

THE
BIBLICAL REPERTORY.

OCTOBER, 1833.

No. IV.

ART. I.—*Quakerism not Christianity: or Reasons for renouncing the doctrine of Friends. In three parts. By Samuel Hanson Cox, D. D., Pastor of the Laight Street Presbyterian Church; and for twenty years a member of the Society of Friends.* Pp. 686.

WE have rarely sat down to our work as critics with so deep a sense of our incompetency to the task in hand, as we bring with us to the examination of the book whose title we have here given. We have two reasons for this, one of which grows out of the character of the book, the other out of the nature of the subject. As to the book, our readers will readily enough understand what we mean, who are acquainted with the splendid eccentricities of its author, and the peculiarities of his intellectual progeny. And as for the subject, after the best investigation we have been able to give to it, we are free to acknowledge that there are some important points in respect to which we are still in doubt: indeed, there is so much of mysticism belonging to the system of the Quakers, and so much of what seems to us contradiction in those authors who are recognised as standards of the sect, that it appears to us well nigh a hopeless matter to arrive at any thing

nothing else but his weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon him; and when most sensible of his own weakness, then is he strong; and the true ground of all just confidence, that we shall not utterly fall from our steadfastness, is the promise of a faithful God, "My grace is sufficient for thee. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

ART. VII.—*Philip Melancthon's opinions respecting Sin. Translated from his Common Places.*

REFLECTING men have always wondered, that as there is in most things in the universe so beautiful an order, there should exist so great confusion, so many crimes and calamities, together with diseases and death, in the human race. The philosophers, in attempting to account for these phenomena, have ascribed them partly to matter, partly to the will of man, and partly to fate, which they say is the necessary connexion of the first cause with all second causes, whether physical or voluntary. The Manicheans, adopting a corrupt philosophy, professed certain insane opinions, equally dishonourable to God and injurious to morality; maintaining, that there were two eternal and independent principles, the one good and the other evil, and also the doctrine of necessity; by which opinions, the church in ancient times was very much agitated. It is the part of a pious mind to think and speak with reverence concerning God; and to embrace and hold fast those sentiments which are true, and friendly to piety and good morals, and which have been approved by the deliberate judgment of the judicious and pious in the church; and not to indulge vain curiosity, or a fondness for useless speculations, nor to enter into infinite labyrinths of disputation.

We ought, however, in the commencement, to lay it down as a certain principle, from which nothing should induce us to depart, that God is not the author of sin, that he does not will sin, nor approve of sin, nor impel the wills of others to choose sin: but that he is truly and awfully opposed to sin, which he has declared, not only by his word, in which eternal misery is threatened, but also by the unceasing manifestations of his wrath against it, in the dispensations of his Providence. And the Son of God, by becoming a victim for sin to appease the anger of his Father, has demonstrated in the most striking manner, by his death, that not God, but the devil is the author of sin. Let it then be received

as an undoubted truth, that sin was not created, nor ordained by God; but that it is a dreadful destruction of the divine work and order; and that the true cause of sin in the will of the devil, and the will of man, which freely apostatized from God, who neither willed nor approved their disobedience. Ingenious men have on this subject stated many inextricable questions; but omitting purposely these abstruse disquisitions, we declare that doctrine which is true, and confirmed by the testimonies of divine revelation, and which we embrace with all our hearts; although we do not undertake to answer all the subtle objections which may be brought up by disputatious men.

Now, that God is not the cause or approver of sin, is made evident by the following testimonies of Scripture: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." Gen. i. 31. That is, every thing was pleasing to God, regular, and accordant with the plan of the divine mind; and so formed as to be profitable to man.

In Psalm v. 5. it is said, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." And in John viii. 44. it is said of Satan, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it."

In the words of our Saviour, just cited, a distinction is clearly implied between the substance of the evil spirit and his moral qualities. Satan himself, as to his substance, was the work of God, by whom all the angels of heaven were created, some of whom fell into sin; but a lie he has of himself, which, by the exercise of his own free will, he produced. And between these things there is no repugnance; for while the substance is upheld by God, the free agent may be the cause of his own sins, by abusing his liberty and apostatizing from God.

Another testimony may be found in Zech. viii. 17. "And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."

Now God is sincere in his professed hatred of sin: it cannot, therefore, be thought that he wills sin.

Again, 1 John xxii. 16. "The lust of the flesh is not of the Father, but of the world." And 1 John iii. 8. "He who committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning;" that is, the devil is the original author of sin. And in regard to the human race, we read in Rom. v. 12. "By man sin entered into the world;" that is, sin is not a thing created by God; but man, in the exercise of his own liberty, has turned away from God, and wasted the gifts of God, and has propagated this his ruin to posterity.

Nor do those words of Scripture, where it is said, "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and other similar expressions, militate with the sentiments expressed above; for to those acquainted with the Hebrew idiom, it is well known, that such expressions signify permission only, and not an efficacious will; as when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," the meaning is, do not suffer us to fall into temptation; or do not permit us to fall or to be overthrown by temptation.

It is here important, that we should have fixed in our minds, the true idea of sin, that we may be able, clearly, to distinguish between it and what is produced by God. Sin is the disturbance or confusion of the divine order; sin, therefore, in the simplest notion of it, is not a substance, nor any thing positive, but a defect, or privation. Sin, as it exists in the mind, is darkness; that is, we have not the clear knowledge of divine things, nor do we yield a firm assent to the divine threatenings and promises. But sin, in the will, is aversion; that is, the heart is destitute of the fear of God, of confidence, and love towards him, and of that obedience of heart which the law of his nature demands, but is carried away with wandering desires which are opposed to God. Now, that those evils are properly defects, and not things created by God, is evident enough. Instead of being his work, sin is the abominable destroyer of the order of his work. It does not follow that he is the author of sin, because he preserves in being the creature in whom it exists; but he is exceedingly displeased with sin, and sent his Son to appease his wrath, and to heal the wound made in our nature. Let it be kept in mind, therefore, that God is not the cause of that *vitiosity* with which we are born; nor can he will that which is evil, or at all approve it. But here a cavil, not uncommonly made, must be noticed. It is asked, if sin be nothing positive, but only a defect, is God angry at nothing? To which we would answer, that there is a great difference between a *privation* and a *negation* (inter nihil privativum et nihil negativum.) A privation requires a subject, and is a destruction of something which properly belongs to that subject, and an account of which it is rejected as worthless. Thus the ruin of an edifice is a destruction of its frame, or a dissipation of its parts. So the depravity of our origin, is a pollution and disorder of our faculties, which defect in our nature is the object of the divine hatred, and on account of which he is displeased with the being in whom it exists. The nature of privation may be illustrated by a bodily disease, in which the subject remains, but in a disordered state. On the other hand, a *negation* is that which requires no subject, as the house of Alexander is now nothing—a mere negation, for it has no existence. This simple illustration may be suf-

ficient to shed some light on this subject to learners, without involving them in subtle disputations or inextricable labyrinths. Geometrical truths, by means of diagrams, may be presented to the eye; but it is not so with these metaphysical truths, which can only be understood by a gradual and attentive consideration. A man who is wounded, when beholding his wound, is certain that it is not a mere negation, but that the parts are really lacerated. So Paul, beholding the wickedness and vices of a Nero, grieves, and does not consider these things as mere negations, but as a most abominable ruin of a divine work. When in this light we view evil as a *defect* or *privation*, we never can think that sin is a thing which should be extenuated. As in man, considered as the workmanship of God, order is a part, and is the production of his power, and is pleasing to him, and conducive to the beauty and happiness of man, and is called an excellent thing, a great good; so, on the contrary, the disorder in which consists the ruin of this good work, must not be ascribed to God, but to the devil, and to the free will of man, and is hated of God, and brings destruction upon the beings who are the subjects of it, and is called evil; that is, a thing not agreeable to the divine mind, but altogether displeasing to God, and destructive to men and devils.

This statement will in some degree illustrate the nature of actual sin, concerning which there are so many intricate questions: it will not be difficult to understand how it is merely a defect, if you will look, not only at the external action, but at the state of the mind which governs the action. Eve, for example, in eating the forbidden fruit, was not governed by the light of God; but not to be governed by the light of God, is to have the will opposed to God, and that this is a defect of a right will, it is easy to perceive. Originally, then, her sin was of a privative nature, although it was followed immediately by external acts, which are, it is acknowledged, of a positive nature. First, it was an internal disorder; the motions of the soul wandering from their right course, just as a ship without sails and rudder tossed by the winds and waves. This figure will very well serve to show that the evil consists in defect; for as long as the ship remains on the bosom of the deep, it will have some motion; so man, while he exists, will have some sort of action, however irregular and confused it may be. Neither because God sustains man in being, is he the author of sin, for those defects in the exercises of the mind are not produced by Him. In the case of Eve, just mentioned, the cause was her own free will. Her actions were her own, and she spontaneously turned herself away from God.

Let it then be admitted as an undoubted principle, that God is

not the author of sin, nor wills sin, and it will follow that there is such a thing as contingency; that is, that all things do not happen by necessity. For sin proceeds from the will of men or devils, and not from the will of God. Contingency supposes that the actions of men proceed from free will, and that they have the power to sin and to refrain from sinning. The contingency concerning which we here speak, relates to human actions, and not to the motions of other things, concerning which it is common to treat when physical causes are under consideration.

Moreover, it must be conceded that the Scriptures attribute to man, in his fallen state, some liberty of choosing those things which are proposed to him as a rational creature, and of doing those external works which are commanded by the law of God; for on this account the righteousness which they render to the law is called the righteousness of the flesh; because, as Paul teaches, it is competent to the strength of nature to perform it. "The law is not made for a righteous man," that is, not to coerce the renewed, but to punish the impenitent. Likewise, "the law is a school-master;" and unless some sort of liberty remained to fallen man, there would be no manner of utility in laws and commandments; and, indeed, the whole apparatus of civil government would be useless. It is certain, therefore, that liberty, which is the source of contingency, does exist, as I before said. But as God is said to determine contingencies, we must be careful to distinguish between his determination of those things which are agreeable to his will, and those which are not; or, between those events which depend entirely on his will, and those which are brought about by human agency, though not to the exclusion of divine agency. God foresaw the crimes of Saul, but he did not will them; nor did he impel his will, but permitted him to act according to his own inclination, without interposing any obstacle to his freedom. But in the view of Saul's misconduct, which he clearly foresees, he resolves to remove him from the high office to which, by divine direction, he had been advanced. This foreknowledge did not cause Saul to act by necessity; nor did it at all affect the free agency of man; nor take away that liberty which belongs to man, even in his fallen state. Neither does the fact that God sustains human beings in existence, and in the exercise of their powers, interfere with the contingency and liberty of their free actions. When Eve sinned, the cause cannot be ascribed to the upholding power of God, but her own will was the real cause of her act; for when human nature was constituted, it was endowed with liberty, and the continuance of human nature by the same power which created it, does not destroy that freedom which was thus conferred on man in his first creation. Thus, although

God preserved Saul in being and in the exercise of his faculties, the cause of his sin was not at all this divine sustentation, but his own free will.

To the representation above made, the words of the prophet Jeremiah are sometimes objected, where he says, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." On which I would briefly remark that it is one thing to speak of the choice of the will, and another of the event, or accomplishment of what we will. Pompey willed to make war upon Cæsar, and freely willed it, but the event was governed by many other causes besides the will of Pompey. This declaration of Jeremiah is a delightful doctrine, and contains the sweetest consolation. We are here taught, that "the way of a man," which includes the regulation of his private affairs, and the success of his public vocations, cannot be sustained and secured by human wisdom and strength. The minds of the best men are not sufficiently perspicacious to foresee all dangers, or to guard against them, but human judgment is liable to be misled by errors, as was that of king Josiah, when he judged it expedient to make war on the Egyptians. Many sad errors from this cause might be enumerated; which led Cicero to complain, that no man was at all times wise. Often, human counsels are involved in inextricable difficulties by mistakes which are incident to all. How many disasters to the house of David arose from one false step. But even when human counsels are wise, and the cause good, the event may not correspond with the hopes entertained. Great calamities, which suddenly cast down the most sagacious and exalted of mortals, do, in the providence of God, take place, when human prudence and human power are of no avail to prevent the disaster, according to that true saying of the poet,

"Omnia sunt hominum tenui pendentia filo:
Et subito casu quæ valere ruunt."

It was concerning these various obstructions, and in relation to human weakness, and the instability of human affairs, that Jeremiah was speaking in the passage cited above. His object was to show us, that the event of things depended on many secret causes unknown to us, and that, therefore, we ought to fly to God, and ask and expect direction, and the regulation of our affairs from his aid. Here we see the benefit of those gracious promises, "I will not leave you comfortless." "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord; and he delighteth in his way." By such promises as these, we are warranted and encouraged to

trust in the Lord for help, in time of need; and we should be ever ready to acknowledge, that nothing spiritually good, or of a saving nature, can be accomplished by us, without God helping us; as Christ declares, "Without me ye can do nothing." And John the Baptist says, "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Pompey, Brutus, Antony, and others, attempted great things, but it pleased providence to disappoint their expectations, and to advance other men to the supreme power. Although it is evident, that the help of God is needed in all actions which are connected with salvation; yet it must not be hence concluded, that man possesses no liberty of any kind, much less that all good and evil are to be ascribed to the divine efficiency: the true meaning of the passage from Jeremiah, therefore is, that salvation cannot be obtained by human counsels and human ability. Let us therefore learn, that we are indebted to divine aid, when we are made instruments of saving benefit to ourselves or others; and also, we owe it to the same cause, that we are not the pests of the human race, like Pharaoh, Nero, Manes, and other similar characters. We ought, therefore, under the deep conviction that we can do nothing ourselves, most earnestly apply to God by prayer and supplication, that we may be directed and governed by our heavenly Father. But it is most evident that this, our dependence on God, does not make him the efficient cause of our sin. The church of God, entertaining correct views of this matter, while she acknowledges God as the author of all good, holds in utter abomination the crimes of Nero, and will neither say that such actions take place by necessity, or that they come to pass by God's willing them.

Another text which has been made the occasion of objection, is that of Paul, where he calls the Ephesian Christians, "Elect according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the purpose of His will." And again, where he says to the Corinthians, "But it is the same God who worketh all in all." Now it is perfectly manifest, that these passages, taken in the connexion in which they stand, relate only to the church and to those saving acts which God is pleased to excite and regulate in the members of the church; but are not intended to be applied to the universal sustentation of all things; nor to all the particular motions of animals. Let these texts then be interpreted according to their true intention, and let them not be forced into a signification foreign to their genuine sense.

Paul admonishes us, that the church is saved, and governed, not by human wisdom or power, but by the wonderful operations of God. The preservation of Noah from the deluge, the protection of Israel in Egypt and in the desert, the achievements

of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and other pious and distinguished persons, are to be ascribed to the power of God which stirred up and enabled them to lend effectual aid to the church, and the propagation of the true doctrine: wherefore the declarations of Holy Scripture, referred to above, are intended for the consolation of believers, that they may be assured of the presence of God with his church to afford her aid in all her dangers and afflictions. It was God that helped David in his wars, and made him victorious over his enemies. It was God also who gave assistance to the dying Lawrence, so that he was preserved from making shipwreck of faith, through fear of death. By such declarations and promises, our souls are consumed, and encouraged to pray in the words of the Psalmist, "Direct me in thy truth and teach me." As, O Lord, thou bringest salvation to thy church, so make me a subject of thy grace, and a vessel of mercy. And this explication of those texts of sacred Scripture, will equally serve to cast light on many similar passages. But it should, in the last place, be added, as a thing requisite to the right understanding of this subject, that there is a twofold necessity. The one is absolute, as when a proposition or thing is simply necessary, so that the contrary is plainly and altogether impossible. Such propositions are said to be necessary with an absolute necessity. Such is the proposition, that there is a God—that He is intelligent, eternal, possessed of power, wisdom, justice, and goodness; and that he wills only what is just and good, and cannot will any thing which is repugnant to his own most holy nature. He cannot be delighted with, or will injustice, cruelty, lust, or any wickedness. But there is another necessity which is denominated *the necessity of consequence*, that is, such propositions or things, the opposite of which are not in their nature impossible, and are only rendered necessary by preceding causes; or, because they are foreordained. And between things of this kind there is a great difference. In regard to events of one class, which are in their own nature good, God not only wills and foreordains them, but foretells them. Such, for example, is this, that on a certain day, the dead will be raised up. This event is not necessary simply and absolutely, but *by consequence*. But in regard to those things which are evil, as wicked acts of every sort, God does not will them, but appoints bounds over which he will not permit the wicked to pass. These events, however, may be said to be necessary in the second sense given of that term. Pharaoh persecuted and oppressed the Israelites: this, in its own nature, was not necessary, but altogether contingent; for the opposite was not a thing impossible, but because it so oc-

curred from causes which existed, it is said to be necessary *by consequence*.

Here also seems to be the proper place to speak of physical necessity. Thus we say the fire burns by necessity, the sun is moved; but according to the doctrine of the church, this physical necessity falls under the head of that necessity of consequence, which we have just described. Fire burns, because God has given to it this nature: the sun is moved by the same power which created it, and we see in the history of Joshua and Hezekiah, that motion is not essential to the sun.

We have now gone over all the principal questions which are to be agitated on this subject, which if they be carefully considered, we shall be able form a correct judgment concerning all these controversies; and it will be evident, that it is far from our purpose to bring in a stoical necessity. How can any one pray to God with the least confidence, who believes that all things are governed by a fatal necessity? The saying which is found in the tragedy, that the blame of our bad conduct is to be charged to fate, is highly injurious to good morals. Every one is acquainted with the anecdote of the servant of Zeno, who when he was about to be punished by his master for some misconduct, excused himself by saying, that it would be unjust to punish him, since he was forced by fate to sin. But fate never made any man a sinner. The sentiments of Plato, in the second book of his Commonwealth, are correct and good. "If," says he, "we would have the state well governed, we must contend with all our might, that no one, old or young, in poetry or prose, should ever utter the opinion, or be permitted to hear it, that God is the cause of the crimes of any one; for as such an opinion is dishonourable to the Deity, so it is injurious to the state, and repugnant to sound reason. There is a common argument on this subject which not a little disturbs the minds of the pious, and which it may be useful to explain. It is said, that second causes cannot act without the concurrence of the first, therefore, as the second cause (as, for example, the disobedience of Eve) is sinful, the first must be so also. I have known some persons who were by this objection driven to great confusion of mind, and to the adoption of horrible conclusions. There is a subtle metaphysical answer which is sometimes given to this objection, but I prefer resorting to one which is better suited to common apprehension. It is this: God is present with and concurs with his creatures, not like the God of the Stoics, as if bound to second causes, so that he is able to act only as they act; but as a perfectly free agent, sustaining them in existence, and with consummate wisdom accommodating his agency to the nature of the

case, not only giving efficacy to second causes, but also, when he chooses, counteracting them. Thus, though he upholds the laws of nature by which corporal things are governed, yet we find him ordering the sun to become retrograde, and the clouds to withhold the rain for three years, and then, suddenly sent plentiful showers. And we know, that although God sustains second causes, He is not confined to them, for every day events occur which are out of the sphere of their operation. In the midst of battle, and on the seas, and in diseases, many are delivered from various dangers, when second causes can be of no avail.

We ought not, therefore, to entertain the opinion of the Stoics, that God is confined to second causes, so as never to act independently of them, but we should believe that he is always present with the work of his hands, sustaining all things by his power, and governing all events by his own most perfect freedom; so that there is good ground for praying for his aid and interposition in any emergency. Thus God not only sustains, but willingly helps those who act in an orderly manner; but in regard to those who act disorderly, although he upholds these also, yet he cannot be said to aid them in doing wrong. Eve was so constituted and endowed with free will, that she had it her power either to obey or to transgress, and the existence of divine favour, as the first cause, did not make God the author of her sin. It is indeed universally true, that the second cause cannot act without the sustaining power of the first; but as was before observed, this upholding providence must be carefully distinguished from that exercise of power which assists in the production of the sinful act; for that effect which God does not will, he never aids the creature to bring into being. If any one inquire, therefore, what was the immediate cause of the sin of Eve, when she turned herself away from God, the answer must be, her own free will. The maxim, that the second cause cannot act without the first although admitted by all, is very differently understood by the Stoic, and by the Christian. The former believes that in similar circumstances the same effects must necessarily take place; but the latter makes an important distinction between good and evil actions, which the Stoic entirely overlooks. It is true, that the second cause cannot act without the first, that is, unless it is sustained by the first; but this does not hinder the first cause from acting when it seems good, without the second, because he is a perfectly free agent: and when the second cause is a free agent, it acts without the co-operation of the first in the production of evil, for the power of originating such acts belong essentially to that

liberty with which free agents are endued. In this explanation, I have endeavoured to avoid too much refinement, and to present the subject in such a manner, as to be level to the common apprehensions of men. Others however choose to explain this matter a little differently. They say that the second cause cannot act without the first in producing a positive effect; but in a mere delinquency, or defect of right action, the second cause can act alone. For example, the will of Eve in the first transgression did not produce a positive effect, but was an aberration from the proper mark; defect in the quality of the act. This explanation does not really differ from the one already given, and may seem to render it more perspicuous. But after all it is best to believe in the general, that God has established such a connexion between the first and second cause, as he acting freely chooses should exist; so that while he co-operates to sustain the creature, He is not the author of sin.