

ual lives of his hearers in spite of the fact that he may be inaccurate and illogical in many of his theological statements, and may misinterpret many texts which he may quote in his sermons. It is possible for a volume of sermons to be of a very high order of devotional literature and full of spiritual quickening to all who read them, and yet be very faulty and unsatisfactory if it should be used and appealed to as a book of systematic theology. Let us apply this distinction now to John Wesley as a preacher and theologian.

**John Wesley's Greatness as a Preacher.**—No history of the doctrines of spiritual religion can ever be written that does not make grateful mention of the name and work of John Wesley. His contributions to the literature of this department of theology are of the highest value. He had a personal passion for righteousness scarcely equaled by any man that has lived since the age of the apostles; and he transmitted this zeal for holiness in a rare degree to his writings. It is all but impossible to rise up from the perusal of any of his sermons or other devotional writings without feeling an intense desire to be a better and holier man. This is the true test of a great preacher. The sermons of Wesley cover sixty years of his busy life. They were produced mostly when his mind was at white heat and all aglow with whatever phase of doctrine or religious life and experience was at that particular time uppermost in his

thoughts. They have from first to last the consistency of a soul bent on holiness and desirous of doing good to the souls of men. They have the consistency that marks the writings of a man who was always and everywhere a truth-seeker, and was ready and anxious to learn from anybody, great or small, and anywhere, in the palace or the cottage or the coal mine or the prison—a man who was never too old to learn from the youngest of Christ's disciples, and, although a scholar of rare ability, never too learned himself to learn from the humblest and least of God's children. His sermons have the moral and spiritual consistency of a man who says: "I would rather be right than consistent: I would rather believe and teach that which I here and now feel to be the truth than to be continually stopping and asking myself whether this statement I am about to make or have just made accords perfectly with what I have previously said and written." That is the kind of consistency we want to see in a preacher and religious writer, and that is just the kind of self-consistency we find in the writings of John Wesley. But uniform theological and doctrinal self-consistency—is *that* found there? And would we seriously detract from their true spiritual value if we should be compelled to say that it is not found there? Take those superb sermons of Wesley, many of which have become classics in devotional literature, and turn them over to the system-

atic theologian that he may square all their doctrinal statements so that they shall constitute a harmonious and self-consistent system of Christian theology, and what will be the result? If he succeeds in accomplishing his task, he will be sure to devitalize them and rob them of half their moral and spiritual power, and thus destroy their true value *as sermons*; and this in spite of the fact that they are unsurpassed for spiritual power in the sermonic literature of the world. In other words, while the ideal and perfect preacher will be absolutely logical in his theology and always sound in his exegesis, we *can have* a truly great and spiritual preacher open more or less to criticism in this respect, but at the same time entirely sound and self-consistent in whatever makes for the development of the spiritual life in man.

**John Wesley as a Theologian.**—If Wesley's sermons are set up as a system of Christian doctrine, therefore, it must be conceded that they are in many respects inadequate, inharmonious, unsatisfactory, perplexing, open to criticism. Many of Mr. Wesley's followers have used his sermons as if they contained a logical and perfect system of Christian theology. To set him before the world, however, as a theologian and as an authority in doctrine is to do him a great wrong and subject him to needless criticism. He has suffered greatly in this way at the hands of his friends. But he is the best friend of Wesley who,

seeing where his true greatness lies, sets him forth not as the model and authoritative theologian but as the spiritual preacher and the great religious leader. If one should take up John Wesley's writings and examine them as if they were a systematic theology to find a logical and self-consistent treatment of the doctrine of holiness, it would not be surprising if he should reach the conclusion that it is practically impossible to reconcile Wesley with himself, owing to the fact that his writings contain here and there statements and views that are incapable of being harmonized with statements and views found elsewhere in his writings. Notwithstanding the fact that he began writing and publishing sermons on spiritual religion many years before he was converted, and continued to do so through a long life that seemed always to be undergoing a marvelous spiritual development—each successive sermon bearing the stamp of whatever shade of opinion he then held—yet he later in life gathered these writings together and republished them without alterations; and he claimed that they were self-consistent. And they were self-consistent *as he read them* and saw everywhere pervading them the spirit that was passionately pursuing the perfect life. But entire dogmatic and theological self-consistency and harmony—they are not there. And all the proof that is needed to justify this assertion is to point to the endless dis-



cussions that have been going on for a hundred years over the Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection as set forth in the writings of John Wesley. A careful student of Wesleyan theology will find that there are two distinct and fundamentally different views of Christian perfection that are merged together in Wesley's writings.

**The First View—Christian Perfection Identified with the Ideal Life of Every Child of God.**—The first view is that which regards every child of God who measures up to the ideal state of a justified and regenerate believer as "perfect" in the New Testament sense of that term. It is based on the conception that the Christian religion is one of perfection; that the genuine and ideal Christian as described in the Bible is one that is entirely holy and free from all sin, one whose heart and life are entirely dominated by love for God and man; that nothing that may *properly* be called sin is to be regarded as belonging to or characterizing a true and genuine Christian. Justification and regeneration are regarded as those radical operations of divine grace which, being preceded by repentance and faith and followed by the witness of the Spirit, constitute a man a true child of God. Mankind is divided into two, and but two, radically different classes—viz., sinners and Christians—made different by the fact that the one have experienced a radical moral transformation which the other have

not. If anything sinful is found characterizing the inner states or outer acts of a professing Christian, such sin is not treated as if it were compatible with the experience and life of a genuine Christian, but is rather condemned as wholly inconsistent therewith; and if those who claim to be genuine Christians do not come up to this definition, the thing which it is insisted must be done is, not to modify and pull the definition down to fit their cases, but to pull them up to fit the definition, and steadfastly refuse to regard them as normal and ideal Christians until they do measure up to the definition. Wherever this conception of Christian perfection for the time being dominates Mr. Wesley's mind, he magnifies the work of justification and regeneration, and identifies sanctification and Christian perfection with religion in its ideal and normal state; and hence leaves no room or necessity for any second radical work of grace subsequent to regeneration—not at least in the case of any man who attains and retains the normal experience and life of a justified and regenerate Christian.\* The fruits of the Spirit which he predicates of all regenerate believers who measure up to this definition and this ideal cover absolutely every virtue and grace that can be predicated of any Christian, unless it be those which imply Christian maturity.

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\* This will be obvious to every one who will turn and read the quotations from Mr. Wesley on pages 221, 243, 270.

**The Second View—Entire Sanctification an Instantaneous Experience Subsequent to Regeneration.**—The second view of Christian perfection identifies it with sanctification, and is based on the idea that to be a truly justified and regenerate child of God is not in itself alone to possess Christian perfection. True and genuine Christians are divided into two radically different classes—viz., the unsanctified and the entirely sanctified—made different by the fact that the latter have experienced a radical and instantaneous work of divine grace which none of the former have experienced; and the latter alone are to be called “perfect.” While those who have experienced justification and regeneration are to be regarded as true, genuine, and normal Christians and are saved from sin, yet “inbred sin” is not yet removed, and hence they continue to be “carnal”—are conscious in themselves of sinful feelings and tempers, and manifest outwardly sinful self-will, pride, resentment, love of the world, and other like sinful tempers—until they experience a second radical and instantaneous work of divine grace, called “entire sanctification,” which saves them from all sin and brings them into the experience of Christian perfection, and thenceforward perfect love to God and man reigns supreme in their hearts and lives; and this second change (sanctification) is unspeakably greater and more important than the first (regeneration). Whenever this conception of

Christian perfection fills Mr. Wesley's mind, there is a manifest, though perhaps unconscious, tendency to so far minify the work of justification and regeneration as to leave believers carnal and sinful, and thus render absolutely necessary a second work of grace in order to secure salvation from all sin.\* This theory of sanctification is one that is necessitated by the "residue theory" of regeneration which Mr. Wesley adopted from the Ninth Article of the Church of England, and in harmony with which he wrote his sermons on "Sin in Believers" and "The Repentance of Believers." It also harmonized with the testimony of many of his followers, who said that after their regeneration they had a most gracious and blessed experience which was described as "salvation from all sin" and the attainment of "perfect love."

**The Two Views Compared.**—Mr. Wesley never seems to have realized that in adopting the theory of instantaneous sanctification with all its concomitants he was introducing an element into his doctrine of Christian perfection that was logically and theologically irreconcilable with the doctrine which he had been preaching from the beginning of his ministry. From his first published sermon, on "Circumcision of the Heart," to his last public utterances on the subject, he steadfastly maintained a *doctrine* of Chris-

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\* See quotation from Mr. Wesley on 357. 358 for proof of this statement.



tian perfection; and he pleads this fact as if it fully proved that his views concerning the doctrine never underwent any material change and that all his statements were uniform and self-consistent throughout his life. But Dr. Whitehead, his first biographer, and Mr. Tyerman, his greatest biographer and interpreter, have both pointed out\* wherein he was mistaken in this impression, and have shown very clearly that when he adopted the view of *instantaneous* sanctification, with all its necessary concomitants—and did so, not on the ground that his own experience or the Bible plainly taught the doctrine, but because some of his converts said that after being first justified and regenerated they were later instantaneously “saved from *all* sin”—then it was that he introduced for the first time that element into his doctrine which has been the fruitful cause of serious differences of opinion among his followers from that day to this. Both of these conceptions of sanctification call for a progressive and gradual work beginning at regeneration and continuing until death; so that the choice one is called on to make is not between Mr. Wesley’s doctrine of progressive sanctification and his doctrine of instantaneous sanctification. But the choice is between a doctrine which teaches that no conscious sin of any kind belongs to a true and genuine believer at any stage of his Christian life, from the moment of

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\* See Tyerman’s *Life of Wesley*, Vol. II., pp. 417, 461.

his justification and regeneration till his death, and another doctrine which teaches that sins of a certain kind (inbred sin, sins of feeling, thought, temper, etc.) are predicable in varying degrees of *all* true believers from the moment of their regeneration until they experience a second radical and instantaneous work of grace, called entire sanctification, by which they are saved from all sin and made entirely holy. That is to say, the sinless character which Mr. Wesley predicates in the first view of every believer whom he regards as fulfilling the definition of a true Bible Christian, in the other view he predicates of only such justified and regenerate believers as have experienced a second instantaneous work of grace subsequent to their regeneration. But it is logically impossible to merge and blend these two views together as if there were no inconsistency between them. The point of difference between them is fundamental and vital. Could Mr. Wesley have discriminated more accurately here, it would not only have saved him from being quoted on both sides of theories that differ, but it would have clarified and simplified his own "exceedingly complex idea of sanctification" (as he in one place designates his view of the doctrine) and saved his followers, who are a unit in their love and veneration for him, from many an unprofitable discussion of this perpetual problem of Methodism.

**The Illogical Point in Wesleyan Theology.**—We are not alone in believing that an unscriptural view of sin in the regenerate is not only a most serious breach in the logic and harmony of Wesleyan Arminian theology, but is the fruitful cause of well-nigh all differences among Methodists concerning the doctrine of sanctification. Dr. John Miley, who is perhaps the ablest and most representative theologian which American Methodism has yet produced, says:

Regeneration should not be undervalued, as it sometimes is, through an unwise zeal for the doctrine of sanctification. The less the work of regeneration, the greater the work of sanctification; so the former is sometimes held to be a very imperfect work, that the greater prominence may be given to the latter. But it is unwise, and a perversion of vital truth, to lower one fact in the work of salvation in order to exalt another. Regeneration is not a superficial work; nor is it, nor can it be, a small thing to be born of the Spirit. Further, there is a mistaken use of certain instances of defective Christian life, particularly in the Churches of Corinth, Galatia, and Asia, which leads to a false view of regeneration. The mistake arises in the treatment of such instances just as though they represented a true and normal regenerate life, whereas the Scriptures treat them as instances of very serious degeneration. This must be plain to any one who will study even a part of the appropriate texts. Hence they cannot fairly represent the true regenerate life. If the aim was to prove that there may be serious degeneration without an utter forfeiture of the regenerate state, these instances would be in point; but they cannot be in point for the proof of the traditional doctrine of sin in the regenerate, because in such

use it must be assumed that they fairly represent the normal regenerate life; and such an assumption is openly contrary to the Scriptures.

We cannot think Mr. Wesley's notable sermon on "Sin in Believers" entirely clear of this error. It is the traditional doctrine which he therein maintains, and which he largely supports with such instances of degenerate Christian life as we before noted. There is in his discussion no dissent from that doctrine respecting the low state of regenerate life which it assumes; no discrimination between the true regenerate life and that defective form of it represented by these instances of serious degeneration. . . . Mr. Wesley was doctrinally educated in the Anglican Articles, and in the Ninth, which formulates this doctrine, just as he was in the others; and, while he came to far deeper and clearer views of the regenerate life than this article allows, yet it is the doctrinal basis of his sermon on "Sin in Believers." On the other hand, such views of regenerate life as shall answer to the traditional doctrine of sin in believers must be most harmful. According to that doctrine, there is unavoidably much sin in the regenerate life; and yet such sin is not sin—that is, it is not counted to the regenerate as sin. . . . Such views of the regenerate life are neither truly scriptural nor truly Wesleyan. Hence we must think that Mr. Wesley's sermon on "Sin in Believers" is not true either to the real truth of regeneration or to its own truthful views of that great and gracious work. All this must be plain to any one who will fairly compare that sermon with his sermon on "The Marks of the New Birth." Indeed, his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" is pervaded with views of regeneration in full accord with the latter sermon, but which are strongly out of accord with the special doctrine maintained in the former.



**The Possibility of Entire Sanctification Being Wrought at Conversion.**—Mr. Wesley conceded that it was *possible* for sanctification to take place at the same time as justification, but considered that such cases must be exceedingly rare and exceptional, as he had never known of one himself. He says: "Sometimes God cuts short his work. He does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies or sanctifies both those who have done or suffered nothing and who have not had time for a gradual growth either in light or grace." In examining fifty-one cases of those who claimed to be saved from all sin, in 1762, he finds one in whom the mighty change was wrought only three weeks after she was justified; in three cases it was only one week after justification; in one case, a girl fourteen years old, it occurred two days after the experience of justification; two of them professed the blessing the day after their conversion, and "Grace Paddy of Redruth," most remarkable of all, was "convinced of sin, converted to God, and renewed in love within twelve hours!" "Yet this is by no means incredible," Wesley adds, "seeing one day is with God as a thousand years." Wesley, admitting as he did the genuineness of all these cases, could not consistently deny the possibility of pardon and "salvation from all sin" taking place at the same time. "In a few cases," says Bishop Peck, a strong advocate of the

doctrine of instantaneous sanctification, "we believe that the blessing has been received so soon after regeneration as to make the periods seem entirely identical," and "some really do pass from a state of guilt into the full enjoyment of perfect purity." "I do not deny," says Rev. W. I. Gill, another defender of this view, "that regeneration and entire sanctification are sometimes coinstantaneous. . . . It is surely within the power of God to sanctify entirely when he regenerates. . . . Many, in seeking religion, have conceived that its attainment would be perfect holiness. . . . We see nothing in Scripture to forbid such expectation. It enjoins this state from the first, declares the provisions for it complete, and the promises of God fully and clearly cover it." Now if it is possible for a penitent believer to be "saved from all sin" at the same time that he is justified and regenerated, it is certainly exceedingly desirable that this complete salvation should be experienced by all at this earliest possible moment. And this leads us naturally to inquire why it is that most people are simply partially saved from sin at conversion (that is, if this be the case), and only a very few are fully saved at that time. The reason must be either in the preacher, who explains the way of salvation, or in the sinner, whose conviction, penitence, and faith are not thorough enough to meet the conditions of a full salvation, or in God,

who for wise reasons does not do what he could do if he would. Whitefield assigned the last-named reason, and said that God left Amalekites in the land to keep the children of Israel humble; and so He leaves some sin in the heart of his children, after they enter upon their inheritance of sonship, to keep them humble—in other words, God leaves sin in the heart of the regenerate in order that it may develop in them humility and other Christian virtues! We cannot accept this view, and so we must find the explanation in one or both of the other reasons—and the two may go together—that is, if the preacher does not believe in a *full* salvation at conversion and does not preach it, the penitents who are following his guidance may repent and believe only according to the light they have, and thus fall short of a full salvation. But we insist that this is the only ideal conversion to aim at—viz., full salvation from all sin at the very beginning of the Christian life. And if this be possible, should we not regard it as the only normal and scriptural conversion? And should not every preacher interpret his commission as enjoining upon him the proclamation to all sinners of a salvation which is *from all sin* that is then seen and known, and *unto all holiness*, virtue, truth, love and duty, that may be then or thereafter seen and known?

Charles Wesley's Change in Doctrine.—Charles Wesley for a while believed in the doctrine of “in-