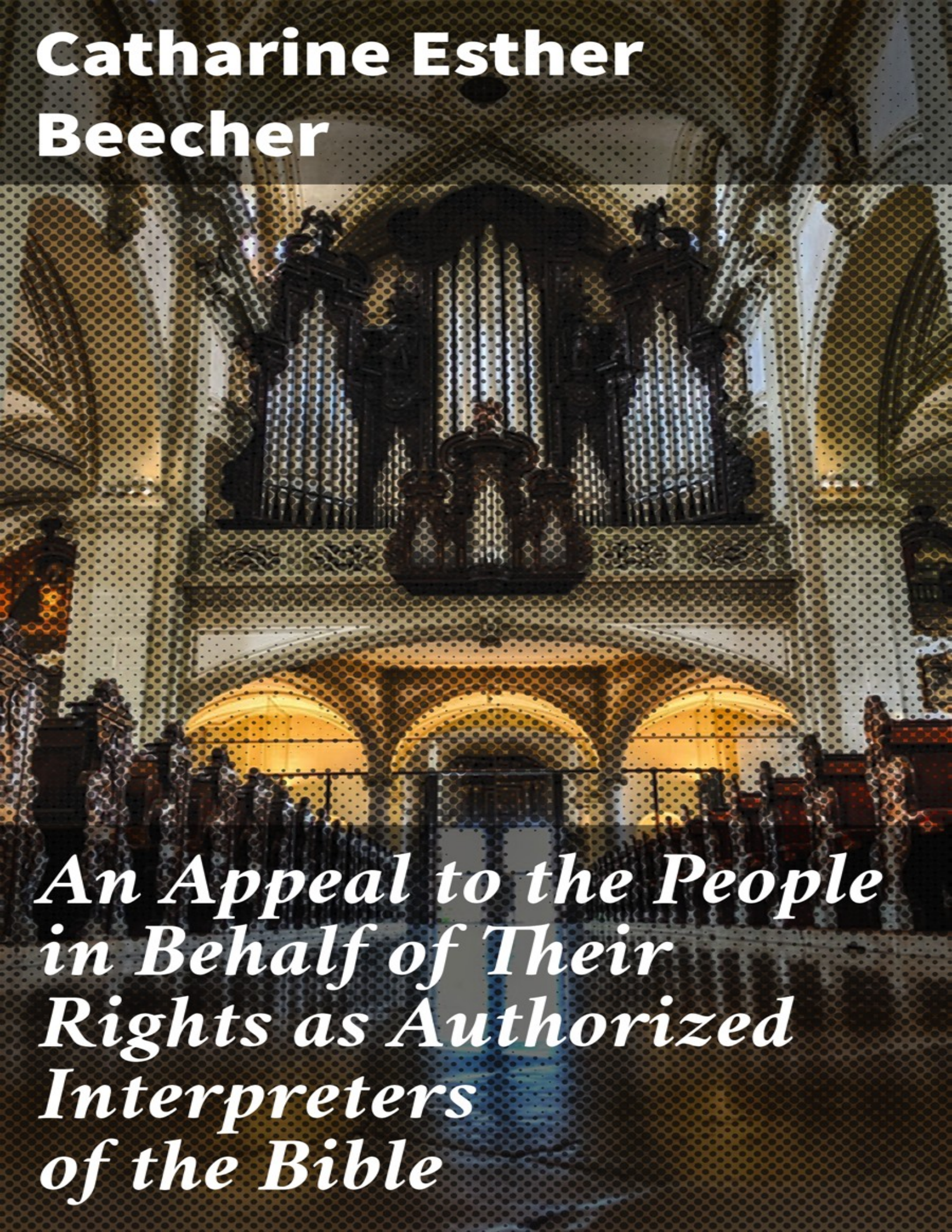




**Catharine Esther
Beecher**

*An Appeal to the People
in Behalf of Their
Rights as Authorized
Interpreters
of the Bible*

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What Theologians will do?

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"

TO The Editors of the Secular Press, THE TRUE TRIBUNES OF THE PEOPLE, CALLED OF GOD IN BEHALF OF THE COMMONWEALTH TO DEFEND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE, FREEDOM OF SPEECH, AND THE RIGHT OF ALL TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE FOR THEMSELVES, UNRESTRAINED BY ANY ECCLESIASTICAL POWER, THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.

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There is an obvious crisis approaching, in the religious world, on questions of the highest moment. In past time such periods of change have been preceded by a slow and silent preparation, in which multitudes have been led into the same course of thought and feeling. Then, as the crisis approached, some efficient leader lifted the last stone which sustained the protecting dyke, and rode on the summit of the in-rushing tide to notoriety and influence. Thus it was in the day of Luther, in the day of Wesley, and at other periods of religious movement.

At the present time there are indications of a great impending change, which has been preceded by a long course of unobserved preparation. But it is believed that, in this case, it is not to be exhibited, like former ones, by leaders forming new sects and parties, amid more or less of conflict and commotion, but by the agency of *the people*, and by a healthful, quiet process, which, like leaven, shall gradually assimilate surrounding particles till the whole be leavened.

The matter involved is the great question of questions, to each individual for himself, and to every [pg 002] parent and educator for their children: "What must we do to be saved?"

It is the object of this volume to show that the answer to this great question has, for ages, been involved in mystery and difficulty by means of a *philosophical theory* to account for the "origin of evil," which, in the fifth century, was forced on the people by popes and ecclesiastical councils, and

which has been sustained by persecution ever since—that this theory is the basis of a system of religious doctrine incorporated into creeds and churches, which is so contrary to the moral sense of humanity, that theologians have failed to render it consistent and satisfactory, even to themselves—that *the people* are endowed with *principles of common sense* by which they can educe from the works of God a system of natural religion far superior, which system is briefly set forth, and also the tendencies of the two opposing systems—that *both* systems are so incorporated into church creeds, and into theological teachings, that they are a compound of contradictions, and all the great religious controversies have been efforts to eviscerate the false system from the true, while through the long conflict, it is theologians who have proved the noble confessors and martyrs for truth—that it is impossible to establish the claims of the Bible, or of any other writings, as *revelations* from the Creator, when the Augustinian theory is made a part of their teachings; so that the real question for the people, is “Bible or no Bible”—that the leading theological teachers of the chief sects in this country have virtually conceded that this theory is sustained neither by common sense nor the Bible; and, finally, that the people are about [pg 003] to cast off this dogma, which for ages has darkened the way to eternal life, and by applying the principles of common sense to the Bible, thus establish its agreement with the system of natural religion herein set forth.

In conclusion, the indications of the predicted change are set forth as they are manifested in the present position of

theologians—of the parochial clergy—of the church—of educational interests—of women—of “Young America”—and of the religious and secular press.

CHAPTER II. THE AUGUSTINE THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF EVIL.

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The theory in question was introduced into the Christian church, as an article of faith, in the fifth century, chiefly by the influence of Augustine, an African bishop.

To understand how it was brought about, it is needful to bear in mind the distinction between facts and the philosophical theories that explain the *how* and the *why* of these facts.

Christ and his Apostles taught the fact that all men are sinners, and the way to escape from sin and its penalties. As, at first, Christianity prevailed chiefly among the uneducated, it was not till some three or four hundred years after Christ, that the philosophy of these facts agitated the churches. Augustine was a man of powerful mind and great learning, and with [pg 004] other philosophers, speculated as to “the origin of evil,” or the why and the how all men came to be sinners.

By the aid of a few misinterpreted passages in the Bible, the following theory was introduced and mainly by Augustine.

The Augustinian Theory.

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The Creator has proved his power to make minds with such “a holy nature” that they will have no propensity to sin, by creating the minds of angels and of Adam on this pattern. Adam having this holy nature, with no propensity to

sin, did sin, and, as a penalty, or in consequence, all his posterity commence existence without this holy nature, and with such a depraved nature that every moral act is sin and only sin until God regenerates each mind. This favor is bestowed only on a certain “elect” number, whose salvation was purchased by the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

The rest of the race, after death, are to continue an existence of hopeless torment in hell.

This depraved nature is the “origin of evil;” that is to say, it is *the cause* of all the sin and consequent misery of our race in time and through eternity. It is what is meant by the terms “total depravity,” and “original sin” as used by theologians.

At first the pope and the church councils refused this theory, but eventually, the Augustinian party triumphed; Pelagius and his followers were persecuted and driven out of the church, and thus this dogma was established as a leading feature in all the creeds and confessions of both Catholic and Protestant churches.

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So thoroughly has it been adopted that, since the time of Pelagius, there has been little discussion among the great Christian sects on the theory itself. These disputes have chiefly related to certain questions connected with this dogma, which will next be noticed.

CHAPTER III. QUESTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE AUGUSTINIAN THEORY.

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In discussing the topics of this chapter it is needful to refer to certain religious sects and parties of this country in their relations to the subject.

The first class may be denominated the old school Calvinists, embracing the Old School Presbyterian churches, the Reformed Dutch and most of the Baptist denominations.

Their views are ably presented by the theologians of Princeton and their quarterly, and by the Baptist theologians of the Newton Theological Seminary and the Baptist periodicals.

The second class may be called the new school Calvinists, embracing Congregational and New School Presbyterian churches. These are ably represented in New England by the Andover and New Haven Theological Seminaries and their respective quarterlies; and out of New England, by the Theological Seminaries of Union and Lane, and their quarterly at Philadelphia.

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The third class are the Arminian sects, including the Methodists and Episcopalians, whose views are ably presented in their quarterlies and other periodicals in New York and Philadelphia.

In what does the depraved nature transmitted from Adam consist?

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In seeking a definite and clear answer to the question, what is the depraved nature transmitted from Adam, we find so much vagueness and mistiness, that it will be needful to state first what it *is not*, and then it will be more easy to approximate to the affirmative reply.

We find, then, that theologians teach that this depraved nature does not consist in any of those constitutional powers and faculties of mind, of which God is the author. For they maintain that all that God has made is perfect and right, and that he is not the creator of that which is the cause or origin of sin, inasmuch as this would make him “the author of sin,” which they expressly deny. This depraved nature, then, is something which God did not create. This is what is affirmed when theologians say that they do not teach a “physical depravity” which demands “physical regeneration” on the part of God.

Then on the positive side, we find that this depraved nature is something that mind can be created without, for God made the angels and Adam without it.

It is something which does not prevent sinful action, for Adam sinned before it existed.

It is something which God can at any time remedy, at least to some extent, by regeneration.

It is something which makes every moral act of [pg 007] every human being sin and only sin until regeneration takes place.

It is something which man created himself, either *in* Adam, or *by* Adam, or *before* Adam.

It is something which man never can or never will rectify, so that he is entirely dependent on God for the remedy.

It is something which most theologians describe as “a bias,” or “a tendency,” or “a propensity,” or “an inclination,” or “a proclivity” *to sin*, while its opposite is called *a holy nature* which was created by God, and which consists in a bias, tendency, propensity, inclination or proclivity to holiness.

According to this, God created the holy nature of angels and our first parents, and *man* caused the depraved nature of all of Adam's posterity.

Some theologians attempt to define it as an *unbalanced state of the faculties*, while holiness consists in the perfect balance of the faculties. This balanced state of the faculties conferred at his creation on Adam has been withheld from all his descendants by a constitution formed by God in consequence of Adam's sin. Some theologians define this depravity as *like* a habit. Others hold that it is a state of *the will*, sometimes called a *disposition* or *ruling purpose*.

Some theologians teach that the presence of God's Spirit, in the soul of man is indispensable to its right action, and that his depraved nature is the result of the “deprivation” of God's Spirit, which was bestowed on Adam, and is withheld from his descendants on account of his first sin. According to this view, a holy mind is one which enjoys the presence of God's Spirit, and a depraved mind is one that is deprived of it.

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Ability and Inability.

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The next question connected with the Augustine theory is in regard to man's power or ability to obey God.

The old school Calvinists hold that man has no power of *any* kind to obey any of God's laws acceptably until his depraved nature is regenerated by God, and also that he has no power to do any thing that has any tendency to secure regeneration. Every act and feeling is sin and only sin from birth to regeneration.

The new school Calvinists hold that man has full power to obey *all* that God requires, but that owing to his depraved nature, he never will perform a morally right act in a single instance, until regenerated, nor will he do any thing that has any promise, or encouragement from the Word of God, as tending to secure regeneration. He is as entirely dependent on God as if he had no power of any kind. And as the inability, whether natural or moral, is all owing to the depraved nature consequent on Adam's sin, the fact that man has power to do what he never will do, only adds to the misery of the condition thus entailed.

The Arminian sects agree in the fact that the sin of Adam entailed such a depraved nature to all the race, as more or less incapacitates for right moral action until regeneration takes place.

The Episcopal Arminians hold to the Catholic view that baptism in part remedies the effects of Adam's sin, so that by the use of the means afforded by a ministry regularly transmitted from the Apostles, the unregenerate can gain eternal life.

The Methodist Arminians hold that depravity consists [pg 009] in the "*deprivation*" of God's Spirit which was given to

Adam, and that the death of Christ has so availed, that man now has some measure of this Spirit restored before regeneration, so that all men have power, by the use of certain appointed means of grace, to gain regeneration.

The main point where the Calvinists and Arminians differ is, that the Arminians teach that man has an appointed mode for gaining regeneration, and the Calvinists teach that he has not.

What is Regeneration?

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The next question is, in what does that great change consist which is called regeneration, and which is indispensable to salvation from eternal woe?

The old school Calvinists say it is a new nature created by God which naturally acts right, in place of a depraved nature which naturally acts wrong and only wrong. With this new nature man has power to obey God acceptably, and without it he has no power of any kind.

The new school Calvinists say that regeneration is a change of the depraved nature of man by God, attended by a *choice or ruling purpose* to obey God in all things made by man himself. They teach also that man can and ought to make this choice without any help from God in changing his depraved nature, and yet, owing to this evil nature, he never will do so till God changes it. Meantime God points out no certain way of obtaining this indispensable aid from him.^{[1](#)}

The Arminians teach that regeneration consists either in the implanting of a new nature by baptism, and [pg 010] the

use of other means of grace, or in the restoration of God's Spirit which was withdrawn from man on account of Adam's sin, and in some degree restored by Christ's death.

What must we do to be saved?

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The next question for a race thus mournfully ruined is, "What must we do to be saved?"

In reply, the old school Calvinist says, you can do nothing at all. Whoever is saved will be regenerated by God, without reference to any unregenerate doings. It is all decided not by man in any way, but by the "decrees" and "election" of God.

The new school Calvinist says, You *can* do all that God requires, so as to be perfect in every thought, word and deed, from the beginning of moral action to the close of life, but you certainly never *will* feel or do a single thing that is right and acceptable until regenerated; nor will you ever do any thing to which any promise is offered by God as that which will secure his interference to regenerate. It is all decided, not by man, but by the "decrees" and "election" of God.

The Arminians say you can obtain regeneration and eternal life, by the use of the means of grace set forth in the Bible and by "the Church."

True virtue, or right moral action.

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The next question is, what is true virtue, or right moral action?

By *moral action* is meant the act of mind in *choosing*, in distinction from intellectual and other acts of mind.

The Calvinists, both old and new school, teach that [pg 011] true virtue, or right moral action in man, is choosing to obey God's laws after regeneration takes place. Previous to regeneration, every choice is sin and has no moral goodness or rectitude. Thus truth, honesty, justice, self-denial for the good of others, obedience to parents, are all sin in an unregenerate mind, and true virtue in the regenerate mind.

The Antinomian Calvinist goes so far as to claim that *every* choice of a regenerate mind is right and holy, just as every choice of the unregenerate is sin. Thus the practice of the most hideous vices and crimes becomes virtue in the regenerate.

But all other Calvinists maintain that after regeneration we can and do sin, though previous to this change no truly virtuous act is ever performed.

The Arminians hold that true virtue consists in obeying God's laws, without reference to the question of regeneration. They do not hold, as do all Calvinists, that all the doings of the unregenerate are sinful, and thus have no promise or encouragement in the Bible as having an influence to secure regeneration.

CHAPTER IV. THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED IN THE AUGUSTINIAN THEORY.

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The difficulties involved in the Augustinian theory of “the origin of evil,” result from these facts. Our only idea of a benevolent being is that wherever he has the power to produce either happiness or misery, [pg 012] he prefers to make happiness. Our only idea of a malevolent being is that wherever he has this power he prefers to make misery.

Consequently, the affirmation that all the sin and misery of man is the result of a depraved nature which the Creator has power both to prevent and to remove, conveys no other idea than that God prefers to make misery when he has power to make happiness, and thus is a malevolent being.

If God would make all minds perfectly holy, as theologians claim he has power to do, all sin would cease. He chooses not to do so, but rather to perpetuate the depraved nature transmitted from Adam, which is “the origin of all evil.”

Now all classes of theologians who hold to the depravity of man's nature consequent on Adam's sin, agree that this is the cause or origin of all sin and its consequent suffering.

They all agree, also, that God has proved his power to make a perfectly holy nature in the case of angels and of Adam, and that in consequence of the first sin of Adam, every human mind begins to exist with a depraved nature, according to a constitution of things instituted by God.

They all agree that God can regenerate every human mind, and that this boon is withheld, not for want of *power*,

but for want of *will* on the part of God.

The difficulty that they have to meet is this—How can the Creator, having done thus, be regarded as any other than a malevolent being, the malignant and hateful “author of sin,” and all its consequent sufferings?

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The following exhibits the several modes of attempting to meet this question.

The Catholic Method.

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The first mode of meeting this difficulty is called that of *mystery* and *sovereignty*. It is simply saying that there is no explanation to be given. It is a mystery that God as a sovereign does not choose to explain, and it must be submitted to in uncomplaining silence.

This is the Catholic mode which has been perpetuated by many Protestants. It is the same method as is adopted in defending the Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation*.

All who do not resort to the Catholic mode of mystery and sovereignty, endeavor to relieve the Creator from the charge of being the author of sin by maintaining that *man made his own depraved nature*.

This they set forth in the following ways:

Mode of Augustine and of President Edwards.

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Augustine, the father of this dreadful system, maintained that all men had a common nature *in Adam*, which was ruined by his act, after God had made this common nature perfect. That is to say, every human soul existed as a part of Adam, and thus his act was the act of each and of all. This act vitiated the common nature of all, and thus Adam and each of his posterity caused the depravity of their common nature. And thus, though God had the power to create each mind as perfect as he created Adam's, still he is not the author of sin.

President Edwards, the great New England theologian, [pg 014] taught that all the minds of our race so existed in Adam, and were so one with his mind, that when he chose to eat the forbidden fruit, all his descendants chose to do so too, and thus each man ruined his own nature, and God is not the author of the evil.

The Princeton Mode.

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The theologians of Princeton set forth the following as the mode in which man caused his own depraved nature:

God created Adam with a perfectly holy nature. Adam sinned and ruined his own nature. God had previously “made a covenant with Adam, not only for himself, but for all his posterity, or in other words, Adam having been placed on trial, not only for himself, but also for his race, his act was in virtue of this relation *regarded (by God) as our act*. God withdrew from us as he did from him; in consequence of this withdrawal, we begin to exist in moral darkness, destitute of a disposition to delight in God and

prone to delight in ourselves and in the world. The sin of Adam therefore ruined us; and the intervention of the Son of God for our salvation is an act of pure, sovereign, and wonderful grace.”

The above is extracted from a standard writer of the Princeton Theological Seminary, and expresses the views of the Old School Presbyterian church in this matter.

It is simply saying that man made his own depraved nature, inasmuch as God *regarded* Adam's act as our act *when it was not*, being performed before we existed, and that he punished us by withdrawing from us, as he did from Adam, and thus our nature becomes ruined and totally depraved.

[pg 015]

The Constitutional Transmission Mode.

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The next way in which man is made to be the author of his own nature is called the *constitutional transmission mode*. It is as follows:

God made Adam with a perfectly holy mind, and then Adam sinned and ruined his own nature. *In consequence* of this act, God established *such a constitution of things* that Adam transmitted his depraved nature to all his posterity, just as bodily diseases are transmitted from parents to children.

In this way *man* is said to be the author of his own depraved nature, meaning, by man, *Adam*.

In this case it is conceded that God had power to make such a constitution of things as that all human minds would begin existence, as Adam did, with perfectly holy minds, and that instead of this, he chose that such a depraved nature should be transmitted to all as would insure universal sin. And yet it is claimed that by this mode, man, and not God, is shown to be “the author of sin.”

This is the mode adopted by most of the Andover and New Haven theologians.

Dr. Edward Beecher, in his work “The Conflict of Ages,” advocates the idea that man ruined his own nature in a preëxistent state *before* Adam. But the evidence of this has not yet been presented.

Thus all who do not take the Catholic mode of *mystery and sovereignty* maintain that *man made his own depravity of nature*, either *in* or *by* or *before* Adam.

Condition of infants.

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The most difficult point of all, is the probable condition [pg 016] of infants after death. On the Augustinian theory they all have been ruined in nature by Adam's sin, and when they die, go with this depraved nature to their final state. Augustine acquired the name of “durus pater” (cruel father) because he was consistent with his theory and taught that these little ones, if unbaptized, were doomed to endless torments.

But as humanity and common sense have gained ground this hideous tenet has passed away, and few are now found who do not sacrifice consistency to humanity, and allow that

in spite of their total depravity, all infants go directly to heaven and are forever blessed. Formerly some would confine this favor to the “elect infants,” others to the infants of “elect parents,” but few are found at this day who venture to teach that God sends even one new-born being to eternal misery for Adam's sin.

The difficulties not removed but rather increased by these methods.

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But the difficulties involved in the Augustine theory do not lie in *the mode* by which it came to pass that all men begin existence with depraved natures, but in *the fact*, that God, having power to create all minds as perfect as Adam's, and also the power to regenerate all, has chosen not to do so, and thus has preferred the consequent sin and misery to the happiness resulting from making perfect minds.

This grand difficulty stands entirely unrelieved by the above methods. Nay more, they all serve but to increase a sense of the folly and enormity of the awful result, and to present our Maker as the cruel cause of [pg 017] all our miseries, and the fullest and most awful realization of our idea of a perfectly malevolent being.[2](#)

Illustration of the Augustinian Theory.

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The following illustrates the case, though but very imperfectly, inasmuch as any finite temporal evils are as

nothing compared to the eternal torments to which are assigned all of our race, whose ruined nature is not regenerated before death.

A father places a poison in the way of his wife, forbids her to taste it, but knows she will do so and that the consequence will be that all his children will be born blind.

Then he places the children thus deprived of sight, in a dreadful morass filled with savage beasts and awful pitfalls, with a narrow and difficult path of escape, which it is certain no one will ever find without sight. The consequence is, that a large part of his children sink into the pitfalls and perish.

Then he justifies himself in these ways. To some he says, I have a right to treat my children as I please, and I allow no one to question me on the matter. All that I do is right and benevolent, and you must not inquire how or why.

To all the rest he says, I am not the author of this evil, it is *the mother* of the children who took the poison when I forbade her to do so. She either made herself blind by taking the poison, and then transmitted the evil to her children as a hereditary boon, or she had “a common nature” with her children and ruined all together, or they all “sinned in her” and [pg 018] became blind before they were born. And so I am not “the author of sin” in this matter.

To intelligent persons not educated in the belief of the above theory of Augustine, and of these modes of explaining the difficulties connected with it, this account of the matter will seem so incredible and monstrous that they will demand evidence that the preceding statements are true. In the next chapters this evidence will be presented.

CHAPTER V. THE AUGUSTINIAN THEORY IN CREEDS.

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The preceding chapters have presented the Augustinian theory of “the origin of evil,” and certain questions connected with it which have been debated by theologians; also the difficulties involved in the theory, and the modes of meeting these difficulties.

The next aim will be to verify these statements by extracts from the creeds and theologians of the great Christian sects.

Creed of the Catholic Church.

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It is well known that the Catholic organization preceded that of the Protestant sects. It is also well known that this church maintains that the decisions of her pope and councils are *infallible*.

The following extracts, then, from the decisions of the celebrated Councils of Trent at the period of the Reformation, exhibit the theory of Augustine incorporated as a part of the Roman Catholic creed:

[pg 019]

Extract from a decree of the Council of Trent.

“Infants derive from Adam that original guilt which must be expiated in the laver of regeneration in order to obtain eternal life. Adam lost the purity and righteousness which he received from God, not for himself only but also for us.”

The catechism of the Council of Trent says:

“The pastor, therefore, will not omit to remind the faithful that the guilt and punishment of original sin were not confined to Adam, but justly descended from him, their source and cause, to all posterity. Hence a sentence of condemnation was pronounced *against the human race* immediately after the fall of Adam.”

John Calvin.

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The celebrated John Calvin, one of the greatest Protestant theologians at the period of the Reformation, wrote a complete *system* based on the Augustinian theory. This system has been perpetuated in all the various sects which from him are named Calvinistic. The following extract gives his views on this subject:

John Calvin.

“It is a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all parts of the soul, which, in the first place, exposes us to the wrath of God, and then produces in us those works which the Scripture calls the works of the flesh.”

Of infants, he says:

“They bring their condemnation with them from their mother's womb, being liable to punishment, not for the sin of another, but for their own. For although they have not as yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, yet they have the seed inclosed in themselves; nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed of sin; therefore they can not but be odious and abominable to God. Whence it follows that it is properly