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REV. MR. CHRISTMAS'S

DISCOURSE

ON THE

**NATURE OF THAT INABILITY,**

WHICH PREVENTS THE SINNER FROM EMBRACING

THE GOSPEL:

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WITH AN APPENDIX.

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A  
**DISCOURSE**  
ON THE  
**NATURE OF THAT INABILITY,**

WHICH PREVENTS THE SINNER FROM EMBRACING

THE GOSPEL:

Being the substance of

**TWO SERMONS,**

PREACHED IN THE AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

MONTREAL, Dec. 9, 1827.

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BY JOSEPH S. CHRISTMAS,  
PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

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THE two discourses, the substance of which are here given, were prepared, and preached in the ordinary routine of congregational instruction, without the most distant thought of their publication. When a request, that they should be printed, was presented me, together with a subscription sufficient to warrant the expense of an edition, from persons whose wishes I love to gratify, and whose judgments I ought to respect, I consented to the measure: not without the conviction, that few persons could fully understand, and remember the discourses, by simply hearing them, and not without the hope, that their leisurely perusal would establish their minds in the important truth inculcated. The two sermons are here thrown into one discourse, the recapitulation of the first, which formed the introduction of the second sermon, is omitted, some additions, and such verbal alterations as two sermons composed in the latter half of a week might be expected to require, are made, and a few notes appended in further illustration of some points, but briefly touched in the discourse.

J. S. CHRISTMAS.

*Montreal, Dec. 14, 1827.*

## DISCOURSE.

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YE will not come unto me, that ye might have life.—JOHN, v. 40.

IN CONNEXION WITH,

No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.—JOHN, vi. 44.

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THERE are two leading views, in which the subject of man's religious obligation, is regarded. The one considers sin, as a misfortune, which is to be pitied; the other as a fault, which is to be blamed. The one regards man as unable to comply with God's commands; and therefore not bound to do so. The other regards him as able, but unwilling, and nevertheless bound. The first considers it his duty to do what he can, that is, discharge the social and moral duties of life, controul his external deportment, and give a diligent attendance on the ordinances of religion, till God shall enable him to do more. The second view of the subject, esteeming the precepts of God, concerning all things to be right, considers man under unalterable obligations to do whatever he commands, that he has power already conferred on him, to do his whole duty, and that while he remains averse to its performance, his praying for assistance, is worse than useless. The supporters of the first view to be consistent, either deny, that God commands unrenewed men to be holy, or acknowledging that he does, deem it impossible, and therefore unfair; while the supporters of the second maintain, that the Most High does de-

mand holiness of unholy men, acknowledge the possibility of compliance with the demand, and perceive and insist on its fairness and equity.—Each of these views, are held by Calvinistic, and Orthodox Divines, in all branches of the Presbyterian Church, both in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.\* Though they may not all push their sentiments quite to the extremes, which I have stated, yet every thinking Christian must, and does adopt principles, which clearly involve the whole of one, or the other of these systems. It need not be said, that the difference between the two is wide; that, it is a difference of great practical importance, and one that meets us at almost every turn. It would be prejudging the case, to ask those who are in the habit of reading the Scriptures, which is there presented, but the bare statement of the question informs us, which side of it reflects the most blame on the sinner, and the most glory to God: a circumstance which to an humble mind affords strong presumptive evidence of the truth.

The whole difference between these schemes, lies in the apprehension of the *nature of that inability, which prevents a sinner from complying with the commands of God.* The one maintains, that it is a *natural* inability, which he *cannot* help, and the other, that it is a *moral* inability which he *will* not help. If the truth on this point, can be satisfactorily ascertained, all the other consequences involved, will easily follow, and the correctness of one, or the other of the systems, be determined. If our investigation should prove successful, I trust, that we shall not regret, having occupied a portion of this holy day, with the consideration of the subject.

It will be, first of all, necessary to have clear conceptions, of the distinction between natural, and moral ability. *Natural* or *physical* ability, is our *power* to do a thing, which we have by the very constitution of our *natures*, whether it refer to our mental faculties, or bodily abilities, or our opportunities to use them. *Moral* ability, is our *inclination* to do a thing, and is irrespective of our power. This

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\* See note A.

kind of ability, is called *moral*, because the inclination, is that on which the moral character of the agent, the good and evil of his actions depend. Perhaps a few illustrations may convey a better idea of the distinction, than any definition, however accurate. A man who has the use of his limbs, has natural ability to walk, but he may from some cause operating on his inclination, be unwilling to move a step. He is now morally unable. Again, he may have a great desire to walk, and not have the use of his limbs. He is in that case, morally able and naturally unable to walk. When the mariners in the vessel, which contained Jonah, rowed hard to bring it to land, but *could not*, it was through a natural inability. When Joseph's brethren hated him so, that they *could not* speak peaceably to him, it was through a moral inability. It is by a natural inability, that a blind man cannot see. It was by a moral inability, that some of whom, an Apostle speaks, had "eyes full of adultery, that *could not cease* from sin." A drunkard has natural ability to abstain from spiritous liquors, as well as from any other poison, but when through strength of appetite, he is unable to forbear, it is a moral inability to abstain. It is an instance of natural inability, that men *cannot* make a hair of their head white, or black, or add a cubit to their stature; and of moral inability, that an affectionate child *cannot* wantonly disobey its parents, or a malicious man *cannot* desire the prosperity of his enemy.

Now, though it sound like an inaccuracy, to say—that a man is unable to do what he is merely unwilling to do; yet through the poverty of human language, it is customary with all persons so to speak. How common is it, for a person to say, that he cannot do, what he is merely strongly averse to do. I tell you to thrust your hand into the fire. You reply that you cannot—you cannot think of such a thing. Now it is evident, that you have the natural ability to do it. You can move your hand in the direction of the fire, as easily as in any other direction. All you mean by saying you cannot, is that you are strongly averse to it: in other words, you are morally unable. When you hear a recital of some shameful, or cruel conduct, you exclaim "Oh! *I could not* have acted so"—not meaning, that you have not powers of body, and mind, to have perpetrated the atro-

city, but that it would have been altogether contrary to your feelings, and inclination. In accordance with this method of speaking so common among men, is the Bible written. Thus the Redeemer said "No man *can* come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him," that is, every one is so strongly averse to coming to me that he *cannot*, or more strictly *will* not come unto me, except the Father draw him, or overcome his repugnance, by the sweet and powerful constraints of his grace. In exact agreement, with this interpretation, are the words of him, who never uttered an incautious expression; and who was always perfectly consistent with himself, "Ye *will* not come unto me, that ye might have life," a declaration which in the original still more emphatically attributes their not coming to a want of will, than the English auxiliary verb, which, generally implies nothing more, than the certain futurity of the event, "Ye are *not willing* to come unto me, that ye might have life."

Having stated, and explained the distinction between natural and moral ability; I observe, that, the inability which prevents a sinner from embracing the Gospel, must be of one kind, or the other, and maintain, that it is of the latter kind—that all men are naturally able to come to God, and that, the only reason why they do not, is that they are morally unable or unwilling to do so.

We are here met at the very outset, with a prejudice against all such distinctions, as a mere metaphysical refinement, which few can understand, and if understood, of no importance, for if men are unable, they are unable, whether it arises from a physical, or moral cause. If any choose he is at liberty, to call the distinction nice, and metaphysical, but it is a distinction still, which is obvious to every capacity, and whose importance is daily felt in the transactions of society. For instance, if one of your children has broken some valuable article, would it be a metaphysical nicety in you, to inquire, whether, it was an accidental thing, which could not be helped, or whether it was done wantonly, and willingly? Does not the very child perceive the distinction? and if he can, will avail himself of it, and never fail to plead that he did not intend it, and could not help

it—and is not this, the very distinction between natural, and moral ability? Again, when a criminal is arraigned at court, for killing a fellow man, is it a matter of too much metaphysical nicety for the jury to inquire, whether it was an accident, which could not be helped, or a wilful murder which had been freely intended, in other words, whether it proceeded from a natural, or a moral inability to do otherwise?

But the distinction is no less important, than it is obvious. Does your child think it of no importance towards establishing his innocence, and would he not justly complain did you punish him, as severely for an oversight, or accident, as for wanton and intentional mischief, and if such were your general procedure, would he not lose all confidence in your justice? And might not the accused at the bar, bitterly complain of the judge, who should refuse to make such a distinction, by saying, that if the man was killed, he was killed, and it would not alter the event, to determine whether it was done voluntarily, or accidentally? And why should it be deemed of no importance to ascertain whether men's continuance in sin be from a natural inability, a cause which they cannot help, or from a moral inability which they will not help. Men indeed continue in sin, whether the cause be of a natural, or moral kind, but is the distinction of no importance towards determining their guilt? No man who thinks at all, can think so. Sinners do without exception, perceive the bearing of the question, and when urged with the immediate obligation of duty attempt to fasten the blame of non-compliance upon their natural inability. They perceive, that if it can be shown to proceed from their moral inability, or unwillingness, that they are stripped of every cloak for their sin. They are quick to discern, that the distinction forces upon them, an irresistible conviction of guilt, which they would gladly avoid. So long as they can excuse themselves, by throwing the blame on something beyond their controul, they rest easy. Hence that rooted aversion to the doctrine, which must have forcibly struck the mind of every one, who has conversed much with impenitent persons, on the subject of their personal obligations.

Hence their unwillingness to admit a truth, which shows their hiding place, to be a refuge of lies. But they *must* see it, if they shall ever be brought to a state of conviction. Of such deep, and practical importance is the doctrine. I know of none more so. Without it, I should be perfectly unable, to justify the ways of God to man. I should feel myself, in the situation of one of Pharaoh's task-masters; and rather than hear the keen retort, "There is no straw given unto thy servants to make brick," and be sensible, that it was well founded, I would resign the service. Without it, I should not know how to acquit the everblessed God of being a hard master, gathering, where he had not strewed, and reaping, where he had not sown.

We will now attend to the evidence, which directly proves, that men have natural ability perfectly to love and obey God, and comply with the Gospel.

I argue it, from the fact, that *God has commanded it*. It will not be doubted that the Supreme Lawgiver enjoins men to love him with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind, and with all their strength, and their neighbour as themselves, that he commands all men, every where to repent, and return to him with their whole heart, that he commands them, to believe the Gospel, under pain of damnation, and to be holy, even as he is holy, and to have holy, and new hearts, that is, to be in the possession of holy feelings, without delay. "Circumcise yourselves," says he, "and take away the foreskins of your hearts, ye men of Jerusalem, and inhabitants of Judah." "O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." "Cast away your transgressions, whereby ye offend, and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for, why will ye die?" "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." "Rend your hearts, and not your garments," "*purify your hearts, ye double minded.*" "And this is his commandment: that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another."

To these might be added a vast many other passages, indeed all the precepts of Scripture which enjoin holiness in general, or some of its particular branches. Now I appeal to you, whether God will ever command what it is impossible for men to perform. Can you for a moment suppose, that the Judge of all the earth, will require of men what is beyond their strength, and that under the penalty of his everlasting displeasure? Then indeed are the complaints which sinners make against the Most High, for the strictness of his law well-founded. And can you believe, that men are in the right, and Jehovah's conduct infinitely in the wrong? "Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity!" "What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with him? God forbid! yea, let God be true, and every man a liar." Whatever be the consequence, we will with Elihu, "ascribe righteousness to our Maker." We are now prepared to see the force of the following argument:—

God will not command what men are unable to perform.

But he does command men to love him, repent, and embrace the Gospel.

Therefore men are able to love him, repent, and embrace the Gospel.

There are two ways, in which men attempt to evade the force of this reasoning. The first is, that we originally *had the ability in Adam, that we lost it in him, and that God's right to command, still continues, notwithstanding our inability to obey.*

In answer to this objection, I would first state, that I have no disposition to deny that Adam's conduct—the Scriptures have not explained *how*, nor have any of its expositors succeeded in becoming wise above what is written—*somehow* involved us in very important consequences. It has brought us into that state, in which every human being is born, and grows up, unless sovereign grace interpose, with a heart opposed to his duty, and to God. But it cannot with propriety be affirmed, that the fall has deprived us of power, to keep

the commands of God. If it has, then our probation, and responsibility came to an end in Adam, and there is no such thing as *actual sin* in the world. If we lost our power to obey in our first parent, then our probation, and responsibility came to an end in him. I do not know of any principle plainer, than that accountability is founded on power to obey, or of any more absurd, than that a creature incapable of acting, should be put on probation. That natural ability is the foundation of responsibility, is evident from the fact, every where taught in the word of God, that the increase of natural ability confers a proportional increase of responsibility. He who receives five talents, has five times the responsibility, of him who receives but one. "The servant, who knows his master's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin." If an increase of responsibility, follows an increase of power, then some degree of power is necessary to constitute the commencement of responsibility. But if we lost all our power in Adam, we have no responsibility. Does not God, however, still deem us accountable, and does he not declare, that the welfare of our eternity, shall be determined by our *own present* conduct? Nay, does he not lay the whole stress on our own personal character, and can it be shown, that any one was ever lost for Adam's sin?

Again, if we lost in Adam all power to obey, there is no such thing as actual transgression in the world. For the loss of power takes away all capacity for sinning. As sin is a breach of obligation, and obligation is founded on power, there can be no sin, where there is no power. If we had power in Adam, we were then responsible, and capable of sinning. If that power was destroyed in his transgression, we thenceforth became forever incapable of actual transgression, and there has been no sin committed in the world, since our common ancestor plucked the forbidden fruit. You perceive the absurdity involved in the supposition. This throwing the fault on the transgression of Adam, is only reviving a proverb for which God, so severely reproveth the Jews. "Our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and their children's teeth are set on edge." Has not God de-

cided the question, by saying, " All souls are mine: as the soul of the father, so also, the soul of the son is mine.—The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him; and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

That present ability, is the only ground of present obligation to keep the commands of God, may be further illustrated in this manner. Upon the declaration of war, a citizen mutilates his person, in order that he may not be draughted on military service. Now the man deserves to be punished, to the full extent of his guilt, for incapacitating himself for the service of his country. But after he has become mutilated, it would not be right to require of him the service of an able-bodied man, and punish him for not rendering it. He deserves punishment for cutting off his foot, for instance, but it would be tyrannical to require him to walk, after it was cut off. In like manner, if Adam when he first sinned deliberately deprived himself, and all his posterity of the power of future obedience, for *that* sin he richly deserved to be punished, but it would not be equitable, to require any further obedience of him. For the one act, by which he destroyed his power to walk in the ways of obedience, he is to blame, but he is not to blame, for not walking in them, after he has lost the power. It is evident, however, that God did require obedience of Adam after his fall, and that he does still require holy obedience of his fallen descendants, which upon every principle of equity, proves that, though they have lost the will to obey, they did not lose the power, on which every just command is founded.

The second way, in which men evade the force of the argument for natural ability, as it is inferred from the commands of God, is, by saying, *that though we are not able to obey, God has promised to give strength, to those who ask him.* They maintain that the character of God is cleared, from the imputation of commanding an

impossibility, by the promise of supernatural strength, to those who ask it of him.

To this evasion I have four objections, each of which, to my mind appears substantial. In the first place, it *mistakes the nature of that strength, which the grace of God confers*. The influences of the Spirit do not communicate any new physical strength, to the faculties of the mind. Sin does not consist in a weak understanding, or memory, or judgment; nor does grace strengthen any old faculty, or communicate any new one. It merely leads to a right use, of what is already possessed. It inclines its subject to do what he was previously able to do. A person after conversion has no better talents, and no other powers of body or mind than what he had while unconverted. But this he has: he has a different disposition—a new inclination to lay himself out for the glory of God. The evasion, then is incorrect in stating that man stands in need of, and asking shall receive, that which the grace of God never confers, viz: new natural ability for the performance of duty.

In the second place, the evasion is objectionable, inasmuch as it *involves the contradiction of supposing that the sinner does that in order to obtain grace, which it is morally impossible for him to do until he first have grace*. It supposes, that before he can repent, he must pray for grace, while it is certain, that he cannot pray for grace without having first repented. What does the asking for grace mentioned in the evasion mean? a mere utterance of the words of prayer? that surely will not be pretended. Or does it mean the acceptable prayer of sincerity, and faith? But that prayer is never offered by the unrenewed man, nor can it be while he continues such.\* The evasion supposes God to have given a law, which man cannot keep without grace, that grace is only to be obtained by prayer, and yet prayer always pre-supposes grace! It attributes to God, the conduct of one, who should command a man without legs to walk, and then upon his complaining of the command on account of his inability, to alleviate his situation,

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\* See note B.

should command him to walk to him, and he would then give him the power of walking!!

In the third place, I object to the evasion, that if it be true, that a man cannot repent without supernatural strength, and that this only can be obtained by asking God for it, *that the only thing which the sinner is bound to do is to ask*, that the whole of his duty is narrowed down to that one act. He is not bound to repent before he asks, for upon the supposition he is unable, nor is he bound after he asks, for if God hears his prayer, he already repents, and if God does not hear his prayer, he cannot help it. But I need not inquire, whether the duty of prayer, is the only duty enjoined in the Scriptures.

In the fourth place, I object to the evasion, as *derogatory to the character of God, and subversive of the nature of grace*. It supposes the Supreme to have given a law, which men cannot keep, and then to clear himself, promises grace to help them out. It makes the divine procedure, like that, of a king who should levy a tax beyond the resources of his subjects, and should then justify himself, by permitting them to draw on the royal treasury enough to satisfy the demand. Such a procedure is no less subversive of the character of grace. The very term *grace*, implies that it is purely gratuitous, and might be justly withheld. But if grace be *necessary* to obedience, then justice obliges God to confer it, and grace is no more grace, but a mere debt.\*

It still remains true, for aught that has yet appeared to the contrary, that the sinner has power to love God, repent, and embrace the Gospel, according to the commandments of the Most High. This truth is confirmed by many positive texts of Scripture, which attribute the impenitence of sinners, not to a want of ability, but to a want of inclination, or the depravity of the will. "Oh foolish people, and without understanding, which *have eyes, and see not*, which,

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\* See note C.

*have ears, and hear not.*" "Son of man! thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious people, which *have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.*" "Bring forth the *blind* people that *have eyes*, and the *deaf* that *have ears.*" "They are like the deaf adder that *stoppeth her ears*; which will not hearken to the voice of the charmers, charming never so wisely." "Those mine enemies, that *would not*, that I should reign over them; bring hither, and slay before me." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men *love* darkness, rather than light, because their deeds are evil. *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*" "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would not.*" "Ye *will not* come unto me, that ye might have life." All these authorities ascribe the sinner's impenitence, to a voluntary disinclination, and not to a want of ability. But here we shall be told, that there is another class of texts which assert his positive disability; such as these. "No man *can* come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." "How *can* ye being evil speak good things." "How *can* ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" "Having eyes full of adultery, which *cannot* cease from sin." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The remarks already made, have given us a clue, I trust, to the meaning of such passages, which must be interpreted in accordance with the other texts already adduced, as the Bible nowhere contradicts itself. When the Redeemer says "no man *can* come unto me," he himself interprets it, by saying, "ye *will not* come unto me that ye might have life." Instances without number, may be adduced from the Inspired Volume, in which the word *cannot* is used to denote nothing more, than a strong disinclination. "Haste thee, escape thither," said the Angel to Lot, "for I *cannot* do any thing, till thou be come thither." "The tabernacle of the Lord, and the altar of burnt-offering were at Gibeon; but David *could not*

go before it, to inquire of the Lord ; for he was *afraid*, because of the sword of the Angel of the Lord." " *Can* that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt ?" " My iniquities have taken hold of me ; so that I am *not able* to look up." " I am so troubled, that I *cannot* speak." " The Lord hath spoken, who *can* but prophecy?" " This is a hard saying, who *can* hear it?" Joseph's brethren hated him, and " *could not* speak peaceably unto him."

But are not sinners compared to dry bones—very dry in the valley of vision? Can any thing more fully express an entire destitution of power and life? And natural men are said too, to be " dead in trespasses and sins," and what power can be attributed to the dead? Upon a little reflection, all this admits of a very satisfactory elucidation. Sinners are as destitute of every holy feeling, and every gracious emotion, as the dry and scattered bones of those who have been long dead, are of every vestige of animation, and can no more be renewed and sanctified by any application of the means, than that crumbling skeletons should hearken to the Prophet's call, and awaken into life. In like manner, to be dead in trespasses and sins, is to be destitute of all the vitality of holiness, not to be wanting in capacity, for holy duties. Their capacity is implied in the exhortation, " O dry bones! hear the word of the Lord," and in the call to the unconverted, " Awake those that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Being *dead in sin*, necessarily implies being *alive to sin*, and the exercise of those faculties and powers which employed in a different way, would be a new life unto righteousness.

There is yet another objection, to the doctrine of man's having all necessary ability to obey God, which will arise in the minds of some in this form. " It cannot be that I have ability to love and obey God; for I know I have the will, and yet I do it not. If I have wished for any thing, I have wished that I might repent, and believe; but still I find I cannot. Though I have sincerely desired it, and made many earnest endeavours after it, I am still as far from believing and repenting as ever." Correct conceptions of the nature

of the desires, and endeavours of the unrenewed would effectually show you that this plea is ill-founded. This subject has never been set in a clearer light than by President Edwards in his Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will. I will quote a part of what he says in the V. 9. of the III. part of that work. 1. "What is here supposed, is a great mistake and gross absurdity; even that men may sincerely choose and desire those spiritual duties of love, acceptance, choice, rejection, &c., consisting in the Will itself, or in the disposition and inclination of the heart: and yet not be able to perform or exert them. This is absurd, because it is absurd to suppose that a man should directly, properly and sincerely incline to have an inclination, which is at the same time contrary to his inclination: for that is to suppose him inclined to that which he is not inclined to. If a man, in the state and acts of his will and inclination, does properly and directly fall in with those duties, he therein performs them; for the duties themselves consist in that very thing: they consist in the state and acts of the will being so formed and directed. If the soul properly and sincerely falls in with a certain proposed act of the will, or choice, the soul therein makes that choice its own. Even as when a moving body falls in with a proposed direction of its motion, that is the same thing as to move in that direction.

"2. That which is called a *desire* and *willingness* for those inward duties, in such as do not perform them has respect to those duties only indirectly and remotely, and is improperly represented as a willingness for them, not only because it respects those good volitions only in a distant view and with respect to future time; but also because evermore not these things themselves, but something else that is foreign and alien, is the object that terminates their volitions and designs.

"A drunkard who continues in his drunkenness, being under the power of a love and violent appetite to strong drink, and without any love to virtue; but being also extremely covetous and close, and very much exercised and grieved at the diminution of his estate, and the

prospect of poverty, may in a sort *desire* the virtue of temperance ; and though his present will is to gratify his extravagant appetite, yet he may have a wish to forbear future acts of intemperance, and forsake his excesses, through an unwillingness to part with his money : but still goes on with his drunkenness : his wishes and endeavours are insufficient and ineffectual : such a man has no proper, direct and sincere willingness to forsake his vice, & the vicious deeds that belong to it ; for he acts voluntarily in continuing to drink to excess : his desire is very improperly termed a willingness to be temperate ; it is no true desire of that virtue ; for it is not virtue that terminates his wishes ; nor have they any direct respect at all to it. It is only *the saving his money*, and avoiding poverty that terminates and exhausts the whole strength of his desire. The virtue of temperance is regarded only very indirectly and improperly, even as a necessary means of gratifying the vice of covetousness.

“ So, a man of an exceeding corrupt and wicked heart, who has no love to God and Jesus Christ, but, on the contrary, being very profanely and carnally inclined, has the greatest distaste of the things of religion and enmity against them ; yet being of a family that from one generation to another, have most of them died in youth, of an hereditary consumption, and so having little hope of living long ; and having been instructed in the necessity of supreme love to Christ, and gratitude for his death and sufferings, in order to his salvation from eternal misery ; if under these circumstances he should, through fear of eternal torments, wish he had such a disposition ; but his profane and carnal heart remaining, he continues still in his habitual distaste of, and enmity to God and religion, and wholly without any exercise of that love and gratitude, (as doubtless the very devils themselves, notwithstanding all the devilishness of their temper, would wish for a holy heart, if by that means they could get out of hell :) in this case there is no sincere willingness to love Christ and choose him as his chief good : these holy dispositions, and exercises are not at all the direct object of the will : they truly share no part of the

inclination or desire of the soul ; but all is terminated on deliverance from torment ; and these graces and pious volitions, notwithstanding this forced consent, are looked upon undesirable, as when a sick man desires a dose he greatly abhors, to save his life.”

From this it clearly appears that you have never really desired holiness, for which you have had no more than an indirect wish as a necessary means of escaping hell. The apprehension of misery is all that excites your anxiety, and should a new revelation from heaven assure you that the mouth of the pit was forever closed, your religious solicitude would be effectually allayed, and your desires for holiness completely gone. That you have had such desires and with such feelings have made earnest endeavours, and still continue unholy is a matter of no surprise, and can never be adduced as a just argument to disprove that a holy inclination is all that is wanting to make you holy, and that of course you have the natural ability to be holy.

There is another and last objection to this doctrine which I shall briefly notice. It is this. If no man ever did, if no man ever will become holy without the supernatural influences of the spirit ; how can it be said with any propriety that men have the natural ability to become holy of themselves ?

I answer by asking what it is that makes the influences of the Spirit necessary in any case ? Is it that men have no natural faculties or power to obey God ? or is it because they are averse of their own accord to use them, an aversion so strong that it never will give way till the Almighty Spirit makes them willing, an aversion so universal that no one ever has or will exist without it ? I leave you to judge now whether it be a fair inference, that because all men are thus obstinately unwilling to do their duty, that therefore no man is able to do it. The fact that every one who becomes a Christian, becomes such by the influences of the Spirit, does not touch the question of man's natural power, but only proves the universality of this unwillingness—a truth which is not in dispute.

Having thus proved, I trust, that all men have natural ability to obey God, and that the only reason why they do not, is purely voluntary, in short: is their unwillingness, and having answered such objections to the doctrine, as I am acquainted with; I proceed to deduce, and illustrate a few practical inferences.

I remark,

1. That, if men have power to obey God, *the want of a disposition to do so, is no excuse for disobedience*, and therefore that God may justly condemn them for want of a right disposition. Very frequently when sinners are urged to the duties of repentance, faith, & love to God, they plead that they have no heart for them, & leave us to infer, that they are not to blame for their impenitence, because God has not given them a different heart. My object under this head of remark, is to show the perfect futility of this common plea.

The Most High never blames for the want of talents, which he has not given, nor requires the improvement of talents, which he has not given. But a talent entrusted lays a foundation for the obligation to improve it, and gives God a right to demand its improvement. The natural ability, which he confers on men, when he endows them with all the qualifications for moral agency, constitutes a good reason why they should employ that ability, in a right manner, that is, as the Creator commands. If men have power to obey, their want of inclination to do so, is no manner of reason why they should be excused from it. But it has been proved that men have power to obey; and the inference is, that their want of disposition to do so, is not only no excuse, but the very ground of their condemnation,—an inference so clear, that it would seem superfluous to add any thing further, were it not daily denied by saints, and sinners, when they urge their want of a different heart, as an excuse for not acting differently. But the principle is not acknowledged in the intercourse of human society, where the mere want of disposition, is never considered a valid plea for the non-performance of duty. If a subject rebels against his King, it will not avail him, that he never

had, and never would feel right towards him. His disloyal and treasonable disposition is the ground of his condemnation. If a servant who is in health, and fully able to work, refuses to be industrious, will his master consider it any excuse, that he says he does not love to work, and feels too indolent for labour? If a child plead a want of love, and respect for his parent, as a reason for his undutiful and disobedient conduct, will his parent on that ground absolve him from his filial obligations? No more is it reasonable for a sinner to expect, that our Heavenly King, Master, and Father, will release him from his obligations to obedience, because he has no disposition to obey.

Again, if a want of disposition to obey, is any excuse for disobedience; God has no right to punish any creature for transgression. The moment any holy being sins, he loses his disposition to obey, and whenever he is called to an account, may plead his want of disposition to obey, and if that plea be valid, the Supreme Lawgiver has nothing more to say to him. He must let him pass with impunity. And then upon this principle, whenever a being sins, he places himself beyond the reach of justice! And then upon this principle if the whole moral universe of God, should rebel against him this moment, they would effectually place themselves beyond the obligations of his law, and the controul of his Government! For they could all then plead a want of disposition. Upon this principle, the Judge of all can never call an offender to a reckoning, and all the penalties in his law denounced against transgression, are mere empty threatenings. This monstrous principle at once strikes at the foundations of Jehovah's throne, and denies his right to reign at all. And yet it is involved in the excuse perpetually urged by men, that they have no disposition to do better than they do.

Again, if the excuse be at all valid, the more sinful a man becomes, the less deserving is he of punishment. For if a disinclination to duty is a reason, why one should not be punished for its neglect; then a stronger disinclination is a stronger reason, why one should not be punished for its neglect; and thus as the disinclination increases in

strength, does the excuse increase in its validity. But if to feel a disinclination for duty is sinful, a stronger disinclination is more deeply sinful. And if the stronger the disinclination, the more valid the excuse, then the more deeply sinful, the more valid the excuse, that is, the more deeply sinful a man becomes, the less deserving is he of condemnation.

Again, if God has not a right to demand a holy disposition of those, who have it not, he has no right to demand any thing of them. For he has no right to demand natural ability, or power, of them which he has not communicated—talents, which he has not entrusted. Nor will it be said, that it would be right for him, to demand wickedness, or an unholy disposition. The only other thing, which is left, which he can demand is holiness, or an holy heart, and if he may not justly demand *that* of those who have it not, (which if the excuse be valid he may not,) then the Most High has absolutely no right to demand any thing of the sinner.

Again, if this excuse be a good one, there is no such thing, as sin in the world. For all sin may be reduced to a want of right disposition, and if men are not to blame for this, they are not to blame for any thing, and there is no blameworthy creature in existence.

Again, in offering this excuse, sinners necessarily condemn the ever-blessed God. Like the unprofitable servant, who hid his master's talent, they come into his presence and say "Lord! I knew thee, that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed." In presenting this excuse, you throw all the blame on God. For he *does* demand your heart, though you have no disposition to give it him, and he threatens you with endless misery, if you do not comply. Now if your excuse is good, God is requiring what is not right, nay he is doing you an infinite wrong, in threatening infinite woe. With all this, you by implication charge him, in your self-justifying pleas, and all this is true, if your plea is well founded. Oh! sinner, do you consider

what blame your guilty excuses are heaping upon your Maker? They will all be rolled back upon you by an Almighty arm, and will fall with an overwhelming weight, and crush you, if not repented of, while yet you are in the way with your Adversary.

Again, you never accept such a plea from another, when you are the party injured, and self-love does not blind you. When a fellow creature distresses, and hates you, you do not deem him excused, because he pleads that he has no right disposition towards you. And what reason can you assign, why God should accept such a plea from you? Nay, there are moments in which conscience, that will be no longer silenced, speaks out and condemns you for doing things, although when you did them, you had no disposition to do otherwise. The rake who is overtaken with shame, poverty, and disease, bitterly condemns himself, although in his career of licentiousness, he had no disposition to do otherwise. The convicted sinner condemns himself, when he sees the fatal consequences of transgression, though at the time of his disobedience, he had no disposition to do otherwise. The sons of Jacob, after they had abused their brother Joseph, Pharaoh, after he had persisted in refusing to emancipate the Israelites, Saul, after he had spared the Amalekites, and Judas, after he had betrayed innocent blood, all condemned themselves, for their conduct, although at the time of it, they had no disposition to act in a different manner. And all sinners, sooner or later, either when the light of conviction shall pour upon their hearts, in this world, or the light of eternity, break upon their vision, in the next, perceiving the falseness of their plea, and themselves stripped of every excuse, and condemned, shall bitterly lament, that they ever attempted to make one. Far better acknowledge your guilt at once, nor longer try to fortify yourselves against a sense of blame. So long as you succeed in soothing your consciences with the belief that you can in any way be excused for the want of holiness, you are proof against conviction of guilt. So long as you cover yourself with the shield of self-justification, the arrows of the Most Mighty who kills to make alive, and who wounds to heal, will never reach your heart. So long as

your hearts are disposed to break his bands asunder, and cast the cords of his obligations from you; He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh at your folly, and vex you in his sore displeasure. Throw your bosoms open then, to a sense of your inexcusable guilt. Be willing to see yourselves as you are, and acknowledge what you see. Like self-condemned traitors, tie the halter about your necks, with your own hands. and then go, and throw yourselves, upon the mercy of the king, before a legal investigation shall extort the confession of treasonable guilt, and pardon being passed, the redemption of your souls cease forever.

The doctrine of man's natural ability, has been made to bear upon the case of the unconverted sinner. It has been shown, that possessing power to obey, his want of inclination admits of no possible excuse. It remains to show that it has an equal bearing upon the case of the converted saint. God not only commands, that the sinner should repent, and embrace the Gospel, but that the saint should be perfectly holy, and so far as he comes short of it, he is inexcusable on the same ground, that the unreconciled sinner is inexcusable. Natural ability to perform our whole duty, is the basis of the sinner's obligation to repent, and be perfectly, and holy of the obligation of the saint, who has repented, to be perfectly holy. And the only reason, why no one on earth, either saint, or sinner is perfectly holy, is that no one on earth has a perfect inclination to be holy. The difference between a renewed person, and an unrenewed, is that the one has a partial inclination to be holy, and that the other has no inclination at all. The difference between a saint upon earth, and a saint in heaven is, that the one has but a partial inclination to be holy, and the other has a perfect inclination to be so. Now as saints, and sinners possess the same natural ability to be holy, the saint is no more excusable, for his varying and imperfect inclination, than the sinner is for his total want of a right inclination.—The servant who works lazily in his master's employment, is reprehensible on the same ground, though not to the same extent, with the servant, who will not work at all. And yet many christian persons speak, and feel, as

though they were not aware of this. They look back upon the days of their unregeneracy, and heartily condemn their character as inexcusable, but see but little guilt in not being now, vastly more holy than they are. They reason much like the impenitent, when they speak of the strength of their corruptions, as something which they cannot help, and excuse themselves in the want of more intensely holy feelings, because God has not given them larger measures of his grace. Now they are blameworthy, not merely on the ground, that their careless walk, and indevotion have deprived them of the larger effusions of the Spirit, which remedy the wrong disposition of the heart, but on the broader basis of their natural ability, which at all times, obliges them as accountable creatures, not merely to be partially, but perfectly holy. Hence ought the children of God to feel, that they should be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect, that every degree of short-coming, as it does not arise from a want of power, but of disposition is inexcusable, that God has a right to demand their perfection on the ground of their ability, without giving the influences of his Spirit, that such is their guilty disinclination to perfect holiness that it never will be overcome, except by the Sovereign and Almighty Power of the Spirit, and that all their desires after perfect holiness, so long as they are not perfectly holy, like the sinner's desires after repentance are not proper, direct, and sincere.

I remark,

2. That if men possess natural ability to do and to be all that God requires, it follows, that they are not passive in regeneration.

The common opinion, that depravity consists in a depraved heart, existing anterior to depraved feelings, that it is a constitutional and physical pravity independent of our will, and that regeneration which remedies it, is a miraculous creation of a new nature, from which holy feelings spring, the production of a new faculty, which the sinner never possessed before, and the infusion of a new principle which must be possessed in order to render him capable of holy feelings, is

inconsistent with the doctrine of man's natural ability, to do all that God requires,—or shall we not rather say, that the doctrine of man's natural ability is subversive of such an idea of his passivity in regeneration! God commands men to make them new hearts, and a new spirit. He makes it their duty to be regenerate. And men have natural ability to do and to be all that God commands. But if regeneration be the creation of a new physical faculty, an operation in which man is passive, he has no ability to be regenerate. Nay, if God requires that of us in which we are *passive*, he requires *nothing* of us. He requires that we should be *acted upon*, not that *we should act*. But it is evident, that the prevalent idea of passivity in regeneration, quite mistakes the nature of that change. It attributes moral character to something which exists anterior to the voluntary, active exercises of the soul, for which alone conscience, and Scripture declare us responsible. Again, all that the divine law requires is love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "The fruit of the Spirit is love." To make a new heart then means nothing more than to exercise holy love. And is a man passive in the exercise of holy love? This view of the subject is agreeable to the experience of all, who ever have become regenerate. They are not conscious of the creation of any new power—of the infusion of any new principle, in which they were passive, but are merely sensible of the exercise of new holy feelings, which they know indeed they would never, left to themselves, have chosen to exercise, but in which they were as voluntary and active, as in any unholy feelings they ever exercised.—They act in being acted upon. It cannot be shown in what respect the first holy exercise differs from any of the subsequent ones, except in its being the first. And if a saint is active in all his subsequent holy exercises of mind, what reason can be assigned why he is not in the first? The same power which began must perpetuate holiness in his heart, and as the saint is active in perpetuated holiness, so is he active in commencing holiness.

Again, if men are naturally able to do their whole duty, nothing but their unwillingness keeps them from it.—If they were willing,

if they had holy inclinations, their duty would be performed, and the first exercise of these would be their regeneration, but is it not evident that they would be active in this? Is a man passive in willing to be holy, or in holy inclinations? Men are not bound to possess the influences of the Spirit of God, for them they cannot command. They are dispensed in uncontrollable sovereignty. But they are bound to possess those holy feelings which that Spirit produces. They are bound to have new hearts, that is, holiness. So long as men think that regeneration is some miraculous operation in which they are passive, and necessarily must be wrought by an agent which they cannot command, so long in short, as the new heart is supposed to be any thing besides the first exercise of holy feelings, men will deny their natural ability to be holy, repel all exhortations to be converted, and never feel the force of the obligation to make them new hearts and a new spirit.

I remark,

3. If sinners are naturally able to comply with their duty, and yet unwilling to do it, we are furnished with a satisfactory reconciliation of those passages of Scripture, which speak of repentance, faith, and love as *man's duty* with those passages which speak of them as *God's gift*. It explains the consistency of men's being in some places commanded to make them new hearts, and the new heart being in other places, said to be the work of the Spirit, and the gift of God.

In the first place, men by the very possession of natural ability, are laid under obligations to be holy. The natural talents with which God has entrusted them they *ought* to improve by the exercise of holy affections. And what they ought to do, God has a right to command them to do. It is therefore, right in God to command men to love him, to repent, and believe in Christ. Their power to do so, lays them under obligations to do so, from which they can in no wise be excused. And hence the propriety of speaking of love, repentance, and faith, as *man's duty*, and urging him to its immediate per-

formance. But in the next place, though this is man's duty, he is obstinately unwilling to do it, and that is his depravity. Urge him to it, ply him with all the inducements, which the whole magazine of truth affords, and in all the ways, which the whole system of means can present them, and he will still refuse. The wicked will continue to do wickedly. Though Christ most tenderly invites him, he will not go unto him, that he might have life. Now God, who sees him in this guilty frame of mind, perceives that he can by the Almighty influence of his Spirit upon the heart, remove his obstinacy, and make him willing to love, repent, and believe, and when he does it, he is said to *give* him love, repentance, and faith. But is it not clear, that what God has given him he was bound of himself to have, and that the exercises of love, repentance, and faith, which are God's gift, were his duty before God gave them? And it would have been right to have urged him to relinquish his obstinacy, before God subdued him by his grace, and made him willing in the day of his power, and if God had never done so, it would still have been his unalterable duty to be willing. Hence we see the propriety of exhorting sinners to repentance, and holiness of heart: for they are bound to it, independently of the grace of God, while another portion of revealed truth assures us, that if they ever do repent, and become holy, it will be in consequence of repentance given, and holiness communicated by the Sovereign and free Spirit of God. Hence we see the reason why God, as a *moral Governor* invariably demands holiness, and in some instances as a *Sovereign* confers it. Thus is it consistent in him, to urge all sinners to make them new hearts, and in some instances to give them new hearts. Thus is what in all cases is man's duty; in some cases, God's gift.

I remark,

4. That, if men have natural ability to embrace the Gospel, and are not willing to do it, the destruction of the non-elect, is to be attributed entirely to themselves.

It has been constantly urged by the supporters of Arminianism, that if none *possibly can* embrace the Gospel, but those on whom a

Sovereign God confers his grace ; then the rest of mankind, the non-elect are placed under a hard, and invincible necessity of being forever lost. And the objection is unanswerable. If such be the condition of the non-elect, all the reasoning, and Scripture in the world, cannot silence the irrepressible dictates of common sense. If those on whom God does not intend ; and therefore does not bestow grace, have no power to embrace the Gospel ; then it is hard, that they should perish for not embracing it. It is to no purpose to say that, they are justly condemned for their transgression of the law, and had no right to expect that God should ever provide a Saviour, or place pardon within their reach. The whole of this is granted. If indeed, the non-elect are treated as the mere transgressors of the law, and never having had mercy offered, die without the guilt of its rejection, it must be allowed there is no injustice done them. They justly perish like the devils, without excuse, and without the offer of pardon. But is this a scriptural view of their situation, at least of those of them who perish amidst the light of the Gospel ? Is not the word of this salvation which was commanded to be preached to every creature sent to them also ? Are they not the prisoners of hope as well as others ? The word which Christ spoke shall that not judge them and are they not condemned for not receiving the Gospel ? And how can we answer him, who inquires into the equity of condemning the non-elect, for not doing what they have no power to do ? The objection, I repeat it, is unanswerable. So long as the natural inability of the sinner is maintained, the Arminian may strike a blow at the vitals of Calvinism which no skill can parry. It was this unfounded idea of the sinner's impotence in every sense held by Hill, Toplady, and others in the famous controversy which took place in Great Britain about the middle of the last century, which gave such an advantage to Wesley, Fletcher, and their co-adjutors, when they appealed to the equitable feelings of mankind. While the former founded the doctrine of sovereign, and unconditional election upon indisputable testimonies of the word of God, they connected it with a view of human ability so subversive of justice, that the latter, thinking, that the *doctrine* and the *view* must stand or fall together, and seeing the horrid consequences of the view, soon persuaded themselves, that

the doctrine was not contained in any of those texts, in which it is so incontrovertibly declared. Instead of maintaining that no man possibly can embrace the Gospel without the grace of God, had the friends of election maintained that to a *certainly no man will* believe without the influences of the Spirit, and that his impenitence, and unbelief arise from no obstacle, but an obstinate and voluntary rejection of mercy and aversion to holiness, there had not probably been made a breach great like the sea, which has not been healed to this day. It would then have been seen, that an interest in the great salvation, is placed within the reach of all, that men in rejecting it, are not controuled by an impossibility, or fatality, but *choose* death, *become the authors of their own destruction*, and are justly condemned; and it would then have been admitted by all the truly pious, that though all continue to reject salvation with a desperate obstinacy, God has power to remove that obstinacy, and can make them willing in the day of his power without destroying, or interfering with the freedom of their will, and that he has a right to exercise that power on whom he chooses, according to the good pleasure of his will, and that the discrimination does no injury to those who are passed by. The inference would then have appeared easy to most of those, who now hold contrary views, that what God does, he must have intended to do, and that if it is right for God, in time, to bestow on some that grace which he might justly have withheld from all, then it was right in God from eternity to make that selection and design to confer that grace.

I remark,

5. If men possess natural ability to turn to God, and nothing prevents them, but their unwillingness, then it is a wicked thing in them to be waiting God's time, till he shall by the influences of his Spirit turn them.

It follows, that the moment you know your duty, you are bound to perform it. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." To continue in the neglect of duty, when no in-

pediment stands in the way, I need not say, is wicked. But how much more wicked is it to neglect it for such reasons, and with such feelings as these? “ I know that it is my duty to love, and obey God, and that it is reasonable, and proper that I should. But I am determined not to do so, until God by his Holy Spirit shall at some time, overpower my repugnance, and make me do it. He can do it, if he pleases, as he has done to many unwilling sinners besides myself. I will, therefore, wait his own time. I will continue to offend him till he conquers me by his grace. I will prolong, my ungodly contest with him, till he makes me drop my weapons. And if his time should never come, if he never subdues my obstinacy in the day of his power, I will continue his enemy till I die.” Now this is by fair construction, the feelings of those who are unwilling to turn to God, and are waiting for God’s time to turn them by the irresistible influences of his Spirit. It may be presenting the subject in a little more glaring and obvious light, than you have been wont to view it. But it is all involved in a willingness to neglect religion, until you can no longer help attending to it, in your intention to continue impenitent, till God shall arise in his power, and break, and subdue, and change your heart. And what, my friend, if God’s time should never come? What, if God’s time should never come! Are you willing to risque the welfare of your eternity, upon the certainty of such an event? This thing is certain: that God’s time will never come while you continue to think as you do. It will never come until you feel, that you cannot defer your duty any longer, until the pressing conviction is urged upon your mind that “ now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Now *is* God’s accepted time, the only time that you may ever know. “ To-day then, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” And will you still maintain the controversy with your Maker by pleading, that you have *no natural ability* to obey. No! you cannot do that, as long as God is just, and commands obedience, as long as the Scriptures are true, and attribute your impenitence to a voluntary and chosen disinclination, and not to a want of power. Or acknowledging your natural ability to obey, will you still plead your *want of disposition* as a sufficient

excuse? What! plead that as an excuse, which is never accepted in human society—an excuse, which denies God's right to punish any creature upon his revolt against his government—an excuse, which would prove, that the more sinful you become the less deserving of punishment—which virtually denies God's right to demand any thing of his creatures—an excuse, which would disprove the existence of any moral evil in the universe—an excuse, which carries with it the highest impeachment of the Divine Equity—one which you would reject with indignation were it offered you by a fellow-creature—one, which in the lucid intervals of your moral perception, you cannot accept from yourself, and one too, which persisted in will be ruinous, by precluding you from all conviction of guilt, and is incompatible with that feeling of self-condemnation, which must precede the extension of mercy towards you? And do you now say, that a conviction that your excuse is inexcusable, does not alter your disposition? that you still have no heart to repent and how can you? What now let me ask, would you think of a child who after he had wantonly and impudently offended his parent, and that aggrieved parent had come, and told him to be sorry for what he had done, should reply that he did not feel like it, that he had no heart to repent—would you not think that he was adding obstinacy to insult? And when the parent should still urge upon him the obligation to repent, he should plead his impenitent disposition as an excuse, and inquire how he was to get a better spirit—would you not say, that he was bound to have a better spirit—that his urging such an excuse and asking such a question, was only evidence of the continuance of his depraved inclination, that the plea was futile and aggravating, and only added insult to obstinacy? In a manner exactly similar are you acting towards God, and in a similar light does he regard your self-justification. But you say you offer no excuse—"I am convinced that I am guilty and inexcusable, that my very plea might justly be made the ground of my condemnation, but still my heart does not relent. May I not by my prayers insure that grace, which shall change my disposition? If I continue to pray will not God give me

another heart?" \* No! you have no assurance that he will. If he does: it will not be in answer to your prayers, much less can your praying insure it. Repentance is your primary and indispensable duty. This is the first step you can take towards the performance of your duty, and the enjoyment of God's favour. Until this is done, nothing is done. A subject rebels against a wise and good Sovereign. Pardon is proclaimed on condition that he throw down his arms and submit. Now it will little avail him, that he sends flattering messages to his sovereign, indites the most friendly addresses to the throne, or acts the most kindly part towards his fellow subjects, so long as he continues in arms and refuses to submit. If the arm of power arrest him in this condition, he will be treated, and condemned as a rebel. Having in like manner, rebelled against the King of Kings, who has sent you a proclamation of mercy on condition of repentance and submission, it will avail you nothing, that you offer the most importunate prayers, that you most diligently use the means of grace, behave in the most unexceptionable manner towards your fellow men, provided you have not first repented, and submitted to God. Till you do this, every prayer you offer is mockery, every means you use, is making you worse and worse. Not only does praying without repentance leave you in a state of condemnation, but impenitent prayers however long continued will not avail to procure repentance, either by any intrinsic efficacy of their own, or by virtue of any promise, that God has given in his word. There is not one word of encouragement in the whole compass of the Scriptures, to any exertions of any one while he continues impenitent, and unconverted. Without repentance you may pray till your last breath expires, and read the Scriptures till the mists of death settle on your vision, and God not give you grace at last, and then it will be no more an imputation on the character of the Supreme, that he allowed an awakened person to die without mercy, than that he lets thousands of careless persons die without awakening. In short, I dare not with the word of God for my guide, direct you to pray previous to repentance, and

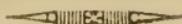
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\* See note D.

as a means of getting it—for that would be to direct you to offer an impenitent prayer, it would to direct you to prolong rebellion, by substituting an insulting mockery for genuine submission. We must adhere to the record, and beseech you to be reconciled to God, on his terms, and without delay. We must urge your obligations, and call on you to cast away all your transgressions, whereby ye offend, and make you a new heart and a new spirit. To all your professions of desires after holiness, of endeavours after conversion, and persevering prayers, we must bring you back to indispensable duty, and ask, do you love God? do you repent of sin? do you believe in Christ? “No I do not. I cannot.” What! is there nothing in the character of the infinitely glorious, and blessed God, that you can admire and love? No form, nor comeliness in Christ, why you should desire him? Oh what a wicked heart is that of yours, that I must stand here and plead the rights of God with you, and after all you should say that you cannot love him. The very first apprehension of his being and character should be enough to fire your hearts: You can love the world, you can love contemptible pleasures, and sinful fellow-creatures. You can love your guilty and polluted selves. You can love *sin*, the most loathsome thing in the universe, and can then plead, that you cannot love God! Hear, oh heavens! and be astonished, oh earth! “How can I repent?” How can you *help* repenting? If you loved God it would be an immediate and spontaneous emotion of your heart. You would take a sacred pleasure in indulging your grief before God. You would feel as though you should choose to go sorrowing down to your grave, and up to the world where Jesus is. How can you *help* repenting? Is it not the most rational thing in the world? Can you think of sin, and its exceeding sinfulness without being filled with self-abhorrence! Can you look upon him, whom your sins have pierced without your eyes affecting your heart! “How can I believe in Christ?” How is it that you have been able to live so long without believing in him? How have you contrived to remain easy in your condemned situation, to refuse an offered and a finished salvation, to despise the bleeding love of Christ,

trample under foot the blood of the covenant, reject the Saviour's kind invitations, doubt his gracious assurances, and expose yourselves to all the consequences of incurring the wrath of the Lamb? Would to God that he would arise and make you feel as though you *could* no longer disbelieve

# NOTES.



## A.

HUMAN authority much as the natural indolence of the mind disposes us to rely on it, as it is no safe arbitrator; so in this case it passes no uniform decision. Calvin himself expressly attributes human corruption not to any natural inability but to a moral pravity. The Divines of the Westminster Assembly have been appealed to. In the answer to the 82d question of the shorter Catechism they state, "No mere man is *able* in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." As they have not explained their meaning of the ambiguous word *able*, their testimony is equivocal. Probably they meant to guard against the notions of some of that day who professed to be perfectly holy. Had Dr. Arrowsmith lived to complete his "Chain of principles," which is a mental history of that admirable form of sound words, we should have been informed what that body of Divines intended by the statement. Dr. Twiss who was prolocutor of that Assembly and whose principles stood at the very acme of supralapsarian strictness, somewhere in his writings accurately makes the distinction between natural and moral ability. Dr. Watts among the English Dissenters, and Dr. McLaurin among the Scotch Divines do the same. But it is evident, that the Divines of New England were the first who saw its importance and traced its bearings. Mr. Newton mentioned to a friend, that he had read a manuscript copy of the two sermons of Dr. Smalley of Connecticut, on natural ability, but it is evident

from his writings, that he never understood the subject.—It appears from Dr. Ryland's life of Fuller, that many of the Calvinistic Divines of the middle of the last century, carried their ideas of the sinner's inability so far, that they never exhorted them to the duties of faith, & repentance; but directed the whole of their discourses to the regenerate. And in this it must be acknowledged, they acted consistently with their principles. The writings of Mr. Fuller, particularly his "Gospel worthy of all acceptance," and his controversy with Mr. Button, have, it is believed, done much to disseminate correcter views among the Clergy of Great Britain, though among them there yet exists that division of sentiment, which still obtains among the Presbyterians of the Western continent.

## B.

IF sincerity and faith are essential to acceptable prayer, then unconverted sinners never pray acceptably.

For 1. They are not *sincere*. For the most part their prayers are a mere *form*, an utterance of words, and they may generally be said, not so much to *pray* as to *say their prayers*. But if indeed, as is sometimes the case, they are in earnest, and importunate in their supplications, presenting them with strong crying, and tears, and deep anxiety for their salvation; they are still insincere. They have at heart no desire for holiness, no loathing of sin, but are merely anxious to escape the punishment of sin. They do not desire conversion, except as a step to escape hell, and were they assured, there were no such place, their anxieties, and their prayers would come to an end together. So long as they are unconverted, they never pray for grace with real desire, and in all their petitions to be made holy dissemble before God, and if they think their heart is not still enmity against God amidst all their seriousness, they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them.

2. Sinners never pray with *faith*, and do not come within the promise. They have no realising sense that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him. The desires which they feel, are only offered at a *peradventure*. They think perhaps, he may hear them, but of a reliance on his word, a laying hold on his promise, they are unconscious. Tossed by their doubts, like a wave at sea, it is not surprising that they receive nothing of the Lord. Besides this, they have no faith in the atoning merits of Christ through whom alone the prayer of the upright can be accepted, and who offers to God the prayers of all saints, with the much incense of his own worthiness.

Harmonising with these views, are many express declarations of Scripture, which clearly state, that the prayers of the unregenerate are not acceptable to God. Not only is the “plowing of the wicked sin,” but his “sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord.” “But the prayer of the *upright* is his delight, the Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the righteous.” “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “I will that men pray every where, lifting up *holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*” God inquires of ancient Israel “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination to me.” “The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him in *truth.*” It is “the effectual fervent prayer of the *righteous* man” that “availeth much.” “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer.” But all the unregenerate, though they may be in a state of *anxious* impenitence, do supremely regard iniquity in their hearts. “Now we know,” says the man in the Gospel “that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.” It appears, therefore, that unregenerate men, never pray with sincerity and faith, the two essential qualities of acceptable worship, and by many express and implied declarations of Scripture, that their prayers are displeasing to God. The question may now occur, “What must the unconverted sinner do? Shall he continue to pray with an unregenerate heart, or shall he leave off praying altogether? Which of these two shall he do?” I answer, NEITHER. Of two *natural* evils let us always choose the least, but of two *moral* evils we must choose neither. Of two misfortunes we must choose the less, but of two crimes we

must choose neither. It is a sin to pray with an unholy heart, and it is a sin not to pray at all. We have no business to determine which of them is the greatest sin, and then direct you to commit the less. You must do neither the one, nor the other. Your duty is to pray with a renewed and holy heart. And this you can do. You can repent, and you can love God at this moment if you will. In other words, you can make you a new heart and a new spirit, and having a new heart and a new spirit, you can pray with sincerity and faith. This is the only thing we are authorised to direct the sinner to do, and till he does this he is under all the curses which are written in the Book.

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### C.

THE Wesleyan Methodists, an evangelical and highly useful body of Christians, deny man's natural ability to do his duty, and yet attempt to justify the divine character, and urge human obligation, by saying that God gives every man a portion of grace, which if he will properly improve he shall be saved. They urge in proof of it that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." No text has been more miserably perverted from the meaning, which the context determines it to have, than this. All that the apostle meant, was that the various supernatural endowments of the members of the Corinthian Church, such as the working of miracles, speaking in an unknown tongue, interpreting that tongue, discerning of spirits, &c., were communicated to promote the edification of all the members of the church. It has no reference to either common grace, or saving grace, but to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. But the sentiment alluded to, is held on other grounds than the wrong interpretation of the text adduced. It appears to me however, to imply the same inconsistency in the Divine Government, and the same disannulling of the nature of grace with which the evasion already noticed is chargeable. It does not appear how that can be called *grace*, which is necessary to give

God a right to command, or man ability to obey. Besides, what is the nature of that communication of the Spirit? Does it merely strengthen our faculties, clear our perceptions, and *give us power to comply with duty?* or *does it impart an inclination to obey?* If the former, then it is an increase of our natural ability, and doubtless if improved, that is; if we use that ability and obey, we shall be saved. If this is what is meant, it is a truism which has never been disputed; though it has not yet been shown how the increase of natural ability has any tendency to remedy moral inability, or how additions to our power, will ever correct a perverted inclination. If it be said that the rectification of the perverted inclination, or the first disposition to improve, and use natural ability aright be owing to a self-determining power of the will, without any influence from without, which all other men do not feel, then the saint makes himself to differ from others, and regeneration is of him who willeth and of him who runneth, and not of God who sheweth mercy. Again, if by common grace is meant that an *inclination to obey* is imparted, it will follow that all men are in a measure holy, for an inclination to obey is holiness, and all men are by the supposition, partakers of that common grace, which imparts such an inclination. If this view be correct, then all men are saints, and their present probation consists in this: whether they shall become more holy, and continue saints; or whether they shall become sinners. But I am confident that pious and intelligent Methodists would refuse to follow out the consequences, which are involved in their doctrine of common grace upon either supposition that must be made. Thus far, I believe the Bible warrants them in saying: that all men are at some parts of their lives more or less under the common influences of the Spirit, which strove with the ante-diluvians during all the period in which the ark was building, which was grieved and rebelled against by the Israelites whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, and which was resisted by those hard hearted and stiff necked sinners who murdered Stephen. That same Spirit still pursues with awakenings and convictions of guilt and mental anxiety the hearts of all men. It is to be greatly feared that most men continue to harden themselves till that grieved Spirit entirely abandons them, and the things which belong to their peace are forever hid from their eyes. Of such it may be said that had even *they* yielded to his influences they would have been saved. But so long as they do not yield, (which they do never in any measure till they give their hearts to

God,) it cannot be said, that they are the subject of any gracious influences, or holy feelings. It is merely an increase of their natural ability, an addition to the sensibility of conscience—an urging of motives which are disregarded, a deepening of convictions which are stifled, a process which so far from proving any thing like the existence of holiness, only shows the desperate aversion of the heart to all that is good.

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## D.

*On the proper directions to be given to inquiring and anxious sinners, as respects the means of grace.*

There are two methods of directing sinners on this subject pursued by Ministers and Christians, one of which and by far the most common I cannot but look upon as unwarranted and highly dangerous. My solicitude for the results of this mode induces me to add this note in the hope that it may meet the eye of some Minister or active Christian, whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose, and who yet may through inconsideration have adopted the unscriptural method of dealing with the anxious of which I speak. When such persons are asked by any one “What must I do to be saved?” they reply “repent and believe the Gospel,” and so far correctly. The sinner replies that he *cannot* do it. They tell him to “pray to God to enable him, and give him a heart for it, to continue in the use of the means in the hope that he shall sooner or later find grace, that none ever sought in vain, and that he must lie at the pool of the ordinances till the Spirit descend to bless him.” I have even known a venerable Divine urge the latter allusion so far, as to tell a sinner he had not been using the means so long as the lame man who lay at the pool of Bethesda, who had been waiting for a cure for 38 years. !

Now this counsel given to an inquirer *directly tends to stifle his convictions; is a virtual relinquishment of God's claim on the heart; is an inconsistent direction to do what is as difficult as repentance itself; and is contrary to scriptural direction, and scriptural example.*

Such a counsel *directly tends to* stifle a sinner's convictions. His conscience has been disturbed. The light of divine truth, has been poured upon his guilty heart. He feels the force of God's demands upon his love and obedience, and it is his unwillingness to comply with these demands together with a conviction that he must, if he would be saved that wrings his heart with anguish. At this juncture his spiritual guide instead of seconding the influences of the Spirit by urging home the obligations he already begins to feel, tells him "to use the means, and lie at the pool waiting God's time and he shall not be disappointed." Glad to catch at any thing rather than immediately give his heart to God he complies with the direction. He uses the means, and prays and reads and hears, and thinks he is now doing his duty. His conscience is relieved, his distress disappears, and he consoles himself with the thought, that if he is not saved, it will not be his fault, for he has done all he could and all the Minister allowed he could. Thus are his convictions stifled and his fears allayed. His feelings under judicious management might have issued in a happy conversion. But he relapses into a state of indifference, from which he may never again awake, or if he dies while he continues in an unconverted use of the means, he is lost, and may say to his counsellor when they meet at the judgment seat of Christ, "I followed your direction, and I went to hell." The relief which is afforded the convictions of the anxious when he ascertains that he may do something beside immediate repentance and submission and preliminary to it, is the reason why such preaching and such directions are so much approved by the unregenerate. Every Minister knows that when he urges obligation, and immediate submission, it produces an outcry of hard doctrine, that it aggravates the feelings of the anxious, who as the cords of obligation are drawn close, feel the pain intolerable. And yet a little consideration must show that the preaching which produces such effects must be right, that minds hostile to duty are averse to have it exhibited, and that the doctrine which soothes the conscience of the impenitent must be wrong. Every ambassador of Christ will find that the more strictly he adheres to his instructions, the more successful he will be in his negotiations, that urging on sinners the obligation to make them new hearts, and giving them no direction which does not involve a compliance with it, is the readiest way under God of producing conviction, and conducting it to a happy and speedy issue. The writer has been privileged with the op-

portunity of seeing more or less directly its desirable effects in the hopeful conversion of above 120 souls within a year past, very few of whom were longer than a few days, in a state of conviction.

In the next place, such a direction, is a *virtual relinquishment of God's claim on the heart*. When the sinner objects to the Gospel injunction to repent, that he *cannot*, he is only expressing his repugnance to the duty. It is not true, that he cannot, in any other sense than that he *will not*. To direct him to use the means of grace in order to get a better heart, is to allow that the objection is valid. The meaning which it conveys to his mind is "you cannot repent, it is true, but you can pray for repentance." Of consequence it follows that God has no right to make such a demand, and the sinner is under no obligation to comply with it. The point in controversy between God and the sinner, viz: the Creator's claim on the heart is conceded to the sinner, and his spiritual guide authorises him for the present, to render something *else*, and something *less than his heart*, viz: an attention to the means—authorises him to continue a little longer in rebellion against God—authorises him to cherish his heart of enmity till God shall please to give him a better!

In the next place, such a direction is *inconsistent, for it directs him to do what is as repugnant to the sinner's feeling, as repentance itself, if done aright*. It is presumed, that no one who gives such a direction would seriously advise the sinner to read, and pray, and hear in an unbelieving, and impenitent manner. But to use these means, with penitence and faith, implies that he has already performed the duty, which the direction evades.

And in the next place, such a direction is *contrary to scriptural instruction, and example*. The Bible no where admits that the sinner cannot comply with his duty and then directs him to pray for strength to do it. It no where admits that men cannot repent, and then directs them to wait on God to get a heart to repent. It fearlessly directs them to repent, taking it for granted that they can if they will, and there it leaves the matter, and there it leaves the sinner to endure the consequences of impenitence. In accordance with this is every direction given to sinners by the preachers of holy writ. Isaiah says "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do well." He calls upon "the

wicked to forsake his way; and the unrighteous man his thoughts." "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord" says the Most High by Jeremiah "and take away the foreskins of your hearts." Ezekiel says "Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye offend and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die?" Joel calls upon sinners in danger, "to turn unto the Lord, with all their hearts." John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness, and saying "Repent ye for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." When the Redeemer began to preach, he said "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The apostles in their preaching made the same unqualified demand of immediate repentance. When the three thousand on the day of Pentecoste, said "Men and brethren! what must we do?" the only direction they gave was, "Repent and be baptised every one of you, for the remission of sins." On another occasion Peter said to the multitude, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." James says "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded!" Among the Ephesians the apostle Paul testified "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," and proclaimed among the Athenians that "God now commandeth all men every where to repent." In all these instances there was no allowances made for the moral impotence of sinners. Their duty was pointed out and obligation enforced, but there was no direction given to pray to get the disposition to do their first and immediate duty. A Minister especially in his more private intercourse with sinners, will often have his feelings tried and his resolution tempted to forsake the scriptural mode. He will meet with persons under great anxiety, professing the strongest desires for penitence and holiness, if they could but obtain them, and flattered by such appearances, he may think that at least *such* may be directed to pray for repentance and a new heart. But if he is induced to swerve from the directness of the apostolic course, he does it at his own peril, and the imminent peril of the anxious.

If it be said, that this places sinners in a hard case, we reply, that they deserve not to be placed in any different situation till they repent. It is the situation in which their own voluntary impenitence places them, nor can any relief be warrantably given till they do repent. The Gospel has not a word of encouragement till they do this, and when this is done, it is all mercy, and it will then be time enough

to apply the balm of its consolations. There is no by-road to heaven, no entrance to the narrow way, but by that strait gate, no "primrose path" to the world of bliss. We dare direct to nothing, as a substitute for faith and repentance, to nothing which implies their procrastination.

The person who is desirous of a full and masterly exhibition of the doctrine of means, I would refer to Rev. Dr. Spring's "Dissertation on the means of regeneration," published at New York, 1827.

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