

A
LECTURE
ON THE
DIVINE DECREES,

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED A FEW

OBSERVATIONS

On a piece lately Printed in Lexington,
entitled "the principles of the Methodists,
or the scripture doctrine of predestina-
tion, election and reprobation."

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P R E F A C E

THe following discourse was composed for the benefit of a number of the author's Catechumens; without any purpose of making it public, in any other way, than by delivering it to those who attended his catechetical instructions. But several who heard it, supposing it to cast considerable light on a subject, which had often perplexed their minds, desired it might be sent to the press, that others might receive the same advantage they had done. Though this request is now complied with; yet, from the consideration of the difficulty and importance of the subject, and the talents required to do it justice, it is done with great reluctance.

Soon after this lecture was written, a pamphlet fell into his hands, entitled "the principles of the Methodists, &c." printed in Kentucky by Mr. Bradford. A few observations upon this he committed to writing for his own private use; but since it is resolved to publish the lecture, it is thought proper to annex these observations; because of the affinity of the subjects.

These

These humble productions are not designed, even to be read by men of improved understandings, or better opportunities: they are solely intended for the benefit of plain, unlearned Christians. If they should be the means of promoting their knowledge and spiritual interest, the author's highest expectations will be answered, and his most earnest wishes gratified.

A
LECTURE

ON THE DIVINE DECREES.

IN the course of our catechetical exercises, I am now called to treat on the subject of the seventh question of the Westminster Assembly's shorter Catechism, viz.

What are the Decrees of God? The answer to which is,

THE Decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby for his own Glory he hath fore ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

I AM entering then on a difficult subject, which has long been warmly debated by Divines, and furnished matter for much altercation among private Christians. On both sides, wise, pious, and learned men *have darkened counsel by words without knowledge*; and it would be presumption in me to imagine that I could handle it in so clear a manner, and set the truth in so convincing a light as to make it appear plain to every one, and free from all difficulties. However, I shall endeavour to treat it in such a way as I hope shall be for edification.

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The contending parties, on this subject, have usually been distinguished by the names of Arminians and Calvinists. Though the use of these names of party distinction may rather appear invidious, yet it is not easy to avoid them without running into many tedious circumlocutions.

The advocates for absolute decrees take their name from John Calvin, one of the first Reformers; who agreed in this point with Luther and other shining lights of the Reformation, Their opponents took their name from James Arminius; who opposed a number of the points of doctrine maintained by Calvin, and among the rest this of the absoluteness of God's Decrees. The Arminians think the doctrine of decrees to be contrary to the justice, holiness and goodness of God, and subversive of free moral agency, or liberty of action in man; that it makes man a mere machine, and lays the fault of all his bad actions on his maker; and that therefore they are bound by all the regard they have to the honor of their maker and the good of their fellow Creatures, to oppose it.

The Calvinists, on the other hand, believe that to deny the doctrine of divine decrees is eventually to deny the sovereignty, omniscience, wisdom, and power of God, and His providential government of the world; and consequently lays the foundation of all religion, and tends greatly to weaken every motive to a life of virtue: and that they are therefore bound under the most sacred obligations to maintain the doctrine, in opposition to the Arminians.

Both parties then believe they are actuated by the noblest motives, a holy veneration for God, and a benevolent regard to man; they therefore imagine that when they are strenuously opposing each

each other, they are doing God good service. Human weakness and corruption take place, a fiery zeal is indulged, reproachful language used, God is hereby dishonored, and good men's reputations greatly injured.

THEY mutually charge each other with consequences of their doctrine, which the defenders thereof neither acknowledge nor see. The Calvinist constantly teaches doctrines, which the Arminian thinks cannot be defended on any other than arminian principles: and, on the other hand, the Arminian teaches doctrines which the Calvinist highly approves, and thinks cannot be maintained, but upon his own calvinistic principles. Hence it is, they mutually charge each other with inconsistencies and self-contradiction; and sometimes have scarce charity enough to believe that their opponents have common honesty, or any serious regard to truth. How unhappy that a misguided veneration for God and benevolence for mankind should hurry honest men into such intemperate heats!

IN the warmth of debate on this subject, both parties have run into wide and dangerous extremes. The calvinistic extreme is antinomianism, or rejecting the law as a rule of life; the arminian extreme is that of expecting a pardon of sin and acceptance in the sight of God on account, at least in part, of their own good works or dispositions. The arminians are zealous advocates for free will; which is more properly called free agency; and look upon the calvinistic notion of absolute decrees to be inconsistent with this. The Calvinists maintain the proposition expressed in the Catechism, viz: That God hath for his own Glory, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

THESE

THESE two opinions, as they are understood by some, are looked upon to be inconsistent and irreconcilable the one with the other.

BUT I apprehend that they are in their own nature reconcilable, and that the true reason of the wide difference in sentiment here is, that the human mind is so contracted in its capacities, so far removed from the proper medium of knowledge or so unacquainted with the manner of God's decreeing and working, that it cannot discern the agreement, though it really exists; and that they have been both proved true by the most undeniable evidence and by arguments that cannot be confuted; but as men imagined that they were contradictory, and could not possibly be both true, each one embraced that which he thought supported by the strongest arguments, or attended with the fewest difficulties, and rejected the other as an error. Many things which appeared irreconcilable to us when children, we can now reconcile with the greatest ease; and it requires no great degree of modesty to conclude that many things which we are not now able to reconcile, beings of larger capacities or better masters of information, may find no difficulty in. I cannot see that this debate is any nearer a close than when it first began; and am persuaded that it will continue, until men learn to say nothing about it; or become so modest as to conclude that both the propositions mentioned are true, though they are not able to reconcile them, and remove all the difficulties that attend the subject.

I know that the proposition laid down and maintained by the Arminians, in opposition to the Calvinists, is, that the decrees of God are conditional and not absolute; but, chuse to mention the other, concerning the freedom of the will, because

cause I believe it to be the difficulty of reconciling the absoluteness of divine decrees with man's free agency that causes them to maintain their conditionality. It is here the point labours; and therefore to this I would at present chiefly turn your attention.

If we leave the field of reason, and enter that of scripture, we shall find the same difficulties here; for both propositions may be proved true from the sacred records, as well as by reason and philosophy: and I think that unless we admit them both to be true, it will be impossible to reconcile several plain passages of scripture, without torturing either the one or the other, and forcing them to speak a sense quite different from their obvious meaning as they stand in their proper connexion. Suppose the fore-mentioned propositions both to be true, there is no necessity of saying, as an eminent writer does "that he would rather conclude that a certain passage of scripture meant *nothing* than *predestination*."

While I speak on this subject, I would desire to do it with the utmost reverence and caution, sensible of the danger on both hands. I cannot but admire a certain Divine of the established church of England, who being asked his opinion of the doctrine of predestination, made no other answer than this, "should I study that doctrine, I would study it on my knees."

Though I am conscious that I am by no means adequate to the subject now to be discussed, yet I hope I shall be enabled to say what may remove some mistakes and hurtful prejudices, and tend to edification.

The question now under consideration calls me to speak only to this proposition viz. *That GOD*

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hath for his own glory fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass; but yet in order to give juster views of this subject, and the more effectually to guard against mistakes and prejudices, I shall also a little consider the other viz. That man is a free moral agent. In treating on this subject I shall endeavour,

I. To explain and prove the doctrine of divine decrees, as laid down in the answer.

II. EXPLAIN and prove man's free agency.

III. GUARD against a bad use or misimprovement of each of these doctrines.

IV. DRAW some practical inferences from each

I. I SHALL endeavour to explain and prove the doctrine of divine decrees, as laid down in the answer before us.

As I shall here have occasion frequently to use the word *contingent*, it may be necessary to define the sense in which I take it. I call a thing, or event, contingent, when it is quite casual, there being no previous ground, reason, or cause of its existence; when there is nothing in the nature or circumstances of the thing, or event, that renders it any ways certain, whether it will exist or not. An act, or volition, of a free agent is contingent when there is no previous ground, reason, or cause of its existence, but a supposed self determining power in the agent.

This point of doctrine now under consideration I shall endeavour to establish from principles of philosophy and by the sacred oracles.

I. I SHALL endeavour to establish this doctrine on principles in which all judicious Theists, whether
Christians

Christians Jews or Heathen, are agreed, viz. the infinite and eternal knowledge, wisdom and power of the great and independent author of all things.

THE great and eternal God must have a perfect knowledge of all things, and of all systems of being, that can possibly exist; with all their possible circumstances, relations and powers of action; and of what would be the consequences of giving any of these systems of being actual existence; he can perfectly view all these consequences, through all time: and therefore he is able to judge, with unerring certainty, which system would answer a good end, and which would not. He is entirely at liberty to chuse what things, or what systems, he will exert his creating power in order to produce. As he is an infinitely wise and designing agent, he must have some important end in view, whenever he exerts his creating power; and this end must be fixed and certain, and not dubious. To deny that God had an end in view, would be to deny that he was a designing agent; and to affirm that the obtaining of this end was a doubtful matter, and that there was a possibility of a disappointment, would have been an argument of the want of wisdom or power.

LET us apply this to our world, and to the case before us; in which application it will not affect our argument, whether we consider this world as a compleat system in itself, or only as part of a larger system.

BEFORE God made this world and its various inhabitants, he had a perfect view of all things he designed to create; of all their properties, powers, relations and circumstances. He saw perfectly how every individual being would act, when possessed of such powers, and placed in such circumstances,

stances; he saw all the events and consequences of their actions, and consequently the tendency and end of the whole system. He saw that such creatures, possessed of such powers, placed in such circumstances, acting in such a manner, and producing such effects, and all under a wise providential government, would answer the glorious and important ends he had in view. The end God had in view in creating this world was the same that it will actually answer. The end which man will in fact answer, is the same that God had in view, and designed he should answer, before he created him. This is evident; because, as he is infinite in knowledge, wisdom and power, he cannot be disappointed, or his purpose frustrated. With all this full in his view, he exerted his almighty power, and produced this world with all its inhabitants, and all their relations and powers, and the circumstances they were placed in, and by his wise and holy providence over rules and governs them, as he from all eternity intended.

Now the adorable creator's having this end, and these means, full in his view and purpose, when he determined to exert his creating power, is what I understand by his *fore-ordaining whatsoever comes to pass*. I do not mean that the great God, ever in any instance, exerts his power to force men to sin, or to weaken their virtuous principles, or to render them less able to resist temptations, or that he restrains them by the force of his decrees from repenting and returning to him, after they have sinned; neither do I mean that the fore-ordination of the almighty renders commands, offers, invitations and promises unnecessary, or weakens their force, or that it ought to be considered as any ground of discouragement to a convinced sinner, or reason why he should not accept of offered mercy; or excite in him the least doubt,

doubt, whether he has a right or warrant to venture his all upon free grace. Neither do I mean that it makes God the author of sin, or in any sense or degree lessens the demerit of it, or renders men more excusable in committing it. I only mean that the plan was so fixed in the counsels of infinite wisdom, and so chosen by the will of a sovereign God, that the end he had in view did not so depend upon uncertain contingencies, as through the influence of these, to become precarious and subject to disappointment; but would certainly be accomplished by those means by which God at first intended they should be accomplished.

The above representation, I apprehend, will be allowed by every one to hold good in all things, except those events that depend upon the voluntary actions of free agents. These events come to pass; and if whatsoever comes to pass is fore-ordained, then these events are fore-ordained; and if so, then the acts of choice which produced them must be fore-ordained too. As this is the main difficulty that attends the subject, I shall chiefly labour to clear this; in doing which we may be greatly assisted by a due consideration of the nature of the thing.

If the free volitions of men are not fixed and certain, then all their actions, and all the events produced by their actions are equally contingent, as they depend upon these free volitions as their cause; and no effect can be more certain than the cause which produces it. Hence it will follow, by a natural consequence, that the existence of families and their various circumstances, and even the future being of the human race, are uncertain: for it depends upon the free choice of a man and a woman, whether they will enter into the

the marriage relation; and the various circumstances they and their posterity shall be in, depend on a variety of other free acts of choice. Now if all these free acts of choice are uncertain in their own nature, so is the existence of families and even the human race, as they depend upon these free volitions as their cause. On the same principles, the decision of battles, the revolution of states and kingdoms, the political, moral and religious state of the world, are also uncertain.

The event of a battle may be determined by a single ball; the decision of the battle may terminate the war; the determination of the war may produce a revolution in the kingdom or state; this revolution may effect great changes in the political, and commercial state, of this, and many neighbouring states and kingdoms; and these changes may greatly affect the morals of the people, and render them much more virtuous or vicious; and this change in their morals may have great influence on their religious principles and practices; and the influence of these changes may extend forward, from generation to generation, to the end of time. All these great changes, and important events, may be brought about by the particular direction of a cannon, or a musket, at one particular moment, and this as the effect of a free act of choice in a private soldier. Now if this free volition of the soldier is properly contingent, if it is uncertain in its own nature, so are all these important events and revolutions, which depend upon it, as effects on their cause.

Now if all these important events are properly contingent, so as for their existence, or manner of existence, to be quite uncertain; for it to be quite uncertain, whether they will, be, or not be; then their future existence, cannot be certainly known.

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That thing whose future existence is uncertain in itself, and known to be uncertain, cannot be certainly known; for that would be as much as to say, that I may know it to be uncertain whether a thing will exist or not, and yet at the same time certainly know that it will exist. Suppose my knowledge to be increased to any possible degree of perfection, I make no advances towards knowing the future existence of a thing to be certain whose future existence is uncertain; the more perfect my knowledge is, the more perfectly I know that to be uncertain which is so in itself; and therefore by this perfection of knowledge I can come so near: knowing that it will certainly be. To say that, in this case, I can make any advances, is the same as to say that I can make some advances in knowing things to be different from what they really are, or knowing that to be true which is false. Now suppose this knowledge to be infinitely perfect, we come no nearer the purpose; for then the uncertainty of the future existence of the thing in question is known with infinite certainty. If omniscience knows a thing to be uncertain, the same omniscience cannot know it to be certain; for this would amount to an assertion that omniscience could discern a thing to be both true and false with infinite certainty.

Thus we see that to maintain the contingency of the free volitions of men, and those events that depend upon them implies a denial of the perfect fore-knowledge of God. If any thing whatsoever is uncertain in its own nature, an omniscient God, who knows every thing as it really is, must know it to be so; and if he knows it to be uncertain in its own nature it is a plain contradiction to say that he knows it will certainly be, or that it will certainly not be. It is to assert that he knows that

It is not possible to say that while he
exists he is not, or that whether he will
or may, which is a plain contradiction in terms.

To say that the existence of the Deity is by
itself not necessary, and that he may
relating to him, is one thing, and that he may
choose not to exist is quite another thing, and
that the possibility of his non-existence, when
he existed, is not a necessary consequence, but
a contingent one, is what we mean by his fore-
knowing all things. If we say that, we evidently
deny the necessary existence of the Deity, and
consequently we can have no object of worship, and
all religion is at an end.

To say that God certainly foreknows the fu-
ture existence of all things, while his future exist-
ence is equally uncertain in itself, and indeed is
such an evident contradiction, that it has misled
some in their view of the divine omniscience. They
saw the impossibility of maintaining his perfect
fore-knowledge, without admitting that he knows
every thing in his future existence, and then ac-
cording to their views, that a being, who in-
terfered with so many necessary consequences, that
they can deny, is, they think, not God, or one
of his essential attributes. This is a gross mis-
take, beyond all words, but to deny the omni-
science of the divine Deities, and maintain the per-
fect fore-knowledge of God, is quite manifest. I
do not mean to signify the limits of our lim-
ited capacities, but to denote contradiction in it-
self.

If we conclude that the free will of man
is necessary, it is necessary, and that the
many and important events, that are connected
with

with and depend upon them, and that these must be equally uncertain, and therefore equally unknown to the great Creator, we must conclude that he knows but very little of what happens in our world, until declared by the event, or what end will be answered by the creatures he has made. It depends upon uncertain contingencies; whether greater good or evil will be the result of creation; and whether the adorable Creator will not at length have reason to wish his rational creatures unmade, and literally repent that he created man; had he literally repented of this, when observing the corruption of human nature, may we not rationally conclude that he would have annihilated him; unless we suppose him limited in his power as well as his knowledge?

This opinion naturally tends to infidelity. For if such a number of important events are entirely uncertain in themselves, we shall easily and very naturally; conclude that this world is not under the divine government at all; but that the affairs of it are under the direction of blind chance or fortune: and if this is the case, we have no reason to acknowledge God in any providential dispensation; but are in a great measure, if not altogether, freed from the obligations of religion. If we exclude the doctrine of a providence, though we profess to believe the existence of a God, we as effectually exclude all religion, as if we fully embraced Atheism: for a God, who does not govern the world by his providence, is not an object of religious worship.

To deny that God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, even the most secret motions of the will of man, includes in it a denial that he governs the world by his providence; unless we understand by his providential government a con-

tinual series of miracles, rectifying the disorders introduced into his system by the free will of man: a notion of providence, which, as far as I know is entertained by none.

BECAUSE, as has been already proved, if the free volitions of men are, properly speaking, contingent, and also those events that depend upon them, as effects on their causes, they cannot be known, even by God himself; and therefore no provision could be made in providence for such cases.

No act of volition seems more uncertain, considering the circumstances, than that by which our first parents chose the forbidden fruit, and fell from their original rectitude. This act certainly made a great, most amazing and universal change in the state of human society: every thing is quite different from what it would have been.—Now unless this act of volition in our first parents was certain, every thing, every change, every event that flowed from it must be uncertain: if it was unknown, all these things must likewise be unknown; and therefore no provision could be made, in the councils of heaven, for the providential government and disposal of this new scene of things. On these changes God must have changed his counsels and designs, and brought all under a new management, which had not been certainly foreseen. On the principle I am opposing, the fall of Adam must be unknown, and therefore, before the foundations of the world, no provision could be made for his recovery. The selling of Joseph into Egypt, the attempt of his mistress, his being cast into prison, his deliverance from prison, and his advancement in Pharaoh's court, must all be unknown; and therefore the provision for the preservation of the family of Jacob from famine could not be made with any certainty. The taking Babylon by King
Cyrus

Cyrus must be unknown; and therefore the provision for the deliverance of the Jews from their babylonish captivity: and the same may be said of every other important event, that has happened in our world, which depended upon the volitions of free agents. From the same principles, it would follow, that many of the most important prophecies in scripture are uncertain, and that there never was any reason to expect the events foretold.

If the free volitions of men, and the consequent events, are uncertain and unknown, the same imperfection takes place in the divine government as is found in human governments; where cases unforeseen cannot be sufficiently provided for; and one act must be passed in order to amend another, and a third in order to amend that amendment. But this is all contrary to reason, and that perfection, which the scriptures every where attribute to the divine government. This brings me to shew

2. THAT this is not only a doctrine that may be evinced from reason, but it may also be proved by many passages of sacred scripture: a few of which I shall produce.

EPH. 1. 9, 10, 11. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he hath gathered together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. PSAL. 33. 11. The counsel of the LORD endureth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. ROM. 9. 17. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh.

even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout the earth. Here we observe a purpose of the divine being expressly mentioned: it was to declare his name throughout the earth; it was to make known to mankind that he was the only true God, and that the Gods of the nations were but vanity. It was a gracious purpose; the spreading the knowledge of God and religion among men, and thereby promoting their happiness in this and a future state. Here we have also an instrument raised up to accomplish this end; viz. the king of Egypt. We may also observe, that the means by which this end was to be accomplished were Pharaoh's free and voluntary actions: *he will not let the people go*. Now certainly if the end was determined, and the instrument raised up on purpose to accomplish it, the means must be determined also; for if we suppose the means uncertain, the end must be equally uncertain, as was before observed. If it was uncertain in itself how Pharaoh would *choose* to act in this case, it was uncertain whether the end for which he was raised up would be answered. The means must exist, and exert their influence, before the end can be accomplished. If the end was decreed; the means by which it was to be answered, viz. the voluntary actions of the king of Egypt, must also have been decreed: this is undoubted, unless the end may be certainly accomplished by means that are uncertain.

In the account we have of this important and instructing matter, God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he should not let Israel go. Which informs us that ancient inspired writers were not so apprehensive of the evil tendency of such expressions, as some of our modern reiners seem to be. It appears to have been a mode of expressi-

on familiar to them, to say that God did whatsoever he permitted to be done and over-ruled it to subserve the purposes of his providence, even though it was what depended upon the free volitions of moral agents. Though I acknowledge the matter to be attended with considerable difficulties, yet I am fully persuaded that the hardening Pharaoh's heart was entirely consistent with his free agency, did not in the least make God the author of his sin, or in any respect or degree free the king from blame, though it made a part of God's plan, and was an appointed mean of accomplishing his holy and gracious purpose.

Envy and cruelty prompted the sons of Jacob to sell their brother to a company of Ishmaelites, who sold him a servant to an Egyptian. This was a very wicked action, in which a number of men were concerned, all acting freely and voluntarily as moral agents; and yet the providence of God had a chief hand in it; for it is said, Gen. 45. 5. *GOD did send me (viz. Joseph) before you to preserve life:* and the seventh verse, *GOD did send me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance;* and in the eighth verse, *So now it was not you that sent me but GOD.* Here the great object in view was the salvation of mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the plan of infinite wisdom, the Saviour was to be born of the seed of Abraham; and therefore it was necessary that his posterity should be preserved alive; but a long famine, of several years continuance, was to come on the country in which they dwelt, and in order to their being preserved from perishing by this famine, God determined to send them into Egypt; but that proper provision might be made for them, Joseph made himself beloved to them, and, we may add, recast into prison, delivered from thence, and introduced into

Into Pharaoh's court. Now all these important purposes must be brought about by a number of free and voluntary actions of men, which were criminal to a high degree, such as the envious and malicious conduct of Joseph's brethren, the lascivious desires and wanton behaviour of his mistress, and her malicious falsehood in accusing the innocent Joseph of a crime, of which she could not persuade him to be guilty by all her solicitations. Now were these actions, on which so many important events depended, absolutely contingent, though they made so great a part of the fixed plan of infinite wisdom and goodness? If so then these events themselves must be equally uncertain. But we are sure that the latter were not uncertain, and therefore believe that the former were not; and that for this plain reason, that God himself sent Joseph into Egypt, and, we may add, into prison; though it was by means of these wicked actions.

See also Acts 2. 23. *Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of GOD, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.* Also Chap 4. 27. *For of a truth against thy Holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.* I do not know that it can be expressed in stronger and plainer terms that God decreed the crucifixion of Christ, and that his purpose was effected by means of the free but very wicked actions of men. The Lord of life and glory was crucified and slain; it was done by wicked hands, through envy, and from malice prepense; it was done in a sinful rage, and with horrid imprecations of his blood upon themselves, and their children; and yet it was done by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God; they did what *His hand* and counsel determined before to be done.

I do not know that any point in Divinity can be proved plainer than this is by Scripture testimony: and I cannot see any possible way of evading the force of this argument, but by saying, I had rather conclude that this passage precious and important as it is meant *nothing* than *predestination*; a short and easy method of removing a difficulty, otherwise insurmountable. But should I conclude that this text had no meaning, others would think it had, and that too, one which is very plain and important.

On the whole, we may see that both reason and scripture concur to establish this important doctrine of the reformation, *That GOD has fore ordained whatsoever comes to pass*. We may also take notice that the very same passages of the word that prove this doctrine, prove also that this does not lessen the criminality or blame worthiness, of bad actions. Hence we may see, that men need not be so greatly affrighted, as some appear to be, at the horrid consequences they imagine flow from the doctrine of the divine decrees, as it respects the volitions and actions of free agents: for these consequences are properly guarded against, in the very sentences that prove the doctrine. The difficulty that attends the subject, as hinted before, arises chiefly from the weakness of our capacities, and our ignorance of the manner of God's decreeing and working; and our perplexity about it is owing to the unmortified pride of our own hearts.

II. I SHALL endeavour to explain what Free agency is, and show that we are Free agents.

FREE agency is a liberty of acting as a person chuses, without being under any constraint or compulsion whatsoever. A man is a free agent when he acts voluntarily, or as he chuses, without any other being or thing to force him to act, or hinder him

him from acting ; and that whether he does that which is morally good or morally evil ; whether he commits sin, or performs duty. This is commonly called *free will*, but more properly a liberty to act, as a man wills. A strong bias or propensity does not destroy this free agency. However strong a man's propensity may be to do good, this does not destroy his freedom ; neither does a strong bias towards that which is evil destroy or lessen it. As a strong propensity to do good or evil does not destroy liberty of action, so it does not lessen the degree of good that is in a good action, or the degree of evil that is in a bad action, or make less praise or blame due to the one or the other. If this was not true, it would follow, that the better a man's disposition of heart is, or his inward principle of action, the less he ought to be esteemed for doing well, and the worse his disposition and principles, the less worthy of blame for doing that which is evil ; which would be laying down a principle in morals contrary to the common sense of mankind. Common sense teaches us that the stronger a man's propensity to goodness, and his aversion to vice, the more perfect his goodness, and the more praiseworthy ; and on the other hand, the more deeply rooted vice is in a bad man's heart, and the stronger his propensity towards it, the more criminal are his bad actions. If a man spends his days in the service of his country, we never esteem him the less, because his love to his country is exceedingly strong. If a man kills another in the heat of passion, on some sudden and great provocation, before he has time to reflect, we call it manslaughter, esteem him less criminal, and spare his life ; but if he kill another from malice pre-pense, we call his crime murder, and judge him worthy of death.

The wickedest man on earth, or condemned spirit in the infernal regions, is I apprehend, as truly possessed

possessed of freedom of will, or is as truly a free agent, as the best man on earth, or the saints or angels that surround the throne of God. He then who denies the doctrine of free will, denies, I presume, what he does not understand. Man is as truly a free agent now as he was before the fall; and will continue to be so, as long as he continues a moral agent, or an accountable creature. Vice does not destroy human liberty; it only abuses it; and hence we may safely, and confidently assert, that no man is ever obliged to sin, nor restrained from turning from it by true repentance, through the power or force of God's decrees. The decrees of God then never bar any man out of the kingdom of heaven, or are the cause of his destruction. All those heavy charges, brought by some honest men, against the doctrine of divine decrees, maintained by Calvinists and proved from scripture; as making man a mere machine, and God a cruel tyrant, the author of sin, and the unrighteous punisher of his creatures for crimes they could not avoid; as being as cruel as the devil, and doing his work for him, while he suffers him to sit at ease in his velvet chair, originate in ignorance of their real sentiments and in strong unreasonable prejudices.

We know that we are free agents by reflecting upon our own actions. We are conscious to our selves that when we do that which is good or that which is evil, our actions are the effect of our own choice, and that we might have acted otherwise if we would. When the pious and benevolent man falls on his knees and worships God, or bestows an alms on the indigent, he is conscious that he acts freely, and could have refrained those actions, if he would; and when the drunkard puts the cup to his mouth, to take the intoxicating draught, he knows he could forbear, if he would. If men were not free agents, they could not be

moral agents; they could not be subjects of praise or blame, nor of rewards or punishments: we are sure of this by an inward perception of the fitness of things, and most plainly discern that it would be unreasonable to blame, or punish a man, for an evil action which he could not avoid, though he desired it most sincerely.

THAT man is a free agent also evidently appears from sacred scripture. All the commands of God prove it; for why should we be commanded, if we were necessary agents and could not obey, if we pleased? All the threatenings of the word prove it, for why should we be threatened to restrain us from doing that which we could not avoid? Every invitation of the gospel proves it; for why should we be invited to do that which we are unable to do, though we sincerely desire it? CHRIST evidently supposes man to be a free agent in that expostulation, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.* Here the blame is laid, not on the want of power, but will. This charge could not have been just, had it not been in their power to have come to him for life though truly willing.

This point is so very plain, that I judge it unnecessary to dwell longer upon it. But here I see an objection or two in my way, which I must stop to remove.

SOME may say, that the scriptures represent man as *dead in trespasses and sins.* Christ says, *Without me ye can do nothing;* and, *No man can come unto me, except the father who hath sent me draw him.* In these passages the deficiency complained of is not the want of will, but power; therefore suppose a person willing to repent and come to CHRIST for life his case is not more hopeful, for still he wants power. Some suppose that this objection is con-

formed by their own experience; they are deeply convinced of their sin and misery, and of their need of eternal life; and would give a thousand worlds they could come to CHRIST, and obtain this eternal life; but though they labour and strive to do it, they cannot come.

To this objection I reply, the inability, or want of power, here complained of, is moral, and not natural. A natural inability to perform a good action excuses the neglect of it, for instance, should I see a stronger man than myself, well armed, about to kill my friend, while I am entirely unarmed, and unable to defend him, though I ardently desire it, it is no crime in me to suffer my friend to be killed. But a moral inability to perform a good action does not excuse the neglect of it; it being nothing else than the want of an inclination, or not chusing to do it; for instance, should I see my friend about to be murdered, when I was properly armed, and had strength sufficient to defend him, but no heart to exert it, and should therefore suffer him to be killed, my neglect to preserve his life is criminal; though I labour under a moral inability to perform this good action. A man's want of an inclination to do a good thing is the same as his not chusing to do it; which is so far from being an excuse for neglecting it, that it is the very thing in which the criminality of the neglect consists. To be dead in sin, is voluntarily and habitually to *chuse* to live in sin. To be unable to come to CHRIST, is the same thing as *freely to chuse* not to come to him. Require a rich miser, who makes a god of his gold, to expend a large sum for some generous purpose, and he will say, I *cannot* do it; I cannot part with my money for any such purposes. He *cannot* perform this generous action, his inability is exceeding great; but it is only moral, and therefore does not excuse him. If it did, then we might certain-

ly conclude that a great degree of avarice was no crime, only a small degree was criminal, such as would create a little reluctance, which after a short struggle would be overcome. Moral inability and unwillingness is the same thing; and therefore when Christ says, *No man cometh unto me, except the father who hath sent me draw him*, he means to charge men with the same crime, as when he says, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life*. Only in the last passage he more immediately points out the sinfulness of that state of unwillingness, and in the former the misery of it. When men imagine that they are willing to come to CHRIST for life, and cannot, they mistake the object of their choice: that life which they desire, is not the life which CHRIST gives. They desire a freedom from condemnation, while sin is not the object of their aversion, nor holiness the object of their choice; but the life which CHRIST bestows, consists in a freedom from sin and a conformity to God in holiness. They desire to come to CHRIST that he may save them from eternal damnation, while they neither see the deformity of sin, nor truly desire a deliverance from it. CHRIST, considered in his true character, as a complete Saviour from sin, *Salvation*, according to the scripture account of it, are not the proper objects of their choice. We may rest assured that every one who views CHRIST in his true character, and knows the nature of that life which he gives, and is truly willing to come to this Saviour, and accept of this life, shall obtain it: yet this willingness, where it is sincere, is actually coming to CHRIST, and receiving life.

I OBSERVED that strong propensities do not destroy human freedom; or, if good, make virtuous actions less commendable; or, if vicious, render bad actions less criminal. Some may object to this,

and assert that the stronger a man's propensity to any vice is, the greater difficulty for him to refrain from it; and therefore he must be less criminal when he commits it.

To this I reply, If the difficulty arose from any thing beside this vicious propensity, there would be force in the objection; but when all the difficulty arises from the strength of this vicious propensity itself, it cannot be admitted. An outward action is denominated vicious, because it proceeds from, and is expressive of, a vicious disposition or propensity; and it would be strange reasoning to say, that the stronger the vicious principle is, that produces the vicious action, the less criminality there is in the action itself. If so, the way for a man to become perfectly innocent, is for him to become totally criminal; and then a perfectly wicked heart will produce a life quite blameless. Perhaps no doctrine can be more false, or more pernicious, than that a strong bias or propensity towards any vice lessens the moral evil of vicious practices. This is so far from being true, that it is the very thing in which the essence of the crime consists. It is so far from being safe, that it opens a door for a life of the most atrocious offences. A great alienation of heart from God and his ways is the greatest difficulty a man can labour under in his service. This alienation of heart is properly a moral inability for the service of God, and is all the inability man labours under; and it is evident that this is his greatest crime, and the fruitful source of all his other crimes. To plead our vicious propensities, as an excuse for our sins, is the same thing as to plead our great criminality, as an excuse for our criminal actions.

HERE I would observe, that those animal appetites that are natural, are in themselves lawful, and
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necessary for the preservation, support, and comfort of the body, or the propagation of the species; and it is lawful to indulge them, as far as is requisite for answering their proper ends: but all beyond this is wrong, and argues a mind enslaved to sensuality, and alienated from more sublime and heavenly enjoyments, and therefore exceedingly criminal in its disposition.

III. I SHALL endeavour to guard against a bad use, or misimprovement, of each of the doctrines already discussed.

Men are naturally inclined to run out of one extreme into another. Both Calvinists and Arminians have their extremes, and frequently pervert the doctrines they profess.

CALVINISTS abuse the doctrine of divine decrees,

1. WHEN they infer from it that the elect are actually justified from all eternity; and that the justification of believers in time is only a revelation, or manifestation, of this eternal act. A doctrine that lays a natural foundation for men, who once imagine themselves to have been converted, to live easy in sins that are unrepented of. If they believe themselves to have been justified from eternity, justified before they repented and believed, it is easy for them to hope that they are still justified though living in the love and practice of sin, impenitent and unbelieving. If this doctrine is true, we ought not to pray for the pardon of our sins, and acceptance in the sight of God; we should only pray, that if we are of the elect, he would be pleased to manifest our eternal justification to us, for our present comfort.

THE same method of arguing, by which I presume

sume this doctrine is supported, would prove that this world and all its inhabitants were created from eternity; that man was from all eternity in a state of innocence; from all eternity condemned and polluted; from all eternity justified and sanctified; and from all eternity glorified; and therefore from all eternity, and at all times, holy and unholy, innocent and guilty, pardoned and condemned, in disgrace on earth and glorified in heaven.

2. THEY abuse this doctrine, when they infer from it, that believers are not bound by the law, as a rule of duty; that God does not charge their sins upon them, and that they by sin are not brought under the divine displeasure; that though they do what would be sin in others, it is no sin in them; and that therefore they are not liable to punishment for it. This is an error that strikes at the foundation of all practical religion, and makes CHRIST the minister of sin. The design of CHRIST'S coming into the world, living a life of sorrow, and shedding his precious blood on the cross, was that he might save his people from their sins, and not in their sins; his design was not to put them in such a state that they might live at ease and safety in the love and practice of sin; but to give them a holy aversion to it, and teach, dispose and enable them carefully to avoid it. The doctrine of grace teach us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and Godly in this present world, looking unto that blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great GOD and of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. In these few words are clearly expressed the main end of CHRIST'S incarnation, of the labours of his life, and the sorrows of his death, of his atonement made on the cross, and his intercession in Heaven; the main end of all the doctrines heard
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his Apostles. have taught; and the natural tendency and effect of Christianity, where ever it is cordially and sincerely embraced.

3. They abuse the doctrine, when they infer from it that it is in vain for them to seek the grace of God in the use of appointed means; that if they are elected, they shall be saved, do what they will; and if they are not, they shall be damned, do all they can. In this manner, I am afraid, some reason themselves out of God's appointed way of Salvation, and into eternal destruction.

Let such be assured, and let the thought deeply impress their hearts, that the decrees of God do not force them to sin, nor to continue in impotence and unbelief.

Men do not act thus foolishly with regard to the life of their bodies. They believe that the time of their death is as certainly decreed as their eternal state; but they do not infer from this, that they need use no means for their own preservation; nor conclude that if it is appointed that they shall die at such a time, they shall die then, and that if it is appointed that they shall live until such a time, they shall live till then, act as they will; and that therefore it is useless for them to use any means to preserve life, or endeavour to avoid danger. Indeed when men argue in this way with regard to their eternal state, it rather arises from their aversion to religion, and is an excuse for their neglect of it, than the effect of any principles they really hold. On this subject a serious rational man would rather reason thus, since whatsoever comes to pass is decreed by the Almighty; the means are decreed, as well as the end; and that this decree establishes the connexion between the means and the end; and is consequently the only ground of execution.

ment we have to use the means, in hopes of obtaining the end. Was there no such established connexion, there would be no ground of encouragement to use the means; and if either the means or the end were not decreed, but left entirely contingent or uncertain, there could be no such established connexion: and consequently we could have no more reason, or ground of encouragement, to do one thing in order to obtain any particular end in view, rather than another quite different from it, or opposite to it,

It is extremely absurd for a man so to busy himself about the secret things that belong to God, and are entirely unknown to him, as to reason himself into the neglect of those things, which are plainly revealed as the path of life, and the way of his duty. The secret purposes of the Almighty are unknown; what he has made man's duty, and required him to observe as the means of his salvation, is plain and obvious; and therefore common sense should teach him carefully to attend to the latter, and be found diligent and constant in the use of God's appointed means of grace. This reason directs, and thus a sensible man will act in all the common concerns of life: men are guilty of the absurdity I oppose, only where the honor of God and their own salvation are concerned.

4. Those misimprove the doctrine of divine decrees, who, though sensible of their ruined state by sin, and of their absolute need of divine grace, yet are discouraged from applying to God in **CHRIST** for deliverance from their deplorable state, through fear of their not being of the number of God's elect. They are fully convinced that they are guilty and miserable sinners, who need a pardon and all the graces of the holy spirit; they believe that **CHRIST** died

died to save sinners, that through him they have an offer of pardon and reconciliation, that a holy and gracious God has made it their duty to seek his grace in the use of his own appointed means, and given them great encouragement to hope for success; they are sure, that if in the use of these means they are brought to true repentance, they shall find mercy; but they are entirely ignorant of the secret decrees of Heaven. Now for men to neglect that which they so well understand, and know to be their undoubted duty, on account of that which they know nothing about, which does not belong to them and, which, being unknown, cannot operate as a rational motive of action, and which does not destroy their free agency, is sinful madness and folly. God informs them in his word that secret things belong to him, and to them those that are revealed; but they are so concerned about God's business, as to neglect their own; and that in matters of the last importance.

Life and salvation are freely offered to all the sons and daughters of Adam, who hear the sound of the gospel, by a faithful God, whose word is not yea, and nay; but yea, and amen: and shall we be so discouraged by that in God, which is an entire secret to us, as to neglect to seek that happiness, which is so plainly and freely offered to us? Such conduct perverts the doctrine of divine decrees to the worst and most destructive purposes. You say, you can find no marks of election in your temper and conduct, and therefore can have no encouragement to come to CHRIST. Could you be persuaded of your election, you could then approach to God, as one of his chosen ones; but as it is, you are afraid of being rejected as a reprobate. Let me tell you, my friends, that there was never yet a fallen son of Adam, who, on his first application to CHRIST, came as one of God's elect; but they come as poor, polluted, guilty, condemned sinners, strip-
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ped of all self-righteousness, and without one discernable mark of election about them. They take not their encouragement from their election; but from the free offer of life made to guilty sinners in the gospel by a faithful God. The gospel offer is not made to the elect, as such; but to men considered as guilty sinners of the race of Adam; and therefore they have no business with their election in the case, they have no business to be searching in themselves for the marks of election, they need only to know that they are guilty needy sinners, in order to be assured that the offer of life is made to them and that they have a sufficient warrant to accept of it; and that on their so doing, they shall certainly find mercy. Seeking for the marks of election, as necessary qualifications for our coming to Christ, is a very effectual bar in the way of a right application to him, and argues that we are strangers to the true character of Christ, and to the abundant riches and freeness of God's grace.

THE Arminian who denies the fore ordination of all things and warmly pleads for human liberty, perverts the doctrine he professes.

I. **WHEN** he concludes that many things come to pass, not by the order of God's providence, but by fortune, luck or chance. This notion naturally tends to exclude the Almighty from the providential government of the world, and thus destroy all religion. If we suppose there are a number of things which are not fore ordained by the Supreme being, it is easy to conclude that they come to pass by accident. If lesser matters may thus come to pass, greater and more important matters may also; and by pursuing this thought, we may learn to ascribe every natural comfort of life, and every natural affliction, to chance, fortune, or I know not what influence of the stars. Every advantage we enjoy, and all the

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cess in our labours, we may consider as our *good fortune* and not as the bounty of Heaven; and every loss disappointment, and affliction we may look upon as *bad luck*, and not as an adverse dispensation of providence: and thus the Deity may be excluded from having any hand in the government of the world he has created, and religion be made unnecessary, and even impossible. Why should I pray to the almighty to guard me from evil, or bestow upon me any of the blessings or comforts of life, if these evils, blessings or comforts come by chance? Or why should I make any grateful acknowledgements for the good things I receive from fortune, and not from a wise disposing providence? How can I be sensible of my dependence upon God, if I constantly depend upon fortune? Thus we see that practical atheism, or a blind devotion to a God that is, and ever will be, unknown naturally flows from the doctrine of chance. And he who denies the foreordination of all things is not many removes from this pernicious doctrine, and will either fall into it himself, or lead others into it, if not much on his guard.

As this doctrine tends to destroy the idea of our dependence on God, and accountableness to him, so it tends to destroy, or at least greatly to weaken, our obligations to justice in our commerce, one with another: for if the good things of this life are only the goods of fortune, and not of a kind providence, why have I not as good a right to pick up what is scattered by chance, as another man? And his being so lucky as to step in before me and get prior possession, is but a very feeble foundation, on which to establish his claim, and prove it to be better than mine. Then why may I not lay it down as a principle to take all advantages, and get possession of as many of these goods of fortune, as I can; since they are no more designed for another than for me?

On this principle, to talk of injustice, and of taking unrighteous advantages of our fellow men, is only to make an unmeaning sound of words. Exclude a providence, and of all the goods of fortune there is no such thing as mine and thine, upon any other principle than that of actual possession. But if the comforts of life are the gifts of God's providence, then the man who receives them has a right founded on the firmest bottom, viz: the free donation of the great proprietor of all; and therefore to deprive him of them is an act of criminal injustice, punishable by the sovereign disposer of all things.

Luck, fortune, and chance, is the proper language of gamesters, who presume to dispose of the bounties of a kind providence, without any regard to the will of that God, from whose munificent hand they received them; and therefore dare not look to him for direction and success in their unlawful and very criminal practice of gaming; and to that abandoned set of unprincipled men they ought to be confined; for they are by no means the proper language of a Christian or a Theist. I doubt not but the frequent use of these terms has a bad influence upon the minds of multitudes, removes God's providential government far out of sight, and by that means corrupts the morals of men, in many respects.

2. THE Arminian misunderstands and abuses the doctrine of free agency, when he so ascribes a number of events to the will of man, as to exclude the providence of God from having any hand in producing, or disposing of them.

A LATE Writer says, that "The will of man is a self determining power springing up in his willing capacity." I confess that to me this sentence appears unintelligible, and I apprehend it is so to all others;

If the will of man is, properly speaking, a self-determining power, if it determines itself independent of the disposing providence of God, then all those events that proceed from it, as effects from their causes, must be equally independent of divine providence; then, when my neighbour, my friend, or the wife of my bosom injures me in the most tender points, whether in my estate, my person, or my reputation, I am not to esteem it any token of the divine displeasure, or a fatherly chastisement for my offences; I have no occasion to humble myself under the correcting hand of God, resign to his will, or to own the justice of the punishment, as coming from him; because all these afflictions proceed from the self-determining power of the will of free agents, and not from any purpose or determination of heaven. The rod is now dumb, and we are not called to hear the voice of him that hath appointed it. The natural tendency, yea the necessary consequence of this, is the neglect of humility under afflictions, and gratitude for blessings received, where other persons are the instruments of them. Add to this the notion of many things happening by chance, and it destroys both natural and revealed religion, and some of the most noble and generous feelings of the human heart: and thus good men will be deprived of the advantages of afflictions, be able no more to make a pious use of them, and be deprived of one of the noblest supports under such trials. This doctrine, I think, naturally tends to heighten the sense of injuries we receive from others, indisposes the mind to reconciliation, promotes a spirit of revenge, and greatly lessens the degree of sociability in our world. When we receive injuries from others, nothing can have a greater tendency to calm the mind, and check the violent emotions of resentment and revenge, than to consider them as the instruments of God's fatherly chastisement, then we say, *It is the LORD, let him*

him do us *some* to him good; but if we consider these crimes as proceeding merely from the vicious dispositions of men, and suppose the providence of God has no hand in them, we want this necessary check on our passions, and will be apt to indulge our resentment to a much greater degree.

3. The Arminian grossly perverts the doctrine he professes, when he is induced by it to deny God's absolute foreknowledge of the free volitions of men.

I have long seen that the denial of the foreordination of all things clearly implied a denial of God's absolute foreknowledge of the free volitions of men, and of every thing, every action and every circumstance, that depend upon them; and knew that there were few men, of a philosophical turn, who saw and admitted the consequence. But as for those who pay a serious regard to the sacred scriptures, which so clearly and fully assert the point, I had charity enough to believe, that they were not the consequence; and doubted not, but that they should see it, a regard to the honour of God, the authority of his word, and the interest of true religion, would reconcile them to the acknowledgment of decess. I still entertain this charitable opinion of many of them, but find of late that I was in part mistaken; that there are some, who are esteemed pious men, who either deny God's perfect foreknowledge, or extol it, their doubts about it. They see the *impossibility*, or at least the great *difficulty*, of maintaining it, without admitting of the foreordination of all things; and the dreadful nature, and horrid consequences of the doctrine have been so often thimled in their ears by those who understood not the doctrine, and were therefore strangers to its nature and serious consequences, that they are frightened by this *hor-*
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bear, or mere creature of imagination, to deny one of God's essential attributes.

With regard to such, I would earnestly entreat you, my friends to make a serious pause; consider the ground you are on, and renounce that doctrine, which leads you to un-deify your Maker, by whomsoever it is taught, or in what ever alluring dress it comes recommended. That doctrine must be false that strikes at the crown and dignity of God, though taught by an Angel from heaven. Search the scriptures, and there you will find the doctrine of divine decrees, and of particular election, expressed in very plain terms; there also you will find man's free agency firmly established; and whether you are able fully to reconcile them, or not, believe them both, because they are both taught in your bibles; and attribute the difficulty to the weakness of human nature, and our incapacity of knowing the Almighty to perfection. Remember that in this case, adoration and submission becomes you, much better than curious speculation.

As for those who have not gone this dreadful length, who, though they deny fore ordination, yet maintain the perfect foreknowledge of God, let me warn you of your danger. You stand just upon the verge of this dangerous, God-dishonouring error. Several of your brethren have already stepped into it; this may convince you of your danger, and put you on your guard. You are not far from denying the perfect foreknowledge of God; and when this is denied, a train of consequences follow, that effectually sap the foundation of all religion, natural and revealed, and lead on to downright Atheism. I hope a number of you are pious men; and I am sure if you are, and are as prudent as pious, you will seriously consider the danger you are in of denying one of God's essential perfections;

or advancing that doctrine, from which others will naturally infer such denial; as some have already done.

Another great abuse of the arminian doctrine, and which he is but a small remove from, is that of rejecting the doctrine of salvation by grace entirely free, and ascribing it at least in part, to the creature's good dispositions, or good works.

As far as I know, the most of Arminian Divines of any note, acknowledge the depravity of human nature, and the necessity of renewing grace, in order to their being turned from sin to God. It is evident that this depravity consists not in the want of faculties or powers of soul, but a disposition to make a proper use of natural faculties. That grace of God then that is requisite for mans conversion from self to Christ, and from sin to holiness, are inward operations of the holy spirit, making him willing to turn. Unwillingness to that which is truly good is the thing in which human depravity chiefly consists. Since Christ has made atonement for sin; since the demands of justice are thereby satisfied, and the law magnified and made honorable, the chief difficulty in the way of the sinner's salvation is his unwillingness to accept of Christ in all his offices, and return to God in a way of duty. This difficulty is universal, it prevails in all men, until removed by renewing grace. Since the chief bar in the way is unwillingness, it is evident that it can never be removed, until the man is made willing; and whenever he is made willing, it is effectually removed. The Arminian may say, and prove, that salvation is offered to all men, and that God bestows upon every man that portion of grace, which is sufficient for his salvation, if he will but, make a right use of it; yet he has said nothing to the purpose, he has not touched the main difficulty; for

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all this would be true, if no such thing as renewing converting grace had ever existed; had the holy spirit never operated upon the mind of man, in any one instance. This then is not fully preaching the gospel, it is not the gospel of free grace; it leaves the sinner in the same deplorable state he was in before; if his mind is fully, and rightly, convinced of sin, it leaves him in despair. I say in all this the Arminian has said nothing to his purpose, unless he can make it appear, that God has bestowed that grace upon all men, which actually inclines their will to accept of offered salvation, and turn to God. Unless he make this appear, the main difficulty remains, and man is as far from conversion as ever. If this difficulty is removed, and he is made truly willing, the work is done, he is actually converted to God. To say that a man is willing to be saved by Christ, is the same thing as to say, that he chooses that way of salvation, and prefers it to all others; which is the same thing as actually accepting Christ and salvation, and turning to God through him; for accepting of Christ is an act of choice, it is being willing to be saved on gospel terms i. e. a gift of grace entirely free. But that all will actually be saved, or that all do actually accept of Christ, and turn from sin to God, I apprehend, is contrary both to scripture and to matter of fact. If we say that all are actually converted, we contradict facts; if we say that some are converted, and some are not, we then assert that there is a great difference between man and man, in their spiritual estate; and if we enquire into the reason of this difference, we cannot say, on Arminian principles, that it is owing to the free sovereign grace of God. Here a man is in great danger of ascribing his salvation to something in himself, or something done by himself, to some virtue, worth, or excellency, superior to what is found in other men. When once we get into this way, we are in danger of proceeding, from step to step, until we

come to attribute our salvation, chiefly, if not altogether, to ourselves; and thus gradually slide off from the covenant of grace to the covenant of works; and instead of being humble pensioners on the bounty of heaven, become, in our own apprehensions, self dependent and self sufficient. This is not mere speculation; it has been frequently realized in the practices of men. Yea many have proceeded that length, as virtually to deny the necessity of regeneration, and justification through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When men once get into this way of depending upon their own works, as the ground of their acceptance with God, they soon come to imagine that less and less will serve, until they as effectually exclude strict morality out of their religious system, as Christianity.

WHAT are properly called the doctrines of grace are the best means of promoting the practice of virtue and morality; and he who preaches salvation by works contributes largely towards banishing good works from among men: therefore Arminians, must be much on their guard, or they will destroy those good works, for which they think themselves the only faithful consistent advocates.

As far as my observation extends, it does not appear from matter of fact that Arminianism is any more friendly to virtue than Calvinism; which makes it appear probable, that as Calvinists are apt to run, first into Antinomianism, and then into carelessness and looseness of living; so Arminians are prone to slide off from the truth of the gospel, first into legality, and then into open immorality.

I have generally found that where the total corruption of human nature, and salvation by grace absolutely free and sovereign, have been most clearly taught, warmly inculcated, and cordially received, there the practice of morality and religion have most abounded.

IV. We shall draw a few practical inferences from each of the propositions we have endeavoured to prove.

1. From the doctrine of the fore-ordination of all things let us learn to magnify and adore the holy sovereignty of an Almighty and infinitely wise God. All dependent beings were made by him; all are disposed of according to his sovereign pleasure; and for his glory they are and were created. He does his pleasure in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou? He giveth and he taketh away; he killeth, and he maketh alive, according to his sovereign pleasure; he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. In all he acts as an absolute sovereign, and giveth an account to us of none of his ways.

Are there any of us loaded with conscious guilt, and lying obnoxious to divine displeasure, in a state in which we shall be eternally miserable, unless speedily delivered from it? Let us remember, and that with joyful hearts, that our salvation entirely depends upon the sovereign will of that being, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. It is matter of unspeakable joy to us that it is so; for if it depended upon any thing that we have done, or ever shall do, or upon any thing in us, any good desires and resolutions, we might justly sit down in black despair. If it depended upon our choice considered as free agents, we should eternally perish; for we are all naturally disposed to chuse wrong. If it depended upon the improvement of that stock of grace which all others receive equally with ourselves, we should forever perish; because we are no better than others, and no more disposed than they are to make a wise improvement.

provement, our hearts being as much inclined to chuse sin, and refuse to turn from it unto God. If it was left to our best endeavours, our penitential tears, and our most fervent prayers, we should certainly perish, for our best endeavours are attended with so many sinful imperfections, that they expose us to the just displeasure of Heaven; our most penitential tears are so mixed with sin that they call for more penitential tears, and our best prayers, while in an unregenerated state, are an abomination to the Lord; and all because we are void of faith in Christ and a principle of love to God. If it depended upon our own faithfulness, we might despair; for we are a faithless generation, and our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. A sinner may have too low thoughts of the mercy of God, and under value the merits of Christ; but he cannot have too bad an opinion of his own state, and undervalue himself. But when we consider that all our dependence is upon the sovereign grace of God, who has mercy for his own name's sake, and for the sake of the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, our reasonable hopes may review, and we may take encouragement to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

The doctrine that suspends the favor of God upon free will, or the free agency of man, and promises men the pardon of sin and other gospel blessings, upon condition of their doing so and so, may be pleasing to those who are strangers to the total depravity of their own nature, the deep rooted corruption of their hearts, their strong enmity to God and the way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ; it may be pleasing to those whose convictions are but superficial, and who are by no means dispossessed of a legal self-righteous spirit: but to a depraved sinner, who is truly and deeply convinced of his own sinfulness, who has long been labouring

In the use of means, and finds his corruptions continuing in their full strength, his sin daily increasing, and himself exposed to an aggravated condemnation even for the sins of his holy things, this is the most discouraging doctrine, exactly calculated to sink him into black despair. My salvation is on a much better footing, and I have much greater reason to hope for success in seeking it, when it depends entirely on the electing sovereign grace of God, than would be the case, if it depended upon my free will. The only ground of encouragement I have to work out my salvation with fear and trembling, is that it is God that worketh in me, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure: because such is the disposition of my heart, and such its enmity to all the ways of God, such my pride, self-righteousness, and unbelief, that I shall certainly refuse salvation on God's humbling plan, unless he is pleased by his sovereign mercy to renew my nature, and make me willing in a day of his power. The grace of God must not only put me in such a state, that I may be saved if I will; but it must also bow my soul and make me willing, or I shall certainly die in my sins.

2. The decrees of God are not the rule of our conduct, they are secret things that do not belong to us; therefore let us not vainly and curiously enquire, what he has decreed for us, either in this world, or in the world to come. But let us consider what it is he requireth of us, as our duty, and endeavour diligently to do it; what he has pointed out as our greatest privilege, and strive wisely to improve it; and what is the method of salvation revealed in the gospel, and be engaged to seek salvation in this way: these are the things that belong to us, and these demand our chief attention. In all, let us submit to God, and resign ourselves to his holy and wise disposals, and realize our dependence upon his sovereign will. Stripped of self-righteousness

high'ness, and self sufficiency, and humbled in the dust under a sense of our own depravity and guilt, let us prostrate ourselves at the foot stool of a sovereign God, and plead that grace which he bestows, how, when, and on whom he pleases, according to the good pleasure of his will. He hath for his own glory, and according to the counsel of his own will, fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, and all things will certainly and exactly answer the ends for which he designed them: they will redound to the glory of his holy name, and will be found, at last, all to have been conducted in a way infinitely holy, wise and good; however unable we may be at present to discern it. Such a God, it becomes us to adore, humbly submit to, and obey; and not curiously inquire into his decrees, nor presumptuously call the conduct of his providence to the bar of our finite and feeble reason.

3. Is man a free agent, who acts according to his own voluntary choice, both when he does that which is good, and when he does that which is evil? Then let us never say, when we sin, that we could not avoid it; let us never ascribe our sinfulness, or our misery, to a just and holy God; for the decrees of God, as was intimated before, never lay any man under a necessity of sinning, they never confine him in a state of sin and impenitence, or hinder him from accepting the offers of the salvation in the gospel.

WHATEVER mysteries may attend the doctrine of divine decrees, or however certainly it has been proved, nothing can be more plain and certain than that God never was, nor ever will be the author of the sinfulness of any action, or the cruel and unjust punisher of his creatures. All his works are holy, wise, just and good; however unable we may be to comprehend it in particular instances.

When

When we speak of the sovereignty of God, we do not mean that he has a sovereign right to do that which is wrong; or that, as an absolute wicked prince, he treats his subjects with injustice and cruelty, for his own interest or pleasure: but we mean that he does what is right according to his own pleasure, independent of the will of man, and without being accountable to him for any of his ways.

We may then conclude, and that with the greatest certainty, that all the criminality, or blame worthiness of our vicious actions is in the sinning creature, and not in the adorable Creator; and let us take shame to ourselves, and humbly acknowledge the justice of the divine displeasure, in the punishment of our iniquities. It is a most unhappy, and sinful state of mind, to be disposed to *reply against GOD, and to say unto the Almighty, what doest thou? Or for the thing formed, to say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?* It becomes us much better to acknowledge, that he has a right to do what he will with his own, and reverently to bow ourselves at his footstool. Our hearts are not sufficiently humbled before God, until they are disposed to look up to him as a sovereign disposer of his favors, and to own that, as men have made themselves sinners, he has a right to make them either vessels of wrath, or vessels of mercy; and that if he bestows mercy on one sinner, and leaves another to perish in sin for the manifestation of his holiness and justice, he does no wrong. Until a man is brought to this, rebellion reigns in his heart, and he is ever disposed to censure the conduct of his Maker and think it hard that he is left to perish in his sins, and sink into that ruin he has voluntarily brought on himself; and therefore that God is under a kind of obligation to bestow favours upon him: and as long as this is the case, he is never

ver properly disposed to plead for mercy. If God has not an absolute right to leave me to perish in my sins, after all I can possibly do, but is obliged to save me, it is an act of justice, and I claim it as my due. If he should bestow his special grace upon another, and leave me to deserved ruin, there is nothing cruel or unjust in it, unless he is obliged to save us both; his saving another does me no harm; and I have no reason to enquire why he does it, or to censure his conduct as partial and tyrannical: he may have mercy on whom he will have mercy; and I have no reason to complain. If I have a disposition to do so, it is certainly owing to the unmortified pride of my heart, my ignorance of the insinck evil and great demerit of sin, and insensibility of my entire dependence on the sovereign grace of God. This pride universally reigns in the human heart, it is the root of all sin, and while it prevails, salvation from sin is impossible; and therefore the first thing necessary, in order to the recovery of the sinner; is to mortify this pride, and bring down the heart to the footstool of mercy.

4. From the doctrine of free agency we infer that the power of God does not force men into a state of grace against their will; for this would be destroying free agency, and treating man as a mere machine.

It is a disposition of heart to chuse wrong, and refuse the offers of salvation in the 'gospel', that renders the inward operations of divine grace necessary, in order to our salvation. By these inward operations the temper of the mind is changed, and the man disposed to turn to God through Christ, and chuse life rather than death: and in so doing, he still acts voluntarily as a free agent, without any compulsion in the case. Then if by inevitable

a term by which some are fond of reproaching the Calvinists, is meant grace which forces men into a happy state contrary to their wills, we reject the notion as an evident absurdity and self-contradiction; but if the meaning is that the grace of God proves effectual, removes the natural enmity of the heart, and efficaciously disposes the mind to return to him, and accept of life on gospel terms, we heartily approve the doctrine, and rejoice in it as most comfortable to creatures sunk into a state of total depravity. We rejoice to hear a merciful God say, *My people shall be willing in a day of my power.*

5. BOTH from the doctrine of divine decrees, and that of man's free agency, we infer the reasonableness and necessity of giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

As rational creatures, and voluntary agents, we are governed by motives, and act under their influence, according to our own free choice; let us then give every motive to repentance and reformation their full force on our minds, that we may be thereby induced to renounce every sin, and turn to God with our whole hearts. When we find an indisposition of mind to these important duties, let us plead, with proper humility and fervency, with him, with whom is the residue of the spirit, that we may be favoured with his powerful operations, renewed in our dispositions, and sweetly disposed to perform them. To this our present condition loudly calls us, to this a gracious God has given us abundant encouragement, and to it all the regard we have to our own eternal interest should powerfully excite us. The great Jehovah, our justly offended sovereign, has made known himself to be *the LORD, the LORD GOD, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth.* He has sent an omniscient Prophet
into

the world to teach us the way of life, a compassionate High-priest, to atone for our sins and make continual intercession for us, an all-powerful King, to conquer and subdue our enemies, and to govern us by the most excellent laws, and also to exhibit for our imitation the most perfect example. He makes us the offer of pardon and reconciliation, tenderly invites and earnestly entreats us to be reconciled. He lays the terrors of hell before us, to alarm our just and necessary fears, and the ineffable joys of Heaven, to encourage our hopes, and excite our ardent desires. In these circumstances let us not say we can do nothing, and sit down in indolence, stupid and inactive; but rouse up all our active powers, and exert ourselves with suitable vigour and diligence, to seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near: let such of us as are wicked, forsake our way, and such as are unrighteous our thoughts, and let us return unto the Lord, who will have mercy upon us and to our God, who will abundantly pardon.

HERE I thought to have concluded this lecture: but another use of the first head of doctrine has since occurred to my mind, which I cannot willingly omit; therefore I proceed to observe

6 THAT the doctrine of divine decrees affords great support and comfort to the mind of a good man under the most gloomy prospect of publick distresses and calamities.

WHEN despotism triumphs, or anarchy prevails: when princes tyrannize, or subjects rebel: when kingdoms dash against kingdoms, and states against states, until broken to pieces like a potsherd: when civil discord rages, and thousands, and tens of thousands, are slaughtered by the hands of war: when the interest of millions are sacrificed to the ambition and avarice of a few: when the jealousy and suspicion of the

the people tie up the hands of the patriot, and prevent the public good: when luxury and dissipation abound and poverty oppresses the people: when savages imbrue their hands in the blood of the innocent, and survivors riot in view of their bleeding wounds: when honor and justice are trampled under foot, and public virtue expiring in groans: when public and private debt, luxury and extravagance, murmuring and discontent, generally prevail: when men are bought and sold, converted into beasts and sacrificed to Mammon, and that by advocates for equal liberty and the rights of humanity; then the pious patriot must feel the greatest anxiety. He loves his country and considers his own interest as inseparably connected with that of the public. When his country is thus distressed, his heart is deeply wounded, and nearly overwhelmed with sorrow. In such a case, it must afford great support and consolation to recollect, that the plan of this world was contrived by a being of perfect knowledge, laid in infinite wisdom, and is governed by an all-wise and powerful providence; and will certainly answer the holy and glorious purposes originally intended by its Almighty Maker. However dark and perplexed the present scene appears, faith in the infinite wisdom and power of God fully assures him, that all this seeming discord is harmony not understood, and that in the final issue every thing will terminate exactly right.

When the affairs of the church, which is dear to a pious man, are all in confusion; when worldly Ecclesiastics tyrannize over the people; and, instead of taking due care of their spiritual interests, are rioting in wealth and luxury, at their expence: when the people are sunk into avarice, and are irreverently starve such as spend their time and their substance in feeding them with knowledge: when the professors of religion are profuse in their expences to support the pomps and vanities of life,

and begrudge the smallest sum for any public or charitable use, and cause to serve God with that which costs them nothing: when the ministers of the gospel, instead of spreading a favour of vital piety, and promoting a spirit of love and union in the family of Christ, are biting and devouring one another, under different names, and converting the sacred desk into a theatre of ridicule and invective, and thus changing religious zeal into ill-natured bigotry, while the people eagerly drink in the poison, mistake ill-nature for a true zeal for God, and substitute it in the room of vital, practical religion: when lifeless formality passes for piety, bigotry for orthodoxy, superstition for the fear of God, enthusiastic dreams and trances for divine inspiration and revelations from heaven, idle visions and enthusiastic whims for sound conversion, and vending of nonsense for preaching the gospel: when learning, in preachers, is substituted in the room of grace, sound authors for experimental knowledge, and a lifeless gravity for holy solemnity: when supposed grace and real impudence supplies the place of learning and common sense: when many name the name of Christ, but few depart from iniquity: when fundamental errors are zealously propagated, and eagerly embraced: when, Christianity, that most benign and God-like institution, is ridiculed, and every inconsistent scheme of infidelity preferred before it: when statesmen represent religion only as a necessary engine of government, fit to awe the vulgar, and by this representation destroy all its force, even in that view; and thereby, not only endanger the eternal salvation of men, but also rob us of one of the best securities of life and property: when many of the zealous professors of Christianity live as if they believed it to be an imposture, or that its tendency and precepts were quite contrary to what they are: when great part of the world are immersed in pagan darkness

ness, mahometan imposture, jewish prejudices, popish superstition, and protestant error, bigotry, impiety and sensuality: I say when this is the state of religion, a good man must view the gloomy prospect with tears of overwhelming sorrow, and and be ready passionately to cry out, *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

UNDER these gloomy views, how must it support and comfort the sinking heart, to think that all these things attend a most perfect plan, contrived in the eternal counsels of heaven, and laid in infinite wisdom, for the accomplishment of God's most glorious and gracious ends! That the same wisdom that laid the plan will so over rule and direct every thing, and every event, as most certainly and completely to accomplish his excellent purposes; that he will thereby most fully manifest the glory of his perfections, and lay a foundation for the increasing happiness of millions to all eternity.

A F E W

OBSERVATIONS

On a piece lately printed in Lexington, entitled "The principles of the Methodists, or the Scripture Doctrine of Predestination, Election and Reprobation."

THE Publisher of this piece seems to aim at the promotion of truth; and I doubt not believed the doctrine taught in this Pamphlet to be agreeable to Scripture and reason; but, I think, if he had not been too much swayed by a deference to the judgment of that honest, zealous, but mistaken man Mr. Wesley, he might probably have thought otherwise; and never have published a piece so prejudicial to the good cause he is engaged in promoting; a piece, in which the scriptures are so grossly and evidently perverted by the most superficial sophistry.

I HAVE been reading and thinking, at times, on the subject of this piece, for thirty or forty years; and on the most mature consideration, I have been capable of, am fully persuaded, "That God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," and that this article of our belief may be proved, yea has often been proved both by scripture and philosophy, beyond all reasonable doubt: and if this is
true

true, the doctrine of particular election must also be true.

THE author sets out in his attempt to destroy the received, protestant, and scripture doctrine of election, by citing several texts, which are commonly produced in support of it, viz Eph. 1. 4. 1 Pet. 1, 2. 2 Thess. 2. 13. In the first of these passages he would have us understand no more by Men's being chosen in Christ before the foundation of world, than being chosen in him at the time of their conversion. In the second, by being elect according to the fore-knowledge of GOD through justification of the spirit unto obedience, we are to understand their being elected at the time of their sanctification, or because he knew they would be sanctified. In the third passage, by being chosen from the beginning to salvation through justification of the spirit and belief of the truth, we are taught to understand, not being chosen before, or at the beginning of the world, but at the time of their sanctification and faith.

In order to support this strange interpretation our author uses, or rather perverts, Rom. 2. 17. *As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations — and calleth those things which he useth as though they were:* and also Rev. 13. 8. *The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

On these scriptures our author reasons thus, Abraham was not at that time the father of many nations, no, not even of Isaac; Christ was not actually slain from the foundation of the world, but several thousand years after; and so men are not generally chosen from the beginning, but at the time of their sanctification &c. because God, before whom all things are evident, foresees that these events would certainly come to pass, and therefore speaks of them as if they were already come to pass.

This is the principal argument of our author, by which he attempts to overthrow the doctrine of particular eternal election: but if he has entirely mistaken the design of this passage, *Who calleth things that be not as though they were*, his reasoning is fallacious; he entirely misses his purpose. The sense he puts upon these words is this, that God speaks of persons, things or actions as now actually existing, as having now actually taken place when it is not so in fact, nor will be for a long time, barely to express his foreknowledge of them, without any intimation of any purpose or decree about them. But how unhappy was our author in chusing this passage for his purpose! Did he imagine he could deceive his Readers by the mere sound of words; and that they would never attend to the connexion, or the nature of the case to which they refer. It is evident, beyond all dispute, that the event here referred to, viz Abraham's becoming the father of many nations, depended upon a miraculous exertion of divine power; because Abraham's body, and Sarah's womb, were now dead. Abraham, in these circumstances, could not be the father of many nations, without an extraordinary exertion of God's power; and this exertion depended upon his will. As he is a voluntary and designing Agent, he must have purposed to exert his power, before he actually did it. As this event could not be produced by any thing, but the Almighty power of God, his foreknowledge of it could depend upon nothing but his purpose to effect it. Unless he had decreed that Abraham should be the father of many nations, he could not foreknow it, and speak of it, before it came to pass, with the same certainty, as if it had actually come to pass: yes, unless he had decreed that it should come to pass, he must, as is evident from the nature of the case, certainly foreknow that it never could; and therefore could not call this thing that was not, as though it was. The

meaning of the passage is evidently this, God decreed to make Abraham the father of many nations; he had a certain knowledge of the sufficiency of his own power to quicken the dead body of his ancient servant; and therefore could speak to Abraham, and give him as strong an assurance of it, as if it had already come to pass. This is obvious; and it is truly astonishing that even the necessity of defending a favorite hypothesis should have driven our author to any other construction. Take this passage according to its plain and obvious design, and apply it to election, and it operates in direct contradiction to our author's sentiments. If when men are said to be chosen in Christ to salvation from the foundation of the world, it is so said, because God calleth things that be not as though they were, in the same sense as in the case of Abraham, it plainly proves that they were elected to salvation, not only before they were converted, but before they were born.

But what are we to understand by Christ's being called the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, seeing he was not slain until several thousand years after?

This passage may, agreeable to the words and pointing in the original, be rendered, *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, (viz. the beast) whose names from the foundation of the world are not written in the slaughtered Lamb's book of life: but I shall not avail myself of this criticism, however just. Take it as in our translation, and we understand by it that he was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God Acts 2, 23. and that his hand and counsel determined before that he should be slain Acts 4, 23. And does this mean nothing, but that God foreknew it, and therefore spake of it as already past? Does it not most evidently*

evidently mean, that it was fixed and determined in the counsel of Heaven? If not, what is the use of language? and why may we not say, that any scripture means any thing we please?

In page the sixth our author proceeds, and says, "How plain is it, where St. Paul saith, that they whom God did predestinate, according to the counsel of his own will to be to the praise of his glory were such as did first trust in Christ," it is a thousand times plainer that the author of the pamphlet says this, than that the Apostle Paul ever said any such thing. I have Testaments in several languages, and can find it in none of them. Is it possible that the author could so change and add words in that passage Eph. 1. 11. 12 as to make the word FIRST come before predestinated in sense? It is sufficiently evident that the comparison is between *we* in the 12th verse and *ye* in the 13th *We* Jews who first trusted in christ, and *ye* Gentiles who afterwards trusted in him. I confess it requires a great degree of charity to believe that this text is not wilfully and dishonestly perverted; however that charity that hopeth all things, concludes it must have been an oversight. If the great stumbling block of Election cannot be taken out of the way, but by such means as these I hope and wish it may ever remain.

LET us return again to the fifth page: where our author is endeavouring to make it appear to be agreeable to the sense of 1 Pet, 1. 2. 2 Thel. 2. 13, that men are not elected, until they are sanctified. In the last of these passages it is evident that *Men* were the objects of God's choice, that *salvation* was what they were chosen to, and the *sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth* the means by which they were brought to salvation: and is this consistent with their not being chosen

to salvation until they believed? In the first passage, they are said to be *elect through sanctification of the spirit unto obedience*. The obvious meaning of which is, they were elected to obedience, and the sanctification of the spirit was the means by which they were to be brought to this obedience. And must we here conclude that they were not elected to that obedience, until they were actually brought to it by means of sanctification? When it is said, That God chose men to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth, does it mean that sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth were the means of his *choosing*? The word elect signifies to chuse one or more out of many: now did God, when he chose some out of many of the human race to salvation, make use of sanctification and faith as the *means* of his *choosing*? When he elected some to obedience, did he use their sanctification as the means by which he made that choice? I have often heard of God's working by means, but his choosing by means would be a language to me entirely new. Is it not most evident, that he purposes the salvation of his people, and determines to accomplish his purpose through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth, as the means? And will it hence follow that he never elects them to salvation, until the means are actually used? Does not every man see that the choice is and must be made, before the means are used; that the end is always first in view and then the means used in order to accomplish it? To say that they were not chosen until they believed, is as much as to say that the end was never resolved upon, until the means were actually used; and that God's choice was only conditional; that the use of the means was not of God, but of the Creature; that the Creature, and not God, was the author of sanctification and faith: and thus this doctrine naturally leads us to ascribe,

the honour of our salvation to ourselves, and say not unto thy name, not unto thy name, but unto us be the glory; we are saved by sanctification, and that not of the spirit, but of ourselves; we are saved by Grace through faith, and that is not the gift of God, but of ourselves: And thus the dispensation of Grace is made to land in the covenant of works.

LET us try how the above reasoning will hold in the common affairs of this life. A's son is extremely sick. He resolves upon his recovery through medicines administered by Doctor B. In order to accomplish his purpose he sends for the Doctor, and directs him to administer the proper medicines. Now, does A never resolve upon the recovery of his son, until the Doctor comes, and the lad actually receives the medicine? It is evident, he resolved upon the recovery of his son before the medicine was given, before the Doctor was sent for; and that he sent for the Doctor to apply the medicine as the means of accomplishing this end. How strange would it be in this case, for a person to argue thus Mr. A did not chuse the recovery of his son, before the medicine was administered; but the operation of the medicine was the means by which he made his choice. Some may assert, if they please that he chose the recovery of his son before he sent for the Doctor, and had the medicine applied afterwards in order to accomplish his purpose; but I insist upon it, as a thing quite plain, that he never determined upon the recovery of his son, until the medicine operated; and that because he determined upon the recovery of his son, through medicines administered by Doctor B. Can any man imagine that this is sound reasoning? It is however exactly the method of our author's reasoning on this subject, by which he attempts to fix so absurd a meaning on the forecited passages of scripture.

But it will be said that God chose men according to his foreknowledge. He foresaw that they would repent, believe, and obey: and therefore elected them. Did he elect them to obedience, because he foresaw they would obey, whether he elected them to it or not? This act of election then must be a very unnecessary and insignificant thing, not worthy to be mentioned by the Apostles. It would look too much like the conduct of General Monk; who, when he saw that king Charles would be restored, whether he had any active hand in it or not, dextrously stepped in, appeared to be the great promoter of the design, and thus assumed the honor of it to himself.

In the sixth page our author, in order to avoid the charge of holding foreseen faith and obedience to be the cause of God's electing us to glory, introduces a long chain of causes. If he uses the word *cause* constantly in the true sense, his doctrine is evidently false; if he uses it in different senses, without explanation, he thereby renders himself unintelligible.

The word *cause* sometimes signifies the active voluntary agent which produces an effect, sometimes a necessary agent, sometimes the instrument, sometimes the means and sometimes only the occasion. Now in which of these senses does our author use the word? The most strict and proper sense is either the first or second mentioned. Does he mean either of these? Then the preaching of the word itself works faith in our hearts, and not the renewing of the holy Ghost; the regenerating spirit of God is not necessary for this purpose, the preaching of the gospel of Christ is sufficient without it. But every true believer knows, what the proper cause of faith is the influences of the holy spirit, removing prejudices and ignorance, renewing
the

the will, and begetting holy and tender affections, ~~and~~ thus inclining and enabling the the soul to believe in Christ for salvation: and then his conclusion, viz. that "God does not chuse any man to life and salvation for any good which he has done, or for any which is in him before he put it there," does not follow from his premises; because his chain of causes is broken in the middle. Here we may observe, this chain of causes finds man dead in trespasses and sins, and brings him to a state of Glory, without the Holy Spirit's being the cause of any thing in the whole important business. I hope this is not the principle of the Methodists, and think it very unhappy that this title was prefixed to a pamphlet so inconsistent and unscriptural.

The author's conclusion abovementioned, though it does not flow from his premises, is an important truth: but unhappily for him, it destroys his whole fabric, and establishes the calvinistic doctrine of election. He says there is no good thing in man, before God puts it there; consequently, if there is repentance or faith in me, *GOD put it there*; if there is willingness in me to accept the offer of salvation and come to Christ, *he put it there*; if there is faithfulness in us to improve the talents God has intrusted us with, *he put it there*; if there is diligence in us rightly to use the means of grace, *he put it there*; if there are any who have not this repentance, faith, willingness, diligence, or faithfulness, it is because they are not in them by nature, and *GOD has not put them there*. If I am willing, and another is not, there is some good thing in me, that is not in him; but *GOD put it there*; and if he had put it in him, it would have been in him also. If this willingness produces any good effect in me, it would also produce the same in him; we are naturally, and in ourselves, alike guilty, depraved, unwilling, impotent, unbelonging, negligent

negligent and unfaithful. This is evident; because there is no good in any of us, *before GOD puts it there*. It will be said he puts it in them, but they will not improve it. If I have in me a disposition to improve the grace God bestows upon me, this disposition is a good thing; and therefore he put it in me; and if another has not a disposition to improve what is in him, God has not put it in him; for if he had, it would be in him. But it will be said, he puts it in all; but they resist, and cast it out again. If I have a heart not to resist, but to improve the good that is in me and another has not, there is some good thing in me, that is not in him: according to the doctrine then God has put some good thing in me, that is not in him; for if he had put it in him, it would have been in him, as well as in me.

We may say the same of perseverance, and every other good thing that is in man. If I persevere unto eternal life, and another does not, but falls from grace, this perseverance is a good thing in me, that is not in him; for if the grace of perseverance unto eternal life had been in him, he would have persevered unto eternal life.

THE conclusion that naturally follows from this is that the reason why one is a saint, while another remains a sinner; why one perseveres, while another falls away, is that God bestows his grace as a sovereign, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, and has mercy on whom he will have mercy.

In page 7th Sect. 5. Our author says, "Our knowing ourselves justified by faith is the cause of our love to Christ." What he means by love to Christ, in this place, is a very important question: but not easily determined. If he means gra-
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titude, I readily acknowledge that a persuasion of the love of God to us, is properly the cause of it. I also acknowledge that the gratitude of a real christian is stronger, and purer, than that of a hypocrite; because he has a more lively view of the divine goodness, and of the holiness of God's mercy. But the cause of that love to Christ which is properly so called, and which distinguishes the christian, is a view of the excellency of his character as God Man mediator; a view of what he is in himself, and not of what he does for us. Gratitude is often found in hypocrites, and hence they say, *GOD I thank thee that I am not as other men.* But a pure love to Christ, for what he is in himself, is only to be found in renewed persons: and if this is what the author means, his position is a gross, fundamental and dangerous error. If the belief of our being justified by faith is properly the cause of our love to Christ, the love that we experience is self love, and not a gracious holy affection. It is a love that does not distinguish the real christian from a self deceiving hypocrite. It is a love that a man may be constantly perfect in, and yet fall into final ruin. *May God preserve his people from such a fatal error as this!* To love a virtuous man, not for his virtue, but for his kindness to me, is no evidence that I have a virtuous disposition; to love a holy God, not for his holiness, but for his kindness to me, is no evidence of a holy affection in me. Suppose I had a very rich neighbour, possessed of the most amiable qualities, who should generously support me and my family, at his own expence: and I should profess great love to him; but being asked what I loved him for, or what was the cause of my love to him, should answer, because he is so kind to me and my family; would any person judge this to be a profession of genuine love? Would it not appear more like it, should I say, I love him because of those many amiable qualifications of which he is possessed, and

which he manifests on every occasion? and would not this profession express a much more virtuous disposition in me than the former.

BUT let us enquire whether this doctrine is proved from scripture. The first passage produced for proof is 1 John 4, 10. Here we have the account of an astonishing display of the love of God to mankind, in sending his son to be a propitiation for their sins; but nothing that even looks like a proof of the author's assertion. The other passage is in the 19th verse, *We love him because he first loved us*; and as this appears more like a proof of the point than the other, we shall examine it a little. If we say, the consideration of Christ's love to us is the cause of our love to him, then, as was observed before, it is self love, and not a holy affection. The sense of this text may be thus expressed, The eternal love of God to us disposed him to bestow upon us the grace of his holy spirit, whereby our nature is renewed and our hearts disposed to love him: and if this is the true meaning, it by no means proves the point for which it is produced, but the contrary.

To assert that our knowing ourselves justified by faith is the cause of our love to Christ, is to give a view of the christian character that is entirely false and extremely dangerous, as it naturally leads men to entertain false hopes that they are renewed and converted persons, while they are utter strangers to the christian spirit.

In page 9, 10, 11, 12. The author attempts to prove that Christ did not die for the elect, as elect; but that he died for all men universally.

FIRST. He says, page 10 "To say that Christ died for the elect, as elect, is shrouding in darkness and confusion." He bears process, all along, upon the sup-

supposition that men are not elected until they believe; and upon that absurd supposition charges nonsense on the doctrine, and kicks up the dust of confusion. But if we suppose that God first chooses men to salvation, and then brings them to it by means of the atoning blood of Christ and the sanctification of the spirit, there is neither confusion nor nonsense in it; but all is plain and rational. The argument by which he proves this doctrine, if I understand him right, is this, Christ did not die for the elect, as elect; because as elect, they were already saved; and therefore needed not his death. But enquire whether this writer and Christ are of the same opinion on this point. Did not Christ lay down his life for his friends? Did he not lay down his life for his sheep? And who are his friends and his sheep? Are they not his elect? But perhaps it will be said he died for his friends, not as friends, but as enemies; he died not for his sheep, as sheep, but as Goats: He died for his friends and his sheep; but when he died for them, he did not consider them in their true character; but in a character that did not belong to them. He did not die for the elect, as elect; because they were saved already. Well then, he did not die for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; because they were already, not only elected but glorified: and he died not for them as sinners; because they were in a state of perfect holiness in heaven, before his death; and therefore he did not die for them at all. Consequently, these ancient patriarchs were saved without the benefit of Christ's blood; and why not conclude that all others may be saved without it as well; and that Christ, in dying for men, lost his labour of love, and accomplished a SOLEMN NOTHING? And what absolute nonsense and confusion is this! It would have been well, if this author had been as careful to avoid nonsense and confusion, as he would have others to be.

SECONDLY, Our author labours to prove, that Christ died for all men universally. This, in my opinion, he has done by arguments which cannot be confuted, without doing violence both to scripture and reason. But here a question arises, which is of considerable importance, in order to prevent mistakes; *i. e.* in what sense Christ died for all men; and whether he actually intended the salvation of all? If he purposed it, he will also do it; for none can stay his hand. As many as he intended to save will actually be saved, because it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do; and his designs cannot be frustrated. All that he intended should be saved will be saved, or he will certainly be disappointed.

Does our author mean that Christ died to bring all into such a state, that they may be saved if they will? If he means, that they may be saved if they are willing to be saved in God's way, and not their own, I acknowledge that this is not only a truth, but a very precious and important truth of the Gospel. But all men are naturally unwilling; whence then must come this willingness? All may be saved if they are diligent and faithful; but whence **must** come this diligence and faithfulness? shall we find it in the fallen creature? by no means; for there is no good in him, *till GOD puts it there.* If we say, that this willingness is owing to the grace of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do, and that this grace is bestowed equally on all, but some improve it better than others; then the question arises, whence comes it to pass that one improves it better than another? Is the disposition to make a better improvement a good thing? If so, it is the gift of God: and would not the other make the same improvement, if God should give him the same good disposition? If nothing hindereth him, but the want of a good disposition, and God gives this, surely then nothing will hinder him from making the

the improvement, he will actually do it. There must be some good thing in us which God is not the author of, or we are all alike good, or else God bestows some good thing on some men, which he does not bestow on others.

HERE I recollect an expression in page 13th "Make use of all the will and power God hath given." Can any man on earth understand this? I doubt it much. What faculty distinct from his will and power, has man to make use of his will and power? Remove, in Idea, all the will and power God has given man, and what is there left by which he is to improve these? What strange faculty is this! A faculty consisting not in any will or power to do good, and yet a faculty of using the will and power God has given. It must be a faculty of doing what he has neither will nor power to do. Does it mean that man must be willing to be more willing than God has made him? If so, we have at last found some good thing in man that God did not put there: and this is the legal, self righteous *Something*, that often lurks unseen at the bottom of our hearts, and, while we talk of free grace, assumes to itself the honour of our salvation.

In the last sect. of this 13th page it is said, "We believe that in the moment Adam fell he had no freedom of will left." Astonishing! What then, was he a brute or a block? If he had no freedom of will left, he could be no longer a moral agent, and therefore could be worthy neither of praise or blame, nor a subject of rewards or punishments: he was then no more capable of suffering in hell, or any more liable to it, than an ox or a horse. What a strange expedient this to show that man's acting as a rational creature, and a voluntary agent, is the effect of special Grace; and thereby to prove that God has bestowed quickening grace upon all men. If
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this can be proved, let it be done by some other medium, and not by such an absurdity as this. But how this will be done, I know not, unless it be by changing the order of the words in Titus 2. 11. (as in page 10th) and making them speak a sense that is neither in our translation nor in the original: and instead of saying, as it is in the greek, *the saving Grace of GOD hath appeared to all men,* say, the grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared. A bold but ineffectual experiment of our author to make the scripture speak his own sentiments.

If man lost his freedom of will the moment he fell, he ceased that moment to be capable of sin or duty, Canst then, when he restored man, restored him to a capacity of sinning, as well as repenting; and thereby occasioned all the sin that has been committed since the fall of Adam to the present moment. Do you believe the author intended this? By no means. I rather think he had no ideas; but was writing on a subject he did not understand. If this Gentleman's turn is orthodox, the compleat restoration of man by the Gospel, is not the recovery of sinful rational creatures from a state of sin to a state of moral rectitude; but the transformation of brutes into Angels.

It is impossible to maintain that man's salvation, all the good that is done by him, or found in him, is entirely of Grace, without maintaining either the doctrine of particular election, or that all men will eventually be saved; or else we must deny the absolute foreknowledge of God or the sufficiency of his power, and maintain that his expectations will be disappointed, or his intentions frustrated. Follow our author's doctrine up closely, and it will inevitably lead to some good thing in man that God is not the author of, and this, what ever it be, is
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the great **SOMETHING** that determines the whole, as all the rest depend upon it, and will prove ineffectual without it. He who denies the doctrine of particular eternal election, if he desires to be consistent with himself, should maintain that there is some good thing left in fallen man, for which he is not indebted to divine grace.

MISREPRESENTING, and loudly declaiming against election, under the frightful name of absolute predestination, and multiplying its horrid consequences, may confound the ignorant, and terrify the timorous; but it cannot destroy the evidence of scripture, nor convince the mind of a rational thinking man.

I **LATELY** met with the following sentence in one of Mr. Wesley's printed sermons, "What are all the absurd opinions of all the Romanists in the world compared to that one (of the Calvinists) viz: That the God of love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh, has from all eternity fixed an absolute, unchangeable, irresistible decree, that part of mankind shall be saved, do what they will, and the rest damned do what they can." A mere creature of the good man's brain! His strong prejudices and pious zeal, by an illegitimate copulation, produced and educated this monster, gave it the nickname of Calvin, and sent it forth to terrify the world. Strange, that so learned, so sensible, and so pious a man should ever be guilty of publishing from the pulpit, and under his hand, such a palpable falsehood, and charging it on whole communities; not one of which perhaps ever believed it! Blush! O Wesley, at the ungenerous deed! Blush, all ye, who publish the slander! How unjustifiable the conduct of those, who implicitly receive this falsehood, for truth, and solemnly publish it throughout the land. They believe (charity obliges me to make the supposition) that what they so boldly charge the Calvinists

vinists with, is a consequence of their belief concerning the Divine Decrees: but is it consistent with truth or justice to charge them with believing consequences which they neither acknowledge nor see? Should I confidently assert and publish it to the world, *That they believe salvation to be not of grace, but of works*, because I thought it a consequence of their doctrines, I doubt not but they would deny the charge, and resent it as a malicious slander. Such men should remember that they have no exclusive privilege in this case; and that it is as criminal in them to abuse others, as in others to abuse them. On reading this, some may charge me with being an enemy and a persecutor: but surely it is as lawful for me to speak the truth in my own vindication, and that of thousands, as it is for others to publish prejudices and falsehoods in the name of the Lord. I highly esteem Mr. Wesley's many virtues; but his few and hatefull vices I must censure.

F I N I S.