

THE
BIBLICAL REPERTORY, AND THEOLOGICAL
REVIEW.

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REVIEW ON THE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE OF
THE SECOND ADVENT.

The Second Advent; or, the Glorious Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ. Being an attempt to elucidate, in Chronological Order, the Prophecies both of the Old and New Testament which relate to that Event. By the Rev. John Fry, B.A. Rector of Desford, in Leicestershire. London, 2 vols, 8vo, 1822.

[The conductors of the Biblical Repertory and Theological Review do not desire to make the work the vehicle exclusively of their own opinions, but are desirous of extending to their correspondents the liberty of advocating their own sentiments, reserving to themselves the right of deciding how far the opinions advanced can, with propriety, through their instrumentality, be presented to the public. They are, therefore, not to be considered as adopting the views presented by the author of the article on the Second Advent. As the subject, however, is one of interest, and has long been a matter of public discussion in England, it is probable our readers will be glad to see an exhibition of the

amination to be nothing else than some ancient heresy clothed in a new dress. That the doctrine of original sin is involved in many difficulties, which no mortal has the wisdom to explain, we are ready to admit: but the question with us is,—is it taught in the Bible? And if any one choose to move a previous question, it will be,—can that book be divinely inspired which contains such a doctrine? And here, if we could get clear of the thing by rejecting the Scriptures, something would be gained; but the evidence of original sin is deeply recorded in the acknowledged depravity of our race, and in the dispensations of God towards us. To account for the facts which experience teaches beyond all possibility of contradiction, we need the testimony which the Bible contains, which if we reject we may escape one set of difficulties, but shall assuredly plunge into others more formidable and unmanageable, although they may be more out of sight.

It is our opinion, therefore, after looking on all sides, and contemplating the bearing and consequences of all theories on this subject, that no one is on the whole so consistent with facts, with the Scriptures, and with itself, as the old doctrine of the ancient church, which traces all the sins and evils in the world to the IMPUTATION of the first sin of Adam; and that no other theory of original sin is capable of standing the test of an impartial scrutiny.

THE MEANS OF REPENTANCE.

The hearers of the gospel are often disposed to ask, when the obligation to immediate repentance is urged upon them, *how are we to repent?* a question which we ought not to be unprepared to meet. The prophet Hosea, chap. v. 4, has, we think, clearly shown the true answer to that question. He there teaches that the way of repenting or turning to God, is *to frame one's doings to that end*: an expression of which an explanation seems needless. Universally, when men would accomplish any thing requiring the use of means, they frame their doings, or direct and order their conduct to

the proposed end; and the same, the prophet takes it for granted as a matter understood and unquestionable, is the way to repent or turn to God.

In order, however, to present this subject in a just and proper light, it is necessary, first, to show, notwithstanding the prophet's clear assumption of the point, that there is a way of repenting as well as of doing other things; secondly, to declare that way, or how a man's doings must be framed in order to repent; and, thirdly, to vindicate our doctrine against objections.

I. There is a way to repent. Repenting is a thing to be done in the use of means and endeavours, and not otherwise.

Repenting, or turning to God, is a state of mind which a man cannot bring himself into by one mere volition. He cannot repent simply by resolving or saying within himself, *I will repent*. That resolution may fix his mind on repenting, and be the beginning of a series of mental acts and exercises which will result in his repentance; but his repentance is not its immediate sequent, any more than a man's becoming pleased or pensive, or affected in any way, is the immediate result of a volition to become so affected. If a man determine that he will be in any frame of mind whatsoever, he does not find himself in that frame as soon as he forms the determination; he finds himself using the means—the necessary volitions and exertions, in order to get himself into it: he finds his thoughts and affections employed about those things which have a tendency to produce the desired frame: in this way, and not otherwise, he fulfils his purpose. If a man would revive in his heart a lively affection for an absent friend, the affection does not instantly glow in his breast as the immediate effect of his volition; it may exist there very quickly, but not until he has given some thoughts to the absent person's image and excellencies. Thus is it in respect to repentance: it cannot be experienced by the mind in any other way than by the mind's action and exercise towards those things which have a tendency to produce repentance. These are the things the mind must address itself unto and employ itself about, in fulfilling the obligation to repent and turn to God. If a man, when commanded to repent, would obey that command, these are the things he undertakes in order to obey it; for in the nature and necessity of the case, it cannot be obeyed in any other way.—We are sometimes much in earnest when we are urging

men to immediate repentance, to obtain from them a promise to do what we press upon them; but if they give us a promise, it amounts only to this, that they will employ their minds about those awful and holy objects of which repentance in the soul is the impress and counterpart. And, perhaps, if instead of exacting a promise we would give our whole labour to the business of making these objects stand out before them in their grand importance and excellence, we should be more likely to gain our point.

Perhaps these observations may be regarded by some in the light of mere assertions: to us, however, they are full of evidence; and we cannot but think they must appear so to all who will give them due consideration. It strikes us as a thing hardly needing more than correct statement to produce conviction, that the mind, to be justly affected by things without itself, must have those things present to its thoughts and contemplations; and we have only been inculcating this principle in respect to the matter of repenting or turning to God. All we have said is, that in order to repent, the things that work repentance in the mind must be thought of and considered;—that this is truly the way to repent—and can any one doubt it? If testimony from scripture be demanded, many other passages besides that of our prophet are explicit. David shows us that there is a way to repent, and to some extent what that way is, when he says “I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” And Ezekiel, in chap. xviii. 28, “Because he considereth and turneth away from his wickedness, he shall save his soul alive.”

II. There is then a way to repent, and that way has been vaguely brought into view. But here more precision and care are necessary, and therefore have we proposed it as a distinct topic, to show what a man must do in order to repent.

We have said he must employ his mind about those things which have a tendency to induce its repentance. Let this condensed view of the course to be pursued be justly expanded, and the way to repent will be fully understood.

What then are those things which have a tendency to bring a man to repentance, or without which his repentance is an impossibility? Here it is obvious that men, being in different circumstances, and having shades of difference in character, are not all under a necessity to pass through the

same process of acts and exercises in order to their reformation and recovery to God. A heathen man cannot come to repentance without a knowledge of the true God and of the vanity and wickedness of idolatry. He must, therefore, use the means of acquiring that knowledge, as those who are endeavouring to win his soul must use the means of imparting it to him. An infidel cannot repent while he remains an infidel, nor a heretic while he remains a heretic; the one must renounce his unbelief, and the other his error; and must do whatever is necessary to such renunciation; and much honest and serious research into the evidences of the truth may be necessary, if, as doubtless has been the case with some, they are sincerely convinced, and deeply rooted in their false and fatal opinions. An immoral man cannot repent while he continues to be unchaste or dishonest, or intemperate or profane; the mind is incapable of exercising repentance while it remains the slave of such flagitious propensities and habits. A man addicted to any vicious practice whatsoever must forsake that evil way, or continue an impenitent and perishing sinner.—But the abjuration of gross delusions and sins, though indispensable, is not sufficient. This must be done, and something else also, or the soul will never come to the turning point of its salvation. Repenting, or actually turning to God, supposes in the soul a lively and commanding perception of God's supreme excellency; but the soul cannot acquire such a perception without apprehending and considering the proofs and manifestations of the divine nature in creation, providence and scripture; that is, without deeply searching after God, in his works and his word, where alone he is to be found.—Again, repentance supposes the renunciation of the world as the chief good; since it is impossible that both the world and God should be embraced as the chief good at the same time; but how can the world be renounced without a deep conviction of its vanity, and how can that conviction be obtained but by reflecting on its character, and comparing it with the soul's everlasting need? The action of the mind in thus reflecting and comparing may be too quick to be discerned, but of its necessity as a means of repentance there cannot be a question.—Repentance also implies sorrow for sin, its essence being love for him against whom all sin is committed, and whose glory and government it aims to destroy; but to be grieved for sin, its turpitude must be seen, and how can it

be seen but by exercising the mind on those things wherein the evil of sin appears.—Repentance in persons indoctrinated in the gospel supposes, moreover, cordial acquiescence in the principles of the oracles of God, the truths of the gospel, the christian rule of life, the terms of saving mercy, and all the revealed prescriptions and enactments of the divine administration; and without employing the mind about these things, how is it possible intelligently and truly to acquiesce in them?

III. But this subject will be further explained when, as proposed, thirdly, we shall have answered some objections.

It may be objected that we give license to sin by allowing that any thing may be done before repentance. What—if nothing is allowed to be done which is not in order to repentance, and without which repentance would be an impossibility? Can that be evil which has a direct tendency to good? Can that be unlawful without which duty cannot be done? Can that be contrary to the commandment which is absolutely necessary in order to the fulfilling of the commandment? Nay, the commandment itself includes and requires it. Universally and necessarily, when a command to do something is given, the things indispensable to the doing of the main thing are as much required as the main thing itself. When a master commands a servant to perform an errand, he commands him to use whatever means may be necessary to its performance. When an instructor commands a pupil to learn a lesson, he requires at the same time all the pre-requisite conning and seclusion. This is so evident that no argument could make it more certain. It is equally evident that when God commands repentance, he commands also whatever may be indispensable to repentance. So that when a sinner considers his ways, and turns away from them, and meditates on the evil of sin, as a transgression against God, and calls to mind all the infinite claims of God to his supreme love, and does all this, in order to, and as included in true repentance, he is not rebelling against the commandment, but falling in with its scope and intention.

Our doctrine may appear to some persons as tending to self-righteousness, by setting men to strive in the exercise of their own strength; whereas the gospel cuts off all hope at once from this quarter, and binds men to come instantly to Christ. But what is it for a sinner to come immediately

to Christ? Let those answer who make this objection to our doctrine. Is there not some movement of mind, some mental act or operation necessary in order to his coming? We insist upon nothing to be done before his coming, but as in order, and absolutely indispensable to it. We do not plead for any thing in itself sinful, as we have shown: we would not set the sinner on a course of self-righteous doings; but by all the motives of eternity, we would dissuade him against such a course; and urge him in the opposite direction, by binding him to the performance of those things, and only those, which have a direct tendency to bring him to repentance. There is a distinction between self-righteous doings, and those which our doctrine defends, as broad as the difference between the way to hell and the way to heaven. When sinners are directed to do things admitted to be, in their very nature, sinful, they are directed to pursue a course directly unfavourable to their repentance. When admitting their excuse for continued disobedience, they are told to wait God's time for converting them, in the use of formal or legal prayers, &c. they are set forward on the road to entire infatuation and destruction. But when they are urged to arouse themselves to the immense concerns of their souls, and employ their minds and hearts about the great objective causes of repentance and salvation, they are not urged to any thing sinful, but to things which, though not holy in themselves, are, as the means of holiness, of indispensable importance.

It may be deemed an objection to our doctrine that it admits of some delay in the infinite concern of repentance, whereby the soul is left exposed, and may perish. But how does our doctrine admit of any, even the least, delay? If a servant is commanded to do a thing, and he instantly betakes himself to the use of the means by which only it can be done, is he delaying, or does the command which requires of him the immediate use of these means, encourage, or even tolerate delay? Our doctrine recognises the obligation, and inculcates the duty, of *immediate* repentance. No repentance can be conceived more immediate than that which it enforces. It requires a man to repent as quickly as in the nature of the case it can be done. A man cannot set himself to the business of repenting without employing his mind about the things which have a tendency to beget repentance. A doctrine which urges him to an

instant occupation of his mind about these things, urges him to the speediest way of repenting. If repentance were a thing to be done without any such occupation of the mind, the objection would be valid; but not, surely, since the fact is otherwise. Besides, the appearance of delay in the objector's view probably arises from some misconception of the nature of the preliminary process. It is not a process of *selfish* exercises, prescribed on the supposition of insuperable difficulty, as a means of procuring divine grace to remove that difficulty. It is not a sinful waiting for the spirit, in formal or selfish praying, reading, &c. To plead for the necessity of such a process were indeed to be opposed to immediate repentance; but as we have said and shown, such is not the nature of the acts and exercises of the mind which are preliminary and indispensable to repentance. They are acts not sinful; and though in the order of nature *previous* to repentance, they are not necessarily previous by any distinguishable distance of time. Repentance ought to ensue upon them instantaneously. As soon as the sinner thinks upon his ways, he ought to forsake them. Thought, previously, is admissible merely because they cannot be forsaken without it. As soon as he turns his mind upon the evidences of the evil of sin and the goodness of God, he ought to be ashamed and humbled and broken-hearted. Not *after* but *as soon as*: not one second should follow: motive should prevail; moral influence should sway the heart, as if it were almighty physical power: to resist it one instant, to resist at all, is wilfully to thrust away the end, after coming to it in the use of the means. Our doctrine demands only that the impenitent sinner do not hope to repent without properly and reasonably exercising his mind to that end; that he rouse himself up, and look about him, and behold the innumerable evils that encompass him, and the countless motives that require his immediate return to God; and then *at once* comply with the force of those motives. To wait with his mind open to evidence and reason is the madness of rebellion, and may be punished by a sudden stroke of the divine anger.

It may, finally, be thought an objection to the view that has now been given of this subject, that it makes the business of repenting too much like any other work or doing of the mind; and leaves no place for that special agency of the Holy Spirit which alone can change the heart. We do in-

deed represent the human mind as acting freely, reasonably, and according to its own proper laws, even in this high matter; and maintain that no affection ever takes place in the heart more naturally and regularly than repentance, though *the immediate effect of the Holy Spirit's agency*. We would have the mind exercise itself in a way which tends to make it penitent; which of itself ought to, and if not resisted invariably would make it penitent: this we acknowledge—and who finds fault with it? Who would pursue any other course? Should we seek to give a direction to the mind's exercises which *would not be favourable* to its repenting? Should we set it upon selfish exertions and strivings, a course which would lead it into stupidity or self-righteous confidence? Or should we set it upon no exertions whatever, but simply repeat the demand for repentance; refusing to give ignorant and unthinking sinners any further explanation or direction, as if they *could* repent without engaging their minds about the things that objectively cause repentance; as if one simple volition, or saying in thought *now we will repent*, were repenting indeed. No reflecting person can hold to this way of dealing with sinners.—It does not follow that the influence of the Holy Spirit is made unnecessary, because the mind is set upon a course of exercises, which, of themselves, have a tendency to repentance. Things may have a strong tendency to what, after all, owing to some hindrance or interference, may not be attained. Deep and intense consideration of sin and holiness, God and eternity, mightily tends to the mind's actually turning to God; but there may be, as there *is*, in the mind, a principle of adherence to the world, which no motive of itself is sufficient to overcome; so that if the Holy Spirit do not lend the might of his invisible hand, the preliminary exercises, however favourable, will terminate ill. Is it asked, then, why set the mind upon these preliminary exercises rather than the way of selfish waiting, since both are alike unavailable? I answer, 1. Both are not alike sinless. 2. The latter has a tendency directly unfavourable, the former a tendency directly favourable to the mind's repentance. 3. It is more likely that the Holy Spirit will co-operate with what is not sinful and is favourable to his good work, than with what is both sinful and utterly unfavourable to it. The fact that the sinner is dependent on the Holy Spirit, and so dependent that he never will repent but in the day of the

Holy Spirit's power, that fact, therefore, is compatible with our doctrine; and need not, nay, ought not, to be concealed from the sinner. The knowledge of it will but encourage his exertions. It will encourage them more than all other considerations besides. Let it enter into the sinner's mind, while he is pondering the vast affairs of his soul, that the Almighty arm must be stretched out in his behalf, before his sinful heart will ever give up the world for God; and that the probability of his having the help of that arm is greater or less, according as his mind is more or less engaged in the exercises necessary to his repentance; and he is put under the force of the mightiest of all reasons for diligence in those exercises. And thus it is, that the doctrine of the sinner's dependence on the Spirit, rightly used, instead of leading to apathy, as it has been made to do by unskilful management, is, in the light of motive or moral influence, one of the most powerful of all the things of revealed truth.

These remarks, we think, expose two errors on the subject of the means to be used by sinners in order to their repentance and salvation.

Some maintain that the means of repentance and regeneration are selfish praying, reading and waiting on ordinances; but the inconsistency of this way with the end to be attained cannot escape remark. Sinning certainly is not the way to repenting. No excuse for sin, in any circumstances, is admitted by God, or ought to be admitted by us, as his ambassadors. If men are saved in a course of sinning, *whatever that course be*, they are saved *against* their own endeavours, and in spite of themselves.

Some allow sinners to use no means whatever. They call upon them to repent, and then cease. As to the manner of repenting they have no explanation to give; they know of no manner: they insist upon repentance, and warn against all exercises of mind and body, but those of repentance itself, or that flow from repentance. The reason of their doing so is, that they suppose all such exercises to be necessarily sinful; and it cannot be right to encourage sin in any case or in any way. Nor can sinning be the way to repent, or doing evil the way to do good. But it is not true that man is capable of no exercises before repentance which are not essentially and necessarily sinful. He is capable, and is in fact, the subject of instinctive and unavoidable exercises and operations, which, in themselves, are

neither sinful nor holy. All such are those which, *in the nature and necessity of the case, are in order and have a tendency to holiness.* These exercises and actions are not holy, for they are in order to holiness. Neither are they sinful, for what is sinful cannot have a *tendency* to holiness. They are *necessary, indispensable*, and that is their vindication. They are the true means of repentance. To say that there are no means of repentance; that nothing can be done before, and in order to repentance, which is not sin; is to condemn not the sinner's doings only, but, to a certain extent, those also of the minister of the gospel. He ought not to call sinners together to hear the word, for they cannot come together but in sin. He ought not to require doubting men to examine the evidences of christianity, for that is requiring them to sin. He ought not to urge consideration on his hearers, for that too is rebellion: He cannot proceed a step in his work, as a messenger of God to sinful men, without making himself, on this supposition, the minister of sin. But he is not so in fact. The things which men must do in order to meet and hear him, and accept the overtures of the divine mercy, are not sinful, because they are absolutely indispensable. Men *must* do these things or remain and die in sin.—Nor are ministers only inculcated. God himself calls on perishing men to hearken to the gracious voice which, through the sacred ministry, speaketh to them from heaven, and to frame their doings to turn unto Him; and does He necessitate men to sin as preliminary to their repentance?

PROFESSOR STUART'S POSTSCRIPT TO HIS LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF THE BIBLICAL REPERTORY.

An edition of Professor Stuart's Letter to the Editors of this Journal, published in our last number, has recently been published, to which is attached a Postscript of sixteen pages.

We deem it necessary to make a few remarks, in order to remove from Professor Stuart's own mind, and from the minds