

History.

HISTORICAL.

The theological topics which are connected with Preliminary Grace have had a very rich development in the history of opinion and controversy. Some things on this subject have been anticipated in former sections; but a few points of deep interest present themselves here.

Hammar
Will.Ante-
Nicene.

I. The relation of man's freedom of will to the Spirit's grace has been matter of controversy only from the time of Augustine. The ante-Nicene Church treated the question mainly with reference to the Gnostic heresies, which anticipated the theory of Determinism. The Greek and Latin Fathers alike earnestly opposed the Manichæan notion of the necessity laid on the soul through its connection with matter. But they differed in that the Greeks exaggerated the primary function of the will in originating good; whilst the Latins thought less of the will and more of the Divine influence upon it, and paved the way for the later doctrine of Prevenient Grace. Common to the whole Church for centuries was the principle: *ἐλεύθερον καὶ αὐτεξούσιον ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον*: God hath made man free and master of himself. Common also was the correlative sentiment expressed by Origen: "Moral good is combined of the first choice of the soul and of the Divine power inbreathed." Common also, though more emphatically among the Latins, that of Ambrose: "Whether we think of the beginnings, or of the progress, or of the final perseverance of the faithful, there is no kind of virtue which may be regarded as without the gift of Divine grace, or without the consent of our own will." On the whole, the tendency was what afterwards was called Semi-Pelagian: grace having been regarded as inducing rather the knowledge than the volition.

The
Pelagian
Contro-
versy.

II. A certain doctrine of Prevenient Grace, interpreted broadly, has been taught in almost all systems. But the lax interpretation of this given by the Greek Fathers led to Pelagianism; and the emphatic assertion of a preponderating Divine influence in it was developed into Augustinianism.

Pela-
gianism.

1. Pelagianism in the beginning of the fifth century understood by prevenient grace the innate and undestroyed capacity of the

soul for good and secret bias towards it; the written law as stimulating both; and, added to this, the teaching and example and illumination of Christ. "Omne bonum et malum, quo vel laudabiles vel vituperabiles sumus, non nobiscum oritur, sed agitur a nobis. Capaces enim utriusque rei, non pleni nascimur, et ut sine virtute ita etiam sine vitio procreamur, atque ante actionem propriæ voluntatis id solum in homine est quod Deus condidit. Sed Deus gratiæ suæ auxilium subministrat, ut quod per liberum arbitrium jubentur homines facere, facilius possent implere per gratiam, quam nos non in lege tantummodo, sed et in Dei adjutorio, confitemur. Adjuvat enim nos Deus per doctrinam et revelationem suam." These words of Pelagius himself must be studied as containing the pith of his whole doctrine, as it has been laid down above. It was his faith that "Est in animis nostris naturalis quædam sanctitas;" and this natural sanctity is only aided by instruction. Hence whatever preliminary grace is in the system of Pelagius is simply external instruction appealing to a nature wrong only through accident and bad example.

2. Augustine's doctrine of Preliminary Grace is the perfect opposite of this. In his doctrine freedom of will remains, but freedom only to evil. Grace acts directly and supremely on the Will. These are his careful expressions: "Gratia prævenit; voluntas comitans non ducens, pedissiqua non prævia. Operari et co-operari est a Deo. Gratia est gratis data, operans indeclinabiliter et insuperabiliter." Pelagius was right in protesting that these last words present "Fatum nomine gratiæ:" Fate disguised as grace. The insurmountable objection to this dictum is that it reduces the whole of the operation of Divine influence, through the Word and in Providence, upon the general world to a mere superfluity, which was afterwards called COMMON GRACE. This is in Augustinian and Calvinistic systems opposed to what is called GRACE EFFICACIOUS: being universal and not particular; being necessarily, or at least actually, inoperative for salvation in the purpose of God. This wasted influence is opposed also to IMMEDIATE GRACE: being given through the truth and not directly influencing the will: touching the soul only through its natural affinity with its former possession, a natural affinity, however, which the theory supposes to have been lost. Hence both terms are

Augustinianism

Common Grace.

misused. Grace is no more grace, if it does not include the saving intention of the Giver; and by being called common this grace is dishonoured, suggesting at least the language used to St. Peter: *that call not thou common*. In such systems the outer court of the world is filled with a *MASSA PERDITIONIS*, in Augustine's phrase; the will of the Spirit kindles life here and there when He will; and the first spark of true grace has in it all the potentiality and effectual earnest of eternal glory. There is strictly speaking no doctrine of Preliminary Grace: Enlightenment, Conversion, Repentance, Faith, are all the fruits of regeneration; and regeneration is absolutely *the power of an endless life*, though Augustine himself did not sanction the notion of his later followers concerning its indefectibility.

Act. x. 16. Mediating Theories. .III. The mediation between Pelagianism and Augustinianism contained the principles of the truth on this subject. It may be divided into three main tendencies: Semi-Pelagianism, Lutheran Synergism, and Arminianism. These three advanced progressively towards a clearer view of the Scriptural doctrine.

Semi-Pelagianism. 1. Semi-Pelagianism in the Latin Church, as represented by Cassian in Massilia, asserted that the power of doing what the will approved was not extinguished but rendered feeble. Prevenient Grace was found in the very contest between flesh and spirit: this being a stimulant to the pursuit of salvation. Moreover, Divine assistance was declared to be necessary to the progress and consummation of all good in man; though the beginning of that good is found in fallen human nature. In the Middle Ages most of the Schoolmen held a modification of this teaching. It was then that the distinction between two kinds of merit was introduced which has given a permanent character to the Romanist doctrine of prevenient grace. The process was thus exhibited by Thomas Aquinas: God is the Prime Mover simply. The free will cannot be converted to God, unless God Himself convert it. It is for man to prepare his mind, because he does this according to his free will; yet even this he cannot do without the help of God drawing to Himself. All things are of God originally; but whether the universal influence is used depends upon the creature. If he disposes himself rightly, it is congruous that man doing his best should be rewarded according to Divine goodness: this is the

Meritum de congruo. The Meritum de condigno is the real merit of acts proceeding from habitual grace. The false doctrine of merit infects the Romanist theology throughout: in the department of prevenient grace it mars what would otherwise be true. Among the Canons of Trent are sentences which assert that free will is by no means extinct, though enfeebled in its powers: "Si quis dixerit liberum hominis arbitrium a Deo motum et excitatum nihil co-operari assentiendo Deo excitanti atque vocanti, quo ad obtinendam justificationis gratiam se disponat ac præparet, mereque passive se habere; anathema sit." The grades and degrees of personal conduct by which the awakened sinner prepares himself for justification are all additions to the Scriptural doctrine of prevenient grace. But the fundamental principle of the whole is sound, though the tendency is towards error. The merit of congruity takes the place of the virtue of the Atonement to which all good left in man is to be ascribed: it is not merit that God rewards but the universal and free influence of the Spirit used by the sinner on his way to salvation. Conc. Trid.

2. SYNERGISM was the necessary consequence in Lutheran Synergism theology of the doctrine of universal redemption. Melancthon wrote in 1535: "Conjungi has causas, verbum, Spiritum Sanctum, et voluntatem non sane otiosam sed repugnantem infirmitatæ suæ. Deus antevertit nos, vocat, movet, adjuvat, sed nos viderimus ne repugnemus. Chrysostomus inquit: ὁ δὲ ἔλκει τὸν βουλόμενον ἔλκει. Erasmus: liberum arbitrium est facultas applicandi se ad gratiam." The watchword of Synergism was that the human will is a causa concurrens: the theological expression of Chrysostom's "He that draweth draweth the willing mind." Man is a free agent, analogous to God the Supreme Free Agent, and his modus agendi, by which he is distinguished from natural things, remains also in his conversion. The opponents of Synergism, Flacius and others, represented the soul as absolutely corrupted in nature by the presence of sin, which is the image of Satan in him. Hence with them prevenient grace was the removal of some almost organic evil. The later Evangelical divines in many ways described and made emphatic the "generale desiderium salutis." But the Lutheran teaching generally on this subject may be said to be vitiated by two errors: first, it ascribes that

good in man to which converting grace appeals to nature, not wholly debased by the Fall, without laying stress on the redeeming gift of our Saviour to the world; and, secondly, it makes the preliminaries of grace depend too much on the sacramental gift imparted in baptism.

Armi- 3. The Arminian mediation between the two extremes,
nianism. generally, of Pelagianism and Augustinianism, has been referred to in some previous sections.

Metho- As to the present topic, that of Prevenient Grace, its
dism. modern Methodist representative maintains a doctrine which is consistent throughout. It holds that there is a state of nature, as distinguished from the state of grace and the state of glory, that state of nature however being itself a state of grace, preliminary grace, which is diffused throughout the world, and visits all the children of men: not merely the remains of good untouched by the Fall, but those remains as the effect and gift of redemption. The special grace of enlightenment and conversion, repentance and faith, it holds to be prevenient only, as resting short of regeneration; but as flowing into the regenerate life. It therefore

Con- asserts, in a certain sense, the principle of a CONTINUITY OF GRACE
tinuity of in the case of those who are saved. But in its doctrine all grace
Grace. is not the same grace in its issues, though all is the same in its Divine purpose. It distinguishes measures and degrees of the Spirit's influence, from the most universal and common benefit of the Atonement in life and its advantages up to the consummation of the energy of the Holy Ghost which fits for the vision of God. It rejects the figment of a COMMON GRACE not

TIT II. 11. χάρις σωτήριος; and refuses to believe that any influence of the Divine Spirit procured by the Atonement is imparted without reference to final salvation. The doctrine of a Continuity of Grace, flowing in some cases uninterruptedly from the grace of Christian birth, sealed in baptism, up to the fulness of sanctification, is alone consistent with Scripture.

Many points of discussion bearing on Repentance and Faith will be considered when Justification by Faith and the Roman Sacrament of Penance are before us.