

REVIEW OF A SERMON ON CIRCUMCISION AS THE GROUND OF INFANT BAPTISM.

PREACHED AT TIVERTON, BY REV. W. FRASER, AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF HIS CONGREGATION, IN THE INTEREST OF LIVING TRUTH.

In reviewing this pamphlet, our object is not to set forth the views of pseudo-Baptists on the subject here discussed. This, we think, is not necessary, as they are not shaken in the least by anything Mr. Fraser asserts, and we readily illustrated in publications to which the public have easy access. It is with very great reluctance we have decided to expose some of the incorrect statements and gross absurdities in which the pamphlet abounds. But the wide circulation, by mail and otherwise, among Presbyterians in Bruce, of offensive literature, which runs down Scriptural institutions and Scriptural practices, which they revere, and have good reason to revere, makes it a duty most imperative, though painful, to notice a conduct so unchristian.

While we appreciate any effort put forth by any body of Christians to enlighten their own people on the characteristics of their denomination—may, while we appreciate their efforts to enlighten the public at large on the special doctrines of their Church, through any honorable or worthy means—yet we very much deprecate all proselytizing efforts among Christian people, as involving a breach of Christian charity and good feeling so essential to the co-operation of all denominations in connection with benevolent enterprises. Before we now lay four printed documents of ana-Baptist literature, one of which is without name, but all apparently designed, not to enlighten the public on the subject they attempt to discuss, but to create prejudices, as they contain only abuse and erroneous representations of the religious views of other Christian Churches, and are so confused that an intelligent reader loses patience in reading them. So far from truth as the statements contained in this pamphlet, that it is difficult to conceive how a man of Mr. Fraser's advanced years, and living so long among Presbyterians, could know so little of their views on the subject he is attempting to discuss. His mind must be very obtuse, otherwise he could not have issued such a discourse. He takes particular credit to himself for the motives which instigated him to the publication. He says it was done "in faithfulness to truth and the souls of men," that this was the consideration which "required its production of him," and, further, that "in the interest of divine truth" his congregation requested its publication. What value ought to be attached to those pretensions will appear by glancing over the contents.

Mr. Fraser, speaking of his "pseudo-friends," as he calls them, says, in particular:—  
1. They claim the promise of the spiritual seed to the natural offspring of believers. This we most seriously deny, and call it a most deadly error. So it is a most deadly error; but who hold it? Presbyterians do not, and it is of no use for Mr. Fraser to emphasize so many words connected with a point which no one maintains. Making this assertion, and throwing it down as a deadly error, he jumps at once from his subject to that of a child resting "the salvation of the soul on natural descent." This is extraordinary, for a child to rest its salvation on such a foundation. But perhaps by the child he means an adult; if so, the youngest person in our Sabbath-school could tell him that the salvation of the soul "is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," and that, in his own words, "An heir of heaven by natural birth is not in the Bible." Mr. Fraser knows well, after his quotation from the Confession of Faith in another place, that Presbyterians believe no such a doctrine. Why, then, does he make such a statement?

2. "They jumble the whole together into one mass; the two seeds, the earthly and the heavenly inheritance, and the two classes of promises made to the same." Nothing of the kind. The jumble is all on the other side. Some of Abraham's natural seed never savingly believed; yet, by the express command of God, were circumcised. Their circumcision introduced them to many important privileges connected with the Church of God—such privileges as are confirmed and sealed to the children of Christian parents by their baptism.

I presume there are some, I fear many, in Mr. Fraser's congregation, who, though baptized by himself, and who must of course have had the right baptism, yet, for the want of saving faith, are like Simon of old, "In the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Now such persons cannot be heirs of the spiritual promises of which Mr. Fraser speaks; yet there is hardly a day he preaches to them but he assures them that they are a highly favored people—a people of unspeakable privileges. Wherein do their favors and privileges consist, while yet in their sins? I don't say they

have no privileges. I believe they have, for which they are accountable. And Mr. Fraser believes so too, or he would not say it. But while he sees the privileges of the baptized in his own church, though unregenerated, yet he seems not to see the privileges of the baptized children of other churches. He should try and clear up this difficulty to his followers, instead of amusing them with the idea that "the good people in Tiverton" look not for "an everlasting possession" "of the kingdom of Palestine." The Apostle Paul, in Rom. iii., may help him, where he answers the question, "What profit is there of circumcision?"

3. "From circumcision they draw the inference, that we have baptism in the place of it, and it is to their children a sealing or confirming ordinance to the baptized, see Confession of Faith, page 254. It reads—'It does not read as given. Mr. Fraser quotes from the Larger Catechism, though he would make his readers believe that he quotes from the Confession of Faith, and tells them that it reads as he has it. It answers his purpose better than the Confession, as in the latter the sign and seal are connected with the covenant of grace; and as he does not like this expression, 'covenant of grace,' and says of it in another place—'It is from the school and not from the Bible—he gets clear of it. In his quotation also we find the little word of, after 'himself,' changed into or, so as to give a different meaning to the part of the question he quotes. Who would expect this from one who writes in the interest of truth? Then, he plays upon the word seal, and gives it his own meaning. But what he says of it has often been said before him by the enemies of the good old books he is running down, and as often explained by their defenders. But Mr. Fraser wants no explanation, but will stick to his own meaning—a meaning, however, against which the Confession carefully guards, as may be seen in ch. 28, sec. 5, where the opinion "That all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated" is expressly denied. This section in the Confession Mr. Fraser must have seen; why, then, does he misrepresent the views of those whom he calls his friends? Why does he hold back a part of the truth, and preach and circulate through the world what he must know to be incorrect? Shame on such a conduct.

Let us have another specimen of Mr. Fraser's garbled quotations and faithfulness to truth. Quoting Rom. iv. 11, and giving his own meaning of the first part of the verse, as it would not answer him to give the text as it reads, he says: "Circumcision is called a seal of the righteousness which Abraham had before he was circumcised, and so was read in the flesh of Ishmael in his day, and by us to-day as a seal of God's great doctrine of justification by faith, as it reads, that he might be the father of all them that believe 'though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.'" I leave this quotation with the intelligent reader, who, I have no doubt, will turn up the passage in his Bible and compare it with what Mr. Fraser gives us. If he can understand how circumcision is to be read as "a seal to God's great doctrine of justification by faith" in the case of Ishmael, whose justification by faith, we fear, never occurred, he sees what we cannot discover, and absurdly too. Let the reader also adopt Mr. Fraser's own reasoning on the seal as under this particular, and he will find that what Mr. Fraser denies to infants, he gives to Ishmael!

Getting over his difficulty in Rom. iv. 11 to his own satisfaction, but I am sure to none else, he follows his own confused course into a regular quagmire, from which he never emerged. Or, to use his own words, he seems to have got under the influence of chloroform, by which, according to him, "millions" have been led "to live without God, and in their sins." Finding himself in such a predicament, and as if to hide his confusion from his readers, he declares that his "pseudo-friends" "do not understand what they say on this point, and how can the people understand?" which is an acknowledgment of what any intelligent reader of his pamphlet sees, namely, that our author does not understand what he writes about. Poor gospel indeed on which to feed his flock.

4. We have the charge against the "pseudo-friends" of giving over the spiritual promises "to the ungodly crowd of the Jews." Of course his friends are proven in an error, both from Scripture and Presbyterian divines. A quotation from Charnock's works gets a good circulation among ana-Baptist literature. It seems to be of immense value, more so than Scripture, and yet Charnock was no ana-Baptist. But, in the quotation before us, we are not favored with Charnock's view at all on infant baptism. This is acknowledged by Mr. Fraser himself, who says that, "The best pseudo-Baptist divines go fully with us on the application of a promise when baptism is not in the question." Then comes his quotation from Charnock's works. Is it not singular that Mr. Fraser, after making this acknowledgment, should take a sentence from the topic discussed by this divine, and apply it to his own subject, which is entirely different? But this liberty is in keeping with ana-Baptist's mode of dealing with Scripture. Who does not know their logic connected with such passages as Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "What faith," say they, "can an unconscious babe have? How ridiculous then to baptize it!" This mode of reasoning is most common among the ana-Baptists. It is taught by the minister to the people, by the Sabbath-school teacher to the pupil, and by the parent to the child. But what is it but a wilful misapplication of Scripture, or an application to unconscious babes of truth never designed for them? By such a mode of reasoning the poor unconscious babe must be damned, because it cannot believe; it must perish, because it cannot repent, Luke xiii. 9; it must not eat, because it cannot work, 2 Thess. iii. 10. Persons who adopt such a course of reasoning—yes, who in the face of the great mass of the Christian world, place in the hands of their children a New Testament, in which the word 'baptism' is not once mentioned—will have no objection in garbling the words of any man.

If Charnock, and his colleagues, from whose works Mr. Fraser so freely quotes, hold the views ana-Baptist literature would have us believe, they must have been great hypocrites, or simpletons, for they could have found plenty of waters in which to be immersed, but did not use them for that purpose. They lived and died as defenders of the good old doctrine which ana-Baptists oppose. But, perhaps, they may have been such simpletons as not to know the doctrines they themselves believed. I leave Mr. Fraser to say, which?

Under this particular we have also an exposition of Peter's address to the Jews at the beautiful gate of the temple, as in Acts iii. Though Peter, we are told, addressed the crowd of Jews, in the 14th and following verses, yet he restricts it, in verse 25th, to "the convert from iniquity." How our author came to this strange conclusion is impossible to see; nor is it possible to find any ground to affirm, as he does, that the prominent assembly at the beautiful gate of the temple ever "charged the Apostles with drunkenness." All this twisting and jumbling of Scripture had to be accomplished so as to get clear of Peter's application of Gen. xli. 3, which is not favorable to Mr. Fraser's theology. After such an exposition, our author would do well to ponder his own quotation from Ezek. xiii. 22.

5. Here, Mr. Fraser, speaking of the "infant seed of believers," declares that his "pseudo-friends" "have not one passage in the whole Bible" in favor of such seed being "subjects of baptism and lawful heirs of the promise." Then affirms that the "word family never means the baby, or the infant part," while "the word children at least includes old and young." It is a pity that Mr. Fraser did not give us his authority for excluding the poor baby from the word family, as it is a new doctrine to many in Bruce, who are taught otherwise. But as Mr. Fraser has no babies in his Church, he would, it appears, have none in our families; none even in heaven; though the Apostle Paul, speaking of the universal Church of Christ, says, in Eph. iii. 15, "Of whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named." See also Gen. xlii. 12.

Again, taking up Gen. xvii. 7-27, he attempts to demolish the whole structure of his "pseudo-friends" by a splendid piece of reasoning, which must be striking to all who may see it; and is to the following effect:—"That because Abraham was 99 years old, and Ishmael 18, when circumcised, therefore there was no one circumcised that day under 18 years; and although, in his own words, 'hundreds of adults were circumcised the same day, almost all servants,' yet among so many there was 'no baby at all!' Indeed, the inference left to be drawn is, that the Jews circumcised none under 18 years! Let not the reader smile over this piece of reasoning, or charge us with exaggeration, as we do it justice, and find it in keeping with the common logic of ana-Baptist literature. What do they say of the word 'baptism'? Why, they prove that it sometimes means immersion. They establish this point; but if it is a point that no one denies; but because it often means immersion, they jump to the conclusion that it always means immersion, and cannot mean anything else. So do they also reason on the subjects of baptism. They first prove that a large number of persons were baptized by the Apostles; then, they show that those persons were adults who were addressed and urged to repent and believe, what unconscious babes cannot do; and having established these points, which none deny, they conclude that unconscious babes should not be baptized. If they accept this same logic from their "pseudo-friends," it will prove infant baptism most conclusively. For, their friends can prove that there is not one single instance, during the whole period of the first sixty or seventy years of the New Testament dispensation, of a person born of Christian parents having been baptized when grown up; therefore all such persons must have been baptized in infancy. Surely ana-Baptists will now yield the whole subject discussed. It is but fair to yield to their own logic, and allow their friends the benefit of it. But to go on:—

Our author is now "astonished," nay, "humbled," in looking at the labors of Dr. Barnes and others, "to force his text—Gal. iii. 16, which I forgot to mention at the outset—to favor the infant seed claim." He speaks of those divines as being very angry at the Apostle for using the language of his text, and represents them as being at their wits' end to give it any meaning but the right one. Indeed he labors hard to prove here, as in other places, what but few of his "pseudo-friends" deny, namely, that to Christ, the Great Head of the covenant of grace, all the promises of the gospel are given. To them this is an old doctrine, a favored doctrine, and a doctrine propounded among them a long time before ana-Baptists had an existence, except on the pages of heresy. They believe also that personal union to Christ is essential in order to become partakers of the spiritual blessings of these promises. But what has all this to do with infant baptism? Nothing at all. The baptism of infants and salvation of infants are two very different things. Respecting the salvation of "elect infants," Mr. Fraser declares himself at one with the Confession of Faith. But how can he believe in the salvation of infants, when he excludes them from the spiritual promises contained in the Abrahamic covenant? and holds those only who can exercise faith in Christ as heirs of spiritual blessings. His belief in the salvation of any infants is without any foundation. He has only an opinion, and an opinion entirely contrary to his mode of reasoning. But a mere opinion will give but little comfort to "Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not."

Then comes a "jumble" of ideas, which gives a specimen of our author's ability in treating his subject. In case any should regard us as being fond of exaggeration, we give his own words in full—"If the question be asked, 'says he, 'will you not receive into the Church all that shall be saved into heaven?' I frankly answer, we shall most gladly; only we refuse to take them by the natural birth, for as such they shall not enter into heaven. In such we are perfectly at one with the Presbyterian

Confession of Faith, ch. 10, 4, which reads: "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. So are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word." Where this takes place, they know and love Christ, and can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb with the heart and the understanding also. All such we are willing to receive as soon as they can be known." Here the question proposed seems to have to do with infants being received into the Church; when received into heaven, why not received into the Church? Yes, says Mr. Fraser, we shall gladly receive them, but not by the natural birth, as if he could know an infant born of the spirit, and was willing to receive such into his Church. Then comes the quotation from the Confession, respecting the salvation of elect infants and other elect persons, with which Mr. Fraser perfectly agrees, and is used to prove that infants born again, or regenerated, are to be received into Mr. Fraser's Church. When this new birth, or regeneration, takes place, even in elect infants, and others not capable of being outwardly called by the word, "they know it, and love Christ, and can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb; all such he is willing to receive into his church, as soon as they can be known." I shall not blame the reader for not understanding this piece of reasoning, as it is but an absurdity, or a number of subjects, very different from one another, worked up into a jumble. Surely our author is still under the influence of chloroform; if not, he should give up book making, and not disgrace his people.

But is it correct for Mr. Fraser to say that regeneration is the ground on which he receives persons into his church. It is hard for those who know the ana-Baptists to believe it. It would be more correct to say that water-baptism is the ground, and not that of the spirit. Now, if any, are rejected who can pronounce Mr. Fraser's Shabbath, especially if they come from any other fold.

He concludes this particular by reminding his "Pseudo-Friends" that "the door of the church is not wide enough on earth or in heaven for couples, families, or nations." Surely he forgot the household baptisms of the Apostolic Church. Or perhaps he acknowledges that the persons who received those households were not of his body. It is not likely, anyway, that he will soon be troubled with an application from a whole family for admission through baptism into his church. He is now an old man, and it is questionable if ever he received such an application. Generally, his mode is to begin with the young boy or young girl from home; then, through the daughter, to reach the mother or sister; and through the son to reach the father or brother. Or perhaps to creep into the house when the husband is in the field or barn, and ensnare the wife or the daughter.

7. Here our author endeavours to fuster on his "Pseudo-Friends" the sin of "making the Jewish Kingdom and the Christian Church one," a statement which I question if ever he heard made by those whom he calls his friends. Had he said they made the Jewish Church and Christian Church one, he would be nearer the truth; but to cast dust into the eyes of his readers, he says the Jewish kingdom and Christian Church are one. No, no, Mr. Fraser, we won't receive your three different "successive administrations of grace." You should study our views better and not be guilty of misrepresentation. We believe there is but "one body (the Church), one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and through you all and in you all." Eph. iv. 4. Nor will we exclude your genuine believers from the unity; though you, with your water baptism, attempt to destroy it, and raise a wall of partition between yourself and all other denominations of Christians.

8. Now our author gets again "to holy blood," and with very great emphasis expresses his astonishment "to find holy births in the County of Bruce by thousands." It is good news for the County. Bruce, unquestionably, is a fertile spot. It would be of importance if Mr. Fraser were more definite, and inform us as to the number of births that ever occurred in the County; if it is not the township of Bruce he means. Such information might entice emigration to the place, and Mr. Fraser might get some of them to his water baptism. I understand he is one of the oldest inhabitants of the place, and may have some statistics in his possession that may be of value to his neighbors. To do this would be more like a man of his years than to amuse his hearers on the Sabbath day with nonsense, and assertions which no one of intelligence believes.

Dr. Barnes is again overhauled in connection with "holy blood;" but is now held forth, "in general, as the first Presbyterian commentator that ever lived!" And why is this eulogium now heaped upon the Dr., after being so bad a little while ago? Because he helps Mr. Fraser out of difficulties connected with 1 Cor. vii. 14, and "holy blood." Let us look at the conclusion arrived at from this passage of Scripture, which Mr. Fraser "recommends to all, especially to Presbyterians." By the children whom the Apostle calls unclean we are to understand illegitimate; and by the holy, legitimate. By this view of the passage we are taught by the Apostle that the offspring of parents, both unbelieving, are illegitimate children; and as the most of the parents in Bruce are, we presume, unbelieving; Mr. Fraser's opinion, their children are illegitimate. Where, then, are Mr. Fraser's "thousands of holy births" in Bruce? Instead of thousands of holy births, his view of Scripture gives us thousands of bastards. See into what a mess he has now brought us!

9. Here our author informs us "that circumcision, as a rite for the administration of baptism, proves too much, therefore proves nothing." Another groundless assertion. Who claims circumcision as a rite for the administration of baptism? No one. Then comes "even counts" to prove inconsistency; but in reality to prove an error of which no one is guilty. Little importance seems to be attached to these counts, as they are but trifling and gene-

ally mentioned, as if the object was to prevent his readers from understanding them. We may glance at one or two of the most important of them.

"Sex."—Would Mr. Fraser instruct his hearers as to the connection the female sex had with the Abrahamic covenant? Were they the recipients of any blessings through their connection with it? If so, they must have been regarded as circumcised representatively in the males. Again, if we administer baptism to the female sex, we do but what is in perfect keeping with the genius of the New Dispensation; while ana-Baptists, in rejecting infant membership, directly oppose the nature of the Dispensation.

"Time."—In what time was circumcision administered among the Jews? How old were Abraham, Ishmael, Moses' son, the Israelites in the wilderness, and Timothy, when circumcised? Mr. Fraser should have exercised a little caution in producing from rule against the "Pseudo-Friends" as his weapon has two edges, and may be used against himself. He would have all to follow his example by going down into the river Jordan. Well, when did the Saviour go down into the Jordan? Luke iii. 23 tells us, when he was "about thirty years of age." Sooner, he could not go, and "fulfil all righteousness," as he had to conform to the law connected with the priesthood. Is it at the age of thirty that Mr. Fraser immerses the candidate for baptism? No; ten or twelve years are sufficient. Then he departs from the rule, and is inconsistent. But he immerses whenever the person believes. Why so? The Saviour had faith a long time before his baptism, and it was not the want of faith that delayed his baptism; and when any of Mr. Fraser's hearers believe, why not allow them to live a while, if under thirty, till they reach that age, and give them an opportunity to follow the Saviour before baptism as well as in baptism and after it? Consistency demands this; besides, it would allow the candidates to show their faith by good fruits before they are baptized. What need is there of such an extraordinary haste after the candidate consents to immersion, as is often seen connected with ana-Baptist churches? A little delay, and more judicious dealings with candidates at that important period of their life would save many from self-deception, and the Church from false professors; and Mr. Fraser would be clear of the heavy charge of giving countenance to such a sin.

But what about following the Saviour down into the Jordan? Well, where is Jordan in Bruce, or any river into which the candidate for admission is to descend? There is something noble, something sublime, in a clear, pure stream of water, and to descend to such a stream is very agreeable. But very different it is to be asked to go down into the stagnant, soily water of a font; and Mr. Fraser, in asking any one to do so, departs from this rule, and can give no scripture for doing so. He should either drop his argument for immersion, from the many waters in Eden—or, as he must now do, much, though in the original it is many—or give up the use of his font. For really Mr. Fraser's mode of baptism does not require much water after all; a few buckets from a neighboring well will be sufficient to immerse scores of persons. Mr. Fraser, of course, regards the font, the water-proof clothes, and the other things connected with immersion, too delicate to mention as modern improvements; but consistency, on his part, demands their being laid aside. Besides, he has not one passage of Scripture to support them. All this on inconsistency we would let alone were we not driven to it. Indeed our pen would not be used in connection with reviews had not our patience been exhausted by the circulation of offensive literature—if the term can be applied to it—among parties that did not want them.

10. We have here but a repetition of particulars already noticed. "Our friends," says Mr. Fraser, "draw the inference that baptism came in the same room of circumcision." No inference at all, but a doctrine clearly taught in Scripture. In our Bible we find a divine charter of the visible Church, organized in the days of Abraham, for spiritual purposes, with government, officers, ordinances, and sacramental seals. It was in this chartered, visible society, "God set some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers" under the New Testament Dispensation; for there was no other Church in which to set them. By examination we find the seals to be undergoing a change in their external forms, but not in the ideas symbolized. As in the passover covenant, the atoning blood of the Lamb gave place to the bread and wine; so in the Abrahamic covenant circumcision gave place to baptism. But in both covenants the spiritual ideas retained their full import. All this is perfectly obvious from those passages of Scripture where circumcision is set forth as the figurative expression of the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing human nature; just as baptism becomes the figurative expression of the same regenerative work under the New Testament, as can be seen by comparing Deut. x. 16; also ch. xxx. 6; Lev. 26-41; Rom. ii. 29; also ch. iv. 11; Phil. iii. 3; Col. ii. 11-13. In these passages the identity of circumcision and baptism is established beyond doubt; so that the very terms circumciser and baptism may be interchanged without impairing in the least the spiritual meaning of the passage.

Now this covenant charter of the visible Church, given by God to Abraham, was recognized by Christ, who, we are told, "was a minister of the circumcision," (Rom. xv. 8) and came to fulfil what Moses and the prophets wrote concerning him. It was recognized by the apostles; hence they baptized whole households on the faith of their parents. Acts xvi. 14-15. The Apostle Paul, in Rom. ii., speaks of the rejection of the Jewish people from the privileges of the church; and the reception of "all that believe of the Gentiles, as only the cutting off one set of branches from the olive tree, and grafting others in their stead. It is recognized also by us, as the divine constitution of the visible Church in which we were born, and which was in full force from Abraham's day till now, and will continue in force to the end of time. Further, by