

CHAPTER VII.

COCHRAN AND COCHRANISM.

To place upon the page of history the errors and defeats of the church is scarcely less serviceable, in securing her true developments and permanent advancement, than to proclaim her virtues and her victories. In this view, it may not be considered entirely without service to the cause of truth, to place even upon our ephemeral pages some account of that manifestation of religious delusion and fanaticism, known as "Cochranism." Besides, in tracing the life of Mr. Phinney, when it became necessary, at least, to touch upon this subject, it was not deemed unwise to devote to it labor sufficient to collect the principal facts concerning it.

Care has been taken not to put down anything as *fact*, which is not supported by the concurrent testimony of witnesses who are familiar with what they relate. Among those upon whom we rely, besides Mr. Phinney, may be mentioned Elder Zachariah Jordan, and Elder Ephraim Stinchfield. The testimony of the latter we find in a pamphlet which he wrote at the time this delusion was at the height of its power, and which was printed in 1819. This pamphlet, as well as other efforts of its author, did not a little in checking the evil to which it relates. For what is probably the only remaining copy of it, we are indebted to the kindness of a lady who not

only is, but who is worthy to be, a grand daughter of Elder Stinchfield, a name of holy memory.

About the close of the year 1816 or the beginning of 1817, Jacob Cochran, from whom this ism derived its name, moved from Conway, N. H., to Scarborough, Me. He began immediately to preach in Scarborough, though we have been unable to ascertain anything as to his character or calling before.

Though a preacher, he belonged to no denomination of Christians; he was however friendly to all; on the one hand, he did not wish to tear down any existing religious organization, nor, on the other, did he wish to add another to their number. He desired rather to work through any or all to restore to the church apostolic religion and the lost miraculous powers. Such were his professions.

Though uneducated, he was by no means deficient in what is called native talent; indeed he seemed to possess a large share of it; but it partook of shrewdness, rather than of sound discretion. If he was not able at once to carry his point, he had that self-possession which can successfully conceal disappointed feelings, till it at length reaps from defeat the fruits of victory. If he possessed not genuine piety, he well knew how to assume the look and gesture of extraordinary sanctity; and, if he had not the powers adequate to true eloquence, he could successfully sway the multitude by vehement zeal and a kind of mesmeric inspiration.

When this new preacher had won not a little upon the attention of the good people of Scarborough, Mr.

Phinney went there, as he was accustomed to from time to time, to hold meetings. Mr. Cochran was among the first and most attentive of his auditors. When the sermon was closed, upon liberty being given to others to speak, as was then the custom after almost every sermon delivered by preachers of our Connexion, Mr. Cochran arose, apparently overwhelmed with holy emotions, and said, "To-day I have heard the gospel in its purity. God has sent this servant of his here for a great work of salvation." After many similar remarks, he concluded by proposing publicly to give up his appointments to Mr. Phinney, reserving to himself simply the privilege of exhorting occasionally, as the spirit might give him utterance. By way of securing for his proposal the more favor, he concluded by giving utterance to a kind of prophetic conviction, that should his plan be acceded to, a most remarkable revival would immediately follow.

Whatever were Mr. Phinney's feelings of repugnance to acceding to this plan, and whatever were his apprehensions of evil, he could not well decline a proposal, thus publicly made, without bringing against himself serious charges of uncharitableness and sectarianism. The event proved, however, that Mr. Phinney did not sufficiently rely upon his own convictions.

Mr. Phinney, entering upon the duties of the proposed series of meetings, Mr. Cochran accompanied him, faithfully availing himself of his reserved privilege: he exhorted sinners to flee to Christ; he often

wept excessively, as he listened and as he spoke. The consequence was that his prophecy was fulfilled, and he won the entire confidence of the people.

Though thus successful with the people, there was still one Mordecai sitting in the king's gate. He was conscious that Mr. Phinney withheld from him his confidence. Other efforts were to be put forth, either to win him, or deprive him of his power among the people. For this purpose he chose an opportunity when he and Mr. Phinney were in the company of several of the brethren of leading influence. "Brother Phinney," said he, "you are very hard-hearted; you do not love me; it is as cruel as the grave; for I never before saw the man I love half as much as I do you." Mr. Phinney, raising his cane to a horizontal position, replied, "Jacob, I love you at the end of that, but I cannot receive you to my heart." This kind of jugglery, however, succeeded too well.

About the same time Mr. Cochran went to Hollis to preach. Here again he resorted to a similar trick to secure influence. "Go to Scarborough," said he to his hearers, many of whom had been converted under the labors of Mr. Phinney, "go to Scarborough, and listen to Mr. Phinney, if you want to hear the precious gospel in its purity. I have travelled in ten States, but never before has it been my privilege to listen to such a man of God."

Though Mr. Phinney was all the time conscious of danger, both to himself and the church, he struggled in vain to break from the toils which were laid before

his own eyes, and in which, notwithstanding that, he was but too successfully taken. The following incident was the source of the most hope for a successful escape: Mr. Phinney having returned to Scarborough, ascertained that Mr. Cochran had grieved even his warmest friend, by an attempt to perform a miracle; for, on this point, he had as yet said but little, and that very cautiously. At this time, however, he undertook to cast the devil out of a man who was under deep conviction. Placing his hand on the head of the subject, he prayed, and bid the devil depart. He then tried to convince the man that he had really undergone a great change, but all in vain; he insisted that he was no better; despite every thing, the exorcist made a complete failure in his experiment; and, as before stated, grieved his best friends, who prevailed upon Mr. Phinney, when he returned, to rebuke the evil spirit in their friend. He accordingly called Mr. Cochran to account in the presence of a part of those who were witnesses of his transgression. At first he insisted that the power of working miracles still remained in the church, and, that all the faithful could exercise it; but, when he found he was losing ground, he made his retreat with such dexterity that his retreat was his greatest victory. Turning his eyes to Mr. Phinney, with great apparent penitence, he said, "I bless God for such a faithful man; O how faithful! I have sinned; I have wronged the cause of Christ; forgive me! What shall I do?" While he thus spoke, tears flowed in streams over his cheeks.

Such penitence, or rather, signs of it, fully restored him to the confidence of his friends. They wondered that Mr. Phinney could not fully forgive such a meek man of God, as they called him. On the other hand, Mr. Cochran ceased not to praise the faithful preacher who rebuked him. Thus at length he succeeded in destroying in a great measure the influence of Mr. Phinney over the people, and then very soon run his miserable career, as we shall soon see.

Here we get a glimpse of Mr. Phinney's weakest side. He never was a man of strife. He was not born for war, however heroic his ancestors might have been. He is so little disposed to war, that his charity is in more or less danger of degenerating into latitudinarianism. Too much charity is a fault, of which, however, we do not often have reason to complain. Every virtue has a corresponding error, into which the virtue, so to say, without much watchfulness, easily passes. On this ground, had it been our object to make the subject of our pages a hero, our hero would have been, at least, out-generaled if not conquered.

But to return to Mr. Cochran. By the sort of dexterity described—by his great enthusiasm, and by assuming an extraordinary degree of sanctity, by praising at first those ministers dear to the hearts of young converts, and by insinuations afterwards—he at length succeeded in destroying, with many persons of a peculiar cast of mind, the influence of those who had shown their character by their faithful lives, and attaching the same to himself in a sort of fanatical friendship, by which he prepared them to go any

length in absurdity, folly and even crime, that his interest or caprice might dictate. "Those who join and become members of this brotherhood," said Elder Stinchfield in his pamphlet, "must renounce every natural connection, and be exclusively under the control of their leaders, who, while they promise them liberty, are themselves the servants of corruption; for, of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage." Again: "I had, before I left this place," says he, in speaking of what he witnessed in Kennebunk, "such a discovery of the *mystery of iniquity*, working to the subversion of all social ties, between husband and wife, parents and children, rulers and ruled, ministers and people—the rising generation corrupted by the introduction of such vicious practices under the cloak of religion—that it seemed as if I should be constrained to cry day and night against the abomination that maketh desolate." Again: "When I arrived in the upper towns in the County of York, I found this dreadful hydrophobia with all its dire effects—children denouncing their parents; members of churches, their pastors; neighbors, one another."

When Mr. Cochran had organized a party for himself, and had thus become free from his dependence upon the ministers, by whose influence he at first contrived to secure to himself power, he revived his doctrine and practice of miracle-working. "They, like all other enthusiasts," says Elder Stinchfield, "pretend to a light superior to that of any other religious society since the apostles; and the power of healing

the sick, raising the dead, and casting out devils—all of which they said had been literally performed among them. Extraordinary dreams and visions, they asserted, had been experienced, and wonders wrought." Among the "wonders wrought," was a pretended baptism of the Holy Ghost. The preacher, while all around him was intense excitement, placing his hand on the head of the candidate, exhorted him to "Press to the light." An adherent to this party told Elder Stinchfield, that Mr. Cochran, "by only laying his hand upon a person's head, could so effect him that "he would immediately fall to the floor and cry out in great distress; and after continuing in that frame a short time, he would then be delivered from that distress and shout, Glory."

From this extraordinary degree of "holiness," so dependent upon mere states of the body, as induced by fear, the glow of emotions, and various other mental states or exercises, it was no long step to holy physical exercises. Then came logically enough holy dancing, marching, and "reaping;" then a luxurious feast called "the Passover;" then, verging from the sensual to the spiritual, came the spirituality of matrimony—ordinary marriage being proclaimed as of the Pharisees, not of Christ; spiritual ties alone have validity for Christians; then, of course an outer temple for the uninitiated, and an inner for the initiated; then a *sanctum sanctorum* for the high priest; and last of all, this holy place, like the Romish confessional, became a shrine of Venus.

Let us hear Elder Stinchfield again: "At one time a cry is uttered by him or some other in his assemblies in the language of the angel in the Revelation, *Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.* A number in the assembly will then be thrown into the greatest agitations; a violent exertion of the arms and body, for a long time together, takes place. These are called *reapers*, and the operation *reaping*. To other violent motions of the arms and body, they give the appellation of *winnowing*, and *separating the chaff from the wheat*; another they call, *gathering and burning the chaff*.

"Cochran pretends to have the power of life and death in his hands, and frightens his pupils into a compliance with any of his injunctions, by threatening to stop their breath in a moment; by which means he takes females from their parents and carries them to his brothel. He declares he has the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and pretends to open it for, or shut it against, whom he sees fit, by stretching out, and making a violent twist with his arm, one way or the other."

To such excesses of crime, especially in violation of the seventh commandment, did this pretended reformer recklessly proceed, that he was soon arrested in his career, and, after due examination and conviction, sent to the State's Prison to suffer its well deserved penalties. Though his arrest took place in Feb. 1819, only about three years from the commencement of his preaching in Scarborough, yet, it

is said, that at one time his adherents numbered more than two thousand; but before this, even, his numbers had begun rapidly to diminish.

Among those who successfully opposed this destructive delusion was Elder George Parcher, of Saco, where Mr. Cochran at length established his head-quarters. At no great distance from Elder Parcher's residence was Mr. Cochran's gloomy and "dreary mansion, provided wholly with wooden shutters on the outside, the better to conceal, no doubt, the works of darkness practiced within its walls. The general family consists of twelve females, besides those who visit the house occasionally. Some of these are widows, who, with the rest of the females, have surrendered their persons, character and property into the common stock; and remain in this place, as those declare who have left them, destitute, to all appearance, of any profitable business; and are, most of them, forbidden to labor with their hands for a living; and intend, as I was informed in the neighborhood, that the wicked shall maintain them; though I believe it is generally thought they will be hungry soon, as the property which has been brought together by this religious fraud is nearly spent; and not much prospect of his realizing his original purpose, of having *all things common*, for any considerable time to come."*

Aside from this new movement, religious excitement, had, in that vicinity and in various denomina-

* Cochranism Delineated.

tions, run to a very high degree in what were called revivals; so that the way was so well prepared for Mr. Cochran, that very many otherwise discreet and even pious persons yielded to this new fanaticism. Indeed it seemed to be carrying all before it. Things in this state, Mr. Parcher, as we were about to relate, was so deeply impressed with a sense of duty to warn his neighbors against their impending danger, that one Saturday morning leaving his field, his horses in the furrow, he went from house to house among the doubtful, and those already gone over, pleading with them, in the name of his Master, to flee from the destroyer. The next day he went to their assembly, and, at length, obtaining permission to address them, he charged them in the name of God to cease from their abominations. His warnings and exhortations were not in vain; for, though many hissed and brawled, gnashed their teeth, and threatened to take his life, so much was God's power in the word of this bold and faithful preacher, that he not only came off unharmed, but he was enabled by these and similar efforts to put an effectual check to the further spread of this fanaticism in that vicinity, to save the doubtful, and indeed to leave the apostate with only a few adherents. These soon ran to the excesses named, which aided not a little in bringing their own abominations to a close.

Under the influence of this delusion, many made shipwreck of their piety, who, under happier auspices, might have been ornaments to the church; some were led into great domestic afflictions,—husbands and wives being parted for life, and the unmarried so cor-

rupted, that some were compelled to drag out life, conscious of guilt, and others in public disgrace. After the imprisonment of Mr. Cochran, Mr. Phinney, in company with Elder John Boothby, of the Christian denomination, went over the fields thus laid desolate. "Never, never," said one of the unfortunate victims, "can I be happy again; I have lost all self-respect." This is only a specimen of what every where made their hearts sad and even sick. Some who had been in affluent circumstances, were compelled in old age to suffer for the necessaries of life.

It might well be supposed that a delusion so speedily followed by such sufferings—sufferings that had to be endured without the consolations of conscious innocence—would ere this have lost all adherents. But a delusion once fastened upon the religious feelings, is not so soon cured. Though thirty years have passed since Mr. Cochran went to prison, near the site of his "gloomy, dreary mansion," there is this day the abode of some five or six of "the faithful," who still, perhaps, wait for either their old prophet or a new one to arise and lead them to the substance of the bright visions that fired their youthful imaginations. Besides these, here and there, in Saço and vicinity, may be found one who still lives in hope. These, it is said, occasionally meet to cheer their spirits by a religious dance, so as to enable themselves the better to endure the ills of their sad pilgrimage.

It is said that, notwithstanding this delusion is so ludicrous where it is not too sad, some of its adherents, by a long life of integrity and general good

character, enjoy the high esteem of all their acquaintances. Who that by his own experience knows anything of the frailty of our nature, would deal harshly with such? Who having such self-knowledge does not find it congenial with his heart, to throw around the foibles of such the ample folds of the mantle of charity, as he commends them to him whose judgment alone is without mixture of error. But this exercise of charity must not prevent us from learning the lessons of wisdom which human frailties and sufferings are designed to teach.

As to Mr. Cochran himself, his term in prison so crushed his spirits, or, at least, moderated his hopes, that he completely failed of the honors of martyrdom. By a natural death not long after his release, he was called to his last account.

Thus inglorious, Protestantism suffers most of her enthusiasts and fanatics to die. Had he fallen under the care of "the holy mother," how different would have been his fate! Then might the sacredness of the confessional, or the gloomy walls of a nunnery, have screened his crimes from the knowledge and penalties of justice; the generalship of a new order of chaste monks rewarded his zeal on earth; afterwards given to him fame and saintship; and to his saintship might have been muttered the prayers of the devout of coming centuries. To many of no more virtue and not half the talent of Mr. Cochran, are offered up every day in papal churches thousands of prayers.

Only now and then among Protestants can a great

enthusiast attract to himself power and honor. When the church is just arousing herself from a long sleep of formalism and dead works; when she begins anew to breathe the breath of that life offered to his people by the Savior; when this new life just begins to make itself felt; then an enthusiast may lead off great numbers of those who are of peculiarly ardent temperaments, especially if they have not enjoyed the advantages of education.

Just such a state of affairs existed when Mr. Cochran began his movement. He had the warmth of emotion, apparent sanctity and shrewdness to attract, combine and control the elements, made ready to his hand. Already "swoonings," and various other mesmeric phenomena, had begun to be considered indicative of peculiar holiness. Nothing but sheer greediness for sensual indulgence prevented his party from rapidly spreading through the country. But for this, temples of more splendor than those of Kirtland and Nauvoo might long ago have been built to his honor. But the honors, if such we may call them, which he might easily have won, are now associated with the name of the Mormon martyr.

Antinomianism, that keeps the children of the church from the consciousness of the redemption wrought out by Christ, is the parent of that enthusiasm which places all religion and religious blessings in the emotions. This enthusiasm, when the feelings have spent their life, as they soon must, produces in its turn antinomianism and infidelity. Formalism

cannot save the church from over-excitement; over-excitement cannot save her from formality. The consciousness of redemption in the human heart—the gospel itself, in short—can and must save her, if she is ever saved, from both.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO HIS REMOVAL TO HARRISON, IN 1824.

THE Free-will Baptist denomination may be regarded as having had its origin in the great religious awakening that occurred under the labors of Wesley and Whitefield. The last sermon ever delivered by the latter, (in 1770,) was blessed to the conversion of a sail-maker, Benjamin Randall, the acknowledged founder of the denomination. At first, he joined "the Standing Order," as the Congregationalists were then called in New England; but owing to a difference of opinion in regard to baptism, he soon after joined the Calvinistic Baptists, among whom he was licensed as a preacher. Possessed of strong practical common sense, and a judgment unwarped by the theological training of those times, it was, of course, impossible for him to adopt the high toned Calvinism then prevailing in the two denominations with which he had been, thus far, associated. Besides, it was, altogether uncongenial with his heart, warmed by the "brotherly love" of a life-giving gospel, to refuse to commune with acknowledged Christians, simply from a difference of opinion in regard to baptism. Hence, in 1780, he was led to form a Free-Communion Baptist church, holding to the freedom of human will. Hence sprung the nick-name Free-will Baptists, and the denomination designated by it.