

Thesis on
"The Evangelical Revival as reflected in the
Life and Works of John William de la Fléchère"
1729 - 1785

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by

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Preface

The writer's interest in the subject of this thesis was awakened by Professor Watt of New College, Edinburgh, who drew his attention to a passing reference to Fletcher in Wand's "A History of the Modern Church". This reference was Voltaire's arresting remark concerning Fletcher which is quoted in Section III, Chapter 1, of this work. The study was undertaken for two main reasons. Fletcher, although apparently a leader of decided significance in the Evangelical Revival, has hitherto been neglected. While there are numerous remarks suggesting his importance in all the histories covering the period, the comments are all commonplace, and are obviously written without any thorough understanding of the man or his work. Then too, there is now an increasing appreciation of the value of biographical study for an understanding of ecclesiastical history.

The writer does not profess to do more than present, through the study of the life and works of John Fletcher, a fresh insight into the nature of the Evangelical Revival. Fletcher was profoundly influenced by the whole religious movement and as he was an alien in England, he reflected very clearly the forces by which he was conditioned. This thesis does not present any historical evaluation of the Revival. The Revival is only seen when and where it touches the life of Fletcher.

The plan of the study, as approved by the writer's two advisers, Professor Watt and Professor Burleigh, is set in its present form in an effort to overcome the lack of a comprehensive biography of Fletcher. Section II, following the Introduction, sets forth the essential details of his life as they can be gathered from the available source material and published biographies. The majority of the

latter have been incomplete or unsatisfactory. Many are simply uncritical eulogies quite unsuitable for historical study. Tyerman's voluminous work, "Wesley's Designated Successor", while providing the most of the information about Fletcher's life which is now available, is written with such a bias, and with such elaboration, as to weaken its usefulness essentially.

There has been deliberate expansion of this thesis in Section II at the period of the Calvinist controversy. Such expansion was considered necessary to give the reader an understanding of the forces which drew Fletcher into the struggle, the part he played in it and its effect upon his doctrinal position.

Some explanation is necessary concerning the abbreviations used. The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics is referred to as E.R.E., John Wesley's Works, Letters and Journal, as Wesley, 'Works', 'Letters', 'Journal'. When a reference is made to Charles Wesley his Christian name or initial is used.

The writer wishes to express his thanks to the Methodist Publishing House, 25-35 City Road, London, for making available the manuscripts of Fletcher which are in their possession. He is especially grateful to Dr. Hunter, the Librarian of New College, Edinburgh, and to the librarians and assistants of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; the British Museum, London; Victoria University, Toronto; and La Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION - " THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL "

INTRODUCTION - "The Evangelical Revival"

The seventeenth century drew to a close with few signs of quickening religious life. Overshadowing all was the dark depression of degeneracy which was settling down on the horizon like a gloomy cloud. The reaction against the Puritan spirit had gathered irresistible force from the accession to power of Charles II, and with the beginning of a new century, the tide of moral and religious indifference heralded a period of spiritual bankruptcy. The transition from the close of the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century has been rightly described as 'a dewless night followed by sunless dawn'.

Religion, however, was not dead. Underneath the corruption of political expediency and the degradation of national life, the seeds of vital religion were being nourished in quiet and concealed places. The growing middle class was beginning to assume a more important place in English social and economic life, and it was within this class, with its distinctly Puritan tradition, its sturdy morality, its domestic sentiment, and its conservative tendencies, that these seeds found their best soil. That they should spring forth and blossom into a living creation within the century, accounts historically, for what has become known as the Evangelical Revival. They had not lain dormant beneath the apostasy and reaction, but had slowly germinated until they had gained sufficient strength to give evidence of their existence. It is thus apparent that something must be said of the environmental conditions which provide a background for the changes that were soon to become real in the Revival. It is not needful to describe this background in detail. Broad outlines of the main determining factors will suffice.

The characteristic conditions which provide the background of the eighteenth century belong to the first part of the century. After 1760 the forces, philosophic, literary, economic, social and religious, which had gradually been working their way to the surface, began to break well through the hard crust of the century's self-complacency. Once initiated, the changes were rapid and revolutionary and so it is difficult to characterize the later period in definite and precise terms.

The political conditions preceding the rise of the revival, though crucial and distinctly complex, may be summed up briefly, for they did not exercise a major part in determining either the form or the progress of the movement. The Revolution of 1688-89 was largely the revolt of the Church of England against a Roman Catholic monarch, and the settlement under William of Orange, which provided that the king should in future be a Protestant, succeeded in bringing some harmony between the executive and legislative branches of the government. The real rulers in England by this time were the squires and merchants represented in Parliament as the leadership of the government was beginning to shift with the emergence of the Prime Minister. The change, in effect, was from a constitution which boasted of an hereditary monarch with a parliamentary agency into a parliamentary government with an hereditary regulative agency. This governing class, with its growing power, made the bishop of the Church its chief instrument in opposing the authority of the crown, as well as in imposing its own yoke upon the masses. With the suppression of Convocation in 1717, when the Church body came into conflict with the civil power over the question of jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters and toleration of Dissenters, Erastianism, which had flourished under the popular doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, made its triumph complete in a new form.

How thorough this victory was, is gathered from the fact that the Convocation was not able to proceed with any important business of its own until 1852.¹ The Church was firmly caught in the grip of her political superiors, and as she settled down under the Hanoverian succession, guided by the astute Walpole, she was moulded into the groove prepared for her. "Tranquilla non movere", was Walpole's motto and policy, and the Church was compelled to acquiesce. She became steeped in the staunch, but dreary Toryism of the age.

The one significant challenge to the Erastianism of the century was the bold stand of the Non-Jurors, who esteemed the reproaches levelled against their faith as riches greater than the treasures of the establishment. Mr. Laski has indicated another factor in their protest when he writes,

"the real interest of the Nonjuring schism was political rather than religious; and its roots go out to vital events of the past".²

Yet it must not be overlooked that, the Non-Jurors, in challenging the assumption of the lay power to control ecclesiastical affairs, were asserting man's essential freedom in spiritual matters. For the most part, they were men whose personal probity, sincerity and conscience, represented a high order of spiritual life.

Greater determining factors in the Revival than political forces, were the economic and social conditions of the age. That the 'Evangelical Revival' should synchronize with the birth of modern England is not an accident. From the middle of the century, as the Industrial Revolution progressed and newly industrialized areas sprang up, the population of

1 Patterson, History of the Church of England. P. 382.

2 Laski, H.J. Political Thought in England from Locke to Bentham. p. 66.

England began to change. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the population was found to have increased by 52% in the last half of the previous century, compared with an approximate increase of between 17% and 18% in the previous fifty years.¹ Accompanying this was the redistribution of the population, and its concentration in the large towns in the North of England. Middlesex, Gloucester, Wiltshire, Somerset, and Northampton, were believed to be the most populous in 1700. By 1800 the changes brought Middlesex, Lancashire, the West Riding, Staffordshire and Warwickshire to the fore.² The population of the cities in these industrial counties increased rapidly. The shift of the population to the newly industrialized areas was accelerated by the depopulation of the country as the result of the enclosure system. The developments of improved methods of agriculture were beginning to transform agricultural conditions. Hammond writes,

"At the time of the great Whig Revolution, England was in the main a country of commons and of common fields; at the time of the Reform Bill, England was in the main a country of individualist agriculture and of large enclosed farms."³

This movement of life and change stood out sharply against a background of grimly sordid social and economic conditions. Historical generalizations are at their best only half true, and the eighteenth century has been painted so often with drab hues that it hardly seems necessary to apply the brush again. The economic distinction between the two social strata, however, provides the clearest picture of conditions. At one end of the scale were the noble and the rich; at the other end were the ignorant and the poor. They existed together at different levels with only an inconsequential growing middle class, to fill the space between.

1 Toynbee, Arnold - The Industrial Revolution. p. 33

2 Hammond, J.L. and B. - The Town Labourer 1760.- 1832. p. 4

3 Ibid - The Village Labourer 1760 - 1832.p. 2

Luxury, licence, and 'high breeding' characterised the upper strata; brutality, crime, and helplessness the lower. The class lines were rigidly and ruthlessly drawn, for the defensive impulses of the vested selfishness of the upper class worked to keep the division clearly marked. Then, the economic conditions combined to render a large section of the lower group impotent. Even at the beginning of the century it was estimated that more than half of the entire population was a liability on the nation.¹ Thus rendered helpless by their physical conditions they easily became the victims of the conspiring forces of superiority and the structure of contemporary society. The maintenance of the 'status quo' was the ruling passion of the age. The sanction of habitual usage was the sanction of divinity. The maintenance of the existing organization, therefore, was guaranteeing immobility in the social and economic condition of the masses, and their superiors, assigning them an inferior position in society, undertook to keep them there.

John Seeley writes,

"The expansion of England in the New World and in Asia is the formula which sums up for England the history of the eighteenth century."²

While the importance of the development of imperial and commercial power in colonial expansion during the century, must not be overlooked, it must also be recognized that its influence did not play a major part in conditioning the early stages of the revival. The development of the New World was only beginning to make its influence felt on conditions at home. Later, when the Revival had come and had gained strength and power, the North American continent in particular, provided a new arena of activity and an outlet for the overflowing enthusiasm of the mother group.

1 Warner - The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution. p. 4
 2 Seeley, Sir John - The Expansion of England. p. 28

The eighteenth century was the age of the Enlightenment. Known in Germany as the 'Aufklärung', in England as the 'Illumination', it gave to the world a new world-view, and, in establishing a new intellectual order, transcended the hitherto accepted standards of the race. It was an effort to set up a new standard of judgment based upon the ultimate appeal to the findings of Reason. The fulcrum for subverting the 'status quo' lay solely in the laws of nature which were discoverable by human Reason through mathematics and astronomy. The revolution moved slowly but it left its predominant mark upon the century in the place it gained for Reason as the court of final authority. To this authority went a constant appeal. Mark Pattison writes,

"With some trifling exceptions, the whole of religious literature was drawn into the endeavour to 'prove the truth' of Christianity". 1

The underlying assumption was the supremacy of Reason in matters of religion for Reason was elevated to a place of authority as the divinely implanted governor of the life of man and the arbiter in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. As has been suggested, the growth of this rationalism may be traced largely to the growing intellectual atmosphere of the age instituted by the changing world - view provided by science. The philosophers of the period were finding their new standard of judgment in science and the new scheme of the universe which came from the astronomy of the seventeenth century. Newtonian science provided a formula applicable to all branches of life. Reason was thus made the final court of appeal, and the scientific method provided the avenue of approach to that supreme court. The heavy weight of the authority of tradition was lifting and mankind was made free to guide his own course by the eternal principles of Reason.

1 Pattison, M. Essays and Reviews Vol. II, p. 5

The religious life of the century felt the direct effect of this rationalism in the movements of Deism and Skepticism. Deism rose to its height in the latter half of the seventeenth century and died away by the middle of the eighteenth. It owed much to the new physics and philosophy. The God of Deism was a mathematician and mechanic who revealed his power in the formulation and application of inviolable laws. This interpretation of the Divine Nature in terms of scientific concepts meant the overthrow of miracles, and deemed special providences and supernatural revelations as incongruous with a God of such uniformity and expression. Creation testified with convincing authority to the wisdom, majesty, and universality of its Creator. He was the Supreme Being and the Universal Father of Mankind. Thus there developed a new theology which propounded a natural religion based on divine beneficence. There was little sense of sin and people felt slight need of salvation. As the movement made itself felt, sermons in the English churches became little more than moral exhortations. Justice Blackstone, who at this time made a point of hearing the most celebrated preachers of London, stated that in all his visits to the churches he did not hear a sermon that had more Christianity in it than a speech of Cicero's, and that it would have been impossible for him to tell whether the preacher were a Mohammedan or a Christian.¹ Christianity was accepted as a natural religion accredited by historic proofs. The heart of the Deistic creed was the avowed superiority of the universal natural religion over the traditions of revelation, and its appeal was to the general religious consciousness of mankind which it considered sufficient to furnish the few essential doctrines necessary for the conduct of man and the education of his soul for the future state.

1 Skeats, Herbert A History of the Free Churches in England. p. 438
Quoted from the Christian Observer 1858

The attacks of Deism, however, were not accepted without a response from within the Church, but while the apologists were able men and directly attacked the Deistic conclusions, they made the same fundamental mistake as their opponents, for they also, too exclusively courted the appeal to Reason. Butler's 'Analogy of Religion' has been generally hailed as providing the final vindication of the case for revealed religion. The general result of his work, however, is to prove that whatever moral objections may be raised against the scheme of revealed religion, the same are equally valid against natural religion. The controversy between the Deists and the Apologists did little in the end except sap the vitality of any religious life which remained in the nation. While the defenders of the faith made every effort to prove that there was nothing in the content of revelation which was not agreeable to reason, little concern or interest was shown for the application of this content to life. Neither side won a victory but the laurels went to the Sceptics, who, under the able leadership of Hume carried the assumptions of the new school to their legitimate conclusions. The resulting Scepticism was not as widespread in England as in France under the influence of Voltaire.

The Church was thus oppressed on all sides. An instrument of the state, she was robbed of her birthright and filled with worldliness. Her ethics became tinctured with secularism, hedonism and class bias as she became indifferent to the social and economic forces which were mustering for change. Her religion was an instrument for guarding the privileges of the rich and for reconciling the poor with their distresses. Impregnated with the forces of rationalism, her teaching was ineffective. Spiritual life ebbed. The symptoms of decline and decay abounded to such an extent that, even if substantial allowance be made for exaggeration, the general

state of the Church's vitality must be estimated as extremely low. Contempt for religion accompanied the prevalent degeneracy of manners and morals. In 1723 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu referred to a proposed Act of Parliament which should take the 'not' out of the Commandments and clap it into the Creed.¹ Mr. Walpole was the originator of this novel idea.

While the Church suffered from the scorn and witticisms of the upper classes, she had no message for the poor, or, for that matter, little concern for them. Large numbers of the clergy were pluralists and absentees from their parishes, and the Church made little effort to reach the growing industrial population in the North.

The Church of England's downward progress was shared by the Non-conformist bodies. These groups had almost entirely forgotten their ancestral inspiration and allowed their gaze to shift from issues they had once held important to others which were circumferential and no more. While the grosser sins of an irreligious society were not so apparent in Non-conformity, the religious fervour which characterized its previous life was almost entirely lacking. Henry W. Clark suggests in his illuminating "History of English Nonconformity", that the cause of much of this decline can be traced to the haziness of Church ideals which existed among the Dissenting group. The vagueness of discernment in respect of essential Church ideals showed itself in the drooping spirit of Nonconformity and the general lifelessness of the religious communities.² The prevailing religious apathy, within and without the Church presents a dreary picture.

Deplorable as the superficiality and irreligion of the century may be there are redeeming factors which must not be overlooked. Beyond the corruption it is possible to find hatred of the corruption. In many quiet and unobserved places that hatred existed. It was in fact, this lively

1 Montagu, Lady Mary Letters, Vol. I, p. 473

2 Clark History of English Nonconformity, Vol. II, p. 175

impatience that gave such impetus to the Revival when it came. Religious revivals do not come forth from wholly barren ground. It was in the soil of this impatience with the degeneracy of the age that the Revival leaders were able to sow their seed. The facile habit of damning the eighteenth century beyond redemption has become rather monotonous. While it is important to see the corruption which existed, it is also essential to recognize the hatred of that corruption which existed as well.

It has been customary to underestimate greatly the actual worth of the parochial clergy and the sincerity of their devotion, largely because their labours have been judged according to the anachronistic standards of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Canon Ollard and Mr. Walker make this significant remark in their recently published "Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns" 1743.

"The strong impression left by these Returns is that of a body of dutiful and conscientious men, trying to do their work according to the standards of their day". 1

The genesis of the Revival cannot be understood apart from the life and story of its living and organic centre, John Wesley. The man whose heart was strangely warmed that night in Aldersgate Street in 1738 became, within months, the dynamic behind the movement. While in substance the Revival was largely determined by the political, social, economic, and religious factors which have been briefly considered, its course and form were shaped under the influence of one man. The whole movement, and more specifically, of course, Methodism, bears the impress of the personality of John Wesley.

1 Ollard, S. L. and Walker, P.C.

"Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns" 1743. Vol. 1, p.XVIII

Townsend writes,

"The great evangelical movement of the eighteenth century arose through one man who was divinely prepared and appointed to lead a widespread religious revival. By his entire consecratedness, his responsiveness to divine leading, and his quick apprehension of the needs of the times he became the most beneficent instrumentality for good to his generation." ¹

At first glance these words may appear extravagant, but in essence they are profoundly true.

The efforts of Wesley alone can scarcely explain the sudden incredible outburst of the Revival. It was through the initiative of Whitefield that field-preaching, which so deeply influenced the nature of the movement, began. The beginning of the Revival was, in fact, to be found in the organization of the 'Holy Club' at Oxford. That early fellowship bears the marks of the stirrings of the new life among a group of students, several of whom were to guide the course and destiny of the spiritual upheaval which was then beginning to make its appearance. But the events of this early period and of Wesley's experiences in America cannot be discussed here. Important as are the influences of other personages in the genesis of the Revival, their part is overshadowed by the predominant place which Wesley occupies.

The recent detailed study of the development of the religious sentiment in Wesley's mind makes a laborious review unnecessary here. ² This research has served to emphasize fully the place and importance of Wesley's conversion experience in the initiation of the Revival. The truth is, that experience marks the birth of a new spiritual freedom. It involved such a reorientation of Wesley's whole life that he found a power and a strength he had never known before and the ability to carve for himself a channel of religious expression through which he not only made articulate his own passion for holiness, but also the dumb or unconscious desires of the

¹ A New History of Methodism Vol. I, p. 80

² Dimond - The Psychology of the Methodist Revival, Chaps. III and IV

English masses. His experience changed his behaviour in relation to prayer,¹ to instantaneous conversion,² and, with the help of Whitefield, to field-preaching. The rigid pressure of his High Churchmanship was relaxed and its form began to change. The burning weight of new found conviction provided the dynamic, and the hungry masses provided the opportunity for its expression.

In February 1739 Whitefield was excluded from preaching in the churches and went into the open air to address crowds at Kingswood and later at Bristol.³ His departure for America necessitated the eventual summons to Wesley for help. Wesley came hesitatingly, adverse to taking such a bold step. But on April 2nd, in a brickyard at Bristol,⁴ he commenced his campaign of field preaching which he continued until near his death. Wesley went out, taking his colleagues with him, into the highways to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation. The novelty of the field-preaching, with the novelty of the message the evangelists brought, stirred the masses to excitement. The sinner was offered salvation as an immediate gift; a salvation which could cure and save all. A psychological fact of great importance in the beginning of the Revival was the introduction of hymn singing. The Wesleys had learned the value of congregational singing from the Moravians and the creative genius of Charles Wesley was active in producing a multitude of hymns as the movement gained force. The effect of the rhythm and music served to create the desired emotional atmosphere which made the speaker's message more forceful, while the hymns themselves

1 Wesley, J. - 'Journal', Vol. 1, p. 449
 2 Wesley, J. - 'Journal', Vol. 1, p. 456
 3 Tyerman - 'The Life of Whitefield' Vol. 1, pp. 179-80
 4 Tyerman - 'Life and Times of Wesley' Vol. 1, pp. 232-33

proved of unexcelled educational value. These early creations have come to hold a place of unique importance in Methodism. A modern Methodist writes,

"For the piety of the Methodists, the ultimate court of appeal is the Hymn-book, especially the hymns of the Wesleys. Our Hymn-book is our liturgy. It is our liturgy both in public worship and private prayer." ¹

The place of Charles Wesley's contribution to the genesis of the Revival through his hymns is too often minimized. He is overshadowed by the dominant leadership of his brother. However, a clergyman at the end of the eighteenth century wrote: -

"For one who has been drawn away by doctrine, ten have been induced by music." ²

As has been suggested, part of Wesley's contribution to the new movement was the drafting of its form. In this there was nothing artificial. The Oxford fellowship had brought home to him the power of the collective sentiment and group loyalty. When he returned from America, the group he was connected with in Fetter Lane, London, was reminiscent of the 'Religious Societies' which had sprung up in the late seventeenth century within the Church of England. This group later came under Moravian influence. It was, however, one of the few remaining 'Societies' within the Church. As soon as the problem of the care and the nurture of the new converts arose, Wesley naturally set up a society modelled after those with which he had experience. The first was in London in 1739 ³ but others were soon organized. Earlier in the year, Wesley had utilized the societies he had found in existence at Bristol. ⁴ Following this came further expansion in organization with the initiation of Bands or Select Bands, and Class Meetings. It is difficult to over-estimate the full significance of this form of organization for the new movement. It made effective the work of consolidation and unity which

1 Northern Catholicism p. 517

2 A New History of Methodism Vol. II, App. C. p. 560

3 Ibid. Vol. I, pp. 284-5

4 Ibid. p. 284

brought the Methodist group into such a place of importance in the history of Protestantism. It is a suggestion that it was the rigid form of organization which accounts for the resemblance the eighteenth century found between Methodism and Roman Catholicism.¹ The charge of 'papist' was not an uncommon one to be levelled against the Methodist during the century. Thus have biographers of Wesley, from Southey on, compared him to the founders of great orders in the Church of Rome. His genius for organization and executive has seldom been excelled either within or without the Christian Church.

Another distinctive feature in the development of the movement, was the early introduction of lay preaching. While it appears that Wesley was at first uncertain about the initiation of lay helpers, encouraging Cennick, and then disapproving of Maxfield and Westell, he was finally persuaded, largely through the influence of his mother, to recognize and accept their assistance. There followed the growth of the itinerancy, the circuit system and the conference; distinctive marks of Methodist polity. The records of the heroic efforts of these early preachers bear eloquent witness to the distinctive part they played in the growth and the spread of the Revival.² Wesley would never have been able to cope with, or control successfully the religious life which was bursting forth up and down the country, had it not been for the body of lay workers he gathered around him. Thus within the first few years the characteristic features of the Revival had been introduced. These later became consolidated in a more rigid form within Methodism.

1 Dimond - The Psychology of the Methodist Revival p. 209

2 Jackson, E. Thomas The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers
6 volumes.

It is the common practice of historians to draw too marked a distinction between that section of the movement which remained within the Church of England, and the group which left. The first are spoken of as the 'Evangelicals', while the latter have retained the early name of 'Methodists'. There is every reason to guard against too rigorous an application of this distinction. It cannot be correctly used until after Wesley's death when Methodism really separated from the Church of England. John Fletcher himself, with whom we are especially concerned in this study, provides ample justification for this contention. He may justly be claimed by both 'Evangelicals' and 'Methodists'. As a staunch son of the Church, he laboured diligently through many years of parochial work and yet retained the closest possible association with the 'Methodists', for whose doctrines he provided an able defence. He died before the separation between Wesley and the Church became real, but there is ground for believing that he was ready and willing to break with Anglicanism.¹ It is true, however, that there were many clergy within the Church who were leaders in the Revival and who were distinctly antagonistic to Wesley. Not only was there a revolt against his autocratic leadership, but theological controversy made their differences more apparent. In addition there were many clergy, who, while influenced by the main stream of the Revival, were adverse to infringe the established parochial system. Many of the more ardent evangelicals, however, and the group under Wesley, chose to disregard the system. At length, the leaders of what may justly be called the 'Evangelical Party' aligned themselves on the side of Calvinism, while Wesley and his followers upheld Arminianism. But, whatever divisions came to exist, in the beginning all sprang from the common source of the upheaval which was breaking through the hardened crust of sordid eighteenth century paganism. Thus the phrase 'Evangelical Revival' must be comprehensive enough to include every branch and division of this religious movement.

It is unnecessary here to pursue the course of the Revival through the maze of its activity to its ultimate divisions. As has been apparent, the characteristic features of the main body of the movement (ie. field-preaching, bands, societies, classes, lay-preaching and conferences) were developed directly under Wesley's jurisdiction. Lady Huntingdon was instrumental in gathering up the loose ends of much of Whitefield's work and consolidating it along a line similar to Wesley's. Her numerous chapels and her theological college at Trevecca helped to entrench the work solidly by providing a centre of nucleus round which the Calvinist tradition might group its adherents. The Calvinistic teaching at Trevecca College left its influence upon the movement in Wales which had begun with the work of Howell Harris and had preceded the English movement. Meanwhile many parochial clergy, Romaine, Berridge, Venn, Perronet, Grimshaw, and numerous others, were making the Revival effective in their own parishes. The work of these men in quiet country parishes so permeated the Church with 'evangelicalism' that it became a power within Anglicanism.

Fletcher did not come under the influence of the Revival for nearly fifteen years after its inauguration. Its course and form were well developed by then and its divisions were just beginning to appear. The leaders had weathered the strong tides of opposition which had been aroused against them and were slowly gaining appreciative recognition. The revolution was forcing itself upon the country. In place of the barren moral theology and cold intellectualism the Revival was presenting glowing experiences of the reality of the love and power of God. Wesley was repudiating the very heart of Deism by confronting the world with the supreme miracle of life - depraved sinners becoming saints of God. He was answering the forces of

evil and indifference by releasing the hitherto unrecognized power of the Holy Spirit in human lives. Fletcher came, however, in time to aid the consolidation of the forces which had been released. There is woven inextricably into his life story much of the familiar history of the later stages of the Revival but much more of the unfamiliar record of the unique spiritual vision which not a few men and women of his generation possessed. To understand the nature of this vision is to begin to comprehend the true character of the Evangelical Revival.

SECTION II

BIOGRAPHICAL - THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER

Section II

Chapter I

John Fletcher¹ was born at Nyon in Switzerland on September 12th, 1729. He was of gentle birth and his family belonged to an old and respected lineage; a branch of the earldom of Savoy. His father, Jacques de la Fléchère, who before his marriage was a general officer in the French army, later accepted a colonelcy in the militia of his native land and became seigneur of the small village of Grens, a league north of Nyon. Fletcher's mother was Suzanne Elizabeth Crinsoz, daughter of the noble Jean Jacques Crinsoz, Seigneur de Colombier, one of the most noble of Swiss families. John was the youngest in a family of eight. There were two brothers and five sisters.²

Nyon is close to beautiful Lake Geneva and is fifteen miles north of the city of Geneva itself, but the accounts Fletcher gives of his birth-place provide only a fleeting glimpse of his early surroundings.

"This is a delightful country. If you come to see it come to share a pleasant apartment and one of the finest prospects in the world, in the house where I was born.... We have a fine shady wood near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all day and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds."³

Mr. Perronet describes Fletcher's home as .,

"a fine large building, agreeably situated. It is in the form of a castle, and is supposed to have been built five hundred years ago."⁴

There is no evidence of any permanent attraction these early beautiful surroundings exercised over Fletcher. England became his home, and was

1 Fléchère accepted this English adaptation of his name.

2 Fletcher MSS Volume, p. 78

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 296 - Wesley 'Works', Vol. XI, p. 303

4 Wesley Works, Vol. XI, p. 305

later the centre of his deepest devotion. He wrote from Nyon in 1779,

"They urge my being born here; I reply that as I was 'born again' in England; that is, of course, the country which to me is the dearer of the two." 1

His education, as far as formal instruction is concerned, began at a school in Nyon, though he had previously been under the care of a preceptor. In 1746, at the age of seventeen, he went with his two brothers to Geneva to study at the University,² He spent several years at this institution laying the foundation for diligent and successful habits of study. All the records of his student life portray him as a normal youth. He gave himself whole heartedly to physical recreation and at the same time proved himself a successful scholar.

Under these influences he chose his career and dedicated himself to the ministry. This choice received the sanction of his parents. The course before him, however, was not clear. As Thomas Carlyle wrote of his own youth so might Fletcher have written:

"Now that I had gained man's estate, I was not sure that I believed the doctrines of my father's Kirk, and so I entered into my chamber and closed the door." 3

Fletcher wrote later:

"I went through my studies with a design of going into orders; but afterwards, upon serious reflection, feeling I was unequal to so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of my friends, who would have me go into the army." 4

The only two possible vocations open to a person of his position and inclination were the ministry and the militia. This fact is made clear in an interesting analysis of the situation in the Pays de Vaud as given in one of Gibbon's letters of the period.

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 134

2 Fletcher MSS Volume, p. 78

3 Watt, L. M. - Carlyle, p. 16

4 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 147

"There the arts still languish, for want of those encouragements which princes only can bestow; the country is still destitute of commerce and manufactures; we hear not of any projects for promoting public prosperity; we see nothing but the marks of an universal lethargy..... In the canton of Berne talents and information are not of the smallest use to any one who is not born in the capital; and in another sense they are useless to those born there; because they 'must' make their way without them. Their subjects in the Pays de Vaud are condemned, by the circumstances of their birth, to a condition of shameful obscurity. They naturally become, therefore, a prey to despair; and neglecting to cultivate talents which they can never enjoy an opportunity to display, those who have the capacities for becoming great men are contented with making themselves agreeable companions....What encouragement is then left for the gentlemen of the Pays de Vaud? That of foreign service. But to them even this road of preferment is extremely difficult and to attain the highest ranks is impossible." 1

Under the influence of friends he left Geneva for Lentzburg in the canton of Berne, where he studied German and the science of fortification. However, when the treaties of Aix-la-Chapelle were signed in 1748, and peace followed, his hope of securing a military appointment diminished. He discontinued his studies and returned to Nyon.

As he had taken up military studies much against the wishes of his parents he did not find his home surroundings very congenial. Receiving an offer of £500 to go to Brazil as a surveyor and engineer in the Portuguese service, he left for Lisbon. A scald upon his leg from an overturned kettle prevented him from sailing with the troops for Brazil. It is reported that neither the ship by which he was to sail nor any on board were ever heard of again.

Fletcher was thus forced to return to Nyon once more, but he still persisted in his intention to pursue a military career. Word came that his uncle, a colonel serving in the Dutch service in Flanders, had procured a commission for him. He set out to join his uncle but for a second time was doomed to disappointment. The commission was not forthcoming.

1 The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, pp. 220, 22-3

He waited several months and then abandoned the idea of military service. He writes,

"I stayed some months waiting for what he had promised me, till, seeing too much of a military life to like it, and tired out by the promises of deceitful men, I resolved to go to England for six years." 1

There seems no particular reason why he should go to England except that he had no desire to return to Lyon, and, in fact, he suggests that he was anxious to escape from his friends. He was uneasy in his own mind about his calling, and distracted by those at home who laughed at him

"for loving so little the diversions of this world". 2

He arrived in London sometime in 1749 or 1750 without any knowledge of the English language, and, being recommended to Mr. Burchell's school at South Mimms, a village in Hertfordshire, he went there for a period of eighteen months. During his stay he succeeded in acquiring sufficient of the language to enable him to proceed to the appointment of tutor to the two sons of Thomas Hill, Esq., of Fern Hall in Shropshire. He remained in Mr. Hill's employment for nearly seven years. Mr. Hill, though resident in Shropshire, journeyed at intervals to London to attend Parliament of which he was a member. Fletcher usually accompanied the Hill family, and it was on one of these journeys that he first met a Methodist. A chance meeting opened the way for further acquaintance with this group under whose influences his life's course was altered. Wesley records the incident thus:

"When Mr. Hill went up to London to attend the Parliament, he took his family and Mr. Fletcher with him. While they stopped at St. Alban's, he walked out into the town, and did not return till they were set out for London. A horse being left for him, he rode after, and overtook

1 Fletcher, see Volume, p. 65

2 Ibid.

them in the evening. Mr. Hill asking him why he stayed behind, he said, 'As I was walking, I met with a poor old woman who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away.' 'I shall wonder' said Mrs. Hill, 'if our tutor does not turn Methodist by and by'. 'Methodist, Madam', said he, 'pray what is that?' She replied, 'Why, the Methodists are a people that do nothing by pray; they are praying all day and all night.' 'Are they', said he; 'then by the help of God I will find them out if they be above ground!'. 1

Upon reaching London he sought out the Methodists and became a member of a class under the leadership of a certain Mr. Richard Edwards. 2

Following this Fletcher passed through a period of intense inward struggle. He became convinced that he was living in sin and had not made his peace with God. He did not find the release he sought until early in the year 1755 when he emerged from his struggle into the fulness of a rich Christian experience.

Fletcher was twenty-six years old when this experience took place. For nearly five years afterwards he remained in the employment of Mr. Hill. The records of these years bear evidence that he underwent rigorous spiritual discipline which bordered on asceticism. The severity of his practices did much to weaken and undermine the very healthy constitution he possessed.

Naturally enough, following his experience, he had a renewed consciousness of the validity of his call to the ministry, and, as his tutorship was drawing to a close, it was necessary he settle his life's vocation. He wrote to Wesley at this time for advice. The opening paragraph of his letter is significant:

"As I look upon you as my spiritual guide, and cannot doubt of your patience to hear, and your experience to answer, a serious question proposed by one of your people, I freely lay my case before you." 3

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, pp. 268-9

2 The exact date of Fletcher's admission to the society is not known. The most probable date is the fall of 1754. Vide McDonald - Fletcher of

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 147

This letter is dated 1756 and it is evident even at that early date Fletcher considered himself one of the Methodists.

When he wrote to Wesley he was struggling with the sense of his own unworthiness to enter holy orders, and, it was evidently Wesley's reassurance of his fitness which finally helped decide him. There is no record of Wesley's reply, but Fletcher proceeded to deacon's orders, which he received from the Bishop of Hereford, on March 6th, 1757.¹ He was not required to wait the customary interval of a year after deacon's orders before he became priest, but was ordained the following Sunday, March 13th, by Bishop Egerton of Bangor, in the Chapel Royal at St. James.² The next day he was licensed to the curacy of Madeley.³ This must have been a purely nominal appointment for Fletcher did not work extensively in Madeley parish. However, he received twenty-five pounds a year as salary.

Immediately on his ordination to the priesthood he proceeded to assist Wesley. The latter wrote in his Journal:

"Sun 6 - I had no help, and I wanted none, for God renewed my strength. But on Sunday the 13th, finding myself weak at Snowfields, I prayed (if He saw good) that God would send me help at the chapel, and I had it. A clergyman whom I never saw before came and offered me his assistance, and as soon as I had done preaching, Mr. Fletcher came, who had just then been ordained priest, and hastened to the chapel on purpose to assist, as he supposed me to be alone." 4

1 Macdonald - Fletcher of Madeley, p. 58n

2 Registrar of Bishop Egerton of Bangor - "John William Fletcher, University of Geneva, at the request of the Bishop of Hereford". Quoted by Sykes, "The Church and State in XVIIIth Century", p. 101. He has the entry for March 15th, 1767. This certainly is a mistake. Fletcher was ordained in 1757. Vide, Macdonald, p. 58n.

3 It appears that he had in the previous year been given the title of curate of Madeley. This strange arrangement is mentioned in a letter to Wesley:

"a clergyman, I never spoke to, gave me of his own accord the title to one of his livings. Now Sir, the question I beg you decide is, whether I must and can make use of that title to get into orders?" Arminian Magazine, 1794. pp/ 219-220.

4 Wesley - Journal, Vol. IV, p. 198

His association with the Methodists became closer from this time. As it was not until three years later that he was presented with a living, he availed himself of the opportunities for service with Wesley and others. These occasions were generally offered to him during his visits to London. His early preaching was confined to the Methodist chapels under Wesley and to the French prisoners at Tunbridge. Sherlock, Bishop of London, rejected a petition from the prisoners enjoining that Fletcher be allowed to officiate as their weekly chaplain. The Bishop, moreover, forbade him to continue his ministrations.¹

Several opportunities were offered him for preaching in the neighbourhood of Tern Hall although his association with the Methodists aroused antagonism against him. He made the mistake of failing to fulfil a preaching engagement at the eleventh hour, and, the accusations made against him because he did not appear, followed him to London and gave him cause for some concern in the chapel there.²

Fletcher was among those who preached in Lady Huntingdon's drawing-room to gatherings of contemporary celebrities.³ In fact he agreed to become one of her Ladyship's domestic chaplains. This appointment did not interfere with his preaching in Wesley's service or to the prisoners at Tunbridge, and did provide him with the opportunity to discourse before the aristocracy and the better educated of the land.

In 1759 a proposal came from Nathanael Gilbert, a plantation owner whom Fletcher had met in London, that he should give himself to missionary labours in the West Indies. He consulted Charles Wesley as to the decision

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 276

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 154

3 Life and Times of Lady Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 233
Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 168-9

he should make and evidently receiving no encouragement abandoned the idea.¹

It was during this period that Fletcher met Mary Bosanquet who later became his wife. She was a person of great piety and like himself was a convert to Methodism. It appears that they felt a mutual attraction from their first acquaintance. Fletcher, however, was far from convinced that matrimony brought any advantage; in fact, he had such grave doubts about the matter that he definitely decided he would not marry.²

Encouraged probably by the example of Wesley, he tried his hand at writing. In 1758 he sent his first little tract to the press. It was entitled, "A Christmas Box for Journeymen and Apprentices".³ He also translated into French, Wesley's pamphlet, "Sermons of Salvation by Faith".⁴ In the following year he published a sermon in French entitled, "Discours sur la Régénération". Affixed to the discourse were two short poems: "Sentiments d'une Âme que la Grâce Régénère" and "Le Bonheur de l'homme Régénère". It appears from the preface that the motive for publication was to render a defence of his doctrine.⁵

His labours as tutor to Mr. Hill's sons terminated in 1760 when the young men entered Cambridge. Fletcher evidently returned to Tern Hall with the family, but his position there became increasingly difficult. Mr. Hill was standing for re-election to Parliament and was concerned lest

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 157

2 Ibid. pp. 202-03

3 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 276. The only record available of this tract is the notice Wesley gives.

4 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 2

5 Preface - "Some prejudiced persons have caused it to be reported that I preach a dangerous doctrine, you will be able to judge as to that, with a knowledge of the case, by reading this discourse on Regeneration."

Fletcher's preaching cast any reflection upon his position.¹ Fletcher, who, of course, was definitely associated with the Methodists, had already stirred up some opposition.² Mr. Hill was therefore desirous of getting him settled and the more speedily it could be accomplished the greater would be his own satisfaction. He evidently held Fletcher in some esteem, and felt sufficient obligation toward him not to thrust him off without employment. Fletcher, on his part, was uncertain as to the course he should pursue. He waited on the guidance of Providence, but was so borne down by the sense of his own unworthiness that he was in a state of complete indecision.³

Mr. Hill offered him the living of Dunham, in Cheshire, of which he was patron. Fletcher replied,

"Alas! Sir, Dunham will not suit me; there is too much money and too little labour." 4

Mr. Hill accordingly suggested Madeley. Fletcher was strongly attracted by the need he had seen there but he hesitated to commit himself.

"The pity I conceived for those poor souls which put me then upon praying often I might be suffered to be curate there for nothing, for I would almost as soon have thought of being Pope as being presented to the living myself." 5

At length he agreed to accept Madeley, and, as Mr. Hill's nephew was patron of the parish, a satisfactory exchange was negotiated; Mr. Chambers, then vicar of Madeley, accepted Dunham, a living worth more than double that of Madeley.

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 234.
 2 Vide Supra p. 25
 3 Works, Vol. III, pp. 173-4
 4 Cox - Life of Fletcher, p. 31
 5 Fletcher, - MSS Volume, p. 2

The living at Madeley was now open for Fletcher's appointment. The way, however, was not entirely clear. He had committed himself to the acceptance of the parish, and thus the uncertainties arising from the conviction of his personal unworthiness were no longer in the foreground. He was, however, in correspondence with Lady Huntingdon and it appears he was most reluctant to abandon his labours in her association.¹ This was likewise true regarding the Wesleys.² John Wesley directly opposed the suggestion that Fletcher should go to Madeley. He would have him see it as the devil's snare and fly from it at the peril of his soul.³ Wesley felt Fletcher's place was with him in the itinerant work and was never reconciled to his labour in the parochial field. He later wrote,

"I can never believe it was the will of God, that such a burning and shining light should be 'hid under a bushel'. No; instead of being confined to a country village, it ought to have shone in every corner of our land."⁴

Fletcher had grave qualms over the possibility of gaining Madeley. He writes that he was opposed by his superiors, hated by his neighbours, and despised by all the world.⁵ The situation was not as bad as he pictured it, but he had stirred up enmity against himself among the clergy and the people because of his preaching and association with the Methodists. This enmity did not bear the fruit he expected and his presentation to the vicarage took place without delay. He wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon telling her of his fortunate escape from an encounter with Sir Peter Rivers, the Bishop of London's Chaplain, at the Bishop of Hereford's, the day he was appointed to Madeley. Sir Peter had opposed Fletcher when

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, pp. 236-8

2 Fletcher - MSS, Volume, p. 2

3 Ibid

4 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 288

5 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 174

he had preached in London, but failed to recognize him that day because of the wig he wore.¹

He was presented to the vicarage of Madeley by the Bishop of Hereford on October 7th, 1760. The same day he conformed to the Liturgy and subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles. On Sunday, October 26th he officially began his ministry.²

Madeley was a populous market village in the county of Shropshire, beautifully situated in the valley of the Severn. The majority of the inhabitants, about two thousand in number,³ were colliers and iron-workers as the parish included Coalbrookdale and Madeley Wood, both noted for their coal mines and iron works. Coalbrookdale was the home of metal inventions. It was there in 1708 that the Darby family established their famous coke-burning furnaces which revolutionized iron smelting. As late as 1750 the ironworks at Coalbrookdale were the only ones to use coal. Arthur Young wrote in 1776:

"Coalbrookdale itself is a very romantic spot, it is a winding glen between two immense hills which break into various forms, and all thickly covered with wood, forming the most beautiful sheets of hanging wood. Indeed too beautiful to be much in unison with that variety of horrors art has spread at the bottom; the noise of the forges, mills, etc., with all their vast machinery, the flames bursting from the furnaces with the burning of the coal and the smok of the lime kilns, are altogether sublime, and would unite well with craggy and bare rocks, like St. Vincent's at Bristol."⁴

It is significant that Fletcher settled in a parish which was undergoing the disrupting changes caused by the rapidly advancing industrialism of the new age. He realized he faced a difficult parish with the

1 The Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. 1, pp. 237-8

2 Maddonald - Life of Fletcher, pp. 58-9n.

3 Fletcher - MSS Vol. p. 2

4 Hammond - The Rise of Modern Industry, p. 137. Quoted from Annals in Agriculture, Vol. IV

prospect of opposition if not open persecution and his first years in Madeley were to be years of difficulty and distress. However, he felt he had been guided by Providence to come to Madeley,¹ and was encouraged by the hope that he might be as effective in parochial work as his friend Berridge who was vicar of Everton.²

His preaching would soon have marked him as a Methodist even if rumours of his earlier associations with the leaders of the Revival had not already preceded him. Persecution by this time had become the generally accepted form of treatment for the so-called enthusiasts and Fletcher was made no exception. Some of the more influential farmers and merchants spoke of turning him out of his living.³

His difficulties increased because of the extreme emotional responses generated by his preaching. It was rumoured he drove people mad. One young girl in particular was the source of severe trial to him.⁴ Fletcher himself thought her insane and he was relieved when she eventually came to herself. This unfortunate incident, however, made his position much more difficult. The archdeacon's visitation took place during the summer of 1761,⁵ and, on that occasion, Fletcher's own pulpit was used by the Rev. Mr. Prothero, a clergyman from a neighbouring parish, to attack his doctrine. Fletcher replied with a long letter which he entitled, "Defence of Experimental Religion".⁶

1 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 173-4

2 The Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 239

3 Ibid. p. 240

4 Ibid. p. 241

5 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 177-8

6 Ibid. p. 404 f. Dated Madeley, July 25, 1761.

During October of the same year, he courageously attacked from his pulpit the drunkenness, shows and bull-baiting which were especially flagrant because of the bacchanals during the week of Madeley wake. This effort served only to stir up fresh enmity against him.¹

Thus, throughout his first year at Madeley he faced persistent disapproval, if not always open opposition. He met the antagonism with a surpassing degree of boldness considering the pitch of his inward conflict. In March he wrote to Charles Wesley that he was violently tempted to quit Madeley.² However, by April his congregations had so increased that some were forced to remain without the church.³ This encouragement dispelled his distress for a period, but by August he was again in despair,⁴ and in October the attendance of the congregation was decreasing.⁵ His despondency was largely due to the recurrent consciousness of his own unfitness for the duties he had undertaken. He increased his periods of prayer and fasting.⁶

He set out to fulfil his various parochial tasks with a stern sense of duty. He not only preached twice and three times on Sunday,^{and} catechised the children,⁷ but gave a lecture on Friday evenings⁸. He gradually carried his work farther afield, and sometime early on 1762 he was delivering private exhortations in the home of Mary Mathews which was built upon a rock in Madeley Wood.⁹ This place became known as the Rock Church.

1 Works Vol. VIII, p. 179

2 Ibid p. 175

3 Ibid p. 176

4 Ibid pp. 177-8

5 Ibid p. 179

6 Ibid p. 177

7 Ibid p. 176

8 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 240

9 Works, Vol VIII, pp. 180-1

He soon found himself in difficulties there. A young man, aroused by his preaching on profanity, endeavoured to enforce the law against swearing which had been violated by one of the parish officers.¹ This act brought the youth under the condemnation of many in the village and Fletcher had to protect him. He did so by taking the lad into his service. His opponents, however, retaliated with some effect. Under the leadership of a Roman Catholic they broke in upon the meeting at the Rock Church and caused considerable disturbance.² Fletcher, thereupon, laid charges of drunkenness, profanity, and of disturbing a religious assembly, against the leader at Ludlow court. Fletcher's churchwardens, however, failed to support him in his charges and he lost the case. The malcontents countered by putting the Conventicle Act in force against the assemblies at Rock Church and Mary Mathews was fined £20 for allowing a service there.³ Additional persecutions were threatened,⁴ but these were not carried out and by January of 1763 he and his flock were in comparative peace. His one remaining difficulty was the fanaticism of another young girl which incited various rumours against him.⁵ By July, however, he could write,

"Everything is pretty quiet here now. . . . The young person I mentioned, as being sorely tempted of the devil, is happily delivered." 6

1 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 16
 2 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 180-1
 3 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 76
 4 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 182-3
 5 Ibid. pp. 190-1
 6 Ibid. p. 195

But to add to his trouble during these first few years of his ministry he had severe domestic trials which caused him great concern. He had brought a housekeeper, Mrs. Sarah Wood, from London. Her peculiarities not only disturbed the peace of his own household, but that of the whole community. After enduring her for three years he was compelled to send her back to London where he helped support her.¹

During 1762 Fletcher formed a society in his parish at Broseley.² He drew up his own rules for this body, but it was organized after the manner of the Methodist societies which he knew well. By 1765 when the county of Shropshire was made a Methodist circuit, and, Alexander Mather was appointed to act as 'Wesley's assistant', Fletcher wrote to him inviting him to give an occasional exhortation at "the Bank, Dale, etc."³ It is evident that Fletcher had organized several other societies by this time. He also offered to help by visiting societies under Mather's control and made a generous plea for unity in service.

In the early part of 1763 Fletcher went to Brighton to preach for the Countess of Huntingdon.⁴ The break in his correspondence during February and the first part of March indicates the period of his visit, but he, himself, makes no reference to his journey.

In July of the next year John Wesley paid Fletcher a visit. This was their first meeting since earlier labours in London and it was a happy reunion for both. Wesley writes:

"It was a great comfort to me to converse once more with a Methodist of the old stamp, denying himself, taking up his cross, and resolved to be 'altogether a Christian'."⁵

1 Fletcher - MSS Volume, pp. 12, 18

2 Ibid, p. 1

3 Works Vol. VIII, pp. 218-19

4 The Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. 1, p. 325

5 Wesley, 'Journal' Vol. V, p. 87

Later in the year, during November, Fletcher was engaged in a theological controversy within his parish. Mrs. Anne Darby, a member of the Society of Friends, attacked his doctrinal position in an open debate during one of his catechetical periods. The lady later submitted six written questions to which Fletcher replied with great care and at considerable length. His reply was submitted to Mrs. Darby and then circulated among his parishioners. Mrs. Darby appended a postscript to Fletcher's document:

"Being called upon for this manuscript before I have considered it all over properly, I therefore have got it copied; and after examination (if worth notice) shall communicate my sentiments hereupon to John Fletcher and sober people." 1

No record is available to show that the controversy was continued.

During this period Fletcher was active in the formation of a society called "The Society for Ministers of the Gospel". The society was to meet four times yearly at Worcester for the purpose of discussing the problems and duties of the ministry. Fletcher drew up the rules and regulations for the group. It is difficult to ascertain what further share Fletcher may have had in the organization or the administration of the society, but it is significant that, at least, he was giving some recognized leadership to the clergy in the vicinity; clergy, who, a few years earlier, had shared in arousing opposition against him.² He was also giving some time to writing, for in May 1765 he was preparing French verses under the title, "La Conversion du Pharisien Moderne". He sought to influence a certain German baron to publish them.³

1 MSS - Letters to Mrs. Darby
 2 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 26
 3 Ibid. p. 27

While Fletcher was still severely criticized because of his open air preaching, the opposition was gradually dying down, so that in 1765 he left his parish for two brief journeys. He had remained faithfully at his post in Madeley for almost five years, with the exception of his brief journey to Brighton in 1763, and they had been years of steady and strenuous opposition. His first journey was to Breedon in Leicestershire to exchange pulpits with Walter Sellon.¹ Sellon had been one of the first masters of Kingswood school and later became one of Wesley's preachers. He had been episcopally ordained and was settled at Breedon.

Later in the year Fletcher spent some time at Bath and Bristol with Lady Huntingdon who had just opened a new chapel at Bath. It was from Bath that he wrote a pastoral letter to his flock at Madeley; the first of many which were to follow during the periods of his absence from his parish.² It is evident from the letter that he had refused the offer of a free journey to Switzerland to visit his relatives there. He writes:

"I find my relations in the spirit are nearer and dearer to me than my relations in the flesh".³

He was back in his parish again by the beginning of the year, and, for awhile, passed through another period of depression and despair. He was much discouraged by the condition of his work and the success of his preaching during his visit at Breedon and Bath.⁴ Later in the year he went to London, Brighton and Oathall to assist the Countess again. He wrote to his parishioners from Oathall that his call to the service of Lady Huntingdon was sudden, but there is no clue as to the urgency of

1 Methodist Magazine 1856, p. 38

2 Works Vol. VIII, p. 95

3 Ibid., p. 96

4 Ibid., pp. 319-20, 222-3

his journey.¹ At London he heard Whitefield preach and on his return through London from Brighton and Oathall he himself preached in Whitefield's Tottenham Court Road Chapel. Whitefield writes: "Dear Mr. Fletcher is become a scandalous Tottenham Court Preacher".²

It is difficult to ascertain when he returned to Madeley, but it was possibly sometime late in November. In any case he was in his parish by the beginning of the year for his correspondence is resumed from there at that time.³

In the spring of 1767 Fletcher had a visit from Lady Huntingdon. Travelling with her were a number of her associates who were engaged in conducting evangelistic meetings. Shortly after her visit Fletcher joined the party at Huddersfield and spent some time with the group as they carried on an extensive missionary campaign in the vicinity of Kippax, Yorkshire.⁴

In December, word reached him that he had been appointed as one of the Chaplains to the new Earl of Buchan. This honour brought him some slight satisfaction, but he was not called upon for any special labours.⁵

At this time, however, an appointment was pending which was of considerable importance. The Countess of Huntingdon had plans under way for the opening of a training college at Trevecca, in the parish of Tularth, South Wales, for candidates for the ministry. Her Ladyship had a considerable number of chapels under her control and was facing increasing difficulty in keeping them supplied with ministers. Thus she proposed to

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 98ff

2 Tyerman - Life of George Whitefield, Vol. II, p. 499

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 236

4 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 288 ff

5 Ibid. Vol. II, pp. 18-9

open her own institution.

"She proposed to admit only such as were truly converted to God, and resolved to dedicate themselves to his service. They were at liberty to stay there three years, during which time they were to have their education gratis, with every necessary of life, and a suit of clothes once a year; afterwards, those who desired it might enter into the ministry, either in the Established Church of England or among Protestants of any other denomination." 1

By November 1767 plans were so far under way that possible candidates for the college were being proposed, and Fletcher had already been approached to become its superintendent. He replies with his characteristic reticence;

"With regard to the superintendency of the College, or the examination of the candidates, I know myself too well to dream about it; nevertheless, so far as my present calling and poor abilities will allow, I am ready to throw my mite into the treasury that your Ladyship may find in other persons." 2

The Countess successfully prevailed upon him and he was made president of the college in January 1768. One of his first tasks as president was to offer his suggestions concerning books necessary for the college library. 3

The college was not opened until the following August. In the early spring the expulsion from Oxford university of six students who belonged to Edmund Hall, on the ground that they were Methodists, hurried forward the preparations for the opening of the new college. 4 This unexpected development made it apparent that students of this group would find it increasingly difficult to secure college training. Lady Huntingdon therefore speeded up the work at Trevecca, and the college was declared open on

1 Life and Times of Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 79

2 Ibid, p. 82

Howell Harris had visited Fletcher as early as 1764 in order to secure his services as President. City Road Magazine, 1872. p. 554

3 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, pp. 84-6

4 Ibid, Vol. I, p. 424

August 24th with Whitefield present to deliver the inaugural sermon.¹

Although president of the college Fletcher was not resident at Trevecca. He was to attend as often as he conveniently could, give advice regarding the appointment of masters and admission of students, superintend studies and conduct; and judge the qualifications of the students for the work of the ministry. He received no salary for this work.²

John Wesley was not impressed by the designs for the college. He wrote Charles from Edinburgh:

"I am glad Mr. Fletcher has been with you. But if the tutor fails, what will become of our college at Trevecca? Did you ever see anything more queer than their plan of institution? Pray who penned it, man or woman? I am afraid the visitor too will fail." ³

Fletcher now confined his labours to his parish and the college. He had been in Bristol in the spring of the year, but he embarked on no more missionary journeys until he went to Trevecca for the first anniversary services of the college in August 1769. This occasion brought John Wesley, Howell Harris and numerous other successful contemporary preachers to Trevecca. They held a week of special services.

It was now twenty years since Fletcher had left Switzerland and his family were insisting that he visit them.⁴ He agreed to accompany his friend, Mr. Ireland of Brislington, to Montpellier in France if he would continue with him to Nyon.⁵ This was in December, but his plans were frustrated for the moment through the appearance of a Roman Catholic chapel in Madeley. He immediately launched an attack upon the priest. The

1 Tyerman - Life of George Whitefield, Vol. II, p. 555

2 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 81

3 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V, p. 88

4 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 250

5 Ibid. p. 251 f

contest between the two, once started, continued on into the next month and Fletcher seems to have come off victor. Benson wrote in 1804 that, while the chapel and the priest still remained, there was not more than a dozen Roman Catholic families in the parish.¹

When the controversy died down, Fletcher left with Mr. Ireland for the continent where they travelled for five months, returning before the middle of the summer.² They went directly to Montpellier where Mr. Ireland had some business and where Fletcher desired to visit some of the persecuted Huguenots in the Cevennes Mountains. He made a long and difficult journey into the mountains on foot.

"Shall I make a visit on horseback, and at ease, to those poor cottagers, whose fathers were hunted along yonder rocks, like partridges upon the mountains? No; in order to secure a friendly reception among them, I will visit them under the plainest appearance, and with my staff in my hand."³

At Marseilles he rejoined Mr. Ireland, who, in the interval, had secured for him the opportunity to preach in a Protestant church in the neighbourhood. Fletcher fulfilled the engagement after some hesitancy and preached with exceptional power. Leaving Marseilles they continued to Antibes, and, though delayed for a short time at Monaco because of contrary winds, went on to Genoa and from there to Rome. As they journeyed to Rome and came to the Appian Way, Fletcher got down from the carriage. He refused to ride over the ground where Paul had once walked chained to a soldier. So he travelled the balance of the route on foot.⁴

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 125

2 Ibid. p. 136

3 Gilpin - Portrait of Paul, Vol. I, p. 166

4 Ibid. p. 33

After leaving Rome, the two travellers journeyed to Naples where they visited the celebrated ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, near Mount Vesuvius. Fletcher wrote:

"I walked in the streets of one of those unhappy cities which the King of Naples has brought to light, by removing part of the stratum of earth and ashes under which it lay buried; and I reached the theatre of the other after having descended many fathoms through a well sunk in a rocky cinder, that was once the fiery fluid, with which the whole city was filled and covered." 1

Fletcher took every opportunity as he travelled to further his knowledge of Roman Catholicism. He listened to sermons from the Roman clergy, visited convents and monasteries and conversed with any he could draw into conversation. The controversy he had recently engaged in at Madeley undoubtedly sharpened his interest in the subject.

Arriving at Nyon, the two settled in the home of Fletcher's eldest brother who was a general in the Swiss army. Fletcher immediately availed himself of the opportunities which were presented to him for preaching, and, as he was welcomed by many of the neighbouring clergy, the way was made easy for him. He preached with great effectiveness and crowds flocked to hear him. When time came for his departure one aged minister pleaded with him to remain. He exclaimed to Mr. Ireland:

"O Sir! how unfortunate for this country; during my day it has produced but one angel of a man, and it is our lot to be deprived of him." 2

A weeping crowd gathered to bid him farewell.

Fletcher returned to England just as clouds were gathering, which were soon to break in the storm of the Calvinist controversy. Wesley held the annual Conference of his itinerant preachers in London, on August 7th, 1770. At the first Methodist Conference in 1744 the question

1 Cox - Life of Fletcher, pp. 73-4

2 Gilpin - Portrait of St. Paul, Vol. 1, p. 69

3 Tyerman - Life and Times of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 69

was asked: "Have we not then unawares leaned too much towards Calvinism? Answer: We are afraid we have."¹ The question was again raised and a more detailed answer given, - an answer which aroused the wrath of the Countess of Huntingdon and her followers.

From his controversy with the Moravians in London, Wesley had fought against antinomianism.² It was now making its appearance among the Methodists themselves, and Wesley was again preparing to lead the attack upon it. In his famous letter on 'conversation' to Fletcher in March 1768 he boldly challenges the results of the Calvinistic preaching;

"that 'amorous' way of praying to Christ, or that way of preaching His righteousness".³

From his letter, it is obvious that he was convinced that the antinomianism found among the Methodists had sprung from the Calvinist preaching. These misgivings of Wesley's were crystallized in the Minutes of 1770. "Take heed to your doctrine" was the warning sounded. Wesley admitted himself that these Minutes were not sufficiently guarded. By endeavouring to expose the dangers of Calvinist preaching, which he believed led to antinomianism, he left himself open to charges of heretical doctrine.

Wesley had been invited to preach at the second anniversary of the opening of Trevecca College which was to take place on August 24th. While he was waiting at Bristol to accompany the Countess of Huntingdon to Wales, he received a letter from her saying that unless he renounced the doctrines

1 Myles - A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists, p. 27

2 Tyerman, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 477f

3 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V, p. 83

stated in the Minutes she would exclude him from her pulpits.¹

Wesley made no reply and went on to Cornwall. The anniversary services proceeded without him. Fletcher was present, and no controversy arose in the college at that time. But trouble came soon enough. In January, Benson, the headmaster of the college, was dismissed by the Countess because he did not believe the doctrine of absolute predestination.²

This aroused Fletcher, who, as president has not been consulted regarding the dismissal. After correspondence with Benson, he wrote to the Countess:

"Mr. Benson made a very just defence when he said, he did hold with me the possibility of salvation for all men. If this is what you call Mr. Wesley's opinion and Arminianism, and 'if every Arminian must quit the College', I am actually discharged. For in my present view of things, I hold that sentiment, if I believe that the Bible is true, and that God is love."³

He wrote to Benson at the same time:

"If the plan of the College be overthrown, I have nothing more to say to it. I will keep to my tent, for one: the confined tool of any one party I never was, and never will be."⁴

Two days later he again wrote to Benson,

"I am determined to stand or fall with the liberty of the College. As I entered it a free place, I must quit it the moment it is an harbour for party spirit."⁵

He left for Trevecca in February in the hope that he might clear up the entanglement. He was further dissatisfied because of the admission of certain pupils who did not appear qualified. He also mentions 'the divisions at Brecknock and Hay' as the source of some trouble.⁶

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, pp. 106-7

2 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 284

3 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 145

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. p. 146

6 As the students in the college were itinerant these 'divisions' were probably the result of controversy aroused by student preaching. Wesley quotes Howell Harris as saying, "I have borne with these pert, ignorant young men, vulgarly called students, till I cannot in conscience bear any longer. They preach barefaced Reprobation, and so broad Antinomianism that I have been constrained to oppose them face to face, even in the public congregation". Wesley - Journal, Vol. V. p. 482

He arrived at the college feeling quite as free as ever, but on the second day there he suffered a severe setback. He wrote,

"As I preached in the chapel, an uncommon weight came upon me on a sudden, and it was not without much difficulty that I struggled under it through the rest of the sermon. As soon as the service was over, I retired to my room in very great heaviness and distress. I saw in the clearest light that I was not in my place and must no longer preside in the College. 1

Further developments confirmed his experience. The next day the Countess turned against him, and, after he was finished preaching, attacked, in his absence, the doctrine he had been upholding. Fletcher, however, continued at Trevecca for almost a month struggling against the conviction that he could no longer retain his position as president and still seek to reconcile the Countess and Wesley.

The situation soon proved impossible. The students were instructed to write their sentiments regarding the doctrine contained in the 'Minutes', and whoever did not fully disavow it, was to leave the college. Fletcher, along with the student group, put his opinion in writing. He made a defence of Wesley's Minutes and concluded them with his resignation from the presidency of the college. He returned to his parish in March.

1 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 183

Section II

Chapter II

Lady Huntingdon's first step after Fletcher's withdrawal from the college was to rally her forces in preparation for an attack upon Wesley. About the middle of June she, in conjunction with her supporters, issued a circular letter inviting the clergy of all denominations to gather at Bristol on August 6th.¹ They were then asked to proceed to Wesley's Conference and insist upon a formal recantation of the said Minutes; and in case this was refused their plan was to sign and publish a protest against Wesley. This letter went out over the signature of Walter Shirley, the cousin of Lady Huntingdon, and was accompanied by a copy of 'Wesley's Minutes' and a 'protest' which had been drawn up by Lady Huntingdon and her party.² The substance of the protest was to disavow the doctrine of 'justification by works', which the antagonists believed to be inherent in the 'Minutes'. They found them from the beginning to the end one uniform and positive contradiction to the principles and experience of the Protestant faith.³

When this circular came into Fletcher's hands, he immediately dispatched a letter to John Wesley giving him an account of its contents.⁴ He also wrote to the Countess stating his intention to undertake a defence of the 'Minutes' if the proposed attack on Wesley were not abandoned.⁵ Since she had refused to return the paper he had written at Trevecca he was forced to begin his defence again.⁶ This he did in a series of letters

1 Tyerman - "Life and Times of Wesley", Vol. III, pp. 93-4
 2 Life and Time of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, pp. 239-4n
 3 Ibid
 4 Tyerman - "Life and Times of Wesley", Vol. III, p. 95
 5 Life and Times of Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 240
 6 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 36

to Mr. Shirley, which were later published under the title of -

"A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Last Minutes: Occasioned by a circular printed Letter, inviting principal Persons, both Clergy and Laity, as well of the Dissenters as of the Established Church, who disapprove of those Minutes, to oppose them in a Body, as a dreadful Heresy: And designed to remove Prejudice, check Rashness, promote Forbearance, defend the Character of an eminent Minister of Christ, and prevent some important Scriptural Truths from being hastily branded as heretical. In Five Letters, to the Hon. and Rev. Author of the Circular Letter. By a Lover of Quietness and Liberty of Conscience."

Fletcher did not write this defence at Wesley's instigation,¹ as some would have us believe, but rather through his own desire for peace and to justify the doctrine of the "Minutes" and Wesley's position. He had written Wesley in June to inform him of the attack which was being planned against him, and, to assure him

"that upon the evangelical principles mentioned in your last letter to me,² I for one shall be glad to stand by you and your doctrine to the last, hoping that you will gladly remove stumbling blocks out of the way of the weak, and alter such expressions as may create prejudice in the hearts of those who are inclined to admit it." 3

He continued,

"I write to Mr. Shirley to expostulate with him, and to request him to call in his circular letter. He is the last man that should attack you. His sermons contain propositions much more heretical and anti-Calvinistical than your minutes. If my letters have not the desired effect, I shall probably, if you approve of them and correct them, make them public for your justification." 4

Fletcher's expostulations, however, availed nothing. Lady Huntingdon and her party were not amenable to explanations, either from Fletcher or Wesley himself who had written to her ladyship in June setting forth the substance of his faith.⁵ The Countess insisted the 'Minutes' were tainted with

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 243

2 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V, p. 231

3 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 36

4 Ibid.

5 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V, p. 258ff

the doctrine of 'justification by works' and reproached Fletcher for "his attachment to man rather than God".¹

During July, Fletcher worked on his letters and had them ready to place in Wesley's hands when he visited Madeley at the end of the month.² Wesley, after he had corrected them carefully, gave them his approval, and put them into the hands of the printer.³ Fletcher's work was thus in the progress of publication when the Conference assembled in Bristol on August 6th, 1771.

The march of the opposing troops upon Wesley's Conference was not so dramatic as it had promised to be. Shirley appeared two days after the Conference had begun with two of the ministers attached to Lady Huntingdon's chapel, three laymen, and two students from Trevecca. The Countess and Shirley had realized their error in presuming to enter the Conference without Wesley's consent. They gained permission by letters to Wesley in which they acknowledged their mistake.⁴ The meeting in the Conference was a success and an agreeable settlement was reached. Wesley and his preachers signed a declaration which repudiated their holding to the doctrine of justification by works and clarified their doctrinal position.⁵ Mr. Shirley, on his part, agreed to make a public acknowledgment that he had mistaken the meaning of the Minutes. This he sent to Mr. Wesley a few days later.⁶

1 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 36

2 Wesley - Journal, Vol. V. p. 424

3 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 191

4 Life and Times of Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, pp. 241-2

Vide Shirley - Narrative of Principal Circumstances, pp. 8-12

5 Wesley - Journal, Vol. V, p. 427

6 Shirley - Narrative, p. 17

The truce gained was short lived. When Shirley learned Fletcher's manuscript was in the printer's hands difficulties broke out anew. He and his friends tried to persuade Wesley to have the press stopped. Wesley was non-committal in his reply. "I will consider it", he said.¹ Two days later he left Bristol for Wales without having done anything. After his departure a letter arrived from Fletcher, who had by this time been informed of the peaceful outcome of the meeting at the Conference.

"I feel", he writes to Mr. Ireland, "for poor dear Mr. Shirley, whom I have (considering the present circumstances) treated too severely in my Vindication of the Minutes. My dear Sir, what must be done? I am ready to defray by selling my last shirt, the expense of the printing of my Vindication, and suppress it. Direct me, dear Sir. Consult with Mr. Shirley and Mr. Wesley about the matter. Be persuaded I am ready to do everything that will be brotherly in this unhappy affair." 2

Fletcher's desire to suppress the publication of his manuscript was not because he considered irrelevant what he had contributed to the controversy. He had written in his letter to Mr. Ireland,

"Whether my 'Letters' were suppressed or not, the 'Minutes' must be vindicated, - Mr. Wesley owed it to the Church, to the real Protestants, to all his Societies, and to his own aspersed character, - and that, after all, the controversy did not seem to me to be so much whether the 'Minutes' should stand, as whether the Antinomian Gospel of Dr. Crisp should prevail over the practical Gospel of Jesus Christ." 3

It appears quite evident that Fletcher's willingness to withdraw his 'Vindication' sprang from a desire for peace and not from any wish to retract what he had written. He fully realized that if his work were published at this crucial time it would stir the fires of controversy into flame.

It was Wesley who eventually prevailed in the matter. He persisted in his original intention that the 'Vindication' be published without delay.

1 Shirley - Narrative, p. 19

2 Ibid.

3 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 194

Wesley wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon,

"The principles established in the 'Minutes' I apprehend to be no way contrary to this, or to that faith, that consistent plan of doctrine, which was once delivered to the saints. I believe whoever calmly considers Mr. Fletcher's letters will be convinced of this. But till Mr. Fletcher's printed letters are answered, I must think everything spoken against those 'Minutes' is totally destructive of His honour, and a palpable affront to Him both as our Prophet and Priest, but more especially as the King of His people. Those letters, (which therefore could not be suppressed without betraying the honour of our Lord) largely prove that the 'Minutes' lay no other foundation than that which is laid in Scripture, and I have been laying, and teaching others to lay, for between thirty and forty years." 1

Thus was Fletcher caught up in the controversy which was to engage his entire attention for almost seven years, and from which he was never entirely to be free during the remainder of his life. His constant application in writing, with the continuance of parochial cares and duties in these years, brought a complete undermining of his health which made him later an easy prey to tuberculosis.

The history of the controversy is not particularly enlightening. It was a prolonged and bitter struggle, and many godly men, enthusiastically championing what they believed to be the gospel, forgot its deeper reality. The publication of Fletcher's 'Vindication' immediately aroused Shirley to action. He wrote Fletcher of his intention to reply giving the details of the controversy surrounding the 'Minutes', and to include the letters of Fletcher to Mr. Ireland against the issuing of the 'Vindication'. Fletcher replied with a warmth of kindness and courtesy, concluding with the generous offer:

"If your Letter is friendly, Sir, and you print it in the same size as my 'Vindication', I shall gladly buy £10 worth of the copies, and order them to be stitched with my 'Vindication', and given gratis to the purchasers of it; as well as to do you justice, as to convince the world that we make a loving war; and also to demonstrate how much I regard your respectable character, and honour your dear person." 2

1 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V. pp. 274-5

2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 196

Shirley's publication, "A Narrative of the principal Circumstances relative to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's late Conference, etc." appeared in September. The 'Narrative', for the most part, is quite fair and free from abuse. Fletcher wrote:

"I do not complain of its severity; on the contrary, considering the sharpness of my Fifth letter, I gratefully acknowledge it is kinder than I had reason to expect. But permit me to tell you, sir, I look for justice to the scriptural arguments I advance in defence of truth, before I look for kindness to my insignificant person; and could much sooner be satisfied with the former, than with the latter alone. As I do not admire the fashionable method of advancing general proofs, I shall take the liberty of pointing out some mistakes in your Narrative, and, by that means, endeavour to do justice to Mr. Wesley's Declaration, your own Sermons, my Vindication, and above all to the cause of practical religion." 1

Thus Fletcher prepared and published "A Second Check to Antinomianism, Occasioned by a late Narrative. In three letters to the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Shirley, by the Vindicator of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Minutes' ". 2

In his "Second Check" Fletcher begins by setting forth scriptural proof in support of the doctrine of a second justification by works, which doctrine Shirley had attacked. His second letter is a protest against Shirley recanting the doctrines contained in his sermons and a continuation of some of the arguments raised by his 'Vindication'. He concludes his work by insisting upon the necessity of his stand against antinomianism because of the prevalence of the evil among the followers of religion. This last section has particular historical value because of the description Fletcher provides of religious conditions of the century.

1 Works - Vol. I, p. 293 "Second Check to Antinomianism"

2 Preface dated Madeley, September 11, 1771. Was not published until sometime in 1772.

The Monthly Review gave the publication the following notice:

"Mr. Wesley is certainly much obliged to Mr. Fletcher for his sober, decent and reasonable defence, against the sharp attacks of Messrs. Shirley, Hill, etc. The Wesleyans, however, seem to be hard pushed, and Calvin certainly gains ground. Meantime the enemies of Christianity triumph and exclaim - "Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" Vol. 46, p. 468, 1772.

"I appeal to matter of fact and your own observations. Consider the religious world, and say, if 'Antinomianism' is not, in general, a motto better adapted to the state of professing congregations, societies, families, and individuals, than 'Holiness unto the Lord', the inscription that should be even upon our 'horses' bells'." 1

In a "Postscript", which Fletcher added to his publication, he replied to a pamphlet which had just been published: "A Conversation between Richard Hill, Esq., the Rev. Mr. Madan, and the Superior of a Convent of English Benedictine Monks at Paris, etc. Relative to some Doctrinal Minutes, advanced by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley and others, at a Conference held in London, August 7, 1770. To which are added some Remarks by the Editor, etc.". This effort of Hill's was pointless and Fletcher touched it where it had no defence.

"We desire to be confronted with all the pious Protestant divines, except those of Dr. Crisp's class, who are a party; but, who would believe it? The suffrage of a papist is brought against us! Astonishing! That our opposers should think it worth while to raise one recruit against us in the immense city of Paris, where fifty thousand might be raised against the bible itself!" 2

Fletcher had no sooner sent his letters to the publishers than he commenced a tract to vindicate the doctrine of Christian perfection from "Antinomian opposition". 3 This work was not completed at that time because he was urged to reply to a pamphlet published by an Edward Elwall, a Socinian Quaker, who was tried for blasphemy at Stafford. 4 Thus encouraged he began his Anti-Socinian Treatises, which were never finished, but which were in turn quickly superseded by his "Third Check to Antinomianism". This work was in the press in February. 5 To accomplish this Fletcher must have exerted himself strenuously for on January 7th

1 Works - Vol. I, p. 343

2 Ibid, p. 387

3 Benson - Life of Fletcher, pp. 151-2

4 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 41

5 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 153

Benson says the work was in the press in February. Wesley, however, in a letter to Charles, March 17th, writes that only part of it is printed by that time. Wesley - Letters, Vol.V, pp. 311-12

he had written Sellon and he was then only about to reply to Elwall.¹

The urgency for the pamphlet was increased by the appearance of a new figure in the controversy, Richard Hill, Esq. of Hawkstone, Shropshire. Fletcher had played some part in his conversion in 1757,² but Hill now considered himself obliged to answer Fletcher's 'Vindication', which he attempted to do in "Five Letters to the Reverend Mr. F---R, relative to his Vindication of the Minutes of the Reverend John Wesley. Intended chiefly for the comfort of mourning backsliders, and such as may have been distressed and perplexed by reading Mr. Wesley's Minutes, or the Vindication of them. By a Friend."³ The pamphlet is free from any personal abuse of Fletcher; a noteworthy fact in face of the increasing abusiveness of the language which was becoming popular among other controversialists. Fletcher, however, had about this time received some violent criticism in an anonymous pamphlet which rated him for "censurable, yea criminal conduct" in the publication of the 'Vindication'.⁴ He ignored this effort but was unwilling to rest under the strictures of Mr. Hill. Hill carried the argument further into the doctrinal difficulties of the 'Minutes' and the emphasis in the controversy now began to shift to the discussion of creedal positions. Hill was a thorough-going Calvinist but not a successful exponent of his creed, and Fletcher showed little mercy in proceeding to expose his weaknesses.

1 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 219

2 Sidney - The Life of Sir Richard Hill, pp. 23 f

3 The Letters were signed, "The Author of Pietas Oxoniensis". This work Hill had written on the occasion of the expulsion of six students from . . . Edmund Hall, Oxford, for 'imbibing sentiments and engaging in practices which were peculiarly Methodistical.' Vide supra p.37

4 Pamphlet entitled - "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, on the Differences subsisting between him and the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Shirley. By a Friend to Religion. Bath, Feb. 3, 1772.



Wesley wrote, upon reading Fletcher's reply,

"he draws the sword and throws away the scabbard."¹

The main substance of the "Third Check" is an attack against Hill's doctrines as Fletcher interpreted them:

"that faith is not previous to justification, that there is no wrath in God for the elect, and that all claims against His people before or after conversion are for ever cancelled."²

Hill, in the meantime, had been occupied in answering Fletcher's "Second Check"; his tract appearing just before the publication of Fletcher's "Third Check". It was entitled, "A Review of all the Doctrines taught by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley; containing a Full and Particular Answer to a Book entitled 'A Second Check to Antinomianism'. In Six Letters to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher. Wherein the Doctrines of a Twofold Justification, Free Will, Man's Merit, Sinless Perfection, Finished Salvation, and Real Antinomianism are particularly Discussed; and the Puritan Divines and Protestant Churches Vindicated from the charges brought against them of holding Mr. Wesley's Doctrines. To which is added A Farrago; and some Remarks on a Pamphlet entitled 'A Third Check to Antinomianism'. By the Author of Pietas Oxoniensis." Hill began his "Review" with no uncertain accusations against the manner in which Fletcher had written.

1 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V, p. 311

2 Works - Vol. I, p. 461

The Monthly Review, which was quite unfriendly to the Wesleyans, noted the publication thus, "Mr. Fletcher, here, answers Mr. Hill's 'Five Letters', mentioned on p. 468 of our Review of April last; and he seems, in general, to conduct his part of the dispute with more temper, candor and decency than we usually find in controversial writers. His opponents, nevertheless, frequently charge him with manifesting a sarcastic spirit, and a certain tartness of expression; a charge which he may justly retort on some of them, particularly the author of "Pietas Oxoniensis". We speak in reference to the present tract, as we pretend not to recollect the particulars of Mr. Fletcher's two former pieces."

Monthly Review, Vol. 47, p. 160

"But whilst I make my animadversions on your Letters, may the Divine Author of Love and Meekness preserve me from the unhappy spirit in which they are written! Oh, my dear Sir! I never could have supposed that sneer, banter, and sarcasm, yea, notorious falsehood, calumny, and gross perversions, would have appeared before the world under the sanction of your venerable name." 1

Hill's accusations were groundless. While Fletcher had pursued the course of 'argumentum ad absurdum', he had never become abusive or scurrilous. He amassed argument upon argument with disconcerting, though polished bluntness.

As the controversy proceeded the main points of difference became more clearly marked, although there was no end of quibbling over the various positions maintained. Hill refuses to hold Fletcher's doctrine of a 'second justification by works' and also attacks him for his exposition of the doctrine of the free agency of man, and on sinless perfection; the latter a doctrine which Fletcher does not hold. He contends with Fletcher over his attack on the tenet of "the finished salvation of Christ". The pamphlet concludes with rather a venomous outburst upon Fletcher for the manner in which he arrayed the Puritan divines upon his side. Hill's angry vituperation does not strengthen his doctrinal contentions.

At this time another antagonist entered the controversial arena against Fletcher. He was Rowland Hill, younger brother of Richard Hill, who, after his graduation at Cambridge in 1769 was refused orders by no fewer than six bishops. He had become a roving evangelist, preaching with great success in Whitefield's London Tabernacle, in Bristol, Bath, and over the west of England.² In 1772 he anonymously published from London

1 Richard Hill - A Review of all the Doctrines taught by the Rev. John Wesley, etc. 2nd edition, p. 6

2 Sidney, E. The Life of the Rev. Rowland Hill, A.M.

(Unreliable - The author makes so glaring a mistake as to record Wesley's memorable Conference as in 1775, and previous Minutes as 1774 instead of 1744. p. 106

"Friendly Remarks Occasioned by the Spirit and Doctrines contained in the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication, And more particularly in his Second Check to Antinomianism. To which is added a Postscript Occasioned by his Third Check. In a Letter to the Author."

Mr. Hill wrote feeling some real concern over the questions at issue.

"Your (Fletcher's) second publication compels me to believe, that to be neuter any longer will be criminal; you have now done sufficient to darken every gleam of hope of future tranquillity, by publishing 'such' doctrine, and in 'such' a spirit, as has kindled no small flame in the religious world." 1

He expostulates with Fletcher at some length on the temper of his writings and for holding the Calvinists up in ridicule before the world as Antinomians; the latter a charge from which Fletcher cannot be entirely acquitted. Fletcher's rather deliberate equating of Calvinism and Antinomianism made this implication quite obvious.

In his treatment of the doctrinal questions, Hill endeavours to show the 'disharmony' in position between the Minutes, the Declaration, and the Vindication. He concludes,

"that Mr. Wesley, according to custom, contradicts himself; that you contradict the Declaration, and that the Declaration contradicts you both." 2

His contentions, like his brother's, were on the main points at issue, i.e. 'second justification by works', 'sinless perfection', and 'imputed righteousness' or what may be equated under the term 'finished salvation'. For the most part Hill devotes little space to his arguments in proportion to the amount used for remonstrance with Fletcher; remonstrance which was by no means free from bitterness.

The pitch of emotion in the controversy was becoming higher and

1 Mill, Rowland - "Friendly Remarks", etc. p. 6

2 Ibid, p. 29

higher. Augustus Toplady now gave vent to its fullest expression in his publication for the year, "More Work for John Wesley".¹ Toplady was undoubtedly the ablest of the writers among the Calvinists, and, though excelling them all in his scholarly treatises, was equal to levelling the lowest of insulting invectives against his opponents.

Fletcher did not reply to Toplady until 1776, as he thought that it was proper to have quite done with Mr. Hill before he faced so able a writer as Mr. Toplady. Thus, late in 1772, he published thirteen letters addressed to Richard and Rowland Hill entitled "Logica Genevesis; or, a Fourth Check to Antinomianism; in which St. James' pure Religion is defended against the Charges, and established under the Concessions, of Mr. Richard and Mr. Rowland Hill, in a Series of Letters to those Gentlemen, by the Vindicator of the Minutes."

Ten of the letters are addressed to Mr. Richard Hill, one to Mr. Rowland Hill, and two are joint letters addressed to them both. The main subject under discussion is the doctrine of the 'second justification by works' but the battle raged over most of the field already covered up to this time. Fletcher proceeded with undiminished vigour to demolish the main pillars of the Hill brothers' doctrine. He examined their arguments minutely and after asserting that they had granted sufficient to admit his central proposition, persistently reminded them that they should accept the full implications of their concessions. He quite deliberately equates Calvinism with what he calls "speculative antinomianism" and takes considerable liberty in compounding a creed for his opponents. He treats them rather severely to an edict of a predestinarian council and parliament. In reply to the younger Hill brother, Fletcher does not hesitate to display his impatience at what he terms Hill's "long, Calvinian, juvenile sentence upon my spirit as a writer".² This whole 'Check'

1 Toplady - Works, p. 730f

2 Works - Vol. II, p. 110

shows an increased severity in denunciation and Fletcher is unsparing in the use of ironical and derisive expressions.

It was now over two years since the eventful Conference and its Minutes of 1770; an exacting two years for Fletcher. He had been in the centre of the struggle from the beginning and had gradually assumed the main burden of the defence. Early in 1772 he expressed the wish that he might be out of controversy, but there was no avenue of escape.¹ During September 1772 he spent some time in Bristol preaching with Wesley. His writings appear to have brought him into prominence for he had larger congregations than Wesley.² The same year, however, he received word from Lady Huntingdon that he would not be allowed to preach in her chapels.³

His literary labours soon called him back to Madeley, for immediately after the publication of his "Fourth Check" there appeared his "An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense; or, A Rational Demonstration of Man's Corrupt and Lost Estate". It was dedicated to "The Principal Inhabitants of the Parish of Madeley". The writing has no place whatever in the controversy and was written sometime before January 1771. Though for a time Fletcher thought he had lost the manuscript, it was recovered and published near the end of 1772.⁴ This was the most popular of Fletcher's works and one of the most important from an historical point of view. In his appeal to 'matter of fact' for evidence of original sin, he vividly portrays labour conditions among the colliers, the bargemen and the iron-workers in his parish, and the social diversions of the populace; bacchanals, dancing, cock-fighting, horse-racing, theatrical performances,

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 153

2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor. Letter by John Dawson, p.242

3 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 45

4 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 152,

The treatise upon original sin["] was lost some weeks, but was found wilfully or inadvertently concealed in the back room of an alehouse in my parish, where the bargemen had left it".

Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 41

annual wakes and dog-fighting.

The work itself consists of a statement of the doctrine of original sin, supported by scriptural proofs and quotations from the Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy of the Church of England. There follow thirty-six arguments taken from the "astonishing severity of God's dispensation towards mankind".¹ There is a concluding address to the serious reader who inquires, "what must I do to be saved?", in which he points the way of salvation to the humble and penitent sinner.

Two other interesting publications appeared in the spring of the next year. One, "The Penitent Thief: or, A Narrative of Two Women, Fearing God, who visited in prison a highwayman, executed at Stafford, April 3, 1733, with a Letter to A Condemned Malefactor and A Penitential Office, for either a true Churchman, or a dying Criminal. Extracted from the Scriptures and the established liturgy." The title amply describes its contents. John Wilkes, who had been found guilty of highway robbery and committed to Stafford jail for execution, besought Fletcher to appeal for his reprieve. Fletcher, believing the man guilty, refused to intervene on his behalf, but wrote him a long letter exhorting him rather to seek mercy and forgiveness from God. The letter was followed with a visit from his sister and a woman named Elizabeth Childs. It was their narrative which Fletcher published and which gave an account of Wilkes' conversion before his execution. To this he added his own letter to the criminal, as well as a "Penitential Office", which he had compounded from scripture and the liturgy of the English Church.

The other publication went under the title of "A Dreadful Phenomenon described and improved, being a Particular Account of the Sudden Stoppage

1 Works, Vol. I, p. 19

of the River Severn, and of the terrible desolation that happened at the Birches, between Colebrook-Dale and Buildwas Bridge, in Shropshire; on Thursday, Morning, May the 27th, 1773, and The Substance of a Sermon, preached the next day on the Ruins, to a vast concourse of spectators". An earthquake, which had caused a considerable upheaval of ground and had diverted the course of the Severn, occurred on the night of May 25th.¹ In his pamphlet, Fletcher described at some length, and with considerable skill, the nature of the phenomenal occurrence. He added to this the substance of the sermon he preached at the place to the assemblage who had gathered there to witness the havoc wrought by the upheaval. Fletcher was not the only clergyman who visited the scene of the disruption. The other minister, however, brought a group of young people with him, and, with music supplied by one of their number, danced at the place. It is significant to contrast the efforts of these contemporary clergymen.²

During January, 1773, Wesley wrote Fletcher suggesting that he relinquish his parochial labours and join with him in his itinerary and so prepare to succeed him as leader of the Methodist people.³ Fletcher, while not rejecting this significant offer, could not yet see his way clear to accept.

"I would not leave this place, without a fuller persuasion that the time is quite come."⁴

In the meantime, Richard Hill had not been idle and his reply to

1 Lloyd's Evening Post, June 9 - June 11, 1773, Vol. XXXII, #2488
 2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 276
 3 Wesley - Letters, Vol. VI, pp. 10-12. Vide infra. p. 148f
 4 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 288

Fletcher's "Logica Genevensis" or "Fourth Check to Antinomianism" appeared early in 1773. It is dated January 2 and was entitled "The Finishing Stroke, Containing some Strictures on the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's pamphlet, entitled "Logica Genevensis, or a Fourth Check to Antinomianism". The controversy was continued in the same grievous strain of much disputation over what the respective opponent had meant or inferred. Hill accused Fletcher of the grossest misrepresentation of his doctrine and the major part of his pamphlet was taken up with bringing charges of calumny, disingenuity and falsehood against his antagonist. As an appendix he added copious quotations from a sermon Fletcher had preached in Madeley Church eleven years previous. Hill asserted he had at first intended to print the completed sermon, but considered it was unfair to do so without the author's permission. However, he was not averse to providing ample citations, which served his purpose quite as well.

In order to meet Hill's attack on this score, Fletcher preached from the same text in his church on May 9, 1773. He later published the sermon in his "Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism" which appeared in 1774. He put his additions to the sermon in brackets and foot-notes. He confessed that he had so leaned towards speculative, as not to have made a proper stand against practical, antinomianism,¹ but went on to say, "I am very far, however, from recanting that old discourse. I still think the doctrine it contains excellent in the main, and very proper to be enforced, though in a more guarded manner, in a congregation of hearers violently prejudiced against the first gospel axiom." 2

Preceding this, however, Fletcher replied to Hill's pamphlet with "Logica Genevensis continued: or, "The First Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism, containing an Answer to the 'Finishing Stroke' of Richard

1 Works, Vol. II, p. 329

2 Ibid. p.330

Hill, Esq., in which some remarks upon Mr. Fulsome's Antinomian Creed, published by the Rev. Mr. Berridge, are occasionally introduced. With an Appendix, upon the remaining difference between the Calvinists and the Anti-Calvinists, with respect to our Lord's doctrine of Justification by works, and St. James' doctrine of Justification by works, and not by faith only". This work was dated September 13, 1773, but did not make its appearance until early in the next year and, for the first time, Mr. Berridge's name appears in the controversy.

John Berridge, the Vicar of Everton, one of the leaders of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England, was a Calvinist and had published a pamphlet entitled, "The Christian World Unmasked. Pray Come and Peep". Berridge was a friend of Fletcher's and they had at times laboured together, but Fletcher felt some compulsion to write against his pamphlet. He wrote Berridge stating his intention.

"What you have said about sincere obedience, has touched the apple of God's eye, and is the very core of Antinomianism. You have done your best to disparage sincere obedience, and in a pamphlet (ready for the press) I have freely exposed what you have written." 1

Fletcher directly opposed him in "Logica Genevensis Continued, Or the Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism; Containing a Defence of 'Jack O'Lantern', and 'The Paper-Kite', that is, Sincere Obedience; - of the 'Cobweb', that is, the Evangelical Law of Liberty; - and of the 'Valiant Serjeant If', that is, the conditionality of Perseverance, attacked by the Rev. Mr. Berridge, M.A., Vicar of Everton, and late fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, in his book called "The Christian World Unmasked". Berridge's work had been ably written, bearing many characteristic marks of the eccentric vicar, but entirely free of the

1 Whittingham - Works of Berridge; and Life, p. 382

predominant bitterness of the controversy. In his attack upon doctrines which he opposed, he made no personal references to the individuals who maintained them. Incidentally he made no reply to Fletcher's attack upon his book.

In Fletcher's "First Part of the Fifth Check", his answer to Hill's "Finishing Stroke", the controversy was continued with fervour. Fletcher was not so prolix in his reply, but endeavoured to clear himself from the misrepresentations with which he had been charged, and at the same time carry on his attack against his opponent's position. The Appendix contained ten arguments against the absurdity of supposing that believers are justified "by works before men and angels, but not before God".¹

The "Second Part of the Fifth Check" was Fletcher's reply to Berridge. Fletcher had turned on Berridge because the latter had maintained that faith must utterly exclude all justification by works. The references to "Paper Kite", "Cobweb", "Jack O'Lantern" and "Serjeant If", referred to terms Berridge had respectively equated with the "passport of obedience", "the law of liberty", "sincere obedience", and the "conditionality of perseverance". Berridge was not guilty of all that Fletcher charged him with; not, for instance, of disparaging "sincere obedience". But Fletcher was crusading against "speculative antinomianism" and did not hesitate to attack looseness of language or fallacy in logic. While Fletcher's reply was quite straightforward and oftentimes blunt, there was still no bitterness in his manner.

During the year an anonymous publication had appeared attacking Fletcher entitled, "Dr. Crisp's Ghost, or a Check upon Checks . Being a Bridle for Antinomians, and a Whip for Pelagian and Arminian Methodists".

¹ Works, Vol. II, p. 240

It was a small pamphlet of only eight pages, but contained considerable abuse. Fletcher took notice of it in a footnote in the "Second Part of the Fifth Check", Section IV, and briefly answered the charges. He referred to the author as the Rev. Mr. P---l. In July of 1773 Fletcher received a letter from Mr. Hill with an overture for peace, suggesting he was stopping the sale of his books and thus expecting Fletcher would do the same. He had written Fletcher because of the rumour which had come to him that Fletcher wished to be done with controversy and was resolved to publish nothing more on the contentious doctrines. There followed a correspondence between Fletcher and Hill, but no amicable settlement could be reached.¹ Fletcher complained of being treated with severity and was evidently not content to let the controversy end at that stage. Hill's third letter was most conciliatory. He affirmed he was done with the controversy and would write nothing more. Though he could not approve of some of Mr. Wesley's doctrines, yet he said,

"As I am persuaded that many who are the excellent of the earth are in his connections, I wish to confirm my love towards them on account of the grace that is in them." 2

Unfortunately, however, it was rumoured that these friendly gestures of Mr. Hill had meant his recantation of his doctrines. Hill rightly felt he could not rest under such a misunderstanding and submitted his three letters sent to Fletcher to the press, to which he added a preface and appendix. The preface told of a friendly agreement Hill and Wesley had reached and included as well a bitter attack upon Fletcher for misrepresentation of facts concerning the results of their correspondence. Hill was very angry, so much so, that he poured invectives upon Thomas Olivers, a Welsh shoemaker and one of Wesley's itinerant preachers, who

1 Fletcher's replies to the three letters Hill wrote have not been preserved. The substance of them can only be inferred from Hill's answers to them.

2 Three Letters Written by Richard Hill to Rev. J. Fletcher, p. 19

had been writing in the controversy. The Appendix was an eleven article creed for "Arminians and Perfectionists" to which was subscribed the initials, "J.F.", "J.W.", and "W.S.". ¹ In this step Hill followed the rather deplorable example Fletcher set in producing his "Gospel Proclamation" from Geneva. ²

Fletcher's indefatigable literary labours kept him well abreast of the controversy, and, even before the publication of the "First Part of the Fifth Check", he had begun another work which was designed to be of a conciliatory nature. ³ This went to the press in the spring of 1774, ⁴ and appeared under the title of "The First Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism, Containing, i. An Historical Essay on the Danger of parting Faith and Works. ii. Salvation by the Covenant of Grace, A Discourse preached in the Parish Church of Madeley, April 18, and May 9, 1773. ⁵ iii. A Scriptural Essay on the astonishing Rewardableness of Works, according to the Covenant of Grace. iv. An Essay on Truth, or A Rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith, with a dedicatory Epistle to the Right Hon. the Countess of Huntingdon. By the Author of the Checks to Antinomianism". Fletcher, fortunately, did not have to clear himself from personal attacks or charges of misrepresentation, and thus discoursed freely and at length on the subjects set forth on the title page.

The "Essay on Truth" is dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon. Some time in the early part of 1774 the Countess had made friendly

1 The initials of John Fletcher, John Wesley, and Walter Sellon.
 2 Vide supra, p.55
 3 Works - Vol. VIII, p. 262
 4 Preface dated, May 21st, 1774.
 5 Vide supra, p. 59

overtures to Fletcher through their mutual friend, Mr. Ireland. She desired to receive him, but he felt he could not accept her gracious offer; partly out of consideration for the Countess herself. He considered it might cause friction between her and her friends and so lessen her influence among them, for he was quite aware of their attitude towards himself, and also, as he writes,

"I must follow my light. A necessity is laid upon me to clear my conscience with respect to the antinomian world, and to point out the stumbling block that keeps many serious people from embracing the real doctrines of free grace. I cannot do this without advancing some truths, which I know her ladyship receives as well as myself, but which, by my manner of unfolding them, will, at first sight, appear dreadful touches to the gospel of the day." 1

He was in personal correspondence with the Countess, and so felt at liberty to dedicate his essay to her.

Within a year Fletcher had submitted his next publication to the press. "Zelotes and Honetus Reconciled: or, The Second Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism Continued: Being the First Part of the Scripture Scales to weigh the Gold of Gospel Truth, - to balance a multitude of opposite Scriptures, - to prove the Gospel - Marriage of Free-Grace and Free-Will, - and to restore primitive harmony to the Gospel of the day. With a Preface, containing some Strictures upon the Three Letters of Richard Hill, Esq.; which have been lately published. By a Lover of the whole truth as it is in Jesus". The third part of the "Equal Check", "The Second Part of the Scripture Scales", appeared shortly afterwards,² as Fletcher intended they should make up one piece, and be taken as a continuation of the "Equal Check".

1 Works - Vol. VIII, pp. 263-4

2 Preface dated Madeley, March 30th, 1775.

These two publications go to make up one of Fletcher's most comprehensive works, in which he brings to bear the full weight of scripture, "understood reasonably, and consistently with the context,"¹ as the reconciling and adjudicating instrument in the controversy. After the respective doctrines are set forth, they are accordingly weighed in the "scripture scales". Fletcher liked this particular work above what he had written previously, for, as he writes, "It has far more of God's word, far less of mine".² In a brief postscript, following the preface he refers to Hill's "Three Letters", which had reached him after his own work had gone to the press. He writes reproachfully of the bitterness and injustice of Hill's production.

His actual reply to Hill, however, made its appearance the same year in a pamphlet entitled, "The Fictitious and the Genuine Creed: Being a Creed for Arminians, composed by Richard Hill, Esq., to which is opposed 'A Creed for those who believe that Christ tasted death for every man'. By the author of the 'Checks to Antinomianism'." Fletcher meets Hill argument for argument, setting forth an "Anti-Calvinian Confession of Faith" in opposition to the "Creed for Arminians" which Hill had supplied in his three letters. This work, however, was an answer to only the first ten articles of Hill's creed. There was an eleventh article which referred to the "perfectionists", and Fletcher decided to answer this in a separate treatise which appeared shortly afterwards under the title of "The Last Check to Antinomianism. A Polemical Essay on the Twin Doctrines of Christian Imperfection and a Death Purgatory. By the Author of the Checks".³ Here Fletcher treated the subject of Christian Perfection,

1 Works - Vol. III, p. 131

2 Ibid. - p. 136

3 Vide supra, p. 50 This work was begun as early as 1771.

endeavouring to present it in its proper light by freeing it from the misrepresentations which had been laid upon it. In the course of his dissertation, however, he does not forego any opportunity to attack his opponent's position. In spite of this he presents a very masterly defence of the doctrine.

Fletcher's part in the controversy was gradually coming to an end. Shirley, Rowland and Richard Hill, and Berridge were all silent, but Fletcher had promised a reply to Toplady. Four years had elapsed since the publication of Toplady's book, "More Work for Mr. John Wesley: or a Vindication of the Decrees and Providence of God", and Fletcher had been occupied in putting the finishing touches to his encounter with the Hills and Berridge. Thus it was not until 1775¹ that he began to write against Toplady, and his work appeared the next year under the title of "An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Vindication of the Decrees, etc.' By the Author of the Checks." Toplady and Wesley had joined issue on the doctrine of election, but Wesley had retired from the field leaving Toplady to Thomas Olivers. Fletcher did not enter into controversy with Toplady to assist in Wesley's defence, but, as he explained in his introduction to his "Answer", because many considered Toplady's work unanswerable, and Mr. Hill had referred it to his readers as the full answer to those attacks which had been brought upon Calvinistic doctrine. Fletcher, in his characteristic, thorough-going fashion, met Toplady argument for argument, there having been no less than seventy-three arguments set forth in the "Vindication". The extreme abusiveness and bitterness which characterized Toplady's work, is entirely lacking in Fletcher's pamphlet.

1 Introduction dated Madeley, October 1775.

Before Fletcher's answer appeared in print Toplady had published another work, "The Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity Asserted." It was written in opposition to a pamphlet of Wesley's; "Thoughts upon Necessity". Fletcher could not rest content until he had answered this also.

"As there are, in that piece, some new arguments, the plausibility of which may puzzle many readers; and as I think it my duty fully to vindicate the truth, and completely detect error; I design to answer that book also". 1

The next year then, he published, "A Reply to the Principal Arguments by which the Calvinists and Fatalists support the Doctrine of Absolute Necessity, being Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity' ". This book was, in reality, a continuation of his preceding work and was his concluding publication in the Calvinist controversy proper. He later published two other works on the subject, but both were of a conciliatory nature.

1 Advertisement - An Answer to Mr. Toplady's "Vindication of the Decrees" etc. 1st ed.

Section II

Chapter III

Fletcher's part in the Calvinian controversy had practically finished, when he unfortunately became embroiled in the dispute over the rebellion of the English colonies in America. Wesley had published an abridged edition of Mr. Johnson's "Taxation no Tyranny", under the title of "A Calm Address to our American Colonies".¹ This had drawn reply from the Reverend Caleb Evans, a Baptist minister at Bristol.² Wesley answered by re-publishing his "Calm Address", with a preface and an address to Evans. Fletcher now joined in the controversy addressing himself to Evans in "A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to Our American Colonies': in three letters to Mr. Caleb Evans". He justifies his entrance into the quarrel on the ground that, at heart, the question at issue was a moral and thus a religious one, i.e., honour and obedience to the king. He also hoped that in so vindicating the doctrine of taxation as rational, scriptural and constitutional, he might succeed in moving some of the colonists to submission.

Fletcher's work was not destined to accomplish all that he hoped. Its immediate result was to call forth a bitter reply from Evans who, as an advocate for the freedom of the colonies, poured scorn on his contentions.³ Fletcher could not rest under this, and replied with "American Patriotism, Farther confronted with Reason, Scripture, and the Constitution: being Observations on the Dangerous Politicks taught by the Rev. Mr. Evans, M.A.,

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 76f

2 A Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, occasioned by his Calm Address to the American Colonies

3 "A Reply to the Rev. Fletcher's Vindication of Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to Our American Colonies'". By Caleb Evans, M.A. Bristol, October 27, 1775

and the Rev. Dr. Price¹ with a Scriptural Plea for the Revolted Colonies". In this work he continued his defence by weighing all arguments by "reason, scripture and the constitution". He concludes with a "scriptural plea" for the Colonies, and some suggestions for their reconciliation with the mother country.

In his fourth letter of the pamphlet he calls for a day of National Confession, of humiliation and prayer. He writes,

"It is not surprising, that amidst all the preparations which have been made to subdue the revolted colonies, none should have been made to check out open rebellion against God; and that in all our national applications to foreign princes for help, we should have forgotten a public application to the Prince of the kings of the earth?"²

A royal proclamation was issued calling for a public fast and humiliation to be observed "throughout England and the Kingdom of Ireland, upon Friday the 13th of December", 1776.³ This move naturally met with Fletcher's approval, and he shortly after issued a small pamphlet with the title, "The Bible and the Sword; or, The Appointment of the General Fast Vindicated; In an Address to the Common People, concerning the Propriety of Repressing obstinate Licentiousness with the Sword, and of Fasting when the Sword is drawn for that Purpose". Here he reiterates part of his previous tract wherein he had advocated the fast, and sets forth scriptural arguments for the use of force under certain conditions. With this he brought to an end his part in the political controversy.⁴

1 Evans had highly commended and quoted from Dr. Price's pamphlet, "Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty". Dr. Price was a Unitarian minister from London.

2 "American Patriotism farther Confronted" - 1st ed. pp. 98-9 (Works. Vol. VII, p. 157)

3 Annual Register, 1776, p. 188

4 Fletcher had written another small tract which was not published. In a letter to Wesley, Jan. 9, 1776, he refers to it as "'A Second Check to Civil Antinomianism', being an extract from the 'Homily against Rebellion', which I think might be spread at this time to shame Mr. Roquet and to calm the people's mind".

Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 213

Wesley evidently decided not to have the manuscript published.

His assiduous application to writing throughout the years of the controversy brought about a breakdown in his health. As early as September, 1773, he complained of inflammation in his throat ¹ and by 1776 he was in a weakened condition.

At this time Wesley invited him to travel with him, and visit some of the Societies.² Since the beginning of the controversy Wesley had visited Madeley only twice.³ They had been together at Bristol in September, 1772,⁴ and had met at Wolverhampton in March, 1774.⁵ That Fletcher did avail himself of Wesley's offer to travel with him is certain, but the exact time and distance of their journeys together cannot now be definitely determined. Wesley writes in his "Life of Fletcher",

"We set out (as I am accustomed to do) early in the spring, and travelled, by moderate journeys, suited to his strength, eleven or twelve hundred miles. When we returned to London, in the latter end of the year, he was considerably better; And I verily believe, if he had travelled with me, partly in chaise and partly on horseback, only a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health." ⁶

There is no record in Wesley's "Journal" of any journey he began with Fletcher "early in the spring". In the autumn of 1776, in October and November, Fletcher was with Wesley, and part of their travels have been recorded.⁷ Their travels together, however, must have begun sometime early in March, after Fletcher had joined Wesley in London, but after travelling north with him through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire,

1 Works - Vol. VIII, p. 262

2 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 173

Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 290

3 1771 and 1774. Wesley - Journal, Vol. V, p. 424. Vol. VI, p. 33

4 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 242

5 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 12

6 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 290

7 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, pp. 130-33. See footnotes also.

(Letters, Vol. VIII, p. 303, mentions leaving London, Nov. 13)

part of Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and Shropshire, he returned to Madeley.¹ The pressure of controversial duties, and the difficulties about a curate for Madeley,² made it impossible for him to continue with Wesley at that time, but later in the year he joined him again. Thus the journey Wesley refers to was not a continuous one, but broken by an interval of about six months when Fletcher was in Madeley and Bristol. During the interval his health continued to fail and by May he acknowledges

"the symptoms of an inward consumptive decay, spitting blood, etc." ³ Very soon after this he was compelled to leave Madeley as his health was so badly impaired, and he went to Bristol, to try the hot wells there. He remained until August and then returned to Madeley. Wesley saw him early in the month and found him somewhat better. He would have liked to take Fletcher with him on a journey to Cornwall, but the physician refused to let him go.⁴ Once in Madeley again, Fletcher returned to his writing and for a time his health continued to improve, but in October he suffered a severe set-back, and for a while it was thought he would not recover.⁵ He did, however, recover sufficiently to join with Wesley and travel with him during part of October and November.⁶ They returned to London, November 22nd.⁷ Fletcher separated from Wesley and visited Mr. Garham at St. Neots. While there he had an opportunity of calling

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 175. It is difficult to understand why Fletcher's presence on this occasion is not mentioned in Wesley's Journal.

2 Ibid.

3 Works - Vol. VIII, p. 270

4 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 119

5 Mr. Greaves, Fletcher's curate, composed a hymn, which was a prayer for his recovery. This was sung by his congregation at Madeley. On June 30 of the same year Mr. Charles Wesley had written a similar hymn.

6 Vide supra, p. 69

7 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VII, pp. 132-3

on Berridge, the Vicar of Everton, with whom he had joined issue in the controversy. It was a joyous re-union of old friends, and their controversial differences were forgotten.¹ The same day, Fletcher also visited his friend, Henry Venn, Rector of Yelling.

On December 16th, 1776, he visited his friends Mary and Charles Greenwood, at their home in Stoke-Newington.² Here Fletcher received the best care and skill available.³ One of the Greenwood family wrote to Mr. Wesley of his visit,

"When he came first, he was, by Dr. Fothergill's advice, under the strictest observance of two things - rest and silence. These together with a milk diet, were supposed to be the only probable means of his recovery. In consequence of these restrictions, he spoke exceeding little. If ever he spoke more than usual, it did not fail to increase his spitting of blood; of which, indeed, he was seldom quite clear, although it was not violent."⁴

During his stay at Stoke Newington he was visited by many of his friends, but the visitors of particular interest were his Calvinistic brethren, some of those whom he had opposed in the controversy.

"The great have done me the honour of calling - Mr. Shirley, Mr. Rowland Hill, Mr. Peckwell, etc. I exhort them to promote peace in the church, which they take kindly. I hope God will incline us all to peace, living and dying. Lady Huntingdon has written me a kind letter also. O for universal, lasting kindness! The world to me is now become a world of love."⁵

During his sickness, Fletcher sent two works through the press. The pamphlets were entitled, "The Doctrines of Grace and Justice equally essential to the pure Gospel: Being some Remarks on the mischievous divisions caused among Christians, by parting those doctrines. Being an Introduction to a Plan of Reconciliation between the Defenders of the

1 Berridge - Works, pp. 61-64. G. J. Garham's letter describes this interesting meeting.

2 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 190

3 Fletcher appears to have been under the care of a number of prominent physicians. Dr. Turner, (Works, Vol.VIII, p. 279), William Perronet (Ibid., p. 282-3), Dr. Fothergill (Wesley, Works, Vol.XI,p.291), Physician at Litchfield (Benson, p. 182), Sir John Elliott (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 112),(L.& T. of C.H., 2, p.11)

4 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 291

5 Works, Vol.VIII, p. 280. Berridge and Dr. Price also were among those who visited Fletcher at this time. Works of Berridge and Memoir. p. 63

Doctrines of Partial Grace, commonly called Calvinists; and the Defenders of the Doctrines of Impartial Justice, commonly called Arminians.", and, "Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism: A two-fold Essay, - Part the First, displaying the doctrines of Partial Grace, Part the Second, those of Impartial Justice. The Reconciliation; or an Easy Method to unite the professing People of God, by placing the Doctrines of Grace and Justice in such a light as to make candid Arminians Bible-Calvinists; and the candid Calvinists, Bible-Arminians. The Plan of Reconciliation." This second work was in the three parts, as designated, and was dedicated to his friend, Mr. Ireland. It was dated at Newington, April 16th, 1777. The first pamphlet was, in reality, an introduction to the second, and, though published previously, was, after the first edition, printed and sold with the second.¹ These writings have not been considered as belonging to the Calvinist controversy proper. Even though Fletcher spoke of them as "my last controversial piece",² the controversy was over as far as he was concerned, and these pamphlets were definitely of a conciliatory nature. He endeavours to show that both parties, Calvinists and Arminians, had been each contending for an important truth, but that neither contentions were exclusive of the other. He makes a plea for union, offering his plan of reconciliation, which is based on a free exchange of brotherly love, and mutual recognition of common purpose. Thus, though rest and silence had been prescribed by his medical advisers, Fletcher did not adhere to their advice. His personal correspondence at this period was extensive, and he addressed several lengthy pastoral letters to his parishioners at Madeley who were under the care of a curate, Mr. Greaves.

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 185

2 Ibid., p. 183

At this time he also projected plans for the construction of a meeting-house in Madeley Wood.¹ Madeley had become part of a Methodist circuit in 1765,² but no particular building for meetings had been available. In a letter to some of his friends in the fall of the same year he discloses the reasons for this move.

"I have attempted to build a house in Madeley-Wood, about the centre of my parish, where I should be glad the children might be taught to read and write in the day, and the grown-up people might hear the Word of God in the evening, when they can get an evangelist to preach it to them; and where the serious people might assemble for social worship when they had no teacher." 3

This move brought him into financial difficulties, but in time he was able to meet the obligations fully.

In May he left the Greenwood's home at Newington, to be with his friend Mr. Ireland at Brislington near Bristol. One of the advantages of his residence there was that he was able to drink daily of the mineral water, which appeared to agree with him.

He was in Bath in the early part of July,⁴ where he listened to Henry Venn's preaching in the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel.⁵ Later in the month he was in Bristol, where Wesley visited him.⁶ He remained in Bristol, and was present at Wesley's annual Conference which was held in that year between the 5th and the 8th of August.

Fletcher's health had failed to such a degree that, as a last resort, he was strongly advised to take a trip to the Continent. Even

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 113

2 Vide supra. p. 33

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 118

4 Ibid. p. 113

5 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 71

6 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 167

in 1773, Mr. Ireland had been encouraging Fletcher to travel with him again,¹ but he had been loath to go abroad, and it was only when no other course appeared open to him that he finally yielded. He wrote in November,

"The debt of gratitude I owe to a dying sister, who once took a long journey to see me, when I was ill in Germany, and whom I just stopped from coming last winter, to Newington to nurse me; the unanimous advice of physicians whom I have consulted, and the opportunity of travelling with serious friends, have at last determined me to remove to a warmer climate." 2

After putting his financial affairs in order,³ and taking affectionate leave of his parishioners by letter,⁴ he journeyed to Newington and from there set out for the south of France with Mr. Ireland,⁵ on December 4th, 1777. He, even then, appears to have made some progress towards recovery.⁶

The party was delayed a short time at Dover due to unfavourable weather,⁷ but had crossed the channel and left Calais by December 12th. They travelled by way of Bretzul to Abbeville, and thence to Dijon. They arrived at Dijon on the 27th, after a difficult and trying journey. The weather was cold, the ground being covered with snow, and to add to their difficulties the chaise in which they were travelling broke down after they had left Abbeville. The party was at Lyons at the beginning of the new year, and after several days went on to Aix-en-Provence where the weather was exceedingly fine and warm. Fletcher had not only stood the journey well, but was showing every indication of definite recovery. Mr.

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 261

2 Ibid., p. 118

3 Ibid., p. 119

4 Ibid., p. 122 f

5 The party also included Mr. Ireland's two daughters, and another family. (Benson - Life of Fletcher, pp. 222-3)

6 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 176

7 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 125

Ireland wrote from Aix,

"Mr. Fletcher walks out daily, He is now able to read and pray with us every morning and evening. He has no remains of his cough nor of the weakness in his breast. His natural colour is restored, and the sallowness quite gone. His appetite is good, and he takes a little wine." 1

While in Aix, Fletcher preached with success to the Protestants in the place, his voice having regained its full power.

It is difficult to ascertain his whereabouts after he departed from Aix, probably late in February. He was in Marseilles on March 7th,² and he wrote from there to Mr. Greaves, his curate, that his brother was coming to accompany him home to Nyon.³ He preached twice at Marseilles.

He was in Nyon sometime before May 15th, but unfortunately the satisfactory progress he had been making towards a complete recovery of health was retarded. A particle of food had lodged in his windpipe, and the violent coughing he went through before he was able to remove it affected his weak lungs.⁴ On May 17th he was at Macon in Burgundy, where he had gone to meet his friend Mr. Ireland, who was returning from Montpellier to England.⁵ After taking leave of Mr. Ireland, he returned to his home at Nyon and he took up his residence there until March 1781, when he returned to England.

During this long interval Fletcher was by no means inactive. As he was on friendly terms with several ministers in the place he had different opportunities to preach and he availed himself of as many as his health would allow.

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 301

2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 411

3 Benson - Life of Fletcher, pp. 228-29. This letter is without date, or location. He mentions being fifty miles from Hieres, and it is probable he was in the vicinity of Marseilles.

4 Fletcher, MSS Volume, p. 54

5 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 291

However, during May a clerical visitation laid charges against him for belonging to a sect which was everywhere spoken against. His friends among the clergy came to his support and the matter ended peaceably.¹

He also pursued the practice he had followed in his own parish at Madeley of preaching in private houses. In this way, he organized a small society similar to those he had in England and carried on effective work in typically Methodist style. His chief joy, however, was the children he gathered about him. He had met and spoken to a small group of children in his wood one day, and, discovering their keen interest in stories he told them about their Heavenly Father, he arranged that they should meet together at regular intervals. These meetings proved very popular and Fletcher's kindly and sympathetic concern for the welfare of the children was so reflected in all his dealings with them that he became greatly beloved by all.²

His health improved very slowly, although he was much in the open. He was continually overtaxing his strength because of his participation in the religious life of the community. In February 1779 he wrote to Mr. Ireland,

"I am better, thank God, and ride out every day when the slippery roads will permit me to venture without the risk of breaking my horse's legs and my own neck. You will ask me how I spend my time? I pray, have patience, rejoice, and write, when I can; I saw wood in the house when I cannot go out; and eat grapes, of which I have always a basket by me." 3

In December 1778 Fletcher had a visit from William Perronet, son of his beloved friend, the Reverend Vincent Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham.

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 132. Fletcher was on a later occasion summoned before the Seigneur Bailiff for preaching against sabbath breaking and stage plays. The magistrate considered his remarks as a personal attack, and, after severely reprimanding Fletcher, forbade him to preach in public. After this Fletcher confined his activities to exhortations in one of the clergymen's houses. Benson - Life of Fletcher, pp. 257-8, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 136-7

2 Benson - Life of Fletcher, pp. 246-7. Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 296-7

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 300

William Perronet had been one of his chief physicians and medical advisers during his illness in England, and had come to Switzerland to take care of his father's interests in a valuable estate which had come into the family's possession at Chateau d'Oex, about fifty-seven miles from Nyon. He found Fletcher in "pretty good health and spirits".¹ Fletcher accompanied him on his difficult journey through the mountains to Chateau d'Oex, and rendered valuable assistance in despatching his business. Perronet remained with him at Nyon until the beginning of 1780, when he went to Lausanne. His own health was failing, and there had been some changes in Fletcher's household. Several deaths occurred in the family, and his sister had been very ill.²

Throughout the major part of Fletcher's correspondence during this period there is constant expression of his desire to return to England. But his wavering health made definite plans impossible. At one time he was seized with a severe attack of rheumatism in his left shoulder, which rendered his arm useless.³ In September, 1780, he had planned to leave Nyon, but he lost a section of the manuscript on which he was working, and was forced to rewrite it. A sudden change of weather brought back acute symptoms of his early trouble, and again he was unable to leave.⁴

Mr. Perronet's health also failed rapidly and thus together they awaited an opportunity to return home. Eventually, however, Fletcher was forced to leave his friend behind at Lausanne, as he had promised to meet Mr. Ireland at Montpellier. He left Nyon in March 1781, and so exhausted himself by preaching in Montpellier and in the neighbourhood,

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 305
 2 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 256
 3 Ibid. pp. 258-9
 4 Ibid. p. 265

that by the time he had reached Lyons on his return journey to England in April, he was undecided whether to go on or return to Switzerland.¹ But by the end of the month he arrived in London, apparently quite recovered from his illness. His friend, Perronet, died in December of the same year at Douay, on his return journey.² Fletcher preached in City Road Chapel, London, on April 27th, and then journeyed to Mr. Ireland's home at Brislington, where he remained until early in May, when he left for Madeley.

His writing during his visit on the Continent, resulted in two publications. The first was a poem, in the French language, which was published at Geneva, under the title of "La Louange". The second edition was published in England in 1785 with some additions. It was entitled, "La Grâce et la Nature, Poëme - Seconde Edition plus complète". The book was dedicated, "A la Reine de la Grande Brétagne". It is a poem of praise. The glory and attributes of God are so delineated as to excite man to lead in the anthem of praise to God from all creatures.

The other literary effort of his retirement was a work entitled, "The Portrait of St. Paul". His manuscript was written in French, and was undoubtedly meant for publication in Switzerland. However, disturbances in Geneva before his departure made this plan impossible.³ It was not published until 1790, five years after his death. It appeared in England under the title, "The Portrait of St. Paul, or, the true Model for Christians and Pastors: translated from the French Manuscript of the late Rev. John William de la Fléchère, Vicar of Madeley. To which is added, Some Account of the Author, by the Rev. Joshua Gilpin, Vicar of Rockwardine, in the County of Salop. In two volumes". The precise

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 273

2 Ibid., p. 275

3 Ibid., p. 270

purpose of the work was to single out St. Paul as the happy combination of a true Christian and a good pastor, and thus to commend him as the example for all ministers of the gospel. He enumerates as many as forty traits of Paul's character worthy of commendation, adding an account of apathetic ministers, and false apostles, in which he answers objections which may arise against his portrait of St. Paul. His work concludes with a review of the necessary doctrines of an evangelical pastor, showing how true morality springs from the love of Christ.

As he commenced his work at Madeley again, he was conscious of a considerable change among his people. He wrote to Charles Greenwood,

"A cloud is over my poor parish; but, alas! it is not the luminous cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night. Even the few remaining professors stared at me the other day, when I preached to them on these words, 'Ye shall receive the Holy Ghost, for the promise is unto you'." ¹

His curate, Mr. Greaves, had not proved successful in his absence and consequently he left during the summer. ² His place was filled by Mr. Bayley, one of the masters of Kingswood School. ³

Fletcher laboured in his parish until August, when he journeyed to Leeds to be present at Wesley's Conference. During his visit at the Conference, he preached with good effect. ⁴

However, by far the most important incident of his sojourn away from Madeley was his visit at Cross Hall, four and a half miles from Leeds. Cross Hall was the home of Miss Bosanquet, to whom he had been so attracted when he had first met her twenty years before. Mary Bosanquet, who, early in her life, had thrown in her lot with the Methodists, had had a varied career. She came from a wealthy and influential family, but her

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 311

2 Arminian Magazine, 1782, p. 48

3 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 280

4 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 330

nts had little patience with her zealous interest in the serious
 irs of religion. After she was twenty-one she left her home, tak-
 rooms of her own. She later became associated with Sarah Ryan,
 had been one of Wesley's helpers in Bristol, and they took up
 dence at Leytonstone. Their home became a Methodist meeting-house,
 the two women devoted themselves to the care of the poor, and to
 many children they wished to help. They experienced years of
 iculty and hardship, and, when in 1768 they moved to Cross Hall,
 arm which Mary Bosanquet purchased, the situation grew worse. About
 same time Sarah Ryan died, and Miss Bosanquet was left to manage
 e. By 1781 the situation had become desperate for she had almost
 oughed the end of her financial resources.

Fletcher does not appear to have been in correspondence with her at
 any time before 1777,¹ when he replied to a letter he had received from
 her suggesting some remedy for his illness. Later they exchanged several
 letters on various religious subjects which were of common interest.
 After Fletcher's return from the Continent, in June 1781, he wrote
 offering her marriage.² He explained his rather sudden action on the
 grounds that his mind had been so strongly drawn to it, that he con-

1 Wesley, in a letter written in 1774, implies that Fletcher had proffered marriage to Mary Bosanquet at some time previous to that date, and that she had sought his advice concerning the advisability of taking such a step. It appears highly improbable that Fletcher made any such proposal, for, as early as 1763 he stated his views on matrimony to Charles Wesley, (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 202-3), and he was far from being favourably inclined to any such move. From Price's "Life of Mrs. Fletcher", it is evident that the thought of marriage with Mr. Fletcher was before Miss Bosanquet at intervals during the many years she had no communication with him. She probably wrote to Wesley, with her usual candour, mentioning this fact, and he possibly misunderstood, or mis-stated, her. In her "Life", Mrs. Fletcher at no place speaks of such a proposal.

2 Moore - Life of Mrs. Fletcher, p. 145

sidered it to be the order of Providence. The reply must have been favourable, for the encouragement he received drew him to Leeds. During his visit at Cross Hall he gained her consent to their marriage.

Fletcher returned to Madeley until final arrangements for the wedding could be made. Miss Bosanquet's financial affairs had become quite involved, and in order to assist her in effecting a clearance of her Yorkshire property he changed pulpits with the Rev. John Crosse, who, was Vicar of Bradford.¹ This took place towards the end of October, and he was thus able to be near his fiancée. They were married in Batley Church, near Cross Hall, on November 12th, 1781, the day being spent with friends in prayer and praise to God.² They continued at Cross Hall until the beginning of the next year, and then went to Madeley. At the time of his marriage Fletcher was fifty-two; Miss Bosanquet being ten years his junior.³ They were very happy together. Henry Venn wrote, after a visit to Madeley,

"I left this happy house - as Cecil, Secretary to Queen Elizabeth, left Bernard Gilpin's - saying, 'There dwells as much happiness as can be known on earth'." 4

Mrs. Fletcher heartily joined her husband in all his labours in the parish, and in March, when Wesley visited Madeley, he found them both busy with their work.⁵

1 Morgan, W.- Life of Rev. J. Crosse, p. 9

2 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 315 f

3 Wesley wrote Fletcher in November, "There is not a person to whom I would have wished Miss Bosanquet joined besides you". Wesley - Letters, Vol. VII, p. 93. Miss Bosanquet was a close friend of Wesley's, and corresponded with him freely.

4 Venn, J. - Life of Henry Venn, p. 370

5 Wesley, - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 345

The next year, he and Mrs. Fletcher accepted an invitation to visit the Dublin Methodists. They left Madeley August 12th, Fletcher preaching at Llangollen in Wales the following day. They arrived in Dublin, Sunday, 17th,¹ and remained until October 7th, while Fletcher laboured with great success. Henry Moore wrote of the results of the visit;

"A great revival of pure religion followed in that society (Dublin Methodist Society). It had usually consisted of about five hundred persons, but it soon increased to upwards of a thousand, and has never since fallen below that number." 2

His chief work was among the members of the Society, but he took every occasion offered to speak elsewhere, preaching in both English and French. However, when it became known he was definitely associated with the Methodist body, the doors of the other churches, with the exception of the French Church, were closed against him.

After his return from the Continent Fletcher had little opportunity to write. However, in 1782, he sent to the press a sermon, "A Race for Eternal Life: being an Extract from the Heavenly Footman. A Sermon on 1 cor. ix, 24: written by the Author of the 'Pilgrim's Progress'".

A more pretentious work was undertaken sometime after the peace of 1783 between England and France and Spain. He wrote a poem in French to celebrate the occasion, and dedicated it to the Archbishop of Paris. This was dated Madeley, January 28, 1784. Gilpin made an English translation which was going through the press in 1785 when Fletcher died.³

1 Moore - Life of Mrs. Fletcher, p. 156

2 Ibid. pp. 158-9

3 "An Essay upon the Peace of 1783". Dedicated to the Archbishop of Paris. Translated from the French of the Rev. J. Fletcher, late Vicar of Madeley, by the Rev. J. Gilpin, Vicar of Wrockwardine, Salop."

In 1783 Fletcher prepared another pamphlet for the press. This one was comprised of suggestions for social reform. The work was entitled, "Three National Grievances, - the Increase of Taxes, the Hardships of Unequal Taxation, and the Continual Rise of the Poor's Rates; with the Causes and Remedies of these Evils. Humbly submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Lord John Cavendish, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and one of the Lords of the Treasury". Fletcher had intended that a copy of his tract should, upon publication, be sent to every Member of Parliament, but for some reason the work does not appear to have been printed.

The most important work of this period was his writing against the Socinianism of Dr. Priestly. As early as 1772 he had taken up the cudgels against Unitarianism, but had to lay his work aside.¹ Now he proceeded to answer Priestly's attack on the Doctrine of the Trinity which had appeared in his "History of the Corruptions of Christianity". The first essay, which was left unfinished, was entitled, "A Rational Vindication of the Catholic Faith, respecting the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: being the First Part of a Scriptural Vindication of Christ's Divinity, Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestly", was not published until after his death. The second essay, "Socinianism Unscriptural; or, the Prophets and Apostles vindicated from the Charge of holding the Doctrine of Christ's mere Humanity: being the Second Part of a Vindication of His Divinity. Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestly". Benson published both pieces after making some additions.²

Wesley was in Madeley on March 27th, 1784, and revised Fletcher's first essay to Priestly. He considered no other man in England so fit

1 Vide supra, p. 50

2 The first essay was published in 1788 or 1789, the second in 1791. Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 533n

to encounter Priestly.¹ Fletcher's essay was, as the title indicates, an effort to vindicate rationally the doctrine of the Trinity. The continuation of his work, on "Socinianism Unscriptural", was intended to answer Priestly's argument that Christ's Divinity had no proper foundation in the Old Testament, and that the apostles themselves had not considered Christ as more than human.

In 1784 Fletcher made one last journey from his parish. It was to Wesley's Conference at Leeds, which began on July 27th. He took an active part in the activities of the Conference preaching as many as three times and assisting at the sacramental service. His chief contribution, however, came through his efforts to maintain peace between Wesley and a number of his discontented preachers, who had been left out of the 'legal hundred' which he had established in his "Deed of Declaration".² Wesley's procedure had raised a storm of protest which provoked an "Appeal" published and circulated among the ministers. The matter was fought out in the Conference, and Fletcher acted as a mediator between Wesley and the contending parties. A peaceful agreement was reached as the Conference drew to an end; the preachers of the opposition apologized to Mr. Wesley for printing the circular letter without having first appealed to the Conference. Thus was Fletcher instrumental in averting a serious division among the body of Wesley's preachers.

In the early summer of 1785 an outbreak of dangerous fever occurred in Madeley.³ Mrs. Fletcher became ill in July and Fletcher had grave

1 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 488
 2 Tyerman - Life and Times of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 417ff
 3 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 556

fears for her recovery.¹ She soon regained her health, however, but Fletcher, early in August, showed symptoms of severe illness. He insisted upon conducting the morning service on Sunday, August 7th, but collapsed as he finished. He died the following Sunday, August 14th, and was buried in Madeley Churchyard, on August 17th.

¹ Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 329, 333.

SECTION III

THE REVIVAL AS REFLECTED IN FLETCHER - THE MAN AND HIS
LIFE'S WORK

Section III - The Revival as reflected in Fletcher - the Man and his
life's work.

Introduction -

Fletcher was a product of the Evangelical Revival. He came to England as a young man, who, while not definitely seeking adventure, was yet not bound to any precise vocation. He had partially trained himself for the ministry, but had deliberately turned his back upon this career. Settling in England, he gave no evidence of desire for particular accomplishment, but was satisfied to accept the first means of livelihood which came to him; that of tutor in Mr. Hill's family. The revolutionizing factor in his life was the definite religious crisis through which he passed in 1755 after his contact with the Methodists. The experience of that time gave a decisive and permanent direction to the future course of his life. The Fletcher whom we know grew from that experience. To affirm this, however, is not to minimize the importance of his early years. It is, rather, to emphasize the true importance of the change which then took place in his life.

It must be remembered that Fletcher received all his training and education for the ministry before he came to England. He had proven himself a competent scholar during his university career, and the high calibre of his intellect was manifest throughout his whole life. During his attendance at the University of Geneva, he was exposed to the liberal revolution of thought which was going on in the University. He was studying there between 1746 and 1749. Borgeaud writes,

"La révolution libérale, dans le domaine de la philosophie et des sciences, s'étendit au domaine ecclésiastique avec Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1737,) élève de Chouet. Le continuateur de Turretini fut Jacob Vernet (1789,) auteur d'un 'Traité de la Vérité de la religion Chrétienne', ou il montre dans le christianisme la religion de la Providence et de la Révélation, la religion raisonnable propre à assurer le bonheur de la société et des individus. Dans sa doctrine, le centre de la religion n'est plus Dieu, comme pour Calvin; c'est l'homme. L'esprit du siècle a fait abandonner les doctrines vitales de la Réformation et de l'Évangile." 1

Fletcher, the Genevan student, would be a product of the teaching of this eighteenth century Swiss Moderatism. This fact, possible more than any other, explains the reason why he, after some years of preparation, finally turned his back upon the ministry. The reasons he himself gave for declining orders were the sense of his own inability and unworthiness, and the necessity of having to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination. 2 The first reason may be quite genuine, but the second is difficult to understand. Choisy writes,

"Dès 1706, la Compagnie guidée par Turretini élargissait et adoucissait le formulaire de réception des candidats au ministère pastoral et leur demandait simplement de ne rien enseigner contre les canons de Dordrecht et le Consensus. C'était un progrès marqué dans le sens de la liberté et de la sincérité. L'influence de Turretini était contrebalancée dans la Compagnie par l'influence conservatrice de Bénédicte Pictet.....Mais lorsque Pictet eut disparu, la Compagnie, presque unanime, donna le coup de grâce au Consensus, le 1^{er} juin 1725, en supprimant tout formulaire; dorénavant on ne demanda aux candidats au Saint-Ministère d'autre promesse que celle contenue à l'Article VI des Ordonnances ecclésiastiques de 1576: 'Vous protestez de tenir la doctrine des saints Prophètes et Apôtres comme elle est comprise en livres du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament, de laquelle doctrine nous avons un sommaire en notre catechisme". 3

Thus were the Helvetic Consensus, the Helvetic Confession and the canons of Dort put aside, and apart from the Bible, Calvin's catechism remained as a symbol with slight authority. It was retained not as a

1 Choisy, Eugène - Esquisse de L'Histoire Religieuse de Genève, pp. 71-2

2 Vide supra p. 20

3 Choisy, Eugène - op.cit. pp.46-7. See also Good, History of the Swiss Reformed Church since the Reformation, pp.177-8

legal oath of subscription, but only for the foundation of doctrine. In 1731. Osterwald's catechism had supplanted Calvin's even though the latter was not out of use. A motion to reject it had failed in 1742. Osterwald's catechism differed from Calvin's mainly in omitting original sin and predestination.¹

In view of the facts it is difficult to account for the necessity Fletcher felt to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination. The pressure of the liberal rationalism, which was thriving in the University of Geneva at the time, accounts for any revulsion he might have felt against the doctrine of predestination, but does not explain why he felt the need of subscribing to it. The truth probably is that his early religious zeal vaporized before the liberalizing influence of Moderatism and he was ready to seize upon any obstacle which seemed to offer a valid excuse for not entering the ministry. In his veins ran the blood of military ancestors and there is no doubt as to the powerful attraction the prospect of military service exerted over him. If he had scruples over doctrine, over his own unworthiness, and perhaps his own unwillingness to maintain his family position by accepting orders merely as a means to such an end, he saw in alien service an avenue of escape. This would provide him with an honest source of income and an untroubled mind in the pursuit of it.

That this is a true picture of the causes which induced him to leave the ministry is further proven from his own words,

"The time was come when I was to chuse a way of life. My friends would by all means have me be an officer; and tho' I had often vow'd to the Lord that if He would accept of me I should rejoice to be the least of His ministers, I yielded to their importunities, as wanting both gifts and grace to carry me thro' the dutys of a clergyman, which I saw not as they were, but as they ought to have been practis'd; and setting out for Germany I spent a year there, to learn Highdutch and fortification."²

1 Good. op. cit. p. 279

2 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 65

Several incidents taken from his boyhood days however reveal a rather extraordinary degree of youthful piety. The following record belongs to the early age of seven.

"The sin by which it pleased God to begin the work of conviction was fighting in a great rage one of my brothers. I was no sooner put to bed after it in the evening, and left alone, but I began to feel the wrath of God abiding on me; the pangs of hell compassed me round about, and I question whether I should not have dropt into hell under that burden that very night, if the Lord had not come to my relief. He came and heaven came with Him. My proud heart was melted, and I began to love and weep much, because much was forgiven me." 1

It may have been this same occasion he referred to when he wrote Wesley in 1756.

"Since the first time I began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my soul, which was, I think, at seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to him, and to the service of his church, if ever I was fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world, and that which was in my heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters which grace had written upon it." 2

An incident recorded of his life at fourteen reveals him as over strict and zealous in religious ardour. While staying with his sister in Geneva, Madame de Bottens, a lady and her three sons visited the house. The boys quarrelled and their mother uttered a hasty imprecation in reproach. Fletcher turned to admonish the mother for her unguarded utterance. He urged her to bring up her children in the fear of God, setting them a pious example. 3

At about sixteen years of age, soon after he entered the University of Geneva, his spiritual life received enrichment through friendships he formed.

"About that time I was also convinced with the necessity of having a Christian friend, and after many useless trials to find one, I at last met with three students, who formed with me a religious-society. We met as often as we could to confess one another our sins, to exhort, read, and pray." 4

1 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 65

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 147

3 Gilpin - Portrait of St. Paul, Vol. I, pp. 10-11

4 Fletcher - op cit.

One of his companions, however, became steeped in Deism and was successful in influencing the other two. Fletcher found himself alone again. He writes that he suffered a "relapse into sin".¹

"Je faisais de longues prières matin et soir, et souvent pendant la journée. Je consacrais à la lecture des prophéties et de quelques livres de dévotion, le temps que je pouvais dérober à mes études."²

The fire of his exertions cooled within the next few years sufficiently to allow him to forego holy orders and turn to military studies. His decision was not accompanied by any evident spiritual crisis and there was no severe reaction against religion. When he came to England he was too deeply marked by the indelible impressions of his earlier striving for holiness ever to sink into an attitude of apathetic indifference to his soul's welfare or to abandon his search for reality. He had not, however, found peace, either in his military studies or his search for adventure, and his heart was restless still.

When Fletcher arrived in England he was not uninfluenced by the 'rationalist' movement with which he had come in contact in Geneva. At one time he had even associated himself with Deism.³ This was during his student days at the university, and may have been at the time he had joined in the group with his three friends. While later in life he was emphatically antagonistic to anything which savoured of Deism, he unconsciously accepted one of its principal, underlying contentions, i.e., the recognition of the supremacy of reason in matters of religion. The rationalist movement was not an anti-Christian movement outside of the Church making war on religion, but was rather a habit of thought ruling all minds, under the conditions of which all alike sought to make good the opinions they professed to hold. Fletcher reflected

1 Fletcher - op. cit.

2 "Vie de M. de la Fléchère", p. 52

3 Ibid. p. 54

this influence in many ways. He put great merit in the sheer weight of argument and at times he drilled a supposed objector with an overwhelming array of contentions. He came to reverence reason with something of the same ardour as many of his contemporaries. He insisted, however, upon devotion being paid to 'right reason', which he believed was only possessed by the regenerate.¹ Finally Fletcher played an important part in starting the 'Evangelical' school, which had its very origin in an endeavour to kindle religious feeling and in a reaction against the dominant rationalism, on a course which involved the same defensive technique as that developed by the school of faith it opposed. It was impossible for the Revival leaders to escape this if they were to meet the challenge of the age, but in committing themselves to this task, they were often forced to argue for the existence of their faith on the very assumptions from which they had revolted. It is obvious during the controversy that Fletcher had an extravagant faith in the conclusiveness of 'rational' argument; to 'out argue' his opponent was to gain victory. So his early contacts with the rationalist movement bore strange fruit.

The two most outstanding facts, then, of the period preceding Fletcher's residence in England, are the evidence of a decided youthful zeal for religion, and his contacts with the 'la révolution libérale'.

His spiritual condition during his first few years in England is best described in his own words;

"Je redevins chrétien pour le nom et la forme, c'est-à-dire, que je commençai à fréquenter assidûment les églises, et que je communiais régulièrement; je priais souvent au nom de Jésus-Christ, et il y avait même dans mon coeur quelques étincelles de véritable amour pour Dieu,

1 Infra p.155

et quelques racines de vraie foi; mais les circonstances dans lesquelles je me trouvais par rapport au monde, et le soin que je me croyais obligé de prendre de ma fortune, les empêchèrent de se fortifier. Cependant je sentais quelque chose dans mon cœur qui me disait souvent que je ne remplissais pas la moitié des devoirs que l'Évangile prescrit aux chrétiens; mais à force de me dire que je me trompais, je me l'étais presque persuadé, et je croyais être assez sûr de mon salut. Si l'on m'eut demandé quels étaient les fondements de cette assurance, j'aurais répondu; que je n'étais pas sans piété, que bien loin de faire tort à personne, j'aurais voulu faire du bien à tout le monde, que je résistais à mes passions, et que je me privais de bien des plaisirs auxquels je me serais livré sans la crainte des jugements de Dieu; qu'en surplus, si je n'étais pas aussi pieux que bien d'autres, c'est que cela n'était pas nécessaire, que le ciel pouvait se gagner à meilleur marché, vu que Jésus-Christ avait élargi le chemin, et que si j'étais damné, il faudrait que la moitié des chrétiens, le fussent avec moi, ce que je n'avais garde de croire, attendu que Dieu est miséricordieux." 1

He was not tranquil long, for several things happened which gave him cause for concern over his spiritual welfare. He had a vivid dream which portrayed the final judgement. He saw himself among those who were cast into the pit to be burned because God had found in him no living faith or seal of His redemption. This dream so perturbed him he was unable to apply himself to his work for several days. There followed a rebuke from one of the servants in the household. Fletcher was employed in copying music on Sunday and the servant admonished him for his thoughtlessness. He so respected the spiritual gifts of the man himself that the rebuke touched him deeply. He was more apprehensive over his condition than ever.

He was in this state of mind when he made his first contact with the Methodists.² As a result of that chance meeting he joined Mr. Edward's class in London. There is no doubt that he gained there an understanding of the peculiar difficulty of his own situation. Fletcher's sensitive soul had been touched with the fact that others possessed a degree of spiritual life which he did not. The meeting

1 Vie de M. de la Fléchère, pp. 55-56

2 Vide supra p. 22 f.

with his first Methodist convinced him of this fact. His Methodist class associates taught him the reason for his spiritual poverty. He had not fully understood the fallen condition of man and the necessity of rebirth. Later, when instructing his brother in the way of salvation he revealed what had been made real to himself.

"Open your heart, and there you will discover the source of that painful inquietude, to which, by your own confession, you have long been a prey. Examine its secret recesses, and you will discover there sufficient proofs of the following truths: - 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;' 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;' 'The thoughts of a man's heart are only evil, and that continually;' 'The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God.' On the discovery of these, and other important truths, you will be convinced that man is an apostate being, composed of a sensual, rebellious body, and a soul immersed in pride, self-love and ignorance, nay more, you will perceive it a physical impossibility, that man should ever become truly happy, till he is cast, as it were, into a new mould, and created a second time." 1

The reason for his deficiency became more apparent as he listened to Wesley preach. Fletcher wrote to him later,

"I soon could trace all my experience in your preachings: only one thing I could not account for; you preach'd forgiveness of sin and power over sin as being given at the same time. This brought me to examine the point..... I was convinc'd of unbelief in God the Son". 2

This conviction was made more real after hearing a sermon preached by a clergyman by the name of Green. He was then convinced that he did not understand the nature of saving faith. He reflected,

"Is it possible that I, who have always been accounted so religious, who have made matters of divinity my study, and received the premium of piety (so called) from the university, for my writings on divine subjects, - is it possible, that I yet so ignorant as not to know what faith is?" 3

So burdened with the consciousness of his ignorance concerning the Christian life he set himself definitely to seek this fuller experience.

1 Gilpin - op. cit. Vol. I, p. 27

2 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 96

3 Fletcher, Mrs. - Letter to Mons. H. L. Fléchère, p. 4

Mrs. Fletcher transcribes her material from Fletcher's diary.

The days of his striving are characterized by intense inward conflict, strain, and mental discord. The more he prayed and read the scriptures the farther the goal receded. He drew up a solemn covenant, signed in his own blood, wherein he dedicated himself to the Lord with complete consecration. This covenant was dated August 24th, 1754.¹ It failed, however, to bring the enrichment in fellowship with God which he sought.

At this time Fletcher came to have a very definite conviction of sin, which is possibly best expressed as a sense of sin since it did not refer to the acknowledgement of specific acts or negligences. This sense of sin sprang from the assurance of his lost condition, and the knowledge that he was living apart from intimate fellowship with God.

It is also evident that one of the dominating emotions of this struggle was fear. The nature of his fear, however, must be distinguished from the elemental fear of suffering, or fear of death. He feared eternity in hell, but he did not fear hell as a place of torment for if hell should become his portion he believed it meant eternal separation from God. He consoled himself,

"If I go to hell, said I, I will still love God there; and since I cannot be an instance of his mercy in heaven, I will be an instance of his justice among the devils; and if I put forth his glory one way or the other I am content." 2

Fletcher, however, anticipated God's intervention. Nothing is more obvious from the records of the days preceding his experience than the way he waited and looked for God to manifest Himself. He wrote:

1 Macdonald: - Fletcher of Madeley, p. 37

2 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit. p. 6

"He will surely let me know before I die that he hath died for me and will break asunder these chains wherewith I am bound..... But then, I thought, this may only be in my dying hour - and perhaps that is a long while to wait..... But I answered my heart thus: my Saviour was above thirty-three years working out my salvation; let me wait for Him as long, and then I may talk of impatience. Does God owe me anything? Is He bound to time and place? Do I deserve anything at His hands but damnation? I seldom went to private prayers, but this thought came to my mind, 'this is perhaps the happy hour when thou shalt prevail with God'; but still I was disappointed". 1

On Jan. 21st, 1755 he had some hope that God would soon finish in him the work He had begun. Fletcher had come to realize fully that it was only through divine intervention that the change he sought could come, and he was patiently waiting and watching for signs. In reading Wesley's Journal he found some relief in Wesley's assertion that man should not build on what he feels; but that he should go to Christ with all his sins and hardness of heart. He was beginning to recognize that, as Oman has written,

"the faith which does not rely wholly upon God, but partly on exciting, or disciplining its soul, lives in valetudinarian anxiety about its spiritual health. To be perpetually feeling our own pulse is the surest way to rob ourselves of the self-forgetting vigour in which health is displayed." 2

However, the thoroughness of Fletcher's self-examination and his efforts at self-discipline brought him to a condition of abnormal sensitivity. He was receptive to the least indication of warnings, and was prepared to interpret the most minute detail in experience as a direct manifestation of God. To stress the place of the anticipatory element in his experience is not to minimize the reality of that experience. This element of unconscious selection may well be recognized as active, and as a determinative factor. But recognition of this fact only further substantiates the claim for the important place Methodism played in conditioning his conversion and consequently his whole life.

1 Fletcher, Mrs. op.cit. pp. 6-7

2 Oman, John - Grace and Personality, p. 12

Fletcher had learned from the Methodists that the knowledge of saving faith was dependent upon God's grace which, once mediated, meant a definite spiritual rebirth. While he waited and strove to have this grace become active, he read in Wesley's Journal accounts of some of the experiences of those influenced by Methodism. He found his case agreed with theirs and with the sermon he had heard on justifying faith.¹ The change he looked for was then definitely envisaged. Every vital process, however, is explained by the end and not by the beginning or by the process itself. And Fletcher's conversion, as seen by itself, its results and ultimate consequences, bears the richest evidence of the reality of divine grace.

It was as he decided to commit the issue entirely to God that he entered into the fuller experience.

"I had proposed to endeavour to meet the Lord the following Sunday at His table, I therefore returned to my room, and looked out a sacramental hymn. I learned it by heart, and prayed it over many times, and then went to bed, commending myself to God with rather more hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked while I slept. I thought I committed that night in my sleep grievous and abominable sins. I awaked amazed and confounded, and rising with a detestation of the corruption of my senses and imagination, I fell upon my knees, and prayed with more faith and less wanderings than usual, and afterwards set about my business with uncommon cheerfulness. It was not long before I was tempted to fall into my besetting sin, but I found myself a new creature. My soul was not even ruffled. Having withstood two or three temptations, and feeling peace in my soul through the whole of them, I began to think it was the Lord's doing. Afterwards it was suggested to me that it was great presumption for such a sinner to hope for such a mercy. However I prayed I might not be permitted to fall into a delusion; but the more I prayed, the more I saw it was real; for though sin stirred all day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord, although I was several times near falling.

In the evening I read some of the experiences of God's children and found my case agreed with theirs, and suited the sermon I had heard on justifying Faith, so that my hope increased. I fell down to prayer, entreating the Lord to do to his servant according to his mercy, and to take all the glory to himself. I prayed earnestly and with a humble assurance, though without great motions of joy, and was persuaded, that

1 Fletcher, Mrs. - op. cit. p. 11

in the name of the Lord I should have deliverance over sin and peace with God, not doubting that joy and a full assurance of faith should be imparted to me in God's time. I continued calling upon the Lord for perseverance, and an increase of faith; for still I felt some fear lest this should be all delusion: and having continued my supplication till near one in the morning, I then opened my pocket Bible, and fell on these words, Psalm iv. 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. He will not suffer the righteous to be moved.' Filled with joy, I fell again upon my knees to beg of God that I might cast my burden upon Him. I took up my Bible again, and fell on these words, Deut. xxxi 'I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed'. My hope was now greatly increased, and I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin, hell, and all manner of affliction.

With this beautiful promise I shut my Bible, as though I was never to open it again, being perfectly satisfied. As I shut it I cast my eye on that word, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it'. So having asked perseverance and grace to serve God till death, I went cheerfully to take my rest." 1

It is not apparent that Fletcher entered immediately into any excess of joy. The predominant note of this new experience was conquest.

"Sin was beneath his feet while he could triumph in the Lord." 2

This triumph was made possible through the gradual and certain integrating and harmonizing of the complete self in all its purposes and activities.

Two other incidents belong to the record of his experience. Mrs. Fletcher records the first:

"I subjoin what I have heard him speak concerning this time. He still pleaded with the Lord to take a fuller possession of his heart; and to receive a fuller manifestation of his love was what he sought with unwearied assiduity, till one day, as he was in earnest prayer, lying prostrate on his face before the Lord, he saw with the eye of faith, our Saviour as bleeding on the cross, and at the same time these words were spoken with power to his heart: -

'Seiz'd by the rage of sinful men,
I see Christ bound and bruis'd and slain;
'Tis done, the Martyr dies!
His life to ransom ours is given,
And lo! the fiercest fire of heaven
Consumes the sacrifice,

1 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit. pp. 11-12

2 Ibid. p. 13

He suffers both from men and God;
 He bears the universal load
 Of guilt and misery!
 He suffers to reverse our doom,
 And lo! my Lord is here become
 The bread of life to me ' " 1

This experience bears a startling similarity to an event recorded in Wesley's Journal from a conversion experience.

"While one read the Passion Hymn, on a sudden I saw our Saviour on the cross, as plain as if it had been with my bodily eyes." 2

It is possible this account was one, among others, of those Fletcher had been reading. The words of the hymn which came to him were undoubtedly those of the sacramental hymn he had memorized which had returned to him with vividness and power.

The other incident he referred to many years later while at Stoke Newington.

"In the beginning of my spiritual course, I heard the voice of God in an articulate, but inexpressibly awful sound, go through my soul in those words, 'If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself'.I was favoured, like Moses, with a supernatural discovery of the glory of God, in an ineffable converse with Him, face to face; so that whether I was then in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell." 3

There are also parallel examples of similiar experiences in Wesley's Journal.⁴ There is thus no doubt of the part suggestion played in shaping the course of Fletcher's various experiences. Pratt has written,

"Make the individual want to believe with all his heart, make him feel that he ought to believe, and also that others around him are believing, and he will believe." 5

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- 1 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit. p. 12
 2 Wesley - Journal, Vol. III, p. 374
 3 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 292
 4 Wesley - Journal, Vol. III, p. 508
 5 Pratt - The Religious Consciousness, p. 190

Fletcher had come to feel, after reading the experiences of others, that audible sounds and sensory revelations were necessary accompaniments of divine manifestation. Thus he strove to experience the same himself and so become certain of the reality of his own experience.

To attribute such importance to suggestion in shaping the course of Fletcher's experience is not to admit that everything that followed arose from sub-conscious thoughts or desires. It is quite open to argument that these very suggestions of the mind were due to God; the result of the working of the divine spirit on the human spirit. To attempt to explain the fact of his conversion on the grounds of the power of suggestion apart from divine interposition is impossible. It does not even adequately describe the experience.

If Fletcher's conversion experience were classified, as psychologists prefer, it would fall under the heading of intuitive or mystical experience. Dimond writes,

"The distinctive mark of this class is the transition from an ordinary religious life to various stages of religious experience which can be described as mystical." 1

Thouless defines a mystic as,

"a person to whom the emotional religious experiences which occur at times to all religious persons have become stronger and more permanent. He has other experiences differing in many of their qualities from those of an ordinary religious person. The mystic is also much more liable to have experiences which would be considered pathological by the doctor - visions, voices, trances, etc." 2

He also asserts that a mystical conversion, which is so often said to be the introversion of the self, that is, the turning inward of the self, is not adequately accounted for by such an explanation. He suggests that it would be better to call it 'deoversion', that is the turning not inward but outward towards God. 3

1 Dimond - "The Psychology of the Methodist Revival". p. 180

2 Thouless - "An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion". p. 205

3 Ibid. p. 237

Fletcher's experience is not lacking in definite intellectual content. On the contrary the intellectual element is dominant. This is most apparent from the survey of his theological position. In no place is his doctrine dissociated from his experience, but at every stage of his teaching there is evidence of its experimental basis. As he passed into a deeper experience of God he passed into a fuller knowledge of His being, His plan and purpose of salvation and of His infinite and eternal love. To Fletcher, his experience meant the awakening of intellectual power and the use of faculties of understanding and will he had never known before. Fletcher emerged from the conflict which had held him so long as a man who had come into a rich and deepening experience of the intimate and gracious fellowship of God mediated to him by faith in Jesus Christ. It is this Fletcher, the 'new creation', who will be considered as the man, the pastor and the evangelist.

Chapter I

The unification of the conflicting elements within Fletcher's soul was by no means complete at the time of his conversion. His personality, however, had reached a higher level and a fuller stage of being and power. He was not only gaining union within himself, but he had gained a profound conviction of union with God. His chief concern was to make the union with God more complete. To understand the degree in which Fletcher achieved this, and the means he used to obtain it, is to comprehend the spiritual magnitude of the man. This is best done by a careful study of the years following his conversion experience.

When struggle had given way to a more peaceful state in which he was able to co-operate willingly with God's purpose for himself and overcome contradictions which formerly distressed him, harmony was restored. He was much among the Methodists in these early years; spending his time with them while in London, corresponding with them while at Tern Hall. He formed a rich and intimate friendship with Charles Wesley, to whom he poured out his heart, and who shared with him the depths of a sympathetic soul. Of the two Wesleys, he was much more attracted to Charles than to John. Charles' more delicate and sensitive nature was more akin to Fletcher's. He wrote to Charles in 1770.

"Les eaux de l'Océan et de la Méditerranée n'ont pas éteint mon étincelle d'amour fraternel pour vous." 1

There was always a reserve manifest in the acquaintance of John Fletcher and John Wesley. Each had the deepest regard and respect for the other, but there never was the same warmth of friendship that existed between

1 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 33

Fletcher and Charles Wesley. It was because of this sympathetic affinity that Charles was able to exercise a considerable influence over him. Fletcher found great comfort and strength through the friendship.

In three years he was pressing 'towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus', which mark he defined as "a heart emptied of pride and 'filled with the fullness of God' ". 1 He had recognized from his conversion experience that the grace of God became operative in his life in proportion to his denial and surrender of self. He was determined to know the fulness of that grace, a determination which never abated throughout his life, but which took its most rigorous form in these early years.

He gave himself to ascetic practices, believing that through the mortification of the flesh he might more completely depose self. He wrote in his book of devotions,

"Porcina qui quaerit Divina solamina perdit.
Ne dapium ventrisque tui mala gaudia quaeras;
Mens tibi erit haud puro dubis nequet saturato ventre vigere.
Cibus enim nimius Divinae particulam aurae
Certo affigit humi coeli que afflamine privat" 2

He took food, which consisted of bread and cheese or fruit, but three times a day. He ate no meat and partook of what he had while on his knees. He wrote among his rules,

"3 edere die. quod ubi primum violaverim, pauperibus b. asses dandi et venia per horam petenda erit, nullo fulcro utens." 3

"Mortify thy five senses till crucified with Christ". 4

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 151
2 Fletcher, MSS. Commonplace Book
3 Ibid.
4. Ibid.

While in time he relaxed the severity of these habits, a constant strain of asceticism is evident through the course of his whole life. He eventually came to the time after his serious illness when he realized the folly of his austerity. But even though experience taught him to moderate the voluntary severities he laid upon himself, he remained, in feeling and opinion, the ascetic. At no time did he seek or desire worldly comforts but lived on the minimum for existence.

He avoided the thought of marriage with Miss Bosanquet to whom he was greatly attracted for he had determined to remain single. His determination was based on the thought that celibacy was the ideal state for a minister of the gospel. This he later expressed in "The Portrait of St Paul".

"A minister of the gospel who is able to live in a state of celibacy 'for the kingdom of heaven's sake', that he may have no other care except that of preaching the gospel and attending upon the members of Christ's mystical body, such a one is undoubtedly called to continue in a single state." 1

He wrote Charles Wesley in June 1764:

"Je suis marié à mon sauveur ne peux-je pas être heureux parfaitement heureux en l'aimant uniquement et sans reserve?" 2

He also sought to exercise control over his emotional reactions, guarding against any excessive enthusiasm.

"Do not surrender thyself to any joy..... Be a true son of affliction." 3

He refused to give himself to pleasure.

"Sperne voluptatem, dirum pone linquit acumen" 4

1 Works, Vol. V, p. 318
 2 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 102
 3 Fletcher - MSS Commonplace Book
 4 Ibid.

To bring every detail of thought, word, and deed under discipline and control was the ideal to which he strove.

"Renounce thyself in all that can hinder thy union with God. Desire nought but His love". 1

Fletcher felt that the chief obstruction which kept him from realizing this end was simply love of self. He wrote,

"Live in continual abstraction, nakedness, forsaking all things created and chiefly self: let thy mind be fixed on God that cold and heat, times and persons and places, sweet or bitter be hardly distinguished by thee." 2

"Appage te mea mens absisque philautia longè,
Filius ipse Dei sua nunquam vota secutus
Ut mea vota Deo mactarem, se duce, laetus
Sponte sau sommo paruit patri inter olivas" 3

"Heureux l'homme sans volonté,
Et qui, vide le lui même,
Est tout plein du vrai Dieu qu'il aime" 4

How successfully he combated that love of self is manifest in his consummate humility. No other single characteristic is so marked in the man. In his contacts and dealings with others he sought at all times to abase himself. Many incidents might be taken to illustrate this; two will suffice.

During one of his early visits to London, he decided to call upon the Reverend John Berridge. He introduced himself as a new convert who had taken the liberty to wait upon him for guidance and advice. Mr. Berridge recognized from his accent and manners that he was a foreigner and asked him what country he was from.

1 Fletcher - MSS Commonplace Book
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

"A Swiss from the canton of Berne", Fletcher replied.

"From Berne", said Mr. Berridge, "then, probably, you can give me some account of a young countryman of yours, one John Fletcher, who has lately preached a few times for the Mr. Wesleys, and of whose talents, learning and piety, they both speak in terms of high eulogy. Do you know him?"

"Yes, Sir, I know him intimately; and, did those gentleman know his as well, they would not speak of him in such terms, for which he is more obliged to their partial friendship, than to his own merits."

"You surprise me," said Berridge, "in speaking so coldly of a countryman, in whose praise they are so warm."

"I have best reason" Fletcher replied, "for so speaking of him as I do, - I am John Fletcher."

"If you are John Fletcher" said Berridge, "You must do me the favour to take my pulpit to-morrow; and when we are better acquainted, without implicitly receiving your statement, or that of your friends, I shall be able to judge for myself." 1

Many years later, in 1784, while in attendance at Wesley's Conference at Leeds, Fletcher rose to withdraw from the gathering, when it came time for the yearly examination of preachers to see if there were any objections or charges raised against them. Fletcher's name was naturally not on the list, and when recalled and asked the reason for retiring, he said,

"Because it is improper, and painful to my feelings, for me to hear the minute failings of my brethren canvassed, unless my own character be submitted to the same scrutiny." 2

This was agreed to, and he remained.

From his letters the depths of his self-abasement is even more evident. In places it seems to be nothing short of despal of self. He wrote to Charles Wesley:

"I have lately seen so much weakness in my heart, both as a minister and a Christian, that I know not which is most to be pitied,

1 Cox - Life of Fletcher, pp. 24-5

2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 546

the man, the believer, or the preacher. Could I, at last, be truly humbled, and continue so always, I should esteem myself happy in making this discovery. I preach merely to keep the chapel open, until God shall send a workman after his own heart. 'Nos numeri sumus;' that is almost all I can say of myself." 1

"Pray for me, and support my weakness as much as you can. I am here, 'umbra pro corpore', I preach as your substitute; come and fill worthily an office of which I am unworthy." 2

"I was ashamed of myself, and I could say with a degree of feeling which I cannot describe 'Nil ago, nil habeo, sum nil; in pulvere serpo'. I could then say, what Gregory Lopez, was enabled to say at all times, 'There is no man of whom I have not a better opinion than of myself'. I could have placed myself under the feet of the most atrocious sinner, and have acknowledged him for a saint, in comparison of myself." 3

"...who can say as well as me, 'Totus displiceo mihi' " 4

It is natural, upon first impulse, to react unfavourably to such expressions of self-depreciation. Nothing can be so insipid as superficial pretensions of humility. However, such suspicions are entirely without foundation in Fletcher's case. His self-abnegation sprang from his genuine desire to bring himself into a fuller union with God. There may, however, be some justification for Wesley's criticism.

Wesley wrote,

"Perhaps it might appear from some passages of his life, that in this he leaned to an extreme; for genuine humility does not require that any man should desire to be despised. Nay, we are to avoid it, so far as we possibly can, consistently with a good conscience; for that direction, - 'Let no man despise thee,' concerns every man as well as Timothy." 5

It is as fair to say that Wesley did not know the same degree of self-denial as Fletcher. Fletcher was not only willing to be despised

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 158

2 Ibid. p. 159

3. Ibid. p. 162

4. Ibid. p. 173

5 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 327

of men for his Lord's sake, ^{but} he knew fully what Paul's words meant,

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." 1

Undeniably his efforts for the subjugation of self were often consciously forced, but this in no way denies the reality of his striving for union with God. He found from his own experience that he simply must submerge self if that union were to be possible for him.

When Fletcher did gain consciousness of union with God in Christ it did not spring from his ascetic practices, though they undoubtedly played a part in bringing his life under spiritual discipline. Nor is it possible to say that even his efforts at self-abasement, as long as they remained purposeful or forced, achieved the end he desired. His deeper union with God came through an almost mystical contemplation which he called 'recollection'. It was none other than the means by which man humbly submits himself to God, and in that act passes into a deeper consciousness of union with Him, and the assurance of His presence.

In writing to his friend Miss Hatton, he describes what he means by 'recollection'.

"You ask me some directions to get a mortified spirit. In order to get it, get recollection.

Recollection is a dwelling within ourselves; a being abstracted from the creature, and turned towards God.

Recollection is both outward and inward. Outward recollection consists in silence from all idle and superfluous words; and in solitude, or in wise disentanglement from the world, keeping to our own business, observing and following the order of God for ourselves, and shutting the ear against all curious and unprofitable matters. Inward recollection consists in shutting the door of the senses in a deep attention to the presence of God, and in continual care of

1 Galatians 2:20

entertaining holy thoughts, for fear of spiritual idleness.

Through the power of the Spirit, let this recollection be steady even in the midst of hurrying business; let it be calm and peaceable; and let it be lasting. 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation'.

To maintain this recollection, beware of engaging too deeply, and beyond what is necessary, in outward things; beware of suffering your affections to be entangled by worldly desire, your imagination to amuse itself with unprofitable objects, and indulging yourself in the commission of what are called 'small faults'.

For want of continuing in a recollected frame all the day, our times of prayer are frequently dry and useless, imagination prevails, and the heart wanders: whereas we pass easily from recollection to delightful prayer. Without this spirit, there can be no useful self-denial, nor can we know ourselves: but where it dwells, it makes the soul all eye, all ear; traces and discovers sin, repels its first assaults, or crushes it in its earliest risings.

In recollection, let your mind act according to the drawings of grace, and it will probably lead you either to contemplate Jesus as crucified, and interceding for you, etc. or to watch your senses, and suppress your passions, to keep before God in respectful silence of heart, and to watch and follow the motions of grace, and feed on the promises.

But take care here, to be more taken up with the thoughts of God than of yourself; and consider how hardly recollection is sometimes obtained, and how easily it is lost. Use no forced labour to raise a particular frame, nor tire, fret, and grow impatient, if you have no comfort; but meekly acquiesce and confess yourself unworthy of it; lie prostrate in humble submission before God, and patiently wait for the smiles of Jesus.

May the following notices stir you up in the pursuit of recollection: - 1 We must forsake all, and die to all, first by recollection. 2 Without it God's voice cannot be heard in the soul. 3 It is the altar on which we must offer up our Isaacs. 4 It is, instrumentally, a ladder (if I may be allowed the expression) to descend into God. 5 By it the soul gets to its centre, out of which it cannot rest. 6 Man's soul is the temple of God; recollection the holiest of holies. 7 As the wicked by recollection find hell in their hearts, so faithful souls find heaven. 8 Without recollection, all means of grace are useless, or make but a light and transitory impression." 1

While 'recollection' is the means Fletcher suggests to get a mortified 'spirit', it is evident that it is through the mortification of the 'spirit', which he seems to use as suggesting will, that he believes God's presence becomes more real, and union with Him more

1 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 206-07

complete. His most apt analogy is found perhaps in the sixth motive which he gives above. "Man's soul is the temple of God; recollection the holiest of holies". There is undeniably present here grounds for asserting a marked degree of mystical content in what he means by 'recollection'; "a being abstracted from the creature and turned towards God". He says too that it is the ladder by which man descends "into God", and the means by which the "soul gets to its centre, out of which it cannot rest". He writes in his *Commonplace Book*,

"Seek to pass into God, to be reunited with God, to lose thyself in God as a drop in the ocean". 1

This is the language of the mystics. This is not a mysticism, however, which vaporizes into ecstasy and bliss over union with an unseen presence nor is it an over-emphasis on feeling and the consequent supersession of reason. It belongs to that saner mysticism of which Mr. Hughes speaks,

"Mysticism is not another kind of religious experience, nor does it constitute a break in the ordinary consciousness of the religious man. It is rather that consciousness becoming more intense and commanding, and as such it is in continuity with the ordinary experience, albeit at a higher level." 2

Fletcher is careful to make clear that 'recollection' is not a means of promoting ecstatic sensations. "Inward recollection consists in shutting the door of the senses in a deep attention to the presence of God" and he suggests that the mind should be active as it is guided by grace. This act of 'recollection' was to Fletcher a deliberate and intelligent means of entering into fellowship with God. The act of

1 Fletcher - MSS Commonplace Book

2 Hughes, T. H. - The New Psychology and Religious Experience, p. 287

communion involves the purposeful turning away from self to the contemplation of the divine, and in that contemplation self becomes merged with God; the soul goes to its centre.

That Fletcher constantly practised 'recollection' is beyond doubt. It is evident that he had found in this mystic contemplation a means of richer communion with God, and leaving the world and self behind, he learned to enter into the 'holiest of holies' and be with God. This explains his deep humility; he so often became nothing in the sight of God that consequently he was nothing, nor desired to be anything, before man. He writes,

"Remember always the presence of God.
Rejoice always in the will of God.
Direct all to the glory of God.
Return inwardly to thy heart,
Abstract thyself from all things,
Mind God alone." 1

Prayer and meditation on the Word came to have a more prominent place in his life following his conversion. He wrote to Charles Wesley from Tern Hall 1759,

"Being arrived here I began to spend my time as I had determined, one part in prayer and the other in meditation on the holy scriptures." 2

Fletcher felt that it was because of his constant praying God had seen fit to intervene and bring him into the knowledge of His saving grace. His experience taught him the necessity of prayer for salvation, and he impressed this fact upon a friend:

"I trust the unction from above teaches you all things needful to salvation, and especially the necessity of continuing constant in prayer, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." 3

1 Fletcher - MSS Commonplace Book
2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 160
3 Ibid. pp. 150-1

Fletcher had always prayed, but now prayer took on a new and deeper significance. Before, in childlike fashion, he had asked for gifts or blessings. Now his prayers sprang from a longing and a passion for a deeper fellowship with God. He had come into the knowledge of God's love, he had surrendered self and will to that love, and prayer became the means through which he was able to throw himself upon God and seek His mercy. The extent of Fletcher's prayer life is indicative of the measure of his dependence upon God. Through prayer he laid self on the altar and offered himself to God to use as He would. Thus he moved in a realm of prayer even as he lived. "Do I meet you praying?", was one of his favourite greetings.¹

At first he sat up two whole nights a week for reading, prayer and meditation,² but as in time the edge of his ascetic zeal became dulled, he relinquished these nocturnal sessions. He himself relates how, on one occasion, while wandering in a wood in the evening, he began to pray;

"I then began to pour out my soul in prayer: when such a feeling sense of the justice of God fell upon me, and such a sense of his displeasure at sin, as absorbed all my powers, and filled my soul with the agony of prayer for poor, lost sinners. I continued therein till the dawn of day; and I considered this designed of God to impress upon me more deeply the meaning of those solemn words, 'Therefore, knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.'"³

As adjustment went on in his life, Fletcher found more normal occasions for prayer, and by habitual participation laid a permanent foundation for a continuous communion with God. Before he commenced any task he joined with friend or stranger in prayer. He would not

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 277

2 Fletcher, Mrs. - op cit. p 13

3 Welsey - Works, Vol. XI, pp. 292-3

venture alone with any undertaking. When a visitor came to the vicarage Fletcher's greeting almost always included an invitation to go at once with him to his study for prayer. An interesting incident is the visit of the Reverend Thomas Reader, who was President of a Nonconformist College. Reader was very annoyed by one of Fletcher's books and undertook the long journey from Northampton to Madeley in order to rebuke the author in person. However, Fletcher's kindly welcome and invitation to prayer restrained Reader from launching into his tirade against Fletcher at the beginning. He remained three days at Madeley but was unable in that time to muster enough courage to intimate the object of his visit. He later said that he had never enjoyed three days of more 'spiritual and profitable intercourse in all his life'.¹ As Fletcher wrote his friends he, at intervals, unconsciously broke forth into prayer. To Charles Wesley he wrote,

"I need wisdom, mildness, and courage; and no man has less of them than I. O Jesus, my Saviour, draw me strongly to Him who giveth wisdom to all who ask it, and upbraideth them not!"²

Another time Fletcher was telling him of the fruitlessness of his work. He burst forth,

"Lord Jesus, come thyself and furnish me with a divine commission!"³

As Fletcher became involved in controversy he begrudged the time which he had to spend in writing. His labours encroached upon the intervals he wanted for prayer.⁴ He would have gladly spent all his time in prayer if it were not, as he writes,

"that a man should have some exterior occupation".⁵

1 Tyerman - op.cit. pp. 320-321. Quoted from "Methodism in North Devon"

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 178

3 Ibid. p. 182

4. Ibid. p. 265

5 Ibid. p. 262

There remains preserved in Madeley a portion of the wall of his study which was stained with his breathings from the long periods in which he poured out his soul to God. The hours that he had free from his labours found him alone on his knees.

If the extent of Fletcher's prayer life be indicative of the measure of his dependence upon God, its reality is indicative of the degree to which he was able to tap the sources of a strength greater than his own. Through prayer, life took on a new dimension for Fletcher. He was partaking of power and strength which God was making real for him. No more substantial evidence of this fact can be obtained than from the accounts of Fletcher in prayer. Those who heard and witnessed him knew how real was his intercourse with God.

Here is a description provided by the author of the "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon". Fletcher was praying during one of the services in the drawing-room of the Countess.

"Mr. Fletcher concluded with a prayer, every syllable of which appeared to be uttered under the immediate teaching of the Spirit, and he has told me since that he never had more intimate communion with God, or enjoyed so much of his immediate presence, as on that occasion." 1

Mrs. Rogers writes, of another occasion,

"After this Mr. Fletcher poured out his full soul in prayer to God. Indeed, his every breath seemed to be prayer, or praise, or spiritual instruction; and every word that fell from his lips appeared to be accompanied by unction from above." 2

A more vivid picture comes from a record of Fletcher's visit to Wesley's Conference in 1784.

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 397

2 Tyerman - op. cit. p. 467

"His attitude and whole manner in prayer were those of a man who felt that he had the fullest access to God, and who with adoring confidence conversed with Him face to face. His hands were stretched towards heaven, his countenance lighted up with reverent joy, and every one was ready, because of the solemn awe which the manifested presence of God inspired, to 'wrap his face in his mantle', and sink into the dust of humiliation." 1

The amount of time Fletcher gave to meditation upon the scriptures in these early years is worthy of equal consideration. It has been noticed that he divided his time between prayer and meditation on the Word.² Mr. Vaughan informed Wesley that at this period he rarely saw any book before Fletcher other than the Bible and the Christian Pattern.³ His intensely detailed study of the Bible bore its fruit in later years when his vital acquaintance and knowledge of all parts of the scriptures manifested itself through the pages of the numerous productions from his pen. To open a volume of his 'Works' at random is almost certain to bring a passage of scripture to view. It is not unusual to find as many as five or six references on the one page. This is not the place to discuss Fletcher's attitude towards the Bible. It is sufficient to realize how carefully he studied it for an understanding of God's will and purpose and for confirmation of God's love towards him.

Fletcher's ascetic habits, his deliberate efforts of self-effacement, his practice of 'recollection', prayer, and meditation on the Word, all centre in his search for union with God. It was a passion for holiness that permeated his life, and his pursuit took him into such

1 Jackson - Life of Charles Wesley, Vol. II, p. 380

2 Vide supra - p. 111.

3 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 274

"The Christian Pattern, or a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ"
from the Latin by Thomas a Kempis, London, 1735

a fellowship with his Lord that he left earthly things behind. It is unnecessary to eulogize the integrity of his moral character. His biographers have all done that to a degree bordering on extravagance. His contemporaries could find no flaw in the matchless worth of the man, nor have the years since revealed any blemish.

One of the most significant testimonies about the remarkable beauty of Fletcher's character is the reported remark of Voltaire. It is said that Voltaire, when challenged to produce a character as perfect as that of Christ, at once mentioned Fletcher of Madeley. It seems that no means of tracing this incident to an authentic source are now available. Canon Overton appears to have been responsible for its first appearance in print.¹ It is now widely quoted and generally accepted as reliable. However, even if Voltaire's statement rests upon a rather doubtful foundation, it bears all the marks of probability. There is every reason for believing that Voltaire would either have met or known much of Fletcher. Fletcher's own brother-in-law, Monsieur de Bottens, was an intimate friend of Voltaire, and was the one responsible for bringing him to Lausanne.²

The most satisfactory evidence, however, of the nobility and integrity of Fletcher's character is gained from the records of men and women who knew him intimately. They all bear testimony to the tremendous power of personality which he possessed. All record an unforgettable sense of being in the company of one who was filled with the

1 Abbey and Overton - The English Church in the Eighteenth Century
Vol. II, p. 343.

2 Nuelsen - John William Fletcher, p. 27

presence of a power which was divine.

"Mr. Fletcher's conversation was always instructive and impressive; and I felt while I was with him, as if I were in the presence of a superior being." 1

Such was the remark of Fletcher's host, Mr. Holy, whom Fletcher visited while at Sheffield.

John Beaumont, after hearing Fletcher preach, wrote,

"I was blessed beyond description, and thought him certainly the most angelic man I had ever heard." 2

Benson, one of his most intimate friends, wrote to Wesley of Fletcher's visits to Trevecca College.

"His manner was so solemn, and, at the same time, so mild and insinuating, that it was hardly possible for any one to be in his company not to be struck with awe and charmed with love, as if in the presence of an angel or departed spirit. Indeed, I frequently thought, while attending to his heavenly discourse, that he was so different from, and superior to, the generality of mankind, as to look more like Moses or Elijah, or some prophet or apostle come again from the dead, than a mortal man dwelling in a house of clay." 3

One of the most important records is an eye-witness account of Fletcher's visit to Wesley's Conference in 1777. It gives some idea of the high esteem in which Fletcher was held by Wesley's preachers.

"On the forenoon of a day, the sitting of Conference was drawing to a close, tidings announced the approach of Mr. Fletcher. As he entered the vestibule of the New Room, supported by Mr. Ireland, I can never forget the visible impulse of esteem which his venerable presence excited in the house. The whole assembly stood up, as if moved by an electric shock. Mr. Wesley rose, 'ex cathedra', and advanced a few paces to receive his highly respected friend and reverend brother..... he addressed the Conference, The influence of his spirit and pathos seemed to bear down all before it. I never saw such an instantaneous effect produced in a religious assembly, either before or since, He had scarcely pronounced a dozen sentences before a hundred preachers, to speak in round numbers, were immersed in tears. Time can never efface from my mind the recollection and image of what I then felt and saw. Such a scene I never expect to witness again on this side eternity." 4

1 Tyerman -op.cit. p. 471

2 Ibid. - p. 543 f.n.

3 Wesley, - Works, Vol. XI, p.

4 Dunn, Life of Adam Clark, p. 126

Numerous other records might be added to the above, all of which bear witness to the same sanctity of spirit and manner. There is no record of any valid criticism or reproach against Fletcher's character. He was himself a model of the 'Christian perfection' for which he contended. Whatever power or strength of personality he possessed came from his desire and striving to be nearer Christ. R. Newton Flew of Wesley House, Cambridge, writes that the first mark of the Methodist Movement was the passion for holiness.¹ Certainly this is revealed at its highest level in Fletcher. He was imbued with this passion, and it became the ruling factor of his life. Thus he is known as the 'saintly' Fletcher, and Henry Venn, who disagreed with him in doctrine, could say to a friend,

"Sir, he was a luminary - a 'luminary' did I say? - he was a 'sun' ! I have known all the great men for these fifty years, but I have known none like him. I was intimately acquainted with him, and was under the same roof with him once for six weeks, during which time I never heard him say a single word which was not proper to be spoken, and which had not a tendency to minister grace to the hearers." 2

To this must be added a few striking words from Wesley's sermon written to commemorate the occasion of his friend's death. Wesley was not given to extravagant language or to careless praise. Here are his words,

"Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourscore years, but one equal to him I have not known; - one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. So unblameable a character in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America; and I scarce expect to find another such on this side of eternity." 3

1 Northern Catholicism, p. 516

2 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. II, p. 71

3 Wesley - Works, Vol. VII, p. 428

"A sermon preached on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley"

Chapter II - Fletcher, the Pastor

Wesley's famous pronouncement, "I look upon all the world as my parish" ¹ might be reversed and appropriately used of Fletcher, "I look upon my parish as my world". During the twenty-five years that followed his appointment to Madeley, he laboured diligently and faithfully among his people. With the exception of his several evangelistic tours which were not of long duration, and his brief visit to Switzerland in 1770, he did not voluntarily leave his parish until his death. His broken health finally forced him to retire for four years and a half, but he returned to finish out his days among his chosen people. He stands out in sharp contrast to the majority of his fellow non-resident clergy who were also often pluralists. The Bishop of Llandaff, for example, was Rector at one time of two parishes in Shropshire, two in Leicestershire, two on the Isle of Ely, three in Huntingdonshire, and seven in Wales. He laboured in none of his parishes, but lived the life of a prosperous farmer in Westmoreland.

"Having no place of residence in my diocese...." he wrote, "I turned my attention to the improvement of land. I thought the improvement of a man's fortune by cultivating the earth was the most useful and honourable way of providing for a family." ²

Yet the same man could write,

"Pluralities and non-residence are scandals in the Christian church, as a church, and injurious to those interests of the state, for the promotion of which it is at the expense of maintaining a clergy". ³

Fletcher had been ordained to the priesthood of the Church of England in 1757, and for three years before he went to Madeley had

1 Wesley - Journal, Vol. II, p. 218

2 Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, p. 189

3 Ibid. p. 159

laboured, at intervals, with the Wesleys and the Countess of Huntingdon in London. The importance of these years cannot be overestimated. It has been seen how Fletcher gave himself to ascetic practices following his conversion experience. He sought to withdraw himself from life, giving way at intervals, to morbid introspection. His correspondence during the periods he was alone at Tern Hall and away from the active work in London, reveal this all too clearly.¹ It was through John Wesley's influence he was ordained a priest, and it was through him too, that he found an avenue of practical expression for his newly found fellowship with God. Thus he was saved from an unhealthy subjectivism. Caught up, as he was, in the strong current of the Revival, he still shrank from appearing before the world. He wrote from London in 1759,

"I want to hide myself from all. I tremble when the Lord favours me with a sight of myself; I tremble to think of preaching only to dishonour God. To-morrow I preach at West-street with all the feeling of Jonah." 2

But these early years were years of apprenticeship in an atmosphere of thriving revival. During this time he derived strength from his fellowship with staunch Christian hearts which helped him overcome his timidity and uncertainty, and sent him forth imbued with a passion for the souls of men. Fletcher learned from Wesley, what Wesley had earlier learned from a 'serious man' to whom he travelled many miles to seek advice.

"Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion." 3

1 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 153, 161, 173.

2 Ibid. p. 156

3 Moore, Henry - Life of Wesley, Vol. I, p. 162

Fletcher's passion for souls, however, cannot be explained on the basis of contagion. His contact with the leaders of the Revival may have helped fire him with enthusiasm and encouraged him on his way, but there was nothing shallow in Fletcher's yearning over men. It sprang from what he calls his "experimental knowledge" of his misery as a sinner and the greatness of his salvation in Christ.

"Since Christian humility has its source in the knowledge of our corruption, so Christian charity flows from a knowledge of the great salvation which Christ has procured for us; and if these two graces are not resident in our hearts, our religion is but the shadow of Christianity." 1

"Evangelical piety is the image of God, and that eternal and infinite charity is nothing less than God himself. One apostle declares, that 'God is love'; and another assures us, that we are called to be made 'partakers of the divine nature'; 2 Peter 1.4; whence the sacred preacher infers, that the 'new creature', of which St. Paul makes mention, 2 Cor. V. 17, must necessarily consist in charity. When a Christian is filled with charity he is then regenerate and born of God. Christ is then formed in his heart, the Holy Spirit rests upon him, and he is 'filled with the fulness of God'. Ephesians 3.16, 19. " 2

"The charity concerning which we speak must flow from a union with Christ." 3

From this exposition it is possible to discern what Fletcher believed to be the source of 'evangelical piety'. This 'charity' is the mark of the regenerate man, who, when born of the spirit of God, is partaker of the divine nature, which nature is love. This love, as he says, must flow from a union with Christ for love becomes the natural expression of life united with Him. Thus, as Fletcher himself moved into

1 Works, Vol. V. p. 241

2 Ibid. pp. 468-69

3 Ibid. pp. 481-2

closer union with Christ his life gave fuller expression to the love he discovered. His great concern for the welfare of his fellowmen rests upon this basis alone.

Fletcher writes,

"The true minister, convinced both by revelation and experience, that Jesus Christ alone is able to recover diseased souls, employs every effort to bring sinners into the presence of this heavenly Physician, that they may obtain of him spiritual health and salvation." ¹

In these words he reveals the secret of his own labours.

When he first went to Madeley, some of the inhabitants excused themselves for not attending church service, saying that they could not awaken early enough in the morning to get their families ready. Fletcher was able to meet this emergency by setting out himself at five o'clock every Sunday morning with a bell in his hand, going to even the most remote parts of the parish and inviting all to come to the house of God.² Late in life, when Charles Simeon visited him and consented to preach in his church, Fletcher went through the village with the bell in his hand, ringing as loudly as he could. He told the people they must attend church as a young clergyman from Cambridge had come to preach to them.³

Fletcher literally ran after some of the most wicked in his congregation in order that he might talk with them and warn them of their folly. One poor collier, a profligate, aware of the Vicar's intentions, used to outrun him, and, upon reaching his home escape by closing the door. Fletcher persevered in his attempts, until on one

1 Works, p. 396.

2 Fletcher, Mrs. - Letter to Mons. H. L. Flechère, p. 14

3 Carus, W. - Simeon Memoirs, p. 99

occasion he got the better of the collier and secured possession of his house before him. Fletcher took full advantage of the opportunity and the man lived to relate how the impression then made, brought a complete change of life.¹

The visitation of his flock was one of Fletcher's chief concerns. He went from family to family, using his visits as opportunities to proclaim the gospel and urge upon his people the necessity of claiming their redemption in Christ.² It is possible that it was through his constant visitation of the simple and ignorant folk of his parish and his quiet exhortations to them, that he developed the habit of 'spiritualizing' common events. Charles Simeon recounts Fletcher's conversation with the iron workers they visited during the period of his stay in Madeley. To one, who was hammering on an anvil, he said, "O, pray to God that He may hammer that hard heart of yours". To another, who was heating a bar of iron, "Ah! thus it is that God tries His children in the furnace of affliction". A third worker was stoking a furnace, and to him he said, "See, Thomas! if you can make such a furnace as that, think what a furnace God can make for sinners".³

This practice developed to such an extent that Fletcher could hardly let an incident pass without seeking to comment on it in such a manner as to exhort his listeners. During his stay at Stoke Newington, Mr. Ireland persuaded him to sit for his picture.

"While the limner was drawing the outlines of it he was exhorting both him and all that were in the room, not only to get the outlines drawn, but the colourings also, of the image of Jesus on their hearts."⁴

1 Cox - Life of Fletcher, pp. 50-51n

2 Gilpin - Portrait of St. Paul, Vol. I, pp. 86-7

3 Christian Miscellany 1848. p. 326. Also Carus - op.cit. p.99

4 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, pp. 293-4

On another occasion, while at Stoke Newington, his doctor bled him. While the blood was running into the cup he expatiated on the blessed blood-shedding of the Lamb of God.¹

His letters bear further testimony to this habitual practice of 'spiritualizing' common events. His friend, Mr. Ireland, sent him some wine and broad cloth. In reply he said,

"Your broad cloth can lap me round two or three times; but the mantle of divine love, the precious fine robe of Jesus's righteousness, can cover your soul a thousand times. The cloth, fine and good as it is, will not keep out a hard shower; but that garment of salvation will keep out even a shower of brimstone and fire." 2

There is no reason to doubt the effectiveness of this method in vividly portraying the truths Fletcher desired to bring home to his folk. He spoke to simple, uneducated workers, and the gospel became real to them as he expressed it in language descriptive of their work and their surroundings. Wesley was careful, however, to warn others against imitation.

"What was becoming and graceful in Mr. Fletcher, would be disgusting almost in any other." 3

Wesley was right; efforts of this nature, coming from anything else than a genuine love and yearning over men would be distasteful. In Fletcher's case it was his friends, and those who knew him, who cherished his aptly chosen exhortations as reminders of moments when real help had been received.

If Fletcher were concerned about bringing his people to a knowledge of God's saving power, he was not less concerned about nourishing and caring for those who had come to that knowledge. He was not in

1 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 294

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 228

3 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 294

Madeley two years before he had formed a 'religious society'.¹

He says that a few of his people,

"design to unite in a Religious Society to support and animate each other in the ways of godliness and to promote our mutual salvation by all the means which Christian prudence and brotherly love can suggest."²

He had a full acquaintance with the Methodist Societies while in London, being a member of one himself, and later labouring among them with John and Charles Wesley. He knew, as well as any other, their value in nuturing and maintaining vital religion in intimate groups.

Thus Fletcher, when faced with the task of leading his new converts to a higher level of spiritual life, naturally used a means he had seen to be so effective. He did not adopt Wesley's rules, which the latter had published in 1743, as his society was not under Wesley's jurisdiction. But in drawing up his own rules he took care to model them after Wesley's. He made only slight alterations to suit his peculiar needs.

Condition of membership was based on,

"A sincere desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek salvation from the servitude of sin, according to the Gospel, and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England."³

This sincerity was to take expression in ,

"Putting on the form of godliness, which we apprehend to consist in three things: First, doing no harm, Isa. 1, 16; Rom. XII. 9. Secondly, doing good, Isa. I, 17; Rom. XII, 9; Thirdly, using the means of grace. Luke 1,16; Isa. IV, 6. "⁴

Under these headings he set out in particular detail regulations for the conduct of Christian lives. The rules under the first heading

1 Vide supra p. 33

2 Fletcher - The Nature and Rules of a Religious Society, p. 9

3 Ibid. p; 11

4 Ibid.

had to do with practices which were forbidden; those under the second with good deeds which were desired; and under the third with the use of the available means of grace. Under the last he names the public worship of God, the ministry of the Word, the Lord's Supper, family prayer, private prayer, scripture reading, fasting, and singing of hymns and psalms.

After his death there was found among his papers a manuscript with the heading, "The Test of a New Creature, or Heads of Examination for Adult Christians".¹ It is possible he wrote this for his society to be used along with his rules. It is designed to encourage believers to obtain the 'likeness of God'. He writes,

"Many consider that perfect love, which casteth out fear, as instantaneous: all grace is so; but what is given in a moment is enlarged and established by diligence and fidelity. That which is instantaneous in its descent is perfective in its increase."

This is certain, - too much grace cannot be desired or looked for; and to believe and obey with all the power we have is the high way to receive all we have not." 2

So did he encourage his people to seek the Lord. He set before them such a series of heart searching questions as to humble them into an apprehension of their need. Here is the first point of examination.

"Do I feel any pride? or am I a partaker of the meek and lowly mind that was in Jesus? Am I dead to all desire of praise? If any despise me, do I like them the worse for it? or if they love and approve me, do I love them more on that account? Am I willing to be accounted useless, and of no consequence? glad to be made of no reputation? Do humiliations give me real pleasure: and is it the language of my heart,

'Make me little and unknown,
Loved and prized by God alone?' " 3

He followed this with twenty other points of examination. They are all equally forceful in their penetrating analysis.

1 Works, Vol. VIII , pp. 87-92
2 Ibid. p. 92
3 Ibid. p. 88

There is no way of determining the actual value and success of Fletcher's societies. They grew in number and in 1782 Wesley was instrumental in forming one in Madeley itself; the one place in the parish where Fletcher had been unable to get the people to meet in society. When the county of Shropshire was made a Methodist circuit, it meant that Fletcher already had some organization set up whereby his people could benefit from the visits of the Methodist lay preachers and workers. Thus they gained fully from the contacts with the wider stream of Revival. There can be no doubt that the formation of the societies was the most vital answer Fletcher could make to the challenge which confronted him. The edification of believers was a charge laid upon his soul and he met it by drawing them into an intimate fellowship where they were able to watch and care for one another in love.

One of the most unique features of Fletcher's pastoral effort was his pastoral letters. He rarely left his parish for long; but when he was absent he addressed lengthy letters to his parishioners. He usually began with an ascription after the following manner,

"To those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, in and about Madeley: peace be multiplied to you from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, through the operations of the Holy Spirit, Amen." 1

Then, taking St. Paul as an example, he proceeded to exhort his people to be diligent about the things of Christ. His letters usually contained but a very brief word about his own activities during his absence from them. The chief purpose of the letter was always to remind his parishioners that they should remain steadfast and sure in their faith in Christ and in love toward each other. A brief

1 Works - Vol. VIII, p. 95

characteristic section from one of these letters must suffice to provide an example of his manner of writing.

"Dismiss your sins, and embrace Jesus Christ, who wept for you in the manger, bled for you in Gethsemane, hanged for you on the cross, and now pleads for you on his mediatorial throne. By all that is near and dear to you, as men and as Christians, meet me not, on that great day, in your sins and in your blood, enemies to Christ by unbelief, and to God by wicked works. Meet me in the garment of repentance, in the robes of Christ's merits, and in the white linen, (the purity of heart and life,) which is the holiness of the godly: that 'holiness, without which no man shall see God'. Let the time past suffice, in which some of you have lived in sin. By repentance put off the old man, and his works; by faith put on the Lord Jesus and his righteousness. Let all the wickedness be gone, for ever gone, with the old year; and with the new one begin a new life, a life of renewed devotion to God, and of increasing love to your neighbour." 1

Fletcher watched over his flock with affectionate and unwearied attention. His particular care, however, was the young, for whom he had a deep concern. That he manifested a love towards them, and that he was likewise attractive to them, is seen from the number of children he gathered around him during his last visit to his old home in Switzerland.² On one occasion the children had followed him home, but the people of the house stopped them, saying that he could not be troubled with children. The children cried and said they were sure he would not say so, for he was their good brother.³ Professor Arnold Ruegg describes these meetings Fletcher had with the children as the fore-runner of the Swiss Sunday School.

"So segensreich auch ~~die~~ Kinderstunden gewesen sein mögen: eine bleibende Einrichtung konnten sie natürlich nicht werden. Fletchers Idee freilich lebte wieder auf, als die Zeit gekommen war, und sie kam verhältnismässig bald." 4

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 108

2 Vide supra p. 76

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 296

4 Ruegg, Arnold - Der Kindergottesdienst in der Schweiz, p. 51
Nuelson - John William Fletcher, p. 25

In his parish Fletcher had a school at Madeley and another at Madeley Wood where he himself taught the young.¹ He frequently visited a boarding-school for girls in Madeley where he had opportunities to speak. The girls, in turn, visited him at the vicarage.² The same was true of the boys' seminary.

"Mr. Fletcher invited the scholars of the seminary to spend an hour with him every morning in his study, when he took uncommon pains to inculcate the principles of Christianity in the most captivating and persuasive manner." 3

Thus did he give much time to the care and instruction of the young. He enjoyed the work for he had been a tutor with Mr. Hill for a considerable time. He wrote in 1781,

"If I were not a minister, I would be a schoolmaster, to have the pleasure of bringing up children in the fear of the Lord." 4

Thus it was that when Sunday Schools were initiated by Robert Raikes in Gloucester, Fletcher was quick to seize upon the plan and inaugurate schools in his own parish. He drew up a plan of organization for six schools which involved a subscription of £20. His proposals were gladly accepted by his people and they gave him excellent support in his efforts. They not only met the necessary £20 required for teachers, but erected a school-house in Coalbrookdale.⁵ Before the schools could be opened three hundred children had gathered, and these Fletcher instructed at regular intervals. His labour over the Sunday Schools was one of the last things to engage his attention before he

1 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 527

2 Hodson, - Sermon preached on the death of Mrs. Fletcher -
quoted by Tyerman, op.cit. p. 98

3 Salopian Shreds and Patches, Volume X, p. 4.

4 Works, Vol. VIII, p.143

5 Fletcher, Mrs. op.cit. pp. 18, 20-21.

died. He had come to the place where he felt the urgency of doing something more for the education of youth. He wrote,

"Our parochial and national depravity turns upon two hinges, - the profanation of the Lord's day, and the immorality which flows from neglecting the education of children."

He goes on to speak of the Sunday Schools which,

"by keeping children from corrupting one another, by promoting their attendance on Divine worship, and by laying the first principles of useful knowledge in their minds, and of true piety in their hearts, bid fair for a public reformation of manners; and seem well calculated to nip in the bud the vices of ignorance and impiety, so common among the lower and more numerous class of people." 1

In such a populous village as Madeley much of Fletcher's time was necessarily taken up with the care of the sick and the poor. He considered illness an excellent opportunity to discourse with the patient concerning the eternal welfare of his or her soul. Mrs. Fletcher wrote,

"This was a duty for which he was ever ready. If he heard the knocker in the middle of the coldest winter night his window was thrown up in an instant and when he understood, either that someone was hurt in the pit; or that a neighbour was likely to die; no consideration was ever had to the darkness or severity of the night; but this uniform answer was sure to be given, 'I will attend you immediately'." 2

An incident of particular interest illustrates his genuine solicitude for his sick folk. After his morning service on one occasion, he asked if any of his congregation could give him the address of a sick man whom he desired to visit. Someone answered,

"He is dead, Sir",

"Dead! dead!" Fletcher exclaimed, "another soul launched into eternity! What can I do for him now? Why my friends, will you so frequently serve me in this manner? I am not informed you are ill, till I find you dying, or hear that you are dead! "

He sat down in his pulpit, covering his head with his gown. When

1 Fletcher, Mrs. op.cit. p. 20

2 Ibid. p. 15

his congregation had retired, "he walked home buried in sorrow, as though he had lost a friend or a brother". 1

With the sick Fletcher was willing to labour in any possible capacity in order to relieve their suffering, or to assist them. During an epidemic of fever, when the neighbours were afraid to nurse the sick, and when he could find no one to do so, he offered to sit up with them himself. 2 While the fever was raging he preached a sermon on visiting the sick. He said to his people,

"What do you fear? You are afraid of catching the distemper, and of dying with them. O fear it no more! What an honour to die in your Master's service; which if permitted to me, I should esteem a singular favour." 3

Fletcher was not less solicitous for the poor in his parish than he was for the sick and the dying. In fact, his poor received special care and attention. His sympathy took a most practical expression. His living at Madeley was worth about £60 - £70,⁴ but only yielded about £50 clear after paying the expenses of the living.⁵ He had about £1500 worth of property in Switzerland and about £400 or £500 more in Madeley.⁶ His yearly income of his estate in Nyon was about £100.⁷ Thus Fletcher would have in the neighbourhood of £150 a year. But money had no value for him except as it could provide for the indigent. On one occasion he sent £80 back to Switzerland with orders to distribute it among the poor.

"As money is rather higher there than here, that mite will go farther abroad than it would in my parish". 8

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher - Appendix II, p. 406, 11th ed.

2 Benson - op.cit. p. 345.

3 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit. p. 35

4 Fletcher, MSS Volume, p. 2

5 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 119

6 Tyerman - op. cit. p. 489

7 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 290

8 Ibid. p. 289

When he was leaving Ireland after his labours there, the people tried to press upon him a small purse containing sufficient funds to cover his travelling expenses. He firmly refused it. His friends, however, persevered until finally he took the purse in his hand, asking:

"Do you really force it upon me? Must I accept it? Is it entirely mine and may I do what I please with it?"

They assured him that such was the case.

"God be praised then! God be praised! What a mercy is here", he said. "I heard some of you complaining that your Poor's Fund was never so low before; take this purse; God has sent it to you; raised it among yourselves; and bestowed it upon your poor. You cannot deny me; it is sacred to them. God be praised! I thank you, I heartily thank you, my dear kind brethern." 1

Mrs. Fletcher tells how he left himself penniless by giving away what little he had.

"If at any time I had gold in the drawer, it seemed to afford him no comfort; but if he could find a handful of small silver when going out to visit the sick, he would express as much pleasure over it as a miser would in discovering a bag of hidden treasure." 2

In a letter to Michael Onions from Bath, he wrote a postscript to this effect,

"Let none of your little companies want. If any of you do, you are welcome to my house. Take any part of the furniture there, and make use of it for their relief. And this shall be your full title for so doing.

Witness my hand,

3

John Fletcher"

He was continually giving away his own linen and household articles. One poor lady came to him in difficulty. He took all his pewter from his kitchen and gave it to her.

"This I can do without; a wooden trencher serves me better, and it will relieve your want." 4

1 D'Ober, Isaac - Life of Henry Brooke, p. 114
 2 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit. p. 23
 3 Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, p. 300
 4 Fletcher, Mrs. - op. cit. p. 24

In order to provide for his poor Fletcher lived on the minimum for existence, often depriving himself of sufficient for his own food and comfort. He said to his wife,

"O Mary, cannot we do without beer? Let us drink water and buy less meat, that our necessities may give way to the extremities of the poor." 1

An additional fact relating to Fletcher's concern for the poor is worthy of mention. He sought not only to minister to them in their misfortune, but endeavoured to relieve and alleviate the burdens they bore. His pamphlet, "Three National Grievances",² contains a forceful indictment of the social evils and injustices which were causing the continued oppression of the poor. He maintained that smuggling was, in effect, the cause of decreased revenue, and consequently brought on increased taxation. He thus proposed a decrease in excise duties, and steps to increase the efficiency of the customs' operations. In the case of the poor rates, he lays the blame to the desperate moral corruption occasioned among the indigent by the ubiquitous public house. He proposed that the government should suppress two-thirds of these houses, raise the licenses of the others, and refuse to let the idle poor have anything to do with the setting up of these places. Not only are his proposals sound, springing from an honest desire to alleviate the suffering of the poor, who were under the weight of heavy oppression and in the grip of vice and sin, but they are also indicative of the awakening 'social consciousness' which was one of the most evident results of the eighteenth century Revival.

Such concrete manifestations of Fletcher's concern for the unfortunate bear ample testimony to his deep and passionate sympathy

1 Fletcher, Mrs. op. cit.

2 Vide supra p. 83

for them. Just before his death, when he spoke with difficulty, he cried,

"O my poor! What will become of my poor? I am dead to my poor." 1

No adequate interpretation can be offered for this deep yearning of a heart so full of rich compassion and such self-sacrificing expression apart from the recognition that this was the manifestation of a life filled with the fullness of God.

The love and esteem in which he was held by his people is in itself a worthy tribute to such a faithful pastor. While he lay dying his parishioners gathered in Madeley Church to offer their prayers to God for his recovery. One who was present wrote,

"I never was witness to a scene so impressive and pathetic. Every breast fell, every countenance expressed one common sentiment. Tears, sobs, and suppressed groans, the expressive language of nature, strongly spoke how sincerely they esteemed their venerable pastor, as more than a father. But when the hymn was sung it is impossible to convey an idea of the general outburst of sorrow which accompanied it. Even those who had spurned his instructions, deprecated his death as a public loss, and expressed their grief with uncommon agitation." 2

Fletcher, the sensitive and refined Swiss, became the beloved pastor of poor English colliers and ironworkers. He lived out his days among them, sparing himself in nothing that had to do with their welfare. They were his first concern and as a true pastor he gave himself for them.

As the Vicar of Madeley he carried on his work without any interference from ecclesiastical authorities. There is no record that he saw his Bishop again after the day he was appointed to the parish. Apart from the antagonism created against him by some of the neighbouring clergy early in his ministry, Fletcher appears to have escaped further tension. His association with the Methodists was of the most intimate character and yet there was nothing official in the relationship. He attended Wesley's Annual Conference, organized societies in his parish and gave himself gladly to the defence of Methodist doctrine. He remained throughout, however, the Vicar of Madeley.

1 Fletcher, Mrs. op.cit. p. 50

2 Methodist Magazine 1802. p. 572

Chapter III - Fletcher the Evangelist

Coleridge is reported to have asked Charles Lamb if he had ever heard him preach. Lamb's retort was, "Have I ever heard you do anything else?" In a much profounder way the same is true of Fletcher. He was not, however, constantly expounding or setting forth his own particular philosophy of life. He was in a real sense the evangelist, the bringer of good news. There was laid upon his own heart such a knowledge of the redeeming love of God that he was constantly constrained to take that message to others. It has been evident that he could scarcely resist 'spiritualizing' every commonplace event in order that he might impress the truths of the gospel more vividly on those around him. It is also true that he rarely let any occasion pass which gave him a suitable opportunity to make clear the necessity and the way of salvation. One of his parishioners related a characteristic incident illustrative of this. After Fletcher had performed the ceremony at this man's wedding, and was about to enter his name in the register, he said,

"Well, William, you have had your name entered into our register once before this."

"Yes sir, at my baptism."

"And now your name will be entered a second time: - you have no doubt thought much about your present step, and made proper preparations for it in a great many different ways."

"Yes sir", was the reply.

"Recollect, however, that a third entry of your name - the register of your burial - will sooner or later take place. Think, then, about death; and make preparation for that also, lest it overtake you like a thief in the night." 1

1 Cox - Life of J. Fletcher, pp. 51-2n

Fletcher was decidedly an opportunist when it came to making use of the possibilities offered him for proclaiming the gospel. Once again the evidence of the influence wrought upon him through his early contacts with the Revival leaders in London is apparent. By the time he had made their acquaintance they were thoroughly awakened to the tremendous possibilities of field and lay preaching. The Revival had found expression in both these channels, and its leaders had come to value and appreciate every occasion that presented itself for preaching. Fletcher himself, while in London, was set to preach to the French prisoners at Tunbridge. At first he had been timid, but as he was caught up in the work his timidity passed and he became more apt in utilizing his chances. He was gradually able to increase the occasions for expounding the Word in his own parish, and Gilpin tells how he employed every evening to proclaim the gospel either in the church, a private home or in the open air.¹

He also preached regularly in places outside his parish which were often from ten to sixteen miles distant and from which he was not able to reach his home until one or two in the morning.

When he did not have opportunities to preach, he made them. He broke in upon the assemblies of youth in the village seeking them out at their dancing and revelling. These were usually nights of drunkenness and obscenity, and in the face of abuse and often rough handling he denounced their dissipation and folly and exhorted them to turn to righteousness and salvation. There were eighteen ale-houses in all in Madeley village and Fletcher, with his Church-Warden, used to visit these in turn on Sunday evenings. He had no hesitation in giving his testimony where he felt it was most needed.²

1 Gilpin - Portrait of St. Paul, Vol. I, p. 84

2 Fletcher, Mrs. - Letters to Mons. H. L. Fléchère, p. 16

It is also evident from the records of Fletcher's journeys away from his parish, and especially those he made to the continent, that he was zealous to use every opening that provided him with a chance to speak. In Nyon he preached to two thousand people in the yard of a jail where they had come to witness an execution. The same day he was refused liberty to attend the prisoner on the scaffold and was somewhat abused by the bailiff.¹ It is not necessary to enlarge on these and other incidents further, except to recognize that Fletcher had a deep rooted conviction in the power of preaching the Word. He writes,

"Every minister should be able to say with St. Paul, 'Christ sent me not' principally, 'to baptize', but to preach the gospel." 2

The Word of God, to him, is the sword of the minister,³ and is the ordinary instrumental cause of salvation "when applied to the soul by his Spirit".⁴ The preaching of the true minister, which commonly passes for folly, is that through which God employs his power for the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers.⁵ The assurance of such faith in the power of the Word was grounded in the growing proofs of the reality of his own experience which he had come to recognize as part of the revival of religion around him. New life had come, and was coming, through the proclamation of the gospel, and thus he gave himself to the same task with unwearying zeal.

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1. Works - Vol. VIII, p. 299
 2. Ibid. Vol. V, p. 248
 3. Ibid. Vol. V, p. 257
 4. Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 368
 5. Ibid. Vol. V. p. 396

His labours as president of Trevecca College are more suitably classified as a preaching, than a teaching ministry. While it is true his duties involved him in the superintendency of college studies, discipline and routine, it would appear he relinquished most of these to concentrate his efforts upon the development of piety among the students. When he visited the college, studies were laid aside. Benson, the head-master writes,

"His one employment was, to call, entreat, and urge them (the students) to ascend with him to the glorious source of being and blessedness." 1

After he had spoken to the students in the class-room, it was his custom to invite any who so desired, to join him in his room. Many followed to spend two or three hours together with him in prayer, "till we could bear to kneel no longer". 2 When Fletcher resigned the presidency, the college did not lose an administrator, though he undoubtedly possessed a considerable degree of organizing and executive ability. The college lost a true evangelist; one who came to bear the glad tidings of the power of the Holy Spirit whose presence could enrich and sustain the believer.

A month after Fletcher began his ministry in Madeley, he wrote the Countess of Huntingdon,

"I have hitherto wrote my sermons, but I am carried so far beyond my notes, when in the pulpit, that I propose preaching with only my sermon-case in my hand next Friday, when I shall venture on an evening lecture for the first time." 3

He evidently found his new venture satisfactory, for there only remain about a dozen written sermons from his pen. The balance of his

1 Benson - Life of Fletcher, p. 139

2 Ibid. p. 140

3 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 238

sermon material takes the form of sketchy outlines, mere skeletons of sermons. Over thirty-five of these have been preserved. It is apparent that he did not find the written sermon suitable for his pulpit style, since he was, as he says, carried beyond it. This passing phrase provides some insight into the characteristic mode of his preaching. Being of Swiss-French extraction he was energetic and loquacious, and would find it difficult to confine himself to a written discourse. But it was not a national disposition which was at the source of his deepest animation. That sprang from the consciousness of the grave concern he had on hand. He was proclaiming the gospel of salvation, and that with wholehearted abandon. While in Dublin he spoke in the French Church. Some of his English admirers followed to hear him. When asked why they went to hear him when they could not understand what he said, they replied,

"We went to look at him, for heaven seemed to beam from his countenance." 1

Such manifest ardour and passion could not be confined to the written page.

It must not be concluded from this that Fletcher went into his pulpit unprepared, trusting in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit for what he should say. His sermon outlines are evidence of the manner of preparation he made. They bear witness by the analysis and exposition of the text, the arrangement of the material, and its application, to a very definitely conceived plan and development of thought.² Among his manuscripts there was found an entry in some notes concerning the means to be used to keep within the allotted time of a sermon,

1 Moore- Life of Mrs. Fletcher, p. 159n

2 Appendix B.

which he considered should be from thirty to fifty minutes. He writes, "Pray, digest the point, have few heads, be not long upon them." ¹ He was guided by his own dictum. The material is not lengthy, as can be seen from his few written sermons; the matter is well digested, and the exposition lucid.

He did, however, consider time wasted which was spent in labouriously penning discourses. He maintains his position with an appeal to the example of Christ and the Apostles, adding additional arguments to substantiate his claims. ² He believes that too much time could be wasted in actual sermon preparation, and especially in concern over oratorical embellishment. Not only did these efforts draw the pastor away from the visitation of his flock, but produced studied affectation in his preaching. He writes,

"The ornaments of theatrical eloquence have been sought after with a shameful solicitude. And what has been the fruit of this useless toil? Preachers, after all, have played their part with much less applause than comedians; and their curious auditors are still running from the pulpit to the stage." ³

Fletcher was too concerned about the urgency of the matter to be over anxious about form or style.

"After perceiving the house of our neighbour on fire, we do not withdraw to our closet to prepare a variety of affecting arguments, by way of engaging him to save both himself and his family from the flames. In such cases, a lively conviction of our neighbour's danger, and an ardent desire to rescue him from it, afford us greater powers of natural eloquence than any rules of art can furnish us with." ⁴

1 Macdonald - Fletcher of Madeley, p. 90

2 Works, Vol. V. p. 382 ff

3 Ibid. p. 387

4 Ibid. p. 383

Behind all his labours was the pressure of this urgency; he was agitated by a knowledge of the danger men face. It was death or redemption; judgment or eternity. Thus his preparation for the public utterance of the gospel was a constant thing with him.

"Let us consider the holy scriptures as an inexhaustible mine of sacred treasures. In the law of the Lord let us meditate day and night. Before we attempt to deliver evangelical truths in public, let it be our first care to penetrate our hearts in private with an adequate sense of those truths. Let us arrange them in the most suitable order; let us adduce and compare several passages of sacred writ which appear to support or explain the particular doctrines we mean to insist upon; but, above all, joining faith and prayer to calm meditation, after becoming masters of our subject, let us humbly ask God that $\pi\rho\rho\rho\rho$, that lively and forcible elocution, which flows from the unction of grace." 1

One can truthfully say that Fletcher's written sermons are good reading which makes them unusual among expositions during the Revival, or indeed either before that time or since. His sermons are not nearly as weighty as John Wesley's, which at times are rather lengthy intellectual treatises on doctrine. Moreover, Fletcher's sermons differ from Whitefield's. There is nothing unusual or striking about the composition of Whitefield's sermons. His strength and power lay in his fiery and emotional oratory. Fletcher's sermons, however, are lucid in exposition and logical in construction; written in simple and direct English. It is his simple and straightforward expression which lends them their peculiar charm. His tendency to diffuseness, which is so prevalent in his other writings, is least apparent in his sermons. There is a calm argumentative appeal to reason, but more directly to conscience. He was successful in this through the personal application he gave his exhortations. He wrote as if to bring each member of his congregation to imagine that the whole force of his

1 Works - Vol. V. p. 388

denunciation or pleading was directly addressed to his or her heart.

He uses the singular and personal pronoun with forceful directness.

"Sinners, you must then lose your taste for earthly joys, and be made capable of relishing spiritual delights, or all the pleasures of heaven will prove to you just as much as the melodious concert is to a deaf man, or the finest pictures to one that was born blind." 1

Here is an example of the plainness of his appeal.

"Nay, Jesus Christ, who is always where two or three are gathered together in his name, stands before you, with his vesture dipped in blood, and waits to see if his agony and bloody sweat, his wounds and sufferings, his tears and strong cries, his cross and passion, shall have any effect upon you; to see whether you will not at last resolve to part even with the most pleasing sins, rather than not come to him, choose him, and enjoy him for your portion for ever. Ah! let him not wait in vain; rather let us lift up our hearts together with him, and say, 'Lord, turn us, and so shall we be turned!' Are you willing?" 2

Another characteristic of Fletcher's preaching is the frank and courageous manner in which he spoke to his people. He was not averse to expressing himself in strong and stern words when he felt the occasion demanded it, and he would break forth in vigorous denunciation of the sin he saw around him. These are the forceful words he delivered against the gluttons and the drunkards.

"Whether, therefore, you dig your grave with your teeth, and entomb in your own bowels that which should be the support of your family and of the poor; or whether, to indulge the lust of the flesh, or only to please and countenance your carnal acquaintance, you can spend the best part of a day in pouring drink-offerings into the shrine of Belial which you carry about you; ... Walk on, then, O man, according to the desire of thy heart, the lust of thy eye, and the way of the world; 'but remember, that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment'." 3

He was no less considerate of the hypocrites.

"These are the very spawn of the crooked serpent, and, like him, attempt to transform themselves into angels of light, in order more effectually to promote the interests of the kingdom of darkness. From these pests may God deliver our church and state!" 4

1 Works - Vol. VII, p. 371
 2 Ibid. p. 362
 3 Ibid. pp. 447-8
 4 Ibid. p. 451

Such fearlessness evokes deepest admiration, especially when it is remembered that Fletcher was speaking to his own people, those with whom he lived and laboured so long.

That he could also be dramatic in his elocution is best seen from an account of a sermon given by Melville Horne. Fletcher was giving an animated description of the terrible day of the Lord's coming, when he suddenly paused, and striking his forehead with the palm of his hand, he exclaimed:

"Wretched man that I am! Beloved brethern, it often cuts me to the soul, as it does at this moment, to reflect, that while I have been endeavouring, by the force of truth, by the beauty of holiness, and even by the terrors of the Lord, to bring you to walk in the peaceful paths of righteousness, I am, with respect to many of you who reject the Gospel, only tying millstones round your neck, to sink you deeper into perdition!"

Horne relates how the whole congregation was electrified and that it was sometime before Fletcher could resume his subject.¹ There was nothing theatrical about his outburst, for it emanated from his paramount concern for the souls of those to whom he spoke. All his preaching was impregnated with that passionate personal appeal which went with force and directness to the conscience of the listener.

His sermons, for the most part, are similar as far as form is concerned. He begins with an introduction which relates the circumstances under which the words of the text were spoken. He then proceeds at once to the exposition of the text itself which exposition is well ordered and lucid and given under several headings. Following this come the inferences which may be drawn from the truth contained in the text. Lastly is the application which is neither general nor vague. He speaks to each class in turn; the sinner, the distressed soul, the backslider and the believer. His constant pastoral

¹ Benson - op. cit. 11th ed. Appendix, II, p. 406

visitation undoubtedly convinced him of the virtue of this particular and definite application of his message. He knew his people and he spoke directly to each class in turn, so that none would be overlooked and that his sermon might come with its own message to each. The simplicity and lucidity of exposition, and the directness of personal appeal are the two most outstanding characteristics of style in Fletcher's sermons.

He spoke to congregations in Madeley comprised mainly of ignorant, and often brutal, colliers and iron workers; those who for long had been beyond the reach of the Church and its message. If there were any thoughtful men and women in his congregation they would have been brought up in the school of Locke, or as Deists, be worshipping an absentee God. But to the unenlightened and illiterate, as well as to the erudite and the cultured, Fletcher preached an almost incredible gospel. Its fundamental characteristic was that Christ was offered to the learned and ignorant alike, and if received in simple faith, would bring salvation. This was a free gift available for all.

"O come now! Enter the ark to-day. In the ark there is salvation. In Christ, and in him alone, there is pardon and life. 'But will he indeed receive me? Will he take in such a leprous, guilty soul as mine?' Yes, thou poor, afflicted, dejected sinner! He will, he does take thee in; for he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Only let thy heart close with his heart, thy soul with his soul, thy sins with his blood, and thou shalt find thy life is bound up in his life; and where he is, there shall be his servant, his spouse, his member be. Thus shut up safe in the true ark, thou shalt outride all the storms of sin, temptation, death, and judgment, which will soon overwhelm a Christless world." 1

As Fletcher thus preached such a warm and intimate fellowship with Christ he awakened a note of response in hungry hearts which had never

1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 441

heard of the redeeming love of God. He struck a deeper chord in lives that had been nurtured on the dead formalism of Deism.

If the most specific characteristic of his message was the proclamation of Christ with the offer of universal redemption, scarcely less outstanding was his insistence on the universal depravity of man. The widespread optimism which Deism had inculcated into the life of the century was a tremendous embarrassment to the preaching of Christ. If there were no conviction of human sin and need and the necessity of regeneration, the gospel had little to offer men, except perhaps an ideal or inspiration. Fletcher realized this, and preached to bring people to a conviction of sin. He expounded the doctrine of man's depravity with simplicity and forcefulness.

"He is not a Christian who professes to be so, but he who has got a 'new heart and a new spirit', by being truly born again, not of water only, but of the Spirit of Christ. That regeneration is absolutely necessary in order to be a true Christian, and that there is no surer mark whereby we may know whether we are living members of Jesus than to be really new men, appears in the clearest light in the words of the text: 'If any man be in Christ', or be a true Christian, 'he is a new creature'. You see then brethren, how necessary it is to have right notions of the doctrine of regeneration, since without it there can be no Christianity." 1

His plain speaking in this regard was not acceptable to the more optimistic of his flock.

"Some of you are ready to find fault with us for telling and proving to you that every natural man, every unconverted person, is in a damnable state, yea, is condemned already: you think this is a monstrous doctrine, not fit to be mentioned in the pulpit." 2

It was his constant insistence in his preaching on the danger of the 'damnable state' of the natural man, and the necessity and urgency of regeneration, that gave his message such practical directness.

1 Works, Vol. VII, pp. 363-4

2 Ibid. p. 423

He convinced men and women of their need, and after making that real to them, offered them a way out. The way he made as plain and simple as possible. He writes,

"Look up, then, believe, and live".¹

The criterion of successful preaching, however, is not in the manner of preparation or mode of delivery of the message, the opportunity found for delivering it or the contents of the message itself, but rather lasting results in changed lives. That Fletcher preached with such an objective in view has been apparent; that he was successful is not less obvious.

When he went to Madeley he saw few signs of any spiritual life in the village. He described his parish to the Countess of Huntingdon as a "howling wilderness".² In six months time he had his church filled to overflowing; some being compelled to stand in the church yard.³ A filled church is not, however, to be equated with a 'spirit-filled' congregation. The most substantial evidence of the effectiveness of his preaching is the rapid growth of religious societies in the parish.⁴ Those who comprised the personnel of these intimate groups were undoubtedly earnest seekers of the truth who had been awakened by Fletcher's appeals from his pulpit. The societies were used to consolidate the work begun by his preaching, and their appearance at different points in his parish bears ample testimony to the steady progress and results of his labours.

Only in the beginning of his ministry does it appear that he produced any excessive emotional or abnormal experiences through his

1 Works, Vol.VII, p. 426

2 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 239

3 Vide supra, p. 31

4 Vide supra, p. 33

preaching.¹ These 'extravagances of the Methodists', as Southey called them, were not particularly widespread in his parish and could not have extended beyond two or three cases. But when such cases did occur they were a matter of grave concern to him and caused him considerable uneasiness.

"Why", he wrote, "God permits these offences to arise has not a little staggered me".²

They alarmed him and he did all in his power to discourage additional outbreaks. He had had experience, while in London with John Wesley, in handling difficult converts whose conversions had been attended by peculiar phenomena.³ He evidently found them more difficult to deal with when he encountered them in his country parish. After the first few years, however, these outbreaks ceased. It is also interesting to notice that the abnormal physical effects, which so often attended Wesley's preaching, were chiefly confined to his early years; i.e. between 1739 and 1742.⁴

The records of Fletcher's labours outside his parish also bear witness to his power and ability as a preacher. Lady Huntingdon wrote of his preaching in her chapel at Bath,

"Deep and awful are the impressions made on every hand. Dear Mr. Fletcher's preaching is truly apostolic - the Divine blessing accompanies his word in a very remarkable manner. He is ever at work, is amazingly followed, and singularly owned of God."⁵

1 Vide supra p. 30 and p. 32

2 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 241

3 Wesley - Journal, Vol. IV, p. 253

4 Dimond - Psychology of the Methodist Revival, p. 126

5 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 469

Benson said of his visit to Kingswood,

"The people are exceedingly affected; indeed, quite melted down. The tears streamed so fast from the eyes of the poor colliers, that their black faces were washed by them, and almost universally streaked with white." 1

Fletcher became exceedingly popular as a preacher, not only among the people, but among Wesley's preachers. He and Wesley were preaching at Bristol in 1772. John Pawson, an itinerant preacher, wrote:

"We have had large congregations to hear both Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher, especially the latter." 2

This significant word speaks for itself. Wesley acknowledged Fletcher's popularity in his Journal while making reference to the Conference of 1781.

"I desired Mr. Fletcher to preach. I do not wonder that he should be so popular; not only because he preaches with all his might, but because the power of God attends both his preaching and his prayer." 3

Two thousand persons listened to Fletcher preach at five o'clock in the morning during the Conference. 4

The most satisfying proof, however, of Fletcher's rank and capacity as an evangelist lies in the fact that John Wesley designated him as his successor in 1773. 5 The following letter of Wesley indicates this fact.

"Dear Sir, - What an amazing work has God wrought in these kingdoms in less than forty years! And it not only continues but increases throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland; nay, it has lately spread into New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina. But the wise men of the world say, 'When Mr. Wesley drops, then all this is at an end!' And so it surely will unless

1 Benson - op. cit. p. 137

2 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 242

3 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 330

4 Tyerman - op. cit. p. 466

5 Vide supra p. 58

before God calls him hence, one is found to stand in his place. ¹
 For οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πάλιν ἰσχυρὸς εἰς κοινὸν ἔστω.
 I see more and more, unless there be one ^{πρὸς ἑστῶς}, the work
 can never be carried on. The body of the preachers are not united;
 nor will any part of them submit to the rest: so that either there
 must be one to preside over all or the work will indeed come to an
 end.

But who is sufficient for these things? qualified to preside
 both over the preachers and people? He must be a man of faith and
 love and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom
 of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and
 things, particularly of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a
 ready utterance; diligence and activity, with a tolerable share of
 health. There must be added to these, favour with the people, with
 the Methodists in general. For unless God turn their eyes and
 their hearts towards him, he will be quite incapable of the work. He
 must likewise have some degree of learning; because there are many
 adversaries, learned as well as unlearned, whose mouths must be
 stopped. But this cannot be done unless he be able to meet them on
 their own ground.

But has God provided one so qualified? Who is he? Thou art the
 man! God has given you a measure of loving faith and a single eye
 to His glory. He has given you some knowledge of men and things,
 particularly of the whole plan of Methodism. You are blessed with
 some health, activity, and diligence, together with a degree of
 learning. And to all these He has lately added, by a way none could
 have foreseen, favour both with the preachers and the whole people.

Come out in the name of God! Come to the help of the Lord
 against the mighty! Come while I am alive and capable of labour!

Dum superest Lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me
 Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo.

Come while I am able, God assisting, to build you up in faith, to
 ripen your gifts, and to introduce you to the people. Nil tanti.
 What possible employment can you have which is of so great importance?

But you will naturally say, 'I am not equal to the task; I have
 neither grace nor gifts for such an employment'. You say true; it is
 certain you have not. And who has? But do you not know Him who is
 able to give them? perhaps not at once, but rather day by day: as
 each is, so shall your strength be.

'But this implies,' you may say, 'a thousand crosses, such as
 I feel I am not able to bear.' You are not able to bear them now;
 and they are not now come. Whenever they do come, will He not send
 them in due number, weight, and measure? And will they not all be
 for your profit, that you may be a partaker of His holiness?

Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood, come and
 strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labour of

Your affectionate friend and brother. " 1

1 Wesley - Letters, Vol. VI, pp. 10-2

It is significant that Wesley, surrounded as he was by many able and worthy men, should appeal to Fletcher to succeed him. The letter, becomes still more significant when it is realized that back of it was the pressure of Wesley's preachers, who had urged Wesley to apply to Fletcher in the hope that he might be persuaded to allow himself to be named as Wesley's successor. When Wesley reported Fletcher's refusal, he was asked to renew his application.¹ Let it not be thought that Wesley was moved to the decision to take such a step only out of regard for the wishes of his preachers. Wesley remained at all times the leader of his people, and was never moved to make a decision that he did not, in his own judgment, feel wise. The letter not only expresses the high esteem in which Fletcher's ability was held by John Wesley and his preachers, but also the regard of the whole Methodist people, in whose name Wesley was well qualified to speak.

Wesley enumerates the qualifications his successor must possess and lays emphasis upon a Christian life with a singleness of purpose, of power and proficiency. No man could have been named as leader of the Methodist people unless he was primarily the Evangelist - as Wesley says,

"one who had a single eye to the advancement of the Kingdom of God".

"Thou art the man", wrote Wesley.

Fletcher's reply to Wesley's letter is as follows:

"Reverend and Dear Sir,

"I hope the Lord, who has so wonderfully stood by you hitherto, will preserve you to see many of your sheep, and me among them, enter into rest. Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, by the Lord's assistance, to help your brother to gather the wreck, and keep together those who are not absolutely bent to throw away the Methodist doctrines and discipline, as soon as he that now letteth is removed out of the way. Every help will then be necessary, and I shall

1 Moore - Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, pp. 260-1

not be backward to throw in my mite. In the meantime, you sometimes need an assistant to serve tables, and occasionally to fill up a gap. Providence visibly appointed me to that office many years ago. And though it no less evidently called me hither, yet I have not been without doubt, especially for some years past, whether it would not be expedient that I should resume my office as your Deacon; not with any view of presiding over the Methodists after you, but to ease you a little in your old age, and to be in the way of recovering, perhaps doing, more good. I have sometimes thought, how shameful it was, that no Clergyman should join you, to keep in the Church the work God has enabled you to carry on therein. And as the little estate I have in my own country is sufficient for my maintenance, I have thought I would one day or other offer you and the Methodists my free service. While my love of retirement made me linger, I was providentially led to do something in Lady Huntingdon's plan. But being shut out there, it appears to me, I am again called to my first work. Nevertheless, I would not leave this place without a fuller persuasion that the time is quite come. Not that God uses me much here, but I have not yet sufficiently cleared my conscience from the blood of all men. Meantime, I beg the Lord to guide me by his counsel, and make me willing to go anywhere or nowhere, to be anything or nothing.

"Help, by your prayers, till you can bless by word of mouth,

"Reverend and dear Sir,

"Your willing, though unprofitable, servant in the Gospel,

"J.F.

"Madeley, February 6, 1773." ¹

It is evident that Fletcher was tempted to leave Madeley and join Wesley as his assistant. The possibility of closer associations with the Wesleys again was a great attraction after his years of isolated parochial work. He gave more serious consideration to this thought than to Wesley's proposal that he should succeed him as leader of the Methodist people. While he promised to do all that he was able to assist Charles Wesley in holding the Societies together in case of Wesley's death, with characteristic reticence he evaded the issue by expressing the hope that Wesley would outlive him. Fletcher was not stirred by the possibility of achieving such an exalted position. Ambition was so utterly foreign to his nature that it never could have been strong enough to break the ties which bound him to his people in Madeley.

¹ Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, pp. 287-8

SECTION IV

THE REVIVAL AS REFLECTED IN THE THEOLOGY

OF JOHN FLETCHER

Section IV - John Fletcher - Doctrine

INTRODUCTION

The theology of Fletcher cannot be considered apart from the theology of Methodism. While it is not necessary to enlarge further here on his close connection with the main stream of the Revival, this affiliation is most clearly revealed in the matter of doctrine. His theology indicates the extent of his indebtedness to the Wesleys, for his 'Checks' were all written to defend Wesley's position, as well as his treatises against Toplady, Price, Priestly and Evans. More significant still is the fact that the major part of his writings passed for revision, before publication, through the hands of either John or Charles Wesley. These literally bear the stamp of their approval. Charles Wesley, more than John, willingly received Fletcher's writings, criticized and revised them for the press.¹ Fletcher became very dependent upon him for his help as a critic. Writing to him during May 1775, he said,

"I give you carte blanche to add, or cut off; but none but you." 2

Once they were published John Wesley freely recommended Fletcher's writings, and especially his 'Checks' to the consideration and study of his followers.³ They were accepted among the people as standard

1 John Wesley was responsible for the printing of the majority of Fletcher's 'Checks'. See, Wesley - Letters, Vol. V. pp.290, 304 311, 345; Vol. VI, pp. 75, 145-46. Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 195. These may all have passed through the hands of Charles as well. He too saw most of Fletcher's work before publication. Jackson - Life of Charles Wesley, Vol.II, p. 293. Fletcher - Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 266, 315

2 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 51

3 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V. p. 340
Vol. VI, pp. 123-4, 137

expositions and thus gained a place in Methodist literature as part of the foundation for its doctrine.¹ It is true that Wesley prescribed his 'Notes on the New Testament' and the first volume of his 'Sermons' as the basis of a common understanding. These standards later were adopted as the basis of doctrine.

Although there is little variance between the doctrines of the Methodists and Fletcher, it is not to be thought that Fletcher simply transcribed what he had assimilated from the Wesleys. He manifests their influence throughout, but he brought his own Christian experience and the experiences of those about him, the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church, all within the scope of his own creative faculties and put his own distinctive exposition upon them. Wesley, himself, recognized that the character of Fletcher's 'dogmatic' often won approval and response where his own failed.² Most of Fletcher's energy, however, was given to the defence of Wesley's contentions and attack upon his opponents. While his work in this regard was unique, he was by it denied the time and opportunity for placid utterance. During the controversy he was of necessity restricted to matters of contention. It is beside the point to regret this, or suggest that his talent might have better been employed. Obviously little is gained by following him through the labyrinthine paths of a controversial jungle. The arguments he used against his Calvinist opponents are barren of worth or interest to us now. The positive content of his theological teaching is the definite matter under consideration.

1 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, pp.329 - 30

Macdonald - Fletcher of Madeley, pp. 116-7

2 Wesley - Letters, Vol. Vi, p. 146

The primary emphasis in Fletcher's theology is laid upon experience. In this he was reacting against the Deism of the age which had literally divorced reason and revelation. He refused to agree with Deism that unassisted reason in itself was sufficient for human needs. On the other hand he refused to concur with the opponents of Deism, who had exalted faith into something almost independent of reason. He insisted on beginning with the facts of experience. He did not argue at length about the actual existence of religious phenomena; he rather accepted that as indisputable. The century presented a frozen theology based on subtle reasoning about the reality of the religious consciousness. Fletcher, instead, pointed men to the fact of its existence in living and glowing experiences. Thus, throughout, Fletcher operates on the basis of an empirical philosophy; his theology is an interpretation of this practical relationship of God and man. He is not concerned with abstract and metaphysical speculations except in so far as they are directly concerned with this relationship.

The word 'experience' for Fletcher, as it refers to religion, is not confined to an isolated and lofty moment in the soul's past; it means communion with God. It is consciousness or awareness of God. Of necessity the human centre of this communion is in the individual consciousness. It does not follow that experience in this sense need degenerate into a maudlin state of emotion and feeling, for it is linked not only to the collective experiences of believers, but is based on the objective facts of historical revelation. There is the historical revelation of God in Christ; there is the continuation of that revelation in the work of the Holy Spirit, who has been the basis

of religious consciousness within the Church, and there is lastly the reality of this consciousness now in the believer. The verification of the latter is solely dependent upon the historical revelation. Or to reverse the order - the facts of the New Testament are verified from the experience of the individual.

It is further true that this experience, to be understood and explained, must come within the scope of reason. Reason and scripture must be employed conjointly. Fletcher writes,

"1. That right reason has an important place in the matters of faith:

2. That all matters of faith may and must be decided by scripture understood reasonably, and consistently with the context: and

3. That antiquity and fathers, traditions and councils, canons and church, lose their authority, when they depart from sober reason and plain scripture. These three general protests are the very ground of our religion when it is contradistinguished from popery.... .. Christian candour being nothing but a readiness to hear right reason and plain scripture; sincerely desirous to prove all things, to hold fast that which is good and to approve things which are excellent." 1

Fletcher did not pay his devotion to the power of abstract reason.

"By reason, I mean that power by which we pass judgment upon, and draw inferences from what the understanding has simply apprehended." 2

That power, unless it be illuminated by God's spirit, easily succumbs to the ravages of sense and is rendered useless through passion and prejudice.

"True reason alas! " Fletcher writes, "is as rare as true piety." 3

Thus reason, for Fletcher, is a God given and inspired faculty, which can only exercise its true function when brought into harmony with God in a regenerate life. In fact, he says,

1 Works, Vol. III, p. 131

2 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 56n

3 Ibid.

"Right reason is a ray of the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world; and a beam of the eternal Logos, the glorious 'Sun of Righteousness'." 1

In this way Fletcher sought to lay the foundations for a rational scheme of Christianity. A scheme which had its organic centre in the historical fact of Christ and the operations of the Holy Spirit, attested and made more vivid in the daily consciousness of the individual by their conscious and vital witness. This could all be reasonably understood and interpreted by 'right reason'.

Fletcher was not beyond the popular view of his century in his attitude towards the Bible. The divine authority of the scriptures rested on the common term 'Word of God'. Protestant 'dogmatic' had laid complete stress on the clearness and sufficiency of the Word and had emphasized along with its authority its 'efficacia' as a means of salvation. Fletcher accepted this orthodox position without question. While his distinction between the covenants or dispensations marks a forward step and shows a semblance of appreciation for the idea of progression in historical revelation, still he clung tenaciously to the idea of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. The obvious criticism to which such a mechanical treatment of the scriptures is open does not belong to the eighteenth century, and there is little virtue in bringing it to bear upon Fletcher.

In this section the study will be confined to the four major points of his teaching; the doctrine of depravity, of redemption, of assurance, and Christian perfection. Around these centres gather the fundamental and positive assumptions of his doctrine.

1 Works, Vol. I, p. 8

Chapter I - THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL DEPRAVITY

There is nothing unique or novel in Fletcher's enunciation of the doctrine of the universal depravity of man. He followed in the tradition of evangelical orthodoxy, endeavouring to reaffirm the doctrine as one of the great and central truths of Christianity.

"This doctrine", he says, "being of such importance, that genuine Christianity stands or falls with it." 1

Later he writes,

"Consider further, that all the capital doctrines of Christianity are built upon that fundamental article of our depravity and our danger." 2

Thus convinced of its importance he prepared his "Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense: or a Rational Demonstration of Man's Corrupt and Lost Estate",³ this being one of the few publications he issued apart from his controversial works. Among those fragments which were published after his death was an unfinished dialogue between a minister and one of his parishioners on man's depravity and danger in his natural state.⁴ This piece contains much material that is similar to that found in his "Appeal". It is possible that the dialogue form of presentation was abandoned in favour of that which consisted in piling argument upon argument, as is in the "Appeal". However, be that as it may, the fact remains that the greater part of what Fletcher had to say concerning the doctrine of man and of sin, is contained in these two expositions.

1 Works, Vol. I, p. 9

2 Ibid.

3 Vide supra p. 56

4 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 447 ff

Fletcher gives expression to the belief that man is meant for God through his doctrine of the 'status integritatis', or man's original perfection. He writes that if we are to consider God as creating this world for the,

"manifestation of his glory, the display of his perfections, and the communication of his happiness to an intelligent creature, whom he would attach to himself by the strongest ties of gratitude and love"

we must conclude,

"that everything God made was at first 'very good'; or in other words, that order and beauty, harmony and happiness, were stamped upon every part of the creation, and especially on man, the masterpiece of creating power in this sublunary world" . 1

Thus man in Paradise is held to be without defect, living in the fullness of knowledge, internal harmony, bodily soundness, and fellowship with God.²

Man, in the beginning was endued with a two-fold life; he was a 'living body' and a 'living soul' .

"He had both an animal life, in common with the beasts, and a spiritual life, in common with angels." 3

Then came the Fall. Fletcher interprets the Genesis story after a literal fashion. 'In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die'.⁴ In the act of disobedience which followed, Adam and Eve felt the force of the promise. They lost the fear, trust, wisdom and love of God, with which they had been created. The penalty was death. Fletcher says,

"Total death, or a full departure of the Holy Spirit." 5

In this regard he is speaking of 'spiritual death', which passed upon Adam and all mankind in him,

1 Works Vol. I, pp. 19-20

2 Ibid. p. 60

3 Ibid. p. 111

4 Genesis 2; 17

5 Works, Vol. 1, p. 429

"when he lost God's moral image, fell into selfish nature, and was buried in sin, guilt, shame and horror". 1

The death of the 'living body' was also part of the condemnation under which Adam came. Fletcher speaks of Adam dying three deaths; the spiritual, the temporal, and the second death, i.e., "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone". 2

The origin of sin thus lies in the wilful act of our paradisiacal parents' disobedience. The specific consequence was the loss of the potentiality of life in God, which meant guilt, evil, suffering, and death. While Fletcher does distinguish between spiritual and physical death, he generally equates the two as equivalent; the physical death is minimized before the awfulness of spiritual death.

The final result of the Fall is the transmission of its consequences to the entire human race.

"Adam was the general head, representative, and father of mankind; and we suffer for his rebellion legally; as the children of those who have sold themselves for slaves are born in a state of wretched slavery." 3

"We are all seminally contained in the loins of Adam." 4

"Adam contained in himself, as in miniature, all his posterity." 5

He writes that sin is,

"a family disorder, incurable by human art. The man is Adam, family mankind, and the madness sin." 6

In thus maintaining the solidarity of the human race, he emphasizes the fact that we have our souls as well as our bodies, by inheritance from Adam, and so, that

"if Adam corrupted the fountain of human nature in himself, we, the streams, cannot but be naturally corrupted." 7

1 Works, Vol. I, p. 429

2 Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 454

3 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 115

4 Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 478

5 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 114

6 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 77

7 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 121

This, he argues, is manifest and indisputable, and he appeals with considerable skill and at great length, to the evidence of the misery in which man is involved in life through his impotency and depravity. It would appear, then, that in the language of the Westminster Confession, man is,

"utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil." 1

Fletcher does not maintain that the Fall meant the total and utter depravity of man. There remained in man certain "grand ruins" of the natural likeness of God,

"in our understanding, will and the eternal duration of our souls." 2

He refuses to accept the doctrine of the bound-will, and argues that man has a degree of liberty.

"Our liberty, or free-agency, consists in a limited ability to use our bodily and spiritual powers right or wrong, at our option." 3

This liberty means we are under no natural necessity, but have power to consider carefully the validity of any action. All moral agents are free to sin, or to refrain from wrong doing, and have the power to suspend one course of action and decide upon another. 4

Fletcher accounts for this partial restoration of will and understanding by the fact that Christ,

" 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world', Christ 'the repairer of the breach', mightier to save than Adam to destroy, solemnly 'gave himself' to Adam, and to us in him, by the free everlasting gospel which he preached in paradise. And when he preached it, he undoubtedly gave Adam, and us in him, a capacity to receive it, that is, a power to believe and repent." 5

1 Westminster Confession of Faith. Chap. VI, sec. IV
 2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 460
 3 Ibid. Vol. III, p. 430
 4 Ibid. pp. 419-421
 5 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 402

Fletcher appeals to experience, reason and scripture, that man is a moral agent, and being a moral agent, is a free agent. In order to harmonize this fact with his exposition of the origin and basis of sin, he finds satisfactory grounds for man's partial restoration of faculties in the work of Christ during his pre-existent condition. Fletcher is also decisive in his affirmation that every choice for good in man is the result of this 'prevenient' grace of God which has made such an action possible. His assumptions may be summarized thus:

1. That the will is always free in the sense that it is not forced.
2. That the will of man considered as fallen in Adam, and unassisted by the grace of God, is only free to do evil.
3. That when man does choose the good he has this freedom from redeeming grace.
4. That man has been put in a state of probation because of the rectifying work of Christ with Adam, to whom and to his seed, Christ restored a 'talent of free will to good', by which all men are put in a capacity of acquitting themselves well or ill.

This assertion of man's freedom of choice raises the problem of guilt. The necessary presuppositions of guilt are that there is a knowledge of right and wrong, and that the sin in question must have been avoidable. While Fletcher makes the individual somewhat accountable for the ugliness of the depravity he has inherited from his first parent, it is a depravity which works now by his own personal choice.¹ This leaves the individual blameable for his sin because his antagonism to the divine life is conscious and intentional. Man has power of discernment given to him in the degree he has received the 'prevenient' grace of God, and in proportion to the manner he exercises

1 Works - Vol. I, p. 117

this gift. The extent of the guilt charged against him is according to his unfaithfulness to the light which has been given unto him.¹

On this assumption the positive cause of sin is "the self-perversion of the free-will".² It began as such with the parents of the race in the Garden of Eden, and it continues as such in their children. Sin is thus fundamentally godlessness, the failure to trust and love God. "Disregard and contempt for the Almighty", Fletcher says, is the principle and nature of iniquity.³ In this sense sin is specifically religious and not a purely ethical conception, for it consists in maintaining a certain attitude towards God.

Sin, however, with Fletcher, is not merely voluntary; there is an hereditary predisposition to sin. He continually stresses how the individual is circumscribed by sin - the burden of the natural tendency to sin inherited from past generations. His main emphasis is upon this inheritance as a matter simply of heredity, thus tending to make sin a purely natural fact. This appears, on the surface, to be inconsistent with his contention that sin was a voluntary act. But while Fletcher maintains that the diffusion of sin and the tendency to sin is, for the most part, due to the natural tendencies inherited from previous generations, he is continually pointing out that man also inherits natural propensities to receive divine light, through the restoration Christ gave to Adam. Thus sin and grace are diffused through the race, and though the transition of sin and the tendency to sin is a matter of heredity, the continuance of sin rests upon a voluntary act or series of acts of the will.

1 works, Vol. I, pp. 405-06

2 Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 341

3 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 50

While Fletcher rigorously maintains that slight infringements on the law of God bring the sinner under condemnation as well as the committal of serious crimes, he agrees that there are degrees of sin. The older theology, with its doctrine of total depravity ethically interpreted, sought to represent all men as equally sinful. This Fletcher would not accept, for in his appeal to experience he saw that men not only sin in different ways but also in different degrees. Sin is dependent upon volition, and "sin will be considered as such (i.e. according to its own nature) before an infinitely holy God".¹ The most important distinction from a religious point of view, is between unforgiven sin, which separates us from the love of God, and forgiven sin, which does not. It is this emphasis which is predominant in Fletcher's distinction among degrees of sin. The amount of the sin is not the relevant fact. He speaks of different degrees of 'spiritual death'. But in every case 'spiritual death' is a matter of unforgiven sin; death which comes by absolutely quenching "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus".² Thus Fletcher joins with the Reformers in emphasizing that the thing which matters most, is not the greatness or the smallness of man's sin, but his personal attitude to God.

Fletcher's doctrine repudiates the idea that God is the author of sin. He allows, however, that God permitted sin to enter the world in admitting the possibility of it by creating man free and temptable. This, he maintains, is no impeachment of divine wisdom, for God after doing all that a wise and good ruler of rational creatures

1 Works, Vol. V. p. 418

2 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 429

could do to prevent sin, perpetually countered its progress by grace.¹

He affirms that God is now concerned with sin in four ways:

1. "In morally hindering the internal commission of it before it is committed."

This He does by forbidding sin through His laws, and enduing man with liberty to abstain from deliberate commission of sin.

II. "In providentially hindering (at times) the external commission of it."

III. "In marking, bounding, and overruling it, while it is committed."

IV. "In bringing about means of properly pardoning or exemplarily punishing it, after it has been committed." 2

The 'wrath of God' holds a real place in Fletcher's teaching. God does punish sin, and there is no distinction between sin and the sinner, for the only reality is the sinner. He writes,

"We grant that, although God punishes no one with eternal death for original and necessary sin, yet, when sin, which might have been avoided by the help of creating or of redeeming grace, has been voluntarily and personally committed, God does punish, and of consequence, has a right to punish, with eternal death." 3

Hell, in consequence, is not a place of imaginative fancy. It is the death which sin brings in the unregenerate, and which begins in this life, ending in 'the lake which burns with fire and brimstone'. Or, as he describes it in one place, it is "complete misery".⁴ Heaven, on the other hand, is "an uninterrupted union and communion with the Lord". 5

It is of interest to relate Fletcher's doctrine of sin to the orthodox teaching of Protestantism. The Reformers of the 16th century

1 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 479-80

2 Ibid. Vol. IV, pp. 318-20

3 Ibid. Vol. II, p. 290

4 Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 482

5 Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 370

were inclined to revert to the Augustinian position. They agreed in asserting that all Adam's posterity had inherited the total depravity of his fallen nature. Thus man not only lacks original righteousness, but is burdened with the 'concupiscentia' which enslaves him. Original sin is, therefore, not only a matter of natural imperfection, but is explicitly affirmed as genuine guilt. The Anglican Article is not in strict accordance with this view. It asserts that man is,

"very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil". 1

As for the nature of sin itself, the Reformers stressed its religious and personal character.

"Sin is the want of faith, the failure to fear and love and trust God." 2

Emphatic as they were in emphasizing the moral responsibility attached to sin, they made no effort to make clear how this can be reconciled with inherited guilt. They saw a fallen race, not fallen men.

The 18th century Rationalism fostered a somewhat shallow and superficial view of sin. It taught that man is disposed by a certain weakness of will to good, and a certain predilection to evil. At the same time, however, he is capable of an infinite perfectibility. He can develop the inborn germ of good which he possesses and supersede the tyranny of evil desire. 3

1 Article IX - Church of England. Vide, The Prayer Book Dictionary, p.50

2 E. R. E., Vol. II, p. 540

3 Mackintosh, H. R. - E. R. E., Vol. XI, p. 540

"The mind of man", wrote the typical rationalist Foster, "is by nature so strongly attached to virtue that it cannot be totally corrupted all at once." 1

Rationalism expressed the optimistic belief that a man could thus rise above the despotic power of evil into a true liberty of spirit by his own efforts.

Against this rather confident and fond hope Fletcher strove to accentuate the fact and the power of sin. His appeal to 'matter of fact and common sense' is primarily an appeal to experience. Substantiating this appeal by an added appeal to scripture and reason, he was definitely confirmed concerning the basic soundness of his teaching. He returned with the Reformers to assert the Augustinian principle that all Adam's posterity from their birth lack that tendency toward God with which Adam was created. His explanation of Adam's partial restoration of faculties through Christ's pre-existent gift of himself, is an honest effort to solve the dilemma which the Reformers left untouched, i.e. the relation of natural inherited sin and the individual's moral responsibility. This view met another difficulty the Reformers ignored, i.e. natural inherited sin and 'civil righteousness', eg. the unregenerate man might be a good father or a good citizen. It must be admitted, however, that Fletcher's theory rests upon rather flimsy scriptural support. In fact it is based upon an hypothetical conjecture, substantiated only by isolated inferences. Fletcher quotes Gen. 2:17, 3:15, Roms. 5: 11-21, as establishing the covenant of grace made with sinful Adam after the Fall.

His doctrine of sin is exposed to the same criticism as is the ecclesiastical view of sin in general, viz. that it is a fault in method

1 Foster, J. - Discourses, Vol. I, p. 387

to start with an isolated and unhistorical account of its origin. Any discussion of sin must begin with sin as discoverable in human existence. Fletcher does in reality begin with sin as a fact and then argues back to its origin. This kept him from turning redemption into a purely passive experience and depriving man of the power of free choice. Fletcher saw the reality of two facts, universal inherited sinfulness and voluntary wilfulness. In explanation of the first he accepted the orthodox view with minor modifications. In explanation of the second he offered a rather strained but sincere scriptural exposition. While we reject the view that sin originated in a pretemporal fall, an appeal to the conscience taught by Christ leads us to trace its existence to the misuse of moral freedom. Fletcher traces it to the same source.

But the question of the origin of sin is not the most important, and it is possible to do without an explanation. The chief concern of dogmatic is with the nature of sin. Fletcher's emphasis is upon sin as a disposition, or a condition, rather than the transgression of outward commandments. It causes a breach in man's relationship with God and it does that in virtue of its antagonism or indifference to holy love. Sin to Fletcher is in essence godlessness. Fletcher is in basic agreement with the modern position as expressed by Professor Mackintosh. He writes,

"Only if we conceive sin as godlessness do we reach a unified view." 1

Fletcher's definite association of sin with moral accountability is the most important note in his teaching on sin. He comes directly into harmony with the position of our Lord. Tennant writes of Jesus,

"Sin, he implies, is co-extensive with responsibility, and therefore with the degree of enlightenment." 1

Thus Fletcher was justified in going further to maintain that God was just in penalizing the sinner according to demerit, not according to the unavoidable lack of privilege.

In the light of modern explanations of the origin and the nature of sin, which are based on two additional centuries of study and research in science, philosophy, psychology and biblical criticism, Fletcher's teaching compares most favourably. We may put aside much of his view concerning the historical account of the origin of sin without loss. But the emphasis he places upon sin as a misuse of moral freedom and its expression in a sinful disposition towards God, and the moral accountability and responsibility of the individual for his actions, makes his account noteworthy and significant.

1 Tennant - The Concept of Sin, p. 32

Chapter II - THE DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION

From Fletcher's teaching regarding sin it is apparent that man, left to his own desires and devices, faces the inevitability of eternal death. The unconverted sinner stands in imminent danger of destruction, and without Christ he is removed further from God and nearer eternal misery.¹ Thus Fletcher lays forceful insistence upon the necessity of regeneration. The new birth is the necessary initiation of the new life, or as he calls it, "the first degree of salvation".²

The basis of its necessity lies in the teaching of St. John's gospel,

"I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."³

Fletcher writes,

"To see the face of God in righteousness, we must be cleansed from our natural corruption, and become partakers of the nature of Christ and of the image of God."⁴

He makes divisions in the process of regeneration. It is nothing less than the two great operations of the Spirit of God upon a penitent soul, i.e. 'justification' or the 'remission of sins', and 'sanctification'.⁵ On this view, then, regeneration is not complete until the highest point of the sanctification of a believer is reached,

"until 'he loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and his neighbour as himself', even as Christ loved him."⁶

1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 351

2 Ibid. p. 317

3 St. John 3:3

4 Works, op. cit.

5. Ibid. p. 329

6 Ibid. p. 330

It is noticeable in Fletcher's doctrine that the following conditions are evident. 1. The new life is decidedly the work of God and rests upon His bestowal of a new relationship between the individual and Himself. This change is decisive.

"A man passes from a state of nature to a state of grace",¹
and the attention is fixed on the sheer difference between the old state and the new. As a new creation, man is

"no sooner born of God than he becomes sensible of the presence of the Supreme Being".²

2. The new life is not a mere change of habit, or reformation of manners, but the bestowal of a new spiritual nature. Regeneration, for Fletcher, means nothing less than a baptism of the Holy Spirit and a real participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"It is a little thing to say 'By the grace of God I am not what I was', if we cannot add, 'By the same grace I am what I never have been'." ³

3. The new life requires to unfold. In naming sanctification as the second operation in regeneration Fletcher makes this quite clear.

4. The new life springs from faith.

"The sole means of obtaining this blessing is by a faith of the operation of God, and which is the power of God unto salvation." ⁴

Thus while the transforming act of regeneration is of the power of God, it becomes operative in us only on the condition of faith. Fletcher so identifies this life with faith that it continues to exist only on faith as a condition. He writes to a friend,

"One act of faith will not do; - faith must be our life, I mean, in connexion with its grand object." ⁵

1 Works, p. 311

2 Ibid. p. 314

3 Ibid. p. 325

4 Ibid. p. 332

5 Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 260

Led then to assert that all men stand in need of regeneration, which he equates with redemption, Fletcher claims that all men may have this redemption. He states his doctrine thus,

"We believe that God's attributes perfectly harmonize. Accordingly, his goodness and mercy incline him to 'wish for the salvation of' all men, upon gracious terms laid down by his wisdom and veracity. As a proof of the sincerity of this wish, he swears by himself, that his antecedent will or decree is not that sinners should die, but that, by the help of his free grace and the submission of their free will, they should turn and live. He does more still; he grants to all men a day of initial salvation, and 'all' that 'day long he stretches forth his hands' to them; he reproves them for their sins; he calls upon themⁱⁿ various ways to repent; and gives them power to do it according to one or another dispensation of his grace; requiring little of those to whom he gives little, and much of those to whom much is given." 1

Fletcher here repudiates the idea that the conditions of salvation can be at the same time 'immutable decrees', and 'free grace'. His belief in the universality of the gospel call was a necessary corollary of his appeal to experience. It rested upon the empirical fact which was central, as Dimond says, in the individual and collective life of Methodism, -

"the dominant sentiment of love, responding to the consciousness of reconciliation through the love and redeeming mercy of God". 2

For Fletcher it had passed from an argument into a conviction; a conviction based upon the organic and living authority of the Christian fellowship. He did not cease to argue about its truth, for it was this doctrine mainly, and its implications that he maintained so zealously in the controversy with the Calvinists.

At this point it is necessary to pause long enough to give a statement of Fletcher's teaching concerning the 'covenants' or 'dispensations' of God. Without an understanding of this it is impossible to comprehend his theological position.

1 Works Vol. II, pp. 307-08

2 Dimond. Psychology of the Methodist Revival, p. 240

His first distinction is between two 'grand' covenants, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.¹ The former was made with the innocent Adam before the Fall. Its basis is the observance of the law of God. The second is the covenant God made in the gift of free grace through Jesus Christ. This had its beginning when God first became man's redeemer after breaking the covenant of paradisiacal innocence by turning man out of his forfeited paradise.

"God", says Fletcher, "gave to Adam, and to all the human species which was in Adam's loins, a Saviour, who is called 'the seed of the woman', 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world', who was to make the paradisiacal covenant honourable by his sinless obedience." 2

In other words Christ fulfilled the Adamic law of innocence for man, and in so doing restored him to a state of grace. Fletcher then compares this restoration of grace to a seed sown which grows and develops in time. It appeared as the 'blade' when God made the promise of the Messiah to Abraham; it grew much under the patriarchs; 'the ear crowned the blade' under John the Baptist; it had remarkable growth with Christ and reached its fruition as the 'full corn' in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.³ These various dispensations appear in Fletcher's writings sometimes as three, and sometimes as four covenants. Three is at length the final number resolved upon, probably because it then becomes possible to relate them to the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴ The dispensation of grace under John the Baptist is not considered separately so as to admit of only the three.

From this Fletcher argues that God is partial in the distribution of grace in so far as the grace a man receives is dependent upon the

1 Works, Vol. II, p. 372f

2 Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 180

3 Ibid. Vol. I, pp. 398-99

4 Ibid. Vol. VI, p. 3f

dispensation under which he lives. He admits that this distinguishing grace may also be personal.¹ This election of partial grace, however, he holds to be truly consistent with the wisdom and sovereignty of God, and maintains it in firm opposition to the strict and immutable decrees of election. Fletcher had to face the alternative of election, i.e. reprobation. He met this in maintaining that God, in electing one man to the blessings of one dispensation, and a second to the blessing of another dispensation, simply means He 'reprobates' each from the promises which belong to the other dispensation.

It follows upon this teaching that a heathen is accepted before God in the degree that he is faithful to the light which is given to him. Fletcher is careful to assert, however, that this acceptance is solely upon the merit of Christ, in so much as Christ, according to Fletcher's theory, is the author of that grace which enables the heathen to fear God and work righteousness.²

The basis of each dispensation rests upon the free grace of God and no other foundation. Fletcher says,

"Our salvation is of God; or 'There is free grace in God; which, through Christ, freely places all men in a state of temporary redemption, justification, or salvation, according to the various gospel dispensations, and crowns those who are faithful unto death with an eternal redemption, justification, or salvation.'" ³

The day of salvation is before every man, and he is capable of acceptance or rejection, because of his rectified and assisted free will.

It follows then that as the salvation of man is of God, his damnation is of himself through an obstinate and final neglect of his first talent or degree of salvation. The basis of this is grounded upon the

1 Works, Vol. II, pp. 297-8

2 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 249

3 Ibid. Vol. IV, pp. 65-66

conviction that God,

"as Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge, he is, and ever will be, impartial in the distribution of justice".¹

The emphasis here is, of course, on the necessary part human volition plays in the individual's eternal salvation. If man refuses to act in accordance with the grace which he is afforded, God cannot choose but act in relation and in harmony with the dispensations He enacted.

Such, in brief, are the main outlines of Fletcher's 'covenant theology'. It is possible now to consider his teaching on the Atonement.

The speculative element is not prominent in Fletcher's treatment of the Atonement. The discussion centres in objective acts, i.e. the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is conducted, for the most part, from within the arena of Christian experience. The blessing, Fletcher says, is not to be described, but enjoyed.² However, among his writings is found a short exposition entitled "General Observations on the Redemption of Mankind by Jesus Christ",³ which contains his central teaching on this subject.

He stresses the justice of God and that in relation to the sin of the world committed against His person. He does not, however, interpret this justice as the private honour of a feudal Lord, but as a moral law under which God provided man life. God is directly identified with the moral law according to His dispensations, and so is not free to forgive without Atonement. Thus, writes Fletcher, it is unreasonable to suppose, "that an infinite bounty cannot present to an infinite justice a victim of boundless merit, fully to expiate, under conditions worthy of God, sins whose numbers were become infinite and boundless."⁴

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 179
 2 Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 15
 3 Ibid. p. 335 ff
 4 Ibid. p. 336

He says it is beyond man to question what sacrifice the justice of the Supreme Being ought to demand, or the moral order ought to require. The emphasis throughout is not on Christ's death as reparation, but as vicarious punishment; for he stresses God's yearning and love over His children. Love is the deepest motive determining God to redeem sinful man. Fletcher says that redemption is an act of compassion on God's part, "glorious and efficacious". His theory emphasizes the active obedience of Christ and His complete identification with human nature and sin as a sacrifice of infinite value for redemption. The more positive side of this sacrifice is to give

"to all reasonable beings the most perfect demonstration of a wisdom, of a bounty, of a holiness and of a justice which are infinite".¹

In this the Cross reveals:

1. God's absolute condemnation of human sin. Sin is now fully exposed and is judged by Jesus' attitude to it.
2. God's final revelation of His infinite love. From this second fact it follows that the Cross not only revealed God's eternal love, but that it made that love effective and created a new situation for sinful men. The reality of the Atonement for Fletcher is grounded in this vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ for it is His perfect sacrifice, and that alone, which is able to expiate human sin and bring men into a new life in God.²

The sacrifice of Christ has thus procured for all men a general temporary redemption, together with an initial salvation. Fletcher writes,

"This part of our doctrine may be summed up in three propositions: -
 1. God's mercy absolutely wills the initial salvation of all men by Jesus Christ. 2. God's goodness, holiness, and faithfulness absolutely will the eternal salvation of all those who, by the concurrence of their assisted, unassisted free will with his redeeming grace, are

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 336

2 Ibid. Vol. VI, p. 73

found penitent, obedient believers at the end of their day of initial salvation. And, 3. God's justice, sovereignty, and veracity absolutely will the destruction of all that are found impenitent at the close of the day of their gracious visitation, or initial salvation." 1

The work of Christ has obtained for all a measure of grace regardless of what dispensation they may live or have lived under. This grace is sufficient to enable them to accept salvation. The Atonement is therefore conditional. While it is made available for all men, it becomes effective for those who unite themselves with Him in faith.

The basis of that union with God is justification or forgiveness.

" 'Justification' or 'the remission of sins', is that gratuitous act of the divine mercy by which God pardons the sinner who believes in Jesus all his past sins, and imputes his faith to him for righteousness." 2

It is thus a supernatural act of God. However, it also becomes the experience of man, registering itself in the inward experience. The individual knows he has received Jesus Christ, because God "fills him with peace and joy in believing, and because he receives dominion over all his sins". 3

Such is man's experience of justification. In Fletcher's mind there is no sense whatsoever of human merit involved in this act. The basis of justification is solely the love of God which acts creatively, inaugurating a new relationship between sinful man and Himself. He writes,

"The glory of our regeneration ought to be wholly ascribed to God's mercy in Christ, since it is the only source of that unspeakable blessing." 4

The forgiving love of God is received through faith which is the only means of applying the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice to the soul. 5

1 Works, Vol. II, p. 308
 2 Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 329
 3 Ibid. p.
 4 Ibid. p. 368
 5 Ibid. p. 385

Fletcher defines saving faith as,

"believing the saving truth 'with a heart unto 'internal' and, as we have opportunity, unto external 'righteousness' according to our light and dispensation". 1

In one of his sermons he gives another definition.

"It is a close union with Christ, and a receiving him in the heart upon God's own terms, whence arises an humble confidence, that our sins are forgiven us, and that we, who were once afar off, are now reconciled to God through the blood of Christ." 2

Faith has thus no efficacy in itself apart from its object, viz., God revealed in Christ. Christ is the sufficient cause of faith and it is he, not faith, who generates the new life.

As faith is turning to God, repentance, which is its other side, is turning from sin. While it appears occasionally that Fletcher is inclined to accept the Reformers' emphasis that repentance is evoked by the Law, and faith by Christ, he makes no clear or emphatic distinction.³ He does distinguish between the sorrow of the world, which he says is fear of contempt, dread of poverty, etc. and 'godly sorrow', which springs from,

"humbling views of God's holiness, the impurity of the human nature, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the transcendent excellency of the law, which condemns the sinner." 4

He quotes from the Acts of the Synod of Berne to the effect that the knowledge of sin must of necessity be drawn from Christ,⁵ and says for himself that it is impossible to form a perfect view of the nature of sin, the severity of punishment it merits, and the greatness of the expiatory sacrifice made for it, apart from the fullest consideration of God's manifest revelation of Himself.⁶ Consequently faith and repentance

1 Works, Vol. III, pp. 11-12

2 Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 385

3 Ibid. Vol. V, p. 404f

4 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 153

5 Ibid. Vol. V, p. 406

6 Ibid. Vol. V, pp. 417-8

are inseparably linked up together, pervading and embracing each other. Thus the act of repentance itself is based upon a recognition of what Fletcher says includes a conviction of original and actual sin, and a conviction of unbelief.¹ There must also be grief for sin; "there is no true repentance where there is no true sorrow for sin".² And with repentance must go amendment, or forsaking of sin.³ Repentance, therefore, with faith, is a condition of receiving pardon, for without true repentance man can never know regeneration.⁴ Repentance, like faith, is not a momentary act but a persisting attitude. Fletcher writes,

"The deeper our sorrow for and detestation of indwelling sin is, the more penitently do we confess 'the plague of our heart'; and when we properly confess it, we inherit the blessing promised in these words, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' ".⁵

Repentance is the Christian's habitual response to the goodness and severity of God.

Fletcher sums up his teaching in what he calls the two gospel axioms,

"1. Ye are saved by grace, 2. Ye are saved through a faith which works by love."⁶

These two propositions support the whole doctrine of Christ concerning faith and works, grace and merit, or mercy on God's part and obedience on the part of man. It is the last part of the second axiom which requires some consideration now.

1 Works, Vol. I, p. 162
 2 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 152
 3 Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 386
 4 Ibid. Vol. V, pp. 398-99
 5 Ibid. Vol. V, p. 184
 6 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 194

Faith is asserted as the principle of action which is productive of good works.

"True faith is the root that produces hope, charity, and sincere obedience." 1

A life of persistent faith is therefore necessary for a life of righteousness.

"Believe and obey is the sum of the gospel." 2

Obedience itself is solely dependent upon faith; thus faith is the source of all spiritual life.

A faith which does not work righteousness has no reality for Fletcher. Faith is only saving and operative, as it continues to work righteousness and when,

"living faith ceases to work, it dies away, as the heart that ceases to beat; it goes out, as a candle that ceases to shine". 3

The emphasis which Fletcher places upon the practical expression of faith in good works springs from his conception of salvation, viz. that salvation is something which does not reach its completion until the day of judgment. He says there is,

"a particular eternal redemption, together with a finished salvation, for them that obey him and endure to the end". 4

Fletcher stoutly maintained that man would stand before God at the last to be judged according to his works, in relation to the response he had made to the light which he had received under his dispensation. Under the pressure of controversy Fletcher stated this thought in bolder terms. He called the event of that last day a 'second justification by works', 5 by which he meant 'a second justification' by

1 Works, Vol. III, p. 51
 2 Ibid. Vol. II, p. 339
 3 Ibid. Vol. III, p. 43
 4 Ibid. Vol. II, p. 312
 5 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 294

the 'evidence of works'. This point had become the storm centre of the controversy arising out of the 'Minutes', and Wesley's opponents had charged Wesley with maintaining a doctrine of justification by works which implied human merit. But Fletcher's doctrine was grounded in the heart of practical Christian experience, and regardless of how badly it may have been expressed, it was an effort to give full consideration to the impartial justice and wrath of God, and the individual's active participation in a necessary and vital union with Christ which was only kept alive by faith. Since faith was entirely the gift of God's grace, a fact Fletcher is never tired of reiterating, every good work springs from grace. Thus man merits nothing of himself. The vital point, however, is that eternal acquittal or conviction of the individual, is based upon the individual's response to the creative act of God's grace made real to him. Carrying the question thus far back, it is seen that final justification does in reality rest upon an attitude or degree of faith, rather than on isolated deeds or works. This is not an unfair reading of Fletcher's doctrine. If the threat of Antinomianism made Fletcher formulate his position in rather bold terminology, he never departed from his central position - that a man is justified solely by faith before God. But he insisted upon that faith being a living and operative faith, one which was productive of good works. F. R. Barry has recently written,

"The ultimate appeal of Christianity must always be to the fruits of Christian living and their moral vitality and effectiveness." 1

This may well describe the true character of Fletcher's appeal.

His deep dissatisfaction and opposition to the Calvinist's doctrine of a

1 Barry, F. R. - Relevance of Christianity, p. 5

limited Atonement bears the marks of the influence of Arminian principles which came through John Wesley. Wesley, himself, inherited them in turn from his father's legacy of Archbishop Laud's High Churchmanship.¹ Laud had repudiated Calvinism and used Arminian teaching as an expedient in theological controversy thus providing it with a fuller entry into English Church life. The issues of the Civil War eclipsed Arminianism, and by the eighteenth century it had become so blended with Latitudinarianism and Rationalism as to become

"a negative rather than a constructive or mediating system".²

Under the Wesleys Arminianism in England revived and became aggressive. Fletcher, caught up in the stream of the Revival, became steeped in its teaching and consequently became one of its ablest exponents. His teaching on the Atonement is, in the main, that of the Arminian theology. Still, he does not appear to bear any trace of influence of the Governmental theory of Grotius, which made such an impression upon Arminian teaching. Professor Miley declares that this is the only theory of the Atonement logically consistent with Arminian principles.³ This statement is far from the truth, for the Rectoral or Governmental theory suffers from as many defects as the traditional or orthodox view which Fletcher upheld, and which was not inconsistent with his position.

It is, however, the covenant idea which is the organizing principle of Fletcher's whole theological system and which has its most definite influence upon his doctrine of redemption. Fletcher, like earlier

1 Workman - A New History of Methodism, Vol. I, pp. 36-7
 2 Platt - E.R.E., Vol. 1, p. 811
 3 Miley - Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 169

theologians, distinguishes between the two covenants, i.e., the covenants of works and of grace. The novelty of his treatment appears in making Christ's covenant of grace effective for Adam and his descendants before His coming, and to those since who know not of Him. Cocceius, who is the most eminent representative of the covenant theology, distinguishes only two covenants, and stresses the fact that the new covenant of Christ was made known to Adam, and to his descendants before Christ's arrival on earth, yet there is no sense in which it became effective for them.¹

It does not appear that Fletcher knew the writings of Cocceius for he makes no reference to them; but it is evident that he was influenced by the teaching of the Federal theology to which they gave rise. His teaching bears distinctive points of difference from the Federal school. The most significant is the difference in the fundamental idea of the term covenant. The Federalists maintained that the only true and proper use of the term was to denote, "a mutual agreement between parties with respect to something".²

Fletcher, on the other hand, is inclined to revert to the conception of the covenant as it was best known in Scottish theology viz., to express in a vivid way the collective essence of God's promises to His people. The covenants are for Fletcher 'dispensations', which are enacted by God. This is a point of fundamental difference between Fletcher and the Covenant school. Through this emphasis on the divine side of the covenant dispensation, he could stoutly maintain how entirely man was dependent upon the grace of

1 Brown, W. Adams - E.R.E., Vol. IV, p. 222

2 Lindsay, T.M. - The British and Foreign Evangelical Review,
July 1879. p. 524

God. He could have used the words Dr. Cunningham once used when he wrote in recognition of Calvinism,

"How entirely God is the author of our salvation, and of all that leads to it." 1

Fletcher's special antithesis between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, with additional minor distinctions in the latter covenant, sets out a plan of redemption which has its own unique qualities. Whatever else may be said of the free use he makes of Biblical material and the form in which he compresses it, this may be said too, he was making a sincere and honest protest against arbitrariness in the plan of redemption. The tendency of the Reformed theology was to concentrate attention upon the metaphysical aspect of redemption, insisting upon divine decrees and divine intention for the salvation of man to the neglect of the active fulfilment of that plan in the history of salvation in time. Fletcher makes an effort to draw the attention of men to a God whose purpose was known and whose character could be trusted. The idea of the covenant is rich in experimental significance. In dwelling upon the historical side of the plan of salvation - its revelation, he sets his system in a philosophy of history.

This further fact must be noted. Once Fletcher had laid out his system of the covenants, he contrives to mass the body of his theology around it. Fortunately this process is not carried to extremes but becomes largely purposeful in harmonizing his doctrines. Thus his teaching on the covenants, though mainly affecting his doctrine of redemption, provides the skeleton for his complete theological position.

Fletcher's doctrine of the Atonement suffers from the same weakness as that of traditional Protestant orthodoxy, with which it is so

1 Cunningham - The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation, p.580

closely identified. It is inclined to represent the Cross as forming part of a drama enacted between God and Christ and to lose the New Testament emphasis of the Cross as something directed toward men. While his discussion is not carried out in legal terms, his treatment does not escape a somewhat legalistic flavour, especially when he makes an equation between the demerit of man's sin and Christ's penal suffering and implies that human guilt and Christ's righteousness are externally transferable. It is to Fletcher's credit, however, that he is not carried away by speculative fancies, nor does he force his theory with undue expansion. His doctrine is anchored in the objective act of Christ's sacrifice. He wrote to Miss Bosanquet,

"I build my faith not on my experience, though this increases it, but upon the revealed truth of God." 1

Fletcher is inclined, in some small degree, to emphasize the sacrificial element in Christ's death as the all important fact, and so to minimize his lived-out life. The sacrifice had infinite value because of Christ's complete identification with the sin of man and his life of obedience.

Whatever weaknesses there are in Fletcher's doctrine to invite criticism in a more enlightened age, there is no denying the soundness of his basic principles. Man is received before God 'for Christ's sake'. He who becomes one with Christ by faith, becomes identified with Christ in that death in which the evil of sin was perfectly acknowledged and the self-consecration of righteousness perfectly achieved. Thus God, in accepting the believer in Christ, does not ignore sin, but recognizes the believer's spiritual identification

1 Tyerman - Wesley's Designated Successor, p. 412

with His son. This was Fletcher's fundamental emphasis; man was only saved when the virtue of the Atonement became real within - when Christ was within. This is assuredly the fullest and profoundest meaning of the Pauline idea of 'union with Christ'.

Chapter III

THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE

The special form of the appeal to experience, which is the fundamental basis of Fletcher's theology, is his doctrine of Assurance. Not only were all men in need of salvation and able to have it, but they might know themselves saved. This doctrine provides a concrete illustration of the degree to which Fletcher reflects eighteenth century individualism. It is necessary, therefore, to examine its philosophical background.

The origin of the appeal to experience came with Descartes and his famous dictum, 'Cogito ergo sum'. His influence brought its own peculiar reaction in England with Hobbes and Locke, who sought to reach the basis of the validity of thought and being through introspection. Hume carried the examination further to demonstrate that this method of seeking to validate the truth revolves upon uncertain and impermanent sensations which are no warrant for belief. Fletcher, as had Wesley, made his appeal to this disputed source of authority, but with this fundamental difference in outlook. The philosophy of the century confined itself too exclusively to intellectual factors. Fletcher, on the other hand, maintained the reality of "spiritual internal senses", which are, as he says, "with regard to the spiritual world, what our bodily, external senses are with regard to the material world. They are the only medium by which intercourse between Christ and our souls can be opened and maintained." 1

In asserting this basis of human reception for spiritual phenomena, he was claiming for them a reality of their own which the philosophical

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 5

school had not acknowledged.

The spiritual faculties for which Fletcher was contending are not generally distributed. The exercise of these senses belong only to the regenerate; they "exist, and are opened in, and exercised by, regenerate souls". 1

The 'natural man' is without such understanding for he "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned". 2

Fletcher enumerates these spiritual faculties - sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and what he calls, "some feeling of our unworthiness, some sense of God's majesty". 3 This last can perhaps be best expressed by what Professor Otto has called 'the idea of the Holy'.

Thus as Fletcher sought to claim the validity of introspection upon an understanding of spiritual faculties he unconsciously reflects the philosophical drift of his age. Inasmuch as he urged an enlargement of the content of the consciousness in the regenerate, he was rightly claiming the validity of religious knowledge upon a level that was not entirely intellectual, and was rescuing spiritual truth from the narrow confines of the purely scientific and psychological arena.

On March 15th, 1760, Charles Wesley wrote to his wife,

"Mr. Berridge is almost as old as me, but deeply exercised, and highly favoured; yet he dares not say he is justified. I am willing to receive light from whatever instrument; neither does it show our doctrine false, but only unguarded. We did not always divide the word

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 5
 2 1 Corinthians 2:14
 3 Works, op.cit. p.9

rightly. We laid more stress upon the verbal than upon the real testimony; and often set believers down for unbelievers, and the contrary. God has remarkably owned the word since Mr. Fletcher and I changed our manner of preaching it. Great is our confidence towards the mourners, who are comforted on every side." 1

This is an interesting, though rather obscure reference. There is no doubt it bears on the question of assurance and this even more evident from the remaining part of the letter. Moreover, it is clear, that Fletcher was associated with Charles Wesley in making some definite change, which proved to be a decided advantage in their preaching on this subject. John Wesley, in his old age, acknowledged that he and Charles had preached the doctrine in an uncharitable and exaggerated form:

"When fifty years ago my brother Charles and I, in the simplicity of our hearts, taught the people that unless they knew their sins forgiven they were under the wrath and curse of God, I marvel they did not stone us." 2

It is plausible to suggest that it was, then, at this time, that the change suggested above was effected, and the doctrine softened, although it must be recognized that Charles Wesley is known to have vacillated in his opinions concerning the abiding witness of adoption even to the point of disagreement with his brother.³ From the letter above quoted, assurance appears to rest upon an inward confidence, a confidence which is to be proven and enlarged upon as one grows in fellowship with God. From a letter which Fletcher wrote about the same time, it is possible to elaborate and authenticate the position that he and Charles Wesley had arrived at.

"I think you take a sure method to perplex yourself, if you want to see your own faith, or look for one moment at yourself for proof of your faith: others must see it in your works, but you must feel it in your heart. The glory of Jesus is now by faith realized to the

1 Wesley, Charles - Journal, Vol. II, p. 227

mind, in some such manner as an infinitely grand and beautiful object which appears in the firmament of heaven: it arrests and fixes the attention of the spectators on itself; it captivates them, and by the pleasure it imparts, they are lead on to view it: so when Jesus is our peace, strength, righteousness, food, salvation, and our all, we are penetrated with a consciousness of it. We should never rest short of this feeling, nor ever think we have it strong enough." 1

Assurance is thus not only the present possession of the believer

In one of his sermons he writes,

"Never rest till you are sure of your interest in him, till you feel the virtue of his blood applied to your heart by the power of his Spirit." 2

Thus could Charles Wesley write that the mourners were comforted on all sides. The harshness had gone out of their preaching. Assurance is something which grows. One might believe and be saved and yet not be completely aware of it. It is an achievement, and even those who have assurance should never think that they have it in sufficient measure. In confidence they are urged to strive for a fuller experience.

The underlying foundation of Fletcher's teaching on assurance is the experience of regeneration. Of this new life the Christian is certain. It is no capricious imputation of Christ's personal righteousness, but

"a real present participation of his purity, power, and blessedness, together with pardon and acceptance". 3

"Therefore, 'the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins', the assurance of faith, and 'the peace of God' passing all understanding, are the experienced blessings of the converted." 4

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 171
 2 Ibid. Vol. VII, p. 456
 3 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 134
 4 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 135

Fletcher is certain this new life is not self-produced. In contrast to much of man's experience it bears witness to an efficient and sustaining cause. He writes,

"A just distinction is to be made between feelings excited in the body alone by self-exertion or mere natural pathos and those bodily emotions that are necessary and involuntary consequences of the powerful workings of God's Spirit on the soul. The one are 'sparks of our own kindling', which give neither heat nor light, and vanish as soon as perceived; the other are the natural effect of grace; which the soul cannot contain." 1

It is Christ, apprehended by faith, who is the creative power.

"His mysterious incarnation re-unites and endears us to God; his natural birth procures our spiritual regeneration, his unspotted life restores us to a blissful immortality; his bitter agony gives us calm repose." 2

In his 'Essay on Truth' Fletcher maintains that saving truth is the ground of saving faith, and is embodied in Jesus Christ, the living word. That word is transmitted to man by "revelations, traditions, scriptures, and sacraments". 3

The emphasis on these objects of faith bears no trace of any tendency whatsoever to confine grace to sacramental channels.

It may be said then, that the central certainty of the Christian, for Fletcher, stands in indissoluble relation to objects of faith in three distinct spheres.

1. In relation to the 'immanent' objects of faith, viz., the consciousness of sin and the need of salvation; the reality of the new birth.

2. In relation to the 'transcendent' objects of faith, viz., the revealed person and purpose of God in Jesus Christ, who himself, became the expiatory sacrifice for sin making human redemption possible.

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 427
 2 Ibid. Vol. I, p. 171
 3 Ibid. Vol. III, p. 24

3. In relation to the 'transeunt' objects of faith; those objects of faith which effect the transition of the 'transcendent' objects to the subject, viz., the Scriptures, the Church with its liturgy and sacraments.

Having pointed out the close association assurance has with regeneration in Fletcher's teaching, it is necessary to consider its relation to the Holy Spirit. He writes,

"Under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the great truths of the gospel are demonstrated by the power of an internal evidence, which leaves in the heart no more room for doubt than a mathematical demonstration leaves room for hesitation in the mind." 1

Thus the Holy Spirit is the operative transcendent fact, and assurance is the direct witness of the Spirit. The Spirit is apprehended by the spiritual faculties of the regenerate man, but as the act of regeneration is also the work of the Spirit, assurance is but the continuation of that process. At one time it appears Fletcher thought he had made a discovery, and had maintained that the receiving of the Holy Spirit was a specific, and separate operation quite apart from justification. Wesley disagreed and there is no evidence that Fletcher persisted in his position.² He firmly urges that the revelation of Christ to the believer is,

"a supernatural, spiritual, experimental manifestation of the Spirit, power, love, and sometimes the person of God." 3

And as man is now living under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is the creative and operative factor in all of God's working. He does not isolate His activities to separate stages or distinct areas.

1 Works, Vol. VI, p. 28

2 Wesley - Letters, Vol. V. p. 228

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 15

Assurance is confirmed by the application of the pragmatic test, "By their fruits ye shall know them". Fletcher always insists upon the evidence of the new life manifested in good works. The regenerate must reveal the reality of his rebirth.¹

Fletcher had little patience with the antinomian believer who gained his assurance through the imputed righteousness of Christ. He stoutly insisted that assurance came through close union with Christ by faith, that it involved a real participation in the source of all goodness and the expression of that goodness in life.

Assurance, nevertheless, does not wait for exterior manifestations of the new life. It rests primarily upon inward spiritual apprehension and may become the immediate possession of the new convert. Dimond says that the psychological basis of the doctrine of assurance is in the noetic quality of the conversion experience. As distinct from abstract reasoning towards a conclusion in discursive thought, the knowledge claimed by the convert is concrete, intuitive, and immediate.² This intuitive certainty springs then from the joint witness of the Divine and human spirit.

When it is evident that the main structure of Fletcher's teaching here gathers around a direct appeal to the individual consciousness as the basis of reality, the danger to which it is subject becomes increasingly apparent. Fletcher might be challenged on the ground that such a doctrine ends in sheer individualism since it bases knowledge upon the feelings and ideas of the individual.

1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 366f

2 Dimond - Psychology of the Methodist Revival, p. 232

Troeltsch has written of Methodism precisely after this manner, as "the renewal of orthodox Christianity in a quite individualistic accentuated form".¹

It must be remembered, however, that Fletcher appealed beyond the individual experience to the collective experience of the children of God confirmed in the 'transeunt' objects of faith. He writes that the true Christian will always render obedience and witness to the Church.² In an effective and practical manner he organized his societies, in which the individual experience was saved from excess by the correction given through the witness of others, while the rigour of the spiritual discipline brought wholesome reaction.

The appeal to collective experience was substantiated, and made more vivid, in the emphasis upon the 'communion of saints'. Conversion meant immediate entry into a fellowship unknown before. The intimacy of the society and the class-meeting gave real assistance in welding the individual into the greater communion. Dr. R. W. Dale spoke of the class-meeting thus:

"It renders possible a far more effective fulfilment of the idea of the pastorate and a far more perfect realisation of the communion of saints than are common in any other Protestant community."³

Introspection is always in real danger of unhealthy habits of self-analysis. Fletcher, himself, for a period, was inclined to morbid subjectivism which gradually disappeared as he apprehended the object of saving grace more clearly. He gained assurance with the increasing consciousness of the tremendousness of the objective force which God provided in Christ for the redemption of sinful men. Throughout his correspondence he is continually advising those to whom he

1 Troeltsch - The Social Teaching of the Christian Church, Vol. II, p. 721

2 Works, Vol. VI, p. 36

3 Dale - The Evangelical Revival, p. 32

writes, to turn from self and fix their lives solely upon Him. To one person he writes:

"The only advice I can at present give you is, not to look at self, except to believe it away." 1

Assurance for Fletcher is never gained through introspection; it is felt by allowing the full consciousness of the redeeming love of God made real in Christ to become a present possession. He was not deluded into thinking that self-analysis could bring assurance.² His own experience had taught him otherwise. It was only when he had turned from the constant examination of his own state of feeling to learn the meaning of faith, that he escaped from the enemy that was ensnaring him. Saving faith brought assurance and was a rebuttal of self which denied any place to morbid introspection.

A further charge against the doctrine of assurance is that it leads to egoism. Assurance, of any nature or upon whatever foundation, is open to the same criticism. The Calvinists who, during the controversy, insisted upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, were more at fault in this regard than their Arminian opponents. Fletcher's own life is the best refutation to those who maintain that egoism and assurance must go together. He bears not the slightest trace of egoism, but on the contrary, is the humblest of men. As has been noted, he insisted that there should be no complacency springing from a sense of attainment. The Christian is not to rest content with a measure of progress. There is always an urgency to press forward.

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 208

2 "Religion is not a diseased self-introspection, an agonizing inquiry". Carlyle - Past and Present, p. 54

Assurance for Fletcher is not only of the present. It has its link with the future. It means that not only has man the consciousness of sins forgiven, but he is blessed with a lively hope. The basis of this hope is Christ himself, in whom all the promises of God have become a living and inviolable Word. This is the only true heritage of the Christian, which springs, he says,

"from an experimental knowledge of God by Jesus Christ". 1

The foundation for this future assurance is thus identical with that of present assurance. In other words, hope, as a present possession, is part of the Christian's assurance.

It must be recognized that there is no outstanding difference between Fletcher's and the Wesleys' teaching of this doctrine. Fletcher can claim no innovations. His exposition is based upon the views he shared with the Wesleys. He may justly claim, however, a place with them through the contribution of some creative labour in the formulation of the doctrine with Charles Wesley.

Dr. Workman writes, in reference to the Methodist doctrine,

"Never before in the history of the Church since the writings of St. Paul had the doctrines of Assurance been so clearly enunciated." 2

He suggests that it was the fundamental contribution of Methodism to the life and thought of the Church. His survey of the relation of this doctrine to its previous appearances in the history of theology makes a detailed consideration in that direction unnecessary. His study reveals the fate of the doctrine in Roman Catholicism where it remains in essence as contradictory to the sacerdotal system. With the Reformers there was no clearly defined position set forth. Assurance

1 Works, Vol. V. p. 459

2 Workman - New History of Methodism, Vol. I, p. 21

could not be a logical doctrine with Calvin since the source of salvation is completely external in the immutable decrees, and Luther's vacillating position on the nature of faith kept the doctrine from becoming incorporated in Protestant theology. From the 'Homilies' of the Anglican Church it may be inferred that it had been taught, but it was a dead issue during the eighteenth century. It remained for Methodism with its clearly enunciated form of the doctrine to bring it into a vital place in Protestant theology and Protestant church life.

It is essential to see the doctrine against the background of the century. Its novelty was the cause of great antipathy and even of persecution. The inner light of spiritual discernment was regarded with distrust as 'enthusiasm'. Apart from the fact that it was a new idea, opposition followed from the Church, which was steeped in Deism, and from the State which was saturated with Toryism. Assurance of sins forgiven and of a living fellowship with God in Christ, cut at the very heart of the fundamental doctrines of Deism. The presumption of underlings who claimed a knowledge denied to their superiors was a frontal attack upon the Constitution. Thus did the Duchess of Buckingham reply to a letter from the Countess of Huntingdon.

"I thank your Ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks, and to do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told, that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding." 1

Wesley records in his Journal the imprisonment of an Edward Greenfield of St. Just, and the reply he received upon inquiring the objection raised against the man.

1 Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, Vol. I, p. 27

"Why, the man is well enough in other things; but his impudence the gentlemen cannot bear. Why, sir, he says he knows his sins are forgiven." 1

Fletcher, as has been seen, was subject to an attack upon his doctrines at the occasion of the Archdeacon's visitation.² The preacher, among other things, charged him with being an enthusiast. Fletcher ably maintained his position in his letter 'In Defence of Experimental Religion'. From this letter it is apparent that the typical preaching of the Church of England during the century sought to discountenance feelings as not agreeable to sober rational worship. Fletcher refused to recognize any inconsistency.

"Does it seem contrary to reason, that a spirit should be affected by spiritual objects? If heat and cold, sickness and health, so affect my body as to cause various feelings in it, why cannot fear and hope, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, sin and grace, remorse and peace, so affect my soul as to produce various feelings or sensations there?" 3

The warmth and passion of such experimental religion could not avoid a clash with the frigidity and barrenness of the century's Deism.

Fletcher was able to guard his teaching from the main attacks it might suffer. Introspection has its dangers but to Fletcher introspection is not the process by which assurance is reached. It follows, rather, from the turning of self outward and from its fixation upon the central and objective fact of God in Christ. Union with Christ, for Fletcher, is the basic condition of assurance and upon this fundamental assumption his doctrine rests..

The question of how the knowledge of sins forgiven and of fellowship with Christ is possible is the most pertinent question. Fletcher

1 Wesley, - Journal, Vol. III, p. 186

2 Vide supra p. 30

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 411

asserts the reality of spiritual faculties of apprehension in the regenerate man. He stands in sharp opposition to the intellectualism of his age which maintained that Christianity exists in a number of dogmas, or in an historical and doctrinal knowledge of Jesus Christ.¹ He seeks to vindicate the claim of religious knowledge, not only for its existence, but as something that is not confined to the limitations of abstract reason. The problem that faced Fletcher is the same one which faces and has faced the Church throughout her days, viz., that of gaining recognition for the reality of the religious consciousness. Fletcher, and the Methodists, gain a victory, not so much with the power of logic, but with the constant witness to the reality of spiritual phenomena. Fletcher was no psychologist; he could not explain in detail the processes involved in the operation of the religious consciousness. It remained for William James and others since to attempt to do this. Fletcher simply demanded recognition of the religious consciousness on the basis of its attested existence in the new man. Once granted, this was not inconsistent, on the ground of revelation, with the revealed and avowed purpose of God in Christ.

The most dangerous tendency in Fletcher's teaching is the inclination to insist upon the religious consciousness as a distinct fact, separate from the ordinary conscious experience of men. This is accentuated through his insistence upon the religious consciousness, or the spiritual faculties, as belonging only to the regenerate - a truly important and correct emphasis. However it must not

1 Works, Vol.VIII, p. 14

be forgotten that consciousness is one and the same under all its aspects and experiences. While it is a common practice to abstract aspects of consciousness for the sake of analysis, as for example, the moral consciousness or the rational consciousness, it does not mean that the abstraction and separation exist in consciousness itself. The consciousness is

"one indivisible whole, and the whole is operative in every act, thought, and purpose".

So writes Dr. Hughes. Fletcher's insistence upon the spiritual faculty as a separate entity is not wholesome. It is seeking to claim for it a reality which cannot be proven to exist. Religion can never be understood if it is to be regarded as the activity of any one aspect of self-consciousness. The functioning of the religious consciousness is self-consciousness functioning at its best and highest level.

Overlooking the unguarded expressions used to make his claims for religious certainty more emphatic, it is possible to gain some idea of the fundamental contribution of his teaching on this subject. He sought to expand the theory of knowledge through the inclusion of a wealth of higher values in order to give full recognition to the place and certainty of religious knowledge. His claim that an individual had every right to assert spiritual certainty is of the highest rank and order. That in his writings he did not examine the philosophical basis of his contention as he might have done, is probably more the result of lack of convenience than lack of ability. However, as has been stated above, it was through the insistence of their demands for the recognition of spiritual phenomena that he and the Methodists, gained their point. What they lost in logic they gained through the force of their lived-out lives.

1 Hughes - The New Psychology and Religious Experience, p. 143

The Doctrine of Christian perfection is a necessary corollary of Fletcher's appeal to experience. It is part of his particular outline of the religious life which begins with conversion. The natural sequel to conversion is the blessed gift of assurance, the seal of justifying faith. Christian perfection is the further seal of the Holy Spirit set upon the earnest strivings of the new life. Upon the recognition of this fact, Fletcher places one of the strongest reasons for the defence of the doctrine. He speaks of his teaching as leading naturally to "holiness and perfect obedience", a doctrine which he refers to as the "precious jewel" of Christianity.¹ In contrast he speaks of the Calvinist's contention for the continuance of indwelling sin as the venomous, mortal sting. He substantiates his plea for the importance of the doctrine on the grounds of its place in the teaching of Christ and in the writings of Paul, John, Peter and James.

Back of this, however, is the practical consideration which actuated Fletcher to contend strongly for his position. He was conscious of the steady growth of antinomianism among the Methodists and a decline in spiritual power. He wrote to his friend Benson -

"Easily the heart gets into a false rest before our last enemy is overcome. Hence arises a relapsing, in an imperceptible degree, into indolence and carnal security: hence a dreaming that we are rich and increased in goods. This is one of the causes of the declension you perceive among some of the Methodists. Another is the outward rest they have, which is consistent with the selfish views of hypocrites, and with the unbending of the bow of faith, in those who are sincere..... The work of justification seems stopped, in some degree, because the glory and necessity of the pardon of sins, to be received and enjoyed now by faith, is not pressed enough upon sinners

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 406

and the need of retaining it upon believers. The work of sanctification is hindered, if I am not mistaken, by the same reason, and by holding out the being delivered from sin as the mark to be aimed at, instead of being rooted in Christ, and filled with the fulness of God, and with power from on high." 1

It would appear that Fletcher had reached a position similar to one Wesley arrived at previously at Launceston in 1776, when he sought the reasons why the work of God had gained no ground; he discovered that,

"the preachers had given up the Methodist testimony. Either they did not speak of Perfection at all (the peculiar doctrine committed to our trust), or they spoke of it only in general terms, without urging the believers to 'go on unto perfection', and to expect it every moment. And wherever this is not earnestly done, the work of God does not prosper." 2

This great salvation is the rightful heritage of every Christian believer and to admit its improbability, or to stop short of its attainment, is to stunt spiritual growth. Fletcher fully realized that spiritual life depends upon a constant longing and searching for a fuller vision of God, a searching which is a gradual fulfillment, but as shall be seen, does not reach its completion in this world.

In his exposition of the doctrine Fletcher did not lay undue stress upon the word 'perfection'. He retained it because of its scriptural basis, "Be ye perfect", etc., but was willing to admit the words 'sincerity', and 'integrity', when taken in their full latitude.³ His phrase 'perfect love' was his happiest expression.

Perfection, itself, he defines as

"the maturity of grace and holiness, which established adult believers attain to under the Christian dispensation".

It is "perfect repentance", "perfect faith", "perfect humility",

1 Benson, - Life of Fletcher, pp. 277-8

2 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VI, p. 120

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 414, n

"perfect self-denial", "perfect resignation", "perfect hope",
 "perfect charity", "perfect love"¹. This latter, 'perfect love',
 represents the consummation of all the rest, and Fletcher understands
 by it

"the pure love of God, shed abroad in the heart of established be-
 lievers by the Holy Ghost".²

On the negative side this 'perfect love' means freedom from sin.

It is necessary to recall, however, what Fletcher means by sin.

"Sin", he writes, "is the transgression of a divine law".³

On the basis of his covenantal distinctions he makes clear the differ-
 ence between the Adamic and paradisiacal law of obedience and the
 evangelical, mediatorial law of Christ. Through the transgression of
 Adam and the consequent inherited bodily imperfections, fulfilment of
 the law of innocence has become impossible for man. Thus to think of
 human perfection on the basis of obedience to this law is inconceiv-
 able. Christ, however, has fulfilled God's paradisiacal law of
 obedience and inaugurated the evangelical 'law of liberty',

"a more gracious law this, which allows of sincere repentance, and is
 fulfilled by loving faith".⁴

Perfection is thus possible through keeping this law; for obedience
 means absence of sin.

"Believers are perfect", Fletcher writes, "so long as they fulfil the
 law of liberty by pure love, they do not sin according to the gospel;
 because evangelically speaking, 'sin is the transgression', and 'love
 is the fulfilling of' that 'law' ".⁵

This distinction between obedience to the paradisiacal law and to
 the mediatorial law necessitated that Fletcher define more clearly what

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 415

2 Ibid. p. 416

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. pp. 417-18

5 Ibid. p. 419

he meant by sin. He discriminates between infirmity and sin. An infirmity is free from guile, having its root in our inherited animal nature, and rises from our involuntary weakness and ignorance.

He defines it as

"breach of Adam's law of paradisiacal perfection, which our covenant God does not require of us now." 1

It is the lot of man to transgress this law of God daily because of the imperfection of his bodily and mental powers. These deficiencies of man are natural and not moral, and as sin is a wilful transgression, they cannot be so characterised. Sin for the Christian is definitely related to the new 'law of liberty' under Christ and not the old.

Fletcher writes,

"Evangelically speaking, a sin for Christians is a breach of Christ's evangelical law of Christian perfection; a perfection this which God requires of all Christian believers." 2

In contrast to an infirmity, sin is the wilful and deliberate disobedience to and transgression of the law of love revealed in Christ. It springs from the choice of the will, and is the abuse of the present light and power given to man. Perfect love means freedom from sin on this score since man is given grace in Christ sufficient to enable him to respond to the light and power to walk in it. Thus Fletcher maintains that Christian perfection extends

"chiefly to the will, which is the capital moral power of the soul". 3

Once the will makes a perfect response sin can be no longer a fact.

Infirmities still exist. In addressing those who possessed perfection

Fletcher wrote,

"Ye are not complete in wisdom. Perfect love does not imply perfect knowledge". 4

1 Works, Vol. V. p. 124

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 425

4 Ibid. Vol. V, p. 210

On the positive side Christian perfection means the keeping of all the commandments, the fulfilment of the law of love. Fletcher in referring to Christ's teaching on the subject writes that perfection consists

"both in doing and in teaching the least, as well as the greatest of God's **commandments**". 1

It means earnest striving to follow in the steps of Christ, being self-denying, courageous, watchful in prayer, rejoicing in truth, and growing in grace.² Obedience to the law of Christ results in the attainment of these virtues which spring from a heart purified by holy love. The obedience, however, is the obedience of faith. Fletcher affirms that Christian perfection is attainable only

"by a faith that roots and grounds us in Christ". 3

Again he writes that

"the way to Christian Perfection is by the word of the gospel of Christ, by faith and the Spirit of God.is by the due combination of pre-venient, assisting free grace and of submissive, assisted free will". 4

In other words, the basis of perfection is the same as that of redemption, i.e., the grace of God operative through faith. As has been affirmed, Christian perfection is but a continuation in the process begun with regeneration. There is growth involved throughout, a growing in repentance and faith until the further height is reached. Fletcher speaks of **going** on steadily to perfection.⁵

"Just so we toil till our faith discovers Christ in the promise and welcomes him into our hearts; and such is the effect of his presence, that immediately we arrive at the land of perfection." 6

1 Works, Vol. V, p. 110
 2 Ibid. pp. 213-221
 3 Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 433
 4 Ibid. Vol. V, pp. 170-1
 5 Ibid. p. 172
 6 Ibid. p. 177

The process of attainment may be gradual but the reception of the experience is instantaneous. At least, so Fletcher believes most Christians arrive at perfection. Although he is placing no limitations on the time or manner which God may choose to purify the heart of the believer.

There are degrees of perfection¹ which a man may attain. The basis of distinction here rests upon Fletcher's differentiation between covenantal dispensations. Divine perfection belongs to God alone; all other beings are imperfect.¹ God gave His creations all degrees of perfection and made them perfect in their places. (Christ, for example, fell short of infinite perfection because of His humanity). Therefore perfection is dependent upon the gradation of God's dispensation of grace. A Jew may reach perfection through obedience to the light which he possesses. However,

"the least perfect of all perfect Christians is more perfect than the most perfect Jew".²

Christian perfection is not the highest degree attainable for man. There is still the perfection of 'disembodied spirits, which is the final goal, that of uninterrupted communion with God. While the actuality of this further height of perfection lies beyond death, the conditions for its realization require to be fulfilled here. Fletcher affirms that no future perfection is possible without present Christian perfection. "Here or never", he writes.³ He refuses to accept the thought of a cleansing from sin upon death.

"I conclude", he writes, "that a gospel without a mediatorial law, without an evangelical law, without the conditional promise of a crown of heavenly glory to the obedient, and without the conditional threatening of infernal stripes to the disobedient....will always lead us to the centre of antinomianism."⁴

1 Works, Vol. IV, pp. 461-2
 2 Ibid. p. 462
 3 Ibid. Vol. V. p. 67
 4 Ibid, p. 115

Thus did Fletcher insist upon the urgency of immediate attainment.

Nevertheless, to arrive at Christian perfection here does not mean the cessation of spiritual growth. Fletcher urges those who have attained Christian perfection to make haste to obtain their crown of angelic perfection.¹ Christian perfection is a state of grace which may be lost by unfaithfulness and is never beyond the reach and reality of temptation. Fletcher writes,

"The doctrine of the absolute perseverance of the saints is the first card which the devil played against man." 2

Once a man has put on the whole armour of God he is to

"keep it on, and use it 'with all prayer', that he may to the last 'stand complete in Christ', and be 'more than conquerors' through him that has loved you." 3

As there is assurance of regeneration, so also is there assurance of this great salvation. Assurance increases as the believer reaches perfection, and Fletcher writes,

"It is hard to conceive how we can constantly enjoy the full assurance of faith out of the state of Christian perfection... But if we 'love in deed and in truth', which none but the perfect do at all times, 'hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him'. I John, III, 18-20." 4

The Spirit of God bears witness to the reality and certainty of each step forward in the spiritual life, but as Christian perfection is a definite stage of attainment the degree of certainty arrived at is clearly known. Fletcher refers to it in such a manner as to leave little doubt that the one who experiences such a blessing will be vividly conscious of its reality.⁵ Sanctification, like justification,

1 Works, Vol. V, p. 208

2 Ibid. p. 209

3 Ibid. p. 210

4 Ibid. p. 147

5 Experiences and Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, pp. 215-220

must be attended by the inward witness.

John Wesley, though he encouraged those who believed that they had attained Christian perfection to bear testimony of the attainment, never bore such testimony himself. After examining some of the 'sanctification' experiences of Wesley's helpers, R. Newton Flew concludes,

"All of them are most careful not to claim perfection, or sinlessness, or even enjoyment of that Great Salvation, at the time at which they write". 1

Fletcher, however, appears to have made a public confession of having reached the height for which he was continually urging others to strive. He testifies to this in 1781 at Leeds at the home of Mr. Smith. Hester Ann Rogers, then present, writes that he used such expressions as ,

"I am freed from sin", "I am dead to sin, and alive unto God... through Jesus Christ our Lord". 2

He will not say that he is perfect in love or that he is crucified with Christ. At that time Fletcher spoke of his previous unwillingness to bear public profession of having arrived at this 'great salvation'. Because of his reticence he lost what he had gained and his assurance faded. This happened several times. He held his peace and forfeited the gift. His experience taught him that public testimony was essential for the retention of the assurance of attainment. In January 1773 he was hesitant about writing on perfection until, as he says, "I experience the thing". 3

There are no fundamental differences between Fletcher's doctrine of Christian perfection and that of John Wesley. Fletcher's teaching

1 Flew - The Idea of Perfection, p. 323

2 Experiences and Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, p. 217

3 Fletcher - MSS Volume, p. 46

is possible freer from inherent contradictions than Wesley's because he uses the framework of the covenant theology as a background. Wesley wrote Fletcher in March 1775 -

"It seems our views of Christian Perfection are a little different, though not opposite. It is certain every babe in Christ receives the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John's threefold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All of these had received the Holy Ghost; but only the fathers were perfected in love." ¹

Wesley evidently feels Fletcher has not made his distinctions in the stages of attainment sufficiently clear. Fletcher, as has been seen, lays few restrictions upon the processes involved in its coming. Wesley, himself, accepts its coming as instantaneous, but as involving gradual work both before and after. ² Fletcher's doctrine concurs in this, and it seems Wesley has misjudged him in suggesting that he was confusing the reception of the Holy Spirit with Christian perfection. The point of difference is minute in any case. In September 1758 Wesley had conferred on the doctrine with Fletcher and others in his company at Bristol. He records in his Journal that he wrote down the general propositions wherein they all agreed. Wesley's "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" was published eight years later. He undoubtedly was gathering and formulating his doctrine in preparation for this publication when he met with Fletcher. It is significant that he conferred with him on the question and that they exchanged their views. It is probably just to state the truth here concerning the accumulated result of

1 Wesley - Letters, Vol. VI, p. 146

2 Wesley - Works, Vol. XI, p. 378. 356f

3 Wesley - Journal, Vol. IV, p. 285

the influence Wesley and Fletcher exercised on each other, i.e., that Fletcher was more often the one who followed while Wesley led the way.

In every age of the Church the desire for holiness has been the mark of true spiritual life. The conscious pursuit of a goal of perfection, which goal is not in itself final and does not exclude growth, provides a bond of unity which links the saints in all ages. Whatever visible differences may exist between them because of their efforts at definition, these do not exclude the basic fact that they were all possessed with a conviction of the reality of the thing for which they strove and which dominated their thoughts. The recent admirable work of R. Newton Flew on "Christian Perfection" traces this chain of unity, link by link, from St. Paul and St. John, St. Basil and St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and the Mystics, to George Fox and to John Wesley. Fletcher takes his place beside Wesley as his friend and henchman, yet with his own creative contribution to make.

The Methodist teaching on the doctrine of Christian perfection holds a distinctive place in the history of theology. Platt writes that it

"presents the fullest and most definitely articulated statement of the doctrine, and claims to be a direct continuation in modern times of the apostolic teaching". 1

J. A. Faulkner of Drew Theological Seminary claims that

"the Methodists were the first Christians who officially, and as a united body, without deviation, and with the power of a church behind them to make it effective, taught the New Testament doctrine of Christian perfection." 2

1 Platt, E.R.E., Vol. IX, p. 730

2 Curtis - The Christian Faith, p. 525

It was the expositions of Wesley and Fletcher which provided the foundation of all further teaching and which, in essence continue to be the doctrine held.

The most obvious weakness in Fletcher's theory is his analysis of the nature of sin. To reiterate his position, he defines sin as the transgression of a divine law. He then proceeds to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary transgression; the first being sin, the latter infirmity. Even if the acceptance of his distinction between the Adamic paradisiacal law of obedience and the mediatorial law of Christ were admitted, it would not solve the fundamental difficulties. The experience of man is that often his worst sins are those which he commits unconsciously. Dr. Tennant in his book "The Concept of Sin" protests against the confusion brought into theological discussion by using the word 'sin' in the twofold sense just mentioned. He urges that the word should be used only in the narrower sense of a voluntary transgression.¹ Certainly this was the sense in which Fletcher used it when he spoke of Christian perfection as 'sinless'. The creative work is done with the will, thus enabling a perfect response.

Though Fletcher's definition of sin fails to satisfy completely, the fundamental and basic assumptions involved must not be overlooked. Comprehensively understood, sin is 'godlessness' to Fletcher and recent theology will concur in this teaching. Fletcher bases his conviction upon the experience that the best that can be expected from man in this world is obedience to the light as

1 Tennant - Concept of Sin, Chap. III

he sees it and a constant searching and striving for a deeper vision. The particular circumstance under which a man lives and receives is largely beyond his determination, but what he does with that which is offered him is not. If he receives God in Christ by faith, God gives him the gift of a new life. The importance of the positive content of the gift of grace is the vital thing. God is able to take him into a living union with Christ and so lift him into 'perfect love'. Thus Fletcher could teach that it is possible for a man by the grace of God to be so filled with such love to Him and to his fellowmen that the power of sin is broken. The creative dynamic of this love exercises a power of expulsion and makes the faculty of obedience perfect as well. This expurgation is a necessary accompaniment. Fletcher speaks of the Kingdom of God as being established in the heart of the perfect Christian, and from the other descriptions provided he makes it quite clear that sin, even in the sense of carnal inheritance, has not the upper hand.¹ In this he stands at one with the Christian faith in all generations. Christ gives man the power for a victorious life. Fletcher suffers, as the Mystics before him, from the lack of clear definition.

While there may be a consciousness of inherent difficulties in his limitation of sin to voluntary transgression, it is not necessary that they should become stumbling blocks. His emphasis that the transgression of God's law is the cause of bringing men eventually to judgment is fundamental. Sin considered in terms of the conscious rejection of God's way is basic.

1 Works, Vol. V, pp. 206-7

Flew lodges a criticism against the Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection on the ground that it is at its centre a contradiction. He maintains that the claim to have achieved this experience is a negation of the experience itself. While admitting that a man may have 'assurance' of redemption, he denies that it is the same kind of 'assurance' he may have of Christian perfection. He writes,

"The first kind of assurance is a conviction about God. The second kind of assurance is a conviction about himself." 1

If this criticism be valid it will apply to Fletcher, who, as it has been seen, claimed the reality of this experience for himself. But is it valid? Flew is drawing his distinctions rather finely. It is true, as he points out, that consciousness of filial relationship with God is of the very essence of the redemptive experience. Is it not also true that the experience of having arrived at Christian perfection is nothing else but the deepening of that same consciousness? To say that the first experience is a conviction of man about God and the latter a conviction of man about himself is to make a distinction that does not exist. It would be truer to say that in both cases the two elements are there. The individual registers a conviction about God and about what God has made real in himself. It is doubtful whether this testimony of attainment necessarily involves pride. Flew writes that man

"cannot without pride believe he is now no longer on a permanently lower level, but on a permanently higher level". 2

He overlooks the fact that there is no permanency involved. The individual may easily fall from his position. Fletcher would have nothing to do with the idea of the perseverance of the saints. This

1 Flew - op.cit. p. 337

2 Ibid.

underlying fact of importance must not be overlooked. The Christian life is from beginning to end growth. There are no resting places. Fletcher did not claim that he was perfect in love. He claimed the negative side of the blessing, that he was free from sin. He realized that as long as he lived it was possible to grow in grace. The fundamental difficulty throughout is the impossibility of applying the categories of time to grace. In trying to mark the steps forward by the hands of the clock Fletcher failed. If, however, time be translated into terms of consciousness, the main difficulties pass away, for spiritual growth involves a deepening consciousness of the power of God's grace operative in the human heart. Man comes to desire more and more that God should rule his whole life.

"Then one day", writes Moulton, "it is brought home to him, perhaps by some chance word, read or heard, or in some moment of private devotion, that such complete control is possible. He leaps forth to meet this possibility. In that moment the system of thought becomes dominant. He takes hold of God by faith as he has never done before, and he lives henceforth on a new level." 1

In some such terms the arrival at the consciousness of Christian perfection is best described.

The merit of Fletcher's teaching on this subject may be summed up briefly. First, it is necessary to draw attention again to the importance placed on Christian perfection as only a relative attainment of a goal which has its consummation in the ultimate destiny of man, lying beyond this life. Growth is the central thing throughout, for the ideal is one that spans both worlds. To stop short of final realization is to surrender what has been gained.

1 Moulton, W. J. - London Quarterly Review, July 1925

In the second place the doctrine lays emphasis upon 'intensive' salvation in contrast to extensive salvation, i.e., as Wiseman says "saving all of man as well as all men".¹

In other words, Fletcher claimed that the Christian ideal may be achieved in this world, or that the Kingdom of God can become a present reality to the individual. The importance of this emphasis cannot be over stressed. As long as the Christian ideal remains something which has no possible attainment in this world, Christianity ceases to be Christianity. Christians must aim at a goal which can be reached. This is not dissociated from the final goal, but, as Fletcher has emphasized the one must be realized before the other is possible.

The third mark of merit is that throughout the central teaching Christian perfection is the gift of God. The spiritual life is not based upon personal achievement in any stage. It is God operating through grace. Thus Fletcher sets no real limitations upon the moral and spiritual attainments possible in this life or in the world to come. He maintains a constant reverence for the infinite resources of God.

Lastly, it is a recognizable fact throughout the history of the early growth of Methodism, that the clearly defined goal of Christian perfection was at the very core of its dominating passion for holiness. This passion for holiness was undoubtedly the mark of its singular power. In Fletcher's own life, it may be said that the goal of complete personal sanctity, which he set before himself, was

1 New History of Methodism, Vol. I, p. 247

the driving dynamic of his entire spiritual growth. His eyes were fixed on a objective revelation of God in Christ, and there was a constant hungering and thirsting after that righteousness. He believed that a relative degree of attainment was possible here. He could not rest short of that, nor even with it, but the fact that there were stepping stones made his progress sure.

SECTION V

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

One persistent question intrudes itself at regular intervals throughout a study of this nature, viz., in what degree is it possible to discover an epoch of history in the course of studying one man's life? The answer is of course conditioned by the character of the individual to be studied and his place and importance in the period in which he lived. Morley, who was concerned with writing the life of Gladstone, states the problem very well.

"Every reader will perceive that perhaps the sharpest of all the many difficulties of my task has been to draw the line between history and biography- between the fortunes of the community and the exploits, thoughts, and purposes of the individual who had so marked a share in them." 1

Biography begins with the individual as the central figure and makes the events of the period revolve about him. Thus the biographer is always in danger of concealing whole peoples under the shadow of a man, and of subtly inferring, by manner of presentation, that a whole period of history is substantially revealed in one individual. Fletcher, of course, was not the central pivot of the nation's life as was Gladstone, and consequently the danger of supposing that it is possible to discover the main trends of the epoch of history in his life is not great. However, the claim the writer has been making in this work is that the study of the life and thought of Fletcher greatly enlarges the perception it is possible for one to have of the Evangelical Revival. The standard approach to the study of the Revival has been through the life and

1 Morley - Life of Gladstone, Vol. I, p. 1

work of John Wesley, and will naturally continue to remain so. The Revival will never be understood without the full knowledge of all that Wesley was and did. Wesley was the itinerant, the organizer, the leader, the administrator; he was the centre from which the whole movement swung. Yet when all of what Wesley did and thought, and when the growth and trends of the Revival are known, there remains much more to be recounted from the records of the lives of men and women who came under its influence. Of these Fletcher is one of the most important, if not by far the most significant.

So history and biography diverge of necessity, but biography supplements, fills out and enriches the meaning of the story that history tells. The strictly historical study has to describe the aggregate movement of men, and the manner in which that aggregate movement moulds political, social, or religious events and institutions. In a biographical study the concern with the crowd is secondary and subsidiary. The chief emphasis is to draw the individual apart from the mass and discover through minute examination of his life, the result of what is happening in the world around him. This study is thus designed to let Fletcher himself reveal some of the qualities of life and thought which he owed to the influence of the Revival and which he shared with it. Such an effort makes any exhaustive conclusions superfluous.

In seeking to estimate, however, the worth of a personality it is helpful to discover the range and importance of his influence. This is not easily ascertainable in the case of Fletcher since his influence has been confined mainly to quiet and secluded areas of life and primarily among those of the Methodist connection. The two claims which have been made for him by those who have since recorded his worth are

that he was a theologian and a saint. The question arises as to whether tradition is correct in upholding such claims.

Fletcher's ability as a theologian appears for the most part to be over-rated. When the highest estimate has been placed upon his scholarship it is evident that he was not an intellectual giant, nor even a very creative thinker. He was too impressionistic to have been either. Deeply influenced by Wesley, and nurtured on his doctrine, he became his staunch friend and exponent. He followed Wesley too closely to allow himself the freedom of thought and expression essential for originality. It is true that his efforts were conditioned too greatly by the struggle of controversy but the supposition that he was capable of a more illuminating exposition of the Christian faith under other conditions has no particular value here. It is necessary, however, to say that Fletcher did render distinctive service to Methodism through the theological controversy. There is ample evidence that his writings were of tremendous value to the leaders and the lay-workers who were crusading against antinomianism in those early years. His 'Checks' on that subject remained to become a standard work in Methodism, and have been read and studied since by numerous adherents of that faith. The use of the 'Checks', which was continued in later years mainly by those studying for the ministry, has been virtually discontinued. The 'Checks' are remembered now only by an older generation of ministers and are almost unknown to many of the younger men. There is no evidence, for instance, of their use in Canada within the past twenty-five years, though they were in slight use previous to that time. It may safely be said that Fletcher's literary contribution belongs to a limited period, and a limited area of thought within the Christian Church, and that it is doubtful whether his

works will ever be revived for study.

There is particular significance, however, in the fact that Fletcher, who was a foreigner, became such a popular theological writer for vast numbers of the English people. He wrote well, having for a Swiss a remarkable grasp of the English language. The precision and decisiveness of his language, combined with his faculty for flashing and withering sarcasm, appealed to the public. These qualities would seem at first incompatible with the euphuistic luxuriance of word and phrase also characteristic of his writing. They combined quite amazingly, however, and have greatly enlarged the place as a theological writer which Fletcher holds.

A careful survey of his writings reveals a richness of training in the classics and this, possibly more than anything else, provided the foundation for his mastery of language and literature. It is also evident that he had an extensive knowledge of varied fields of literature. Of course his main interest was theology and in his Greek New Testament exegesis he displays a really fine critical faculty. Thus, while Fletcher may claim a position of some importance as an able exponent of the Bible and of Wesleyan doctrine, and rank as one of the best trained and most scholarly of the leaders of the Revival, posterity is not likely to give him a place of any importance among the great Christian thinkers of the centuries.

Beyond all else Fletcher will be remembered as the saint. This claim is substantiated by the fact that since the publication of his "Works" nothing significant has been written upon his theology, while various biographies have appeared, and, with practically no

exception, their claim for existence has been founded upon the reality of his saintliness. Consequently they have all suffered because of their tendency to eulogize, without criticism, the fine traits of his character. It is true, however, that Fletcher is not a good subject for the modern biographer. The true quality and worth of the man escapes under the super-critical treatment now generally afforded for all and sundry. The dull and uninteresting pages of his 'Checks', the extravagance and piety of his language, and the abundance of monotonous testimony to his saintliness, all serve to provoke impatience rather than understanding. The reader is soon forced to a decision; either Fletcher was a consummate hypocrite who thrived on an insipid and pious humility or he was actually a saint. Voltaire believed him to be the latter and his contemporaries, both friend and foe, were of the same mind. This is an accepted fact, and it is hoped that this study has served to demonstrate its truth further and to discover the source of his saintliness.

The late John Telford, recognized authority on Wesley, is correct when he writes,

"Fletcher was a saint who was a recognized theological thinker and a champion of Methodist doctrine. His saintship was blended with, and grew out of his faith in Christ's teaching as Methodism had interpreted it, and was adorned with a life which still makes us wonder." 1

It is the life "which still makes us wonder" that is most significant; and it is the life and the story it tells which tradition will preserve. Evangelical religion and especially that of the eighteenth

1 Letter to the writer

century Revival has often suffered under the charge of spiritual shallowness. Any movement which produces a life of such unqualified holiness as John Fletcher's is exonerated from such a charge. Fletcher takes his place among the great saints of the Christian Church. Any history of the Evangelical Revival must give Fletcher a position of prominence if it is to recount truly the full story of the movement and its significance.

Appendix AFLETCHER TO WESLEY ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE METHODIST
SOCIETIES TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Fletcher, because of proposals laid before him for consideration by his friend Joseph Benson, came to express his opinion on the then vexing problem of the relation of the newly formed Methodist Societies to the Church of England. Benson was concerned with securing greater efficiency among the Methodist preachers and intended to lay certain considerations before the Conference of 1775 which was to meet at Leeds. He recommended that the Conference should,

1. Inquire into the character, experience and qualifications of all who were employed as preachers in order to discover their fitness.
2. Set aside those who were found qualified by fasting, prayer and the imposition of hands by John Wesley, Charles Wesley, John Fletcher, and other presbyters of the Established Church.
3. Set 'quite aside' any who were found blameable in character and conduct, and who were considered unqualified and unworthy to exercise the functions of the ministry.
4. Provide that the balance of men, who were as yet unfitted to have the responsibility of full pastoral work, should be sent to Kingswood School for further training.
5. Devote Kingswood School entirely to the above purpose and for the education of preachers' sons.

From the context it is difficult to understand what Benson meant by the ordination of the preachers. It appears that he thought it desirable to invest them with definite authority for their work. This

he believed would satisfy not only those who among the preachers were desiring episcopal ordination, but also the people themselves, who were distressed about the status of their ministers. He does not discuss the effect such action would have upon the relationship of the Methodist Societies and the Church of England.¹

Fletcher saw at once that what Benson was suggesting was, in fact, if not in theory, ministerial ordination. It was impossible to have the action otherwise interpreted if the Societies were to train and set aside men for the ministry of the Word with the laying on of hands. His reply to Benson follows in full.

Madeley, 12 July, 1775

My dear friend,

I thank you for your last. I shall be glad, very glad to see you, and your Sermons, to improve by, not to correct them. But the dedication you speak of I must beg you to set aside, as it would injure your book, and give me an air of importance, which belongs less to me than to any man living.

I approve of your desire to do what you can to promote the purging of our branches, that we may bring forth more fruit. Whether the scheme of Kingswood would answer, without some men truly alive to God to inspect and direct the preachers there, I question. Their taste might lead them to impertinent lectures and studies; and a bookish, literary emulation, or downright sloth, rather than devotional eagerness for the wisdom and power of God. Proper men would not be found easily. I mentioned the scheme to Mr. Collins, our Assistant in this round, who says that some of the preachers who could hardly speak sense have been the means of more good than many who had matter, manner, method, and parts at command. This fact needs only to be proved to throw down your scheme of 'improvement'. I wish Kingswood was so ordered to answer the most important ends; but as matters are, I question whether it is so. I am not acquainted enough with its state to judge of it. I sent some time ago your letter to Mr. J. Wesley to Ireland. I second your request with respect to sifting of the preachers. With regard to their ordination, I see a good and a bad side in it. The good side is obvious: it would cement our union; it would make us stand firm to our vocation; it would give us an outward call to preach and administer the Sacraments. But at the same time it would cut us off, in a great degree, from the national Churches of England and Scotland, which we are called to leaven.

¹ Details of Benson's proposals taken from manuscript 'Life' by his son. Reproduced in Appendix XXIX, John Wesley's Journal, Vol. VIII, p. 328f.

My own particular objection to it respects Messrs. Wesley, who could not with decency take the step of turning Bishops after their repeated declarations that they would stand by their mother to the last. I mention to Mr. Wesley that before he take that step, it will be expedient that he desire, in print, the Bishops to take it. It would be but form, I grant; it might, however, show that he would not break off without paying a proper deference to Episcopacy. The point is of such importance as to require the coolest deliberation; and that view of the work, and acquaintance with the preachers, which my retirement here deprives me of. A proper way would be for those who are for the step you mention, to put their reason on paper, and vice versa; and then with prayer and love to compare the reason pro and con without prejudice. God has lately shook Mr. Wesley over the grave; but notwithstanding, I believe he will, from the strength of his constitution and the weakness of mine - which is much broke since I saw you - survive me; so I do not scheme about helping to make up the gap when the great tree shall fall; sufficient to that day will that trouble be, nor will the divine power be then insufficient to help the people in time of need.... Remember before God your affectionate friend,

J. Fletcher ¹

Fletcher had forwarded Benson's proposals to Wesley. Wesley sent word through Fletcher that Benson would be given the opportunity at Conference to set forth and explain his proposals. The Conference, however, produced no definite recommendations concerning these suggestions.

On the opening day of the Conference Fletcher wrote to Wesley,

August 1st, 1775.

Rev^d. and Dear Sir,

This is the day your conference with the Methodist preachers begins. As I prayed early in the morning that God would give you all the spirit of wisdom, and love to consult about the spread of the power of godliness, the motion made by Mr. Benson in the letter I sent you came into my mind; and I saw it in a much more favourable light than I had done before. The wish of my soul was that you might be directed to see and weigh things in a proper manner. About the middle of the day, as I met with you in spirit, the matter occurred to me again in so strong a manner that I think it my duty to put my thoughts upon paper, and send them to you.

You love the Church of England, and yet you are not blind to her freckles, nor insensible to her shackles. Your life is precarious,

¹ Wesley, J. Journal, Vol. VIII, pp. 329-30

you have lately been shaken over the grave; you are spared, it may be, to take yet some important step, which may influence generations yet unborn. What, sir, if you used your influence as an Englishman, a Christian, a divine, and an extraordinary messenger of God? What, if with bold modesty you took a farther step towards the reformation of the Church of England? The admirers of the Confessional, and the gentlemen who have petitioned the Parliament from the Feathers' Tavern, cry aloud that our Church stands in need of being reformed; but do they not want to corrupt her in some things, while they talk of reforming her in others? Now sir, God has given you that light, that influence, and that intrepidity which many of those gentlemen have not. You can reform, so far as your influence goes, without preverting; and, indeed, you have done it already. But have you done it professedly enough? Have you ever explicitly borne your testimony against all the defects of our Church? Might you not do this without departing from your professed attachment to her? Nay, might you not, by this means, do her the greatest of services? If the mother who gave you suck were yet alive, could you not reverence her without reverencing her little whims and sinful peculiarities (if she had any)? If Alexander's good sense had not been clouded by his pride, would he have thought that his courtiers honoured him when they awkwardly carried their head up on one shoulder as he did, that they might look like him? I love the Church of England, I hope, as much as you do. But I do not love her so as to take her blemishes for ornaments. You know sir, that she is almost totally deficient in discipline and she publicly owns it herself every Ash Wednesday. What are her spiritual courts in general, but a catch-penny? As for her doctrine, although it is pure upon the whole, you know that some specks of Pelagian, Calvinian and Popish dirt cleave to her articles, homilies, liturgy and rubricks. These specks could with care be taken off, and doing it in the circle of your influence might, sooner or later, provoke our superiors to godly jealousy and a complete reformation. In order to this it is proposed: -

1. That the growing body of the Methodists in Great Britain, Ireland, and America be formed into a general society - a daughter church of our holy mother.

2. That this society shall recede from the Church of England in nothing but in some palpable defects about doctrine, discipline, and unevangelical hierarchy.

3. That this society shall be the Methodist church of England, ready to defend the as yet unmethodized church against all the unjust attacks of the dissenters - willing to submit to her in all things that are not unscriptural - approving of her ordination - partaking of her sacraments, and attending her service at every convenient opportunity.

4. That a pamphlet be published containing the 39 articles of the Church of England rectified according to the purity of the gospel, together with some needful alterations in the liturgy and homilies - such as the expunging the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian creed, &c.

5. That Messrs. Wesley, the preachers, and the most substantial Methodists in London, in the name of the societies scattered through the kingdom, would draw up a petition and present it to the Archbishop of Canterbury informing his Grace, and by him the bench of the Bishops, of this design; proposing the reformed articles of religion, asking

the protection of the Church of England, begging that this step might not be considered as a schism, but only as an attempt to avail ourselves of the liberty of English men, and Protestants, to serve God according to the purity of the gospel, the strictness of primitive discipline, and the original design of the Church of England, which was to reform, so far as time and circumstances would allow, whatever needed reformation.

6. That this petition contain a request to the Bishops to ordain the Methodist preachers which can pass their examination according to what is indispensably required in the canons of the Church. That instead of the ordinary testimonials the Bishops would allow of testimonials signed by Messrs. Wesley and some more clergymen, who would make it their business to inquire into the morals and principles of the candidates for orders. And that instead of a title, their Lordships would accept of a bond signed by twelve stewards of the Methodist societies, certifying that the candidate for holy orders should have a proper maintenance. That if his Grace, &c., does not condescend to grant this request, Messrs. Wesley will be obliged to take an irregular (not unevangelical) step, and to ordain upon a Church of England independent plan such lay preachers as appear to them qualified for holy orders.

7. That the preachers so ordained be the assistants in their respective circuits. That the helpers who are thought worthy be ordained Deacons, and that doubtful candidates be kept upon trial as they now are.

8. That the Methodist preachers assembled in conference shall have the liberty to suspend and degrade any Methodist preacher ordained or unordained who shall act the part of a Balaam or a Demas.

9. That when Messrs. W. are dead, the power of Methodist ordination be lodged in three or five of the most steady Methodist ministers under the title of Moderators, who shall overlook the flocks and the other preachers as Mr. Wesley does now.

10. That the most spiritual part of the Common Prayer shall be extracted and published with the 39 rectified articles, and the minutes of the conferences (or the Methodist canons) which (together with such regulations as may be made at the time of this establishment) shall be, next to the Bible, the vade mecum of the Methodist preachers.

12. That the important office of confirmation shall be performed with the utmost solemnity by Mr. Wesley or by the Moderators, and that none shall be admitted to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper but such as have been confirmed or are ready to be confirmed.

13. That the grand plan upon which the Methodist preachers shall go shall be to preach the doctrine of grace against the Socinians - the doctrine of justice against the Calvinists - and the doctrine of holiness against all the world. And that of consequence three such questions as these be put to the candidates for orders at the time of ordination:

I. Wilt thou maintain with all thy might the scripture doctrines of grace, especially the doctrine of a SINNER'S free justification merely by a living faith in the blood and merits of Christ?

II. Wilt thou maintain with all thy might the scripture doctrines of justice, especially the doctrine of a BELIEVER'S remunerative justification by the good works which ought to spring from justifying faith?

III. Wilt thou preach up Christian perfection, or the fulfilling of the law of Christ, against all the antinomians of the age; and wilt thou ardently press after it thyself, never resting till thou art perfected in humble love?

Perhaps to keep the work in the Church it might be proper to add:

IV. Wilt thou consider thyself as a son of the Church of England, receding from her as little as possible; never railing against her clergy, and being ready to submit to her ordination, if any of the bishops will confer it upon thee?

14. And lastly, that Kingswood School be entirely appropriated (1) To the reception and improvement of the candidates for Methodist orders; (2) To the education of the children of the preachers; and (3) to the keeping of the worn-out Methodist preachers, whose employment shall be to preserve the spirit of faith and primitive Christianity in the place; by which means alone the curse of a little unsanctified learning may be kept out.

Tuesday evening.

PS. The preceding pages contain my views of Br. Benson's proposal. I wrote it immediately after dinner and was going to send it to you, thinking that now is the best time to deliberate upon this plan. But when my servant was gone to look for a messenger to go to Leeds, my heart failed, as not having had time enough to consider what I had wrote, or to pray over it. So I called her back. This evening the young man whom I mentioned to you in my last being come to see me, I asked him if he would carry a letter to you. And, as I had some mind of sending him, barely as one that might labour on trial, if you accepted of him, and had need of help, upon his consenting to go, I send you my scrawl, that, if there is anything therein worth your attention, you may have it while you can yet consult with the preachers. That the God of all grace may preside over your every deliberation is, dear sir, the ardent prayer of

Your affectionate son and serv^t. in the Gospel,
J. FLETCHER. 1

It must be admitted that any estimate of the extent to which Fletcher influenced Wesley regarding the relationship of the Methodist Societies to the Church of England is merely conjecture. This was a problem Wesley had to struggle with from the very inception of the Societies and one which increased in perplexity as the movement spread. Many factors conditioned the decisions he made. However at the time Fletcher wrote the problem was becoming more acute because of the pressure of the increased demands from the lay-preachers for ordination and the need for ordained men in America. Wesley moved slowly. He had

1 Wesley - Journal, Vol. VIII, pp. 331-4

no clearly devised policy for each new situation created fresh emergencies. In writing to his brother Charles in 1785 he said,

"I walk still by the same rule I have done for between forty and fifty years. I do nothing rashly If you will go hand in hand with me, do However, with or without help, I creep on." 1

The last phrase describes fairly correctly the way Wesley met the issue.

From the postscript of Fletcher's letter it is clear that he was hesitant in sending his proposals to Wesley. It may have been that he felt his retirement kept him from an intimate knowledge of the general situation and he was unqualified to speak. More probably it was because he felt he had gone too far in the suggestions he had made. The earlier part of the letter is obviously written to incite Wesley to action and to urge him to go on and make complete the reformation he had begun. The rather clear cut and decisive proposals which Fletcher has to make, reveal that he had given the matter considerable thought, and, also, that he himself was prepared for a complete break from the Anglican Church. There is something rather naive in the way in which Fletcher suggests distinct church organization for the Methodist group although receiving ordination for the preachers from the Church of England. It is evident that he was anticipating a greater degree of tolerance from the mother church than he had any reason to expect. Wesley appears to have shared the same delusion. Fletcher, however, was prepared to go the whole way and separate from the Church of England completely. He felt that the furtherance of the work Wesley had begun should not be frustrated by

1 Wesley - Letters, Vol. VII, p. 285

any ecclesiastical body. He wrote Wesley, "I love the Church of England, I hope, as much as you do". His hope was mistaken. He was not reared in the English Church tradition as Wesley was, and his attachment to the Church did not carry with it the same emotional ties of devotion and loyalty as those which bound Wesley.

Fletcher's comments on this matter are of more than passing interest. They are extremely significant for they sum up the most careful and creative thinking done by followers of Wesley at a critical period in the relationship of the Methodist Societies and the Church of England. Fletcher obviously writes with Benson's proposals before him and with a fairly accurate knowledge of the feeling and opinions of others. If Wesley were prepared to accept any advice on this vexing problem, no doubt he would be happier to receive it from Fletcher, whom he had named his successor, than any other. The spirit of Fletcher's letter and the constructive character of its contents would commend a good reception.

Appendix BA SERMON OUTLINE

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, &c.
Gen. 1. 26.

Introduction. - Man created last. The finishing stroke, (1.)
For humility. (2.) That his palace might be furnished.

The word of command, - now, of deliberation. - Trinity in our
creation, - so in our regeneration.

- I. God's natural image, lost in part.
 1. Clear understanding, - now dark.
 2. Pure reason, - now carnal.
 3. Upright will, - now sinful.
 4. Holy affections, - now disordered.
 5. Strong memory, - now losing good.
 6. Immortality, lost as to the body, which would have suffered no violence, hunger, pain, or old age.

II. Totally lost.

1. Dominion over the creatures.

Exceptions. - Seas, fishes, rocks, earth. (Moses.) - Sun, Moon.
(Joshua.) - Fire. (Elijah.) - Iron. (Elisha.) - Seas, fishes, trees,
winds, (Jesus Christ.)

Faith as mustard-seed.

2. Impassibility. - (Naked) insects, vermin, thorns, &c.
3. Intuitive knowledge. - Creatures, angels.
4. Glory. - (Naked) garment of light.
5. Knowledge of God. - Adam hiding, quibbling, &c.
6. Love of God. - He fled from him.

7. Righteousness and true holiness. - Innocency, propensity to good.

8. Peace and happiness.

III. How is the mighty fallen! - Ox for stupidity. -

Wild ass for refractoriness. - Lion for rage. - Fox for craftiness. -

Dog for greediness. - Swine for impurity. - Devil for sin. -

Covetousness besides.

IV. Inferences. - 1. If we are born in sin, we are fallen. -

Satan's image.

2. If God created us, let us obey him. Leave the usurper, return to our first Master.

3. No safety or bliss till God's image is recovered.

4. How rational the doctrine of the new birth.

5. It is God's work; Let us make; created again.

6. How precious Christ, the second Adam, whose image we are called to recover. "We all with open face beholding," &c. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

7. How empty formality and morality.

8. How invaluable the workings of the Spirit.

9. How deluded professors not new created.

V. Application. - 1. Careless sinners. - Know whence you are fallen. -

Awake, - See your calling in Christ Jesus: a king, a priest, a prophet, a son of God. - Confess what you are: groan for what you are not. If you remain sinners, like to like.

2. Distressed souls. - See the second Adam, "made to you of God wisdom," &c. You can do all things through Christ. - Innocency, happiness, garments of righteousness, and glory in him. - Believe till you are changed. - Plead, God was your Father.

3. Children of God. - Grow, walk in his image. - Show you are born. - Know your privileges in Jesus Christ are greater than in Adam. - Seriousness, majesty, dignity, heavenly-mindedness, contempt of earth, become you.

"Whose image and superscription hath it?" See by thoughts, words, actions. - See by the contrary, the glass of the law and the gospel. - O pray that God would deface with Jesus's blood, and stamp you with his Spirit. - New heart: till then all is against you, creation, redemption, &c. ¹

¹ Works, Vol. VII, pp. 457 - 9.

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