

A SERIES
OF
TRACTS
ON THE
DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY
OF THE
✓
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EMBRACING
SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

VOL. V.

PHILADELPHIA :
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION.

CONTENTS.



- I. Experimental Religion a rational thing, by the Rev. Jonathan Greenleaf.
- II. A Traveller's Hints on subjects of practical importance, by W. M. Engles, D. D.
- III. Advice to sinners under conviction, by the Rev. Samuel Corbyn.
- IV. Certain rich men, a series of portraits, by W. M. Engles, D. D.
- V. To an old disciple, by W. S. Plumer, D. D.
- VI. To an old person who has no hope in Christ, by W. S. Plumer, D. D.
- VII. How to bring up children, by W. S. Plumer, D. D.
- VIII. Jehovah our Righteousness. by Geo. Whitefield.
- IX. Words of Warning.
- X. Now!
- XI. Luther's Conversion.
- XII. Sin our Enemy, God our Friend.
- XIII. Anchor of the Soul.
- XIV. Do you go to the Prayer Meeting?
- XV. Night, Day-break, and Clear Day.
- XVI. Who shall dwell with devouring Fire?
- XVII. Without God.
- XVIII. The False Peace and the True.
- XIX. God's Purpose of Grace.
- XX. The Sin-bearer.
- XXI. The Sovereignty of God explained and vindicated, by Daniel Baker, D. D.
- XXII. A Message from God, by the Rev. W. J. McCord.
- XXIII. Stop!
- XXIV. The blood upon the door-posts, or means of safety in the time of pestilence.
- XXV. To a young disciple.
- XXVI. William and his mother, or What is true Repentance?
- XXVII. Scarcely Saved, by the Rev. W. J. McCord.
- XXVIII. Sin must die, or the soul must die, by W. S. Plumer, D. D.
- XXIX. Thou must die.—To die is gain.
- XXX. The Standards of the Presbyterian Church, a faithful mirror of Bible truth, by Daniel Baker, D. D.
- XXXI. The difference between Popery and Protestantism in a letter to an inquiring friend, by "Kirwan" (Rev. Nicholas Murray, D. D.)
- XXXII. The Western Patriarch, an authentic narrative, by W. S. Plumer, D. D.
- XXXIII. Parity admitted by Prelatists.

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION

A RATIONAL THING.

ABOUT 1800 years ago a notable prisoner was arraigned before a Roman tribunal, charged with rebellion against the government. He was accused as being a most sacrilegious wretch, who profaned holy places, and led away multitudes after him: as being "a pestilent fellow," a "mover of sedition," and a "ringleader" of a most troublesome sect. Notwithstanding the enormity of his supposed crimes, and although he was in the power of his accusers, they were very irresolute respecting a final disposition of his case, and for two years he was kept in confinement, without any regular trial, though he was repeatedly examined before legal functionaries, magistrates, and kings. On one of these occasions, having no advocate to plead his cause, the dignitaries before whom he stood, as a great favour, desired him to speak for himself, when instead of criminating his accusers, as perhaps they expected, or entering into any theological controversy, he simply related his own experience of what he hoped was a work of divine grace upon his own heart. This was so unexpected that his auditory were confounded. One declared that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian, and another could not account for what he heard, but only on the supposition that the extensive learning of the prisoner, which he perceived that he possessed, had turned his brain: for "as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." The prominent thought here is, that experimental religion is rational. Paul was thought insane, simply because he related his religious experience. But experimental religion is rational, and may be seen as the result of sober reason, and sound intellect.

Let us examine a few leading exercises.

1. Conviction, or alarm of soul for sin, is a rational exercise. The anger of God revealed against sin is a real thing. Jehovah means as he says when he declares "The soul that sinneth shall die." It is hence no more than the dictate of well informed reason to be alarmed when the wrath of God gathers blackness, and his vengeance like some mighty storm is about to descend. When a pestilence is spreading devastation and death all around, it is deemed perfectly rational for men to be alarmed, and to take all prudent precautions to prevent contagion. In such a case no one is suspected of insanity if he is much distressed, and even should he remove immediately from the infected spot. If a fire has broken out in a populous city, and is spreading in every direction, who blames men for being exceedingly alarmed, or who taxes them with loss of reason when they run to and fro calling for help, and seeking to remove their property from the power of the flames? If a hostile army has invaded our shores, and is fast approaching the place of our dwelling, scattering carnage and desolation, and putting every human being to the sword, do not men feel justified in taking the alarm, and in the greatest distress fleeing to a place of safety? Distress and anguish of spirit at a time when danger is apprehended is then perfectly rational, and is fully justified by the common sense of mankind. Now conviction of sin arises from an apprehension of danger. The Spirit of God awakens the soul to discern its exposure to wrath on account of transgression. The infinite evil of sin may not be perceived as yet, but the man will have a dreadful sound of vengeance in his ears. He will see that the law of God is broken in ten thousand instances, and

that no doings of his own can repair the breach. The penalty of the law, sacred as its precept, cannot be given up, and when the Spirit of God awakens the mind, the penalty of the law will seem most dreadful. Destruction upon destruction will be cried in the ears of the awakened soul, and he must be hardened indeed not to feel distressed. Thus conviction of sin may be explained, and may be seen to be an exercise perfectly rational, and just as much so as distress and alarm in the apprehension of any danger whatever.

2. Repentance is a rational exercise. The operations of the Holy Spirit in the soul are not stationary, and the man once thoroughly awakened very soon begins to feel the pollution of sin, and to realize something of the plague of his own heart. The light which enters his mind serves to discover somewhat of the darkness which still dwells there, and as the purity of God's character is displayed, the awful pollution of his own will become more manifest. It is this view of himself, which as far as means are concerned, produces the grace of repentance, displaying itself in deep contrition and self loathing for sin, confession of the sin, and reformation. These exercises are perfectly rational. If a man has committed an error in any transaction with a fellow being, it is deemed no more than reasonable that he should acknowledge his fault, and make restitution. If the wrong he has committed is of a defiling and polluting nature, every one expects that he will be ashamed and confounded for it, and in this way will manifest the most unfeigned sorrow. It is expected also that he will forsake his evil way, and wherein he has done iniquity that he will do so no more. This is according to the common sense of mankind, and is considered perfectly reasonable for every one to do. Repentance towards God, in its external form, is nothing more than this: the soul is enlightened to see its error; sin is found to be polluting, and the person makes ingenuous confession, and turns from it in disgust. Is there any thing irrational in this? Is there any thing which looks like insanity, or fanaticism? Surely not. The man has offended against God: the Spirit of the

Lord has convinced him of his error; he becomes ashamed of it, and turns away into a different course. Thus is repentance rational.

3. Faith in Christ is rational. The soul being enlightened to discern the Saviour, and wholly despairing of help in itself, is thereupon persuaded to renounce every self-justifying plea, and to depend alone on Christ for salvation. And is not this perfectly natural? If a man had been in difficult and trying circumstances, and some benevolent hand had set him free, would he not greatly regard him whose benevolence had done so much for him? And even when the offer was made, would not his heart leap within him, to think that any one was ready to relieve his distress? It is thus that the believing soul views Christ. Nothing on earth can relieve him. He views sin as having not only polluted but endangered his soul. He looks behind him, and nothing but destruction is there; he looks forward, and it is all darkness and conjecture; on the right hand and on the left no refuge appears, no man cares for his soul. At this moment of extremity the Saviour's voice is heard. A pardon to a condemned criminal is not more welcome, and the soul leaps up with joy, embraces the Saviour, and believes on him unto everlasting life. Is there any thing irrational in these exercises? Would not any person in trouble hail a deliverance with equal delight? And are the exercises of gratitude toward Christ, which the believer feels, any thing more than the reasonable expressions of regard which any one ought to exercise toward a kind benefactor?

But perhaps we shall be told that faith in Christ for personal salvation involves with it a belief of several things of which at present we can have no positive proof. This is admitted. There are many things received into the Christian's creed which rest simply on the divine testimony of the word of God. But is this unreasonable, and are those who embrace scriptural truths with no other evidence than that afforded in the Bible, to be accounted insane men, or branded as fanatics? Do not men receive as truths many other

things with far less evidence? For example: who knows that the stars and planets are the abodes of rational life? It is conjectured, yea, it is believed by most men of education in the world. But where is the absolute proof? We are constrained to admit that we have none. We reason on the subject, and there we stop. Take another example. We take up a number of small seeds, but they look very nearly alike. We examine them very closely, but perceive little or no difference. We analyze them, we take a microscope, and look on every fibre, but we cannot discover the plant which will spring forth, nor tell whether it shall be large or small, healing or noxious. Yet we cast these seeds into the ground, and are not surprised when from one springs up a plant, from another a flower, and from a third a majestic tree which waves upon the mountain's side. Can any of us tell how this is? Our ownselves furnish us with another example. We all believe that we have a soul within these bodies. But what is it? And where does it dwell? Is it in the head, or in the heart? When separated from the body has it any likeness to the mortal frame? And if not, what constitutes its identity? Still none of us doubt the existence of the soul.

Thus we see that men receive as truths many natural things more mysterious than those spiritual truths for which we are dependent alone on revelation. Yet the phenomena of nature are not doubted, and no man is thought insane or fanatical who believes and defends them. Is not faith in the leading doctrines of revelation at least equally rational? Indeed is it not more so? Have we not better evidence for the truth of the great doctrines of the Bible, than for many of those things which the ingenuity of man has laid down as correct? In the one case we have reasoning from analogy, and the conjectures of men of enlarged and scientific minds; but on the other we have the word of God, attested by miracles, and proved to be such by the witness it carries within itself.

4. Humility, which is another characteristic of experimental religion, is also perfectly rational. It is

often thought very strange that Christians whose external conduct is fair, and whose former lives were irreproachable, should cry out upon themselves as the chief of sinners, and take their place in the very dust of humiliation before God; and not unfrequently their conduct in this respect is ridiculed as the height of fanaticism. But what is there irrational about it? The standard by which they measure themselves is a perfect one. Jehovah has said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," and while they fall so far short of this mark, they shrink away, and cover their faces in confusion. Thus the humility of a lowly Christian is a reasonable service.

It thus appears that conviction of sin, and the leading Christian graces of repentance, faith, and humility, are all perfectly rational exercises; nor should we have any difficulty in showing that the more minute parts of Christian experience may all be accounted for, and shown to be the result of sober and correct reasoning.

Now if experimental religion is thus rational, certainly those who ridicule or oppose it, must be very unreasonable. Let the subject as now presented be soberly pondered, and we can scarcely fail to see that the prominent exercises of Christian experience are perfectly reasonable, and may be defended by fair argument; nor can we find on mature reflection that there is any fanaticism in that process of divine grace whereby a sinner is truly converted to God. If this conclusion be admitted, then to oppose experimental religion by calling it a delusion, or the reveries of a distempered brain, must be extremely unreasonable. Men readily admit truths relating to other subjects with less evidence than on this, and if those who oppose experimental religion on account of a supposed mystery attending it would be consistent, they should become sceptical on every point involving any mystery. Let them boldly deny the doctrines of modern astronomy. let them insist on it that the mighty orbs which roll over our heads, and the innumerable stars which spangle the firmament, were placed there merely for

man to gaze at, and that this globe is the sole abode of rational life in the universe. Let them ascribe the shooting forth of the blade of grass, and the springing up of the plant, the shrub, the flower, and the tree, all to mere chance. Yea, let them deny that they have souls because they cannot see them, and then we will at least give them credit for consistency when they deny the efficacy of God's grace in changing the heart, and call experimental religion all a delusion. But while they readily admit the doctrines of the philosopher respecting the phenomena of nature, they are certainly most unreasonable in denying the doctrines of experimental religion.

We remark in conclusion, that if experimental religion is rational, it is not discreditable to men of the most refined intellect. There is an idea prevalent in the world that vital religion is beneath the notice of men of refinement, or of very deep research. They suppose it may do well enough for common people, or for women, and children, or for those who are very old, or those who are sick; but for active men, for men of business, for men of science, for men of enlarged minds, this they think is degrading. Here is a mighty error. Some of the greatest men in the world have been humble Christians. Real religion does not shrink from the light. It invites investigation. It is perfectly rational. Let fair argument be taken, let sober criticism be used, and experimental christianity shall never hide its head. There is no man so great either in wealth, honour, or science, but experimental religion would be an honour to him; it would shed a mild radiance over all his acquirements, rendering his wealth, his honours, or his learning, "as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed." Reader, from all that is taught us on this subject, have we not reason to believe that an experimental acquaintance with religion is indispensable to salvation? What shall subdue these hard hearts of ours but an experience of the power of that grace which can take the flint away? What shall cleanse our spotted souls but "the washing of regenera-

tion, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost?" What can raise us above the world but that faith which the Spirit of God alone worketh in the heart? Be alarmed then if you have never yet experienced religion. Death will soon intercept your career, and the renewing grace of God, and that alone, can prevent your eternal ruin.

THE END.