

THE
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

OCTOBER, 1858.

ART. I.—REFORMED SYNODS.

THE restoration of the Reformed, or—as it is commonly called—Presbyterian Church polity, is by many attributed to Calvin. This is correct only in part. The honor of having materially aided in its development belongs, no doubt, to him, but the first movement in that direction, and the first partial success in its restoration, belongs to Zwingli. Dr. Paul Henry, in his extensive and learned *Life of Calvin*, admits, that “the direction which Calvin took as a reformer, in matters of discipline, was that pointed out by Zwingli, and the opposite of that pursued by Luther.”*

Our present inquiry has reference to the rise and history of Synods and other ecclesiastical judicatories in the Reformed Church.

The first Synod in the Reformed sense, growing out of the new order developed by the Reformation, was, beyond doubt, the one held at Berne, Feb. 13th, 1528, six days after the close of the Disputation of Berne, when the ten Theses were signed. It was called with a view “to ascertain the sentiments of the congregations, through their delegates, with regard to the Reformation.” Whether this was designed to be the first of a series of permanent and regular Synods does not appear, but this is most likely. On account of disturbances which broke out in the Highlands, 1528, and also the religious wars of 1529 and 1531, what is usually called the first Synod of Berne did not meet till the 9th of January, 1532, continuing till the 14th.

* Vol. I, p. 367.

ART. VI.—THE ASCETIC SYSTEM.

By asceticism * we mean, in general, a rigid outward self-discipline, by which the spirit strives after full dominion over the flesh, and a superior grade of virtue. It includes not only that true temperance and restraining of the animal appetites, which is a universal Christian duty, but total abstinence from enjoyments in themselves lawful, from wine, animal food, property, and marriage, together with all kinds of penances and mortifications of the body. In the union of the abstractive and penitential elements, or of self-denial and self-punishment the catholic asceticism stands forth complete in light and shade; exhibiting, on the one hand, wonderful examples of heroic renunciation of self and the world, but very often, on the other, a total misapprehension and perversion of Christian morality; the renunciation involving more or less a Gnostic contempt of the gifts and ordinances of the God of nature, and the penance or self-punishment running into practical denial of the all-sufficient merits of Christ. The ascetic and monastic tendency rests primarily upon a lively, though for the most part morbid sense of the sinfulness of the flesh and the irremediable corruption of the world; then upon the desire for undisturbed solitude and exclusive occupation with divine things; and finally, upon a certain religious ambition to attain extraordinary holiness and merit. It would anticipate the life of angels † upon the earth. It substitutes an abnormal, self-appointed virtue and piety for the normal forms prescribed by God; and not rarely looks

* *Ἀσκησις*, from *ασκω*, to exercise, to strengthen; primarily applied to athletic and gymnastic exercises, but used also, even by the heathens and by Philo, of moral self-discipline.

† Math. 22: 30. Hence the frequent designation of monastic life as a *vita angelica*.

down upon the divinely-ordained standard with spiritual pride. It is a mark at once of moral strength and moral weakness. It presumes a certain degree of culture, in which man has emancipated himself from the powers of nature and risen to the consciousness of his moral calling; but thinks to secure itself against temptation only by entire separation from the world, instead of standing in the world to overcome it and transform it into the kingdom of God.

Asceticism is by no means limited to the Christian Church, though it there first developed its highest and noblest form. We observe kindred phenomena even long before Christ; among the Jews, in the Nazarites, the Essenes, and the cognate Therapeutae; and still more among the heathens, in the old Persian and Indian religions, especially among the Buddhists. Even the Grecian Philosophy was conceived by the Pythagoreans, the Platonists, and the Stoics, not as theoretical knowledge merely, but also as practical wisdom, and frequently joined itself to the most rigid abstemiousness, so that "philosopher" and "ascetic" were interchangeable terms. Most of the apologists of the second century had by this practical philosophy, particularly the Platonic, been led to Christianity; and they on this account retained their simple dress and mode of life. Tertullian congratulates the philosopher's cloak on having now become the garb of a better philosophy. In the show of self-denial the Cynics, the followers of Diogenes, went to the extreme; but these, at least in their later degenerate days, concealed under the guise of bodily squalor, untrimmed nails, and uncombed hair, a common Cynic spirit and a bitter hatred of Christianity.

In the ancient Church there was a special class of Christians, of both sexes, who, under the name of "ascetics," or "abstinents,"* though still living in the midst of the community, retired from society, voluntarily renounced marriage and property, devoted themselves wholly to fast-

* *Ἀσκηταί*, continentes; also *παρθένοι*, virgines.

ings, prayer, and religious contemplation, and strove thereby to attain Christian perfection. Sometimes they formed a society of their own,* for mutual improvement, an *eclesiola in ecclesia*, in which even children could be received and trained to abstinence. They shared with the confessors the greatest regard from their fellow Christians, had a separate seat in the public worship, and were considered the fairest ornaments in the Church. In times of persecution they sought with enthusiasm a martyr's death as the crown of perfection. While as yet each congregation was a lonely oasis in the desert of the world's corruption, and stood in downright opposition to the surrounding heathen world, these ascetics had no reason for separating from it and flying into the desert. It was under Constantine, and partly in consequence of the union of Church and State, the consequent transfer of the world into the Church, and the cessation of martyrdom, that asceticism developed itself to anchoritism and monkery, and endeavored thus to save the virgin purity of the Church by carrying it into the wilderness. Yet the lives of the two first hermits, Paul of Thebes (†340) and Anthony of Egypt (†356), fall, at least partly, in the ante-Nicene age. At the time of Cyprian† there was as yet no absolutely binding vow. The early origin and wide spread of this ascetic life are due to the deep moral earnestness of Christianity and the prevalence of sin in all the social relations of the then still thoroughly pagan world. It was the excessive development of the negative, world-rejecting element in Christianity, which must precede its positive effort to transform and sanctify the world.

The ascetic principle, however, was not confined, in its influence, to the proper ascetics and monks. It ruled more or less the entire morality and piety of the ancient and mediæval Church; though, on the other hand, there were never wanting in her bosom protests of the free, evangeli-

* *Ἀσκητηριον.*

† Epist. 62,

cal spirit against moral narrowness and excessive regard to outward works of the law. The ascetics were but the most consistent representatives of the old catholic piety, and were commended as such by the apologists to the heathens. They formed the spiritual aristocracy, the full bloom of the Church, and served especially as examples to the clergy.

But we must now distinguish two different kinds of asceticism in Christian antiquity: a heretical and an orthodox.

The heretical asceticism, the beginnings of which are resisted in the New Testament itself,* meets us in the Gnostic and Manichaean sects. It is descended from Oriental and Platonic heathenism, and is based on a dualistic view of the world, a confusion of sin with matter, and a perverted idea of God and the creation. It places God and the world at irreconcilable enmity, derives the creation from an inferior being, considers the human body substantially evil, a product of the devil or the demiurge, and makes it the great moral business of man to rid himself of the same, or gradually to annihilate it, whether by excessive abstinence or by unbridled indulgence. Many of the Gnostics placed the fall itself in the first gratification of the sexual desire, which subjected man to the dominion of the Hyle.

The orthodox or catholic asceticism proceeds upon Christian views and upon a literal and overstrained construction of certain passages of Scripture. It admits, that all nature is the work of God and the object of his love, and asserts the divine origin and destiny of the human body, without which there could, in fact, be no resurrection, and hence no admittance to eternal glory. It therefore aims not to mortify the body, but perfectly to control and sanctify it. For the metaphysical dualism between spirit and matter, it substitutes the ethical conflict between the spirit and the flesh. But in practice it exceeds the simple and

* 1 Tim. 4: 3. Col. 2: 16 sqq. Comp. Rom. 14.

sound limits of the Bible, falsely substitutes the bodily appetites and affections or sensuous nature, as such, for the flesh, on the principle of selfishness, which resides in the soul as well as in the body, and thus, with all its horror of heresy, really joins in the Gnostic and Manichæan hatred of the body as the prison of the spirit. This comes out especially in the depreciation of marriage and the family life, this divinely appointed nursery of Church and State, and in excessive self-inflictions, to which the apostolic piety affords not the remotest parallel. The heathen Gnostic principle of separation from the world and from the body,* as a means of self-redemption, after being theoretically exterminated, stole into the Church by a back door of practice, directly in face of the Christian doctrine of the high destiny of the body, and perfect redemption through Christ.

The Alexandrian fathers first furnished a theoretical basis for this asceticism in the distinction, suggested even by the Pastor Hermae,† of a lower and a higher morality; a distinction, which, like that introduced at the same period by Tertullian, of mortal and venial sins,‡ gave rise to many practical errors, and favored both moral laxity and ascetic extravagance. The ascetics, and afterwards the monks, formed a moral nobility, a spiritual aristocracy, above the common Christian people; as the clergy stood in a separate caste of inviolable dignity above the laity. Clement of Alexandria, otherwise remarkable for his elevated ethical views, requires of the Christian sage or gnostic, that he excel the plain Christians, not only by higher knowledge, but also by higher, emotionless virtue, and stoical superiority to all bodily conditions; and he inclines to regard the body, with Plato, as the grave and fetters of the soul. How little he understood the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, may be inferred from a passage in the Stromata, where he explains the word of Christ: "Thy

* Entweltlichung and Entleiblichung.

† Simil. V, 8 (p. 492 ed. Dressel): Si autem praeter ea quae mandavit Dominus aliquid boni adjeceris, majorem dignitatem tibi conquires, et honoratior apud Dominum eris, quam eras futurus.

‡ Peccata irremissibilia and remissibilia, or mortalia and venialia.

§ Ταφος, δεσμος.

faith has saved thee," as referring not to faith simply without good works, but to the Jews only, who lived according to the law; as if faith was something to be added to the good works instead of being the source and principle of the holy life. Origen† goes still further, and propounds quite distinctly the Catholic doctrine of works of supererogation‡; works not enjoined indeed in the gospel, yet recommended,|| which were supposed to establish a peculiar merit and secure a higher degree of blessedness. He, who does only what is required of all, is an unprofitable servant;§ but he, who does more, who performs, for example, what Paul, in 1 Cor. 7: 25, merely recommends concerning the single state, or, like him, resigns his just claim to temporal remuneration for spiritual service, is called a good and faithful servant.¶ Among these works were reckoned martyrdom, voluntary poverty, and voluntary celibacy. All three, or at least the last two of these acts, in connection with the positive Christian virtues, belong to the idea of the higher perfection, as distinguished from the fulfilment of regular duties, or ordinary morality. To poverty and celibacy was afterwards added absolute obedience; and these three things were the main subjects of the *consilia evangelica* and the monastic vow.

The ground, on which these particular virtues were so strongly urged, is easily understood.

Property, which is so closely allied to the selfishness of man and binds him to the earth; and sexual intercourse, which brings out sensual passion in its greatest strength, and which nature herself covers with the veil of modesty;

† In ep. ad Rom. C. III, ed. de la Rue IV, p. 507: Donec quis hoc tantum facit, quod *debet*, i. e., quæ præcepta sunt, inutilis servus. Si autem *addas* aliquid ad præceptum, tunc non jam inutilis servus eris, sed dicetur ad te: Euge serve bone et fidelis. Quid autem sit quod addatur præceptis et *supra debitum* fiat, Paulus ap. dicit: De virginibus autem *præceptum* Domini non habeo, *consilium* autem do, tanquam misericordiam assecutus a Domino (1 Cor. 7: 25). Hoc opus *super præceptum* est. Et iterum *præceptum* est, ut hi qui evangelium nunciant, de evangelio vivant. Paulus autem dicit, quia nullo horum usus sum: et *ideo* non inutilis erit servus, sed fidelis et prudens.

‡ Opera supererogatoria.

|| Matth. 19: 21. Luke 24: 26. 1 Cor. 7: 8 sq. 25. Hence *consilia evangelica*, in distinction from *præcepta*.

§ Luke 17: 10.

¶ Matth. 25: 21.

—these present themselves as the firmest obstacles to that perfection, in which God alone is our possession, and Christ alone our love and delight.

In these things the ancient heretics went to the extreme. The Ebionites made poverty the condition of salvation; the Gnostics either entirely prohibited marriage and procreation as a diabolical work, as in the case of Saturninus, Marcion, and the Encratites; or substituted for it the most shameless promiscuous intercourse, as in Carpocrates, Epiphanes, and the Nicolaitans.

The ancient Church, on the contrary, held to the divine institution of property and marriage, and was content to recommend the voluntary renunciation of these intrinsically lawful pleasures to the few elect, as means of attaining Christian perfection. She declares marriage holy, virginity more holy. But unquestionably even the church fathers so exalted the higher holiness of virginity, as practically to neutralize, or at least, seriously weaken, their assertion of the holiness of marriage. The Roman Church, in spite of the many Bible examples of married men of God from Abraham to Peter, can conceive no real holiness without celibacy, and therefore requires celibacy of its clergy without exception.

The recommendation of *voluntary poverty* was based on a literal interpretation of the Lord's advice to the rich young ruler, who had kept all the commandments from his youth up. "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me."* To this were added the actual examples of the poverty of Christ and his apostles, and the community of goods in the first Christian Church at Jerusalem. Many Christians, not of the ascetics only, but also of the clergy, like Cyprian, accordingly gave up all their property at their conversion for the benefit of the poor. The later monastic societies sought to represent in their community of goods the original equality and the per-

* Matth. 19: 21.

fect brotherhood of men. Yet on the other hand, Clement of Alexandria for example, in a special treatise on the right use of wealth,† observes, that the Saviour forbade not so much the possession of earthly property, as the love of it and desire for it; and that it is possible to retain the latter, even though the possession itself be renounced. The earthly, says he, is a material and a means for doing good, and the unequal distribution of property is a divine provision for the exercise of Christian love and beneficence. The true riches are the virtue, which can and should maintain itself under all outward conditions; the false are the mere outward possession, which comes and goes.

The old Catholic exaggeration of *celibacy* attached itself to four passages of Scripture, viz: Matth. 19: 12; 22; 30; 1 Cor. 7: 7, sqq; and Rev. 14: 4; but it went far beyond them, and unconsciously admitted influences from foreign modes of thought. The words of the Lord in Matth. 22: 30, Luke 20: 35 sq., which, however, expressly limit unmarried life to the angels, without setting it up as the model for men,—were most frequently cited. Rev. 14: 4 was taken by some of the fathers more correctly in the symbolical sense of freedom from the pollution of idolatry. The example of Christ, though often urged, cannot here furnish a rule, for the Son of God and Saviour of the world, was too far above all the daughters of Eve, to find an equal companion among them, and in any case cannot be conceived as holding such relation. The whole Church of the redeemed is his pure bride. Of the apostles some at least were married, and among them Peter, the oldest and most prominent of all. The advice of Paul in 1 Cor. 7, is so cautiously given and guarded that even here the view of the fathers found but partial support; especially if balanced with the Pastoral Epistles, where monogamy is presented as the proper condition for the clergy. Nevertheless he was frequently made the apologist of celibacy by orthodox and heretical writers. Judaism—with the exception of the paganizing

† Τις ο σωζωμενος πλουσιος

Essenes, who abstained from marriage—highly honors the family life; it allows marriage even to the priests and the high-priests, who had in fact to maintain their order by physical reproduction, and it considers unfruitfulness a shame or a curse. Heathenism, on the contrary, just because of its own degradation of woman, and its low, sensual conception of marriage, frequently includes celibacy in its ideal of morality, and associates it with worship. The noblest form of heathen virginity appears in the six Vestal virgins of Rome, who, while girls of from six to ten years, were selected for the service of the pure goddess, and set to keep the holy fire burning on her altar, but, after serving thirty years, were allowed to return to secular life and marry. The penalty for breaking their vow of chastity was, to be buried alive in the *campus sceleratus*.

The ascetic depreciation of marriage is thus due, at least in part, to the influence of heathenism. But with this was associated the Christian enthusiasm for angelic purity, in opposition to the horrible licentiousness of the Græco-Roman world. It was long before Christianity raised woman and the family life to the purity and dignity, which became them in the kingdom of God. In this view we may the more easily account for many expressions of the church fathers respecting the female sex, and warnings against intercourse with women, which to us, in the present state of European and American civilization, sound perfectly coarse and unchristian. John of Damascus has collected in his *Parallels* such patristic expressions as these: "A woman is an evil." "A rich woman is a double evil." "A beautiful woman is a whited sepulchre." "Better is a man's wickedness, than a woman's goodness." The men, who could write so, must have forgotten the beautiful passages to the contrary in the proverbs of Solomon and Sirach; they must have forgotten their own mothers.

The excessive regard for celibacy and the accompanying depreciation of marriage, date from about the middle of the second century, and reach their height in the Nicene age.

Ignatius, in his *Epistle to Polycarp*, expresses himself as

yet very moderately: "If any one can remain in chastity of the flesh to the glory of the Lord of the flesh (or, according to another reading, of the flesh of the Lord), let him remain thus without boasting; if he boast, he is lost, and if it be made known, beyond the bishop,* he is ruined." What a stride from this to the obligatory celibacy of the clergy! Yet the admonition leads us to suppose, that celibacy was thus early, in the beginning of the second century, in many cases boasted of as meritorious, and allowed to nourish spiritual pride. Ignatius is the first to call voluntary virgins brides of Christ and jewels of Christ.

Justin Martyr goes further. He points to many Christians of both sexes, who lived to a great age unpolluted; and he desires celibacy to prevail to the greatest possible extent. He refers to the example of Christ, and expresses the singular opinion, that the Lord was born of a virgin only to put a limit to the sexual desire, and to show, that God could produce without the sensual agency of man. His disciple Tatian ran even to the Gnostic extreme upon this point, and in a lost work on Christian perfection, condemned conjugal co-habitation as a fellowship of corruption destructive of prayer. At the same period, Athenagoras wrote, in his Apology: "Many may be found among us, of both sexes, who grow old unmarried, full of hope, that they are in this way more closely united to God."

Clement of Alexandria is the most reasonable of all the fathers in his views on this point. He considers eunuchism a special gift of divine grace, but without yielding it on this account unqualified preference above the married state. On the contrary, he vindicates with great decision the moral dignity and sanctity of marriage against the heretical extravagances of his time, and lays down the general principle, that Christianity stands not in outward observances, enjoyments, and privations, but in righteousness

* *Εαν γνωσθη πλην του επισκοπου*, according to the larger Greek recension, c. 5., With which the Syriac (c. 2) and Armenian versions agree. But the shorter Greek recension reads *πλεον* for *πλην*, which would give the sense: "If he think himself (on that account) above the (married) bishop; si majorem se episcopo censeat."

and peace of heart. Of the Gnostics he says, that, under the fair name of abstinence, they act impiously towards the creation and the holy Creator, and repudiate marriage and procreation on the ground, that a man should not introduce others into the world to their misery, and provide new nourishment for death. He justly charges them with inconsistency, in despising the ordinances of God, and yet enjoying the nourishment created by the same hand, breathing his air, and abiding in his world. He rejects the appeal to the example of Christ; because Christ needed no help, and because the Church is his bride. The apostles also he cites against the impugners of marriage. Peter and Philip begat children; Philip gave his daughters in marriage; and even Paul hesitated not to speak of a female companion (rather only of his right to lead about such an one, as well as Peter). We seem translated into an entirely different, Protestant atmosphere, when in this genial writer we read: The perfect Christian, who has the Apostles for his patterns, proves himself truly a man in this, that he chooses not a solitary life, but marries, begets children, cares for the household, yet under all the temptations, which his care for wife and children, domestics and property presents, swerves not from his love to God, and as a Christian householder exhibits a minature of the all-ruling Providence.

But how little such views agreed with the spirit of that age, we see in Clement's own Stoical and Platonizing conception of the physical appetites, and still more in his great disciple Origen, who voluntarily disabled himself in his youth, and could not think of the act of generation as any thing but polluting. Hieracas, who also perhaps belonged to the Alexandrian school, is said to have carried his asceticism to a heretical extreme, and to have declared virginity a condition of salvation. Methodius was an opponent of the spiritualistic, but not of the ascetic Origen, and wrote an enthusiastic plea for virginity, founded on the idea of the Church as the pure, unspotted, ever young, and ever beautiful bride of God. Yet, quite remarkably, in his

“Feast of the Ten Virgins,” the virgins express themselves respecting the sexual relations with a minuteness, which to our modern taste is extremely indelicate and offensive.

As to the Latin fathers, Tertullian, although himself married, placed celibacy above marriage as a higher degree of sanctity, represents marriage more as a concession which God made to the weakness of our flesh, and, in his Montanistic period, most vehemently combatted second marriage as a decent form of adultery and fornication. His disciple, Cyprian, differs from him in his ascetic principles only by greater moderation in expression, and, in his treatise *De habitu virginum*, commends the unmarried life on the ground of Matth. 19 : 12 ; 1 Cor. 7., and Rev. 14 : 4.

Celibacy was most common with pious virgins, who married themselves only to God or to Christ,* and in the spiritual delights of this heavenly union found abundant compensation for the pleasures of earthly matrimony. But cases were not rare, where sensuality thus violently suppressed, asserted itself under other forms ; as, for example, in indolence and ease at the expense of the Church, which Tertullian finds it necessary to censure ; or in the vanity and love of dress, which Cyprian rebukes ; and, worst of all in a venture of asceticism, which probably often enough resulted in failure, or at least filled the imagination with impure thoughts. Many of these heavenly brides† lived with male ascetics, and especially with unmarried clergymen, under pretext of a purely spiritual fellowship, in so intimate intercourse, as to put their continence to the most perilous test, and wantonly challenge temptation from which we should rather pray to be kept. This unnatural and shameless practice was probably introduced by the Gnostics ; Irenaeus at least charges it upon them. The first trace of it in the Church appears, though under rather innocent allegorical form, in the Pastor Hermae, which originated from the Roman Church.‡ It is next mentioned

* *Nuptae Deo, Christo.*

† *Ἀδελφαί, sorores* (1 Cor. 9 : 5) ; afterwards cleverly called *γυναῖκες συνισταεσσι*, *mulieres subintroductae, extraneae.*

‡ *Simil. IX. c. 11* (in Dressel, p. 627.)

in the Pseudo-Clementine Epistles ad Virgines. In the third century it prevailed widely in the east and west. The worldly-minded bishop Paulus, of Antioch, favored it by his own example. Cyprian of Carthage came out earnestly, and with all reason, against the vicious practice, in spite of the solemn protestation of innocence by these sorores, and their appeal to investigations through midwives. Several councils, at Elvira, Ancyra, Nice, &c., felt called upon to forbid this pseudo-ascetic scandal. Yet the intercourse of clergy with "mulieres subintroductae" rather increased than diminished with the increasing stringency of the celibate laws, and has at all times more or less disgraced the Romish priesthood.

It is not our intention here to follow the further development of the ascetic system through the Nicene and the Middle ages; for this would imply a whole history of anchoritism, monasticism, and the celibacy of the clergy in the Greek and Roman Church. We merely intended to trace its origin and to exhibit it in its primitive form under its good and bad aspects.

With all its morbid excesses and corruptions, the ascetic system must be admitted by the impartial historian to have fulfilled a great and important mission in the past. It asserted the uncompromising antagonism of Christian morality against the awful corruption of the old heathen world as centring in its absorbing worldliness and sensuality; it developed the negative aspect of this morality, its intense capacity of self-denial and abstinence; and it was used by Providence as one of the most efficient means to prepare the barbarian nations of the middle ages for Christianity and civilization.

This mission accomplished, the Church had to enter upon the higher duty of transforming and sanctifying all the divinely appointed relations and conditions of man, by the positive principle of Christian ethics and to penetrate the whole lump of society by its leaven-like power. This is the Protestant evangelical system of morality which we are bound to hold fast and to carry out untempted by the

allurements of the artificial show of ascetic hypo-holiness. It agrees with the inmost spirit of the New Testament, which every where goes hand in hand and in the vane of the westward and onward march of the Protestant religion. It agrees likewise with an enlightened moral philosophy, which is most extensively cultivated in the bosom of Protestantism. Christianity, we should never forget, starts with the regeneration of the soul and ends with the resurrection of the body; it is in its inmost nature, not law and work, but gospel and faith, not letter and slavery, but spirit and freedom, not irrational and unnatural, but super-rational and supernatural. The God of grace is also the God of nature; the Head of the Church is also the Ruler of the world; Christ is not a hermit and a saint of the desert, but the absolute ideal of human perfection, the eternal priest and king of the regenerate race, and the living centre of the moral universe.

P. S.

Mercersburg, Pa., Sept., 1858.

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