

VIEWS IN THEOLOGY

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Views in theology by Lyman Beecher

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LYMAN BEECHER

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THEOLOGY**

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IN
THEOLOGY.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST

OF

THE SYNOD OF CINCINNATI.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

- I. INTRODUCTION.
- II. NATURAL ABILITY.
- III. MORAL ABILITY.
- IV. ORIGINAL SIN.
- V. TOTAL DEPRAVITY.
- VI. REGENERATION.

INTRODUCTION.

TO THE SYNOD OF CINCINNATI.

BELOVED BRETHREN:

I AVAIL myself of the earliest opportunity permitted by prior engagements, to comply with your request, 'that I would publish at us early a day as possible, a concise statement of the argument and design of my Sermon on Native Depravity, and of my views of total depravity, original sin, and regeneration, agreeably to my declaration and explanation before Synod.' I am cheered in this attempt by the consideration that the Synod 'saw nothing in my views, as explained by myself, to justify any suspicion of unsoundness in the faith,' and expressed their entire satisfaction with the terms of my acquiescence in their decision, and their belief that nothing insuperable remained to prevent my usefulness, or impair confidence in me, as a minister of the gospel in the Presbyterian church. I am cheered, because, though my doctrinal opinions have been unchanged from the beginning, and have been published often, and are in accordance, as I suppose, with the received expositions of the Confession of Faith, and the Bible, and have seemed to receive some token of Divine approbation, and as eternity approaches are increasingly precious to my own soul, it is nevertheless true that I had fallen under suspicions. The causes of these suspicions, I shall not stop to explain; nor am I disposed to regard them with entire disapprobation. In one view, I regard them with pleasure, as evidence of a

wakeful zeal for the truth, for want of which in a generation past, innovations and heresies were permitted insidiously to invade portions of the church.

But who does not know that upon the very confines of honest zeal for the truth, lie the territories of twilight, and suspicion, and rumor, and fear, and whisperings, and false accusations, by which confidence is undermined, and very friends separated!

The strength of the church, under God, depends on concentrated action; and this, like mercantile credit, depends on confidence. Whatever, therefore, propagates distrust among brethren, creates a panic, like the failure of capitalists in a great city. Of this, the enemy of souls is aware; and has never failed, when the power of the church became too formidable to be resisted, to ease him of his adversaries, by dividing them. Thus the sacramental controversy divided the reformers, and the contentions of the Independents and Presbyterians lost the vantage ground in the commonwealth, and brought back monarchy, despotism, and irreligion.

In this nation, for a long time, the kindred denominations, Congregational and Presbyterian, lived in peace and good fellowship, and were doing valiantly their part in filling the land with churches and temples, and pastors and revivals, and seemed to bid defiance to his wiles. But at length the storm has smitten us, and with a fury proportioned to our power of annoyance to the kingdom of darkness. I was not unapprised of the beginning of this evil, when I consented to come into the Presbyterian church; but its subsequent developments have indeed outrun all expectation, and have reached a crisis deeply afflicting, humiliating, and alarming. Extensively, confidence has ceased, and misapprehension, and suspicion, and alienation, and contention have entered. In this condition of the church, though pressed beyond measure by other responsibilities, there is no effort, or sacrifice, or self-denial which I would not make joyfully, to extend correct information, allay suspicion, extinguish animosity,

stop contention, and by purity and peace, and concentrated action, make her prosperity like the waves of the sea.

It will not be easy, however, to illustrate my views on the subjects named, in the form of independent dissertations, without the danger of alleged discrepancy. Nor do I understand it to be the wish of the Synod that I should confine myself to the exact limits and language of my defence. I have chosen, therefore, to follow the order, and extensively the language of my defence from copious notes, adding such illustrations and topics as I had prepared, but a regard to brevity compelled me to omit. Making such an exhibition, however as will, in the best manner, answer the design of the Synod, in putting the community in possession of my doctrinal views on the subjects named.

I cannot, however, forbear to remark, that the necessity of explanation imposed on me at this time of life by unfounded accusations, is not unlike calling on an aged merchant of long-established reputation, to prove his honesty, by the exhibition of his books; or a physician of age and experience, to repel the suspicion of quackery, by publishing an account of his cases and his practice. I am happy, however, to say, that it is not the fault of the Synod, that such a necessity exists, and that all which I requested or hoped, was illustrated in the kind and candid manner in which the trial was conducted.