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I.

THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

ONE of our old shipmasters of the pre-steamer days tells of a naïve but perhaps not unaccountable exclamation of one of his passengers. From the day they left Liverpool until they passed the banks of Newfoundland the voyage had been foggy and cloudy, and as on a certain other voyage of a better known traveller, "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." At last, in the early evening, the sky cleared. The young lady in question, coming from below, found a soft clear light silvering the ship's deck. As one who has discovered a new planet, she rushed back to the cabin, crying with enthusiasm, "Oh, come right up and see the American moon!"

Now, to speak of the "American Sunday-school" might seem, at first view, as indefensible as to speak of the "American moon." The world is now belted with Sunday-schools, and it might appear as if the phrase meant nothing more than the Sunday-schools in America. But much more than that is intended by it. It is the function of America to Americanize. All our national ease of mind is based on a firm conviction of this national tendency. Democracy is no new thing. Greece knew it well. Rome tried it. Small European communities have made it answer. But when it crossed the Atlantic, that which failed under Greece and Rome got itself Americanized. The republic took on a new form and developed new virtues. Accordingly, it is with hopeful equanimity that we have stood by and seen immigration dilute our citizenship. The stalwart population, intelligent, God-fearing, sober and industrious, which filled the earlier borders of the country, has not multiplied

VII.

CONSILIA EVANGELICA.

IN the First Epistle to the Corinthians we read (vii. 25), "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." This is generally understood to mean that on the matter now in hand neither Christ himself nor the Holy Spirit, by whom Paul was guided, had given him authority to command. All he could do therefore was to express an opinion, which, considering its author, was entitled to great deference, yet imposed no obligation. Paul's utterance amounted to a general rule of expediency, which left every one free to judge of its application to his or her peculiar case. Hence it would not be irreverence or disobedience in any to act contrary to the Apostle's opinion. This was one of the matters in which the Christian conscience was left by the Spirit at liberty to take its own course. In the Vulgate rendering of the verse quoted, the word (*γνώμην*) which the English versions translate "judgment," is given as *consilium*, and so also in verse 40. And this led many to make a distinction between the precepts of the law and the counsels of the Gospel, thus converting a special statement respecting a particular case into a general rule of very wide application. In this way there came into vogue the term *Consilia Evangelica*, or *perfectionis*, as denoting certain things morally good, but not unconditionally commanded nor universally binding. These do not come into the category of duty, because this is too low for them. They form an uncommon, higher morality which God has not commanded, but which confers perfection. These counsels are not meant for most persons, much less for all. "The state most perfect in itself would increase temptation and endanger the souls of those who lack the vocation and therefore the strength to follow it. But those who have the strength have been the salt of society, in that caring for others they forgot themselves and exhibited an ideal life before a corrupt and sordid world."

The distinction thus made is not to be confounded with that which is held to exist between obligatory and supererogatory moral obedi-

ence. The difference between the two is clear and decided. It is shown in two particulars. "First, counsels of perfection always have reference not to actions in themselves moral, but to actions in themselves indifferent; secondly, they are to be sought not in the words of Christ, but in the words of his Apostles. Whatever Christ says in reference to practice is a command which men disobey at their peril. But the Apostles, though they may often have authority to command, may also be unable on occasion to arrive at a decision, and therefore rest content with the expression of an opinion which Christians may, if they so judge, lay aside." (Edwards on 1 Cor.)

Hooker seems to concede the essence of the *Consilia Evangelica* when he says (Eccles. Pol. II., viii. 5) that "God approveth much more than he doth command," and that "some things, although not so required of necessity that to leave them undone excludeth from salvation, are, notwithstanding, of so great dignity and acceptance with God that most ample reward in heaven is laid up for them." But God's law cannot be less good than his will, and no man can do more good than is required of him. The notion that there is some good which is not also a duty, can be obtained only by lowering the requirements of the law from the highest possible moral perfection to some inferior standard. But of such lower standard not a trace is found in holy writ.

The germ of this doctrine is found in a very early period. Indeed, asceticism was one of the undefined impulses existing at the time when Christianity appeared. The philosophical doctrine that all contact with matter is essentially evil pervaded most of the ethnic faiths of the world, and seems to have affected the Jews after their return from exile. Ascetic pietism appears in a rigid form in the Essenes of whom Josephus tells us, and influenced in a certain degree the development of Pharisaism, as may be seen in the writings of Philo. In his view, the body being the prison of the soul, the truly virtuous man must be lifted out of himself till he beholds Deity, this vision of the divine being the highest point of earthly happiness. Beyond it lies only complete deliverance from the body, the return of the soul to its original incorporeal condition, a blessing which is bestowed only on those who have kept themselves free from attachment to this sensuous body. (*Leg. Allegor.*)

The first indication of the evangelical counsels is given in the visions of Hermas the Shepherd (c. 130), where we read (v. 3): "If you do any good beyond what is commanded, you will gain more abundant glory and be more honored of God." Some deny that the words of Hermas can be thus construed, but it is difficult to see

what other interpretation can be put upon them. In Cyprian and Origen, while the claim is not expressly put forward, it seems to be implied in the extravagant commendation given to celibacy practised on religious grounds. In Chrysostom's homilies there are continual references to the superior excellence of a life of celibacy and solitude. He borrows the pagan usage by which philosopher and ascetic became synonymous expressions, and uses the term "philosophy" to denote a monastic and contemplative life. The prevalence of this usage, which is found in all the writers of the time, is sufficient to show how deeply inwrought was the conviction that in this was realized the highest conception of human attainment. But the dogma seems to have found its fullest development in the time of Thomas Aquinas, in whose *Sum. Theol.* (II., 1, Ques. 108) it is carefully stated and elaborately vindicated. We avail ourselves of a compendious statement of his views, given in the work of a Romanist writer of our own day.

He holds that the observance of the Commandments is a matter of absolute necessity for all who wish to be saved. However, a man may wish to do more than what is necessary to secure heaven. Instead of asking simply, "What *must* I do to be saved?" he may inquire what are the readiest and surest means of securing his salvation. Now the counsels of the Gospel come to his help. They teach him the most perfect manner of serving God. The great objects which men pursue are riches, pleasure, and honor, the desire of the eyes, the desire of the flesh, the pride of life, mentioned by the Apostle John. The three evangelical counsels encourage us, so far as we can, to renounce all these desires—to renounce riches for voluntary poverty, pleasure for perfect chastity [*i. e.*, celibacy], our own self-will and love of power for obedience to a religious superior. Bellarmine distinctly affirms that he who loves God with his whole heart is not bound to do all that God counsels, but only what he commands.

The Scriptures cited in support of this distinction between commands and counsels are as follows. In Luke (xvii. 10) our Lord, at the close of an instructive comparison, said, "Even so ye also, when ye have done all the things commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which it was our duty to do." From this it is inferred that if those who do only what was their duty are called by our Lord unprofitable, the Christian must needs do more; and so a passage which on its face declares the impossibility of creature merit is made to furnish a basis for a claim of uncommon merit. The clear intention of the Master's words is to show that the most faithful and exemplary servant has no rightful

claim to reward, has not brought his Maker under obligation to him, and is therefore simply and truly unprofitable. To maintain that such a servant can do anything, whether called a precept or a counsel, that God is bound to requite, is to upset and deny the letter and the spirit of the whole passage. It is to make a forced and illegitimate inference contradict the express statement of our Saviour. Another text is the reply of our Lord to the rich young man who came asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, and when referred to the Commandments, said that he had observed all these things from his youth, and asked, What lack I yet? The answer was (Matt. xix. 21), "If thou wouldest be perfect, go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* Here it is asserted that the young man's claim being admitted, the Master only gave him a counsel by which he might attain perfection. All that he needed was to give up his possessions. But this evidently was not our Lord's meaning. His purpose was to lead the young man to a knowledge of himself, and show him that in reality his heart clung to his wealth as the highest good. It was to convince him that he was utterly mistaken in his estimate of his own character, and that however outwardly correct his life had been, he was deficient in that supreme love to God which is the sum of the law. This view of the case is further confirmed by the fact that perfection, instead of being the privilege of a certain class, is the duty of all believers. The command of Christ is universal and unlimited—"Ye shall therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In the matter of celibacy appeal is made to two texts in Matthew. One of these is the remarkable utterance of our Lord (xix. 12), "There are eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb ;

* This text played a very important part in the origin of monasticism. It is related of St. Anthony, the father of the system in the East, that being the child of noble and wealthy Christian parents, he was carefully trained from his youth, and by their death he was left in charge of the estate and of a very young sister just as he was entering manhood. One day when he was attending church the lesson of the Gospel that was read contained the answer of our Lord to the rich young man. He felt this to be a divine call to himself, and accordingly, on returning home, divided his estate among the poor and devoted himself to a life of prayer and bodily mortification. So, centuries afterward, we are told of St. Francis of Assisi, whom repeated attacks of illness converted from a gay and profligate youth into a religious devotee, that gathering some companions who aided him in works of charity he retired with them into a lonely spot and sought for a rule to govern the young brotherhood. Thrice he opened the Gospels which lay upon the altar, expecting thence a divine direction. The first passage that met his eye was, "If thou wilt be perfect," etc. The others were of like tenor, and he at once proceeded to Rome to obtain authority for founding the order which has obtained such world-wide celebrity.

and there are eunuchs, which were made eunuchs by men ; and there are eunuchs, which made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." That is, some men are naturally disqualified for marriage, others have been disqualified by human action, while a third class voluntarily abstain from marriage on religious grounds. The advocates of *consilia perfectionis* insist that the existence of the last-mentioned class proves the superior holiness of a celibate life, but this is neither said nor implied. The question is simply as to greater or less usefulness in promoting the kingdom of heaven. There continually occur cases in which celibacy gives great advantages to one that labors in the Gospel, as that of Paul ; or in which it enables a man to discharge other important duties, as when one having a mother or other relatives dependent upon him refuses to embarrass himself with the cares and expense of a family. These cases are to be decided by the parties themselves, as our Lord said, " He that is able to receive it let him receive it." When any one is convinced that celibacy is best for him, then such a life becomes a duty. It is not a counsel by following which he becomes perfect or holier than is demanded of him, but a precept which he is not at liberty to neglect, one of the common obligations resting upon him as a disciple of the Lord. The other text is found in the account of the future life given by Christ to the Sadducees (xxii. 30), " In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven." This is supposed to give sanction to the claim put forth for a celibate life, that it is one of angelic purity and excellence, whereas it does not contain even a remote hint of any such thing. Angels are not better than men because they were created not as a race but each independently ; and men become like them in the future life only because then, the human family being completed, married life ceases. And as for celibacy being angelic, we are to remember that it is expressly said of the Old Testament saint who walked so close with God that he was translated, that he had sons and daughters.

But great stress is laid upon the language of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, the seventh chapter of which is occupied with this theme. He distinctly allows marriage, and gives directions concerning the duties it imposes, but says he would that all men were even as he himself, and recommends celibacy in view of the present distress and of the fact that freedom from domestic joys and sorrows often enables one to serve the Lord without distraction. He is careful, however, to add that " each man hath his own gift from God, one after this manner and another after that." Here it is claimed that an express sanction is given to the vocation of cel-

ibacy, not as a duty upon all, but as the glory and excellence of the minority who thus attain a holier state. But the Apostle gives no hint of such superior holiness. The unmarried has an advantage over the married not in purity and spirituality, but in freedom from distracting cares. It is a great mistake to make a peculiar stage of higher morality out of what is nothing but a necessary regard to individual circumstances, or to stretch an opinion given for a particular period and a peculiar state of things into a rule that applies always and everywhere. The Apostle's principles are still valid and wholesome, but they by no means teach that voluntary celibacy is an exceptional virtue and entitled to an extraordinary reward.

Another favorite text is that found in the account of the hundred and forty and four thousand (Rev. xiv. 1-4) who were purchased out of the earth, and of whom it is said, "These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." But to interpret this literally seems impossible. The hundred and forty and four thousand represent the whole multitude of the redeemed, and these cannot be celibates. The words, therefore, are to be understood either figuratively, in accordance with the whole tone of the Apocalypse, as meaning those who have kept themselves free from spiritual disloyalty to Christ (cf. Paul in 2 Cor. xi. 2, "I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ"), or, possibly in a narrower sense, as denoting those who had entered into that closest of earthly ties, marriage, and yet had learned to keep it in subordination to the will of Christ, "those that had wives as though they had none." In one or other of these ways nearly all expositors explain the passage, and it therefore has no bearing whatever upon the counsels of perfection.

It is clear, then, that the whole theory has no foundation in Scripture, but in every case mistakes the meaning of the inspired writers. It is also open to attack on various grounds.

1. It impeaches the perfection of the Divine Law, whether as found in the Ten Words from Sinai, or as given in our Lord's summary which requires us to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. This takes in, and was designed to take in, all human duty. There is a unanimous consent among all thinkers not biassed by a theory that the law of the Lord is perfect in every sense of the word, since it is the reflection of his own infinitely holy nature. It covers all relations, it extends through all time, it demands every degree of excellence, it reaches all thought and feeling, whether impulsive or deliberate. But the *Consilia Evangelica* deny this. They say that there is a degree of holiness higher than what the law demands, and that this is attainable under certain conditions. This

claim, no matter on what ground it may be made, is dishonoring to God and a serious accusation of his law. It raises a higher standard than he saw fit to set up, and represents him as asking less of his creatures than is appropriate to their character and circumstances. Yet how can any one do more good than is required of him? The human will cannot be better than the divine, and God's law is not less good than God's will. It is the merest delusion to set up a so-called moral counsel as something different from the law and superior to it. The moment any such counsel becomes a duty, it is such absolutely, and falls into line as a part of the law. So that the whole theory of evangelical counsels is a needless and unworthy impeachment of the one perfect and eternal statute.

2. It makes abstinence a greater and more important virtue than temperance. At one time the authorities on the subject enumerated twelve vows of superior holiness, but for a long period they have been confined to three—viz., voluntary poverty, celibacy (often by a shocking misnomer styled chastity), and implicit obedience to a chosen superior. The last one applies, of course, only to a monastic life. But there is no sin in the mere possession of property, nor in entering into the married state, nor in the due exercise of a man's own freedom in respect to the affairs of life. Sin lies in the abuse or perversion of any of these things, and therefore we are not called to renounce them, but to use them in such way as will most honor God and secure our own well-being and that of our fellow-men. There is, of course, risk and difficulty in doing this completely and habitually, but it is part of the moral training and discipline by which God's people are brought to their normal state and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. It is in using without abusing the things and relations of the present life that believers are led to the exercise of that supreme self-control which is man's highest moral characteristic. Of what worth is a virtue that has never been tried? But the disciples of the *Consilia Evangelica* deliberately throw away all the opportunities of self-culture thus afforded. Choosing to renounce all earthly possessions, they lose all the gain to be derived from the practice of a wise and conscientious stewardship. Choosing a celibate life, they lose all the stimulating culture involved in the exercise of the social and domestic affections amid the cares and vicissitudes of the present world. Resigning the disposal of themselves to an ecclesiastical superior, they lose all the fine discipline by which the soul learns to achieve the highest freedom in subjecting itself to the sovereign will of the Infinite Reason. Their course is a base abnegation of man's highest obligation and loftiest opportunities. It is a cowardly flight from

the true field of conflict for the soldiers of Christ. "Abstinence is the virtue of the weak, temperance is the virtue of the strong. Abstinence is also inferior in healthiness of tone. It tends inevitably to morbidity, distortion, exaggeration. Ascetic abstinence is the ghost or disembodied spirit of morality, while temperance is its soul, embodied in a genuine human life transacted amid earthly relations, occupations, and enjoyments. Abstinence is even inferior to temperance in respect to what seems its strong point—self-sacrifice." * It is easier to forsake family, friends, and fortune and become a monk than it is to retain all and yet use them moderately, never becoming their slave, and ready at any moment to relinquish them at the call of duty. This view was held as early as Clement of Alexandria, who says in the *Stromata* (VII., 12), "The genuine Christian has the Apostles for his example; and in truth it is not in the solitary life that one shows himself a *man*; but *he* gets the victory over other men who, as a husband and father of a family, withstands all the temptations that assail him in providing for wife and children, servants and substance, without allowing himself to be turned from the love of God. The man with no family escapes many temptations; but as he has none save himself to care for, he is of less worth than the man who has more to disturb him, it is true, in the work of his own salvation, but accomplishes more in social life, and in truth presents in his own case a miniature of providence itself." It seems singular that this and other similar decisive utterances of the acute and learned Clement, the teacher of Origen, should have been so entirely overlooked or disregarded by those who came after him.

3. The theory is founded in error. It assumes that there are some duties which are not of universal obligation. The performance of these is not essential to a man's obtaining the kingdom of heaven, but simply serves to secure him a speedier attainment of it and a higher degree of blessedness. It is this voluntary character of the service that gives it its value, and makes it so praiseworthy upon earth and in heaven. But in direct opposition to this stands the clear statement of the Apostle James (iv. 17), "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If the things contained in the *consilia* are good, they are already obligatory. If it be said that a man or a woman has a vocation in this direction or in that, the moment the fact is ascertained there ceases to be any option in the matter, and the whole falls into the category of duty which no believer is at liberty to disregard. Or to put the case as

* Bruce's *Training of the Twelve*, pp. 258, 259.

Dorner does (*Christ. Ethics*, Eng. Trans., 207), "The law of the Christian life is love, which is the ἀγαπεφαλαίωσις (Rom. xiii. 9) of the law. According to this, there can be nothing good that lies above it or beneath it. Love itself, however, is what absolutely all men are required to exercise; it is not merely the duty of certain individuals. Since therefore love claims all the faculties for itself, there is no room for the *Consilia Evangelica*." How can any man be at liberty to choose whether he shall be a good Christian or an indifferent one, or to determine whether he has or has not a vocation which may involve extraordinary toils and self-denials! If he would keep a conscience void of offence, he must discharge every duty brought before him by the word or the providence of God. It is one and the same inflexible rule for all that call Jesus Lord.

4. The theory opposes the whole current of Scripture. According to this, Christians are to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. But monasticism puts the salt in one place, and that which is to be salted in another. How, then, is the antiseptic influence to be exerted? The daily contact which in all ages has promoted the growth of the Church, by compelling men to see the good works to which the Gospel gives birth, is set altogether aside. And so the lamp which ought to be placed upon a stand in order to give light to all that are in the house is put under a bushel—*i.e.*, hid in a monastery, or, as often in the third century, in the midst of a desert. Our Lord recognized the circumstances of the case when he prayed for his disciples, not that they might be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil that is in the world. In like manner, the chief of the Apostles, when warning his brethren of the danger of having fellowship with false and immoral brethren, expressly says that he does not mean to interdict all secular dealings with bad men (1 Cor. v. 9-11). For that would be tantamount to the withdrawal from the world of the power of Christianity to influence men for the better. So far from it being the duty of believers to live in seclusion, they are rather to court society and let their light shine. The Master compared the kingdom of heaven to leaven, not stored away by itself, but put into three measures of meal and kept there till the whole was leavened. It is designed to take up into itself and appropriate to its own ends whatever belongs to man. It does this only by the healthy development of Christian principle in all the relations of life, furnishing to every class and condition the example of holy living. But all this is lost in the celibate or solitary life.

5. It is opposed to the fraternity of the New Testament Church. Here all are brethren. There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus. There are differences of func-

tion, but all are parts of one and the same body, with equal rights and equal privileges. But the monastic theory introduces a very different state of things. A line of demarcation is drawn, one that affects even those who are clothed with ministerial functions. And accordingly in the communions which hold the doctrine of vows, we find the secular clergy and the religious, the latter being those that belong to the monastic orders. This has led to a curious misuse of language. When men ordinarily speak of a religious life they mean one governed by a supreme regard for God. But this is not the case in the Roman and Greek communions. The holiest life conceivable, led by cleric or layman, if it be apart from the vows of a monk or a nun, is not a *religious* life—that term being appropriated in another and a specific direction. Such a distinction and division can hardly fail to be injurious. It weakens the authority of law as a common and indispensable rule, and holds up the continual spectacle of some who, by a peculiar obligation, are held to a higher degree of self-renunciation and holiness than others, and consequently these others are at liberty to feel themselves less stringently bound by the Commandments of God. Less is expected of them and less is done by them. And so the *Consilia Evangelica* sews pillows under the armholes of the rank and file of God's militant host, telling them that there are heights of Christian attainment toward which they need not aspire. Neander (I., 278) speaks of this result as flowing from the habit of exalting the secluded course of ascetics above the ordinary life of Christians. "They who were occupied in the common business of life forgot the greatness of their Christian calling, and thought that they were entitled to lower very much the requisitions as to their own daily living." It is difficult to see how this result could be avoided. Set before men two ways to heaven, one hard and trying, but leading to a greater blessedness, the other easy, but assuredly safe and certain, the temptation must be irresistible to make the easy still easier and to remit every trying duty to those who profess to be in the self-denying road.

6. The fruits of the system testify against it. It is true that in certain periods it was of great service, but its benefits have been greatly overborne by its evils. It drew many thousands from the sphere of active duty, and they were lost to society. Its irrevocable vows often led to great suffering and not a little crime. Its attempt at the absolute suppression of the whole sensual side of our nature defeated itself by occasioning grave aberrations of the imagination—such aberrations being the rule rather than the exception. During the period of its greatest prevalence it struck out love from its place as the central and distinctive feature of Christian ethics, and substi-

tuted for it the so-called chastity—that is, the utter denial of the sexual instinct. It put its ban upon the domestic affections and sympathies, which are of the very highest moral value. It depreciated and sometimes extinguished the civic and intellectual virtues which are so needful in the progress of civilization. The vain attempt to achieve greater holiness than is proposed in the ordinary constitution of earthly society, and to turn the human into the angelic, rebounded into frightful degeneracy and corruption. Men bound individually by solemn vows to absolute poverty, as a community, became possessors of enormous wealth, with all the evils naturally following from such accumulations. And monasteries and nunneries often became the very opposite of what they professed, and were sinks of iniquity. The evidence is found not in the works of heated controversialists, but in the writings of many friends of the system who mourned sincerely over the decay of discipline.

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