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A Fine Distinction

Freedom Press (London)

February, 1888

The pastor of a Congregational church writes to us:

"I find in your issue of this month you say in your article on Reason-Worship: 'Christian theology and pessimist philosophy are agreed in condemning the nature of man as essentially evil.' As a regular reader of your paper, I was sorry to find such a mistake. This may be some people's impression of the teaching of theology, or it may actually be taught by some ignorant preachers. It is not the doctrine of theology, but on the contrary has been specially condemned, and I believe never revived. Theology teaches that sin is in the will but not in the essential nature of man. These views are distinct. Man is created in the image of God: this is the teaching of the Bible and of theology. The emphasis laid upon the fact of sin has led you astray."

Is not the will part of the essential nature of men? If the will is depraved (however that may be said to have come about), is not the man a depraved being?

We fully admit that many Christians theoretically, and a vast number practically, do not believe in the essential wickedness of human nature. The vital force of Christ's religion, as distinct

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from theology, has been its loving reverence for man; and the section of the Christian Church to which our correspondent belongs is one of those that has retained most of the popular and humanitarian character of their master's teaching. But we must reassert that the doctrine of the evil nature of man has been an article of faith in the dominant forms of Christian theology during the last 1800 years, and has exercised a great and injurious moral influence upon social relations.