

ART. VII.—*Principle of Protestantism as related to the present state of the Church.* By Philip Schaf, Ph. D. Professor of Church History and of Biblical Literature in the Theological Seminary of the German Reformed Church. Translated from the German with an Introduction. By John W. Nevin, D.D. Chambersburg: 1845. pp. 215.

THE importance of the subject of which this book treats, the ability which it displays, and the attention which it has excited, all claim for it an elaborate review. Such a review would be a very difficult task; one which we should not be ambitious to assume, even if circumstances beyond our control had not shut us up to the necessity of confining ourselves to this short notice.

It is a book not easy to understand, especially that part of it, which has proceeded from the pen of Dr. Nevin. We have read the whole twice over, and yet we are very far from being satisfied that we adequately comprehend its principles. This obscurity is no doubt due, in part, to the nature of the subject. Every thing that involves the nature of the church, pertains to one of the most difficult departments of theology; one in which the indefiniteness of language almost unavoidably leads to more or less confusion. The obscurity, however, of which we complain, we are disposed to attribute in no small measure to the manner in which the subject is treated. The book is thoroughly German. The mode of thinking, and the forms of expression are so unenglish, that it is not easy for an American to enter into the views of the authors. German writers have many characteristic excellencies; but they have also some characteristic faults. They are seldom very intelligible. Their preference for the reason over the understanding leads them to eschew Begriffe, definite conceptions, and to abound in ideas, whose import and limits are indeterminate. It is hard, therefore, in many cases, to tell precisely what they mean. This whole book is about the church, and yet we have tried in vain to find out what the authors mean by the church. Is it the body of professors? or the body of true believers? or the two in inseparable union as one body? These are questions we cannot answer; and therefore we cannot tell what interpretation is to be put upon their language. If a writer speaks of man

in such a way, that his readers are at a loss to determine whether what he says is to be referred to the soul or to the body, or to the whole as a unit, they must be at a loss whether to assent or dissent. This is precisely the state of mind in which the perusal of this book has left us. This remark is intended to apply in a measure to the whole work, but more particularly to the introduction and appendix, which are by far the most difficult to understand.

The first point which Prof. Schaf endeavours to establish, is that the Reformation was neither a revolution nor a restoration. It was neither a violent disruption from all that preceded it, nor the return of the church to the state in which it had existed during any preceding century. As to both these points, we presume, he speaks the general sentiments of Protestants. The middle ages were no doubt pregnant with the Reformation; the church lived through all those ages, and Protestantism was the revival, through the word and Spirit of God, of a backslidden church, and not a new creation. It is also no doubt true, that as in the case of an individual believer, who is brought back from his declensions, and by the grace of God rendered more enlightened and stable than at any previous stage of his career, so the church of the Reformation was in a more advanced state than the church of the second or third centuries. No one would think of comparing the works of the Fathers with those of the Reformers as to enlightened, scriptural and comprehensive views of the gospel.

When again Prof. Schaf speaks of the distinguishing principles of Protestantism, he follows the common method of evangelical theologians. Those principles are the doctrine of justification by faith, and the supremacy of scripture as the rule of faith. The former is our continued protest against the error of a mediating church or priesthood. It is undoubtedly the vital principle of Protestantism that God is now accessible to all men by Jesus Christ; that all who hear the gospel may come to Christ, and through him to God, receiving, in virtue of union with Christ by faith, the imputation of his righteousness for justification, and the indwelling of his Spirit for sanctification. In this liberty of access, lies the priesthood of all believers. And so long as this is asserted, do we protest against the great error of Rome, that men can only come to God through the church, or through the mediation of other men as priests, by whose

ministrations alone the benefits of redemption can be applied to the soul. The reverse of this is true, and the reverse of this is Protestantism. We are in the church because we are in Christ, and not in Christ because we are in the church. The analysis and exposition which Prof. Schaf gives of this great doctrine of justification by faith alone, is thoroughly evangelical. We commend it to our new school brethren as a mirror in which they may see the true principle of the Reformation, and thence learn how far they have lapsed towards Romanism in their denial or explaining away of the corruption of our nature by original sin, and in making justification mere pardon, to the exclusion of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Our author, however, presents this doctrine too exclusively "in opposition to all Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian error." He does not present it sufficiently in its opposition to the doctrine of a mediating church, which was historically its most prominent aspect. When the sinner asked, What must I do to be saved? the answer which the Spirit of God, and their own dear bought experience taught the Reformers to give, was: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. That alone can save you; and that can, and most certainly will. And by faith they meant, not mere assent, but, as Dr. Schaf says, a personal appropriation of the merits of Christ. That is all the sinner needs in order to secure his justification, and with that blessing, sanctification and eternal life are inseparably connected. The answer given by Rome and "ecclesiasticism" in general, to the momentous question, What must I do to be saved? is, Come to me, I have the merits of Christ; I have the Spirit; I have the custody of the blessings of redemption. Your own act of faith will do you little good; you can only come to Christ by me; I give you his merits and grace in baptism; and if you lose them, I alone can restore them by the sacrament of penance. It was in opposition to all this; it was as their protest against this, the very thing that made them Protestants, that the Reformers said, we are justified freely by faith alone. We need not your mediation, Christ is every where present. And we can and must, each one for himself, lay hold on him by faith, and we know that whosoever believes on him hath eternal life, though he has never heard of the church, or of a priest, or of the sacraments. It is this aspect of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which Prof. Schaf has failed to render promi-

nent; and it is the *apparent* denial of this view of the subject by Dr. Nevin, which forms the stumbling block, presented in this book. It is this which gives his portion of the work, the Puseyite aspect which has created so much anxiety. We say "apparent denial," because we are not satisfied that it is any thing more than apparent. For while he speaks somewhat too contemptuously of those who make the turning point between us and Rome, the question, "whether salvation be an individual concern or something that comes wholly by the church;" p. 12, and says: "We are not Christians, each one by himself, but we become such through the church;" p. 200, still he pronounces "ecclesiasticism, as held by Rome and also by Oxford," a terrible error; and declares it would be treason to the gospel to reject "the position that religion is an individual interest, a strictly personal concern, a question between a man singly and his maker. He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." p. 12. We can only repeat what we have already said, as to our inability fully to comprehend his meaning on this point; and comfort ourselves with the conviction that it is impossible to hold the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as it is stated in this book, and yet mean by saying, "we become Christians through the church," what Puseyites mean by such expressions.

In the exposition, given by Dr. Schaf, of the formal principle of Protestantism, viz: that the scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, we in general concur. As the doctrine of justification by faith is the protest of the Reformed against the Romish doctrine of a mediating church; so the assertion of the sole infallible authority of the written word of God, is their protest, against the doctrine of an inspired church to whose teaching we are obliged to bow. As the church, according to Rome, consists of all who profess the Christian religion and are subject to the Pope, the wisdom and teaching of that body, consisting in great measure of unsanctified men, is but another name for the wisdom and teaching of the world. But if by the church is meant the body of true believers, in whom Christ dwells by his Spirit, and whom he leads to the knowledge of the truth, then indeed to differ from the church is a serious, and if on any essential doctrine, a fatal matter. It is by losing sight too much of this distinction, that Prof. Schaf is led to attribute much more weight to the usages and

opinions, i. e. to the traditions, of the visible church, than we think is due to them, consistently with Protestant principles. This is a subject, however, on which we cannot dwell. We only wish to express our dissent from the obvious or apparent meaning of some of his remarks on tradition; which though we think they admit of a good sense, yet more naturally express one with which we cannot concur. We are more sensible of the difference of views between our author and the mass of his American readers, as to this point, from the conclusions to which his principles lead him, than from the statement of those principles themselves. He condemns not only the more rigid Puritans, but most of the Reformed churches for repudiating the usages, (ritual traditions,) of the church, and commends the greater regard of the Lutherans for such traditions. In this respect he will find few American Protestants to agree with him.

The two great diseases of Protestantism our author represents to be Rationalism and Sectarism. He gives a historical sketch of the rise and progress of the former in Germany, and concludes with the expression of his conviction that "the most dangerous enemy with which we are threatened on theoretical ground, is not the catholicism of Rome, but the foe within our own borders; not the hierarchic papacy of the Vatican, but the worldly papacy of the subjective understanding; not the Concilium Tridentinum, but the theology of unbelief, as proclaimed by a Rhoer, a Wegscheider, a Strauss, a Feuerbach, and others of the same stamp." This is a very natural view to be taken by a theologian born and educated in Germany, who has been accustomed to see comparatively little of the evils of Romanism, and before whose eyes the desolations wrought by Rationalism were constantly present. In itself considered, however, and in reference to the state of the church in America, we consider Romanism immeasurably more dangerous than infidelity. Not by any means, as some have said, a greater evil; but an evil more dangerous to Protestantism. This is only expressing our conviction that a false religion is more likely to spread than mere irreligion; and that the human mind has greater affinity for superstition, than for infidelity.

The section relating to "Sectarism" we consider as more marred by false principles and false views of facts and of their historical relations, than any other in the book. Here

we think our author betrays erroneous principles as to the unity of the church, too much forgetting that it is a spiritual unity, arising from the union of believers with Christ and from the indwelling of his Spirit; and which manifests itself in unity of faith, of love and of communion. There is therefore more of real unity, more real brotherhood existing between the evangelical denominations of America, than is to be found in the church of Rome, the church of England, or in the Reformed or Lutheran church of Germany. The true unity of the church is therefore, in a measure, independent of external ecclesiastical union. It is marred by all diversity of faith, all want of love, and by all refusal of intercommunion and fraternal subjection and intercourse; and is destroyed by the entire absence of any of these bonds. It is not, however, necessarily interrupted by separate ecclesiastical organizations, or diversity as to modes of discipline and worship; uniformity and unity being very different things. We do not suppose that Dr. Schaf denies this, but he constantly speaks as though he regarded external union, that is, union secured and expressed by outward bonds as far more essential to unity of the church than appears to us consistent with its true nature.

Again, his principles as to conformity and the preservation of outward union, seem to us erroneous. He says, the Reformers had "they been permitted to preach the pure word of God with freedom, and to administer the sacraments according to Christ's appointment, would have remained in their original communion." He blames the Puritans for separating from the established church of England, and condemns the recent secession of the Free Church in Scotland. All this we think betrays very wrong notions as to the principles involved in such questions. Such separations are a duty, which we owe to God and to the real unity of the church, whenever unscriptural terms of communion are enjoined. If the Puritans, in order to their connexion with the church of England, were required to declare their "assent and consent" to all and every thing contained in the book of Common Prayer, then those who could not assent to the baptismal or burial service, or to the semi-deification of Charles I., were bound in conscience to separate from that church, and to protest against the schismatical principle of making such matters terms of Christian communion. The same remark may of course be applied to a multitude of other cases.

book before us, that the apprehension that Dr. Nevin and Prof. Schaf are tending toward Puseyism, if by Puseyism be meant prelacy and Rome and what is necessarily connected with them, is altogether unfounded. It would be suicidal in them, and entirely opposed to all their principles, to step out of the line "of historical development" to which they belong. They are in the Reformed church: that church is an immeasurable advance on the church of the middle ages, to go back to the ground which the Puseyites are endeavouring to regain, would, in their view, be for men to turn children. Their motto is Forwards. What is the future they have figured for themselves and for the church, we cannot distinctly discern.

We confess we have not much faith in the means of progress on which these gentlemen seem to place their main reliance. German philosophy and German theology appear to be the great sources of their hopes, as far as human agency is concerned. We once heard a distinguished German professor say, "England and America are the hands of the church, Germany is the head. She must do the thinking, they the work." A division of labour with which we ought to be content, especially if our working does not depend upon our understanding their thinking. Prof. Schaf's book is imbued with the same idea of the relative vocations of the several portions of the church. "Germany is the proper home not only of the Reformation, but of all the deeper spiritual movements which have been called forth by this, during the last three hundred years." "It is the proper home of Protestant theology." If we allude to German Rationalism, we are told "only an archangel can become a devil." To Germany therefore we must look for the impulse and the light to impel and guide this onward movement of the church. We are very ready to admit the great superiority of Germany in all that can be attained by research and concentrated labour. We admit too that the German mind is in some of its attributes favourably distinguished from the English and American, but we think Dr. Schaf not only over estimates this superiority, but finds it, in some instances, in those very peculiarities where the advantage is on the other side. The Germans have never been celebrated for their ability to distinguish between the unknown and the unknowable, they cannot discern the limits of human knowledge; and by passing those limits they lose all the criteria of knowledge, and are unable to

distinguish between truth and the phantoms of their creative imaginations. To our apprehension the willingness of the English mind to rest content within the sphere which God has assigned it; to submit to the laws of its nature, and to confide in the principles of belief impressed upon our constitution, without attempting either to question the legitimacy of those laws, or the conclusions to which they lead, is worth more as a means of attaining truth, than all that mysterious "power of perceiving the supernatural, the infinite, the harmonious unity, the essence of things, the primal idea of the absolute,"* which is the peculiar excellence of our German brethren.

In order to decide what the church has to hope from German theology, in securing the anticipated progress in divine knowledge, it would seem natural to inquire what that theology, since its revival, has actually accomplished. A question we are not competent to answer. On the one hand, we are disposed to hope that it has not done much in unsettling old landmarks, when we find such thoroughly evangelical exhibitions of the doctrine of justification, as that given by Prof. Schaf, and when we see that the very best of the recent German theologians are precisely those who are most like the Reformers. On the other hand, we cannot repress our fears when we find that to those most imbued with this theology, every thing seems alike. Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, as philosophers; Daub, Schleiermacker, Marheinecke, as theologians, seem to be regarded as differing from each other, and differing from received standards, only as to their mode of presenting truth. When we express surprise, that men who seem to deny a personal God, to deny sin, to deny the continued personal existence of the soul after death, should be referred to as substantially sound, we are told we do not understand these writers, and therefore are not competent to form an opinion on the subject. The sufficiency of this answer we should feel bound to admit, were it not for two circumstances. First, we see the professed and thoroughly instructed disciples of these schools in Germany itself, asserting that these philosophers do in fact teach what their words seem to imply, viz., that there is no God, no sin, no conscious existence hereafter.—And secondly, when we hear some of the most highly educated and devout, among the Germans themselves, denounc-

* Dr. Schaf's definition of reason, p. 102.

ing as an utter abomination those very systems and writers, who are so much lauded in this country. Here then are two classes of men, neither of which can be summarily set down as destitute of the Anschauungsvermögen, the power of perceiving the absolute and infinite, who unite in condemning just what those among us most zealous for German philosophy and theology, unite in lauding. We confess that this, more than any thing else, far more than any confidence in our own limited knowledge of these systems and writers, makes us fear their influence. We are afraid of their confounding all the landmarks of truth, of leading men to see no difference between holiness and beauty, sin and defect, fate and providence, a self-conscious universe and our Father who is in heaven.

While we say this from a deep conviction of its truth, we are not insensible either to the merits of this work or to the advantages which the author derives from his familiarity with the varied learning of his native country.—The evangelical character of the leading doctrines of his book, the seriousness and warmth of feeling which pervade it, and the high order of ability which it displays, give ground to hope that Dr. Schaf will prove a blessing to the church and country of his adoption.

An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will. By Albert Taylor Bledsoe. H. Hooker. Philadelphia.

WE know nothing of the author of this treatise, and are, therefore, not likely to do him injustice through prejudice. We *guess*, however, that wherever he may now reside, he must have had his birth and education in the land of the pilgrims; for without intending any disparagement to the Middle and Southern states of our union, it must be admitted that the sons of New England excel in metaphysical research and acumen. Whether it be owing to climate, education, or some other cause, the people of this section of country possess a power of nice discrimination, which, perhaps, is not equalled by that of any nation on the globe. The subject of the freedom of the human will, it must be confessed, is one of the most abstruse, and to most men, the most perplexing, which falls within the range of human knowledge; and yet more books have been written on this subject in this little territory, than, as far as we know, in any country in the world.

President Edwards, by his work on this subject, has acquired a reputation for profound research and conclusive reasoning, superior to that of any other American author. And as no answer was attempted, either on this side the Atlantic or the other, which acquired any celebrity, the friends of the Edwardean theory of the will considered it unanswerable. But still many were not satisfied. They were of opinion, that there must be a flaw in the reasoning, somewhere; for they felt that upon this theory human liberty was annihilated. And it cannot be denied, that Edwards has made use of the same arguments in the main which, long before his time, had been adduced by the infidels Hobbes and Collins, and at a later period, by Lord Kaimes. It cannot be truly said, that the public sentiment generally acquiesced in the conclusions of Edwards; the contrary was the fact, and however plausible his reasoning might appear, it was received with the same suspicion and incredulity, as the logical argument of Berkeley, to prove that no external world existed. Such men as Dr. Johnson, Dr. Beattie, Dr. Reid, and Dugald Stewart, scouted the theory as absurd, in the view of common sense. But if Edwards be wrong, why has not the fallacy of his reasoning been pointed out? This challenge has been long before the public; and at length, more than one champion has entered the arena, in opposition to this metaphysical giant. Dr. Tappan, of New York, has lately attacked Edwards, in a work in three volumes, one of which is occupied expressly with a review of Edwards's "Inquiry." And here, in the volume before us, we have another attempt to subvert the theory of "moral necessity" and "the influence of motives," from the very foundation. This author does not seem to have been aware that he was engaged in performing very laboriously, a work of supererogation; that is, if Dr. Tappan has effected what he designed. We presume, therefore, that Mr. Bledsoe had not seen the work of his fellow labourer.

Our judgment of Mr. Bledsoe's acumen of intellect is very favourable; and evidently he has thought much and read much on the subject; and we are of opinion that he has succeeded in pointing out some considerable errors in the work which he assails, and has shown, at least to our satisfaction, that Edwards is often inaccurate in his definitions, and confused in his views of the nature of the will in relation to the desires and affections of the mind; which