

**T H E
O R I G I N O F E V I L,
T R A C E D I N A
S E R M O N**

**P R E A C H E D A T T H E
P R E S B Y T E R I A N C H U R C H**

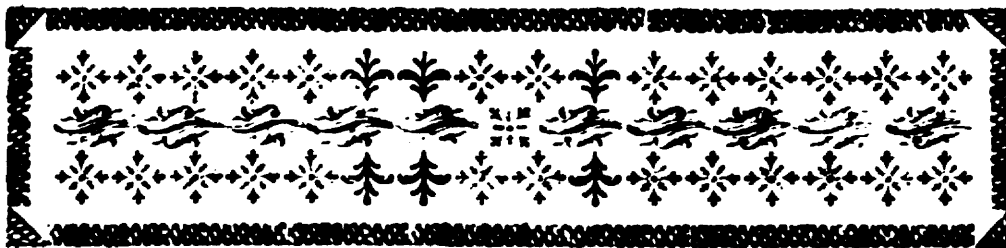
**I N
N E W B U R Y - P O R T,
M a y 23d. 1784,**

**A N D P U B L I S H E D A T T H E U N W E A R I E D I M P O R T U N I T Y
O F S O M E O F T H E H E A R E R S.**

**B Y J O H N M U R R A Y, A. M.,
P A S T O R O F S A I D C H U R C H.**

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. M I L T O N.

**N E W B U R Y - P O R T :
P R I N T E D A N D S O L D B Y J O H N M Y C A L L, M D C C L X X X V**

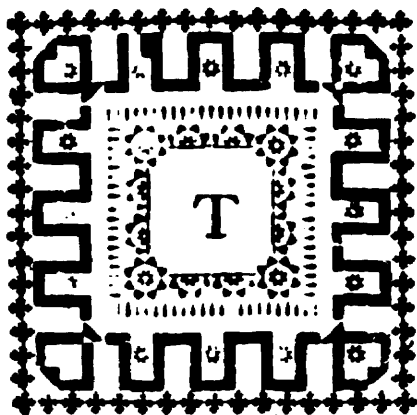


A S E R M O N.



KINGS VI. 33, last clause.

Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer ?



H E S E are the words of Joram, a very wicked king of Israel, when going about a very wicked deed. They were spoken to ELISHA the Prophet on a memorable occasion. The Syrian army had for a long time held this monarch besieged in his capital city, Samaria. The length of the siege had exhausted the stores within the walls ; the city was completely invested ; all hope of relief, from the surrounding country, was cut off. Thus the inhabitants were reduced to.

to the most extreme distress. The pitiful mother, urged by raging hunger, had forgotten the tenderness of her nature, and devoured her infant son ! The inhuman deed was reported to the king by her own lips. Shocked at the lamentable tale, and galled with conscious inability to raise the siege, he rends his garment in a gust of fury, takes a solemn oath to be revenged on Elisha, and instantly dispatches the executioners on the bloody errand, to behead that holy man of God as the guilty cause of all the calamities of his people.

For this outrage no pretext could be made, unless the manifest proofs of his being very dear in God's sight, and the chief supporter of true religion in Israel. Often had the kingdom owed its deliverance, under God, to this eminent prophet : frequently that nation had received great good through his hands ; but no instance could be produced in which those hands had done it evil. Yet, now the public woes, which heaven had justly inflicted for the complicated wickedness of king and subjects, are all imputed to the ill-nature of Elisha ; which forbids his using that interest in heaven on
their

their behalf, by which they seem to believe he could procure their deliverance whenever he pleased.

HENCE the tyrant dooms him to death. But no sooner had the messengers set out to execute the sentence, than Joram himself follows close at their heels. For what purpose, it cannot certainly be determined; whether awakened by a smiting conscience he hastens to prevent the fatal blow which himself had ordered, to expostulate with the prophet and obtain some news of relief; or, instigated by the phrenzy of passion, he goes to satiate his vengeance with the sight of the innocent blood shed at his command and before his own eyes. Lost to reason in the storm of wrath, he feels the evil of punishment, but forgets the evil of sin. Blind to his own enormities, to his mother's abominations, and to the crimes of his subjects which had deservedly drawn down all these distresses, he wickedly charges all on the LORD: as if he made his creatures miserable and delighted to keep them so; and merely to answer that end, had actually inspired Benhadad and his host with all the ingratitude, avarice and ambition, which spurred on their expedition:

tion : and really infused into their hearts all the pride and relentless barbarity which marked their every movement through the whole progress of the present invasion. In this infatuation he gradually rises from the prophet's impeachment to that of his master ; and madly concludes he is now furnished with a sufficient plea for avowedly casting off all further regard to the Lord, to his laws, and religion ; and for cutting off the head of Elisha his servant : while he spares and caresses the prophets of Baal, adorns his altars, and cultivates his groves. Such is the temper with which he belches out the blasphemy in the words of the text, " This evil is of the Lord ; what should I wait for the Lord any longer ? "

The particular call which has constrained me to solicit your attention to this subject, at the present time, will fully excuse me from dwelling longer on the case represented in the context. It bids me only to consider this bold assertion as the language of unclean lips ; and directly expressive of the disposition of a heart full of enmity against God. It requires me, from them, humbly to essay something towards

towards a solution of this long-contested problem,

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF EVIL? .

The business then assigned me is, to take occasion from the words of the text, to enquire whence evil comes ; and whether it be indeed from the Lord, or not ?

FROM the time allowed for this composition, and from the circumstances of bodily infirmity, in which it was undertaken, no labored discussion can be expected ; nor any thing to supercede your most careful attention to the far clearer light which has oftentimes been cast on this important point by very many of the ablest divines in almost every age. If this feeble effort may be so happy as to contribute ever so little towards satisfying the scruple of the pained enquiring conscience, and towards setting the truth before you in its natural attitude, freed from the distortions in which it has too often been depicted by the vain fancy which affects to be wiser above what is written, although it is born like the wild asses colt ; and if in the issue the glory of the Lord may be promoted, and his church established in the present truth, the whole end will be obtained :

ed : for, I trust; I can honestly appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that this, and not the injuring of any party or individual among the human race ; this, and not an affectation of distinction ; this, and this alone is aimed at in the present attempt.

IN pursuit of this design, it will be necessary 1. to explain the terms of the question,—2. to remove the *false* causes to which evil has been ascribed,—3, to investigate the *true*,—and 4. to make reply to some objections.

ALL these things then shall be briefly essayed in as plain a manner as I can, and in the order in which they have been just proposed.

I. BY EVIL is meant all that opposes the perfection and happiness of the universe in any of its parts. The perfection and happiness of the universe are here put together ; because in the nature of things they are inseparable. Whatever then impairs the former, obstructs the latter in the same degree. To oppose the one, is to fight against *nature* ; to resist the other, is rebellion against *law*. Hence evil has put on a two-fold aspect, and been denominated

denominated by two epithets of distinction : and hence we hear it sometimes called *natural* evil, and sometimes *moral* ; intending by the former whatever militates against happiness ; while every thing that maims perfection is designed by the latter.

It is no part of the present question to ascertain the real existence of evil in the world. That *natural* evil has taken place in the system, the pains and sorrows, the misery, desolation, and ruin so frequently to be seen, must forbid us to dispute. Nor can it be a problem whether *moral* evil does in fact exist ; while so many sins and disorders in the tempers and conduct of mankind every where meet the enquiring eye ; and fix a stain so indelible on the character of the human race.

BUT from what source did it proceed ? Who is its author ? What cause gave it being ? Who is the efficient where this is the effect ? This is the narrow of the question concerning its ORIGIN.

THAT species of it which has been denominated *natural* is called *evil*, as it operates to disturb the happiness of the system. But if the universe is

considered as the creature of God, the production of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness exercised in concert, it cannot be imagined that this evil arose from any defect in its original frame ; or from the want of sufficient resources for the complete happiness of the whole ; or from any pleasure taken by the infinitely benevolent Creator in beholding misery among his works : it follows, then, that it must have been introduced by another cause, and really owed its origin to that other kind of *evil* which is called moral ; as one that had previously operated to impair the *perfection* of the universe. - Thus all *natural* evil will be found to be the proper effect of *moral* : and if it be added that it is applied under a perfect moral government, as a mean designed to prevent or restrain, to correct or punish that moral evil which had first broken in upon the world ; in this view natural evil has the highest congruity in it, as a remedy against the disease of moral evil ; and so, instead of *evil*, it deserves the name, as it possesses the nature of real good.

MORAL evil then remains as the only evil in the universe ; and the present question is now to be confined

confined to that alone : and to do justice to it, a brief view should be taken,

II. Of the absurdity of the theories which have assigned *false* causes for this sad phœnomenon,

Among these may justly be reckoned.

I. CHANCE; To this as the only and universal cause EPICURUS and his followers ascribed all effects. But when the meaning of this term is examined by the touch-stone of reason and true philosophy, it is found to be merely a *name*, to which no distinct idea is annexed : a term expressive of no *real being* ; and, in fact, a word signifying nothing but the want of a cause, or rather our ignorance about one : and hence it appears a preposterous attempt to combat this absurdity with serious arguments : for, at one glance, it is evident that as *chance* has no being, it can have no powers ; and if no powers, then no agency ; and so this never being able to act, can never be a cause of any thing, whether it be good or evil.

2. FATE was considered by the *Stoicks* and others among the Gentiles, and even by the *Essenes* among

mong the Jews, as the inflexible Sovereign which necessarily swayed the adamantine sceptre over the universe ; and bound all beings therein in its fetters of iron : Many fine things have been said by Christian writers to ingraft this wild cyon on the gospel-stock ; and reconcile this irreligious principle to the system propagated by CHRIST and his Apostles : and what pity is it that names so great as *Augustine*, *Zanchy*, and *Lipsius* should be prostituted to the support of so bad a cause ! For, whoever enters thoroughly into the Spirit of that doctrine, will quickly perceive that *fate* signifies only an eternal, unmeaning necessity of nature, which binds all things fast without reason or design ; and includes God and the world in the immoveable bond. From this description it follows, that *fate* can have no place in the universe if there be a GOD : for by the supposition it is a cause separate from GOD, independent on his being, and really incompatible with his existence.

NOR, even if fate could exist, was it possible for it to be the cause of moral evil ; since it infers a necessity of all things and actions, which is utterly
inconsistent

inconsistent with that choice or liberty which must ever be held essential to the being of either vice or virtue.

3. BESIDES the eternal principle of all good, the Persians of old, and after them the Manichees and Gnostics in later times, conceived in their brains the whim of another eternal being, independent on him ; and, by its nature, directly opposite to him : this they imagined to be the cause of all evil.

BUT the supposition of the existence of such a being is contradictory in itself : the very notion of two contrary beings, co-existent, independent, infinite, and omnipotent, immediately destroys itself ; and it need only be unfolded to prove it both false and impossible : for the existence of the one of these beings excludes that of the other ; and demonstrates that any other being could neither be infinite, independent, nor almighty. In vain then shall we try to get rid of any difficulties about the origin of evil, by recurring to any eternal being which is originally evil in its own nature ; and therefore, naturally disposed to diffuse evil, as an emanation from itself, throughout the universe ; since the very existence of such a being is clearly impossible.

4. OF all the abominations which rendered the heresies of the ancient *Manichees*, the *Simonians*, and the *Priscillianists* detestable to the pious mind, none was so much the object of horror as that by which they all agreed in charging the only living, the holy and true GOD with being the *author of sin*.

AND it must be acknowledged that *Austin* himself, that great defender of the faith once delivered to the Saints, in the heat of his zeal against the Pelagian notion of human liberty, was sometimes carried away into the opposite extreme ; and explained the doctrine of prædestination and of Providence in terms which gave too much countenance to this horrible tenet ; although no body more openly condemned the blasphemous doctrine than himself.

THOMAS AQUINAS, the head of the popish order of Dominicans, and the father of the school-divinity, raised Austin's doctrine from the grave where it had long slept. * And the authority of his
name

* He asserted that God was the first and immediate cause in the production of every thought, action, motion or mode ; that by a physical influence, the wills of creatures are predetermined, by God, to all things, whether good or bad ; and hence, that the will is never free in *sensu composito*, though ever free in *sensu diviso*. Burnet. on 39 art. page 200, 201.

name gave sanction to the harshest sounds in that system ; as long as the scholastic theology continued to sway its dire sceptre over the reasoning faculties of the human mind. Yet, whatever might be inferred from that doctrine tending to establish the idea of God's being the original source of moral evil, the school-men very freely reprobated the principle itself.

WHEN the glorious morning of gospel-light dawned on the church in the blessed reformation from popery, after so long a night of deep darkness ; no stratagems of the anti-christian party were tho't more likely to overcast it with a gloomy cloud, and to persuade the world to shut its eyes against the blaze of truth then shining in meridian splendor, than the artful insinuations whereby they accused the *reformed church* with the blasphemy of charging God *as the author of sin*. This notion was so shocking to every fair mind, that it was easy to see that any church which espoused it, could not long pass in the world as a true church of Christ ; therefore, *Bellarmino*, that Goliath of the popish cause, strained every nerve to fasten this charge on the
Calvinists ;

Calvinists ; assured that, succeeding in that design, he should effectually blast their reputation, and ruin their cause.

BUT the slander was effectually refuted by the most express declarations of the reformed churches ; not only in the learned labors of their members, but also in public apologies, catechisms, symbols, or systems of divinity, and confessions of faith solemnly authenticated by these churches in their councils, synods, and general assemblies of divines ; in all which they professedly reject this horrible tenet in terms of the utmost detestation : §

I am very sensible, that the Socinians and Remonstrants loudly impeached the doctrines of Calvin and Zuinglius with this absurdity ; and certain strong expressions in some parts of their works have been very eagerly seized and strained into that meaning

§ See the following public confessions of faith, published by the reformed churches in Europe, the Helvetic confession, art. 8. the Gallic, art. 8. the Belgic, art. 13. the Augustan, art. 19. the Canons of the synod of Dort, art. 1, 5, 15. The 39 articles of the church of England, together with the canons of that church ; the Westminster confession and catechisms ; the consensus of Polonia, Lithuania, &c. the acts of the Toronian General Synod ; the public confessions of faith of the churches in Saxony, Wirtemberg, Bohemia, the Argentinian, that of the Palatinate, and various others, which I have examined on this question, all concur in reprobating this doctrine.

ing by their adversaries. But with what justice this, we may learn from the words of that learned and pious reformer BEZA; than whom none had better opportunity to know the real sentiments of his friends: "It will not follow (says he) neither from Calvin's doctrine nor mine, that God is the author of sin, or that he is pleased with iniquity, or even wills it to be; or that Satan or men obey God by doing evil: or that they do the thing which God wills so far as they do evil, &c. let all blasphemies of such kinds be banished to the greatest distance, not only from our tongues, but even from our very thoughts." †

No testimony can be plainer, unless that of CALVIN himself; when, speaking of some Libertines who pleaded that God was the author of sin, he adds, “ These men, by saying that ’tis God himself that, by his providence, effects all these things, really mix and confound all things in the universe; they blend not only heaven with earth, but even GOD himself with the devil: The
C “ wicked

† Eeza, tract : de Prædestin : contra Castellionem :

“ wicked man is moved to his sin by his own ava-
 “ rice or ambition, or envy, or cruelty ; nor has he
 “ regard to any other end than what these propose ;
 “ therefore, it is from that root, that is, from the
 “ affections of his own heart and the end he aims
 “ at, that his work takes its true quality, and thence
 “ it is deservedly judged to be evil.” ‡

As it would be easy to multiply quotations from
 all their own writers, to shew in what abhorrence
 the reformed churches ever held this doctrine ; for
 it would be by no means a difficult task to produce
 testimonies from the express words of many of the
 ancients, who have been called THE FATHERS in
 the christian church, to prove that the body of that
 church in their days, and from the earliest antiquity,
 was as far from receiving this principle as it has
 been since the *Reformation*. † This however,
 would

‡ Calv. instructio : contra Libertinos. Cap. 14.

† The learned reader will see full evidence of this, if he
 inspects Chrysostom de provident : lib. 1. Augustin : re-
 tract : lib. 1. cap. 26. de civit : Dei lib. 5. cap. 9. Ambros :
 de vocat. gent. lib. 2. cap. 8. tom. 2. Tertull adversus
 Marcion : lib. 2. Jerome in Habak : cap. 1. and in Ezek.
 cap. 10, and cap. 18. Lombardus : lib. 1. sent. distinct. 38,
 40, 45. Clemens : Alexandr : Stromat, lib. 1. Cyprian :
 Epist. 50, 55, &c. &c.

would be as tedious to you as it is needless in itself : the concurrent sense of them all may be seen well expressed in the sentence of that learned and judicious German divine, HERMAN WITSIUS ; ¶ his words are, “ To make God the author of sin is “ such dreadful blasphemy, that the thought can- “ not, without horror, be entertained by any chris- “ tian : God, indeed created man mutably good, “ infallibly foresaw his sin, fore-ordained the permis- “ sion of that sin : really gave man sufficient power “ to avoid it, but which could not act without his “ influx : and though he influenced his faculties to “ moral or physical actions without influencing the “ moral goodness of those actions, all which appear “ from the event, yet God neither is, nor in any “ respect can be the author of sin.”

BUT there is no need that our faith should stand in the wisdom of men on this subject ; while the voices of reason and revelation concur in bearing so loud a testimony against the error in question. Reason indeed maintains that, as there must be a
first

first cause of all things ; so there can be but **ONE** such. His nature alone can claim independence ; of that eternal nature it is the prerogative to exist and act in all things from itself, without assistance or influence from any other : The whole created universe being his work, in the construction of it he furnished himself with a sufficiency of instruments, to be used as second causes in conducting its several movements to answer his end : all these, however, depend absolutely on the first cause for the beginning of their existence ; and therefore, also for its continuance : for this being an effect of the same kind with that, must owe itself to no less powerful a cause. The power of acting in any being rises out of its essence ; as the operation itself does out of the power. Whatever being then is debtor to another for the essence, must be so for the active power too : Indeed the power of acting, being greater than that of mere existence, seems to require greater exertion of energy in the cause which produces it.

To the present subsistence of the world, then, Providence is as necessary as Creation. The power

er of the first cause must continue to be exerted, or the existence of the creature must cease; or, if it continues to be, it must be independent; and really be, so far, an effect without a cause: and if it can be such for one moment, why not for a second? Why not for ever?

FROM the nature of causation, it is certain there can be no positive reality in the effect which was not first in the cause; since no being can give what it has not: 'tis no less certain there can be no degree of positive entity in the effect which this cause has not put into it; otherwise the stream might rise higher than the fountain, and contain more than it has received from thence. It follows, then, that the physical good which second causes put forth into those motions and acts, by which they continue to exercise the several powers of their natures, they must receive wholly from a physical influx of the first cause, into their natures, at that instant, communicating that good to them: and if this is necessary to the continuance of such acts, surely it cannot be less necessary to their beginning; for the transition from a state of inaction to action, is evidently

dearly greater than from the beginning to the continuing of the same act.

WHAT has been said of physical good is not less true of that which is moral. This is a superior and more perfect kind of entity than that. The second cause then can no more be supposed to put this in any of its acts, unless it receives it also from the influx of the first cause; for if it should then, in that case, the second cause must have become the first; God and the creature must have exchanged places in point of dependence; and if God give existence only to the physical good, and the creature to the moral; then the creature is dependent on God for the least, and God dependent on it for the greatest.

ALTHOUGH this reasoning fairly concludes, that God alone is, and ever will remain, the first cause of all real, positive being, and of all good, both natural and moral, in the universe; it will by no means lead us to infer that he is also the author or cause of evil. That this supposition is no less impossible than it is absurd, I presume, might be made very manifest, had we time duly to consider the following plain and undeniable truths.

1. *The nature of God forbids it.* From a first principle already laid down it follows, that evil can never come from any other than an evil cause. But reason and scripture join to assure us, that the true God is altogether *good*, good in perfection, yea, his very essence infinite, eternal, absolute goodness, unmixed and underived, the only original good, and the source of all the good that ever shall be found in the universe. And, if so, then there can be no evil in his nature. Possessing no evil himself, it is impossible he should communicate any to his creatures : for all his communications must come out of himself; none of these can be evil, until there be evil in that fountain from which they flow.

2. *It is contrary to fact.* In those of his works, in the *natural* world, with which we are acquainted, no evil is to be found : the more they are known, the more they are admired ; by how much the more exactly they are examined, by so much the more do they set forth the power, wisdom, and goodness of their Creator ; and appear to be all beauty, order, and fitness in themselves. Now the *rational*
creation

creation was more perfect in its kind than the other works of God ; it was also designed to occupy a more elevated rank in the scale of created existence ; it therefore, surely, could not be less perfect, in purity from evil ingredients in the essential qualities of its nature, than the rest ; for it cannot be imagined, that care was taken in the formation of a gnat or grain of sand, and none in the constitution of a man or an angel. And hence, so far as this topic of proof may reach, we must conclude, that as the evil now in question was not, either the whole of the nature of the great first cause, nor any part thereof, so it was not one of his creatures, nor a natural ingredient in any thing he made.

3. The notion we implead is contradictory to the declared judgment of God himself. Revelation informs us, that when the great Creator had finished his work ; on a solemn review of the whole, he pronounced every part of it, as it came from his creating hand, to be *VERY GOOD*. *Gen. 1. 31.*

4. As evil had no place in the *nature* of God, it could not be in his *will*. For, with equal truth, it
may

may be said of the divine will as of his intellect it is his very essence; it is no adjunct, no accident, no mixture, or appendix of his being, nor any thing else but God himself, willing agreeably to his nature. It is evident, then, that as nothing but good is found in that nature; nothing but good can be the direct and proper object of his will. This, indeed, is essential to the will, even of creatures; through the present imperfection of man, however, he often mistakes his mark; and chooses evil instead of good: Yet, it is under the appearance of good, and only when apprehended as such, that evil is willed.

BUT the infinite intellect, is incapable of being imposed on, by false appearances: He never can be in any danger then of willing evil under the mask of good. Whatever he apprehends to be good, is so in fact. He therefore, cannot will evil by mistake: Nor can he will it knowingly; for, that would be to will contrary to his own nature; such a will in a being all good, would be a principle of self-destruction. * Nay, the idea of God's

* Vid. Baxteri method: theolog: christianæ. par. 1. cap. 2. page 70.

willing evil, is contradictory in itself. Every will, necessarily rests in its own acts. But this would be, in fact, willing contrary to his own will; that is, willing and nilling the same thing at the same time.

NOR can the idea of God's willing evil be ever admitted by such as deny it to be his creature: for between his willing the existence of it, and actually creating it, there can be no difference; since it is on all hands confessed that no other exertion than a bare act of his will, was ever employed in giving being to the universe, or to any creature contained in it.

5. The absurdity of this doctrine might be evinced from the nature of moral evil itself. The will of God is the rule and standard of virtue. Whatever is willed and done, to agree with that, is morally good, or virtuous. In the essence of virtue then there is a positive entity. The direction of acts by a due application of the powers or faculties of the agent to right of objects, in a suitable manner, cannot belong to a mere non-entity. No: Reason is constrained to acknowledge, that such adjustment
of

of acts to rule implies the presence of a real and positive nature, regulating both the impulsive and final causes of action, and giving it both the matter and the form which agrees with the known will of the great Lawgiver. What then is vice? All agree to answer, it is the direct opposite to virtue; and that in all respects. Granting this one point, we must conclude, if virtue, then, is a positive; vice must be a negative, in the nature of things. That requires a positive cause, exerting real power to produce so important an effect: but this admits only a negative cause; not efficient and powerful, but deficient and weak. The one is a real *E N S*, diffused through all the habits and acts of moral agents which are fit and right; and conveying to them all such qualities as the grand standard requires: The other is only the privation, the want, or absence of that positive nature: hence 'tis called *anomy*: or, want of conformity to the law. This want is defect. And the production of defects, cannot be the object of power. Unless, therefore, we would venture to say, that the great first cause is a deficient cause; we may not go about to affirm, that it required an exertion

of

of his omnipotent energy to produce *sin* ; or that defect, non-entity, or mere privation is the effect of divine creating might.

THAT influx of Providence, which was stated above as necessary to give being and continuance to every power and operation of created agents, was considered as acting only in effecting *good*, both of the physical and moral kind. Now it appears, that it could not produce any thing else ; for nothing else has a real or positive nature. That influx, then, may be said to extend to the support of all natural powers ; and to all their natural exertions, or applications to their proper objects ; for in all these, there is a physical good, and nothing else : But it cannot be from thence inferred, that it also is concerned in causing that *anomy*, or moral evil which attends any of those exertions ; because therein is not to be found either good, or entity : and therefore, nothing which can be the object of either the will or the power of the All-perfect mind.

6. From all that has been said, it must be evident, that God cannot be the *natural* cause of sin :
since

since he cannot, by any physical influence, convey moral evil into the nature or acts of any creature : and that he is not its *moral* cause, will be no less manifest to the mind that considers the nature and tendency of his voice in conscience, and in the law he has revealed. For by neither of these does he influence, persuade, or command his creatures to it ; on the contrary, he warns, and dehorts ; forbids, and threatens it ; yea, punishes too, and does all that moral government, as such, can do to prevent it.

7. In the production of effects, all causes may be reduced to the efficient. Where several efficient causes are concerned, it is an ancient maxim that the effect always follows the nearest, or immediate cause. The agent, then, is, in this view, the cause of his own acts. Whatever evil is found in them is all his own ; he alone is the author of his own sins, nor can it be said, that God his maker is the cause of his being so. † For however we assert him

† Whoever would see this matter fully discussed, may consult Herlock on Free Will, p. 32. Doctor John Edwards' body of divinity, vol. 1. page 79—87. Alvarez de

him to be UNIVERSALLY THE FIRST CAUSE ; it will by no means follow, that he is the immediate, efficient cause of all things. To affirm this is down-right *Pantbeism*. Pleading, in this sense, that *God is all things*, we unavoidably infer, that *all things are God*. The terms are convertible ; and the propositions reciprocal. If this doctrine were indeed true, then creatures must not be considered as possessing any real beings, or faculties of their own : the powers and acts of one would thus become the powers and acts of all the rest, as much as his : nay, thus, they are all reduced to be mere parts of the Deity himself ; or only so many varying modes of his existence. And here all debate on this subject, is immediately cut off for ever : on this hypothesis, there is, and there can be no being but God alone : No creatures can ever be produced, ruled, rewarded or punished :— To attempt such acts towards them, would be
only

auxiliis. Fulgentius ad Monim : lib. 1. cap. 6. Van Maftricht, lib. 3. cap. 1. pages 2-3, 892. Turretin : loc. 9. page 671. Amesii medulla : page 60. Wollebii Compend : lib. 2. cap. 3. page 21. Pareus in Urfin : catech. par. 1. p. 47. 67, 201 : but above all, Baxter's Method : theol. : pages 6.—79. 262—294.

only making the experiment on himself : and thus should we be landed at open atheism ! For that doctrine which asserts that every thing is the Deity, plainly teaches us to believe there is no Deity at all : the divinity of every stick, stone, insect and grain of sand, being at least as hard to believe, as the existence of the world without a Maker, or the production of effects without a cause.

HAVING thus endeavoured the removal of false causes for the origin of evil, let us now proceed

III. *To investigate the true.* All positive substance is either God or creatures. It has been proved, we trust, that God is totally and eternally clear of this charge. It remains then, that moral evil must have arisen from a created moral agent.

1. *A moral agent* ; for such only are capable of moral good or evil. All orders of being that are devoid of reason and of the conscience of obligation, are alike incapable of both.

2. *A created agent* ; since it now appears, that the Creator of all could not give being to evil without denying himself, and working contradictions.

BUT

BUT this could not issue from any original fault in the nature of such beings. For, that created moral agents should have any real evil in any faculty of their natures ; that they should lack any faculty, or any good quality in any faculty, that might be necessary for enabling them to right action ; or the want of which might cause them, by a natural inclination, to lean to wrong : or, in a word, that their natures should labor under any defect, as they at first dropt from the All-creating hand : these all are suppositions which would infer, either that such agents were not the creatures of God ; or that he himself was not a being of pure rectitude of nature, and so would not make his creatures completely pure, or that through some deficiency of wisdom or power, he could not produce a creature to his mind ; and so the effect was contrary to its cause.

Now, in the idea of created moral agents, which possess in their original constitution, all the *natural* good, which, as such, they ought to have, it is implied that they have 1st. understandings to discern what is good, 2dly. wills to choose it, and 3dly. liberty,

berty, or power to act, or not to act, at their own pleasure ; without controul, or coercion from any foreign force. Of these powers, the *second* is necessary to their being really *agents* : for, so far as creatures are moved involuntarily, they are merely passive. There can be no sort of agency of theirs in the case. The *first* is requisite to their being *rational agents* ; for without perception and comparison of objects, and a judgment drawn up thereon, however, they may be said to be voluntary, as having wills to choose what pleases them ; yet they cannot be said to choose rationally, having no reason leading to such choice. And the *third* is indispensable to their being *moral agents* : Since without liberty they could not be subjects of law, nor capable of being moved by arguments or entreaties ; destitute of this power, they could not, in justice, be liable to blame or punishment ; nor would praise, thanks, or reward, be applicable to them for any part of their conduct : remove this from their nature, and thenceforth all pains taken with them by others to educate or instruct, to persuade or reprove, to encourage or deter them are vain and

fruitless things ; yea, and all enquiry and consideration—all resolutions and endeavours, even by themselves, are utterly preposterous and futile. Moral government is government by law, by motive, by reason, by reward and punishment, according to the congruity of things. A creature, then, endowed only with understanding and will, but destitute of liberty, is so far from being a capable subject of such government, that he is reduced to the rank of a mere machine ; and all his motions are the effect of foreign force : he himself is no agent in them ; nor any thing else than the passive subject of mechanical impulse.

By this power is not meant a liberty to perceive or not the objects presented by the senses. It is conceded, that in perception, the mind is passive. Yet even here it feels a power to attend, more or less, to retain, recall or dismiss the idea at its pleasure. Nor is it taken for a liberty of judging of any perceptions contrary to evidence, or agreeable to it ; although in this stage too the mind is conscious of a power of staying judgment, till after more careful scrutiny ; of examining the matter fairly, and

and attending equally to both sides, or the contrary; a liberty of availing itself of all the light that can be obtained, or contenting it with less; and of giving to each part impartially its full weight in the scales of deliberation, or not, just as it pleases. Nor is it understood of a power of indifference to contrary extremes; a power which can never act without keeping its possessor in a state of total suspense, incapable of any choice whatever: nor, in a word, do we intend by it a power of choosing against all motive; or affecting independence on God: but only liberty of acting according to our choice, and of choosing freely whatever is agreeable to the last dictate of the practical judgment, unconstrained by any foreign power.

THIS is a species of liberty which every body so plainly perceives, that it is hardly possible to make any man sincerely to believe, in the cool of retirement, that he does not possess it. This inward consciousness is immediate; and carries certainty with it, and without it, nothing could impress on the mind a sense of moral obligation; nothing could be conceived of as duty; nor could one moment's

ment's remorse ever be felt within for the greatest transgressions ; all sense of guilt, or fear of punishment for moral evil must be utterly cut off.

WHATEVER is useful, is liable to abuse : and by how much the more important the uses which any thing can serve ; by so much the abuses of it are the more destructive : it now appears that liberty is essential to moral agency : without it there could be no virtue in the creation : but the very existence of liberty opens the door for its being abused : and the abuse of it is, in fact, the immediate source of all vice. And thus, at length, we have found out the *Achan* in the camp : the object of our research now stands confessed the true cause, OR ORIGIN OF ALL THE EVIL in the universe.

To suppose created moral agents naturally capable of abusing their liberty, is not inconsistent with the idea of the original rectitude of their natures ; for however perfect that rectitude, yet there are certain circumstances attending such natures, which cannot fail to convince unbiassed minds that, from the *real* existence of created subjects of moral government,

vernment, the *possible* existence of moral evil is a natural consequence.

As creatures they are finite. An infinite creature is a contradiction. To be infinite is to be GOD. If their natures are limited; such must be all the faculties which compose them: for the part cannot be greater than the whole. Hence each faculty can be applied only to some objects; not to all. Each is fitted for its place and end; and so is naturally right in itself, and to it a peculiar object, suited to its nature, is allotted by its great author. In its application to this, its proper object, lies the continuance of its rectitude. And in the neglect of this, or in its application to another, its fall.

THAT such misapplication of faculties is possible, is plainly declared by the limited nature of them all. A finite understanding cannot see all objects at once; nor all parts of the same object; hence it cannot be infallible in its conceptions or judgments about any. The narrowness of its limits occasions the contemplation of one part, of course, to exclude that of the rest: its best views of things are, of consequence,

consequence, partial. From partial views wrong judgments *may* arise : by wrong judgments the objective motives *may* be unfairly presented to the will : and thus wrong volitions *may* be induced. Thence ensues naturally a misapplication of all the powers ; and so is brought forth all the *evil* which belongs to the affections, passions, and conduct ; all these being under the controul of the will as the commanding faculty in moral agents.

AGAIN, from the very nature of a limited understanding must arise a succession of ideas. This can be superceded by nothing but a capacity which, grasping all objects at once, and taking in equally the past, the present, and the future, is above the possibility of ever seeing any thing new.

AN infinite intellect is thus incapable of any idea but one : that one contains all things : and hence its view never can admit a change. Not so the finite mind. Viewing things piece-meal, it must be constantly changing its ideas ; as the circumstances or appearances of their objects are shifted, or its knowledge of them increased. And thus ev-

ery finite intelligence is naturally mutable. To make one otherwise would be to deify it ; immutability being an attribute competent only to the infinite and eternal nature.

NOR would the natural mutability of created moral agents have been removed by an alteration of their rank in the universal scale. Had they been placed one step lower, they must have mingled with the brutal or inanimate tribes. All moral agency on their part was thenceforth impossible.—The wisdom of the Deity requires that all creatures be ruled agreeably to the powers and faculties which are essential to their natures. This would, therefore, surely forbid creatures of such a class, ever to be put under moral government ; and instantly consign them over to the mechanic force of matter and motion. This rank would have made them impeccable indeed : but then it would have placed them equally out of the reach of virtue too ; and demonstrated, at once, the inconsistency of putting them under law ; as that ever supposes the peccability of the subject.

ON the other hand, to have raised them higher among rational creatures, to any supposable degree, would not have mended the matter ; for, rise we ever so high in that scale, if we stop short of infinity, the creature is still left limited in nature ; and therefore, mutable still. Instead of superceding the danger, then, elevation would but enhance it ; for the smallest stumble in the most exalted, would be an evil equal to the greatest fall in the meanest intelligence : and the best natures, when depraved, become the worst.

Thus it appears, that the highest creature is naturally capable of falling from its native innocence, without any thing foreign to compel it : possessing liberty, it may abuse it : furnished with faculties, it may misapply them to objects unsuitable to their nature and end ; and so introduce moral evil, with all its consequences, into the system. And this natural fallibility must co-extend with the existence of such creatures, and endure as long as they ; unless the Creator himself shall be pleased, at some period, to interpose, and withdraw that liberty ; or con-

firm

firm all the other powers against the danger of a fall ; or supercede the exercise of those faculties to which himself had given being.

SUCH interposition, however, would be utterly inconsistent with their continuance in a state of probation. To supercede the natural exercise of its faculties must destroy the moral agency of the creature, on the wheels of whose motions the stopper is fixed. It would also seem everfive of the design of the creation of such faculties : it could not be denied that, by preventing the use of the powers he had bestowed on such creature, its Maker would appear to be pulling down with one hand what he built with the other. Such interference before their probation is expired, would stand in direct contradiction to moral government. Freedom is necessary to both virtue and vice. The creature, then, who is, by these means made incapable of vice, could no longer possess or exercise virtue by his own choice ; and therefore not at all. The law, far from being honored with any sort of obedience from him, is in effect repealed, all its injunctions are made null and void at one stroke : the moral
 F obligation

obligation of the creature is cancelled; and the authority of the great Legislator at an end.

AGAINST this reasoning, the gracious act by which it has pleased God to confirm angels and perfect saints in virtue and holiness, so as to render them for ever impeccable, is no just ground of objection; for the immutability ensuing thereon is not natural; but conferred on them by a special gift of divine grace: this gift was not bestowed until their state of probation, as moral agents standing candidates for blissful rewards, was fully expired. When they received this confirmation their trial was over; and retribution begun: all the proofs of their allegiance, which God required of them, had previously been exhibited; and for all the time which he was pleased to appoint for them to stand probationers for final acceptance: they had been weighed in the balance of their awful Judge; *Well done, ye good and faithful servants!* had dropped from his lips: *enter into the joy of your Lord!* had begun their heavenly state, and insured the everlasting possession of it: and this confirmation in holiness is deservedly to be considered as

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the chief jewel in that crown of life which constitutes the future and eternal reward of him that overcometh ; after it is found that he hath endured to the end.

IN this procedure there is nothing unsuitable to that state of consummation, wherein the servant is allowed to rest from his labors, while his works do follow him ; but, had the Deity thus dealt with his rational creatures from their first coming into existence ; he could not thenceforth have considered them as in a state of probation ; nor properly the subjects of any future reward for whatever right acts might be done by them subsequent to such confirmation : nor could they ever be called to judgment, or to render an account for any such part of their duration as succeeded it : on this score, the solemn process of the great tribunal would be turned into a ridiculous farce ; and all the business of the great day dwindle into a pompous piece of empty and affected pageantry.

So far, then, is it from being fit that the great Creator should be expected to step forth, immediately

ately on the creation, and destroy those very powers of his creatures, with which he had declared himself well-pleased when he made them; that, on the reverse, the dignity of his government required, that whatever he does with them should rather be calculated to strengthen each faculty to constant exercise in the natural way.

THE wisdom of the eternal KING forbids his essaying to govern one class of subjects, according to the natures which he had indeed conferred on another species of his creatures, but withheld from them. This indeed necessitates that every species of beings be acted and managed agreeably to its own specific powers: and so infers that he will attempt to act rational creatures merely by physical or mechanical force; no more than he will go about to move stocks or stones only by the influence of argument or persuasion.

FROM the very idea of moral government it may be gathered that, as its subjects are moral agents; so the sceptre is swayed over them by moral engines; such as law, motive, reason, argument, promise and threatening.

threatening. Such government alone is adapted to the nature of the subject ; and therefore, worthy of the great Ruler : and that such government alone should be used with such kind of subjects, will not be disputed ; if we consider that any other would be contrary to the natures of the parties concerned in the case, and inconsistent with their relations to each other ; and that this is indeed true will appear if we, for a moment, attend to the following obvious remarks.

To every single being, a singular, definite essence is necessarily required. From this are derived all its natural properties : or, rather, essence and properties reciprocally involve each other. These are the *law* of that nature. And ever determine both the manner and the measure in which it will act or be acted on in every supposable case ; for all beings act like themselves, or according to the natures which they severally possess.

WHEN one being exists alone, as the Deity did before the creation, it has no relations. Nor can it ; since there are no correlates : no other beings
existing

existing to which it can stand related. It can, therefore, lie under no obligations ; nor have any thing to prompt, to direct, or to limit its actions ; save its own nature only. Whatever that leads it to pursue must be right ; since there subsists no relation which can be violated ; nor any being to which it can do wrong. In this case, God acted from mere absolute sovereignty from eternity : and might have continued so to act for ever : his own self-sufficiency, in which he had been blessed hitherto, shews that he needed not any creature to make or keep him happy. And creatures, being then mere non-entity, had no claims to existence ; and, therefore, to nothing else.

BUT as soon as two, or more beings exist, even in idea, certain relations commence between them ; these are founded in their respective natures ; and in their concern with those of each other. From these relations arises a *law*, now superadded to that of the single essence of each ; and this comes in with that to a share in prompting, regulating and restraining the acts of each nature ; and so is partly concerned in determining what is right in each.

To treat every being agreeably to its nature and relations, is right : for thus no law is violated, no truth denied, and every thing is treated as it is.— To treat it otherwise, is wrong : as it is practically viewing it as what, or where it is not ; it is doing violence to the nature ; and in fact denying and opposing the truth of things. And hence it follows, that between right and wrong, there is a real difference ; and that difference is natural, eternal, and unchangeable.

THE infinite wisdom of God could not but see what natures and relations should subsist in the universe as soon as he designed to create it : and so perceive what treatment would be right from him to each, from each to him, and from each to all the others, & v. v.

THE perfect rectitude of his nature could not but approve this *right treatment* ; and shew his approbation by making that to be the *grand, the original, the universal* LAW ; and using his authority to bind all creatures to perfect conformity to it.— Yes, and (with reverence be it spoken) to bind himself

himself to observe that some rule of right, in all his own conduct towards every being which he ever should be pleased to create.

No more, then, can he be considered as acting towards creatures, once made, merely in the light of an absolute sovereign. He has willed to prescribe to himself a certain line of conduct from which he never will deviate, and that is the line of perfect right; or that which will deal with, or govern all creatures according to their natures and relations.

WHEN we speak of the sovereignty of G O D, then, in any acts done subsequent to creation; we ought to mean, not arbitrary pleasure abstracted from all reason or rule; but the SUPREME himself, freely exercising his power towards his own creatures; according to his own will, unawed by any superior, and independent on the creatures themselves; yet only in a way perfectly agreeable to all his perfections; and therefore, in exact conformity to all the relations of himself, and the creatures

which

which he rules. * In giving being, God acts the absolute sovereign in the highest sense: this is true both of the *new* nature and the *old*. Moral government has nothing to do with the act which creates. It begins where that ends. It finds the natures of its subjects already produced; and themselves in actual possession of the kind of existence allotted them by the creating Sovereign. It takes them up as it finds them; and treats them according to the natures they have; and that in the very best manner each nature can admit. To man in a state of primitive innocence, it affords all advantages which his state of probation could allow. To man fallen, and unregenerate, it offers all he needs; and freely gives all he will receive: and to the renewed, it furnishes every thing necessary for the support, growth, exercise and perfection of the *new* nature which he enjoys; but, in all, it acts in perfect consistency with the natures with which it has to do.

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Nor

* Sovereignty, separated from all respect to goodness, is no idea of God: but of some merciless tyrant rather; yea, of the spirit of darkness, that strong armed man; but power and strength guided by goodness and holiness, are truly heavenly and divine. Dr. EDWARD'S body of div. voi. 1. p. 78.

NOR does this manner of government eclipse any of his perfections : Bishop Burnet has well said, that
 “ God having made men free creatures, his govern-
 “ ing them accordingly is no diminution of his au-
 “ thority : it is only carrying on his creation accord-
 “ ing to the several natures that he has put in that va-
 “ riety of beings, of which it is composed. There-
 “ fore, if some of God’s acts, with relation to men,
 “ are not so free as his other acts are, and as we
 “ might suppose, necessary to the ultimate perfec-
 “ tion of an independent being ; this arises not
 “ from any defect in the acts of God ; but because
 “ the nature of the creature that he intended to
 “ make free is inconsistent with such acts. The
 “ Divine Omnipotence is not lessened because some
 “ of his works are more beautiful than others : so,
 “ if that liberty with which he intended to endue
 “ thinking beings, is incompatible with such posi-
 “ tive acts, and so positive a Providence as governs
 “ natural things and this material world ; this is no
 “ way derogatory to the sovereignty of his mind.” *

In

IN support of the same ideas Dr. Edwards observes, that “ When we say God can do all things ;
 “ those are excepted which involve in them a flat
 “ contradiction : thus he cannot cause the same
 “ thing to be and not to be at the same time : he
 “ cannot make things past to be present. Not be-
 “ cause there is any restraint of his power. But
 “ because those things cannot be done. So God
 “ cannot make truth to be falsehood; and he
 “ would be no God if he could do evil.” †

WE may now venture to add, that, so far as the moral government here reviewed is, in fact, administered, if any of its subjects fall ; the whole blame is to be laid at the door of the falling creature ; for whatever evil is thereby brought on itself or on the system. Since this mode of administration may well warrant the Governor to say, what could have been done for my subjects, by me, in this character, that I have not done ? even as he had a right to give the same challenge in the character of Creator when he had originally given them all, and only

† Dr. John Edward's body, vol. 1, page 61,

ly such powers and faculties as belonged to the place of rational and moral agents.

It follows, then, that the doctrine of God's being the author of sin is as directly contrary to the nature of his government; and inconsistent with the moral agency of his subjects; and so with the very being or possibility of sin itself; as it is blasphemy against the goodness and rectitude of the divine nature.

LET US now proceed

IV. To consider some objections against the doctrine here maintained.

THESE have ever been making by the enemies of the divine government. But they have always varied their appearance, as the leading notions in the schemes of their makers have disagreed. "What-
 " ever is fixed on as the primary idea of God, all
 " things must be so explained as to be consistent
 " with that." * The absolute sovereignty already mentioned is fixed on by some: and, in the view
 of

of such minds, all divine attributes are reduced to it. This seems in their ideas, to swallow up and absorb all the other perfections of the nature of God. Thither they repair for an asylum in every thing that puzzles their system of divinity. This is the two-edged sword with which they cut every gordian-knot in their scheme. Accordingly the whole of their experimental religion seems to be resolved into absolute submission to absolute sovereignty, and constant rejoicing in its reign.

AFTER what has been formerly mentioned on this point, we trust, no attentive hearer will despair of future felicity, if he has every other mark of the christian character, even although this be an attainment of which he cannot boast. A little examination of the scripture-account of the Deity will make him very easy on that head. No such object of worship being set up in the Bible, he may rest assured, that no such being rules the universe. Far from assuming the character of absolute sovereignty, divested of every thing else; the glorious JEHOVAH is there proposed to us as an infinite, eternal, all-perfect

all-perfect Spirit, possessing, in boundless perfection, the attributes of mercy, love, and goodness ; of wisdom, power and holiness ; of truth, justice and righteousness, as the essentials of his nature. In obedience and submission to such a character, the duty and happiness of every rational creature lie ; and to the truly rational, every such act will give the most refined delight. But sovereignty, to be absolute, must be separated from all these ; and to rejoice in the government of such a being, is impossible to reason : indeed, to such a being no submission is due : none such did ever fill the celestial throne. If instead of this ideal sovereign, they would put the sceptre into the hand of a supreme Ruler, whose will is ever conformed to his own eternal reason ; and incapable of deviating from the moral perfections of his nature ; all right minds will join them in rejoicing in his reign : the sovereign, uncontrollable, absolute liberty of every one of his attributes, will be the glory of all its exercises ; and thus it will be to the great honor of his mercy, that it is sovereign mercy ; of his justice, that it is sovereign justice, and so of every perfection. Of these attributes,

butes, imperfect, and created minds can form more clear ideas than of eternity, immensity, or necessary existence. In these views the scripture most frequently displays the Deity. Thus exhibited, as the standard of all excellence, he is proposed in these moral attributes as a pattern for the imitation of his rational creatures: and they are required to be holy as he is holy,* and commanded to be merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful. †

BUT to remove all the objections of Platonists, ‡ of Epicureans, ¶ of Academicks, § and Manichæans of old, || and particularly to refute the several exceptions of fatalists, infidels, and atheists of modern times would require a volume rather than a sermon. Instead of this, let it suffice us to consider such as, if justly taken off, will remove the grounds on which all the rest are raised.

OBJECTION 1st. *The existence of sin is necessary.*

ANSWER.

• Lev. 19. 2. † Luke, 6. 36. † These objections may be seen in Maximus Tyrius Dissert. 25.
¶ Lactantius de ira Dei. cap. 13. § Cicero de natur : deor. || Bayle de themiste page 142.

ANSWER. Necessary existence is an incommunicable attribute of God himself : to ascribe it, then, to any other being is impious blasphemy ; but to assign it to sin is atheism of the worst sort : however, if this assertion were true, it would not answer the end of proving God to be the cause or author of sin : for, if necessary, it was impossible that God should produce it. Whatever existence is necessary, must be eternal. It could not but exist *always* : therefore, it was impossible it should ever begin ; and so could never owe its being to any producing cause.

OBJ. 2d. Sin was necessary for the greatest good of the universe, and the greatest glory of God.

Ans. To suppose that the greatest good of the universe is the result of sin, is to make all the happy beings in it greater debtors, for their bliss, to sin, than to God ; since it is evident now that they cannot say they are debtors to the HOLY GOD for the production of sin. This must needs be an unanswerable argument in favor of evil ; for if happiness rise out of it ; then the more of sin, the more
of

of happiness; even as to increase the force of the cause naturally tends to increase the effects.

BUT to assert it to be necessary for God's greatest glory, is to make sin the foundation of JEHOVAH's throne ! It is to make the Creator more abjectly dependent than any of his creatures ! These indeed, under God, depend mutually on the beings, powers, and usefulness of each other : but this makes the LORD of all dependent, not only on the beings of his own created subjects, but even on their sins ! Dependent for his honor on what is their disgrace ! And if for his honor, then for his very life and being : for he can no more survive his existence than his glory ! How horrible must such doctrine be to the heart, that loves to adore the *Most High* ? Who would wish to be ruled by a sovereign of this sort ? Who would choose to be at the absolute disposal of such a being as this tenet describes ? Who could ever worship him in spirit and in truth ?

OBJ. 3d. Sin was a necessary part of the best possible plan for moral government.

Ans. This objection is arrogant and absurd.—
Arrogant, as it presumes to dictate to infinite wisdom, what measures it ought to adopt & what steps it must follow; it dares to sit judge and jury on the divine conduct; or, as the poet strongly expresses it, to

“ *Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,*
 “ *Re-judge his justice,”* and “ *be the god of God,”*

absurd, as it speaks of the greatest evil, as, in itself, a great good. For, that surely cannot be very bad, that is indispensable to the best of all possible schemes: nor can that be reckoned among the least goods that is essential to the greatest.

OBJ. 4th. Infinite wisdom and power must of necessity, choose and do the very best at all times that it can.

Ans. If God *must* of necessity act so; then the ALMIGHTY is chained fast in fate; and cannot, if he would, turn from the line thus prescribed him: there is left no liberty in his acts: all are necessary: all unavoidable! But if this be the case, where is the virtue, or the holiness? Where the moral goodness of any of his doings? Will not this doctrine
 strip

strip the HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL of the brightest beauties of his lovely nature? Would it not disrobe him of the fairest ornaments of his adorable character? I mean those of his moral perfections. Would it not rob him of all title to thanks or praise for any thing done by him? If all are necessary in this sense, all are unmeaning, undesigning acts.— This, instead of the blessed Creator and ruler of all, has set up the blind fate already exploded! With equal horror we turn away from the object, and the doctrine which upholds it, as a doctrine which is plainly a fetter-forth of strange gods.

THAT the great first cause, before any system was produced, had all possibles in his power, we readily grant: but what exercise would be left for his wisdom, if it must be pinned down, by natural necessity, to one, and only one of them all? If he must ever choose only the highest, and was not free to make a choice among them, according to his own mere pleasure; and without any bond, to give existence to this or that, merely because he chose to do so? What praise is due to his wisdom, on that hypothesis, for giving the preference to the system he has chosen?

chosen? If not free, he was incapable of doing otherwise ; even had he otherwise inclined.

BUT as the necessity here pleaded for, excludes divine wisdom from all part in the honor of the present plan of administration : so the supposition of its having done its best, forbids it all claim to the character of *infinite*. The plain meaning of that epithet is, “ Without all possible bounds or limitations.” Now, can that wisdom be really infinite that has a boundary? Yes, and has already come up to it? Have we not already seen a line of circumference actually drawn around it? Hitherto it has come : but no further can it : it has raised its building so high, that it is not able to go an inch higher ! Is this the true signature of infinite wisdom? Nay, rather, I would ask, whether the very idea of its infinity does not infer, that it never came to its *ne plus ultra*, and that it never can ?

THE same things may with equal justice be affirmed of divine power : to suppose, with the objector, that this attribute must ever be exerted to the utmost of its capacity, would argue against the possibility

possibility of different ranks of beings among his works. On this plan, all must be of the highest order. Every worm must have been made an archangel, every atom a world, every world a universe; for who will pretend that infinite power was not able to have made them such? Nay, on this supposition, there could never have been any creature made at all: and so infinite power, in this sense, would be only the power of doing nothing. It is absurd to say, that an infinite being could be created: yet, no less a being could be the adequate object of infinite power: for between that attribute and any finite being, there will ever be an infinite disproportion. None such, then, could ever be produced by the divine hand; since that hand was bound to act only in the highest instance and manner possible. On the principle of the objection, any creation at all ever was impossible, in the nature of things, and ever will remain so: for an infinite being could not be produced; and divine power must not stoop to create a finite one.

BESIDES, as was observed, with respect to wisdom, whatever power the objector would consent to
repose

repose in the hands of his Deity, it must not aspire at the name of *infinite* ; far from this, it has exerted its *utimum posse* already : nay, it ever did all it could. Instead of being without limits, its boundaries are found, and already past : and beyond them it never shall be able to go. It could not have created another grain of sand, another drop of water, or spire of grass : whereas, common sense would tell us that, in fact, that power cannot be infinite which ever has done its utmost, which ever shall do it, or which ever can ! This shocking position was never maintained, until very lately ; unless by those pagans who held the world to be an infinite body, of which God was the infinite soul.

Who can say, that the present system is any thing more than the threshold of a temple which JEHOVAH may yet erect to his eternal praise ? Who can tell how system may be built on system, and world on world, throughout unmeasured space ? Or how the divine work may keep growing greater and higher through interminable ages ? This may be a theme far above the tongues, or conceptions of men and angels : one thing, however, we

may

may safely venture to affirm that, how numerous soever may be the plans of infinite wisdom, which the Deity may think proper to execute by his power through vast futurity; and however high one may rise above the rest; there never will be so many, but that it is possible there may be one more; nor will any one of them be so great, but that room will be left for one still greater. So little reason is there to alledge that infinite perfection must ever be doing the very best it can.

OBJ. 5th. If sin was not necessary to the perfection of the universe, its origin must be ascribed to some fault in the plan, either of creation or government.

Ans. Fault can have no place in a plan laid by perfect rectitude that cannot err. Nor is it possible for the objector to point out any fault in this, which could have been prevented, but by a greater fault. Amid the uniformity and harmony of parts, every where observable, in a system produced by a Creator, of boundless wisdom, goodness and power, was it not fit there should be found

found that variety which is essential to the beauty of such a work ? In this variety of beings, was it not fit there should be gradation ? that in all the various orders of creatures no two should coincide, nor any ungrateful sameness in different species appear ? That each should be perceivably connected with the next ; and that, by easy and insensible ascents, the second should rise above the first, and the third above the second, and so on in a continued chain ; without leaving any chasm in the series, from the lowest to the highest in the system ?

If it was fit that in the natural world such gradation should be found ; I ask, why not in the moral too ? especially as that is the upper and nobler half of the whole ?

AGAIN, was it not fit that each order should be furnished with faculties suited to its place and end ? That each faculty should have a peculiar object fitted to itself ? That every order should be governed only in a way agreeable to its peculiar faculties ? And so, that material beings should be ruled by the laws of matter and motion ; and moral agents governed

verned by a moral law ? Is it said that no creature
 should have been made peccable ? It may be an-
 swered, then either there must be no thinking crea-
 tures----or, if there are, they must have no facul-
 ties ; or there must be no law, or rule to direct the
 exercise of the faculties they have. If it is con-
 tended that liberty was a dangerous property, and
 that it had been better that none had been indulged
 with it, we reply, that then there must have been
 no created moral agents at all ; for it has been pro-
 ved that none such could be without this liberty.
 Is it insisted on, that, this with-held, would have
 prevented sin for ever ? We rejoin that it would
 have forever shut the doors against virtue too : thus
 it would have superceded punishment and reward
 at the same time ; and made a moral government
 impossible. Will the objector urge, that such a
 faculty, if created, should not have been suffered
 to act ? We may ask him, if not, why was it crea-
 ted and given at all ? If he still plead that, at least,
 the MAKER should have watched this liberty him-
 self ; and prevented the abuse of it. We still in-
 sist, that although God's mere power could very
 easily have done this ; yet it would have been ut-

terly unfuitable for him to use his power to govern any creature ; except in a manner suited to its nature and capacity : this would call up the Most High in one character to counteract his doings in another : thus as a Governor he must supercede the faculties he had implanted as Creator ; and destroy, as a Ruler, the natures of his creatures which himself had just given them as the Author of their frame. Besides, if such perpetual restraining influence was due from him to his own subjects, there could be no room for giving them a law : since, if one were given, it must be a law, not indeed to them ; but only to the Law-giver himself : he alone being bound by it ; and he alone responsible for every breach of it that might be found in the universe.

OBJ. 6th. Sin could not have entered into the world against *God's* omnipotent will.

Ans. Many things happen every day, which it was his will strictly to forbid ; yet nothing comes to pass which it was not his will to permit ; for he ever possessed power enough to hinder it, and fully understood what power he possessed. That God permitted

permitted sin to enter, we readily grant : but this is only granting that he determined not to interpose the power of his almighty arm to hinder it. This, however, is a very different thing from his using that arm to cause it, or bring it into the world ; as different as the sun's not hindering the midnight-darkness, or winter-cold, while he withdraws his genial beams, is different from his causing the light of day, and the heat of summer ; when his presence is granted to our clime, and the influence of his kindly rays diffused. Nor will God's permitting sin, infer his willing it to be. A great divine already cited, * has clearly shewn, " That moral evil is not " a substance which exists by itself, as the Mani- " chees of old, ignorantly dreamed." It was not then, a capable object of creating power ; and we have seen, that creating any thing, and God's willing it to be, are synonymous terms : the thing which God wills is only his own act, which is perfectly good ; not the evil arising from the acts of others : it cannot, then, be properly said, that he willed sin's being : but only his own act in permit-
ing

ting it : † this permission by no means implies that he ever approved or took any pleasure in sin ; his holy eye never beheld it without abhorrence : nor does this suppose him either an ignorant by-stander, or an unconcerned spectator of this event. No : it only asserts that, while he utterly abhorred the sin of his creatures, he perfectly approved his own act in permitting it. Well knowing how far it would be consistent with the freedom of their natures, and the state of probation in which they were placed, for him to interpose ; and conscious, at the same time, that he was able entirely to over-rule their sin, contrary to its own nature ; and frustrate the evil designs of its wicked authors : so as to bring good out of evil, though he never did, nor caused to be done, any evil that good might come of it. And AUGUSTINE justly remarks, that “ It belonged more to the goodness of his almighty nature “ to bring good out of evil ; than not to suffer evil “ to be,” * and this sentiment is confirmed by another venerable ancient, who says, “ ’Tis the greatest

† Turret : loc. 6. p. 570.

* Aug. de correptione & c. 40.

“ test work of divine Providence, not to suffer the
 “ evil, arising from voluntary apostacy, to remain
 “ unuseful, or in every respect to become noxious.
 “ For it is peculiar to divine wisdom and power,
 “ not only to do good (which is as much the na-
 “ ture of God, as it is the nature of fire to warm, or
 “ of light to shine ;) but much more, to make the
 “ evil devised by others, to answer a good and
 “ valuable end. †

OBJ. 7th. Divine fore-knowledge made sin
 necessary.

Ans. The knowledge which any being has of
 the acts of another, however certain it may be ; yet,
 considered simply as mere knowledge, has precise-
 ly the same relation to those acts, whether it be be-
 fore them, after them, or at the moment of their being
 done. In all cases, knowledge is but knowledge still.
 It indeed, ever carries in it the idea of certainty.
 But that is founded on the certainty of its object ; in
 the production of which it can have no influence,
 natural or moral. Fore-knowledge of events, then,
 can

can do no more to necessitate them, than after-knowledge, or knowledge at the time of their taking place. NEWTON'S certain fore-sight of an eclipse a hundred years before it, really contributed no more to the certain futuration of that event, than my knowledge of the same thing since it happened. And, so far as knowledge is considered abstractly, this remark will equally apply to human knowledge and divine. The nature of things is not altered by being known : if known truly, they are only known to be just what they are ; and what they would have been if they never had been known.

I see an elegant building, or a beautiful garden just before me. I am certain they are there. But does their existence depend on my certain knowledge of it ? Should they not have been both what and where they are, if I had been blind ? They are ; not because I see them : but, v. v. I see them, because they are. In like manner it may safely be affirmed, that God certainly foresees things as future, because they certainly shall happen ; not that they shall happen because he foresees them : Præ-science,

science, therefore, whether human or divine, is, in fact, no *natural* cause of the things fore-known.

NOR is it less true, that mere fore-knowledge of the acts of moral agents cannot be the *moral cause* of such acts. These we have seen to be the effects of the agent's own choice; that choice is the act of his own will: and he is conscious, that it is an act freely done. Nothing, then, can influence the act *morally*, without moving the will. Nothing can do this, without becoming a motive, or a reason of its choice; nothing can be a motive to the will, until it is presented as such by a judgment of the understanding, and nothing can be so presented, until it is known there. But the divine fore-sight of any action cannot be known to us, unless God has revealed it by prophecy, until we have seen the action really done. 'Tis from the fact we argue -- to the divine præscience of its futurition; not from the præscience to the fact.

THIS reasoning receives daily confirmation from the universal experience of moral agents. That assures us, that so long as the matters which are the object

object of divine præscience, are hid in the divine breast; they are secret things which belong not to the creature; and whilst they remain such, they never affect man's free motions: his will is, in fact, never moved by them, until they are opened up to his mind. God's mere fore-knowledge of such motions does no more to incite him to them, than if all minds had been from eternity as ignorant of them as his own. No! Creatures do not take these or those steps meaning thus to fulfill the divine præscience in such cases. They go on freely, fulfilling their own pleasure, from their own motives, as these arise to the view of their own minds: quite undisturbed in their way by this fore-knowledge; they are freely intent only on doing their own business, whilst they are undesignedly accomplishing the things it foresaw: and thus it appears, on the whole, that the divine præscience is neither the natural nor moral cause of sin; and therefore can take none of its blame off from the sinning creature; and so can fasten none on the omniscient Creator.

OBJ. 8th. The decree of God, which eternally foreordained sin, has made it infallibly necessary.

Ans.

Ans. What has been said of divine fore-knowledge is thus far applicable to the divine decree. Simply considered this is no more the natural, nor the moral cause of sin than that. And for the same reasons. This, as well as that, is an immanent act. It dwells only within the breast of the ETERNAL JEHOVAH. It passes not, as his transient acts do, out of himself upon creatures. Therefore it effects nothing merely of itself: it is assigned to the divine power, as its proper province, in its energetic exertions in creation and providence, to make the decree bring forth. It is this energy exerted in its due time and order, and not the mere purpose of exerting it, that is properly the cause of things. Were not something more than mere *decree* necessary to the production of events, the effect must have instantly followed the cause; all events must have happened as soon as they were decreed: the world must have been created, deluged, judged, and consumed by the last general conflagration, all at once; Adam and the last of his race must have been born at the same moment: must have died at the same instant in which they began to

K, live ;

live ; must have been holy and depraved, condemned and justified, lost and saved, on earth and in heaven at the same time ! Yes, and each of these things must have actually happened from eternity ! for all were decreed at once ; and that decree was of no later antiquity.

It is certain, then, that the divine decree, simply considered, is not the *natural* cause of sin, since it cannot be such to any thing else that exists. And its being wholly hid in the divine mind, will sufficiently evince that it cannot be the *moral* cause of the creatures' transgressions ; since it could not move or touch their wills, by any moral influence, until it was discovered to their minds.

ALREADY, we trust, has it been proved that *God* does not make creatures sin by any act of his own done by his Providence in time ; and granting this, it will surely follow, that he could not do it by any purpose in eternity. For, as his power is not exerted in time to do any thing which his wisdom had not from eternity determined to do ; for known unto *God* are all his works from the beginning of the world :

world : * So nothing was purposed in the eternal decree for God to do, which is not actually executed in time : for he worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. † Since the producing of moral evil was none of God's works, it may be asserted that he never decreed to produce it ; nor to contrive to make a creature produce it : this was wholly the sinner's own contrivance : on the contrary, it was God's contrivance to counter-work it, to restrain it to a boundary, to destroy its force, and so to over-rule it, as to bring good out of it ; in spite of all the violence with which, in its own nature, it directly tended only to produce the contrary.

OBJ. 9th. Is not the holy scripture full in declaring God to be the author of sin ?

Ans. No ! but the reverse in every respect. In this attempt, indeed, we have endeavoured to treat the adversaries of the truth only with their own weapons. Arguments drawn from the reason and nature of things have been the chief tools here employed. Very sparing use has been made of scripture

* Act. 15, 18.

† Eph. 1. 11.

ture on this subject : That sort of defence seems to have been as obnoxious to the opponents of the present age, as it was inapplicable against their predecessors in the reign of paganism.

BUT if the dim light, thus feebly emitted from fallen reason in the clouds, may force the diseased eyes of sinners to wink hard, to escape the pain of seeing their own shame ; how must they *bide their diminished beads*, confounded, if the BIBLE were once to open upon them the sun-shine of divine truth in its meridian lustre ? Every leaf they turn, in that sacred volume, might flash conviction, or, at least, confutation in their faces. There the divine character is drawn to the truth : and all its parts delineated by a pencil which cannot err. If the bold blasphemer, who dares to charge his Maker as the author of sin, could condescend to listen, for a moment, to the language of those inspired writers, it would surely suffice for the stopping of his mouth.

WOULD he know whether there be not in God's nature, some secret leaning towards sin ? Their declaration is, GOD is light, and in him is no darkness

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ness at all ; * he is not a God who hath pleasure in iniquity ; neither shall evil dwell with him ; † for he is the rock ; his work is perfect : a God of truth, and without all iniquity ; ‡ yes, and of purer eyes than to behold it without abhorrence ; § that he is the HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD, GOD, ALMIGHTY, and that just and true are all his ways.¶

Do these men suspect that there was some evil infused into the constitution of created moral agents, either men or angels, at the first ? The Bible will assure them, that angels were made, originally, all bright as morning stars : ¶ that man was then made upright, (a) and in the image of his great Creator ; (b) yea, and that all the works of the All-creating hand were perfect in their kind, were good—were very good. (c)

ARE they jealous, that there was something not quite right in the law, under which creatures were placed ? Infallibility itself declares, that the law is
holy,

* 1 John, 1, 5. † Ps. 5. 4—7. ‡ Deut. 32, 4.
§ Hab. 1. 13. ¶ Rev. 4. 8. and 15, 3, 4. Ps. 145. 17.
¶ Job, 38. 7. Mat. 25. 31. Mark, 8. 38. (a) Ecclef. 7. 9.
(b) Gen. 1. 26. and 9. 6. (c) Gen. 1. 31.

holy, just and good. * Do they affect to doubt whether God has not some secret way of tempting his rational creatures to sin? Let them hear the decision of an Apostle in the case; who affirms, that God is as far from tempting any to evil, as he is from being tempted or drawn away to it himself. †

So far is the sacred book from inculcating, that God is the author, or cause of sin, that we need but open it to find the strongest evidence to the contrary. For, through those august pages, how does he every where denounce the most certain and awful penalties against it? How dreadfully has he inflicted many of these threats already? What solemn assurance has he given, that he will strictly adhere to the rest? and see them executed in their full extent to all eternity? And now, can this same being have given any of his subjects reason to complain that he himself necessitated and effectually produced those very sins, for which he will eternally punish his creatures? Are not his ways equal? ‡ Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? §

And,

* Rom. 7. 12. † Jam. 1. 13. ‡ Ezek. 18. 25. 29. § Gen. 18. 25.

And, when he judgeth his subjects; shall not himself be found clear ? †

It is true, scripture does not say that he has done all that Sovereign omnipotence was able to do, to prevent sin's entrance into the world ; for he could, in a moment have destroyed the faculties of rational creatures ; and reduced them to brutes or stones : he could at once have withdrawn his hand from supporting their beings, and so brought them, in an instant, back again to their primitive *nought*. But this capricious, and self-contradictory conduct, we have seen, would have been unworthy of the wisdom and goodness, not to say the immutability, of his nature. Yet, when we consult the sacred oracles, and consider God as Creator, as law-giver, as moral governor, or as judge, it appears from what has been said, that, in all these characters, he has good right to challenge all the universe with the confounding question, “ What evil have ye found in me ? ‡ Judge between me and my rational creatures, what could have been done for them, in either of these relations, that I have not done ?” *

Ans.

† Ps. 51. 4.

‡ Jer. 2. 5.

* Isa. 5. 4.

OBJ. 10. Even scripture asserts, that God creates evil, (Isa. 45. 7. Amos. 3. 6.)

Ans. 'Tis evident from the context, that not moral evil is spoken of in either passage; but natural evil only. The subject in both places is the righteous judgments of God; poured out in the due punishment of sins: and we have already shewn, that these are not really evil, but good in a moral view.

OBJ. 11. All the sins of men, since the revelation of Christ, arise from unbelief; and that is unavoidable.

Ans. So far as relates to God's dealing with men on the score of law, enough has been said to stop the mouth that would insinuate, that he has not originally furnished the human nature with sufficient ability to obey him: or that he denied it sufficient means of knowing its duty, or sufficient motives to induce to it. Not a murmuring word can, with reason, be uttered against the awful sentence, which God, in that law has denounced against sin; nor against the full execution of it. All
guilt

guilt lies on the sinner's own head. The throne of God stands unimpeachable, though all the race of rebels perish for ever.

IF the sinner must stand speechless at JEHOVAH'S bar, who only sinned under the law ; what can be said for such as live in sin under the gospel ; and, at last, die Christless, through their unbelief ? Can these plead that their need of a Saviour could never be known by them ? What ? Had not GOD written to them the great things of his law ? Could they not have read it ; or listened seriously when others did ? Could they not have compared themselves with its perfect, holy and just commands ?—And, if they had, was it impossible to find one flaw in their obedience to them ? Now, if human laws, which cannot boast of perfection, may be allowed justly to arraign—to condemn, and to punish, even capitally, the subject who is found guilty of but one breach ; shall it yet be expected that a law, perfect and divine, may not proceed so far ?

Had they found themselves guilty of but one sin, what can they offer to screen them from the

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punishment;

punishment which that one has merited ? Can they make their obedience perfect after that ? If not, must a perfect law be satisfied with less ? Or, should a perfect obedience be insisted on, who shall perform it for them ? And who shall bear the punishment of that one fault in their stead ? Can that punishment be less than infinite, which is due to a sin infinitely evil ? If not, can any mere creature sustain it all, and so discharge the debt, in less than an eternity of future sufferings ?

If the answers to these queries are so manifest, that nobody can mistake them ; is it possible that it should surprize the sinner to be told, that he absolutely needs a Saviour infinite and divine ?

Nor will any man, under the gospel, be able to plead that he never heard that any remedy was found ; or that he could not, if he would, come at the knowledge of the plan of salvation : or, having known it, that he found it, in any part, exceptionable, inconsistent, or unsafe. None can say that the gospel did not afford sufficient proof of CHRIST's ability, suitableness, and willingness to save ;

save ; to save freely, and to the uttermost, all that
 come to him for it. And where is he who can,
 with truth, pretend that he durst not come ? Has
 he not the warrant of a thousand calls from God's
 word ? Yes, and of a thousand commands superad-
 ded to these calls. Were not all these sufficient to
 authorize his coming ? Has he had greater warrant
 for his refusing ? or who, that ever came had grea-
 ter ? Under calls so universal, and so free, surely
 none can plead that gospel-proposals reached not
 to their characters ; or, that from any offer therein
 made, they were specially excluded. And, if not,
 who has hindered their accepting them ? Was it
 possible for evil men to compel them to follow
 them in vice ? Or could the devil force them into
 his lures against their wills ? Do they plead, that
 they could not believe ? I ask them, how do they
 know this ? Have they ever done all that they pos-
 sibly could, in order to believing ? Have they al-
 ways done so ? If not, how can they tell where their
 power was bounded ? Or, where it might be said
 to it, hitherto hast thou come ; but no further thou
 mayst ? And, if men go not as far as they can, with
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the strength they have ; let them blush to pretend cause of complaint for want of strength to go further ! It is evident their defect is wilful ; they would not convert themselves to the faith, if they could.

OBJ. 12th. Converting grace is the gift of God ; this he could give to all if he would ; but he does not ; therefore, their continuing in sin and sinking into misery is of the Lord.

Ans. It has been proved, that God was not bound to keep men from falling : if so, he surely is not obliged to recover them from their fall ; nor under any obligation to restore what he took not away. If he was not to blame for suffering them to begin to sin ; he cannot be for permitting them to continue sinning : he therefore, owed not this converting grace to any one of his rebellious subjects : and, if not to one, he certainly was not held to confer it on all. And they who are not made the subjects of this favor, can no more ascribe to God their continuance in sin, which is the consequent of his with-holding this grace, than they could charge

charge him as the cause of their commencing sinners at the first.

MOREOVER, it is very evident, that God never did any thing to hinder the conversion of any man ; whatever operated in them to prevent it, must have arisen from another quarter.

It ought, also, to be remembered, that when men are, in fact, converted, they are wrought on as moral agents ; in the use of the rational faculties, which, as such, they possess. Their understandings are influenced only by the light of divine truth ; and their wills, by motives suitable to their nature : the affections are drawn out to their proper objects fairly presented ; and every faculty is acted towards its own quarter, in its natural order and way. The means appointed for this work, are the truths of the gospel ; these means are used with all who come under the dispensation of it : they are made effectual to some : they would be so to all, if it were not their own fault. When duly improved, they are the means of conveying gifts higher and more special than themselves. But, when neglected or
abused

abused wilfully, they leave men not only unconverted; but also inexcusable for not using, as they could, the talents thereby given them, and so forfeiting all pretence to ask for more: having thus proved that they would make no better use of greater powers if they had them.

If all these finally fail, God is certainly not held to do more for any man. If he continues in sin unto final destruction, he may thank himself. For when all is done that is comprised in the use of means, in moving their hearts by moral influence, or the force of rational motives; it may then be said, that all is done which it belongs to the department of moral government to do: the act which forms the new creature is no more an act of moral government than that which created the old. This, as well as that, is the doing of Sovereign omnipotence. It is properly a creating, not a governing act. The influence of the HOLY GHOST which performs it in the heart is physical, not moral.

OBJ. 13th. God is expressly said in scripture, to harden the heart of Pharaoh.

Ans.

Ans. The history of that monarch's conduct, which we have in the book of *Exodus*, repeatedly charges the man himself with hardening his own heart : and sometimes when his conscience finites him with remorse, he himself confesses the awful fact, and owns his sin in the perpetration of it. *

SCRIPTURE cannot contradict itself; and if not, it follows, that GOD cannot be the agent, or efficient cause in producing this hardness of heart : nor is there any reason to charge the HOLY ONE with infusing a principle morally evil into this mighty sinner. No ! If God cannot tempt any man to evil, much less can he instil such evil into the natures of some. Every actual transgression implies an act of the sinner's will. Will, thus indulged, is easily confirmed into habit. And habits ever strengthen by continuance and exercise. Hence the sinner, at first timid and bashful, in process of time becomes a scorner, and glories in his shame : just as a bodily inflammation, slight and trivial in its beginning, by long tampering, neglect, or improper

* Exod. 5, 2. & 7. 23. & 8. 15. 32. & 9. 27. 34. & 10. 16. 17.

proper treatment, is at length aggravated into a gangrene, and pronounced incurable.

By a progress similar to this, did the state of Pharaoh's heart arrive to that pitch of pride, of passion, and of obstinacy which made the very means, used for his awakening and reformation, become only provokatives to his ruling lust. And hence he became impregnable to all the warnings of God's messengers, and to all the judgments of his Almighty hand.

If now we sometimes find it said, that God hardened this wretched criminal; the reason of things assures us, that this was only by way of sufferance or toleration, even as he concerned himself, by a holy permission in the first offence of angels and of man. The LORD, justly provoked by Pharaoh's daring insolence, withdraws, and exerts not his power actually to soften the temper of that monster. His own vices naturally tended to bring him to this case all along, if some foreign restraining power had not hindered them: God, in mercy, had hitherto laid on that hindrance, by his own restraining providence;

dence; as indeed he must be ever doing with sinful men, if he means to keep this world from soon becoming another hell:—But now, after Pharaoh's long and obstinate resistance of all the light afforded and all the means used with him, God, in righteous judgment, takes off the hindrance: and then, his heart naturally hardens itself apace, like dissolved metals taken from the fire and set in the cold. Now the ocean of iniquities in the sinner's heart, begins to cast up the mire and dirt, which had long lain settled, and concealed at the bottom; and without any propelling foreign force, he now wilfully precipitates himself headlong into the abyss, just as the herd of swine, rushed furiously down the steep and plunged themselves into the sea. In all this, God can be considered as the cause of his hardness, no otherwise than the hand in which a stone had been held up in the air, can be the cause of its falling by letting it go, when the truth is, nothing but its own innate principle of gravitation carries it downwards. No less justly, might the sun in the heavens be charged with producing darkness by the withdraw of his beams: in both cases, the

hindrance is indeed removed, which had hitherto prevented the event : but it is not the removal of the hindrance which produces it now : the event is the effect of other causes.

In this light, too, are all those passages to be understood, which seem to ascribe to God, the tempting, blinding, or spurring on sinners to evil. All are the just punishment of obstinate resistance of light ; issuing in their being, at last, left to their own lusts a prey.

BUT the time requires that a very brief IMPROVEMENT close this subject.

LET us, then, learn ever to consider the divine character as clear of all reasonable suspicion of being accessory to the origin of evil. Let us take occasion from this subject to adore and love that spotless Majesty, who, far from producing it, has done every thing, which it was proper and consistent with his station to do, to prevent the introduction of this abominable thing which his very soul hates. Be deaf, my hearers, to the diabolical suggestion in the text ; it leads to charge God foolishly : if, at any time,

time, the wicked insinuation is offered, it becomes you to treat the offerer as our blessed Lord himself, once treated an Apostle for a smaller offence : turn away the ear, and answer with a “ Get thee behind me Satan.” For if an angel from heaven were to begin to preach to you the blasphemous doctrine, that the MOST HIGH GOD is the author, the cause, or efficient of moral evil, you have the authority of God’s own word to declare him accursed. * This indeed is to clothe the ever blessed Deity with the worst part of the character of devils : to divest him of every attribute amiable or glorious ; to paint him as ————— but I shudder to give utterance to the horrible ideas which it forces on the mind. It is directly calculated to ROB THE FOUNTAIN of all good, of every service from the rational world, unless that, which some Indians were wont to pay to the devil, when they cringed, and bowed, and worshipped him, as a potent and malicious enemy ; lest he should do them harm.

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THE candid, but solemn, and judicious result of a *venerable* COUNCIL, which has lately appeared among us, concurred with the calls already hinted, to press the consideration of this subject upon us at this time: from that decision, we are furnished indeed with matter of lamentation, that there should be found, among christian teachers, any who would venture to inculcate this doctrine from the sacred desk: but it ministers, at the same time, a joyful occasion of adoration and praise to the great Head of the church, who has raised up so great a cloud of witnesses as that council comprised, to bear an open, a faithful, a solemn and judicial testimony against it, “As anti-scriptural, dishonourary to the
“Supreme being, and highly injurious to his glo-
“rious character.”

FROM the same authority we are taught to conclude that, should it ever be our misfortune to have our ears grated with the unhallowed sounds, that would attempt to make us believe that “G O D
“made or created sin, as he did the rest of the
“creation.” We need not wonder if we soon hear

it added, that men *ought not to be sorry for the worst crimes, even murder itself*, if they have been ever so *notoriously* guilty of them. There can indeed be no room for sorrow for any crime, when once they are sure that, not they, but their Maker has done it. Rather should the criminal rejoice in all his own sins, as well as in those of others ! What tho' an Apostle has affirmed that true charity, or love to God and men, rejoiceth not in iniquity ? † What though a sight of the sins of men drew rivers of waters from the eyes of the pious psalmist ? ‡ nevertheless, the greatest abounding of iniquity must be cause of joy and gladness ; if it be true, that it is all “ Necessary, and the very best way possible to procure glory to God and bliss to the universe.”

NOR shall we be surprized at any practical consequences following from this doctrine. Should *those ministers who direct sinners*, even under concern for their souls, to read the bible, hear the gospel, meditate on divine truth, pray to God for salvation, or, in a word, *to attend the means of grace*, be dubbed
with

† 1. Cor. 13. 6.

‡ Ps. 119. 136.

with the honorable title of *dumb dogs that cannot bark, &c.* Should the unregenerate be encouraged to lay the reins on the neck of their lusts, to dismiss all cares or pains for their own salvation, to cease all strivings to enter in at the strait gate; all this will be quite consistent: for if God is the author of all their errors, nothing is their sin; and therefore, nothing can be their duty. What, tho' sinners are commanded to kiss the Son, or believe in Christ, from this very motive, lest he should be angry with them, and they perish from the way? § What, though fear was a moving argument with Noah when he prepared an ark for the saving of his house? * And it is urged on Lot, by an angel, as a motive to escape to the mountain, lest he should be consumed? † Apostles may urge sinners to flee from the wrath to come; ‡ all this will not hinder an advocate for the principle here impleaded, solemnly to charge us to see to it, that no fears of God's anger, no dread of misery, no sense of guilt or danger, and, no desires of escaping it, should

§ Ps. 2. 12. * Heb. 11. 7. † Gen. 19. 15. 17. ‡ Mat. 3. 7. Luke 3. 7. Mat. 10. 23. & 24. 16.

should have any hand in prompting us to seek to Christ as the great city of refuge.

Moses indeed had respect to the recompence of reward; when he chose religion with all its sufferings. ¶ And Jesus himself, that perfect pattern of all holiness, is said to have endured the cross, for the joy that was set before him : ¶ that same blessed teacher invites sinners to come to him, that they may have life ; ** the weary to get rest, ¶ the hungry to obtain the bread, †† and the thirsty to find the water of life ; §§ and an inspired apostle declares salvation to be the end which the faith of God's elect keeps in its eye ††. Yet, on this principle, we are strictly forbidden to come to Christ, while we have any regard to our own salvation in the matter !

HAD the abettors of this doctrine joined themselves to the ORIGENISTS, and openly denied the truth of all the threatnings in the bible ; had they proceeded

¶ Heb. 11. 26. ¶ Heb. 12. 2. ** Joh. 5. 40.
 ¶ Mat. 11. 28 †† Joh. 6. 34. 35.
 §§ Rev. 22. 17. †† Pet. 1. 19.

proceeded to assure men that they had no evil consequence to fear from all their transgressions, for that the same God who himself caused—produced—or necessitated sin, could never proceed to punish his creatures for it ; this would have preserved some shew of consistency in the scheme : but when we hear the same lips declaring, according to truth, the infinite evil of sin—holding forth the law of God, in all its terrors, and denouncing even an eternity of just punishment against the transgressors ; we are struck with no less astonishment at the capacity of the human mind for swallowing contradictions, than horror at the article which completes the odium attempted to be thrown on the character of the HOLY ONE of Israel !!!

THE only salvo which could have been devised for so manifest an absurdity, was the ingenious discovery that creatures ought not to desire their own felicity—nor wish to escape eternal misery.

IT must be confessed that it would indeed seem necessary, at least to save appearances, that a Sovereign, who had made his subjects choose to sin against

gainst him, should also take care to make them choose to suffer for it—or, that, if he brought sin upon them, without their consent, he should make sure of their consent, before he punished them on that account.

THIS necessity will plead as strongly as any thing for your excusing a man of education, in his senses, if he tell you it is the duty of all “*To be willing to be damned, or made eternally miserable :*” or that none can be converted to God in time, without loving him so well, as to be willing to hate, blaspheme, and fight against him with all the heart to all eternity :*

N

“ per

* The absurdity to which this thought has reduced the tenet here considered, is generally evaded by its patrons, by pleading that damnation is willed by christians, only for the sake of God’s glory : this plea, however, on slight examination will appear to be only covering one great absurdity with another still greater : the damnation here supposed to be chosen, is either just or unjust ;—*if the former*, then to choose this is to choose to dishonor him by sinning here, in order to deserve a punishment in which we shall do all we can to dishonor him in suffering for ever :—this is to choose to dishonor his goodness, mercy, justice, truth, love, and every other moral attribute of his nature, in order to honor his justice and wrath :—to choose sin, is to sin wilfully—to do this for the glory of God, is to offend him, in order to please him—and to make the
greatest

“ per place for sinners : and therefore, they
 “ ought to choose to be there ;—and, as for
 “ faints, they had as lief be in hell as any where
 “ else ! ”—There is no danger of your believing
 such doctrines—it is impossible that a preacher of
 them should believe them himself. For common
 sense will assure him that nature must cease to be
 nature, when it ceases to seek its own happiness ;
 and his bible can inform him that grace shall cease
 to be grace, when it ceases to seek SALVATION by
 Christ.

WHILE we turn away, with detestation, from
 language so shocking to pious ears, let us learn to
 take to ourselves the blame, and the shame for all
 our iniquities. Convinced that God is clear of
 the charge of being the author of sin, let us stand
 fast

greatest act of sin the highest act of duty !—*But if the latter,*
 that is, if the damnation be supposed *unjust*, then to choose
 this for the glory of God, is to choose that God should do an
 act that would eternally dishonor him ; in order to secure his
 honor to eternity—that he should do evil, that good might
 come—and give up the glory of all his attributes, for the sake
 of promoting the glory of all his attributes ! ! ! Turn
 this monstrous tenet to any side you will, it presents you with
 nothing but absurdity or absurdity—and contradiction on
 contradiction.

fast in this faith, and humbly, but resolutely, set ourselves to vindicate his holy name from the aspersions of his enemies. Captivated by the charms of that goodness, truly divine, which has eternally fixed the heart of the Sovereign of the universe on accomplishing the redemption of sinners, from that state of wretchedness, into which he had none of the blame of plunging them—and moved him to be at all the cost of our cure, though he had no hand in inflicting the wound : let us adore the rich, the free, the sovereign grace of God in CHRIST JESUS his dear son, which has opened a glorious way of deliverance for perishing men, from all their guilt and all their woe ; through the obedience and sufferings of that eternal LAMB in their stead. Let us instantly fall in with the plan of reconciliation with God, as it is opened in the gospel. Let us now embrace the offers of the Saviour there freely made ; and ever give him all the glory of our salvation : And, for this purpose, let us lean on his grace to incline and enable us to live holy, while we continue pilgrims here below ; that

so

To we may grow up to perfection in the end ; and on the footing of his imputed righteousness alone, may then be brought to that state, where sin and sorrow shall be no more ; and God shall wipe all tears from our eyes,

A M E N.

ERRATA, *counting from the bottom.* Page 26, line 3, *del* of ; p 32, l 10, *for* pure, r perfect; and p 48, l 21, *for* some, r same.

