

ON

REGENERATION.

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THE
DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES
RESPECTING
REGENERATION.

1. Regeneration is supposed by the Church of England, and asserted in her articles, to be conferred by baptism. Others imagine it to be an operation effected in a moment, by a sudden infusion into the heart of justifying faith. According to either view, the doctrine is incomprehensible. Indeed, so irrational have been the opinions that have been generally formed upon this subject, that the very idea of any such thing as regeneration has, with many, been brought into contempt, and been considered as a fair topic for infidel raillery. But however it may have been misrepresented, regeneration is an object which, of all others, ought to engage the attention, and stimulate the pursuit, of every rational being. In fact, to place this object within our reach, and thus to draw our immortal spirits to their proper destination in heaven, is the sole end regarded by our Creator in calling us into existence in this world of nature.

Let it be seriously asked, who, upon reflection, can suppose, that regeneration, which properly implies a renewal of the heart and mind, is a thing not necessary;—that it is a mere fiction of the imagination;—that man can attain to the regions of bliss without it? Is man, as we behold him in the present day, so exempt from evil propensities, as to be qualified, in his natural state, for the society of angels? Where care has been taken to instil good maxims, and to form good habits, during the period of education, the inherent depraved propensities

of our nature do not always break out into those more flagrant crimes, which at once call down the reprobation of the beholder; but are not the numerous instances in which this is the case—the multitude of examples of wrong and violence, of fraud and treachery, which are continually occurring before our eyes, sufficient to prove an evil bias in our constitution? And if we were willing to explore our own hearts in the light of genuine truth, we should find that there is no need to look without ourselves to obtain conviction of the fact:—we should discover that a regard to our own gratification, our own worldly interest, our own fancied importance, is continually carrying us away, and leading us to treat as of no account, if not violently to injure, the happiness, interests, and feelings of others. It is indeed most certain, that when the more noble and only saving motives—the fear of God and reverence for his laws—are absent from the mind, it is nothing but a dread of exposing themselves to the penalties of the laws of their country, or at least of bringing disgrace upon their character, that withholds men from indulging their evil inclinations in their most pernicious forms. And even when a fear of God and a reverence for his laws have established themselves in the heart, we at first find that they are more efficacious in bringing our evil propensities to light than in removing them. They will indeed, if we are sincere, generally preserve us from a commission of the acts to which those propensities would lead us, and they will prompt us earnestly to supplicate the Lord to remove the propensities themselves; but we shall soon be convinced that this is a work which none but He can accomplish. This, however, if we are sincere in our supplications, he will do. If, when we have acquired some knowledge of the doctrines of the Divine Word, we are careful to perform our part in the work of regeneration, by abstaining from evil in our lives, exploring at the same time the intentions of our will by noting the quality of the thoughts which spontaneously arise in our minds;—and if, as we thus became acquainted with the evil propensities of our