

Review of Harris on Psalmody,



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Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue until
this day witnessing both to small and great, saying none other
things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say.
Acts, xxvi. 22.

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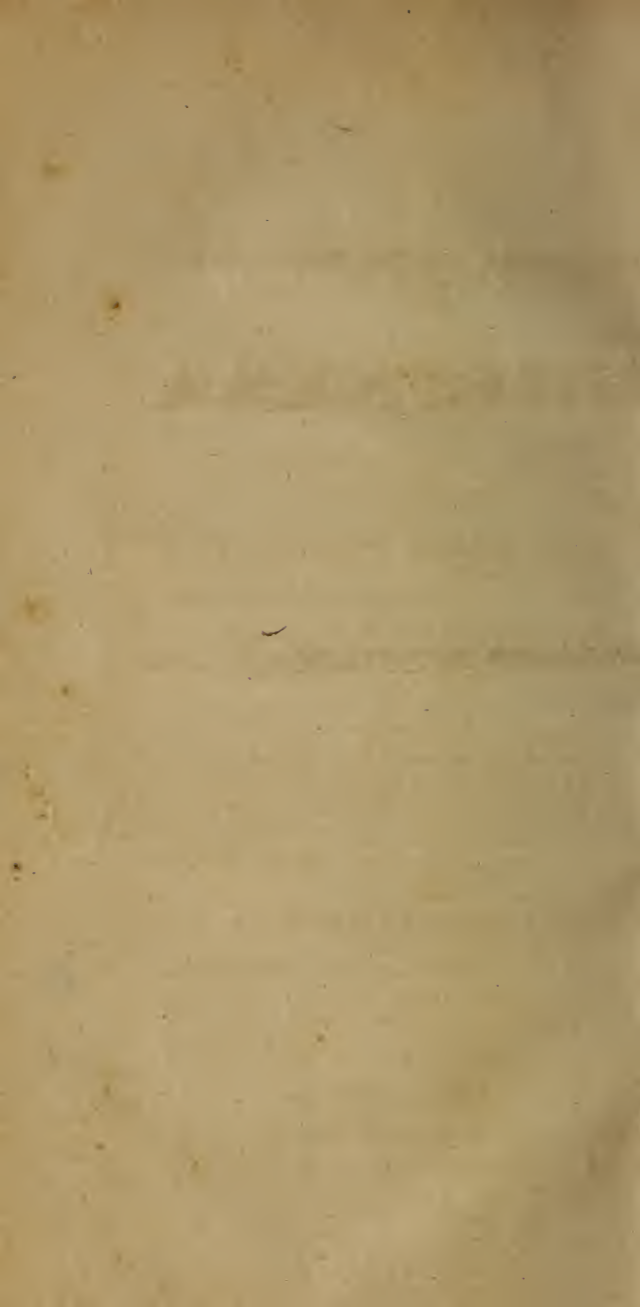
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cation was made of this distinction, which, it is evident, he never intended, though he did not utter his views in a manner sufficiently guarded. The next step was to maintain that the sinner was not totally depraved, but that his understanding and memory, or, in more modern phraseology, his intellectual powers, were not injured by the fall, nor in any way depraved. While the doctrine of the Bible and of the old orthodox divines is, that man needs sanctification, in his "*whole soul, spirit, and body*, the New-England Salmurensians limited all depravity to the heart, or as they express themselves to the will, the intellectual powers and the body being left unpolluted by sin. Intimately connected with this, was the denial of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity; for they would have all sin which exposes to condemnation voluntary, not admitting that "*sentence has passed upon all men to condemnation on account of the transgression of one.*" The preaching of these errors seems to have occasioned the bruit of the existence of Arminianism in Yale College, mentioned in the Life of Dr. Coleman, as creating some alarm in the New-England churches, about the year 1750.

Though there are no monuments of the fact from the press, we can hardly doubt that those errors were

taught from some pulpits in Boston, before the College of Cambridge declined to Socinianism, and before this heresy was embraced by some of the clergy of that city; for no man or body of men ever receded so far at one step, as to abandon at once, Calvinism, and embrace the Heresy of Socinus. Such errors as are detailed above, have in all known cases, formed the intermediate steps—they are the well-known road that leads from the purity of gospel truth, to the extremes of heresy. That they were so in Boston, scarcely admits of a doubt, from the disclosures made since the open appearance of what they call Unitarianism in the capital of New-England.

Most of the Salmurensian errors are cautiously introduced into the works of Belamy, who was one of those few leading divines in the Congregational church, that consolidated the system now so prevalent, and devised secretly the measures for its propagation in the American churches—measures which unhappily have proved too successful, which have already produced and still threaten consequences ever to be deplored. We shall prosecute this subject in our next number.

(To be continued.)

REVIEW OF HARRIS ON PSALMODY.

The Ploughman's Letter, in answer to some inquiries on Psalmody, by his young friends. By James Harris, Esq. Yorkville, S. C. 1824. pp. 49. 8vo.

When some the first English adventurers, more than two hundred years ago, were about to set sail from one of the East Indian Islands, the king asked them, whether

they sung the Psalms of David in their own country? The chief and some of his people immediately commenced the singing of one of these inspired odes.* By what means these remote islanders become possessed of the knowledge of this part of the inspired Scriptures, we are not informed. But we may safely infer that it was through the medium of the Dutch navigators, who had formed trading establishments in the East, before any British vessel navigated those seas. We know that the Reformed Church in Holland, by an act passed soon after the Reformation, and which is yet in existence, ordered that the 150 Psalms of David, the Apostles' Creed, and one or two other short articles of their Formularies should be sung in the praises of God, and none others were permitted. Such, for many years, was the law in most Protestant churches, and in practice, the inspired Psalms were used generally to the exclusion of human compositions.

It is in defence of these psalms, as the only divinely authorized matter of the church's praise, that the Ploughman publishes his letter. He is a plain, unlettered man, who, like Mr. Haring on Hopkinsianism, writes ably on an important subject of controversy. The polemical discussions, which, within a few years have been revived on this subject, have undergone some change on the part of those, who defend the use of uninspired songs. When Anderson, Clarke, &c. in the latter part of the last century, entered the lists in favour of inspired psalms, against Black, Latta and Freeman, it was the age of infidelity; and we often see

*See vol. II. *May. Voy. and Trav.*

the spirit of the world, passing, like a dark cloud, across the firmament of the church. Black, &c. treated the psalms much more unceremoniously, than Priestley did the epistles of Paul. That champion of Socinianism, charged the Apostle of the Gentiles, with unsound reasoning, and an inaccurate application of the Old Testament Scriptures to the doctrine of Christ's priesthood. But the advocates of human songs in divine worship, alluded to above, had the intrepidity to charge the book of psalms with not only obscurity, and unfitness for devotional singing, but with malevolent and malignant passions. This was adventuring farther than any one, professing to be a Bible believer, much less any professed Christian minister, so far as we know, did adventure before them, in attacking any part of the acknowledged inspired Scriptures. The spirit of the age must account for it.

The present advocates for Watts' Imitations and Hymns, and other uninspired odes, seem unwilling to go so far in this age of Bibles, when the dark cloud of infidelity has in some measure passed away. Yet it cannot be disguised, that the very argument which they manage, appears almost to force them into this tremendous position, at which they themselves must shudder. They must maintain, in order to be consistent, that the Psalms of David are unfit for Christian worship; otherwise, why reject them and substitute others in their room? Human compositions must be defended as superior to the inspired psalms, or why use them in preference? Here is a sore temptation to go perilous lengths on this side of the controversy, which the spirit of the age will not permit, and which,

we hope, their own better judgment, and heart do condemn. Treat the Psalms of David with that reverence, which the inspiration of the Holy Ghost challenges, and little room seems to be left for disputation. It is announced in the Pittsburgh Recorder, that T. D. Baird, A. M. is about to publish, should sufficient encouragement offer, "An inquiry into the duty and privilege of the Christian church in the exercise of sacred praise." The object of the work, is to refute the Rev. Mr. McMaster's "Apology for the Book of Psalms." We say, in the language of the Religious Monitor, a sound, orthodox, and valuable magazine, published in the city of Albany, when noticing this proposed publication: "We hope he," the author, "will evince for the book of Psalms, as a component part of the inspired volume, greater reverence than most of his predecessors have done, when advocating the cause which Mr. Baird has espoused."

But we must not forget the Ploughman's letter. It is modestly addressed to his offspring and other relations, who appear to be very numerous. The style though unpolished, is perspicuous and nervous, and the argument manly, powerful, and, we think, decisive. After having proved that we have a Divine warrant for the use of David's Psalms, that the Psalms and Hymns of Watts are erroneous in many points, and having answered objections, he goes on to say:

"No matter how many good things are in Dr. Watts; being his design was to supplant the book of Psalms with his Psalms. This is enough to condemn his book. Could you think any man to be a friend to the President of the United States, if he would tell the President

that he was his friend, approved of his measures and intended to do him a kindness ; but at the same time told him that he intended to supplant him and to take his place, turn him out of his office and only let him live as a common subject in the government ? Certainly not. How, then, can you approve of Dr. Watts' conduct, when he has done the very same thing with David ? How much soever they speak in favour of the Psalms of David, they prefer Dr. Watts'. Let common prudence speak, were you travelling with your waggon, and all your property in it, and should come to a river over which there were two bridges ; the one was of sound materials, of long standing, and no danger of giving way, and that was safe for all passengers and for any burden, but the other bridge was of unsound materials, of a dangerous construction, and led into a dangerous swamp, would not common prudence direct you to take the one that was safe, notwithstanding the bad one was the smoothest covered.

“ So this is the very case with regard to Psalmody ; the book of Psalms is, beyond all doubt, a safe way ; the prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers and Christ himself have all gone in this way. This book stands in the very way that Ezra the scribe left it, when he made the selection under the spirit of inspiration : but this other bridge or way, by every flood, is altered, changed, amended and repaired every few years : and indeed it needs it, and it will lead them into strange and unsettled principles ; and every erroneous sect, at its first outset, will throw away the book of Psalms and get a Hymn book, with all their errors plainly held out in it, so that they will not only preach their errors, but sing

them, which is ten-fold worse than when it is preached, for *all must join* ; but when it is preached, it is only held out for their consideration ; this consideration ought to make a church or minister very careful that nothing that is possible for to be erroneous, should be admitted as the *matter* of our songs and praise ; and if there is an error in the Hymn we sing, how is it possible for us to be right ? If we do what God commands, we are on safe ground.”

He then proceeds to a considerably ample historical deduction, in which he demonstrates that the practice of the church in her purest parts and best times, is in favour of the use of David's Psalms. His comparisons are remarkably striking and appropriate. Take the following example :

“ My nephews, of whom I have upwards of one hundred and fifty of the first and second line, all within 25 miles, besides those that are far off, all which are in the habits of friendship with me, and I am confident will attend to what I say, as to what the scriptures principally teach. Some of you are well established in the present truth, others are unsettled and need some advice. I offer this as my last, as one that has a great desire to see you walking in the way to peace and happiness, and this can only be attained by knowing the truth and walking in it. Never give up the book of Psalms which hath a positive command to be used. No scripture inference will be admitted, in order to set aside the commands of God. I deny that there is one single text in all the New Testament to *make a Hymn* ; the advocates of Hymns always fly to Col. iii. 16, and Eph. v. 19, for their scripture warrant. But in these

texts there is nothing about *making* Hymns, but only *using* those that were *already made*. Would you not easily understand the impropriety of such conduct upon such directions in temporal things. Were you to order your servants to take an axe, mattock and plough, and go and chop, grub and clear such a piece of ground and plough it; if, when you go to see how they were doing, you would find them all making new kinds of ploughs, you would say, What is this you are about? did I tell you to go and make ploughs? had you not good ploughs ready made? why did you not chop, grub and plough as I told you? I told you nothing about making new ploughs and behold you are disputing about which of your new ploughs is the best; you find that they need altering, and so you are spending your time in mending that which will never answer the purpose."

The extracts given are a sufficient specimen of his manner. We earnestly recommend this pamphlet to the attentive perusal of our readers.

Until within a few years no kind of instrumental music was permitted in the Congregational churches of New-England. Latterly in some churches the bass viol has been introduced. An organ has lately been constructed in New-York for a Congregational church in New-London (Connecticut). Anciently, in the churches of that section of the country, David's Psalms only were sung, and that by the whole congregation—then Watts' were introduced. Next, the whole business of praising God, was committed to a choir—generally some young people on the gallery—all others being silent. This is now the common practice. A good organ will prevent the words sung by the choir from being heard: it will be music only. Query. Of what use, in that case, will any psalms be of to the congregation? May not psalms be dispensed with altogether?