, but to common struggles, common passions, common experiences. The theologies of the sixteenth century are the record of this experience and of its interpretation. They are marked by errors and exaggerations, like the human beings who threw them up to the surface of their hearts and minds in that battle of giants. But considered from the point of view here suggested, they cast an intense light upon the needs of the human heart and upon the Divine answer to them; and it may be added, in conclusion, that their best results, and the truest record of the experience they have won for us, are embodied in our own Thirty-nine Articles, which are, as it were, the aphorisms of the *Novum Organum* of a new religious world.

HENRY WACE.

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ART. II.—BAPTISMAL REGENERATION IN CHURCH HISTORY.

“SEEING now that this child is regenerate.” Few will deny that these words are one of the chief stumbling-blocks that the Prayer-Book presents to devout and thoughtful minds. We have all felt their difficulty. Probably every clergyman

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<sup>1</sup> Brewer's "English Studies," p. 271.