

# The American Presbyterian.

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### EFFECTS OF OVER-CIVILIZATION ON THEOLOGY AND MORALS.

"There is a shape which Theology is extensively assuming in this age, originating in the feeling of kindness, compassion, charity. . . . In some respects it grows out of progress in civilization and refinement and cannot be rebuked without the suspicion of a desire to go back into the days of barbarism."—*Albert Barnes.*

Many indications are abroad, in theology, in politics, in social morals of the debilitating effects of a civilization pushed too far, at least in some departments of human activity. The refinements of modern culture, if not unfriendly to the manly and robust traits of character, yet seem to cast into the background that deep foundation of order, the sentiment of justice. Men are so engaged with the external and lighter aspects of things, that they forget the rock-ribbed frame of the world beneath their feet, or cease to feel an interest in its nature and existence.

In departing from the barbarity of the Middle Ages, with its Inquisition and its *Auto da fe*, we are rushing to an extreme of charity exhibited in the greatest possible amelioration of the sufferings and discomforts of criminals. As far as practicable, the very idea of justice is abstracted from punishment; the mere protection of the community from loss or damage, or at most, the reformation of the offender is proposed as the chief, and, in fact, only end of punishment. It becomes altogether a mere matter of expediency how much the criminal is punished, or, indeed, whether he be punished at all. No high and awful duty is owed by the government to a Divine principle. It is a mere matter of calculation; and if no clear ends of utility are gained, punishment for a principle—to "satisfy justice," is viewed as downright expediency.

Many times have we had occasion to remark the extraordinary obstacles experienced in the attempt—we will not say to punish rebellion, but suitably to indicate, in the policy of the nation, the moral difference between loyalty and rebellion, between patriotism and treason. The most persistent opposition is made, even on the part of many truly loyal persons, to any measures of reconstruction involving the least punitive element. This was clearly illustrated in the transactions out of which grew the Reconstruction Bill of the Thirty-ninth Congress, too familiar to our readers to need extended rehearsal. The two Houses agreed on all the main features of the plan, except the penal provision of rebel disfranchisement which formed part of the bill, as originally introduced into the lower House. Leading Republican Senators resisted this feature of the enactment, and framed a plan which would have given almost every rebel in the South the right to take equal part with the loyal people, in restoring civil government in their section. When the Senate amendments came back to the House, it was doubtful whether there were enough strenuous Republicans in that body to carry its own measure of rebel disfranchisement. It was not merely Raymond, but such men as Dodge, Thayer, Bingham, and a score of others like them, who joined the Democrats in a vain effort to defeat Mr. Shellabarger's amendment, which saved the penal character of the Bill; and when the amendment came before the Senate again, even Henry Wilson objected to the disfranchising clause and gave his vote for the amended bill "with regret."

Passing now to the domain of Theology, we see the working of what seems to us the same spirit, in the attempts made to eliminate all penal elements from the philosophy of the Atonement, and to limit the effects of that transaction solely to the moral nature of man. The death of Christ, according to such men as Bushnell and Dr. John Young, is not a Sacrifice, a Ransom, a Propitiation. Especially, in these theories, it is argued that the death of Christ on the cross is quite unnecessary to the perfection of his work. Dr. Bushnell says, the moral tragedy of the garden is supplemented by that of the cross; as if the cross were a secondary matter, instead of the central figure of Christianity. Dr. Young, in his book on the same subject, "The Life and Light of Men," gives greater prominence to the cross as producing an effect upon the minds of men to subdue and

to attract them, but denies to it any expiatory power. Such expiation is, in the view of these men, unnecessary. There is no demand for it, in the nature of things, or in God's moral government. The grand idea of justice, which blazes like a star upon the very forehead of all the orthodox views of the Atonement, is hidden, nay, is blotted out in these theories. Their resemblance to those theories of human punishment which are aimed solely at the reformation of the offender, is too plain to need pointing out. Before Christ comes, there is no obstacle in the way of the forgiveness of the sinner, but such as exists in the sinner's own heart and character. The very idea of moral government, in any true sense of the term, is absent from the mind of such speculators. It is distasteful to them. "There is, then, no such thing in God," says Dr. Bushnell, "or in any other being, as a kind of justice which goes by the law of desert, and ceases to be justice when not exactly matched by suffering." "It is another misconception," he says again, "that we assume the essential priority of law and justice as related to mercy." Says Dr. Young: "Always God is more and better than merely just, and acts on the ground of pure mercy. . . . There is no such attribute [as rectilinear justice] with God."

The appearance of such treatises as these of Drs. Bushnell and Young, with similar phenomena in many other theological and moral treatises, must be regarded as a symptom of the diminished power of the sentiment of justice in the minds of this class of thinkers. They reluctantly from an exhibition of the character of God, at least in his relations to the atonement, in which a supreme place is given to justice. Mr. Barnes, in his "Thoughts on Theology," published thirteen years ago, anticipated this class of speculations, in the remark which we have put at the head of this article. "There is a shape which Theology is extensively assuming in this age, originating in the feeling of kindness, compassion, and charity. . . . In some respects it grows out of progress in civilization and refinement, and cannot be rebuked without the suspicion of a desire to go back into the days of barbarism."—(*Essays and Reviews*, I, 331.)

"Whatever else God may be," says another recent essayist, "he must be just. It is not optional with him to exercise this attribute or not to exercise it. . . . We can say, 'God may be merciful or not, as he pleases,' but we cannot say, 'God may be just or not, as he pleases.'" We do not wonder that Dr. Young is not altogether satisfied with the essay of Dr. Shedd, from which this extract is taken. [See *Life and Light of Men*, p. 116, note.]

Finally, we may class with these phenomena, the infrequency with which the doctrine of Eternal Punishment is preached and the subdued manner in which it is treated, as compared with the representations of earlier times. In art, as well as in preaching, the difference is marked. No great painter now thinks of taking "The Last Judgment" as a subject for his pencil, and no decorator of a Christian temple would be likely to order it. And as to the holding and maintaining of the doctrine of eternal punishment, while there is no evidence to show that its avowed opponents are gaining numerically upon those who hold orthodox views, or that the doctrine is losing its hold on the popular conscience, we think it is much less frequently made a set topic of preaching, and is put in the background as a matter of allusion and inference, when referred to all. Such a sermon as that of Jonathan Edwards, on "The Sinner in the Hands of an angry God," is as much out of the ordinary vein, and we may add capacity, of modern sermonizing, as Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment" is beyond the taste and capacity of modern painters. There seems to be no spontaneous impulse towards the subject, as there is towards the thousand and one social, moral and political subjects, with which Christianity has become associated in modern times. There is, in fact, a tenderness or delicacy of feeling, which makes men shrink from treating with undue frequency, or in an uncompromising way, a doctrine which nevertheless they cannot but entertain, as a most evident part of Divine Revelation.

On the whole, we are inclined to class all these and similar phenomena, as results of that refinement of the sensibilities which Christian civilization itself must bring with it, but to which there is liability of excess

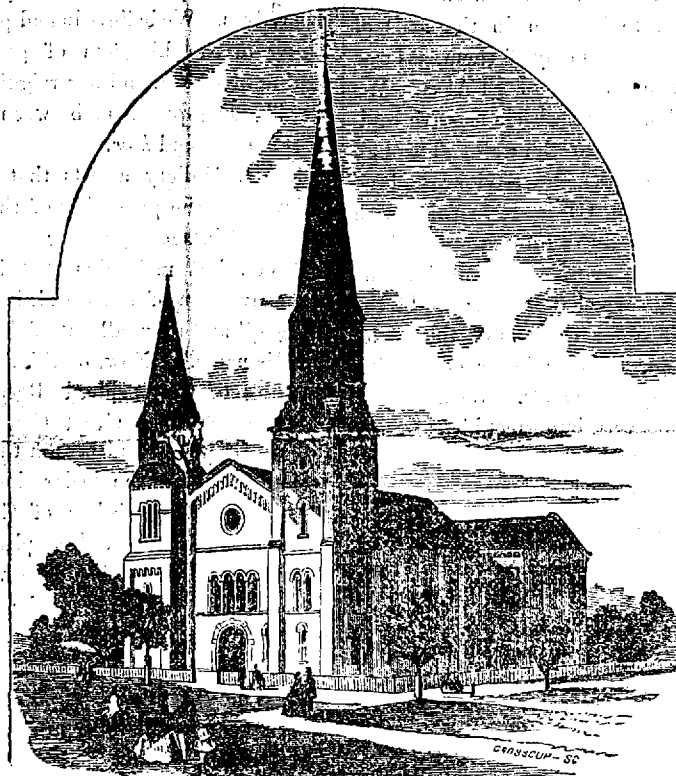
or of perversion. Refinement and delicacy of feelings are among the most valuable distinctions of a civilized state; but few calamities can be so terrible as to have strength and principle and conscience refined and polished quite away from one's life and character. No policy can be more truly cruel, than that which is too tender and merciful adequately to punish criminals. Nothing is more akin to crime or more certain to breed crime, than a want of a quick appreciation of crime in its enormity and ill desert.

And woe to the preacher of the Gospel, who allows his creed to be enfeebled, and his message to be deprived of strength and emphasis and authority, by conscious or unconscious conformity to the standards of what we may term the over-civilized age in which he lives! He may by no means ignore the real advances of the age in every kindly element. It would be unpardonable in him to go back to the rude and coarse exhibitions of an era which knew less of the refining influences of true Christianity than this. The arrows of truth which he shoots may, indeed, be more polished and shapely, but only a false and cruel tenderness will shrink from planting them sharp in the heart of the King's enemies.

The release of Jefferson Davis on bail, since the above was in type, is a commentary and corroboration of the leading points of this article.

CEDAR (SOUTH) ST.—The Pastor, under date of May 7th says: "Last week I had the pleasure of receiving into the communion of our church thirty-five (35) persons. Men and women of ripe years stood beside children and youth to confess Christ. From two families a brother and sister stood together, and from another two sisters were glad to find they sympathized in their newfound joys and hopes. Another family sent the only one of their number, who, till then, had refused Christ, and the whole family were thus permitted to sit together at the Lord's Table. Two families, who before were all of the world, were divided, by two from each standing up for Jesus, and we hope the division will be healed by their leading the rest to the cross. The parents of two that we welcomed, when I asked their consent to their becoming members of church, told me they had not been in a place of worship for fifteen years; but ever since, they have been constant attendants upon our Sabbath and week night-services, and are now seeking the truth."

TABOR CHURCH.—At the communion season last Sabbath, twenty-six persons were received, all but three on profession. The work of building a parsonage, on the lot adjoining the church, is rapidly proceeding, the people having formed themselves almost *en masse*, into a mite society, for the purpose of equalizing the burden and meeting the expense, if possible, entirely among themselves. The membership is now over four hundred; Rev. George Van Deusen Pastor.



BRICK CHURCH, ROCHESTER.

We take pleasure in laying before our readers a cut representing the Brick Church, Rochester, in which the sessions of the General Assembly, commencing this day, are held. It was built in 1860; and is of ample proportions, being one of the most commodious and well-devised edifices for Christian worship in the land. It is seventy-six by one hundred and fifty-eight feet, part of the great length being, in fact, the front of the building arranged for lecture room, Sunday-school room, and other apartments, and communicating directly with the main building.

The audience room is seventy-three by eighty-eight feet, with galleries, and will comfortably seat 1250. Two thousand can

be accommodated and often have been when aisles and areas are filled. The chapel or end building, is forty-four by one hundred feet; eight hundred scholars can be accommodated in the school room, and the lecture room, forty-four by fifty-six feet, will hold four hundred. The present structure is in place of one erected in 1826, fifty by seventy-two feet. The name "Brick Church" appears to have been used first in 1834. Rev. Dr. Shaw, who is the fourth pastor, was installed January 1st, 1841. This church has had a most prosperous history, and has steadily grown from its organization in 1825, with twenty-five members, to number nearly 1100, being one of the four largest Presbyterian churches in the country.

### THE PRESBYTERIAN.

We reprint our two questions to the *Presbyterian* of this city, as yet unanswered, for two reasons; first, lest our cotemporary should by accident have overlooked them in our issue of April 25; and secondly, because if the failure is an intentional one, we think it should be known what sort of questions they are, which it refuses to answer. And we fear the failure is intentional, from the fact that the last number of *The Presbyterian* bears evidence of pretty close attention to other recent articles of ours on the same general subject. Here are the questions:

I. Does *The Presbyterian* subscribe to the language of the answer to the 16th Question of the Shorter Catechism: "Sinned in him and fell with him," taken in its literal import?

II. Does *The Presbyterian* believe that subscription to the doctrine of a limited atonement is necessary to good standing in the Presbyterian Church; or, in other words, does it regard the belief that Christ died for all, one of the New School peculiarities which must be ruled out of the reunited Church?

Rev. John Hall, D.D., of the Irish Deputation, arrived at New York, on Monday, May 13.

### THE REUNION COMMITTEES.

The Joint Committee on Union resumed its sittings in New York city, week before last. The members, feeling the profound importance of their mission, resolved to lay aside at once all thoughts of haste, and they devoted nearly a week to the deliberate consideration of the subject before them. Every aspect of the subject was thoroughly and frankly discussed, both in the separate committees, in joint meeting, through a sub-committee, and in joint committee again. They finally agreed upon a report, covering the entire ground of possible differences between the two bodies, as they presented themselves to the Committee. The report will be laid before both Assemblies; and in the near approach of the meeting, it is regarded inexpedient to make it public. It is, however, proper to say that no hasty action is counselled; it is proposed that a year be given for full discussion before any formal action is initiated, and the Committee recommend that the vote of three-fourths of the Presbyteries in both bodies be made necessary for ratification, whenever the sense of the Church is taken.

The members of the Committee express themselves mutually gratified by the truly

Christian spirit of frankness, brotherly regard and humble and prayerful dependence on God, which marked the entire proceedings, and declare themselves rewarded for all their pains, if nothing beyond the establishment of such happy relations between individual members of the Committee, is the result.

### INTEMPERANCE—ENCOURAGING FACTS.

Our excellent Union League in this city prohibits the sale of spirituous liquors in its refectory, but it follows an evil custom in providing them in abundance at the public banquets given in its splendid hall. One would think the example of General Grant, who at one of these banquets rebuked the custom by refusing to touch a drop, and the example of the sturdy teetotal Governor Geary would prompt them to a reform in this particular; not to speak of the Congressional Temperance Society, and of the remarkable accumulation of grave instances of excess on the Democratic side in high political circles in Washington. And we have now to add another recent example of abstinence at these over bountiful tables in the person of Speaker Colfax, at the supper given him on Tuesday night of last week. The steady nerves, the clear head and the unfeigned geniality of that remarkable man were not on that occasion put at the mercy of the intoxicating cup, and never are.

Judge Brewster, in his elegant address to the Scotch and Irish Presbyterian delegation at the residence of Matthew Newkirk, Esq., said that we would not, like Aescetes, send our guests away with refilled casks of wine. That was literally true for that evening. There was not a drop of wine visible in the truly sumptuous entertainment which followed the speech-making. This, it is true, was not unexpected, but the example was none the less important in the present revival of the Temperance cause. Let wine disappear from the Union League banquets, and from festivities in high places, and it will be comparatively easy to deal with whiskey in the low.

KOLAPOOR MISSION, INDIA, is an independent enterprise, supported at an expense of between two and three thousand dollars *per annum*, which is contributed by individuals and Sunday-schools among Congregationalists, and New and Old School Presbyterians in this country, and by individuals principally in Her Majesty's civil and military service in India. In the report for 1865, contributions are also acknowledged from the Female Normal School and Instruction Society, London, and from a Christian lady in England, who bore the expenses of the preaching tour through the villages. The India contributions for 1866, were about \$650 in gold, considerably more than in the year previous; there is also also acknowledged a legacy of \$1000 from Mrs. Hammond in this country, realized last year.

A stone chapel, 36 by 65 feet, has been built, and a congregation of two hundred hearers gathered, with a church, which, fifteen months ago, numbered eleven communicants. It is a solitary witness for Jesus in a city containing two hundred and fifty-two idol temples. The missionaries are Rev. R. G. Wilder and wife, with a female Bible Reader; there are four schools embracing, at the last report, two hundred and thirty-four pupils. 2949 volumes, 293,007 pages of religious literature were distributed, mostly by gift, in 1865. Extensive preaching tours are made during the cool season through the numerous villages of the densely crowded province, where there is not another missionary to be found.

Some single wealthy church or cluster of churches should take charge of this hopeful and much needed enterprise, and place it on a permanent basis.

THE N. Y. CHRISTIAN INTELLIGENCER (Reformed Dutch) quotes our description of the Old School character, as deduced from history, and admits the justness of the portrait as regards individual cases, but finds fault with us for applying it to an entire denomination. This we did not do. The careful reader will notice that the subject of all our propositions in that article, was "the thorough-going Old School man." We by no means believe that the other branch contains only such men, although we find such almost exclusively represented in the newspaper organs of the body. Our views and language naturally take shape from the class with whom we, in our editorial capacity, are brought in contact.