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BY GEORGE HOWARD.

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## COMMUNICATIONS.

[The following article has been on hand some time, but we could not conveniently insert it until now. The queries referred to appeared original in this paper—we were subsequently informed that they were copied from Mrs. Royall's "Paul Pry."—Ed. Free Press.]

FOR THE FREE PRESS.

Mr. Editor: In looking over your paper of the 2d Oct. my eyes glanced at several queries, given to some preacher of the gospel; by answering which, it is said, "his kindness would much oblige a sincere seeker for the truth." We had believed that in this age of gospel light, it would have been difficult to find any man, who would be disposed to quibble with the voice of revelation, as we think, the author of these queries has. The sincere seeker for divine truth generally manifests his desire, not by making a diligent search for obscure passages in the volume of revelation, which may be calculated to obstruct the attainment of it, but by a rigid adherence to the plain precepts of the gospel. When a man becomes desirous of obtaining a knowledge of any science, does he at once meddle with the most abstruse parts of that science? or rather does he not commence with the most plain and simple, and gradually rise as his knowledge becomes enlarged and he is able more fully to understand all its parts? Has the seeker for the truth fully considered that the word, which he presumes to doubt, is the word of infallible truth? Has he calmly examined its truths? Has he for once carefully read its soul-converting page? Has his life been in unison with its precepts; brought under its influence and guided by its truths? Has he diligently read it and compared one truth with another? or may we not fear that his reading has been with a view, not to discover its beauties or feel its blessed influence, but to find out if possible something which would derogate from its divine authenticity and thereby lull him to sleep in his state of unbelief; as an object unworthy the regard of his maker, or as one whose powers of ratiocination are sufficient to mark out the path which will secure eventually all that his heart desires. We are not disposed to censure our fellow men and particularly to judge of the motives by which they are actuated; but from the questions before us, we do think, that he, the author of them, labors under a delusion or is actuated by a spirit inimical to divine revelation.

Every thing necessary to the future well being of man is plainly revealed in the bible, still we must confess that there are "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unstable and unlearned wrest to their own destruction." Although there are depths and heights in the inspired volume which the conceptive powers of man will never be able fully to fathom; yet it is indeed a book fraught with that instruction which we need, and guided by its light we may make our journey safe from this abode of trial to a state of rest. Here the true character of man is described, his duties made plain and he that reads attentively may be enlightened: and in it his final destiny is proclaimed. And although we find him in his present state wretched and miserable, yet here is a way marked out by which he

may be saved from misery and though subject to death, he may be ransomed from the power of the grave and enjoy the felicitous mansions of glory. While this will be the happy inheritance of the true believer, the unbeliever, the mocker, and the finally impenitent must be forever deprived of the enjoyment of happiness and feel as the consequence, the actual suffering of an eternal world.

We would now examine the proposed queries, which we trust will be answered satisfactorily to every unbiassed seeker for the truth. In the scripture we have more than once, repentance applied to the Supreme Being. We consider with regard to that repentance which is produced by sorrow for sins committed, that it cannot at all be applicable to the Supreme Being: nor can it in any case where it is mentioned be so understood as to impeach the immutability of his nature. When spoken of as in the query which is taken from the vi. chap. of Genesis, we infer, and we think justly too, that the expression is taken from the *finite capacities of man*, which would be unable to understand the term if other language was used than that which is accommodated to his understanding. We understand it, that the relation in which man stood to his maker, had become changed and consequently it called for his displeasure, and thus the idea suggests itself to us of the determination on the part of God to destroy man which he had created; and as the creature man, had shared the chief regard of the Eternal, we should conclude, humanly speaking, from these circumstances, it would produce sorrow or grief at heart. It is intended to show that the creature thus changing his relation, still stood in the merciful regards of his creator and He is represented as manifesting his concern, and the language which is proposed as a query was that which would best convey to our understandings, the tenderness and love with which the Eternal viewed us, the highest order of his lower creation. We conclude, God repents, not by changing his mind, affection or purpose, but the manner of his work; so he repented that he had made man, when he changed the course of his providence towards them as men do, when they repent and change their minds as one determined to destroy and pull them down—Gen. vi. 6, 7—1 Samuel, xv. 11. Sometimes his repentance imports his compassionate rising up for the deliverance of his servants after he had seemed determined to destroy them—Deut. xxxii. 36—Psalm, cxxxv. 14—Hosca, xi. 8—Jonah, 3. 10. From the foregoing view we conclude that God retains his immutability, and on this score Moses is no blasphemer. As it does not affect his immutability, so it derogates not from his essential happiness.

Another query commences, "Moses states the Lord informed him, that he had hardened Pharaoh's heart—and that because He had done this, Pharaoh was compelled to refuse permission to the Israelites to depart. And can we believe that the Deity did actually punish Pharaoh for not doing that which Deity had made impossible to be done? or must we believe that Moses was a blasphemer?" The case of Pharaoh has given rise to much controversy and to some strange and conflicting opinions, and perhaps among the strange opinions we may place the above query. If we would carefully and minutely examine the whole account, we should be more apt to find out the truth. The verb which we translate to harden, literally signifies to strengthen, confirm, make bold or courageous, and is often used in the sacred writings to excite to duty, perseverance, &c. and is placed by the Jews at the end of most of the books in the bible as an exhortation to the reader to take courage and proceed with the reading and with the obedience it requires. It constitutes

an essential part of the exhortation of God to Joshua, ch. i. 7: "Only be thou strong"—and Joshua's dying charge to the people, ch. xxiii. 6: "Be ye therefore very courageous to do and to keep all that is written in the law." Now it would be very strange in these places to translate the word, harden, "Only be thou hard"—"Be ye therefore very hard," &c. Now suppose we apply the word in this way to Pharaoh; the sense would be good and the justice of God equally conspicuous. I will make his heart hardy, bold, daring, presumptuous—for the same principle acting against God's order is presumption, which when acting according to it, is undaunted courage. It is true a different verb is used in chap. viii. 3, which signifies to render stiff, tough, stubborn, but it amounts nearly to the same with the above. Every person acquainted with the bible well knows that God is represented as doing what he only permits to be done. So because a man has grieved his spirit and resisted the proffered grace, He withdraws from him that spirit and grace and thus the man becomes bold and presumptuous, or hard. Pharaoh made his own heart stubborn against God, and He gave him up to judicial blindness so that he rushed on presumptuously to his destruction. If we take into consideration the character of Pharaoh, we shall find him such a one altogether as called forth a display of the power of Deity. When Moses first addressed him, he presumptuously demands "Who is Jehovah?" And from the whole history of Pharaoh and his frequent confessions and more frequent sins, we plainly perceive the cause of his punishment; and upon the whole, we must acknowledge that the permission of these things, was for the good of the Egyptians and Israelites. The Israelites were convinced that the Lord Jehovah was the only true God and thereby they could rely on him for protection in their extremity; and on the other hand the Egyptians were brought to discover that the many gods which they worshipped could not be compared to the true God, and consequently their esteem and veneration was lessened. If Pharaoh had consented at once for the children of Israel to leave his dominions, those great ends would not have been answered. No doubt for the encouragement of the Israelites on the one hand and the destruction of the confidence of the Egyptians in their idols on the other, that these things were wisely permitted. And in the whole affair we see nothing at all with regard to the eternal state of Pharaoh or the Egyptians.

It is said in the xi. chap. that Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you that my wonders may be multiplied—though shall and will are both reputed signs of the future tense and by many indiscriminately used, yet they make a most essential difference in many cases: For instance, if we translate the original words, Pharaoh shall not hearken as in our text, the word *shall* strongly intimates that it was impossible for Pharaoh to hearken, and that God had placed him under that impossibility: but if we translate as we should, Pharaoh *will* not hearken, it alters the case most essentially and agrees with many passages in the scripture where he is said to harden his own heart; and this proves, that he without any impulsive necessity, obstinately refused to attend to what Moses said or threatened; and God on account of his obstinacy wrought another miracle and thus multiplied his wonders in the land. Pharaoh will not hearken unto you, and because he would not God hardened his heart, i. e. left him to his own obstinacy. The heart of Pharaoh was hardened from his sinning yet more, and hardening his own heart against the judgments and mercies of God, chap. ix. 34. And should we be surprised, that after God had given him the means of softening and repentance,

and he had in every instance resisted and abused them, he should at last have been left to the hardness and darkness of his own obstinate heart, so as to fill up the measure of his iniquity and rush headlong to his destruction. Had it have been impossible for Pharaoh in all the plagues to have humbled himself and repented, can we suppose that God could have addressed him in language like this: "How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?" We may be assured there always was a time in which Pharaoh might have relented, and it was because he hardened himself at such times, that God is said to harden him, that is, gave him up to his own stubborn and obstinate heart. And from the confession of Pharaoh himself, we perceive he did not conceive himself under any impulsive necessity, for he says to Moses, "I have sinned against the Lord thy God and against thee."

The above remarks we hope are sufficient, unless the querist is disposed to think, that he can scan all the ways of Providence and if so, we would address him as the little boy did St. Augustine—when the saint perceived that the little boy had scooped a hole on the sea shore and with his hand was endeavoring to draw the ocean into it—

"O! foolish boy," the saint exclaimed, "to hope That the broad ocean in that hole should lie!"  
"O! foolish saint!" exclaimed the boy, "thy scope Is still more hopeless than the toil I ply: Who thinkest to comprehend God's nature high, In the small compass of thine human wit; Sooner, Augustine, sooner far shall I Confine the ocean in this tiny pit, Than finite minds conceive God's nature infinite."

A few words more with regard to the advice of Moses to the Israelites to borrow all the jewelry, &c. they could of the Egyptians. The querist wishes to know whether God did direct such a fraud to be committed? On this we will give you more of the ideas of one of the most correct biblical critics, who though now dead yet may speak in this communication. Speaking of the present version on this point, he observes of the word borrow, "this is not certainly a very correct translation. The original signifies simply to ask, request, demand, require, inquire, &c. but it does not signify to borrow, in the proper sense of that word: though in very few places of scripture it is thus used. In this place the word signifies to ask or demand, and not to borrow, which is a gross mistake, into which scarcely any ancient or modern version has fallen but our own. The European versions are generally correct on this point and our common English version is almost the sole transgressor. I say the common version, which following the bible translated by Beck in 1549, gives us the exceptionable term borrow. God commanded the Israelites to ask or demand a certain recompense for their past services, and he inclined the hearts of the Egyptians to give liberally; and this, far from being a matter of oppression, wrong, or even charity, was no more than a partial recompense for their long and painful services. Our exceptionable translation of the original has given some countenance to the desperate cause of infidelity; its abettors have exultingly said, "Moses represents the just God as ordering the Israelites to borrow the goods of the Egyptians, under pretence of returning them; whereas he intended they should run off with the booty." Let these men know that there was no borrowing in the case, and that if accounts were fairly balanced, Egypt would be found still in considerable arrears to Israel. Let it also be considered that the Egyptians had never any right to the services of the Hebrews. Egypt owed its policy, its opulence, and even its political existence to the Israelites. What had Joseph for his important services? Nothing! He had neither district nor city nor lordship in Egypt; nor did he reserve any for his children. All his services were  
(continued on the last page.)