

**A TREATISE ON THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE
OF ORIGINAL SIN: WITH
EXPLANATORY NOTES**

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A Treatise on the Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin: With Explanatory Notes by H. A. Boardman

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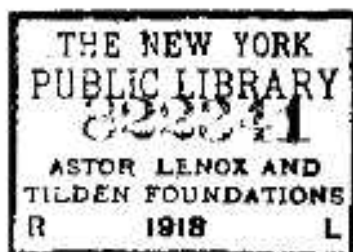
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES.

BY H. A. BOARDMAN,

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PART I.

NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

THE question, *What is the native character and condition of man?* is an important one, for several reasons. In the first place, it is one in which all men have a direct personal concern. In the second place, scriptural views on this subject lie at the foundation of all sound theology. He who misapprehends the disease under which the race labours, will fail of understanding the remedy that has been provided for it. And, in the third place, such formidable attempts have been made in our day to set aside the ancient doctrine of Original Sin, that there seems to be a special propriety in re-examining the grounds upon which it rests.

The doctrine of the standards of the Presbyterian Church in relation to the native character of man, may be learned from the fol-

lowing quotation from the Larger Catechism: "The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions."

The doctrine of the Church of England is thus expressed in her Ninth Article: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk,) but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil; so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person, born into this world, it deserves God's wrath and damnation." The reference to the "Pelagians" in this Article, requires an explanation which may be of advantage in the discussion before

us. Pelagius was a Briton, who lived in the early part of the fifth century. He published a set of opinions on some of the fundamental points of theology, which alarmed and convulsed the Church, and were, with their author, condemned in numerous councils. His sentiments on the subject immediately under consideration, were substantially adopted by Socinus in the sixteenth century, and are held by the modern Socinians. He maintained that the sin of the first pair injured no one but themselves; that their posterity have not been affected by it; and that all infants are born as free from sin as Adam was before his transgression. "Our first parents, (according to his theory,) who sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, were not distinguished in any essential respect from those who sin in after ages, and our condition is not the worse for their sin; as they were to blame for yielding to a temptation which they might have resisted; so all of us, by a proper attention to cultivating our natural powers, may maintain our innocence amidst the temptations with which we are surrounded; and therefore we fall short of that which it is in our power to do, if we do

not yield a more perfect obedience to the law of God than Adam yielded."* (See note A.)

A modification of this opinion has appeared in our day among professedly orthodox Christians. According to this view, the posterity of Adam are not born with a depraved nature, nor have infants *any moral character* at all prior to the commencement of moral agency. But, although neither holy nor sinful, up to that period, they are placed, by a divine constitution, in such circumstances as to render it certain that they will sin as soon as they become moral agents. The principle which is mainly relied upon to sustain this theory is, that morality can attach only to acts of the will—that there can be no such thing as a moral disposition, antecedent to the exercise of the moral powers. (See note B.) In accordance with this principle it is maintained that Adam was not created a holy being, but became holy by the first act of his will, in which he chose God as his portion. Nay, it is (in perfect consistency) argued that even the infant Jesus was not holy until he became a moral agent!

* Hill's Lectures in Divinity.

It will be my object to prove, in opposition to the dogmas of this dangerous philosophy, that our Confession of Faith is correct in asserting that "the same death in sin and corrupted nature," which attached to our first parents, as the fruit of their transgression, are "conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation;" and that their posterity are "defiled and corrupted" from the womb. It is not meant, by this language, that any of the original faculties of the soul are destroyed. Man has all the faculties before regeneration which he has after it. Nor is it meant that depravity is a material substance which is infused into the soul; it is moral, not physical depravity, of which the Confession speaks. But it is meant, that the soul has lost its "original righteousness;" that it is destitute of holiness; and that as the absence of light causes darkness, so the absence of holiness causes mental darkness, and involves all the faculties and affections of the soul in disorder. They cannot, in this state, answer the purpose for which they were created, of loving, serving, and honouring God. The insubordination and confusion which reign