

Predestination calmly considered from principles of reason; ... with answers to seven queries on predestination. By William Tucker.

Tucker, W. (William), b. 1731.

Boston, W. Peirce, 1835.

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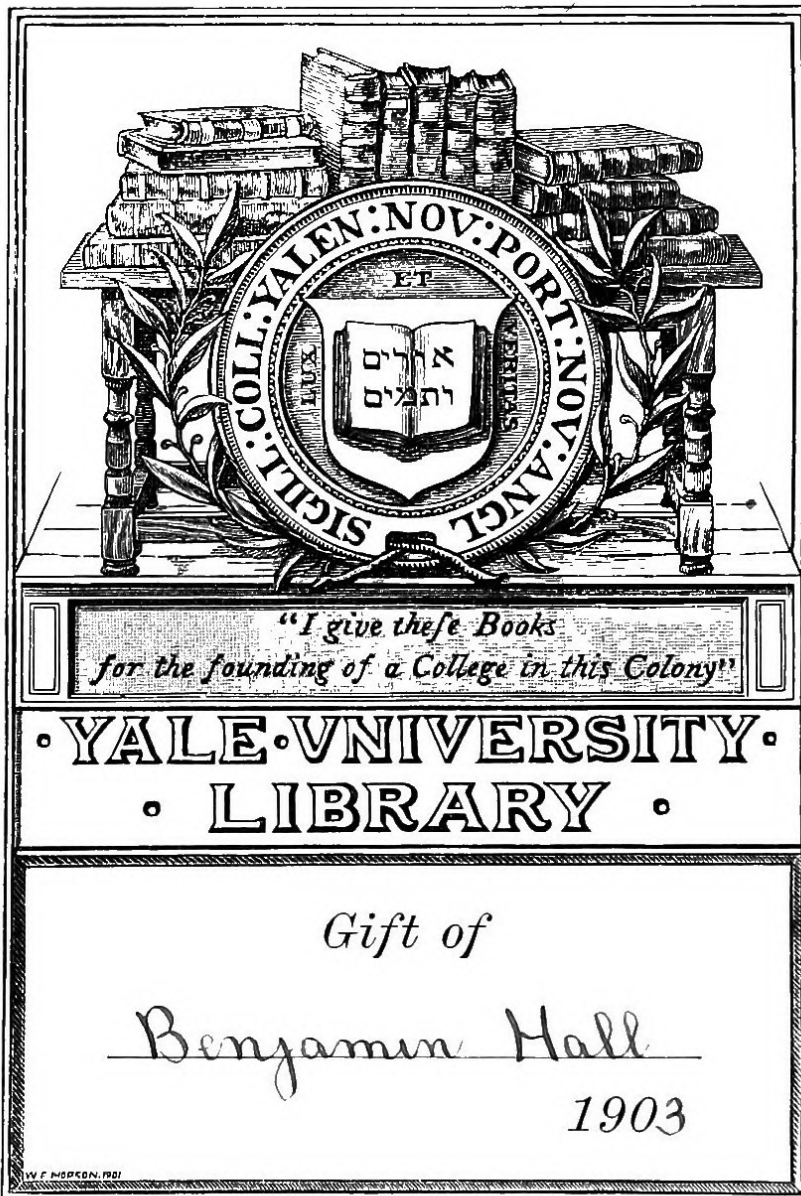
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PREDESTINATION

CALMLY CONSIDERED FROM

PRINCIPLES OF REASON;

IN

CONSISTENCY WITH THE NATURE OF THINGS,

AND THE

Scriptures of Truth;

WITH

ANSWERS TO SEVEN QUERIES ON PREDESTINATION.

BY WILLIAM TUCKER.

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BY L. IVES HOADLEY.

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ERRATA.

- Page 98, third line from the bottom, erase No. 4.
 Page 99, beginning of fourth line from top, insert No. 4.
 Page 102, Note, for *tuuth*, read *truth*.
 Page 118, middle of the page, for *nto* read *into*.
 Page 158, paragraph number 2, for *That if*, read *If*.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

The reader of these letters will find in them the plain thoughts of a plain man plainly expressed; but on a subject the truth and sublimity and grandeur of which, made even a plain man forcible, and at times truly eloquent.

It is not designed in this place to give anything like a full account of the author. This indeed would be impracticable. The materials for it are not at hand; nor are they, so far as is known to the writer, to be obtained in this country, if in fact they exist at present at all. It is true what is called a *memoir* accompanies these Letters in the English edition from which this is prepared, but it is really neither a *memoir*, nor a mere *notice*. For the latter, it is too long; and for the former, it is quite too short and meagre, especially for such a man as it is easy to see, even from this memoir and from these letters, Mr. Tucker must have been. Besides the memoir, there is also, in the English edition, a general *introduction* accompanying the letters. But except a fact or two, there is nothing in it of importance to be retained in the present edition. In place, therefore, of the memoir and the introduction, it has been thought necessary to retain a brief sketch only of the life of the author, introducing him merely to the acquaintance of the reader.

WILLIAM TUCKER, the author of the Letters on Predestination, was a cutler and iron-monger. He was born at Chard, Somerset County, England, March 7th, 1731. His parents were in moderate circumstances, but honest and industrious, and attentive to the morals and, as far as they were able, to the education of their children. William, who was the eldest, gave early indications of possessing a mind

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of no ordinary character, and during his apprenticeship was so fond of reading and contemplation, that he spent most of his pocket money in the purchase of books to gratify his inclination in this respect. Being, except his parents, his only tutor, he had not of course a regular and systematic education ; yet so ardent was his desire for improvement and cultivation, that he acquired a tolerably good knowledge of the learned languages, of philosophy and of general literature.

At what time precisely he became hopefully pious, does not appear. Probably it was when he was about 20 or 21 years of age. He went about that time to London, and though the particulars cannot be ascertained, it is known in general that he then and there heard the celebrated Whitefield preach, and through the instrumentality of his preaching, was hopefully converted. — In his profession of Christianity he was of the Baptist denomination, and was baptized by the Rev. Isaac Ham, July 7th, 1765.

After his return from London, he settled in his native place, where he continued to do business between 30 and 40 years. His habits were regular, and his application close and thorough.

Besides business, he also applied himself regularly and constantly to the acquisition and communication of knowledge, particularly on the subject of religion. He had a taste, too, for poetry, in which he indulged himself considerably.

He was accustomed to rise early, and when the weather was unfavorable to his amusing or employing himself abroad, he did it in his study. It was in these seasons he composed his Letters on Predestination. They were first published in 1772, in the ' Gospel Magazine,' a periodical at that time edited by the Rev. Augustus Toplady, by whom and by the Rev. John Rayland, among others, Mr. Tucker was much encouraged as a writer. The Letters were first published in a volume in 1798, under the title of ' Predestination calmly considered.' The reviewers are said to have borne a respectful testimony to the work, and no opposer, for a number of years, attempted a reply or even an attack.

Besides the Letters on Predestination, and some poetical pieces, Mr. Tucker furnished the Gospel and Baptist Magazines with a variety of articles on the pre-existence of Christ, the moral law, and other subjects, mostly controversial ; all of which are spoken of as having been highly esteemed. He is said not to have been greatly gifted with the grace of utterance, but his talent for writing may be presum-

ed to have more than made up for any deficiency in the power of oral communication.

In his religious sentiments he was, as might be inferred from these Letters, a decided Calvinist. Not that he was particularly educated in Calvinist sentiments. His parents, it is stated in the Memoir, were members of the church of England; but how particular they were in the *religious* education of their children does not appear. At any rate, so far at least as predestination is concerned, our author was far at first from being a Calvinist. Thus in his introduction to the Letters, he says, 'I was in my youthful days an avowed enemy to the doctrine of predestination, and thought it scarcely possible for any man to believe it. But the Lord in his rich mercy was pleased to convince me of my error, by giving me a view of his own most adorable perfections; and I was led to see such a harmony between the doctrine and them, that in my view it was impossible to separate them, without destroying both.*' He adds, that in conversing with men and books on the subject, he found that most grounded their objections to the doctrine on the single mistaken position, that 'it is contrary to reason.' This led him to consider whether it were so or not, and in these Letters, we have, it may be supposed, the result of his investigation. His introduction is taken up principally with remarks and illustrations, showing how a doctrine may be *above* reason, and yet *not* contrary to it. In a note he makes mention of President Edwards in a manner which shows he was a great admirer of him, and probably well acquainted with his writings. There are expressions also of simplicity and modesty which are highly indicative of the excellence of his character; though, as has been stated already, there is no great importance to be retained here as aiding the better understanding of the Letters, or recommending them particularly to the attention of readers.

It appears further from the Memoir, that Mr. Tucker, as a man, was naturally amiable, and, as a Christian, unaffectedly pious. He deeply lamented the pride of our fallen nature, which he considered the master-sin of the race. He set a great value on the Bible, and, what is remarkable, there was found among his manuscripts, after his death, a large part of the Bible very curiously written in a short hand of his own, under an impression, that troublesome times might come, when he should be deprived of that inestimable treasure. He died,

* See Letter VII.

as he lived, in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; and, though dead, he yet speaketh.

As to the preparation of the Letters for this American edition, they were found, on examination, to be repetitious to such a degree as to lessen the interest, it was thought, with which they would otherwise be read. They have therefore, in accordance with the suggestion of a friend to whom the volume was sent for his opinion of its merits, been, in some parts, considerably abridged and condensed. A careful and scrupulous regard has been had, however, throughout the volume, to the sentiments of the author, and in no case has he been made to speak a sentiment not his own. The divisions into paragraphs, wherever the numbering of them seemed likely to promote a clearer understanding of the argument, have been numbered. Besides this, a running title, varying with the subject, has been introduced; the topics discussed in each Letter have been stated at the opening of the same, and a general table of contents has been prefixed to the whole. The work will still be found repetitious more or less, but what of repetition remains, is, for the most part inseparable from the subject, as the author chose to discuss it.

Respecting the author's manner of conducting his argument, it may be well to observe, generally, that the argument is sustained, first, from a connection of the nature of cause and effect, and, secondly, from that of the perfections of God and his works. The evidence also of systematic is introduced briefly at the close of the discussion, though amusing comment from this source is not considered as altogether pertinent, the proper object of the Letters being to prove the doctrine from reason rather than from Scripture.

The Queries and Answers following the Letters, are worthy in their place, but need not be here specified, as to method. In some places in them there is either a repetition of what is said in some parts of the Letters, but, as they are not very long, they have been retained almost entire.

As to the subject in general, both of the Letters and of the Queries and Answers, the editor having introduced the reader to the author, and given some necessary account of the preparation of the work, as here presented, would now, before closing, bespeak the attention and candor of the reader, suggest a few things respecting the doctrine itself of predestination, and remark briefly on the state of the public religious mind at the present day, calling for a consideration of the subject.

There is not perhaps in the whole compass of philosophy and theology, a single doctrine which men are more liable to abuse than the doctrine of predestination. As a philosophical doctrine, it degenerates with mere philosophers into blind inexorable fate; and as a doctrine of revelation, it is liable to be, with some, little better; while others, however they may believe it as a doctrine of philosophy, reject it altogether as a doctrine of revelation, and thus wrest the truth, as is to be feared, to their own and others' destruction. It is a doctrine which should be studied, therefore, with the greatest possible candor and impartiality of mind, and with implicit regard to the simple question of conclusiveness in the evidence by which it is sustained. With such a regard, it is hoped, every reader of this volume will weigh the arguments and reasonings of Mr. Tucker, and not hastily reject them, or consider them inconclusive, because the general subject is environed with difficulty. He will find himself frequently called upon by the author to consider the solemnity and seriousness, as well as the importance, of the doctrine, and nothing is more needful to a right understanding and reception of the truth.

And here the editor would make a single remark respecting Mr. Tucker's reasoning from the divine perfections. It is frequently objected that reasoning of this sort is all to little purpose, inasmuch as we know, confessedly, so little about God. But it may be replied that, though we know so little about God, it yet is not to little purpose to reason in this way; for, limited as we are in our knowledge and capacity, we are manifestly so constituted, (and this is an ultimate fact in relation to the human mind and the nature of things,) that we cannot but thus reason, and not to reason thus, is to launch at once into universal skepticism about everything, even our own existence.

The doctrine itself of predestination is rather peculiar. It is held in its different forms by men, in other respects, of opposite creeds, and by some of no acknowledged religious creed whatever. It is called the doctrine of predestination, but is known and recognized in substance under other names. The doctrine of necessity or of providence, and that of election or divine sovereignty, is but another name for nearly the same thing. And it is further peculiar, in that, while as a philosophical doctrine merely, it is wont to be considered as remote and foreign from all practical regard, it nevertheless, as a religious doctrine, comes home more closely to the heart, and is in-

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vested with more practical relations than almost any other. Whence, the unsubdued and such as have not repentance and faith are more quick to contend with this than with any other doctrine: because, conscious of their guilt, they feel themselves pierced by it just in the point of their greatest vulnerableness, and that too in a way most to expose the awfulness of their state. Therefore they cannot endure it. However it be considered, the doctrine of predestination is evidently one of great interest to the human mind; and unless the mind be turned entirely away from the contemplation of it, no man can, as an accountable creature and a subject of the divine government, be at rest in his feelings, or at peace with his conscience, without submissively and confidently receiving it as the only proper basis, next to the doctrine of the divine existence, of all true religion.

As to the public mind, it is with that in relation to religion, as it is with the mind of an individual in relation to the same. Sometimes it is in one state, and sometimes in another. Now one doctrine or sentiment has an ascendancy, and now another. But what is desirable, is, an equal proportion of all the various doctrines of religion at the same time; and without this, the mind, whether of an individual or of the public, is liable to be disproportionate and distorted, and subject to irregular and extravagant action. Accordingly, in this view, one doctrine may be more important at one time, and another, at another. And if we would seek to be useful in calling the attention of the public to needful subjects of contemplation, we must, like the parent or the teacher in the education of a child, throw out before the mind the doctrines and sentiments, which are required from time to time to give it a right direction and promote its healthy action. A great variety of influences may be employed, some more agreeable perhaps, and others less, yet all necessary in their place in order to the grand result.

In this point of view, it would be very unphilosophical, as well as unwise, to complain of certain means and influences, which are having great prominence in the formation still further and the direction of the religious public mind, at the present day, especially in our own country. The evil in them must be counteracted as far as may be, and the good cherished; but they are both perhaps the legitimate and natural offspring of the human mind, so situated and circumstanced, and so acted upon by Heaven, as is the mind of the American people. No other people, with the same universality, and degree of intellectual

cultivation have ever been placed in such a focus of moral light ; and none probably, as a whole, have ever had such manifestations of the awakening and converting influences of the Holy Spirit. It is to be feared the work of progressive sanctification has not been, in all, proportionally carried on ; but, though this should be the case, among no people, probably, has the god of this world been more disturbed, or excited to attempt mischief on a more elevated and extensive scale than among us. His kingdom is invaded on all sides, and he is put, it may be supposed, to his utmost to retain his hold on his subjects.

In such a state of things, it were to be expected that every means would be employed, promising success even the least. And so we find it. The adversary not only shows off the bold and daring front of infidelity, as if to carry all by force and superior power : but he practices also every sly and wily art of plausible error and seeming truth, to decoy, if possible, and beguile and thus to conquer. As in the great anti-Christ of papacy, he engrafted scions of the tree of death on the stock of the tree of life, the better to elude detection on the part of those who would eat and live ; so, in instances less prominent, and down even to the least observable, his artifice still is, to engraft error on truth, wherever he can, and thus to carry on his work of death by stealth, and under the garb of an angel of light. Universally, his object seems to be to poison the waters of life in the very fountain, or at least at as little distance as possible from it in the stream, that all who drink, whether here or there, though they may seem to themselves to drink pure water, may yet be fatally poisoned and finally destroyed.

What proportion of the speculations in the philosophy or the religion of the present day, or whether this or that particular in either, be the proportion what it may, deserves to be included as noxious in the view just taken, the writer will not attempt to decide ; nor does he, in reference to some things which may be specified as at present doubtful, feel very confident to declare what will be their ultimate effect. But it is reasonable, taking the most liberal view of things, to consider Christians of every name as called upon to be on their guard against exposure ; and in so far as books and publications are concerned, one of the signs of the times indicative of exposure, may be found, it is believed, in a certain apparent eagerness on the part of a great multitude of readers, (I will not say how much of the fault is to be attributed, in some cases, to authors,) after something excit-

ing, something new in theory, or keen in wit, or imposing in imagery — something light and airy perhaps, or something crowded with incident, and set off with high coloring. The reading life of not a few readers of the present day is literally, as the Psalmist says, ‘as a tale that is told,’ for so they spend their life as to reading.

There is, too, a willingness on the part of others who would seem to be of a more substantial character, to be gulled into the belief that everything, whether in science, or literature or religion, is now about to be made as simple and plain as the child’s first lesson in the alphabet, under the all-discriminating, comprehensive and explicatory power of these modern improved and improving times. It is a remark recently made by a writer with whom the public are well acquainted, that ‘every doctrine (he is speaking of religion,) is surrounded with difficulty, about in proportion to its radical and fundamental importance.’ But the times on which we are fallen are rare times in respect to things of this sort, and *facile* and *simplex* must be inscribed on every thing; and this too, not by a ‘thus saith the Lord,’ and *therefore* it is plain and easy, but as traced out and fairly disposed of by the ingenuity and research of the human understanding; so that whatever will not bear the test in this respect by yielding and coming under subjection, must be given up, and pronounced untrue and unworthy of confidence.

Thus, between what is pert and flippant, or at least, superficial and perhaps fictitious, on the one hand, and on the other what is seemingly profound, but really full of assumption, if not of vain boasting, the truth, on many subjects, is exposed to fall and become neglected. The writer is aware that these remarks may not be popular with some; but they may, nevertheless, be true, and have no less importance, particularly in so far as the doctrine contended for in these Letters is concerned.

Whether from design or otherwise — probably it is only incidental to the state of the public mind, considering how, to a great extent, it is wont to be fed at present, but it evidently is the fact that the *doctrines* of religion, and especially the doctrine of predestination, has not been so frequently the subject of discourse, as it is believed it was formerly. Perhaps in some of its forms it was once made too prominent, at least in the discourses of some ministers; — or they, rather, may not have inculcated it in the best manner. Probably they erred in both respects.

Yet why should the doctrine be passed over in silence, or laid aside as useless, if not detrimental? It is manifestly a great doctrine, both of revelation and of reason. Only admit that there is a God; and, as He must necessarily have originated everything, and imparted to everything whatever power it has, the doctrine follows, of course, that nothing can be above him, or beyond his control. And admit that God is wise, and acts with a view to some end, and predestination follows irresistibly, as is shown abundantly by Mr. Tucker.

The only question, therefore, would seem to be this: Is the doctrine worthy, and important to be known? and has it any practical relations to make the knowledge of it useful?

And here the answer must be obvious, and cannot be mistaken. Certainly if *every* doctrine of Scripture, however minute, is profitable, and none can be unimportant or without usefulness; much more must this be true in relation to a doctrine of such vitality and radical character as is the doctrine of predestination. Its power with the conscience has been brought to view already, showing its agency in the work of conviction and conversion. And if it should be objected, as it sometimes has been, that it discourages effort and deadens zeal: though we may admit that this is sometimes the case where the doctrine is abused, yet it is only in such cases that it has this effect; and where it is rightly received, it is, on the contrary, the very spring and life of all effort and zeal; as, for instance, none are so earnest and persevering in prayer and the use of means, as they who realize most strongly the truth and practical importance of this great doctrine.

And we see why it is so. For this doctrine brings God continually before the mind. We see him working around us. He speaks to us in every event. Therefore this doctrine at once promotes holiness of heart and life, through reverence, and fear, and gratitude, and love; while it excites also and animates to duty, through confidence and a well grounded hope that exertions made in obedience to God and dependence on Him will not be without effect.

The neglect, then, of the doctrine of Predestination in the present state of the public mind, or the misuse of it, perhaps, in some cases, is a reason why, considering its importance and usefulness, it should be brought before the public, and commended especially to ministers and candidates for the ministry. It is plainly a great doctrine of religion, both natural and revealed.

Let it, then, be investigated. Let it be proved and established by the proper evidences. And if it is liable to abuse, let it be properly guarded ; and let its right use, and in that case its powerful, *salutary* influence be searched out and faithfully employed.

The Editor cannot but hope that the discussion of the subject so clearly and copiously by Mr. Tucker, may be of great service to many who may read his Letters ; and though he would have been glad to have had them published in this country at an earlier period, he flatters himself the publication of them now will still be thought timely by many. Some at least, whose judgment the community are accustomed to respect, have thought well of the republication, and wished it might go forward. For, though not exactly upon the topics which have interested so extensively the theological reading community for the last few years, they yet bear, notwithstanding, in a great many points, on kindred topics. They come, too, as the testimony of an uninterested, independent, unprejudiced witness. The surface of the water has now and then been a little ruffled ; here and there, indeed, the commotion has sometimes been considerable. May it not be hoped that these Letters will have a tendency to tranquilize and smooth any commotion that may remain ?

Charlestown, June, 1835.

PREDESTINATION

CALMLY CONSIDERED;

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.

LETTER I.

Preliminary remarks.—Plan of the discussion.—Fixedness of events from the nature and connection of cause and effect.

My Dear Friend,

Error in principle, will be productive of error in practice, and attended with as awfully fatal consequences. Certain it is, God has as much regard to what we think, as what we do. If our thoughts of Him correspond not with his revealed will, it is as criminal in his sight, as any outward transgression: for to discredit what He saith, is making Him, who is truth itself, a liar; and is, consequently, a fault equally punishable with any outward breach of his holy law.

Predestination is, most certainly, a revealed truth—there being scarce a chapter in the Bible without some traces of it—and did not men set their reason above revelation, no doubt would arise about it. And reason, respecting things concerning God, ought to submit to the revelation He has given of them; because, it is impossible for creatures to

judge what is reasonable of God, but from what He reveals. His word is truth, and must be so, whether consistent with our notions, or not. Nor is a truth less a truth, because we cannot comprehend it, nor deduce it from principles within the compass of our minds. Nothing can be, in its own nature, unreasonable, that God hath revealed; but, contrariwise, must be rational in the highest degree: and the reason why we cannot see it thus, is, not because there is any real absurdity in the thing itself; but, because of our ignorance of its true nature; and also, because of our pride, in setting up our judgment as a rule, in things far above its sphere. There are many things in nature, which we know as infallible truths; when, at the same time, we may as soon comprehend Deity, as tell how, or give a reason why, they are so. Who can describe how spirits act upon matter; or how volition directs and regulates the actions of the body? Who can search out the real essence of a grain of sand, or a blade of grass? And if things so near us are incomprehensible, is it any wonder that some things God has revealed in his word, are so? If the works of God are inscrutable, can we suppose God himself to be comprehensible; or, that what He has made known of himself is capable of full investigation by our shallow understandings? If there are mysteries in *nature*, can we suppose *grace* to be without them? Shall we discredit a truth and pronounce it absurd, because our depraved and limited reason cannot explore the secret of it? We should think it highly ridiculous for a blind man to deny the existence of light, when he has the joint evidence of so many millions in favor of its truth; and is it not fully as absurd to reject a truth of revelation because our comparatively blind reason cannot comprehend it, when the witness of God is more to be depended on, than that of all created beings united? But thus unac-

countably absurd do those act, who deny the truths of revelation, because they are above the comprehension of their limited powers. If their conduct in other things were consistent with this, they must of necessity, deny their own existence.

But though there are some truths which are above the reach of reason, and which depend alone on revelation for their certainty; such as the doctrine of the Trinity; the union of the divine and human nature in Christ, with many more; yet there are others which are fairly deducible from principles of reason: among which I include the doctrine of Predestination; which, therefore, I shall accordingly attempt to demonstrate in the following Letters.

The plan on which I shall proceed, is, 1. To prove that there is, and must necessarily be, such a certain fixed state of all events from eternity, both as to time, place, mode, and circumstances, supposing no decree of God concerning them; as there must be on supposition, God eternally, absolutely, and unchangeably decreed them. 2. To show from a few considerations, the great probability of God's irreversibly determining all events from eternity; and, 3. To show the absolute impossibility of God's not having immutably and irreversibly willed, appointed, ordained, fixed, and determined, (either effectually or permissively,) from eternity, whatsoever comes to pass.

I. I shall attempt to prove, that there is, and must necessarily be, such a certain fixed state of all events from eternity, both as to time, place, mode, and circumstances, supposing no decree of God concerning them; as there must be on supposition, God eternally, absolutely and unchangeably decreed them. And this will appear,

1st. From the nature and connection of causes and events, and their dependence one on another.

It is a self-evident truth, that all events from the beginning to the end, are one continued series of causes and effects. All things, their places, circumstances, and time, are events or effects which naturally follow their causes. There cannot be an effect without a cause, nor a cause without an effect. To suppose either would be a contradiction. There is no effect but is necessarily dependent on its cause, nor any cause but is necessarily connected with its effect. Every event is the effect of something prior to itself, which is its cause, or the reason why it exists. This cause is the effect or effects of some thing or things antecedent to it or them; and so the relation of cause and effects holds on to the beginning of the series. Or, we may invert the order and say, causes produce effects; these effects becomes causes, and produce other effects; these effects also become causes and produce effects in their turn; and so on to the end of the chain. The same cause, in all respects, would necessarily produce the same effect: but, as there cannot be two causes, in all respects the same; so, there cannot be two events in every point the same: for, they must necessarily differ either in time or in place. If they agree in time, they cannot in place; if in place, not in time. And consequently, there never can be two causes, nor two effects precisely the same. Two causes exactly the same except in time, will invariably produce like effects, except in time. Two causes, similar in everything but in place, will produce effects exactly similar, but in place. And it is, I apprehend, a certain truth, that so far as causes differ from one another, in time, place, and mode, so far will the effects produced, differ also; and the nearer causes approach each other, the greater similarity will there be in their effects. Pour water on a declivity, and it will ever run off; the greater the descent, the swifter it will run, invariably. Throw anything

in its way, it will naturally stop and take another course. Pour it directly perpendicular on a perfectly level ground, it will run in all directions alike, until it spreads equally over the surface; and pour it on a thousand like planes, it will produce the same effect. This will hold good in all causes and events whatever; and it shows that effects are invariably connected with their causes, and necessarily follow them. It never was known that water stood on a declivity without being dammed up, or that a stone ever rolled on a plain without being impelled by some foreign power, or that two like causes produced contrary effects. And therefore it must be an infallible truth, that there is an inseparable connection between every cause and its effect; and consequently, as every cause, except the first, is an effect which necessarily follows its cause; every event is, and must be, a fixed thing; so that if the first link in the chain be put in motion, all the rest will follow. There will not be an event through the whole compass of time, in the whole creation, but is the effect of some cause, which is the reason and ground of its existence. And whatever the cause which is the reason or ground of an event, may be, it also, must be an effect of a prior cause; and so on to the first cause of all. Consequently, if the series be once begun, all must inevitably follow.

Though these things at first sight may appear strange to some, yet I am persuaded, if they are attentively examined, they will be found indubitably true. Whenever a cause is fully known, we are never at a loss what effect it will produce. We are daily conversant with a thousand things, the effects of which we are as certain before their existence, as after. And did we fully know the time, place, nature, and tendency of every cause; we should as certainly know every effect, its time, place, nature, and tendency also; and

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clearly see that there is not, nor can be in reality any such thing as chance, accident, or contingency in the world: we should see all things come to pass according to a fixed invariable rule; and our knowledge would extend to futurity; we should as perfectly know things to come, as we know those that are past. It is known that astronomers can tell events that will happen, twenty, a hundred, or a thousand years to come; such as the positions of the heavenly bodies; the eclipses of the sun and moon, the ebbing and flowing of tides, &c. It is evident these events can be traced backward or forward to almost any number of years. And I doubt not but all other events, whether past, present, or to come, might be as fully traced, *were their causes as fully known.*

But if this be the case respecting what we know, why not with those things we are ignorant of? Our ignorance of causes, does not make effects, in themselves contingent; though it may make them appear so to us. Perhaps nothing in nature has more the appearance of chance, to those who are ignorant of their causes, than eclipses; yet this ignorance in the wild Africans, does not make these eclipses contingent or casual in themselves, though they appear so to them; for nothing appears more regular and certain, when the cause is perfectly known. A fall from a horse, a broken bone, with numberless other things, are called accidents, misfortunes, and the like; but this is owing to our ignorance; for had we seen the various combined circumstances that became the cause, reason, and ground of the event, we should see, also, that the event was not a casual, or accidental thing; but a certain consequence of such antecedents. And could we trace the various circumstances, which became the cause, reason or ground of the event, we should find them also to be effects of prior causes; which

causes being known, would infallibly discover those circumstances to be the necessary result of those causes; and so on to the beginning of the series.

It is evident, then, that there is not any such thing in reality, as chance or contingency; and that it is our ignorance of causes which makes them appear so: for when a cause is perfectly known, the event is never supposed to be accidental. From all which, I humbly apprehend it to be demonstrably evident, that all events, of every kind, are fixed and permanent — that the chain once begun, the last link is as certain of existence, as the first — that all future events, as they depend on causes now existing, are as certain of being, as those already past. And consequently in this respect, are the same to us, supposing no decree of God concerning them, as on the supposition that He absolutely and unchangeably decreed them.

I am aware that prejudiced minds may raise many objections against the foregoing; as, for instance, that many things often occur which turn effects into a different channel to what, else, they would take; that man, on the foresight of a cause having a tendency to produce a disagreeable effect, turns, by his own agency, both cause and effect out of the course in which they would otherwise run: that God by his own immediate interposition, changes the series of events from what, otherwise, they would be. But these, or ten thousand such objections, have not the least tendency to destroy their stability, but rather firm them. For, as a thousand things may combine, will produce an event, the least alteration in one circumstance will produce the event different from what otherwise exist. And yea, it would make it another cause and another effect. But both in the one and in the other, the event will be what either cause has a natural tendency to bring forth. And as this circumstance or variation must be the effect of another cause,

it also must necessarily exist, and consequently could not but be as it is. And this will hold good in any supposed accidental circumstance whatever. And with regard to the immediate agency of God, who turns and changes the course of events when He pleases; it only proves, that He is the sole *Ruler* and *Guided* of events; and that none exist but such as are agreeable to his sovereign will and pleasure.

These things, well weighed, must leave the unprejudiced mind without a doubt of the certain fixedness of events, and that they could not be otherwise than they are, without supposing a change in the first cause. Wishing you to examine these things with candor, I rest your's.

LETTER II.

Fixedness of events from their futurity, and from the knowledge God has of them.

My Dear Friend,

Having in my last shown, that the fixed and certain state of things is manifest, from the nature and connection of causes and events; I proceed now to a farther proof,

2dly. From their futurity:

It is a self-evident truth, that all things, modes, times, places, connections, relations, and every circumstance that ever did or shall exist, were future from eternity. Whatever exists to-day, was future yesterday, and from the beginning. To-morrow's events are future to day, as are all succeeding ones to the end of time. The events of all succeeding generations were future to Adam, and were then such as would take place in the time, and manner, they have, and do. If an event be future, it is as certain of existence, as that which is past. If it be future to such a time, in such a manner, and to such a place, it is certain of being at that time, in such a manner, and at such a place. The non-existence of things destroys their futurity: for, what will not exist, cannot be future; but, what is future, must exist. And though its futurity doth not give it being, yet, it ascertains it as much as a thing past does its once existing. Our ignorance of future events does not make them doubtful in themselves. We may not know when any of the planets are in conjunc-

tion or opposition ; when an eclipse will take place in either of the luminaries, in future: yet, these events, themselves, are as certain, and will as certainly take place at the time to which they are future, as though we knew them ever so perfectly. Our existence was future from the beginning, and we have being accordingly ; consequently, our existence was a fixed thing. It is a common, but true saying, that, ' what must be, will be ;' we may improve it and observe that, whatever is future must be ; if it must be, it will be ; and if it will be, its existence is a certain and fixed event. And as all things were future from eternity, they were fixed, permanent, and certain, and would be, are, and must be, in all respects, as their beings have made appear.

But as these things are self-evident, I need not enlarge, and therefore observe,

3dly. That the fixed state of things appears, not only from the nature of causes and effects, and the futurity of events ; but, also, from the knowledge God hath of, and concerning them.

He that is God, must be omniscient ; and he that is omniscient, must be God. God, and the Omniscient, are terms in all respects synonymous. Omniscience is essential to Deity ; or, rather, omniscience is God, and implies a being whose wisdom and knowledge is without bounds, and immutably the same from eternity to eternity. The Scriptures testify of Him that, ' his understanding is infinite,' and if so, He must eternally know all things, and the circumstances thereof, even to the falling of a sparrow or the shaking of a leaf. Nothing, though ever so minute, could escape his most perfect comprehension. To suppose otherwise is to suppose a possibility of increase in it, and consequently, to destroy his omniscience, and, in effect, deny Him to be God. Now, if God had, from eternity, a perfect knowledge

of all things and the circumstances of them ; it follows that all were eternally fixed and certain : that is, they are events that would, and must infallibly have existence. Whatever is known to be, must be, or it cannot be said to be known. It is true, knowledge gives not being to the thing known : but if the knowledge of it be accurate and true, it gives an infallible certainty of its existence. We know a thousand things, which, though our knowledge does not give, yet it undoubtedly proves the certainty of their being. The knowledge of things future proves their existence at the known time, with as much certainty, as the knowledge of things past doth their having had existence.

Therefore the argument stands thus :

1. Whatever is perfectly known to be, in any manner, at any time, must infallibly exist, in the manner, and at the time known : and, consequently, is fixed and certain.

2. But God from eternity knew perfectly all things, with their times, modes, and circumstances, that ever did, or will exist. Therefore,

3. All things with their times, modes and circumstances, were fixed from eternity, and those, which would infallibly, without the least, have being.

These things, I apprehend, are self-evident, and cannot be denied without giving up the omniscience of God, which would deprive Him of his essence, and be in effect atheism.

On the whole then, I apprehend, it demonstrably appears, that the opposers of Predestination cannot have the least advantage by denying the sovereignty and eternity of God's will or purpose, or his fixing and determining all things that ever shall come to pass. For, as causes and effects, means and ends, will have their certain accomplishment ; as every future event must have existence ; and as God knoweth all things, and consequently all things must exist as known ;

it can make no difference with regard to things themselves; nor to us, in some respects, whether they take place in virtue of God's sovereign and irresistible decree, or some other cause or causes unknown. A cause, — a *first cause* there must be; for there cannot be an effect without it, and it will be difficult, yea, impossible to prove any other but God himself.

Thus I have endeavored to prove the first proposition, and think its truth clear and evident, even to a demonstration; and though prejudice may raise many objections, yet, I humbly believe that nothing can be urged sufficient, in the least, to invalidate the evidence given, or that will not admit of a fair and full confutation.

I hope you will examine these things with all possible candor, and endeavor to divest your mind of partiality and prejudice; remembering that God requires us to think of Him consistent with what He has revealed of himself in his word. If his word is not our rule, we are sure to err. This is our only guide, the only criterion of truth. And that the divine Spirit, by his word, may lead us into all truth, prays

Your sincere Friend.

LETTER III.

Same subject continued. — Stoicism disclaimed. — Probability of God's choosing and fixing things, from supernatural and extraordinary events, and, from prophecies and their fulfillment.

My Dear Friend,

You may think, perhaps, that some of the principles already laid down, bear too near a resemblance to the fate of the stoics, who held, (some of them at least) that all things followed each other, and were connected together in one continued series, by an immutable tie from eternity. But as we do not deify matter, nor believe it eternal, we naturally suppose that the order of events had a beginning, and that God the first cause began the series. And though, certainly, there is a natural and infallible connection between cause and effect: yet, we do not believe they follow each other *so as to supersede the divine agency*, in the supporting, guiding, and directing all events to the noblest ends. But, on the contrary, we maintain, not only, that God is the sole *Ruler* and *Guide* of all events; but that He actually determined their existence—the time when—the manner how—and the place where, from eternity. Therefore the blind fatality of the stoics cannot, justly, be charged upon us.

Having proved that there is, and must necessarily be, such a certain fixed state of all events, supposing no determina-

tion of God concerning them, as there must be, on the supposition that He absolutely and irreversibly determined them ;
I come now,

II. To show from various considerations, the great probability of God's immutably choosing and fixing all of them from eternity. And,

1st. The probability of this appears from the many supernatural and extraordinary events that have taken place in the world in consequence of the immediate agency of God ; by which, the then present course of events has been stopped, and others, far different in their consequences have followed ; as the bringing a flood upon the earth, and destroying all flesh, except Noah and his family ; the confusion of tongues, in the land of Shinar, at the building of Babel ; the destruction of Sodom, with the cities of the plain, and the turning Lot's wife into a pillar of salt ; the calling of Abraham ; multiplying his seed in the land of Goshen ; the many miracles before Pharaoh, and judgments upon Egypt ; dividing the Red Sea, preserving Israel and destroying the Egyptians ; the many miracles in favor of, and judgments upon, Israel, while in the wilderness ; the driving out the nations before them, and placing them in Canaan ; the many interpositions on their behalf, and the judgments executed on them there ; and at last scattering them all over the earth, and keeping them to this day, though thus dispersed, a distinct people from all the inhabitants of the globe : all these are events brought about by the all-powerful arm of Jehovah, as the effect of his sovereign will and purpose, by which the course of events has been stopped, changed, and carried into a different channel, times without number, as Scripture abundantly evinces. And I think it no less true, that God has thus interposed, not only with regard to this people, but also with regard to all the nations of the earth, from their

beginning to this day. Indeed this is manifest from their histories.

And not only history, sacred and profane, but daily experience gives ample proof of the immediate interposition of divine power, by which millions of events are prevented that would otherwise have had existence, and birth given to as many more, which, else, would never have had being. And here, all the elements, yea, all creation are his instruments. His thunders roll, and shake the heavens and the earth. The forked lightnings fly, and deal destruction all around. Trees, herbs, and fruits are blasted. Beasts are struck out of the list of breathing existence. And man, when by the Almighty arm, the subtle fluid is directed to that end, untimely falls a victim to it. — He commands, and the winds obey Him. Hurricanes arise, and spread devastation far and wide. The sturdy oak, the towering pine, and whole forests bend beneath its force; and though deeply rooted in earth, and intermixed with rocks and clay, all are too weak to hold their strong and numerous fibres. One blast levels their lofty heads with the ground, and raises their roots on high; while the weaker branches, torn and driven away by the mighty gust, lie scattered over the neighboring plain. Yesterday, we beheld the friendly harbor, where navies rode in safety, without the least apparent danger; to-day, the tempest roars and beats on all the coast. Now, these floating castles of the ocean, these stately vehicles of commerce and wealth, incapable of withstanding the mighty torrent, are driven on rocks and sands, and in a moment, dashed to pieces. Their unhappy tenants perish in the briny flood, and all the shore is covered with the wreck and dead.—He gives the word, vapors arise, and gather into clouds; these thicken and darken the hemisphere, till becoming too heavy for the supporting air, they pour their contents in hasty show-

ers upon the earth. The rivulets rise and increase the larger streams; these swell the rivers, till, bursting their bounds, they sweep the whole adjacent country, as it were with a besom of destruction: their weighty waves bear all before them, and villages, towns, and cities, man and beast, fall a prey to their fury.—He commands, the air is filled with pestilential vapors, and men suck in death with every breath.—Anon, He causes the sword to go through the land, to cut off whom and whatsoever offends Him. Or, He opens the earth, and buries in a moment, towns, and cities, with thousands of their inhabitants, within its capacious tomb. In a word, He makes the meanest of his creatures, sometimes, the instruments of his vengeance, and a means of turning the course of events to the fulfilling of his own purposes.

Now, none, I apprehend, will assert that these extraordinary events take place without the direction and agency of God. It cannot be supposed that fire, air, earth, and water, or any other creature, can thus act by its own power. God, the first cause, who gave them being, gives them motion; directs their course; keeps them within the bounds prescribed, and says to all, ‘hitherto ye shall go and no further.’ The power of God is certainly exerted in these tremendous commotions. And if so, *they must be the effect of his purpose. For it is impossible for God to exert his power contrary to his will; nor can He act without design. But whenever He puts forth His power, He must determine so to do, and must know his own motive, and the end to be obtained thereby.* For, doth it not appear that great and important ends are answered by these events? And we know the instrument neither had, nor could have had, these ends in view. The fire and brimstone had no intention of destroying Sodom and the cities of the plain: nor did the

locusts, frogs, and lice, intend to plague the Egyptians. And though these ends were answered by them, they could be no more than passive instruments in the hand of Him 'who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.' It was He that sent the flood, to stop the flood of wicked events that else would have taken place. He confounded the language of the people, to stop and abase the towering thoughts of those vain builders who dared to mistrust the veracity of Him who had said, 'the waters shall no more become dry, for I will send a flood to destroy all flesh;' and, also, to fulfill his own divine purpose in scattering them and filling the earth with inhabitants. His dealings with Israel, and with the nations of old, bear their account, as well as all the extraordinary interpositions of divine power from the beginning to this day, were also for like ends; that is, to bring about and accomplish his infinitely wise purposes. Therefore, as those events stood in connection with, and became causes of, succeeding ones, which must be known to Him who knoweth all things; there is, I think, the greatest probability that He eternally determined whatsoever should come to pass.

2dly. This appears probable, also, from the prophecies of Scripture, and the fulfillment of them.

I shall not attempt to enumerate these prophecies; it will be sufficient for my purpose to speak of them in general.

The prophecies concerning the Messiah and his kingdom, with their fulfillment, are glaring proofs that God, from the beginning, determined a great part, at least, of the events that have existed since the first promise and prophecy of Him to Adam: for, some way or other, they have stood connected with this, and the subsequent prophecies of him. The whole book of God is interspersed, yea, we may say, filled with prophecies and promises relative to Christ and his Church, numbers of which are fulfilled, while many now are, and will

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be, fulfilling to the end of time ; for not one jot or tittle shall fail till all be accomplished.

The prophecies, respecting the nations of the world, are a further evidence of God's determining the greatest part of events before they exist. Perhaps there is no nation, people, or tongue, on the face of the earth, but God has afore-declared their circumstances in some respect or other ; it is evident to demonstration, that He has done so with respect to a great part, numerous instances of which might be given ; but, as you have an opportunity of searching the sacred volume, where you have abundant testimony of these things, I shall waive it.

I would observe here, that these prophecies are not a mere foretelling events by tracing effects from their causes, as astronomers foretell eclipses and the positions of the heavenly bodies ; but, they are spoken of in a positive strain, as what *should* take place ; not, merely, as *effects* of such and such *causes* ; but, as *that which God himself would bring to pass by his own immediate agency*.

Now, as the fulfillment of those prophecies stands connected with, and depends in some measure on, millions of millions of other events, (if not on all that exist) the failure of which would prevent the accomplishment of those prophecies ; I humbly apprehend, there is more than a probability, that God determined, not only the events prophesied of, but all others.

I am, yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

Same subject continued. — Probability of God's choosing and fixing things, from the dependence of creatures on God. Analogy of human and divine power.

My dear Friend,

HAVING in my last shown the probability of God's ordering all events, from his extraordinary and miraculous interpositions, and from the prophecies of Holy Writ; I come,

3dly. To shew that this appears further, from the dependence of creatures on God, for their existence and continuance therein. — Next,

Neither ^{of} ~~of~~ nor any other creature, exists at any time, in any situation, one moment, independent of the supporting power of God. He that gave us being, upholds us therein, every instant of time we exist. Our existence in life yesterday, is no foundation for our living to-day. The existence of a shadow one moment, is no ground of its existence in the next: let the sun cease to shine, or the intervening substance be removed, it instantly vanishes, nor leaves the smallest trace behind. So that, did not God unceasingly hold us up, though yesterday we might shine in all the bloom and vigor of life, to-day we should be breathless, and our flesh turn to corruption. 'By Him we live and move and have our being.' 'He gives to all, life and breath and all things.' There is no moment of our existence, but his power is exerted to

maintain and continue it: with unremitting energy, it fills heaven and earth, grasps the universe, and rules, supports, directs, and guides every atom. Tell me, who exists a moment without, or independent of Him, and I will tell you who is God besides Him. God alone is independent, and there can be only one independent being; consequently, all but one must be dependent, and ever be supported and bounded by Him who is independent. It follows, then, if his power is continually exerted to support his creatures, it must be his will to exert it; and if it is his will, as He perfectly sees the effects and consequences of his exerting it, there is the greatest reason to believe that all these effects and consequences are, also, according to his will. For it cannot be supposed that He exerts his power to produce that which is contrary to his will. Hence, therefore, there is, at least, a great probability that He determined every event before its existence. But,

4thly. This further appears, from the powers and faculties given to man, which, in God are superlative degree, or rather without any degree. — By these powers, I mean those which constitute intelligent agents; and which distinguish them from all other beings.

But what I have a particular respect to here, is, 1. The understanding, or power of perception and judgment; or, rather, a capacity of receiving and retaining ideas; forming propositions, by uniting and comparing them; reasoning upon and about them, to discover their agreement or disagreement, and drawing conclusions therefrom: and, 2. The will or that faculty of the mind which prefers one thing above, or before another, according to the view the understanding has of it; expressed by willing, nilling, choosing, and refusing.

I shall not attempt a particular definition of these facul-

ties : but only speak of them as far as it suits my present purpose.

The understanding does, or ought, at all times, to *direct* the will in its acts ; and it will ever do so, where the mind is entirely unbiased by prejudices. It is true, that love, hatred, anger and revenge, may so far bias the mind as to influence the will to acts contrary to the judgment of the understanding. But where these are not, I apprehend, it is impossible for the understanding to form any judgment, or draw conclusions about anything that concerns us, without some act, or acts of the will immediately following ; which act, or acts, direct our conduct respecting that thing. For I think it manifest in every man's experience, that, whatever choice he makes, he will execute, if he have power sufficient, and time and opportunity give leave. And it is the undoubted procedure of every man to endeavor to carry his purpose, will, and choice, into execution. As the will ever follows that which in the mind's present view seems most agreeable and best, it cannot desire and attempt its accomplishment. There is no man with regard to himself ; no master of a family ; no governor of a city ; no commander of an army, or king of a nation, but would, if it were in his power, have all things done, in every station, according to his own will and choice. And, indeed, it would be right that the purposes of each should be executed, if they arose from a right judgment. But, as men, through the darkness of their understandings, so often err in judgment, and make a wrong choice, it would bring things into the utmost confusion to attempt it.

But without enlarging here, this, I think, is clearly evident ; that every man forms a judgment about everything he views concerning himself, whence arise some acts of his will or choice respecting it ; and this choice he will

execute, if his mind remain the same long enough, and it be in his power. I apprehend it is in the very nature of the powers of the soul thus to direct and do. Therefore, as God possesses these powers without measure or degree, (for it is declared of Him, 'His understanding is infinite,') He must have eternally had the most perfect idea of all things, in all their various relations. He must have known them all, in their diversity of times, places, modes and connections. Every atom, in its simple or compound state, must have been ever perfectly present to his view. Their nature and properties, and the effects they would produce, under their various modifications, must have been eternally, most intimately known to Him: and He, as infinitely wise, must have been able to judge, with the utmost precision, of the propriety of all and each to answer any end proposed. And thus judging, his will must be according to the judgment formed: for He could not but choose that which He, as omniscient, saw fittest and best to be chosen. In a word, as God must have absolutely comprehended and known, from eternity, what has, does, and will exist; He must have judged, with the utmost accuracy, the fitness of things existing as they do. And as his power would ever prevent that which his wisdom judges improper, I think it more than probable that all things exist as the effect of his will and choice.

These things would admit of a much larger discussion, and many more considerations might be added here from the perfections of God; but as I shall particularly speak of the divine perfections, when I come to show the impossibility of God's not having eternally fixed and determined all things, I shall waive the consideration of them on this head. In the mean time, I would humbly hope, that what

has been said, will prove in some measure convincing; and if so, I shall think my labor doubly recompensed.

I am sensible, objections may arise, and things may be suggested, as consequences of what has been said, that may not wear a pleasing aspect. But I hope, ere I have done, to remove every doubt which can with any propriety be raised against the truth I contend for.

And now, entreating you to consider these things, with impartiality and candor, and to pray for direction to form a right judgment of them, I rest,

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

The doctrine argued from a consideration of the perfections and works of God. 1. His perfections. — 2. His eternity and omnipresence.

My Dear Friend,

Having proved that there is, and must necessarily be, from eternity, a certain fixed state of all events, their time, place, mode and circumstances, even supposing no decree of God concerning them; and also shown, from various considerations, the great probability that God eternally determined their existence: I come now,

III. To point out the absolute impossibility of God's not having immutably and irreversibly willed, appointed, fixed and determined (either effectively or permissively,) from eternity, whatsoever comes to pass. And this I shall attempt to do, 1. From the perfections, and, 2. From the works of God.

1st. From the perfections of God.

By the perfections of God, I mean those excellencies which are essential to his nature; which characterize and distinguish Him from all other beings: or, (in different words,) which constitute the *essence* of DEITY, and cannot be found in any creature. Such as infinity, eternity, omnipresence, &c.

Here let me premise two things:

1. That those excellencies, which are ascribed to God,

are not to be considered as accidents, adjuncts, or qualities of a subject ; but as the subject itself. Whatever is justly predicated of God, is God ; and cannot be separated from Him, without destroying his nature, deity, and existence. — And,

2. That notwithstanding we ascribe various perfections to God, they are not to be considered as separately subsisting in Him. They are all one in the unity of the divine essence. And although, to assist our ideas, there is a distinction made, according to the various displays, or manifestations of the divine mind ; yet it is easily observed by an attentive examiner, that there is such a union and oneness in the attributes of the Deity, that each severally involves the whole ; so that if either be wanting, the whole must cease.

They who oppose the doctrine of predestination, affect to deny it, on the supposition of its being contrary to the perfections of God. I hope to make it appear that this pretence is entirely groundless. Permit me to ask you, my friend, — Did you ever calmly, attentively, and impartially, consider the divine perfections, with a view to this point ? Have you ever considered them in their connection, harmony and dependence on each other ? If not, you build your objections on a very precarious foundation ; and, it may be, the superstructure will resemble that built on the sand, when the day of trial comes : to prevent which, let me call your attention, for a few minutes to the serious consideration of the attributes of God ; and first, his eternity and omnipresence.

Eternity is that perfection of Deity, which implies infinite duration ; to the utter exclusion of beginning, succession or end. We naturally judge of eternity by our ideas of time, and conceive of it as a constant succession of mo-

ments, gradually accumulating to countless ages. But the eternity of God, or, God as eternal, must not thus be considered. For to suppose a succession in Him, were to suppose Him a changeable being; for in that case, He must be, this moment, what He was not the last; namely, — *older*. Besides, if this were true, He could not be omnipresent: because there would be moments to come, which now He possesses not; yea, which would always be at an infinite distance from Him. This also, would go far to destroy his omniscience: for He could hardly be supposed to know that which would be infinitely removed from Him. Therefore we must separate from Him, all ideas of time; or a successive quantity of days, months and years.

God, the eternal, is not what we understand by duration; but He fills it as an infinite area would fill an infinite circle; not by extension, nor by accumulated existence; but at once, and in such a manner, that the whole of infinite duration is always and alike, present. There is neither before, nor after; but eternity past, present and to come, is ever with Him, an absolute now. 'One day with the Lord, is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

The omnipresence of God, implies his being everywhere at once, and forever. His omnipresence includes his eternity, and eternity his omnipresence. The one cannot exist without the other. For omnipresence supposes eternal duration present to Him, which could not be, were He not eternal: and eternity supposes the same; which could not be, were He not omnipresent. Eternity supposes Him to fill a boundless duration; omnipresence, an infinity of space. Each includes each, and both. On the whole, then, and to convey my conceptions as concisely as possible, I would observe: that God comprehends, is present with, and fills, (by his will, power and wisdom,) at once, and always, an

infinite duration, and immensity of space. Or thus: — the whole of the divine essence is at once present with, and fills, every point of infinite duration, and unlimited space. Read attentively the 8th of Proverbs and the 139th Psalm.

Now then, admitting the conceptions here given of these two attributes to be just, and that God is an intelligent and all-perfect being; it will undeniably follow, that not only eternal duration, and infinity of space; but also, all possible existences in the compass of both, must be invariably present to his understanding, and be entirely subject to his will. Nothing that ever did, or shall exist, but was completely present in, and to, the divine mind, eternally before its existence, as it can possibly be, when, or after it actually takes place; nothing being either future or past to Him, but all ever most intimately present, yea, more so than anything can ever possibly be with us. But if all (to us future) existences were eternally present to the divine mind, it is impossible that they should not, in every view, depend absolutely on his will. When no created thing existed but in the mind of God, it depended entirely on his will, unto what to give being. And as the nature and the properties, the causes and the consequences of things were equally present to God, these also must exist, operate, and come to pass, by virtue of his sole determination. For his eternity and omnipresence render it impossible that any cause or reason should arise, either of any uncertainty in, or for any change of the divine will. Even *our wills* are never in suspense about things of which we have a clear view; nor do our wills change, so long as we retain the same ideas of the same things. And God having ever the most intimate, true, and perfect idea of all things, with their modes and effects, his will respecting them can never be suspended, or changed. To suppose it,

were to suppose Him unwise ; which would destroy his Deity ; and therefore cannot be.

Besides, the will of God is his essence, which (as before proved) fills eternity, and admits of no succession. Suppose, then (for example's sake,) that it is the will of God to direct and influence, or effectually to permit me to write this disquisition on the doctrine of Predestination ; as I cannot possibly write without his actual permission and supporting power, my writing must necessarily be eternal in the mind of God ; because nothing in Him admits of past or future. Succession belongs only to creatures. What is *now* with us, was simply and *eternally present* to Him. And what is eternally past with respect to us, is, ever was, and ever will be, *now* with Him. Consequently, whatever appears to exist, either as the effect of his positive power, or of his sovereign permission, (for by one or the other, all things must exist ;) his will either way, must have been necessarily and unalterably fixed, from eternity.

This would admit of more ample discussion ; but from these few hints, I humbly apprehend, it will undeniably appear, to any unprejudiced inquirer, that it is impossible but God must have eternally fixed and determined all things that have, do, or shall exist, from everlasting to everlasting. For what should hinder his will from *determining the end from the beginning* ? Or prevent his *bringing to pass the things before appointed* ? Can an infinite mind, with all possibilities present, suspend his own determinations, till the effects of intervening determinations exist ? Impossible ! Yet, into a thousand such contradictory absurdities, must the rejectors of Predestination fall, unless they deny the divine attributes altogether ; as I shall endeavor, hereafter, to make appear.

You will, I trust, seriously and impartially consider what has been said. And may the good Spirit of our God lead you deeply, and experimentally, into this truth, so glorifying to God and so comforting to the soul.

I rest, Yours, &c.

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LETTER VI.

Same subject continued.—Eternity and Omnipresence.

My dear Friend,

Who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Can man, by searching, find out God? Can creatures of a day unravel the inscrutable mysteries of the eternal mind; and by their scanty line measure the fathomless abyss of infinity? Shall folly dictate to uncreated wisdom, and tell omniscience what He ought to do? Yes, vain man would be wise, though he is born like a wild ass's colt! Yes, man, proud man, is prone to arraign the mighty acts of Jehovah; and set up his depraved reason, as a standard, by which to bring his Maker to the test! While unsinning seraphs deeply bow at the divine footstool, and receive each sovereign mandate without a murmur, or opposing thought; man, the dust of time, fraught with rebellion in all his powers, dares to accuse and condemn the sovereign counsels and conduct, and with an effrontery not to be paralleled, presumes to charge them with injustice and cruelty!

May that most holy Spirit of illumination, who actuated the living creatures, and guided the eye-filled wheels in the vision which the prophet saw by the river Chebar, fill your heart, lead you into all truth, and inspire you with understanding; that you may know the things that are

freely given us of God! Let me entreat you to look up to that Spirit, for direction and wisdom, while I further consider the arguments in favor of that grand truth for which I contend.

In my last, I considered, briefly, the attributes of eternity and omnipresence, as absolutely demonstrative of God's having eternally predetermined whatsoever comes to pass. And I am verily persuaded, none can consistently deny that proposition without also denying those attributes, as will yet more fully appear, if we investigate a little further what has been already hinted in brief.

I have affirmed, that the eternal and omnipresent God must have had, ever, and at once, most intimately present to his understanding, all possible existences, from the highest seraph to the meanest animalcule; and from the most ponderous globe to the minutest atom; together with all their natures and properties, tendencies and effects: and also, that, at first, these could have had no existence, but an ideal and intentional one, in the divine mind. For, there was in eternity no being but God, whence any other being could originate; no other cause from which an effect could take place; nor could any event of future existing matter or spirit, be secluded from his infallible knowledge. These things granted, it must undeniably follow, that the subsequent existence and operations, of all other beings, depended solely and entirely on Him; and his will must direct what, of the universality of possibilities should actually exist and operate. For, as their existence depended on Him, He could not give it, without determining to give it; his will and pleasure must direct what should be, and when, and how. Things could not give being to themselves, nor could they arise from mere nonentity; there must have been a prior efficient cause, and this could be no other than God. It is most clear, then, to the eye of reason itself, that God created the heavens and

the earth, and all things therein. It is alike clear that He could not give being to them contrary to his will. It is evident also, from the above perfections, that the nature, properties, and effects of things, were eternally present to his view; nor could He give being to that, the existence of whose nature, properties, and tendencies, were contrary to his determination, will and choice. Consequently all are, and must be, according to his eternal purpose, and determinate counsel. In the very nature of things it cannot be otherwise. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose that new acts of will continually take place in the divine mind; which would be attended with such derogation from his perfections, and with such flagrant contradictions and absurdities, that it cannot be admitted. Some of these, give me leave to lay before you.

If any new volition, or act of will, were, at any time, to arise in the mind of God; it would destroy his eternity: for, such new volition must necessarily have a *when* and a *date* whence to originate; that is, it must have a beginning; and its duration would be to be counted by moments, or succeeding lapses of time; which supposes eternity divided, and immensity to be measurable.

The supposition would destroy his omnipresence; for this new act, and the things concerning which it is put forth, could not be eternally present or known to the divine mind. It is, I apprehend, a self-evident truth, that no intelligent being, whether God, angel, or man, can certainly foreknow a future act of his own will. God, indeed, knows all the future volitions of his creatures: but then, they are not future to Him; but always and ever present. With regard to creatures, they cannot certainly know a future volition, without having that very act of will present to the mind. The acts of will are, in order of nature, prior to the knowledge of them: consequently, our knowledge of a volition cannot

precede its existence. I cannot know my own determinations, until I have determined. And, I think, I may affirm (though I would do it with the most awful humility,) that [in so far as man can see] God cannot know his own will, choice, or determination, until He has willed, chosen, and determined. These things are clear and evident; because, the nature of the will is such, that it cannot be in suspense, when the mind has a clear view of the things about which a volition is put forth.

Therefore, it is impossible that any new act of will can arise, in a rational being, without a cause for that new volition. There must be something in the view of the mind, which was not there before, to be the occasion, ground, or reason of this new act. But this cannot be with respect to God; because it follows, from his omnipresence, that all futurities are, at once, and ever, most perfectly present to, and with Him; and therefore no occasion, ground, or reason, can arise in his mind to produce any such new act. Consequently, if any new volition be supposed to take place, it must be from no motive, reason, or ground, whatsoever, and to no end; because, nothing new, or unknown, can come up to his view, to direct the will into a new channel. No new end can present itself to Him, nor any new plan or scheme, possibly take place in such a mind as his. Therefore, if any new volition could have existence in God, it must be without choice, design, motive, or end; which would be a contradiction and absurdity altogether, and sink the Omniscient to a level with an idiot.

Another intolerable consequence, which would arise from the above supposition, is, that there would be an effect without a cause. Whatsoever has birth in time, must be an effect; and owes its existence to some preceding cause. If a new act of will were to take place in God, it must be in

time; for all before time must be eternal. Such new act, then, must be an effect; but it would have no cause, either in, or from, God himself, nor yet from any creature. Not from God; because, as omniscient, all his own acts of will, power, wisdom, and justice, must have been eternally known, and present to Him. Not from the creatures; because, all that can possibly arise from them, was alike eternally present to his view. So that this supposition carries in it this flagrant contradiction: an effect, which as such, must have a cause; and yet cannot possibly have any cause at all.

Many more things might be observed, to show the inconsistency, absurdity, and impossibility, of the above supposition. But as they will come of course, in treating of others of the divine perfections, I shall add no more here. Wishing you to weigh these considerations in the impartial balance of unbiased reason,

I rest, Your sincere friend. .

LETTER VII.

Same subject continued. — Doctrine argued from the considerations of omniscience and immutability. — Omniscience.

My Dear Friend,

I once thought it scarcely possible for a good man to believe (what I then called) the absurd doctrine of Predestination. But it was an awful error I was in; and I desire to be eternally thankful, and to adore discriminating grace, that I was not left to persist in it. My conviction was not by man: but, being led to consider the divine perfections — their nature, as revealed in the word, and manifested in the works of God — I clearly saw in them, the grand truth I had formerly opposed. The more I contemplated the excellencies of the uncreated majesty, the more certainty, and the brighter glory, I beheld in this capital and fundamental doctrine. And I am most firmly convinced, that no man can, *consistently*, believe a God, and deny Predestination. For, if this fall, his perfections and providence must fall with it; as my friend, I doubt not, will also clearly see, if, with attention and impartiality, simplicity and prayer, he considers the real nature of the divine attributes.

You will, I trust, throw aside prejudice, and carefully and candidly examine, what I have now to offer from two more of these attributes, omniscience and immutability.

Omniscience is that perfection by which God is infinite

in knowledge and understanding. It includes a most perfect and absolute knowledge of himself, of his own essence, or of all his attributes in their unbounded extent. It affirms Him to know his own wisdom and power, together with all possibilities and futurities; his own purpose and will, and all the consequent effects of both. It comprises an absolute and eternal knowledge of things *extra se*, or out of himself; their causes, effects, time, places, modes and circumstances, in all their boundless variety. Not an atom, through the universality of things, with all its multiplicity of changes; not a thought, that ever did, or will, arise in human or angelic minds, or any of its effects, but was from eternity perfectly known to Him. In a word, there is nothing knowable, or possible, from eternity to eternity, but He perfectly and everlastingly, knew, and knows.

Immutability is that perfection, by which God is unchangeable in his nature, or invariably *the same* yesterday, to-day, and forever, in his essence, will, power, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, love, and every other attribute. It declares Him to be of one mind, and that none can turn Him; and that the thoughts of his heart are the same through all generations. So that it is impossible that the least alteration or even a shadow of turning, can ever take place in Him. These perfections are included in his eternity and omnipresence, and all confirm each other.

Now as these attributes are truly predicated of God, it must necessarily follow, that all things are the objects of the decrees of God; and that his decrees, will, and purpose, are eternal.

All things are the objects of the decrees of God, because they are the objects of his knowledge; and because, though He knows them, and has power to prevent them, yet, He permits their being.

They are the objects of his knowledge; for God has an eternal knowledge of all things. But the question is, whether He knows them in consequence of his having decreed and determined their existence and effects.

This, I apprehend, will be past all doubt, if we consider, that there can be no true knowledge of anything, where the thing is not conceived, or rightly apprehended in the mind. The infallible certainty of the things known constitutes real knowledge. God's foreknowledge (or rather absolute and ever-present knowledge) of all things, proves that they must, and shall, surely exist; though that knowledge is not the direct cause of their existence, for the cause must be sought elsewhere.

God must be infallibly sure of the things foreknown, or He could not be said to foreknow them. But whence could this certainty arise, if not from his own immutable will? His having determined them, must be the source, both of their certain existence, and of his own immutable knowledge. For, as a late great master in Israel has observed, 'Certain and immutable knowledge, is founded on some certain and immutable cause; which can be no other than the divine will. God knows that such and such things will be; because He has determined in his will, that they shall be.'

And it is self-evident, that nothing can, with absolute certainty, be foreknown, without some infallible ground for that foreknowledge. The foundation of it must be permanent and stable, as the immutable will of God is, or the knowledge cannot be infallibly sure.

If we consider knowledge as having place in intelligent creatures, it is demonstrable, that they can have no foundation for real knowledge, but what arises, either from *their own* will, or the will of another. They cannot know

(for instance) their own future voluntary acts, unless those acts are their present determination; nor can they know anything, that depends not on their own will, any further than they know it to be the will of another. But neither a man's own present will, nor the present will of any other human being, can minister infallible ground of foreknowledge; because the will of man is mutable, and consequently precarious and uncertain. A thousand intervening things may influence him to a change of purpose. And if not, and the will should remain the same; yet, innumerable unforeseen occurrences might intrude, and render abortive every effort to execute the things designed. Consequently, nothing in creatures can be any ground of infallible foreknowledge.

And this will appear still more evident, if we consider, what it is that constitutes a real, permanent, and certain ground for such knowledge; which I take to be, — a knowledge of the will of Him, on whom the thing known depends, — an undoubted certainty of the permanency and stability of his will, — and that his wisdom and power are equal to the execution of the things determined. There must be a knowledge of these, before any absolute certainty of future things can take place in the mind. But this absolute certainty can nowhere be found, except in God. And, therefore, nothing can be infallibly foreknown, but as it is known to be his immutable will.

To examine this a little further, let me ask, What is it, that we do or can foreknow, unless upon this foundation? Is it the positions of the heavenly bodies, and some of their various effects, as eclipses, and change of seasons? Is it the flux and reflux of the sea, at certain periods? These are still the will of God, as manifested in the established law, or order of nature. Nature, in her operations, evi-

dences his will, as clearly as any thing revealed in his word; and it is only the divine will manifested in this established order, that can be any ground of foreknowledge in these operations. How could we know that a body lighter than air will ascend, while the heavier descends; that heat will melt wax, while it hardens clay; if these effects were not the apparent laws of nature, as settled and established by the immutable will of the omnipotent Ruler? Could we be sure that the rolling planets would continue to perform their revolutions, and night and morn, and seasons again return; were it not revealed as the sovereign will, that day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should continue? Could we be certain, that this ponderous globe, hung upon nothing, with others more ponderous than it, would continue to whirl, with force so rapid, through such immense tracts of space, and never vary their course; did not we know it to be the will of the all-wise Mover, and that his omnipotent arm is equal to the mighty work? Or could we have an absolute certainty of their continuing a moment longer, were we not assured, by the divine word, and unaccomplished prophecies, that the end is not yet come?

These things must appear evident to the views of impartial reason, and from these we may justly infer, that no creature can have any certain infallible foreknowledge of any thing which has not its foundation, primarily, in the sovereign and immutable will of God, either as revealed in his word, or manifested in his works. It follows also, that if creatures cannot be to themselves the foundation of infallible knowledge, much less can they be so to God; and if they are not the ground of his foreknowledge, nothing out of himself can be. Further, as there cannot be a knowledge of the existence of things, without the

existence of the things known, and as bare knowledge cannot give, or be the cause of, existence to any thing, (for they must either have an actual, or a certainly determined existence, before they can be known;) we must conclude, that God must have determined all existences and events before (in order of nature) He could know them. And, as his knowledge is eternal and immutable, his will respecting all things must be no less so. This will appear with additional evidence, by considering,

That though God knows them all, and has power to prevent them, if He please; yet, He permits their being.

There is not a thing, or circumstance of a thing, through the universality of existence, but God was able, with infinite ease, to have prevented both its existence and effects. And no other reason can be given, why He prevents them not, than because it is not his will. For does, or can any thing come to pass, and the Lord command it not? and if it is not his will to prevent it, it must be his will (at least) to permit it: and, consequently, it has being, because it is his will it should. There is no man that sees an advancing event, which is contrary to his will, but he will, if in his power, prevent its existence. And can it be that *He*, who does according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, would permit the existence of that which He wishes should not exist? Can it be, that *He* whose will is omnipotent; who speaks and it is done; who commands and it stands fast, and whose mighty *fiat*, the whole creation united, cannot in the least degree resist; I say, can it be, that *He* should be the dupe of his creatures; give up the reins to them, and suffer them to run their mad career beyond the bounds prescribed, and thereby endanger the overturning and rendering abortive of his own infinitely wise purposes and designs? Impossible! — Be-

sides: the will of God is wisdom itself. What He wills is most wise; yea, infinitely wiser than its contrary; it being the result of consummate *wisdom*; Consequently, if He suffers things to be, and wills, or chooses that they shall not be; He must suffer folly to triumph over wisdom; and be either unwise, wanting skill; or impotent, wanting power. But as neither of these is possible, it undeniably follows, that whatever has been, is, or shall be, exists in consequence of his *determinate will and choice*.

I remain,

Yours.

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LETTER VIII.

Same subject continued. — Doctrine argued from the divine immutability. — God's foreknowledge founded on his will, the consequences of not admitting it, and of denying that his will and purposes are eternal.

My Dear Friend,

In my last, I endeavored to prove, that God's foreknowledge of all things that ever did, or ever shall come to pass, is founded on his will.

I now proceed to show, that the decrees, will, and purposes of God, are, and must be, eternal. This, indeed, is demonstrable, from all the divine perfections; but, especially from his immutability; to which I shall, at present, more immediately confine myself.

In such a being as God, eternity and immutability stand essentially connected; they are two names for almost the same attributes; nor can I conceive, with what propriety any can allow that God is eternal, while they deny Him to be unchangeable. The absurdity of such a sentiment is so glaring, that, did not prejudice blind the understanding, and lock up the mind from all conviction; every one that possesses the powers of reason and reflection, would be ashamed of it. But as some are thus inconsistent, I shall,

Briefly consider the attribute of unchangeableness, in connection with the doctrine of predestination; and prove, that they must stand or fall together; after which I shall point out some of the absurd consequences which must follow, on

not admitting, that God's foreknowledge is founded on his will; and on denying, that his will and purposes are eternal.

Immutability is that perfection in God, which eminently runs through, cements, and adds perpetuity to all the rest; so that, if that cannot be supported, these must fall; but, if that stands, these must also. For a mutable God would be no God at all. And to say that God is immutable, and yet to suppose a change in his will, is such a flagrant contradiction as none can rationally allow: so that if there is a God, He must be immutable; and if immutable at all, He must be so in His will, in which lies the very essence of immutability.

And what is predestination, but the eternal will, and immutable purpose of God respecting all things? or, (in other words,) the eternal fixedness of his mind, in relation to their whole existence, agency, and duration. Predestination is neither less nor more than this. For if God be an infinitely perfect being, He must be eternal; or, (which is the same) immutable, in his will, purposes and designs. And God's eternal, immutable will, purposes and designs, respecting the whole of created things and events, is that which we understand by predestination, in the utmost extent of the term.

Predestination, then, and the eternal, immutable will of God, concerning all things, are perfectly synonymous.

Consequently, if we deny Predestination, we must also deny God to be immutable in his will: and as immutability of will is essential to his nature, (for an infinitely perfect being can never change;) it follows, that a denial of his immutability, is, in fact, a denial of his existence. Consequently, if absolute predestination (or the eternity and immutability of the divine decrees) be not true, there can be no God, and atheists are in the right.

This may be further proved, thus: — Whatever is essential to, or constitutive of, the divine nature, cannot be denied of God, without denying Him to exist. But Predestination or the eternity and immutability of his will, is essential to his nature. Therefore, to deny Predestination, or the eternity and immutability of his will, amounts to a denial of his Deity and existence.

But this leads me to point out some of the absurd consequences, inseparably connected with the denial, that God's foreknowledge is founded on his will; or that his will and purposes are eternal.

And here I would observe, that if God's foreknowledge of things be not founded on his will, it must be founded on the will of some other being, or result from the things themselves. But, if it be founded on the will of some other being, that being must be God, no less divine than the fore-knower himself; in which case, we should be presented with a plurality of Deities. For, I have before proved, that there cannot be any infallible knowledge of futurity, but from the immutable will of Him who is both omniscient and omnipotent. Consequently, all those intelligent beings, whether angels or men, on whose will this knowledge is founded, must be so many deities.

On the other hand, if we suppose the divine foreknowledge to be founded, though but in part, on things material and inanimate; then those things must have operated as causes, by producing effects on the divine mind, eternally, before they existed; otherwise God's knowledge of them could not have been eternal. Therefore, you must, on your principles, be reduced to this dilemma: either to deny the eternity of God's knowledge; or to affirm, that the things known gave birth to the knowledge of them, eternally prior to their existence.

On this supposition, God must be infinitely beholden to his creatures; in that they gave Him that knowledge, without which He could not be *omniscient*. For He could not have this perfection, had He not, from everlasting, perfectly and infallibly foreknown all things. If, then, his knowledge be founded on the things known, they must contribute to the production of this attribute, and God must be dependent on the minutest circumstance of every simple atom, for a perfection essential to his Deity.

If God foreknew all things, only because they would exist, if his *knowledge* be founded on *them*; then, He could not have had any hand in their production and formation, much less, in supporting them; and, least of all, in directing them to any end; or, if He had, He must be *compelled* thereto by some power extrinsic of himself. For if his will were not *prior* to, and the *foundation* of his acts; nothing in himself could be. But, if his own will be that which influenced Him thereto; his knowledge must be founded on that; as He could not know the things willed, unless He had first willed them. So that it follows from such an hypothesis, either that God exerts His infinite wisdom and power like a mere machine, compelled to motion by a complication of other causes: or, that He really has little, or nothing at all to do in the matter.

But these consequences, and the supposition whence they flow, must be spurned, and renounced by every rational mind.

Here, should the objection arise, that, 'though God's knowledge of things be founded on his own will, yet it does not follow that his will is eternal;' I would say, that besides all the absurdities, pointed out in my *sixth* Letter, the objection must further destroy divine omniscience, or the eternity and infinity of divine knowledge; as appears from

what was said in my *last* Letter; and must deprive God of his immutability, as proved above; for what is not eternal cannot be immutable. In a word, the supposition is destructive of every perfection of the infinite Jehovah; as I doubt not to evince before I conclude.

I might have considered the attributes of omniscience and immutability in various other lights, with a view to this point; but I hope these are sufficient. Wishing you the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER IX.

Same subject continued. — Doctrine proved from the divine omnipotence and wisdom. — Explanation of what is meant by omnipotence and by wisdom. — Several axioms or self-evident truths.

My Dear Friend,

Having briefly considered the divine attributes of eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, and immutability; and thence drawn a few arguments, among others that might have been educed, in favor of Predestination; I would now beg your candid attention, while I consider two other perfections of God: his omnipotence and his wisdom.

Omnipotence is that attribute by which God is infinite in power, or by which He does whatsoever He pleases.

Unlimited power is essential to Deity, and coincides with his very nature and existence. For *power belongeth unto God*, even that power which is almighty. With *Him* all things are possible; and to the Lord not anything is difficult. This manifestly appears, from all his works: for *the invisible things of Him are clearly seen from the creation of the world; being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*. He is the original and source of all power; and whatever of it is in creatures, results from his voluntary communication of it. *By Him all things subsist, and in Him we live, and move, and have our being*. He is sovereign and uncontrollable in the exercise of it: for when *He worketh*, none can let. He acteth *according to his will in Heaven and Earth; and what his soul*

desireth, even that He doth. Every creature, both animate and inanimate, is bound and limited by Him; for He says to all, as He does to the sea, *hitherto shall ye come, and no further.* His eyes behold the nations, and He rules them *by his power forever*; nay, through the greatness of it, *He maketh his enemies to submit themselves unto Him.* In a word, He is the POWER, by which all things exist; by which all creatures act; by which every atom in the universe is supported and guided to its various respective ends; and by which all shall be upheld, and carried on, until the whole of the divine purposes concerning them, shall minutely be fulfilled.

Wisdom is that perfection by which God not only knows, but also contrives, purposes, and actually conducts all things, in a complete manner, and to the best end.

This attribute enters likewise into his nature and essence, for *wisdom dwells with Him; and He is the only wise God*; as his works of nature, providence, and grace, demonstrate. By wisdom He made the heavens. The firmament, with all its immense retinue of suns and worlds, shows his handy work. By it the earth and everything thereon is founded and established. So that it is not without just reason, that the adoring psalmist exclaims, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In *wisdom* hast thou made them all!'

It is also evinced by providence, in the preservation of man and beast; in upholding all things by the word of his power; in sustaining, providing for, and satisfying the desires of every living thing; and in ruling and guiding the whole, to their various ends and purposes.

Grace, too, manifests the superabounding wisdom of Jehovah, both in its plan and execution. This is the *wisdom of God in a mystery*, the hidden and manifold wisdom, wherein He has abounded towards his creatures; and the

contemplation of which, made the prince of apostles cry out, with holy wonder and admiration; 'O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.' In a word, God's wisdom is eternal, absolute, complete, universal, and immutable; without a shadow either of defect or of change. Nothing can be added to, or taken from it. It is a depth unfathomable, a height immeasurable, a breadth and length boundless, incomprehensible, and infinite.

Such, my dear friend, is that *almighty* and *all-wise* Being, with whom we have to do; whose omniscient eye perpetually and at once, pervades ^{the} universe; and before whom every heart, and all ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{self} ~~parts~~ thereof are ever clear and open. For *there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight.* May the most profound awe, and holy reverence of this **DIVINE MAJESTY** possess your soul and mine, while I point out some of the particulars which may be offered from these attributes, as additional proofs of the grand doctrine we are considering. — I will lay down a few propositions, which I shall assume as axioms, or self-evident truths.

1. As God has *exerted* his omnipotent power in the works of nature, He must, as a perfectly intelligent being, have willed to exercise that power, prior to *his* actually putting forth those acts; for it would be altogether absurd to suppose that He first acts, and then *wills* to act. Neither would it be less irrational, to suppose that He knew not what acts He was going to put forth; which however must be the case, if his will did not determine, and direct his almighty arm in its exercise. Moreover, as an infinitely wise being, He could not determine to put forth acts of power, and exercise his power accordingly, without a previous knowledge of their effects and operations, and what

the result would be; for it cannot be supposed that perfect wisdom could work, without knowledge, design, or end. Consequently,

2. God must have formed a *plan* of all his works, and of the effects which they would produce, before He exerted any act of power towards their accomplishment; as it will evidently appear, if we consider, that it is not a characteristic of wisdom, but of absolute folly, to work without a plan. No wise master-builder undertakes to raise an edifice, without a scheme, or platform, antecedently drawn. It would imply a most egregious abuse of common sense, to attempt such a thing. Nay, it would be impossible, even for the most skilful artist, to execute that of which he had no idea. If, then, that minute ^{action} of wisdom, which is in man, would not admit of such a procedure; can we suppose that the Supreme Architect of the universe, who is Wisdom itself, could act thus? Can He to whose infinite understanding all possible plans are eternally and perfectly present, reject them all, and work without design, and to no determinate end? This would be sinking the infinitely wise Jehovah to a level with an idiot. The supposition therefore, is fraught not only with blasphemy, but impossibility.

3. The works of God are such as might be expected from perfect wisdom; and are too numerous, important, and well ordered, to be executed without previous design. He must have had the complete idea, form, and model of the whole, and of all its parts, in his own eternal mind, antecedently to the exertion of creating power: as the admirable arrangement and disposition of things conspicuously evince: all of which are manifestly the effect of *design* and *forecast*; being adapted to ends and uses so wise as no finite power can improve or equal. Every part of the vast machinery of nature discovers infinite art and skill, in its forms,

operations and ends; so that it would be to the last degree absurd, to imagine it is not the effect of unerring counsel, forethought and design. I conclude, then, that God formed from eternity, a plan of all his works; or that He, from everlasting, fixed on that scheme of things, which, by his wisdom and power, He is now accomplishing.

4. This scheme or plan must be infinitely wise, for nothing can be the will and pleasure of God, that is not so. Sooner might the grand fountain of light become the centre and source of darkness, than an unwise volition have place in the mind of God. Sooner might the torrid heat of the equator generate the intense cold of the frigid zone, than an imperfect purpose or design have birth in that Being, who is absolute intelligence itself. Consequently, his will, purposes and decrees, respecting all things whatsoever, must be wisdom in the abstract: and that plan or scheme of things formed in the divine mind, must be the very perfection of prudence and rectitude.

5. As the plan itself is most wise, so must be the various ends which God designs thereby. A Being of infinite understanding, cannot propose an end, which is not perfectly consistent with his own consummate excellencies. Therefore, whatever it be that God ultimately designs by all his work, that must be the best, the wisest, and consequently a perfect plan.

6. This grand end, purpose and design, can be no other than *his own glory*; or the display, manifestation, and exhibition of his adorable perfections. For the Lord hath made all things for himself; *and of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things*. And as this is the highest, wisest, and best end possible, it would be beneath the dignity of the infinitely wise Worker to propose, or purpose anything short thereof. It is, moreover, demonstrably evident

from the whole tenor of Scripture, that all things in nature, providence and grace, are *subservient* to, really declarative of, and shall ultimately *terminate* in, the glory of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. And if this will be *eventually* the case, it must have been the chief and primary intention of God, in all his works. For what can be more absurd than to suppose that such a glorious and sublime event should be the effect of mere chance? or that things inanimate, things animated, intelligent beings, as angels, men and devils, with natures and principles so contrary and opposite, should fortuitously co-operate, to bring about this last and grand result of all? Consequently, as they do, and shall finally unite and harmonize in promoting God's manifestative glory; it follows that God himself must design, superintend, and guide the whole. — Hence,

7. The divine plan must comprehend, or take in the whole compass of finite being in all its modifications, effects, operations and ends; with all the circumstances of time, place, relations and qualities; whether of matter or spirit, from the beginning to the end. For if God's intentional end is his own glory, or the display of his supereminent excellencies; He must be the efficient agent that orders and directs all the *means* thereto; otherwise He could have no absolute certainty of the event's taking place. God, as omniscient, perfectly knows every possible way of displaying his own perfections. View Him as consummate in wisdom, and He would not but choose those means which are the wisest, the best, and the most congruous to his designs. And as omnipotent, no barrier could stand in successful opposition to the execution of his purposes. In the plan which He had eternally fixed, God also infallibly knew, not only the grand result of his intentions, his own glory; but

all the boundless variety of subordinate ends, that should coalesce and terminate in that, and every means to these: and as his *knowledge* of them is founded on his *will*, the whole must have been absolutely and eternally *determined* by Him who doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

8. I conclude then, that God, as *omnipotent* and *perfectly wise*, could not exercise those perfections without a *will* and *purpose* so to do. That consequently He must have had a preconceived *plan*, form or model, of all his works, *before* He exerted his power in their production. That his plan must be infinitely wise. That the ultimate end, primarily and immutably designed thereby, was the greatest and best possible; which end, consequently, must be the manifestation of his own glory: and that for these reasons, the divine plan must comprehend and include the *whole compass of finite being*, with every attending circumstance, operation and effect; and the whole eternally determined by Him who declares, that his *counsel shall stand*, and that *He will do all his pleasure*.

These things, I apprehend, are not only demonstrable from Scripture, but also from principles of reason; and are self-evident to every competent unprejudiced mind.

You will, I trust, seriously weigh what I have here advanced. And may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

I am,

Yours.

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LETTER X.

Same subject considered more at large.—Nature and operation of power and wisdom in rational intelligences. — Consequent conclusions and arguments.

My Dear Friend,

In my last, I laid down some *propositions*, which I apprehend must appear self-evident to every one who really and firmly believes that God is omnipotent in power, and consummate in wisdom. Only allow these axioms, and the point under consideration must be granted. But as these attributes of Deity must be disputed by every consistent opposer of Predestination, I shall endeavor to demonstrate them more largely; and prove that if absolute Predestination be not true, infinite power and wisdom cannot be justly predicated of God.

Let me then, 1. Briefly consider the nature and operation of *power* and *wisdom* in rational and intelligent beings. And thence, 2. Draw such conclusions and arguments as must necessarily result from such premises; — in view of which, the great truth now under examination will, I trust, appear to be established beyond all rational contradiction.

I. I will briefly consider the nature and operations of *power* and *wisdom*, in rational and intelligent beings.

I understand power, in its first principles, to be an ability to exert all or any of the faculties of the mind at pleasure; and to carry the mental designs and volitions into actual execution.

All acts, of what kind and nature soever, whether intellectual in the mind, or put forth extrinsically on outward objects, are exertions of that attribute we call power. So that power in exercise, is the acting of the mind in, on, and concerning itself or others.

In a still more simple view, it is but another name for the effectual efforts of the will to accomplish its own purposes. The will is the immediate antecedent and impulsive cause of all free acts of power, in intelligent agents; so that they can put forth no act of it, with any design, or to any determinate end, without first choosing and resolving so to do. Consequently, the source of power with regard to its exercise, is seated and centred in the will.

Power, then, if considered as productive of effects, is the will acting on things exterior to itself: or, the volitions of the mind, successfully terminating on its objects, to the accomplishment of its own wishes and designs.

In rational creatures there may be a will to exercise a power, which they cannot use, being bound and limited by superior agency, and by the narrowness and circumscription of both their mental and influential sphere. They may be impelled to put forth acts, in some sense contrary to their wills; but they exert no *free* or unforced acts, without the will being the immediate cause. But with respect to God, nothing extraneous can bind, limit, or oblige Him to an exertion, or non-exertion of power; therefore its exercise is wholly directed and limited by his own free and sovereign pleasure. Indeed, if we consider power in its primary sense, as an ability to act at pleasure, there may be, and is, a capacity for acts that are never put forth. But considered in its exercise, what God does not will to be done, cannot be done; and what He wills, must be done. In this sense, the *will* of God may justly be called omnipotent. For what is

omnipotence but absolute ability or power, in the will of God to perform all his pleasure?

Wisdom, in its primary signification, I understand to be the faculty of just perception, knowledge and judgment; or a capacity for perceiving, knowing, judging, and ordering things aright. In a secondary view, it is the preferring and willing of that which is just, right, and good. In a third, or manifestative view, it is a conformity of actions to right principles; or a conduct correspondent with truth and fitness in their being and excellence. The first we may call wisdom in its principle and essence; the second, wisdom in its effect or operation on the mind, and the third, wisdom in display, or the manifestation of it to others. The two latter are the necessary result of the former: but it is by the last only that human beings can discover where this excellence resides

Wisdom, then, as to its nature, both in God and rational creatures, may be briefly defined thus: *Truth in the understanding, with approbation of the will, displaying itself in corresponding actions.* Or thus: *Truth in the understanding, influencing the will to just, right and good actions.* Wisdom cannot be where truth and rectitude are not; for these are essential to it: and truth and rectitude, in being and operation, are wisdom in essence and manifestation.

From what has been observed concerning the nature of these attributes, we may trace something of their operation in intelligent creatures. Wisdom, we see in its primary source is, just ideas, or truth in perception. For, if we do not conceive of things as they are, we can have no true knowledge; nor can we, consequently, form any right judgment of them. But if the soul conceives of things in their true nature, with their effects, modes, relations and connections, the knowledge hereby conveyed will be just and true:

and the understanding, thus truly illumined, judges of the things it contemplates, with precision and truth; and discovers the beauty and excellence of some things above others, which immediately creates in the mind an approbation and preference of that which is most lovely, just and good. Here wisdom is manifested to be in the will, by its choosing what is most excellent, and rejecting the contrary. If the object of the will's choice be some good to be done, or to be enjoyed, the will then acts upon, and excites the powers of the soul, in order to find the best means of obtaining the desired end: the understanding points them out, and the will obeys its intimation, and exerts its influence for their accomplishment. The will, thus exerted, is power in exercise; or, the exertion of the will is power in operation. And the will thus operating to effect just and wise designs, is wisdom in display and manifestation.

From the above observations, I beg to remark,

1. That though wisdom has its residence primarily in the understanding, yet the exercise and manifestation of it, as well as of power, lie in the will; and though the will is governed by the understanding, yet, in return, the will guides and impels, (if I may so speak,) the mind, in its searches and researches after truth; and acts, in the contrivance of every scheme, as well as in the execution thereof.

2. That the will always prefers and follows that which the judgment or understanding points out as most eligible; and if the mind be uncontaminated with evil, divested of prejudice, and unbiased by everything but the love of rectitude and truth; wisdom will characterize both its volitions and its outward acts.

3. That as the source of active power is centred in the

will, it cannot (if possible) but execute its purposes: for the very idea of willing a thing, implies a determination to effect the thing willed; and where there is no barrier superior to the powers of the will, it must and will execute its own designs.

These things, I apprehend, are in the very nature of the faculties of the soul, and agree with the universal experience of mankind.

Let us now ascend a little higher in our views of this part of our subject.

And here I think we may with propriety affirm, that as God created man after his own image, the soul, in its primitive state, bore some analogy or resemblance to the divine mind; and possessed somewhat of those powers, in a limited degree, which are infinite in Him. For it cannot be supposed, that He endued man with those excellencies which did not in a supereminent degree, (or rather, without degree,) reside in himself.

God, then, as unlimited in wisdom, must have eternally perceived with infallible and infinite clearness, all things in their nature, operations and effects, that were possible to exist. The ideas, or images of them, with all their numberless modifications, must have been from everlasting, completely present to his mind: so that He must have known in truth all things whatsoever, with every circumstance thereof. His knowledge being thus perfect, his infinite understanding could never be misled by false appearances, or deceptive mediums; nor was it possible for his judgment to err. Consequently such clearness of idea, such absolute perfection of knowledge, and such truth in judgment, could not but be accompanied by infallible efficacy of will. In other words, God being consummately wise in his under-

standing, all his volitions must be absolute certainty and rectitude, and his determinations the very standard of wisdom. And further, as the volitions, purposes, and determinations of God, are thus perfectly pure and just; every act of his power which operates as the result of his will, (or rather, which is the will itself operating,) must display and exhibit essential wisdom, rectitude and truth. But not to proceed any further here,

I am, yours, &c.

LETTER XI.

Conclusions and arguments from the premises already established — particularly from the nature and operation of power. Summary.

My Dear Friend,

Having briefly surveyed the nature and operations of power and wisdom in intelligent beings, I come now,

II. To deduce such conclusions and arguments as must necessarily result from such premises; in view of which, the great truth now under examination, will, as I trust, appear to be established beyond all possible contradiction. And this I shall do, — from *power* and *wisdom*.

1st. From *power*. — By what has been observed of the nature and operations of power, it appears that the source of it, with regard to its exercise, is seated and centred in the will. And I would add here, that power in its first principle, is no other than the will itself; this faculty being essential to its very existence: for without it there could not have been the least possibility of a powerful act, in any creature whatever. Yea, even God himself, could He be supposed to be destitute of will, would be utterly void of power; and instead of being omnipotent, would be impotence in the abstract. This granted, it follows, that all things whatsoever, from the beginning to the end, must originate in, and be the result of, the eternal and determinate will of God; which will appear, if we consider that every act of power must have its source in and from Him. There is nothing whatever in the whole creation, but is a display of

power, and must have a cause, and originate either in the agent working, or some other cause. If power can originate independent of the Uncreated Mind, it must be either from matter or spirit; for these, as far as we know, comprehend the whole of finite being. But,

1. It cannot originate in, or from, matter. For power, or motion, is no essential property of it, under any mode or form; it being naturally quiescent and passive, and without any capability of exerting itself, with the least activity: rest is its natural position; and so it would remain forever, were it not impelled to motion by the effort of some cause extraneous. View matter under any of its modifications; with its infinite variety of operations, by which power is displayed, we shall find all depend on some agency foreign to the subject of that display. Thus vegetable power, or the power of vegetation, depends on the united and efficacious agency of light, heat, air, and water; the circulation and motion of the blood, on the action of the heart; and all mechanical operations, on the power of gravity. But I need not enlarge here, as our senses demonstrate the truth, and philosophers of all ages confirm it. I observe also,

2. That as power does not originate from matter, so neither does it originate from created spirits.

We can form no idea of spirits and their agency, but from our own minds and their operations: and here we fall vastly short of just and precise conceptions; the soul being as far above our full comprehension, as the heavens are above the earth. But this one self-evident truth is sufficient for my purpose; that every act of the mind, of what kind and nature soever, is the effect and consequent of prior agency; and has a real cause, which is the reason and ground of its existence, distinct and separate from itself, and without which the act could not possibly take place. No act of the mind can be its own cause; neither can the mind, with all its

powers, be the unoriginated cause of any of its acts; as will be evident if we consider that perception or the faculty of receiving, contemplating, and retaining ideas, or the images of things, is the first cause in the soul of all its after acts: for without perception we can have no idea, knowledge, understanding, or will; and if no will, consequently no power; so that if power originate at all in the soul, it must be in the faculty of perception. But perception being in itself an effect, it must have a cause; and therefore cannot be the unoriginated cause of those after acts of the soul, of which itself is an antecedent ground. In short, it is evident to demonstration, that not only the soul itself, but all its acts are effects; they are consequents of, and produced by, prior causes. It is likewise evident that in all acts, considered as effects, the soul is passive; and only to be considered active in them, as they are causes and grounds of consequent effects. Like the great wheel of a mill, which is passive in the reception of the stream that turns it, but active in setting the wheels in motion: and the stones are passive in the reception of the power of the wheel, but active in grinding the corn. Or we may reverse the order; and then the corn is passive to the action of the stones; the stones, to the influence of the wheel: the wheel, to the force of the water; the water, to the power of gravity; and what is gravity but the power of God?

On the whole, then, as the mind and all the acts thereof, are the effects and consequents of prior agency, it is impossible that power, in any respect can originate hence: nor can it indeed from any created thing, whether matter or spirit. Consequently, all must arise solely, and alone, from God: and this will appear with additional evidence, if we consider briefly,

3. The nature of causes and effects.

Nothing has *being* throughout God's universal dominion, but is an effect of an antecedent agency. No event could possibly exist without a cause. The very nature of an event implies this; and to suppose the contrary, is a contradiction, and destroys the nature of both cause and effect. All causes (except the first) are effects prior to their becoming causes; and as effects, they cannot generate themselves, nor be their own cause. Neither can they exist any longer than they are influenced by their causes; for the present being of an event cannot be the foundation of its existence the next moment; but the duration of it must be entirely owing to the continual influence of its cause. And it will hold true of all causes whatsoever, that if their influence be suspended, their effects will immediately subside. Thus, if the power of gravity were to cease but for one minute, all mechanical operations would cease also for the like time; stop the pulsations of the heart, and the blood circulates no more; blot out the sun, and total darkness instantly ensues. Now as all causes (except the first) are effects before they become causes, and as no effect can exist a moment longer than it is influenced by its cause, it is evident to demonstration, that all causes and effects depend for their existence, through every instant of their duration, on the incessant and ceaseless influence and agency of the first cause, God, who does according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

Of what has been said, this is the sum: All things and circumstances of things; all causes, effects, relations and qualities whatsoever, found in created spirits, or matter, are displays of, and produced by the exertion of, that attribute we call power. Power displayed, and by which all things are produced, does not originate in, or arise from, the things themselves; but from God, the first cause: therefore all power, however manifested and by whom, or whatsoever displayed, is of God. And if so, it will demonstrably follow

that all things without exception, are the objects of his decrees, will, and choice; and that it is impossible it should be otherwise. For *will* and *power* with God, (in this respect,) are the same; his power exerted and displayed, is his will in act and manifestation. In a word, to will is power in God; and the simple volition, 'LET IT BE,' generated the whole of matter and spirit, modified the former in all its inconceivable variety of beautiful forms, and adorned the latter with all its wonderful and astonishing faculties; it incessantly upholds, supports and maintains the whole, and all its parts in motion; and directs every iota to its assigned end. 'He spake, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast.' And 'of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever and ever.'

On the whole then, we may safely conclude,

That whatsoever is effected by, or is a manifestation of, the power of God, is the object of his determinate will.

But all things, without exception, are effected by, and are manifestations of, the power of God.

Therefore all things, without exception, are the objects of his determinate will and choice.

I might have enlarged much more on these things; but as I would study brevity, I forbear; and I am,

Yours.

LETTER XII.

Same subject continued.— Conclusions and arguments from the nature and operation of wisdom.— Axioms premised.— Inferences drawn.— Summary

My Dear Friend,

I proceed now to deduce some arguments,

2dly. From the nature and operation of *wisdom*.

And here permit me to premise as axioms and indisputable truths, the following things:

1. That no principle of operation can act contrary to its nature.

2. That wisdom, as a principle, operating in the mind of an intelligent being, can never act contrary to its nature: that is to say, unwisely. Consequently,

3. Whatever acts of folly are discovered in rational creatures, they must arise from another principle; wisdom cannot be the immediate source of them. Therefore,

4. In whatever being there is the least warping to error in judgment, will, or act, perfect wisdom cannot reside, i. e. wisdom cannot possess the whole of his intellectual powers. Darkness and error must in part have the rule. For,

5. Perfect wisdom utterly and eternally excludes ignorance, darkness, error, and all evil; both in understanding, volition, and action. But,

6. This perfection resides nowhere but in the Infinite Mind; there it essentially dwells; yea, it is his nature and essence, and operates on *all things* throughout all the *ex-*

tent of time and place, agreeably to its own nature, without the least shadow of defect. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

These things premised, let us examine whether it be compatible with infinite wisdom, to leave, suffer, or permit, any the least iota of created things, or circumstances, to take place undetermined by Him; or which He did not eternally purpose, and choose should have place, being, and existence. If it be, I give up the point; but if not, the doctrine must stand more firm and permanent than mountains of brass, never to be moved by all the wit and wisdom of men.

In a former Letter, I defined wisdom to be, 'truth in the understanding, with approbation of the will, displaying itself in correspondent actions;' or thus, 'truth in the understanding, influencing the will to actions, just, right, and good.'

If this definition be just, (as I think cannot be disputed,) it undoubtedly follows,

1. That God, as perfect in wisdom, must have all truth in his understanding; or a perfect and true idea, knowledge and judgment, of all things possible, knowable, or conceivable. Not an idea, thought or volition of any creature; not an act of body or mind; not a circumstance of motion, quality, relation, time, place, effect or consequent, either of matter or spirit, under any possible mode of existence, but must from eternity, be perfect in the conception of, most intimately present with, and with absolute and perfect clearness known to *Him, whose understanding is infinite*. Consequently,

2. He must have an indubitable certainty of those things, which of all possibilities conceivable in his infinite mind, are most fit and proper, and most agreeable to his wisdom to have place, being and existence. And,

3. As infinitely wise, He must not only *know*, but *choose*

what is best. To know what is infinitely good and preferable, and not to prefer and choose that good, is contrary to the nature of wisdom. Sooner may light coalesce with darkness, than wisdom not prefer and choose the greatest good. And this, because,

1. God, as completely wise, must possess absolute and eternal rectitude of will. Whatever choice or design warps in the the least degree from uprightness, faithfulness and truth, is incompatible with perfect wisdom; therefore the designs, ends, choice and determinations of God must be holy, just and good, and forever the best possible: or He cannot be infinitely wise. For,

2. His wisdom renders it impossible that ever a change can take place, or a new volition arise in his will. Nothing demonstrates want of wisdom more, than fickleness and instability: unsettled purposes always flow from ignorance, or folly. These are the root of all the mutability discoverable, in the volitions and actions of men, for where the former is not, the latter cannot be; because, perfect wisdom, as it implies absolute and complete knowledge, is an everlasting bar against the least shadow of a change. In such circumstances, no *reason* can ever arise for even a turn of thought, and it would be folly and madness to change without it. Therefore God, as infinitely wise, must be immutable in his will, choice and determination. He is of one mind, and the thoughts of his heart are the same through all generations. It follows,

3. That as God eternally knows and chooses what is best, so as wise, He must do all He chooses. To know, choose, and determine the wisest and best of all possible plans, and at the same time not to accomplish it, is utterly incongruous with consummate wisdom. Therefore God

must either execute his purposes, or be unwise. Especially as,

4. He cannot be at a loss for the best ways and means to fulfill his designs; neither can He want power. He knows *how*; and therefore can with infinite ease, do all his *pleasure*. Uncreated wisdom cannot be deceived; neither can his influence be diverted or rendered abortive. No wisdom can circumvent, no arm successfully oppose Him! He worketh, and none shall or can hinder it; and He has said, I will do all my pleasure. And his unlimited knowledge and infinite sagacity, joined with boundless power, must eternally prevent even the skaking of a leaf, the falling of a sparrow, the growth of a hair, the least possible effect, existing without his knowledge, approbation, will, determination. In a word, it is the perfection of wisdom that gives, or rather includes power omnipotent, (for one cannot exist without the other,) and makes all things possible and easy with God. It is the knowing how, that renders the accomplishment of the divine purposes, effectual and certain.

And it is wisdom's energetic influence that puts an eternal bar to the rising of the least circumstance, unfixed or not determined by Him.

These things, I humbly apprehend, are necessarily included in the idea of perfect wisdom; of which this is the sum: God, as completely wise, must have infinite knowledge, and therefore knows what, of all things possible or conceivable, are best to have being: these He must choose, fix and determine; because his will cannot but be perfect rectitude and truth; which could not be the case, if He did not prefer that which in his wisdom He saw best on the whole. Also, what God chooses, must be his eternal choice; because no reason can ever *arise* for a change, and it would

be folly to change without one. Further, He not only knows and chooses, but must also execute his purposes; for it would be inconsistent with wisdom, for God to leave his wise determinations unaccomplished; especially as He knows how, and wants neither wisdom nor power to execute them in the best manner, or to circumvent, and render abortive, every thing that can possibly stand in opposition to them.

On the whole, then, it demonstrably appears, that if God is infinite in wisdom, He must not only know, fix and determine, but work all things (without exception) after the counsel of his own will, and that nothing can possibly exist but as the effect thereof. And this will appear with additional confirmation and demonstration, if we consider how opposite to the nature of wisdom, and what absurdities and impossibilities follow a contrary supposition. But these must be the subject of my next.

I am, Yours,

LETTER XIII.

Absurdities and contradictions consequent on the supposition that God has not determined, and does not work, all things after the counsel of his own will.

My dear Friend,

FROM the things laid down in my last, as necessarily resulting from the idea of perfect wisdom, I think it must undeniably appear to every candid and impartial examiner, that God not only knew, fixed, and determined, but that He worketh all things (without exception) according to the counsel of his own will. But to demonstrate this a little farther, I come now to consider, how opposite to the nature of unerring wisdom a contrary supposition must be, and what absurdities and contradictions would follow upon it.

If any event, or events, be supposed to exist without, or contrary to, the determinate will of God; He foreknew them, or He did not. If He did not foreknow them, He cannot be omniscient, nor, consequently all-wise; for perfection of wisdom includes unlimited knowledge. If He did foreknow them, they were either dependent on Him for their existence, or they were not. If they were not dependent, there must be some being, independent of Him, from whom they must derive their being; which would, consequently, destroy both the independence and omnipotence

of God; as, then it would be impossible for Him to do all his pleasure. If they were dependent on Him, He must work to bring them forth, either with, or without his will: if without his will, He must exert His power without design, and to no end: and like the pendulum of a clock, give motion to the wheels, but know not why. But this is so absurd, and contrary to the nature of wisdom, that the lowest degree of reason must cast it off with abhorrence. But if He is allowed to work with, or according to, his will, the supposition vanishes, as darkness before the rising sun.

God, in the exertion of his power to create, uphold, and preserve all things, worked after a plan, or He did not: if He did not, wisdom could have no share in his works; for design, means, and end, are essential to wisdom; but, without a plan, there cannot be either. And confusion and deformity may as soon manifest order and beauty, as wisdom be displayed without design. To suppose the works of nature, and of providence, in all their beautiful harmony and usefulness, were not the effect of a previous plan, form, or model, conceived in the divine mind, is such a mystery, that none but an atheist, with his confused jumble of atoms, would dare attempt to unravel. For, here would be the grandest designs manifested, the wisest means used, and the noblest ends attained, without aim, intention, or design at all. But this is altogether opposite to the nature of wisdom, and absurd, contradictory, and impossible.

If God (as He certainly must) did work after a plan, then, on the foregoing supposition, there must be some events which exist, that are not included therein; and his all-penetrating eye must behold them, intruding, and mixing themselves with the works of his hands, without a thought, or will in Him, either to permit or prevent them: for, if his will were to permit them, they must be a part of his plan;

for a will to permit, undoubtedly implies intention and design; and previous intention and design form the very nature of a plan: therefore permission would destroy the supposition. On the other hand, if He determined to prevent them, they could not exist at all; for who hath resisted his will? Consequently, if any such events are supposed to exist, God cannot have any thought, will, or concern about them; but must be (with respect to them at least) like the passive, senseless mirror, receiving the impressions, or images of the objects before it, without any other effect. But this is so contrary to the nature of divine wisdom, that it needs no comment to make it appear more so.

Allowing that God formed the noblest and wisest plan, yet, on the above supposition, it was impossible but He must fail in the execution; for these supposed events must necessarily be so interwoven and connected with those concerned, and purposed in the divine mind, that the order of the whole must be subverted, and the various ends proposed, rendered uncertain of accomplishment, is not entirely abortive. Let us consider this a little.

God, determining to manifest and display his matchless perfections, conceived, in his eternal mind, the best ways and means thereto: these his wisdom chooses, and determines to pursue and accomplish. End and means thus conceived, comprised the whole plan, form, or model of all his works; in which not an atom, a creature, or thing: not a thought, volition, or act, more or less, were included, than unerring wisdom saw necessary and conducive to answer all the ends proposed. This, I think, must be granted, if we have any rational ideas of the divine perfections. And, if so, those supposed events, as they are not the effect of his will, cannot (as observed before) be any part of his plan: but yet, notwithstanding, they must be coeval with,

involved in, and, by some inscrutable means, so jumbled and connected together with those that are, that no separation can be effected, without wholly subverting and changing the entire series of events, as will appear if we consider an instance or two.

Let us then suppose the sin of our first parents to be one of those events that did not exist in consequence of the divine will, and so was no part of his all-wise plan; suppose also this event to be separated from those fixed by unerring wisdom, or, (which is the same) that it never had any being; can imagination paint the vast difference it would have occasioned throughout the whole scheme of things? Would it not have produced and exhibited a change inconceivably great? Certainly it would. Consequently, if that sin were not included in the sovereign plan, and appointed, fixed, and determined, as a mean to the grand end, the whole scheme of infinite wisdom must be overturned and inevitably miscarry.

And, when we consider what important events arise from the smallest beginnings, perhaps the same might be justly observed of any other event. Even a single thought or volition, in its progress, affects and influences the affairs of the whole world. The thought of building a tower, that should reach to heaven, became an occasion, or the means, of separating the families of Noah and giving different language and manners to all the nations of the earth. The evil thought of Lot's daughters gave birth to the two nations of Moab and Ammon; and the determination of Xerxes to invade Greece, terminated in the destruction of the Persian empire. And no doubt but millions of events take place, even at this day, in consequence of these things, which else had never had existence. In short, were we to trace things minutely, innumerable are the instances that

might be produced, where a single thought, or volition, has been a foundation, not only of effecting a change in the affairs of a nation, but of the whole world; and which, were they not the effect of God's sovereign purpose, (and so a part of his plan,) must necessarily overturn, and as it were, annihilate the whole; and so render it impossible for God to govern the world. But when perfect wisdom can err, and so act contrary to its nature; and power omnipotent be successfully opposed; then, and not till then, can this be supposed; then, and not till then, can a single event have being, without the concurrence of, or in opposition to, the divine will.

Upon the whole, if the foregoing suppositions be allowed, these absurdities, contradictions and impossibilities, must necessarily follow.

1. Wisdom, perfect wisdom, must work without a plan! And the Omnipotent must exert his power without any intention, design, aim or end. Or,

2. If He did work after a plan, or previous design; yet millions of events must exist through the efficacy of his will and power, and at the same time be no part of his plan or design; and so, consequently, not the effect of his will. Or,

3. These events could not depend on Him for their being, and then they must either give it to themselves, or derive it from some agent independent of God, and so suppose a plurality of *first causes*. Or,

4. God must fix a plan, and not act according to it: must contrive, appoint, and determine, the wisest of schemes, without a design to accomplish it. Or,

5. He must determine to prosecute and accomplish it; and at the same time know that He either will not, or cannot execute his purpose. And then,

6. He must be a passive spectator of the subversion of

his all-wise designs; having neither thought, will or power to prevent it. And consequently,

7. Can have no more to do in the government of the world, than any individual therein.

But these things, and many more that might be added, are so absurd in themselves, and so incompatible with the nature of perfect wisdom and power, that pure reason must forever reprobate and spurn them off with detestation and abhorrence; so that, on the whole, we must not only give up those essential attributes of Deity, but our reason also, if we allow the supposition.

I might have abundantly enlarged on these things; yea, enough might have been raised from the perfection of wisdom, to fill a volume in favor of the doctrine; but I apprehend it is not necessary, and therefore leave it. I purpose in my next, for the further investigation and confirmation of the point, to treat particularly of the divine will; its nature and properties; and shall attempt to show how, and in what manner, God executes his purposes: and also, in what respect, and how far his will is concerned in those things that appear contrary to his written word, and which his law forbids and condemns.

But who is sufficient for these things? Here are depths and mysteries inscrutable by mortals! yea, which angels cannot explore; and which none but uncreated wisdom can unravel! His judgments, indeed, are unsearchable! and his ways past finding out. And such knowledge is too wonderful for created beings: it is high, and none can attain unto it. But though we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection; yet enough is revealed in his word, and manifested in his works, to lead and guide the sober inquirer; and to convince and to satisfy him that his counsels of old are faithfulness and truth: and that though He worketh *all things*,

(without exception) after the council of his own will; yet, that He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

To vindicate the divine proceedings, and to advance the glory of his perfections, I make this feeble attempt. May the Spirit of wisdom, which cannot err, guide and direct my thoughts herein, and at the same time enlighten you to distinguish truth from error, and influence you to reject the latter, and cordially embrace the former. Then will you rejoice in God, as that God, who, in doing his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, *does all things well.*

I rest, Yours, &c.

LETTER XIV.

Further confirmation of the doctrine from a consideration of the nature and properties of the divine will.

My Dear Friend,

Having briefly considered the eternity, immensity, immutability, knowledge, omnipotence and wisdom of God; and thence drawn a few of the many arguments that might be produced in favor of the truth before us; I come now for the further investigation and confirmation of the point, to treat particularly of the divine will: in doing which, I shall consider, 1. The nature and properties of the divine will, with some inferences therefrom; and, 2. How, and in what manner God executes his purposes; taking care to point out in what respect, and how far the divine will is concerned in those things that appear contrary to this written word, and which his law forbids and condemns.

I. I am to consider the nature and properties of the divine will.

The will is that power in rational beings which is the immediate source and spring of action; or, it is that principle by which preference is given to any thing or things. Volition in man, is the soul going after, or acting upon, some object or objects, in a way of election, choice or preference, and is that by which all its other powers are put in

motion, and the members of the body excited to all their free actions. So that the will is the soul itself; and volition, its simple and only primary act.*

And with respect to God, his will or the divine principle of volition, is no other than God himself; it is his nature and essence; and which is possessed of all the properties of Deity; as will, I apprehend, fully appear from the following considerations.

1. Eternity, as it is an essential property of Deity, so it is of the divine will: for God cannot be eternal, if his will be not so. To suppose Him to be eternal, and his will not, is to suppose God to be, for an eternity past, without a will; but God without a will can be no God. Consequently, the supposition carries in it this absurd contradiction: A God, from everlasting existing without a will; or no God for an eternity past. But God's will is eternal, as appears,

2. From its immutability. Immutability and eternity involve each other; and if one be destroyed, the other must necessarily be so too. But that the will of God is immutable, is clear and evident from various Scriptures. 'He is of one mind,' and 'his thoughts are the same through all

*That volition is the primary act of the soul, and puts all its other powers in motion, I think is evident; for I apprehend the mind is wholly passive in the reception of all its primary ideas; like a mirror, on which the objects before it fall; or, as the eye in its perception of the images of things before it. For when, through the will's activity, they are brought to light, they cannot but be perceived; and the soul can no more avoid them, than the open eye the images of the objects it looks at. In a word, the soul or will, is the only active principle in seeking ideas; but in the reception of them is entirely passive. Whence I think it appears, that the will, or principle of volition, is the very essence of the soul, whence by its operations, all those appetites and passions that are predicated of it, arise. Therefore the understanding, judgment, &c., are not faculties distinct from the will, but rather different operations and effects of volition in and upon the mind.

generations.' Mind and thoughts here certainly imply his will and purposes, and strongly express both his unchangeable nature and eternal duration; and that 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.' If the will of God be not eternally the same with respect to all things and circumstances of things, it cannot be immutable; and if God be not immutable in his will, He cannot be so at all: for if it be possible for a change to take place in a pure, spiritual, intelligent being, it is the will that must be the subject of it. Nor can we conceive a possibility of a change in Deity, but here; and if here, it immediately destroys every perfection of his nature. But the God of Jacob changeth not; yea, He is eternally without the least shadow of change. Consequently, his will, purpose, choice and determination are ever the same; and therefore immutability is a predicate of the divine will; and the will, the essence and nature of Jehovah.

3. Another essential attribute of Deity, which belongs also, in a peculiar manner, and is essential to the divine will, is omnipotence. Omnipotence, or infinite power, is an ability in God to do all his pleasure; and this ability is centred in his will: for power without will is nonentity. If we examine things closely and clearly, we shall find that there are no displays of power in God, or the creature, but originate in volition. In the Mosaic account of the creation, we trace nothing but the simple act of God's will, as the energetic worker in the production of the universe. **LET IT BE**, was the effectual volition, the all-powerful voice, which generated and spake the heavens and the earth into being: 'Let there be light, and there was light. He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' No foreign aid was called; no instrument was employed; but his simple word or will, built the whole frame of nature, with all its grand apparatus; and the same volition has, and will

preserve it, to its appointed end. So that power, in its principle and essence, is no other than the divine will; and power displayed is this will manifested; so that on the whole, will and power are primarily the same; that is to say, God himself. Consequently it follows,

4. That sovereignty is also a property of the divine will. For if infinite power be a perfection of it, sovereignty must be; and that it is, Scripture abundantly evinces: 'He doth according to his will, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.' And God himself declares: 'I will do all my pleasure.' Sovereignty, therefore, is in the divine will: consequently, it is God himself.

5. Infinite knowledge and wisdom, as they are essential to Deity, so also are they to the divine will. That the knowledge of God has its source in his will, I have before proved in my seventh Letter. And that his wisdom is centred there, is evident, in that all the displays and manifestations of it in nature, providence, and grace, are the emanations, effectual exertions, and certain effects, of the good pleasure of God; the divine will being the alone and only source, spring and cause, of those displays. Consequently, as unlimited knowledge and perfect wisdom reside there, it is God himself.

6. Simplicity is another property or attribute of the divine will; it being but one simple, eternal and immutable act. By which I mean that though divine volition acts on all the objects that can possibly exist; and though these objects are infinite in number and variety, yet the act is immutably one and the same: for 'His thoughts are the same through all generations;' and if He has no new thoughts, He can have no new act of will. If there be but two acts of the divine will in succession, they destroy the simplicity of

the divine essence; for one must be eternally before the other; or there must be a time when God had no will; which is absurd and contradictory, as observed above. If volition were as distinct in the mind of God, and followed one another in succession, as its objects do, with respect to their being, God would be as much the subject of time, as the objects on which He acts, or about which his will is conversant. But this would destroy his eternity and immutability. It follows, therefore, that there is not, or can be, any distinction or succession in the divine will; but that it is eternally one and the same; 'determining the end from the beginning, and bringing to pass the times before appointed;' and consequently, no other than God himself.

7. Again let me observe, that the simplicity and oneness of the divine will and purpose, constitute, or are the foundation of the omnipresence of God. In my seventh Letter, I have proved that his will is the source or spring of his prescience; *for He could not have foreknown what would not be, had He not foredetermined what should be*: nor could all things have been *ever present* with Him, had not his *will* made them so. It is the divine will that eternally comprehends, commands, acts upon, and brings the whole series of events most immediately present. It is there He sees them all in complete and perfect existence; and it is for this reason that He calls things that are not, as though they were; and speaks in many parts of holy writ, of things done, which, in our view, came not into being until after ages.

'This oneness and simplicity of the will of God, as it entirely excludes succession of thought, so it annihilates the idea of time. - Time cannot take place where there is no succession of ideas; nor can there be any succession of ideas where there is an eternal sameness of will. So that with

respect to God, we cannot with just propriety, say there is any time between the divine determination, and the execution thereof.* Things are done in this view as soon as determined. He spake, and it was done. The absolute determination of the being of things, makes their being absolutely certain and complete in his view; and the immutable oneness of his will, makes a whole eternity at once and ever present: so that not any one event, though ever so distant from creatures, can be any otherwise than perfectly present with Him. Consequently, omnipresence is the property of the divine will; and no other than himself.

I might proceed to other perfections, but as they follow of just consequence, I shall waive it, and only further observe, in brief, that all moral perfections belong also to the divine will: for what is goodness, but the constant determination

* It is absolutely impossible for created intelligence to conceive of being separate and distinct from, independent of, and unconnected with, *time and space*. Existence without succession and locality, is, to us, inconceivable. And yet such must be that infinite Being, who is the first cause and Creator of all things. Succession of moments, or change of place, are none of his properties: for the simplicity and oneness of the divine nature, render either of them impossible.

To think of a Being to whom neither time or space has any relation; and that the things which to us existed unnumbered years past, or will exist in countless ages to come, are as equally, fully and perfectly present to Him as those existing this present moment, seems something beyond the conception of a finite capacity. But it must be so, if infinity be the attribute of Deity.

Therefore, on the whole, we may safely conclude that Jehovah pervades, encircles, and grasps, at once and ever, the whole of duration, space, creation, and all the vast concrete of things, with their operations and effects, in his infinitely capacious mind.

Consequently, Predestination is not that horrible thing, which some would represent it to be; it being only the divine will reaching to all things — bringing them eternally and at once most intimately present, — and guiding them by his wisdom to the fulfillment of all his purposes.

of things, not only just, but beneficent, benevolent, and a superabounding of unmerited kindness? What is justice, but the eternal choice of that which is right, and a fixed determination to give all their due? What is holiness, but the invariable rectitude of the divine purposes? What is mercy, but the eternal resolution of God to save sinners? What is divine love, but God's everlasting good-will, determining the welfare of the objects of it? In short, we cannot separate one perfection from the will of God; and therefore it is demonstrably evident, that it is essentially himself.

On the whole, then, if the divine will is God himself, and consequently possessed of all the perfections essential to Deity; it follows, that all the arguments already drawn from these perfections, will rise in proof here, and stand firm and immovable as mountains of brass. I shall not, therefore repeat them, but attend to some others which are just consequences of what has been advanced. But I must leave this till my next, while

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER XV.

Inferences from the discussion on the divine will in the last Letter confirming the doctrine still further.

My Dear Friend,

Having proved that every perfection of Deity centres in the divine will; and consequently that it is the very nature and essence of God;* I propose now to draw a few brief inferences from those things, as a further confirmation of the truth in view. And,

1. If eternity, immutability, simplicity, and oneness, are predicates of the divine will; if God is really of one mind, and never changes the purposes of his heart, or alters the thing that goes out of his lips, it is impossible but all things, their modes and circumstances, must be according to, and the effects of, his eternal will and decrees: for could it be

*I have been the larger in proving this point, because there are some who would be thought masters in Israel, that sneer at this proposition of the Calvinists: 'The will of God, is God willing.' And I cannot help observing with what gust their mistaken and fallacious reasonings are swallowed by the carnal multitude: and not only the sober Deist, Socinian, Arian, and Arminian, but the most reprobate, openly profane, and ungodly, drink them in with the utmost greediness, and exult in having such champions for principles so agreeable to the flesh, and so pleasing to the carnal dictates of proud nature. This, I humbly apprehend, is a criterion, and ought to be a satisfying argument to the doubting but sincere inquirer after truth, that the works referred to, do not savor of the things that be of God.

supposed otherwise, and that anything could exist contrary to, or independent of, his determinate will, that event must have been from an eternity, secluded from his view and knowledge, — not to be known by Him till it arose into being: for who could be his counsellor, or teach Him? — There are none more knowing or wise, from whom He could get information; nor could the event itself produce this effect on the divine mind, prior to its existence. Consequently, the rising of such an unknown event would surprise Him into new ideas, thoughts and purposes, and influence Him to new model his plan, to bring the supposed event and its consequences subservient to his own ends and designs, which would make Him both the subject of time and changeableness, and consequently destroy his eternity, immutability, &c., and so deprive Him of Deity.

2. If omnipotence be a perfection of the divine will, it follows, that all things have been, are, and shall be, according to the good pleasure of it: for what should hinder? Not *impotency*; for that would be contrary to the supposition, He being the Almighty, and able to do whatsoever pleaseth Him. Nor because He *will not* do it: for that, as it would be willing and nilling the same thing, would be contrary to the nature of the will, and so an absurdity in itself: therefore the supposition of an event existing contrary to his determinate will, must imply a want of an ability to prevent it, which would destroy his omnipotence and Deity, and therefore cannot be.

3. The sovereignty of the divine will renders it impossible that any event should exist but as the effect of his absolute determination. SOVEREIGNTY is the glory of Deity, and essential to his very being, that which *Grace* most humbly adores and glories in; but which the carnal mind inveterately hates and opposes: it is that which stabs the

very vitals of man's boasted free-will, and brings down the towering imaginations of our proud hearts. Pride, that first and ruling passion in the human breast, forever disputes and objects against this glorious prerogative. And however ignorant thereof, men in general may be, yet it is a certain truth, that this latent bosom evil is the foundation of all their objections. Many acknowledge indeed in words the divine sovereignty, but how few maintain it in its effects and consequences. Many seem to allow God to be the supreme and universal Governor, but at the same time deny his having any concern with millions of events that are continually coming into existence. But these things cannot hang together; for divine sovereignty cannot consistently be supported, without maintaining also, that 'He worketh *all things* (without exception) after the counsel of his own will.' For a sovereign without rule and government, is a contradiction; and a universal sovereign without universal sway and influence, is no less so. If God does not all his pleasure, He is but a nominal or partial sovereign: for He cannot rule where his will neither binds nor influences. Whatever is not subject to his will, cannot be under his government. If but a single atom, or volition, or any mode, quality, or circumstance of either, be supposed to be without the control, rule and guidance of the divine will, so far we suppose God to fall short of absolute sovereignty. And were He to leave anything to act independent of his will, and were it possible for it so to act, his government would be limited, and no longer universal: yea, there would be more Gods than one; for this thing would be independent, and independence is characteristic of Deity only.

4. Therefore we must either allow that God eternally determined all events, or give up his sovereignty, and blasphemously deny Him to be the universal Governor. There

is no alternative; God is the absolute sovereign, determining, ruling, directing and guiding all things, or He can be no God.

From the consummate knowledge and unlimited wisdom of the will of the adorable Jehovah, may be assuredly gathered, that the whole scheme of things, the grand plan of creation, providence, and grace, was perfectly contrived, settled, fixed and formed, complete in all its parts, and the execution absolutely determined before one line was drawn towards the performance thereof. Infinite wisdom could not be surprised by unforeseen events into after contrivances; for time, with all its circumstances, was open to his capacious and unbounding view. One eternal thought comprehends the vast concrete of finite things. One eternal volition fixed, and gave being to all: and his all-pervading wisdom and will bound and limit the number, weight, and measure of the whole. So that the times, places, modes, effects, use and end of every atom in the universe, from the beginning to the consummation of all things; and also every idea, thought, and purpose, that takes place in rational spirits throughout their existence, were all fixed in his eternal plan. Nor could the least idea, more or less, ever be admitted into, or omitted from, the grand scheme of things, but that which was worthy the highest wisdom to fix, ordain and determine. For, He being *wise in heart*, and therefore his purposes infinitely best; and being most *excellent in working*, and therefore at no loss how to execute them, it is impossible but He must do his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. It is true there may be, and are, many devices in the hearts of the children of men; yet, nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. For though a man's heart deviseth his ways, yet the Lord directeth his steps: and by his infinitely wise and holy will

guides the whole to their appointed ends. Heaven and earth shall pass away, before one jot or one tittle of his purposes or decrees shall fail of accomplishment: for as He hath purposed, so shall it stand; as He has thought, so shall it come to pass. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose Him not wise or not powerful enough to do all his pleasure. But this would at once undeify Him, and therefore is impossible.

The ubiquity of the divine will proves to demonstration, that as nothing could ever be but as most intimately present to Him; and as nothing could be present but what his will made so, all things, without exception, must be according to his eternal will. If the least thing or circumstance of a thing could arise in the universal system of affairs which He had not from eternity absolutely determined, so far would it be from being intimately present, that it could not be known at all. For if the divine will is not the foundation of his prescience, nothing can be. And if we suppose any one thing about which his will has no concern, that thing must have been unknown, and, (as before observed,) eternally secluded from his sight. For had He seen it, and it had been contrary to his will, He must, as wise and omnipotent, have prevented its existence; and then He must have known from his will that it could not exist. But if on the view thereof, He determined not to prevent it, its existence then must be the effect of his will, and a part of his all-wise plan. Therefore if anything exists any otherwise than as the effect of his all-comprehending will, it could not be known; it could not be present; and then his prescience, omnipotence, and in short, every other essential perfection of Deity, must be given up, and the consequence would be, that the fool's thoughts are agreeable to truth, who says in his heart, 'There is no God.'

5. I would further add, lastly, that as all moral perfections are also predicates of the divine will, it follows, that God cannot do, or suffer to be done, anything that shall in the least degree, depreciate, or terminate in the dishonor of those perfections. And therefore as He could have no certainty but such things would arise, did not He superintend and guide the whole; it cannot in the nature of things be supposed, but that He appointed, fixed and determined the whole.

God, in all these works, proposes as the chief and ultimate end, the manifestation of his own most glorious attributes: for He *made all things for Himself*, and created them *for his glory*, nor will He give it to another. But how could He be sure of this end, if the means in all respects were not absolutely fixed? For, first, He could not display his glories without beings to display them to. In vain had nature, in all her extensive and superlative beauties, shown the amazing wisdom and power of Jehovah, had there been no beholder, no one to view the wonders thereof! therefore the existence of rational creatures, must in order of nature, be first in his decrees, as means to the grand end. And, secondly, the things by which, and the manner how, this should be made known, must have been determined, as next in order in the grand scheme of things. Creation, providence, and grace, are the means by which his matchless perfections shine, and are manifested to angels and men. By these, his power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, justice, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness and truth, are displayed in their full extent of glory. And there is not, or ever will be, a single event of any kind, but shall terminate in the manifestation and glory of some or other of the divine excellencies: or, but what was designed, fixed, and decreed in the eternal council of the Sacred Three, for that end. Even sin, that grand and irreconcila-

*9.

ble enemy to God and men, and every act thereof shall so terminate. The glory of divine holiness and vindictive justice, will be conspicuously seen in the punishment thereof: and the glory of his love, grace, mercy, holiness, and justice will be displayed in the pardon thereof. Sin did not slip in unperceived among created beings; no! He whose single thought comprehends eternity's unbounded round, ordained its being, and fixed its limits, with the utmost precision; nor shall a single thought, more or less than is fixed in his all-wise plan, be ever found among rational beings. *Moral Evil*, that seemed to threaten with destruction the whole empire of God, is made by infinite wisdom, subservient to the manifesting and glorifying of all his moral excellencies, and must have been ordained, determined, and permitted for that very end, as evidently appears from the everlasting covenant of Grace, in which such rich and ample provision is made, to deliver the guilty subjects from the dire effects thereof. Christ could not have been set up from everlasting, and appointed to appear in the fullness of time, to purge away sin by the sacrifice of himself, had not the being of it then been fixed and determined. His engagement with the divine Father in eternity, is a full and clear demonstration that sin, or moral evil, is no accidental thing, but a wise and holy ordination* of God, for the manifestation of his own glory, in the person of his dear Son, the adorable Redeemer from it. Indeed I humbly apprehend that Christ is the beginning and end of all God's ways; and that the manifestation of his glories, as shining forth in his perfections and work, is the grand ultimatum and final result

* Let none start at this; for though it is a certain and indubitable truth, yet God's ordination of it is in such a way as shall be for the glory of his wisdom and holiness, while the blame alone falls on the creature, as I humbly hope to prove before I finish the subject.

of all God's works. But not to treat of this here, and to be as brief as possible, it is evident that moral evil has the greatest share in the events of our globe: it prevails in and over the whole human race! its baleful influence intermixes with all the affairs of men! kingdoms and their inhabitants meet their ruin here! and destruction marks its footsteps throughout this nether world! And can it be supposed that a thing so extensive in its operation, and of such vast concern in the system of events, could exist so many ages without the divine determination? His simple word or will, could in a moment stop its progress, and blot it *forever* out of existence. And can it be imagined that He would suffer its being when in its own nature, it tended so much to his dishonor, had not his wisdom ordained it as a mean for the manifestation of his glory? Sure, reason must blush at the contrary supposition! And if moral evil exist in consequence of the divine will, what in the whole system of things can be supposed that does not? especially when we consider that there is not an event among men, but by some way or other stands connected with it.

In a word, the moral excellencies of the divine will, stand as an impregnable argument for extending the divine decrees to all things without exception, as I might here abundantly prove. But having already exceeded bounds,

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER XVI.

How God executes his purposes, 1. By the positive and effectual energy of his power, without the aid of any second cause, mean or instrument; and, 2. By making use of second causes, or the instrumentality of his creatures. — How far and in what respect God's will is concerned in those things that appear contrary to his word, and are forbidden in his law.

My Dear Friend,

From what has been advanced in my last and former letters, I would observe here, that the many distinctions formed by School Divines, respecting the divine will, have no foundation in truth. God's will is his will, and but one immutable act, having neither before nor after, priority or subordinancy. If application of those distinctions be made with any propriety at all, they can only respect the *manner* of God's *executing* his purposes, and not the *purpose* or *will itself*. God, in the accomplishment of his decrees, works various ways; the which will admit of distinction, as will appear if we consider what was proposed further, namely,

II. How, and in what manner, God executes his purposes.

In general God executes his purposes in two ways: 1. By the positive and effectual energy of his will and power, without the aid or influence of any second cause, mean, or instrument: and, 2. By making use of second causes, or the instrumentality of his creatures.

1. God accomplishes his designs by the positive and effectual energy of his will and power. Thus were all things at first formed. The sovereign *fiat*, will, or word, or the simple volition, 'Let it be,' produced the whole universe. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them. He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Also, all those after events, which we call miraculous, took place in consequence of the all-powerful exertion of the divine will; as the confusion of tongues at Babel; turning Lot's wife into a pillar of salt; dividing the Red Sea; bringing water out of the rock; drying up Jordan; the falling of the walls of Jericho; the sun standing still; raising the dead. It is true, there was something like means used in some instances, but they were no way naturally adequate to the effects. What real fitness or tendency had the lifting up of the rod by Moses, to divide the sea — His striking the rock, to bring forth water — The Priests' feet, to dry up Jordan — or the sound of rams' horns, to throw down the walls of Jericho? These means (if they may be so called) were no way answerable or suitable to these grand events: and consequently the events must have been effected by the immediate energy of the divine will and power.

2. The other way of God's executing his purposes is, by the instrumentality of his creatures. This takes in nature universally, no creature or thing excepted. 'All (in heaven and earth) are his servants,' and, some way or other, work, as instruments in his hand, to bring forth the end He designs. Nature's grand and stupendous machine, effects nothing but the will of its divine former: and He works by the whole his sovereign pleasure. No created arm has the least influence in its operations. It is He that gave the sun

for a light by day, and the ordinance of the moon and stars for a light by night. He walks on the wings of the wind; holds it in his fist, and stays it at his pleasure. He covereth the earth with clouds, and prepareth the rain in its season; watering the mountains and valleys therewith; causing the grass to grow for the cattle, and herbs for the service of man; giving food to all flesh, and thereby satisfying the desires of every living thing. In a word, as there is nothing in nature but is formed by Him, so all operate through his agency, and fulfill his pleasure.

But what I have chiefly in view here is, the intelligent and rational part of the creation; all of which, angels, men and devils, join as instruments, and are made subservient to fulfill the divine purposes. Angels that excel in strength and do his commandment, are made ministering spirits, and constantly obey and effect the will of their adorable Creator. Man also, though lord of this lower creation, is under the control and direction of Him who is Lord of all; and is made instrumental of fulfilling his infinitely wise designs. All his mazy ways and multifarious schemes centre here: for whatever devices may be in the hearts of the children of men, yet the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. And those evil spirits that left their first estate, and forsook their own habitations, and who are now reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day; they, notwithstanding their cursed malevolence and daring opposition to the divine will, are continually effecting it. Their inveterate rancor, envy, and malice against the divine throne and government, are limited and bounded by the sovereign will; and all their effects (though secret to them) are made by infinite wisdom subservient to the accomplishment of his own purposes. In short, all rational beings in a peculiar manner are instrumental in

fulfilling the good pleasure of God: for 'He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.' And this He does, in a twofold way.

By positive and effectual energy; and by withdrawal of influence. From the former proceeds whatever is holy, just and good, amiable, or lovely, in any of his creatures; and from the latter arises whatever is evil: So that I humbly apprehend the fall of angels and men took place in consequence of a suspension of divine communication; a withholding that to which they had no right, and leaving them to the exercise of their mere natural powers. God as much fulfills his will *this way* as He does by any positive influence. And if I might be permitted to give my thoughts on a subject so deep, I would with an eye to the divine glory, humbly offer a few things to the sober consideration of my friend, and those who are puzzled about the origin of evil; and who through the subtlety of Satan, are sometimes tempted to charge God foolishly. But here I would premise two self-evident propositions.

1. That God is infinitely holy, just, and good, and eternally separate from the least possible taint of sin, or moral impurity. Iniquity cannot dwell nigh Him; nor can He behold it but with infinite abhorrence: Consequently, He cannot possibly be the blameable author, worker, or abettor of it. This, his perfections, word, and works of providence, and redemption, demonstrate beyond all possible contradiction. But nevertheless,

2. Sin could not have existence without, or contrary to, the divine will: its being must be a consequent of the sovereign purpose. This appears demonstrable, from the infinite wisdom and unlimited power of God, by which He might, with the most perfect ease, have prevented its being; from its increase, and the extensive spread of its dire effects,

when God could have stopped its progress in a moment, at any period of time, had it been his pleasure; and also from the glorious provision and remedy prepared for its subduction, and the delivery of millions of its guilty subjects from its baleful and ruinous effects. These things, among others, indubitably prove, that the being of moral evil was a certain consequent of the divine purpose.

From these propositions arises this grand paradox, that, 'An infinitely holy, just, and good God, did eternally will the existence of moral evil.' And the truth of this must be evident to every one who has any just ideas of the divine perfections; but *how* it is, cannot be so easily investigated.

To suppose that God could not, consistent with the glory of his attributes, so order things, that sin should have being in the way and manner it has, and the subjects only bear the blame; is limiting the Holy One of Israel in his wisdom. And to suppose it crept into being without the knowledge and concurrence of the divine will, would be limiting his knowledge and power; and supposing sin to be his superior. But here is wisdom! This is power! To ordain this evil, and make it subservient to the display of every moral perfection; to which it is in its own nature so opposite and contrary! — If we may be allowed to give a reason for the divine procedure; I humbly apprehend the ordination of moral evil was for this end; namely, to manifest the divine holiness, righteousness, truth, faithfulness, grace, mercy, justice, and wrath; as also to exalt the divine person of the eternal Son; in whose stupendous work, the work of redemption, all these perfections shine with unrivaled glory. Indeed, it seems impossible to conceive, how these perfections could be fully displayed, or their glory shine with such infinite lustre, if sin had not had existence. It undoubtedly is a mean of bringing more glory to the

adorable Father, Son, and Spirit, than all the un sinning creatures in the universe could bring to eternity ; and this it does, not from its own nature, for its tendency is directly the reverse ; but from the consummate wisdom and power of Jehovah ; whose omnipotent arm operates through all, and brings the whole subservient to that grand end. That this end is attained, there can be no doubt ; and *he* can have no just conception of divine excellence, who imagines this not to be the end designed : for to suppose God to produce an end without design, is an absurdity beneath a rational being.

It is certain, then, that the existence of sin was the ordination of the divine will, or it could not have been made so eminently subservient to the harmonious display of the divine glories ; and it is alike certain, that God could not be the author, worker, or abettor* of it ; as that would be to the dishonor, instead of the glory of his attributes. But how God could thus ordain it, and so become the first and

* Some, perhaps, may object here, that if sin be the effect of the sovereign will, He must be the author of it : If He works all things after the counsel of his own will, He must be the worker of it ; and if He could prevent it, and would not, he must be the abettor of it. I will not dispute about words ; for if to determine the existence of sin, and so to be the remote cause of it, is to be the author ; if to order things so as it should infallibly have being, is to be the worker ; and if suffering, permitting, and leaving his creatures, to the commission of it, when it was in his power to prevent it, is to be the abettor of it, let it be so. God may yet be eternally free from the fault or blame. Therefore, allowing these things, is no impeachment to the divine character. But my meaning is, that we cannot suppose God to produce it, by any immediate impulsive influence, nor by any incitement, motive, bent, or force, allure, beguile, tempt, or compel the creature to the commission of it ; nor that He can, in any respect, connive at it, much less behold it with the least approbation. That this is my meaning, fully appears in the course of these Letters.

remote cause of it, and, yet, be absolutely free from the fault or blame, is a point which, perhaps, cannot be fully investigated by a finite understanding. But I would with all humility offer a few things in my next, which, I flatter myself, will prove satisfactory to you, and every sober mind.

I am,

Yours.

LETTER XVII.

Same subject continued. Sin the appointment of God, and yet He not the blameable cause of it. How sin probably originated in the fallen angels, and Satan in particular.

My Dear Friend,

I shall now offer a few considerations to show, that though the existence of sin was in consequence of the sovereign appointment of God; yet it was impossible that He should be the blameable cause of it.

1. Sin could not be a first cause, and so produce itself; neither could it be without a cause; for then, it would be eternal, and, consequently, God himself. But, as it is a departure from, and a transgression of some law, which the subject was under an indispensable obligation to obey, it must be an effect and consequent of something prior.

2. Whatever was the first cause or occasion of sin, it must be entirely free from the fault or blame; for, if fault or blame was in the cause, sin must be in it; and then, this flagrant contradiction must follow, that sin was before it was. But this was impossible. And, therefore, God may be the first cause or occasion of sin, and yet be absolutely free from the fault or blame.

3. It is evident, the first cause could have no *positive* influence in its production; I mean, so as by force, fraud or incitement, to compel, deceive or instigate the creature to the

commission of it; for if this is supposed, sin must be in the cause, and the above contradiction returns, that sin was before it was.

4. If we consider in what respects God might be regarded as the first cause of sin, we shall find, that fault, or blame, cannot possibly be in that cause. He was the first cause of sin, only by determining its being; by creating capable subjects; by giving them a law; and by leaving them to the exercise of their intellectual powers, unsupported by super-creation grace; or, withholding that influence and support, to which they, as creatures, had no right. For, if God had not determined its existence, it could not have had being; unless we suppose sin to be greater than God. If He had not created capable subjects, it could not have had entrance. If he had not given a law, there could have been no transgression. And if by effectual energy, He had kept his creatures, it could not have entered; — unless we suppose, as before, sin to be superior to the Supreme.

In all which, who art thou, O man! that repliest against God? Or who dare charge Him with injustice? Was it unjust, for the supreme Sovereign of the universe, to determine what should have being in his vast and extensive empire? Was it unjust to create intelligent beings, who are the only subjects capable of sinning? Was it unjust to exact obedience from them? And was it unjust to withhold that power, and support, which was in no sense their due? No one, I presume, that is not sunk so low, as to lose all just conceptions of Deity, will answer in the affirmative.

5. To clear things a little further, let us trace sin to its fountain; and, as far as human sagacity can penetrate, with the aid of Scripture, search out its origin, and see, if it is not manifest beyond a doubt, that while it is an effect and con-

sequent of the Sovereign Will, the fault or blame rests alone with the creature.

We can trace sin no higher than the fallen angels. In them, as far as we can judge, its being commenced. Scripture informs us, that they fell from their first estate, and left their own habitation; and that for this, they are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day. From this it appears, that the state, from which they fell, was a state of holiness and happiness; and their leaving it implies their own voluntary act, and free choice, without any impulsive cause out of themselves, or motive, incitement, or influence, from any extraneous power. Neither were they deceived, as Eve, by a foreign enemy; for there was none to tempt them, but all arose solely in and from themselves. The state from which they fell, was perhaps, the most exalted, they, as creatures, could enjoy; and, I humbly apprehend, it is, in the highest degree, probable, that Satan, the chief of all the fallen myriads, was advanced nearest Godhead, of all the sons of glory; that his intellectual powers were strongest, and shone with the greatest splendor; so that his knowledge, wisdom and understanding appeared with peculiar distinction above his fellows: that he was honored as such by his companions in bliss; and that as his excellencies were seen and acknowledged by them, so he could not be unconscious of them himself. This consciousness of superior excellency, joined with the honor and respect it justly claimed, from the surrounding seraphs, producing in the end, high thoughts of himself, became the father of pride; and when this lust was conceived, it brought forth sin, with all the innumerable evils that followed.

This, I apprehend, is not only a probable, but as rational

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an account of the introduction of sin, as, perhaps can be supposed: on which permit me a little to enlarge.

1. I have observed, that it is, in the highest degree, probable, that Satan, the chief of the fallen myriads, was advanced nearest to the Godhead of all the sons of glory. And this appears, because, had it been otherwise, it is not likely he could have drawn such a multitude to participate his guilt; for the higher his exaltation, the greater his influence on those around. Nor is it probable, that such a number could have united as one in that grand rebellion, without some head, whom they highly esteemed; whose word was their law, and whose influence was equal to the black and awful event. Yea, it seems certain, that he was so advanced, from that dominion which he now holds over the unhappy partakers of his fall. Scripture represents him, as having such dominion; he is called a king, the angel of the bottomless pit; and the prince of the power of the air; all which carry evidence of his rule and dominion now; and prove it more than probable, that he was advanced to peculiar dignity before the fall.

2. I have said his intellectual powers were strongest, and shone with unrivaled splendor. This, I think, appears from his refined subtlety, by which he drew aside unknown numbers of the once happy tenants of glory; by which he still keeps them under his dominion; and by which he rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience. It also appeared in the method he took to deceive Eve, which discovered peculiar penetration, foresight, and sagacity; for nothing could be more fitly calculated to attain his diabolical end. It also appeared, in his daring attempt on the Lord of Life and Glory; by which he thought, probably, at one stroke to conquer heaven and earth, and destroy both. It appears farther manifest, in the variety of his temptations, by which

he lieth in wait to deceive, not only sinners, but saints; none of whom are wholly free from his fiery darts, and cunning devices; and, over whom he would gain his infernal aims, did not God in infinite wisdom, love and grace, circumvent his malicious designs; all which demonstrate his intellectual powers, (though now debased to diabolical purposes,) to be of the superior degree. Consequently,

3. He was honored as such by those around him. This it seems natural to suppose; and there is no doubt, but he was esteemed and exalted by them in proportion to his high state, and intellectual accomplishments; and this gradually arose to a kind of adoration, and to a degree of honor and worship, incompatible with his state as a creature. Thus, perhaps, they became tempters to each other

4. He could not be insensible of his exalted and superior abilities. The higher his dignity, and the more capacious his powers, the more clearly he could discern the difference between himself and those beneath. This consciousness of superiority, and the respect paid him, by the surrounding intelligences, generated high thoughts of his own worth, self-love, and self-complacency; and in the end, self-admiration took place: all this engendered pride; pride darkened his mind, both to the past and the future; he forgot the Rock that begat him, and that now upheld him, and all his powers became absorbed in self. Pride, thus generated, became exceedingly prolific, and the now fallen spirit, conveyed the dreadful bane through ten thousand minds.

This, I have observed, is as probable an account of the introduction of sin, as perhaps can be supposed. And from this it appears, that the immediate cause, or occasion of sin, was Satan's exaltation, superior intellectual powers, and the consequent esteem and honor paid by those around him;

in all which, where can the fault or blame be fixed, but on the guilty subject? This cause, instead of extenuating his guilt, aggravates it to the highest degree: for the more elevated his station; the greater his obligation to his Sovereign; the more capacious his powers, the more able was he to glorify his Creator; and the more exalted ought to have been his obedience and worship therefore his rebellion sunk him into proportionable guilt, and rendered his base revolt absolutely inexcusable.

But to clear these things more fully, I would consider a remoter cause or occasion of sin; namely, God's leaving his creatures to the exercise of their mere natural powers. But this I must leave till my next,

And rest,

Yours.

LETTER XVIII.

Same subject continued. A remoter cause of sin, namely, God's leaving his creatures to the exercise of their mere natural powers.

My Dear Friend,

The divine perfections are so far above all finite excellence, that let the intellectual capacity of a creature be raised to any supposed degree, it will fall infinitely short of ability to form full and adequate conceptions of them. No creature can know God, farther than He is pleased to reveal himself: for, who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection? God himself must dart a ray of light into the mind, or reason in its highest exercise can never trace his glories; for true it is, the world by wisdom knows not God. No, nor has the highest seraph powers equal to it. Impervious darkness surrounds his throne, even to angelic minds, till He shines through it, and shows himself. 'When He hideth himself who can behold Him?'

Hence arises another (though more remote) cause, or occasion of the entrance of sin: namely, the suspension of divine influence; or, God's withholding the communication of himself, and leaving the creature to the exercise of his mere natural powers. This was one reason why the angels that fell, kept not their first estate; and why man, when in honor, abode not; as I shall attempt to prove; in doing which, I shall, 1. Demonstrate the impossibility of their

falling, had God given them a continual view of his glories; 2. That God's concealing his own excellencies, and suspending his influence, must inevitably be productive of such consequences; and then, 3. I shall offer a few considerations to clear the divine procedures from those charges, which men of corrupt minds may cast upon them.

1. I am to demonstrate the impossibility of the creatures' falling, had God given them a continual view of his glory. And this appears from the superlative excellence of the divine perfections, and from the state of the creature.

1. From the superlative excellence of the divine perfections. In these there is such beauty, harmony, and glory, as cannot but attract a rational mind, and fill it with admiration, love and delight. Whatever has the most alluring power, and sweetly attractive force, to draw an intelligent being into love and complacency, is to be found in the highest degree, alone in God. All the beautiful and sublime, with which creation teems, are but a drop of that boundless ocean which centres in Him, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. All that wisdom and sagacity, discoverable in rational minds and in animal nature, and which is displayed in the amazing structure of the universe, are but small streams flowing from that immense fountain resident in Him, whose understanding is infinite. All that power manifested in creation, and in the conservation of the boundless variety of creatures and things, in the heavens, and in the earth, is but the single breath of his mouth, or the simple volition of his will who spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast. And all that goodness, love, and grace exhibited in providence and redemption, are only the emanations of that inexhaustible fulness which resides in Him who filleth all in all. In a word, all that is beautiful, amiable, and excellent; all that is most alluring,

engaging and attractive; all that has a tendency to please, delight, charm, and satisfy to the utmost fullness a rational mind, are found in the superlative and ineffable glories of Jehovah. And can it be supposed that an intelligent being, under a view of these things, could ever have conceived a thought of offending such infinite majesty? Sure reason must be dethroned, or act contrary to its nature, before such a procedure could be supposed possible. Especially if we consider,

2. The condition, or circumstances of the creatures; which was that of perfection, in a degree necessary and suitable to their complete happiness. Nothing was wanting to render their felicity absolutely perfect; having in, and from their Creator, everything adequate to supply and satisfy to the full, all they could rationally desire. They had knowledge, and a capacity of knowing beyond our conception. And they had holiness and rectitude imprinted on all their powers, to the choice of which, their wills were perfectly free, without the least bias to evil in any shape. And they were in a dependent state. They must have known they were not their own creators, nor self-originated; but his offspring whom they beheld exalted above all principalities and powers, possessing the empyreal throne, and shedding his benign influence on all their favored heads! They saw, that in Him they lived, moved, and had their being; and that in Him was centred all their glory; while the emanations of his love filled them with bliss and joy unspeakable. And they must have seen the vast distance, and disproportion, between themselves and that grand Fountain of their being, at whose throne they bowed; whose praise they sung; and before whose face they veiled their own, as incapable of beholding his unrivaled excellencies. Surely, in such a state, and with

such views, it was impossible that a thought could ever enter of rebelling against such goodness, perfection, and glory.* To suppose the contrary, we must conclude they

* Let me call on all those that have tasted that the Lord is gracious, as my witnesses here. Tell me, ye favorites of the Most High, what saw ye? What felt ye? What wished ye? when the Divine Comforter convinced you of sin; and gave you a view of that vast ocean of iniquity, which pervaded your hearts, and led captive to its rule, all the powers and faculties of your souls; filling you with a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries? And tell me, what saw ye? What felt ye? What wished ye? When the same Sovereign Agent revealed the Savior in the glory of his person, and the wonders of his grace; giving you to see the fulness and perfection of his righteousness, for your justification; and the efficacy of his atoning blood and sacrifice, for the cleansing and pardoning of all your transgressions? What then were your sensations; what your resolutions; and what the earnest breathing of your souls? Was it not, to devote all your powers to glorify *his name*, who had called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, by walking in all the commands and ordinances of the Lord blameless? Was it not then, your ardent desire and prayer, that you might be holy as God is holy? Did you not see, and feel sin, as an evil infinitely to be detested? And was not its being in you, your greatest burden? I am persuaded this, and abundantly more, is the experience of the saints, when God is pleased to shed abroad his love in their hearts. And were they continually under the full beamings thereof, as manifested in the works of the adorable Trinity, for their salvation and glory; they would be so swallowed up in the contemplation thereof, that it would be impossible for them to sin: for a full uninterrupted survey of the divine glory, would so change them into the same image, from glory to glory, that meridian light, and total darkness, cannot be more opposite, than they would be from every appearance of evil.

I doubt not but this will be considered by some, as the rant of enthusiasm. It is a truth, that the 'natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' But let such beware, lest that come on them, spoken by the prophet: 'Behold,

were created with worse than Satanic principles. And therefore, before they fell, they must in measure, have lost sight of the glories of their adorable Creator. And this appears further,

(3.) From the reason and nature of things; and from Scripture and experience.

[1.] From the reason of things.

It is in the nature of intelligence, or for an intelligent being, to choose and prefer the greatest apparent good. Whatever is preferable, cannot but be chosen; and whatever is chosen, must be apprehended as the most desirable present good; for it is impossible the mind can reject that, which, in its present view, it conceives to be the most preferable object. Therefore, as God is the chief, and, to a mind uncontaminated with evil, and unfettered from malignant passions, the most desirable good; it is impossible, viewing Him to be such, but He must be the object of its choice. The contrary would be acting entirely opposite to the very nature of the powers of a rational mind, and therefore cannot be. Consequently the mind must lose sight of God as its highest bliss; the divine excellencies must be veiled from the mental eye, before any inferior object could gain the preference. Such therefore must have been the case, both of angels and men, ere they fell from their primitive rectitude. And this is farther confirmed,

[2.] From Scripture and experience.

Eve, who was 'first in transgression,' was certainly deceived by the subtlety of the serpent. His suggestions wrought in her mind, a doubt of the divine veracity; and led her, perhaps, to suppose, that God's prohibitions and ye despisers, and wonder and perish!' And let them be assured also, that they are realities; substantial as the being — permanent as the throne of God — and, in their effects, endless as duration.

threatenings, were deceptions, and given with a view to prevent her enjoying some greater good. That this was probably the case, appears from the history of that awful event. But could she have listened to the vile insinuations of the tempter, had she been impressed with a realizing view of the matchless glories of her Creator? and that justice and judgment were the habitation of his throne, and his counsels of old, faithfulness and truth? Impossible! unless we suppose her destitute of rationality. Therefore God, in his essential excellencies, must have been hidden from her understanding in some degree, ere she could have fallen in with the temptation, and perpetrated the horrid deed. Adam, also, though not deceived as Eve: yet overcame, by the love he bore to her, the obligations he was under to his Maker; and rather than be deprived of her social intercourse, became an accomplice in her guilt; preferring his wife before Him, in whom he lived, moved, and had his being. But would this have been his conduct, had the infinite glories of Jehovah been impressed on his mind? No, for he would have seen a good in Him, over-balancing ten thousand Eves. Nor, would they have attempted to hide themselves among the trees of the garden, had they had a sense of the omnipresence of their Creator, whose eye is eternally, in every place. Neither would Cain have slain his brother Abel, had he considered that the holy and jealous eye of Omniscience, was viewing the impious deed; and that He would by no means clear, but take vengeance on, the guilty.

These, with every other instance of atrocity, recorded in Scripture, must have been prevented, had the perpetrators been at the time impressed with a view of the immaculate holiness, and inflexible justice of the Most High. For, as observed before, the perfections and excellencies of the un-

created Majesty are such, as when manifested, cannot but attract, charm, and fill, with delight and love, a rational mind; and would produce such holy awe and reverence, as would influence to repel every temptation, like Joseph, with, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.'

(4.) This is further evident from the universal conduct of mankind. For, will a servant purloin under the immediate eye of his master? Will an adulteress take a stranger to her bed in the presence of her husband? Will the swearer, the whoremonger, the drunkard, indulge their unlawful propensities in the presence of those who they know will punish them for the same? Certainly not. On the contrary, how cautious and circumspect are the most reprobate and vile, in their words and actions, before their superiors; especially if they are conscious they have ability and will, to punish their impieties? In such circumstances, the most turbulent and brutal, will put on the appearance of meekness, and the innocence of the lamb. And how are the multitude awed into circumspection, and reverence, at the sight of a wise, good, and beloved king? Indeed, constant and universal experience demonstrates, that millions of enormities are daily prevented by the fear of punishment, and by that awe, which superiority of station in life, wealth, wisdom, and power, creates in the breasts of those, who else would perpetrate them. And, if the fear of man, and the glare of human greatness be productive of such effects in the conduct of men, how much more so, would the impressive sense of the divine excellencies, work in man a fear of transgression, and a becoming conformity to rectitude and truth? I am verily persuaded, that could the mind take in the whole character of God, it would see such a blaze of glory in his attributes and perfections, as would

make the most exalted of creatures shrivel, as it were, into nothing before Him ; and tremble at the thought of offending such consummate Majesty.

These things, I apprehend, are evident to demonstration. Whence we may safely conclude, that, had God, by a perpetual influx of divine light and love, exhibited himself to the angels that fell ; they would ever have stood in their primitive rectitude. The same may be justly asserted of our first parents ; and I think it an indubitable truth, that the preservation of the elect angels, flows from the constant impression of the ineffable excellencies of the divine Majesty ; and that, had He concealed his glories from them, they also would have fallen.

This will further appear if we briefly consider the natural tendencies of the intellectual powers of rational beings. But this I shall leave till my next.

And remain,
Yours.

LETTER XIX.

Same subject continued. Natural tendencies of the intellectual powers of rational beings. Preservation of the elect angels in holiness from the constant impression of the excellencies of the divine Majesty.

My Dear Friend,

The proposition before advanced, that, God's withholding the communication of an impressive sense of his own glories, became an occasion of the fall, both of men and angels; may yet be further amplified, by briefly considering the natural tendency of the intelligent powers of a rational mind. I shall not attempt to give a particular definition of those powers, but speak of them, principally, respecting their effects, as manifested in the conduct of the subjects of them.

The Scriptures tell us that 'God created man in his own image.' Now knowledge and understanding form one part of that image, and holiness the other. Understanding and rectitude, therefore, were the bright image of the Most High, in the creature. And no doubt angels and our first parents were created with those powers, in a degree far surpassing what has appeared in man since the fall; and that, therefore, the utmost stretch of human intellect falls vastly short, now, of what Adam possessed in his primitive state. Yet, in the present situation of things, the powers of man are truly great and wonderful, and far exceed his

own comprehension. Such is the brilliancy and lustre of its faculties, that the soul sees nothing without, that exceeds, or equals itself. Those shining orbs around us, the twinkling rays of which, enliven the gloom of night — the more splendid sun, the blazing glory of which, enlightens and cheers the else torpid and sterile earth — with all the delightful scenes of this lower world; must sink into nothing, when compared with the intellectual powers of a rational mind. The mind that surveys, and contemplates these objects, must see the disparity; and, consequently, prefer itself above them. For though they possess peculiar glory and harmony; yet, it sees them as operating for its use, and benefit: consequently, the sight of such myriads of surrounding beauties, calculated for its pleasure, accommodation, and support; must, naturally, produce a high opinion of its own importance in the scale of being: and being able, at will, to contemplate them in their natures, causes, and effects; it must add to its self-complacency and high thoughts of its own consequence.

Thus man, being conscious of his own superiority over the visible creation; and the superlative glories of his Creator being hidden from him: he makes himself, and the gratification of his senses, his chief, and only end: sensible objects engross all his attention — captivate the affections — warp the judgment — and enslave the understanding and will, to its dictates. Indeed, it is impossible it should be otherwise: For a rational mind destitute of the constant impressions of Deity, seeing no higher, must set up himself, as his chief good; and make his own glory his principal aim. For nothing but the excellencies of the Creator, can over-balance the intellectual beauties of the creature. Consequently, if the former be hidden, the latter must predominate in his mind. And as the capaciousness of his

powers enlarges in a proportional degree his desires, he ranges the wide creation to gratify them; but his mind being more copious and extensive than the whole of created things, no part or the whole of them united, can satisfy him to the full. Hence it is that, having no higher object, he perpetually wanders from thing to thing, and creature to creature, vainly seeking happiness from them; and though always deceived and disappointed, yet, not aware of the delusion, still wanders on, absorbed in sensual gratifications, till death draws aside the curtain, and too late he discovers his fatal error.

It is, as has been observed, the very nature of intelligence, or of the intellectual powers of a rational mind, whether of God or the creature, to choose, pursue, and embrace the greatest good. Matter of fact evinces this beyond sober contradiction. God does all things for his own glory; which is the highest good, infinite excellence can pursue. The glory of the highest must be the preferable object of the Most High. And all lesser ones must terminate in that; for God cannot give his glory to another, or deprive himself of his just right.

Man, as an intelligent being, naturally pursues the same object; the highest good in his present view. See this evidenced from the dawning of reason in childhood, to its utmost maturity in manhood. From the former to the latter, what is the mind incessantly reaching after, but some real or imaginary good? And though its pursuits are gradually advancing from the furniture of a toy-shop, to the fame, grandeur, and riches of the world, yet all is under the view of the highest present good.

But to come a little closer to the point in hand: What is the principal aim, or ultimate desire of intelligent creatures? I mean when they have lost sight of the great First Cause.

Is it not Independence? Certainly it is. Yes, this is their perpetual design; to this their wills are unremittingly bent; to this all their motions tend; and it is this that makes them ever on the stretch for honor, wealth, and superiority over their fellow beings; and produces that restlessness and discontent observable in the whole race of mankind. What is it, but this principle, that makes this world an aceldama, a field of blood, and a slaughter house of men? What has produced such vast carnage and destruction among the human race, but the ambitious aim at independence, and a superiority over others? It was this principle that actuated those great butchers of their species, whose conquests and devastations fill the historic pages of every country and every age. It is this principle, that works in all the sons of Adam; so that each individual, were it in his power, would, like Alexander, bring the whole world subservient to his command: nor would he, suppose it granted, then rest till he was master of the universe, and became superior to the Supreme. This is an indubitable truth: as all would find were they impartially to examine the motions, aims, desires and tendencies of their own thoughts. Every aspiring wish, that passes in the breast, is a confirmation of it. Every desire to be above others, in fame, wealth, or power, has a direct tendency to this conclusion. For let the desire be attained, another more aspiring follows, and so on *ad infinitum*; and never would rest, but still ascend till Deity itself became subject to its dictates.*

* Many, no doubt, will start at these things, and with Hazeel, cry out, What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do these great things? However, Hazeel did them, and so would every individual, placed in like circumstances. God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth. He fashioned their hearts alike in creation, and this likeness continues in their fallen and corrupt state. Let any man be left to the

I apprehend it needless, or I might greatly enlarge. On the whole, I think it evident to a demonstration, that it is in the very nature of intellectual excellence to set up itself, as the uncontrollable guide, in all things within the compass of its sphere and power; and that the more enlarged the intellect, the stronger this principle works.* Hence, supposing the divine glories concealed, we may safely conclude, that the higher those excellencies, in a creature are, the more liable is he to fall from his allegiance to his Creator, and set up himself as his supreme end. That this was probably the case, respecting the angels that fell, I have before proved. And it appears by the conduct of men, from the beginning to this day, that their fall and estrangement from God arose from the like incidental cause. Hence, also, we may see, that though God decreed the being of sin, it was not brought to pass by any positive energy, motive, incentive, or temptation from Him; but arose from the darkness and mutability of the creature, and his ignorance of the divine glories. When God 'hideth himself, who can behold Him?' He withheld the light, and darkness ensued. He suspended his special agencies, and the creatures fell. And, therefore, though God, *in some sense*, was the cause of sin, it was only a *negative* cause, arising from a withholding that

mere natural dictates of his corrupt inclinations, and there is not an enormity but he would be guilty of, if a suitable temptation offered. If David, a man after God's own heart, fell into adultery and murder; where is the man, placed in similar circumstances, and so left, but would be alike guilty?

* This is true undoubtedly of *fallen* man, and, so far as we can learn from the Bible, of *fallen* angels, but it may be queried how it certainly follows that it must be so in relation to either man before he fell, or angels before they fell.

ED.

which was necessary for the creature's preservation; **BUT WHICH HE, IN NO SENSE, WAS OBLIGATED TO GIVE.**

I might, here, add another incidental, or occasional cause of sin; namely, giving to the creatures, and placing them under, a **LAW**. This appears, 'because the law worketh wrath; for where there is no law, therere is no transgression.' And had not the law entered, sin had not abounded.

But I shall not dwell on this point. And therefore I conclude with observing, that from what has been said in this, and the two foregoing Letters, I think we may trace such a rational account of the original occasion, and cause of the introduction of sin, as is sufficient to satisfy any serious, sensible, and impartial inquirer. And further, that as sin, with all its baneful effects, has filled our world, and swallowed up, as it were, all the human race in its dreadful vortex; and as its being and operations are so extensive, and of such vast importance in the grand scheme of things; its existence must have been pre-determined, permitted, and designed,* by the wise Creator, Supporter, and Governor of the universe, as one grand mean to an end worthy of Him, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.†

How moral evil first entered the breast of an intelligent

* No doubt; but whether the theory of the author or any other within the present compass of the human faculties to contemplate, be the true theory on this subject, may, perhaps, still be questioned. ED.

† God ever saw, in one capacious thought,
 Worlds upon worlds to full existence brought;
 And fixed the end, ere time its race began,
 Of seraphim, of reptiles, and of man.
 He saw, long ere yon brilliant arch was spread,
 The sons of Adam fallen in their head.
 He saw, and sov'reign will'd the dire event,
 A mean to prosecute his wise intent.

holy creature, is a question that has puzzled the children of men in all ages of the world. I have, therefore, endeavored, according to the light and ability given, to elucidate the subject from the nature of things, from Scripture, and from experience; and I humbly apprehend, the things offered must carry conviction to every serious, considerate mind. But as I know that you and others, who are opposers of the

He saw, He will'd, but no incitement gave :
 The sin was man's, but his the grace to save.
 Man's will was free, and strength was giv'n withal,
 "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall."
 Not free ! he had not sinned when he fell ;
 Nor trial had, if made impeccable.
 Not free ! what test of his obedience then ?
 As well might torpid stones obey, as men.
 Man, in obeying, and in sin was free ;
 His crime no impulse had from Deity :
 Though *in* the act, the Sov'reign him upheld ;
 Yet *to* the act, was by no pow'r impell'd.
 'Tis God supports thy soul while sinning now ;
 Yet hates thy sin, and threatens vengeance too,
 Permits its reign by his determin'd will ;
 And his wise counsels do thereby fulfill.
 Prevent He could, if wisdom had seen fit ;
 But wisdom saw it wiser to permit :
 But the permission was no active cause,
 Though man without it ne'er had broke the laws.
 When Sol withholds its rays, black shades arise :
 And sable gloom its dazzling beams supplies :
 But who dare say this splendid orb of light,
 Producing darkness, generates the night ?
 That life 's death's cause, we may as justly cry:
 For who ne'er lives, can ne'er be said to die.
 Can we the law, with justice, blame for sin ;
 Though without law transgression ne'er had been ?
 So the permission causes not the woe,
 Though unpermitted, it had ne'er been so.

grand truths of revelation, will cavil at, and object to them, I shall attempt, in my next, by some observations, to vindicate the divine procedures.

Wishing you soberly and seriously to consider what has been advanced; and, according to their momentous importance, give the arguments their due weight,

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER XX.

Same subject continued — vindication of the divine dispensations by which angels and men were left to sin.

My Dear Friend,

Such are the incomprehensible glories of the divine Majesty, that all created excellence, comparatively, sinks into nothing. All other beings are but dark shadows of being to the self-existent Jehovah. They are shades which set off his brightness; but to whom they bear no proportion. Surely then, it is arrogance and presumption in the utmost extreme, for man, the shadow of a shade — the atom of an hour — a dust in a balance — a mere nothing and vanity, to arraign the sovereign appointments, and dispute his right of doing whatsoever pleases Him! Language is too faint to set forth the folly of such a procedure! Shall the drop of a bucket oppose itself to the mighty waves of the ocean? Shall the cold glimmer of the glow-worm pretend to rival the warm effulgent beams of the meridian sun? But how infinitely greater the disparity here! What stupidity and madness for impotence to exert its feeble efforts in opposition to Omnipotence; and for ignorance to oppose its dark reasonings to consummate Wisdom! Yet, such is the unaccountable conduct of men, who dare accuse and condemn the wise decrees, and dispensations, of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. And

when I consider how they whom I sincerely value and esteem, cavil, and deny the grand truths of revelation, my soul weeps for them in secret, and cries, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Surely, the consequence, if God convince them not, will be tremendously awful. Indeed, the thought is infinitely interesting, and too big for utterance!

But leaving this, I will now attempt, by a few considerations, to vindicate the divine dispensations, in leaving angels and men to fall from their primitive rectitude. And here I would observe, that God is not under the least obligation to give to his creatures any account of his matters; and it is the height of presumption to require it. He that made all things, has an indisputable right to do his pleasure with the things He has made. Has the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor? And shall not the Sovereign of the universe have the same prerogative, without being called to account by the vessels He has made? The disproportion between God and the creature, infinitely surpasses that between the potter and the clay. Then, 'Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?' Such a conduct is insolence and presumption to perfection.

I have before remarked, that God neither impelled, nor tempted, by force or fraud, his creatures to sin. Its existence therefore can be no impeachment of his holiness or justice. The bare permission was no active or blameable cause. If it were, God only can be accountable for every sin committed. For He permitted, when He had power to prevent — nay, He still permits it, though He has ability to stop its progress in a moment, were it his pleasure. Therefore, though the nature of sin is infinitely opposite to the na-

ture of God ; yet, his permission of it proves that its existence is according to his sovereign will. A will to permit, in God, is equivalent to the determination of the being of the thing permitted : because infinite wisdom could not but know the event of such a permission. And it, and its consequences, must be parts of his all-perfect plan, by which He brings forth that grand end, the manifestation of his own glory. For had not God suffered sin to have being, many of his perfections could not, in so far as we can see, have been known ; but must have been eternally hidden from his creatures. And here I observe,

1. That divine holiness, or God's infinite hatred to sin, could not have been displayed, or known, if sin had not existed. It may seem strangely paradoxical, for sin to be a mean to set forth the beauty of holiness ; and that evil should be productive of good ! But so it is, for how could holiness have been exhibited, or the extent and glory of the divine rectitude been known, if the creatures had not transgressed ? God's infinite hatred of sin must have been a secret forever, if it had not existed amongst rational beings. The perfection, glory and beauty of holiness had ever been secret also, if evil, its opposite, had not been suffered to exist. The angels that fell could not know it, till taught by their own rebellion and consequent punishment. And the elect angels must be, in measure, ignorant thereof till they saw it displayed by the vengeance poured out on transgressors. Nor would men or angels have seen it in that fullness of glory, in which it now shines, but for the cross of Christ, where sin was punished to the uttermost, and infinite hatred against it manifested. — Divine Justice could never have been so clearly set forth without the being of sin. Its inflexible nature had not been open to the view of creatures, had there not been sinful subjects to exercise it upon. Justice is exhibited

by rendering to all their due; by rewarding or punishing as circumstances demand. It was necessary, therefore, to give justice a full display, that sin should exist. — The divine faithfulness is another perfection which could not be known in its full compass of glory, had not sin entered. The fulfillment of promises to the obedient, and threatenings against transgressors, could not have been so clearly manifested, if no disobedience had taken place among the creatures. — Mercy also, could never have had so glorious a display, had there not been miserable sinners to need it. — Grace too, which so eminently shines in the redemption of man, must have been eternally hidden in the divine mind, had not sin rendered the creatures fit objects for its exercise. — Nor, would the heights and depths of divine love have appeared so conspicuously glorious, had it not fixed on sinners, on whom to display its matchless and unmerited kindness. Here it shines with such unparalleled lustre as will astonish saints and angels to eternity. But without sin's existence it must have been, in a measure, hidden; and its infinite greatness never known.

2. I observe further, that divine wisdom owes its fuller display to the being of moral evil. That infinite contrivance which makes sin subservient to the complete manifestation of all his amiable excellencies, must discover consummate wisdom in the grand counsels of the Most High.

3. I also observe, that it seems more than probable, that the being and permission of sin, was designed to show the absolute dependence of the creature on the Creator. Nothing is more evident than that the creatures depend on God for life and breath and all things. He that gave them being, holds their souls in life every moment of their existence. Satan, and his guilty associates, losing sight of this, fatally rebelled. Supposing they were independent;

or, a mad desire of being so, seduced them to set up themselves as their chief good — to cast of their allegiance to the Most High — and to oppose his just rule and government. Their foul revolt and consequent punishment were, no doubt, a lesson to the standing myriads; and as it is natural to suppose, gave them a keener sense of their absolute dependence on their Creator, for every blessing they enjoy. To be preserved in their primitive bliss and rectitude, while millions of their companions fell, was such a distinguishing act of kindness, grace, and goodnees, as will eternally excite their highest love, gratitude, and praise, to their adorable Sovereign. And it is alike certain, that the sin and fall of man, will ever impress the saints with a deep sense of their sole dependence on God, for all they are, and enjoy. The love and grace manifested in the ancient choice of them in Christ; and the redemption wrought out by Him for their deliverance, will be an everlasting stimulus to sing; ‘not unto us, not unto us, but to thy name be all the glory: Unto Him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us Kings and Priests unto God, and his Father: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.’

In a word, every moral perfection shines, in a special manner, with redoubled glory, through the occasion given by the existence of sin for its display; which shows, that its being took place in consequence of the devine permission, wisdom, and will; and that it was a part of that all-wise plan, or grand scheme of things, which God, of old, fixed and determined for the manifestation of his own ineffable excellencies and glories. For the Lord made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. For this purpose was Pharaoh raised up, that He might show forth his power in him; that his name might be declared, and his glory manifested, through all the earth. And how many are

the instances in the divine records, where the wickedness and wrath of man praise the Most High, in being made subservient to his glory? Among the many, one grand instance is, the crucifixion of Christ. Peter told the Jews, that, '*Him*, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' Here is one of the most flagrantly wicked acts, that, perhaps, ever was committed, taking place in consequence of the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*; and which is fraught with such displays of divine glory as no dispensation can exceed, or equal. For, take in the full compass of this amazing transaction, in its causes, motives and ends, and view without prejudice the astonishing wonders it contains, from its first contrivance before the birth of time, to the consummation of its designs in endless glory, and we shall see ten thousand arguments for the propositions before advanced; for all the events of our world are some way or other connected with it.

4. On the whole, then, who dare reply against God, or say to Him, what doest thou? * His glory is to be regarded

* Many indeed do this; and speak many great swelling words against the divine decrees; especially God's eternal determination to punish sin in the subjects of it. This is called by one who was of extensive note in the religious world, **THE HORRIBLE DECREE**. And many horrible things he says of it; representing God, on the supposition of its truth, as worse than Satan — as an almighty, cruel, and unjust tyrant. Many follow him in this our day; and, in their declamations, brand the doctrine of predestination with the most opprobrious, harsh, and shocking epithets.

But God's decree to punish is not an arbitrary act, determining it without the consideration of sin: for, as God punishes no man but for sin, so He decreed to punish no man but for sin. Therefore, not the decree, but sin, is the cause of punishment; and, consequently, punishment is just. If, then, it be cruel to punish, or, to decree to punish, when justly demerited; all punishment is cruelty, and so must be the law that or-

infinitely above the happiness, or misery, of any of his creatures; especially as both are made subservient to that end. Better that ten thousand worlds should perish, than one ray of his manifestative glory be lost in obscurity, or buried in oblivion. What are ten thousand worlds to Him who is infinite! and to whom all the nations of the earth are but as the drop of a bucket; and are counted by Him as nothing; yea, less than nothing and vanity? The perishing of millions of these comparative nothings for their sin, is not equal

dains it. For without law there is no transgression. Every law, whether it be of God or man, virtually decrees, and brings the criminal under an obligation to punishment; and it makes no difference, whether the law is given an hundred, or a thousand years before the criminal act is committed: it equally binds the transgressor to suffer, as it would were it promulgated but yesterday.

And I would ask all those, who represent the doctrine of predestination in so horrid a light, whether God did, or did not know from everlasting, the persons and the iniquity of those who shall be cast into outer darkness; as well as those to whom it shall be said, 'Come, ye blessed?' To deny Him this knowledge, would rob Him of his deity, and be direct atheism. But, if granted, the doctrine in dispute necessarily follows. For if God foreknows a thing, that thing must be fixed and certain, or He could not know it; and if any think, that He foreknows any existing circumstance or thing, which He did not determine to effect, or permit, let them prove it if they can.

On the whole, the above blasphemous expressions, and the notions connected with them, display utter ignorance of the nature of God; and rob Him of every perfection essential to his being; as is fully proved in these letters; and therefore need not be repeated. But I would wish every opposer of the doctrine to weigh well, and to consider the folly and danger of his opposition. It is not a light thing to deprive the Most High of his just prerogatives. He is a Sovereign of infinite dignity and glory, and will not hold him guiltless that depreciates his perfections, and withholds from Him that honor and praise justly due to his name. May the divine Spirit convince such of their sin, and lead them into a cordial reception of every truth of God.

to our crushing a worm. We tread it to atoms at our will, without repugnance, or the least fault in the worm, or profit, or honor, to ourselves. But in the punishment for sin, God glorifies his law, his justice, faithfulness, and truth; rendering to the creature only his just desert. The worm breaks no law, gives no just cause of offence; yet we sport with its being, and deprive it of existence at our pleasure, and think we do no wrong. And shall we impeach the Most High for his just and righteous dispensations to his sinful creatures, between whom and Him, is an infinitely greater disparity than between the meanest worm and the most exalted of intelligent creatures? Surely such conduct is superlative presumption and folly.

I might have entered much farther into these things, but I think that what has been said is sufficient. And of what has been advanced this is the sum: That all divine perfections are essential to, and justly predicated of, the divine will. Consequently, it is not an adjunct, quality, or a faculty of the divine mind; but is that mind, or God himself. That, therefore, God's will is positively effective in the accomplishment of all his designs; doing according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: Or, in other words, working all things after the counsel of his own will. I have also attempted to show how God executes his purposes; which appears to be, by the effectual energy of his power, and the withdrawment of influence. I have moreover taken occasion to offer some thoughts on the original of evil, in whom, and how, it arose into being; and have concluded with some observations to vindicate the divine procedure.

I might have taken a survey of the moral perfections of God, as corroborating proofs of what has been advanced in favor of the point before us; but I think it unnecessary. I shall

therefore proceed, in my next, to consider as proposed, the works of God, as a further evidence of his eternally determining (either effectually or permissively,) whatsoever comes to pass. In the mean time,

I rest,

Sincerely yours.

LETTER XXI.

Corroboration of the doctrine from a consideration of the works of God. 1. Creation. 2. Providence.

My Dear Friend,

Having treated of the divine will, and shown that all the attributes of Deity are predicates of it; and that, consequently, it is his nature and essence, or God himself; it follows, that all arguments advanced from those attributes, will hold good here; and the rejection of the doctrine will be followed with like absurdities and impossibilities, and therefore need not be repeated.

I shall now consider,

2dly.* The Works of God, and that as perpetually holding forth visible demonstration of the truth contended for. But here I shall be brief, and not enter into that full extent of proof, to which the subject naturally leads.

The works of God may be comprised under two heads, those of creation and providence.

Considered as an act, creation is that amazing stretch of wisdom and power, by which all things are brought into being from nothing. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. LET IT BE was the volition, or the all-powerful voice, which spake the whole from non-entity into existence.

* See page 36. Letter V.

But, here I would observe, that when no creature existed, it was entirely at the option of the divine wisdom and will, whether to create or not. Nothing out of himself; nothing but his own will could bind or engage Him to this mighty work; consequently, ere one line was drawn, He must determine not only to create, but what to create. The whole plan, end, and means, must be before Him, ere one act of creating power could be put forth. To imagine otherwise, would be to suppose infinite Wisdom to work without design, and to no end; which would be altogether absurd, and display folly instead of wisdom. God could not determine to create without knowing his own intentions; nor could He work without knowing the end designed; much less could He design an end, and work to accomplish that end, without a perfect knowledge of the means. The means, in all their parts, must be determined, or there could be no certainty of the end. Consequently, He must, with infallible certainty, also have known and determined the various natures, tendencies, and manner of operation, of all the creatures and things He was about to form. For He could not, as infinitely wise, form He knew not what.

A wise master-builder not only lays the plan of his house, and determines its shape and size; its several apartments, and their uses; but the various materials, with the due proportion of each, of which it shall be composed. And shall the great Builder of the universe be supposed to work without a plan; and consummate wisdom be surpassed in contrivance by a wise man? Surely every pin in this vast, grand tabernacle, its place and use, must be fore-fixed, drawn, and determined, in the eternal mind, ere one line was stretched out for its accomplishment. To work without design, or plan, is characteristic of an idiot, and not of Him whose will and works are wisdom and perfection in

the abstract. Known unto Him are all his works from the beginning. And known, because determined.

And not only his works in their first formation, but all their effects were known and determined also. A good mechanic, not only designs the construction of a machine, but the various use of the parts, and the effects the whole shall produce; and, if his abilities are competent, he never fails of his end. God has wisdom and power sufficient to accomplish all his purposes, and none can successfully oppose their execution. Consequently, nothing can come to pass when He commandeth it not; therefore his eternal will and decrees have had, and shall have, their full completion.

Creation, then, in all its parts, took place in consequence of the sovereign will of God. Not an atom, more or less than he absolutely determined, could possibly have being. For it would be egregious nonsense and absurdity to suppose He created a single particle of matter, much less intelligent minds, without design; for that, as has been observed, is characteristic of folly, and not of wisdom; and therefore cannot be.

Further, not only the things created, but their natures, properties, and tendencies, must be absolutely determined also. Consequently, their effects, under every possible modification, must likewise be known; or He could have no determinate end in view; or if He had, He must inevitably fail of that end: For, to design an end without determining the means, renders the end uncertain, yea, impossible. But this must be absolutely denied of consummate Wisdom.

And again, as God created all things by the word of his power, and that to ends worthy of himself; He must, to effect his purposes, superintend, rule, and guide the whole, or disappointment must be the issue. But as this cannot be,

He must determine the means, in every view, as well as the end. The works of Providence are those means, which I shall now consider, and briefly investigate, with a view to the confirmation of the truth before us.

Divine Providence* is God's superintendence, and wise ordering of all things. — It is the accomplishing his purposes by disposing of all things in the wisest and best man-

* It is a matter of wonder and surprise, that so many, who are justly esteemed for their literary accomplishments, and whose good sense and judgment, in natural things, are indisputable; should, while they acknowledge a governing superintending Providence, deny the doctrine of Predestination! Surely, they are not aware of the inconsistency of their sentiments. Predestination, or the determinate will of God, cannot be separated from Providence, without destroying both; they must inevitably stand or fall together. — The former is God's will determining; the latter, God's will executing. Predestination is the grand root, whence spring those wide-spreading branches — that beautiful foliage — those odoriferous variegated blossoms — and those infinitely diversified fruits, which the expanded tree of Providence exhibits through all the vast and spacious field of time. It is that immovable foundation on which the magnificent structure of Providence is built. The first grand cause of every event which Providence displays. So that, to maintain a Providence and deny Predestination, is to suppose a flourishing tree, without a root; — the wisest scheme executed, without either plan, or agent — the noblest edifice raised, without a foundation — and, that all the events, in the vast system of things, exist without a cause.

There are others, who would be also thought men of sense, that, not having effrontery enough to deny a Providence altogether, will admit of some things to be under its governing hand; while, according to them, millions of others are left to work their way in the dark, without either path or guide. These are rejecters of Predestination also; but their views of things are an insult to common sense. They fondly set up themselves as judges of what things are, and what things are not, proper for the government and direction of infinite Wisdom; and instead of allowing that God worketh *all things* after the counsel of his own will, pick and cull this, that, or the other event, as the work of his Providence; and, at the same time, leave, as it were, the rest to

ner — It is his governing them, so that they shall not exceed the limits prescribed; and guiding them to ends worthy of, and consistent with, his own glory. Providence, in its largest sense, takes in the whole government of God. Time and space and all the existences in the compass of both, are under his absolute control, and infallible guidance; so that not the least circumstance, of whatever nature, can escape his notice, but must always be under his immediate direction.

Indeed, Providence is an immense field, a boundless ocean, capacious as space, and endless as duration. It is a height, a depth, a length and breadth, immeasurable, inscrutable, and past finding out. In a word, it superintends the universe, and rules and directs the whole, to the various ends and purposes of infinite wisdom.

In short, God's Providence is his matchless wisdom displayed in working all things after the counsel of his own will.

I shall briefly consider the works of Providence in a more distinct manner; but this shall be the subject of my next. In the mean time,

I rest,
Yours.

shift for themselves; that is, to arise to being without a cause — to be subject to no agency — and, consequently, to exist to no end. So that, in reality, these events must proceed from nothing — be subject to nothing — and tend to nothing.

In short, to acknowledge, in whole or in part, a Providence, and deny Predestination; is to separate the end from the means; — the effect from the cause: — it supposes God to work without a will; without design; without a motive; and to no end: or, rather, that the sovereign will effects nothing; and, consequently, that Providence is a mere nullity: — and in a word, it makes the Bible a farce; puts reason to the blush, and renders both of no use in the investigation of truth. Such, and many more, are the absurdities, contradictions, and impossibilities, connected with, and justly deducible from, such principles.

LETTER XXII.

Further consideration of God's Providence — The works of nature and the dispensations of grace.

My dear Friend,

I come now briefly to consider the works of Providence in a more distinct manner. And this I will divide into the works of nature, and the dispensations of grace.

1. The works of nature.

As to these I observe, that with regard to those splendid orbs, which shine through yonder vast area, the numbers and distances of which exceed imagination; the most we can know of them is, they are the works of Jehovah; and all the stupendous monuments of the wisdom and power of Him who is the **WONDERFUL, and WONDER-WORKING GOD.**

With regard to the solar system, with which our globe is more immediately connected, we know, comparatively, but little. By the help of optical instruments, some discoveries have been made of the relative distances, magnitudes, and motions of the planets; but the real nature of any, except that which we inhabit, remains a blank. What know we of that bright luminary the Sun, whose blazing glories spread their benign influence, and impart light, life, and heat, to distant worlds; and of that beautiful queen of night, the Moon, who periodically, and partially, dispels the sable gloom occasioned by the absence of the solar rays?

Scarcely anything, but that they are appointed for seasons, the Sun for a light by day, and the Moon and Stars for a light by night; and that their rising and setting are settled and established by the Almighty hand. We can trace, in some measure, the harmony of their motions, and how they are regulated and governed by certain fixed laws; but what those laws are, and how they operate to produce such constant and uniform effects, cannot, perhaps, be fully investigated. But this is evident, that as they are the work of creating power, so they are all continually supported in being, and guided by the divine arm to the various ends his purpose has assigned them. Their motions, effects, and uses, are fixed by his eternal will; by which they are bound and limited, without a possibility of deviating in the least degree.

If we descend to this earth, what but his providential hand sustains, rules, and guides, to their purposed ends, all things around us! And man, the chief of God's works on this little spot, or point of creation, is certainly under his governing and supporting arm every moment of his existence. Our times are in his hand, and He gives to all life, and breath, and all things. The way of man is not in himself, nor is it in man that walketh, to direct his steps: for though a man's heart deviseth his way, the Lord directeth his steps; and though there are many devices in the hearts of the children of men, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand; for He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. Sickness and health are at his control; He wounds, and He heals; He killeth, and He maketh alive. Afflictions are also from Him; they come not from the dust, neither doth trouble spring from the ground; nor is there any evil in the

city, but the Lord, in his wise and overruling providence hath done it.

In short, if we carefully search the Scriptures, we shall find, that there is not the least thing or circumstance, in the whole universe, but is under the immediate direction, and unlimited control of infinite wisdom. And, therefore, it is an indubitable truth, that God worketh all things without exception, (either by positive effectual energy, or by sovereign permission) after the counsel of his own will. And, indeed, it is impossible to be otherwise; for can we point out one operation, in all the vast concrete of things, that is effected by the immediate agent, independent of any foreign cause?

Suppose we take a view of the vegetable kingdom, is there one effect in all the growth of plants, that is produced by any innate principle, or power of their own? Certainly not. Deprive a tree or plant of earth and it will die; give it earth and no moisture, it cannot vegetate; let it have earth and moisture, and deprive it of air, it fades and dies; give it all these, and withhold genial warmth, and sterility will be the consequence: so that a due proportion of these are absolutely necessary, according to the nature of the plant, to produce vegetation; and though they are all extraneous to the plant itself, yet it depends on each for the operations it performs.

What is the earth but a steril inert body of matter, composed of an infinite number of heterogeneous particles, held together and made to cohere by, perhaps the united agency of gravity, the swiftness of its annual and diurnal motions, and the humidity that insinuates itself through all its parts, and preserves the whole from crumbling to dust and sand? All of which are foreign from the earth itself, but necessa-

ry to its being a proper nidus, or repository, for the nourishment and germination of the vegetable world.

What is gravity? What is motion, by which all the phenomena of nature are performed? not self-existing independent powers; but effects of a cause we cannot trace short of the infinite Mind.

What are those subtile fluids, air and water, on which animal and vegetable life so much depend? Are they self-generated, or self-acting bodies? or are they passive instruments in the hand of the first great Cause, to effect his own all-wise purposes? The latter is most certainly the case: For it is demonstrable, that it is their nature, like other parts of matter, to be quiescent, and at rest; and that they do not, cannot act, but as they are acted upon, by some extraneous impelling power. This impelling power, in general, is heat.

What is heat? not a self-moving principle, but the effect of the sun's rays, operating on our earth and atmosphere.

And what is the Sun? We see it a luminous body, the source of light and heat to our system, and the principal cause of vegetable and animal life on this globe; but its real nature, and of what it is composed, whether of fire, or any other unknown matter, is not determinable by us. However, it is evident, that it is matter, and partakes of the *vis inertia*, or inactivity, natural to all matter; and therefore its rapid and unceasing motion round its own axis of between three and four thousand miles an hour, and by which it darts its rays at the amazing rate of upwards of twelve millions of miles in a minute, towards its attendant worlds; and by which, perhaps, the wonderful phenomena, or operations and effects in our system, are in a great degree produced, cannot be from its own intrinsic agency and

power; but from a cause exterior to itself, and which can be nothing less than the omnipotent hand of Jehovah.

If we take a survey of animal life; what a multiplicity of multifarious events arise from the innumerable species, and individuals of living beings! All of which depend on that life for their production: for let the vital function cease, and these effects are no more.

What is life? How is it maintained? It is God that giveth to all life and breath; it is He that preserveth man and beast, and in his hand is the life of every living thing.

Intellectual and rational life, or the soul, is also from Him: He formed man from the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. The soul is a simple, indivisible substance, without parts, solidity, or extension; it is an immaterial spark, kindled, upheld, and preserved, by Omnipotence. It possesses amazing powers; in which it is a faint, yet a striking image of Deity; and its faculties in many respects, bear some analogy to the divine perfections. The soul is the immediate fountain of motion and activity in the body it inhabits; and the spring of motive power in all our spontaneous acts. All voluntary motions of the body are the effects of the soul's volitions. It is but to will, and our members instantly obey: and, if no disorder attends, the frame cannot but obey. Such is the nature of the volitive power of the soul, that no created arm can by force subdue it; and it is stronger to impel the body to execute its designs, than the united effort of the whole creation. And we may observe here, that volition is the only source of all the acts and effects of power visible among the whole of creatures; for, if there were no volitive beings, the universe would be a blank — a nothing. By the mere volition of the divine will, all crea-

tion rose into being; and by the same will are all creatures preserved every moment of their existence. And it is only by the soul's volition, that every act of the body is performed; nor can we stretch an arm, or move a finger, unless we will so to do. All the external motions of the body, necessary for the various occupations we are called to, for our supply, support, and comfort in life, arise solely and immediately from the volitive power of our own minds; but, those internal motions, such as digesting our food, secretion of the juices, motion of the blood, respiration, &c., so necessary to our existence here, depend not at all on our will; but entirely on Him who holds our souls in life. God has kept these operations wholly, and immediately in his own power, and continues them for a longer, or shorter period, as it seems good in his sight, to answer the important purposes of his own eternal wisdom and will. But,

Though volition gives motion and activity to the members of the body, yet itself is not a self-originated, self-sufficient principle. Every act of the will is an effect, and must have a cause. The immediate cause is the soul's power of perception. Without perception there could be no volition; for if the soul could perceive nothing, it could will nothing. And therefore, though the soul is percipient, and has a capacity of taking in, and viewing objects when presented, yet as a mirror cannot receive the impression, nor reflect the images of things unless they pass before it, so the soul cannot perceive the images or ideas of objects, except they are conveyed by the organs of the body to the sensory. Consequently, the mind depends, for the exercise of its perceptive faculties, and its consequent volitions and effects, on circumstances without itself; for objects are first presented, then taken in by the senses; the ideas of them fall on the sensory, where the soul beholds them, and its volitive power

catches, and as it were, stirs them about ; views them on all sides, separates, combines, and compares ; then judges and concludes according to the view it has of them.

In short, the soul itself, with its percipient, and volitive powers, is the immediate work of God ; but, He has made the exercise of these powers to depend on their union with, and the ideas taken in by the senses, or nervous organs of the body. So that all its operations within itself — upon the members of the body, or anything extra, flow from perceptions primarily taken in by the senses ; and which join as so many causes of the wonderful display of its astonishing powers.

Thus it appears that the soul, its faculties, and all its acts, are effects of prior agency ; and therefore must absolutely depend on the first grand cause, for its being, its amazing powers, and the exercise of them ; and must, consequently, be ever under the government and direction of his providential hand. And it appears also, that there is not a phenomenon or operation in nature, but is the passive and necessary effect of a cause, or causes, existing out of itself. And it is demonstrable that no event or thing can be its own producer ; for if we trace things up from step to step, from effects to their causes, we cannot stop at any point, till we resolve it into the will and agency of Him, who does according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

I might abundantly enlarge on these things, but think it not necessary, therefore conclude this Letter with observing that, as Scripture ascribes all operations in the heavens, air, earth, and sea, to God the Creator of all, so reason evidently joins in demonstrable proof of the same. For, as we see every event to be the result of prior agency, and that it must have an efficient, stable cause — as all causes except

the first, must have been effects before they became causes -- as the first cause must be an intelligent designing agent, having ends in view by the events, worthy his greatness and wisdom — and as no event can exist separate from, or independent of, the influence of its cause; it is impossible but all must exist, and act, as the result of his supreme will; and this, though in other words, is nothing less than absolute Predestination.

I shall in my next, attempt to treat of the other branch of divine Providence, namely the dispensations of Grace, as a further proof of the doctrine before us. In the mean time,

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER XXIII.

Continuation of the same subject. — Dispensations of grace.

My Dear Friend,

In my last, I briefly treated of the works of God in nature, as displayed in the wonderful operations seen in the heavens, earth, air, and sea; and proved that He perpetually superintends, guides, and governs the whole, in all their operations and effects; and that, therefore, their existence is the consequence of his sovereign will and pleasure.

I come now therefore to the other branch of divine providence; namely, The dispensations of Grace,* as a further proof of the point before us. Here, also, I shall be as concise as possible.

GRACE, properly speaking, is free unmerited favor. It is not, either in its design, or display, compelled or deserved; for compulsion or merit destroys its nature. Grace, in God, is not merely a disposition to show favor; but his actually showing it. It is his eternal will determining how, and on whom to display it; and the real accomplishment of his

* I do not expect that what is observed here, will be of any force to convince those that reject revelation; or, that oppose, or deny the grand, sublime truths of the everlasting gospel. To such I would recommend a re-perusal of the arguments in the foregoing Letters. And if these do not carry conviction to the mind, it may be no breach of charity to assert, that they have rejected reason as well as revelation.

purpose. Every act of kindness Jehovah shows to his creatures, (even to those that never sinned) as they are free acts of his will, and unmerited by them, may be justly called *grace*. But Grace, in its general acceptance, and in a scriptural view, is applied to the acts of the divine will, and their effects *toward sinners*. Grace, in the former sense, is common to all creatures; for 'He giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things.' In the latter sense, it is to *sinners*, and a *part* of them only, to whom it is extended. But take it either way, it is all free; nothing in the creature can merit* its display; but all flows according to his sovereign

* The doctrine of merit is the bane of true Christianity, and of real vital religion. It is the nauseous scum arising from the ebullition of pride, in the corrupt hearts of fallen creatures. To suppose a creature, even of the highest order, capable of meriting anything at the hands of his Creator, is an affront to common sense: But, to imagine a sinner — a transgressor of the law of the Most High, to perform works meritorious in his sight; is an absurdity that wants a name; and can be nothing less than the spawn of hell, and the smoke of the bottomless pit, which stupifies and blinds the souls of men to their own destruction and perdition.

I am persuaded the idea of merit, never entered the minds of those pure spirits that worship before the throne; and it is that which can never enter the realms of bliss. No, the language there is, 'Not unto us! not unto us! but to thy name be all the glory.' And the saints at the judgment day, astonished at the condescension of their adorable judge, will, with holy wonder ask, when saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, &c. spurning the idea of merit from them with the greatest abhorrence. I verily believe there is nothing in the whole empire of God that He more hates, than that pride which influences a sinful worm to imagine he can merit anything at his hands. 'Can a man be profitable unto God, as a man that is wise is profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it any gain to Him, that thou makest thy ways perfect.' Man's goodness extendeth not unto Him; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and have done no more than we ought to have done.

Therefore the tenet ought to be rejected with the utmost detestation, by every rational mind.

pleasure; without any cause or reason out of himself. It is in the latter view I shall consider it here.

I shall not attempt to go through that vast extensive field, to which a full discussion of the doctrines of grace would lead me; but only briefly observe, that, — God, from eternity, resolved to display his grace to some of the sinful sons and daughters of Adam, and formed a plan for the execution of the same — that in this plan He fixed the individual subjects that should be the recipients of its blessings — and that all his dispensations in time are, in some way or other, connected with, and subservient to, the fulfilling of the purposes of his grace.

1. God from eternity resolved to display his grace, and formed a plan for the execution of the same.

I have proved, in my *ninth* Letter, that God, as perfect in wisdom, must have formed from eternity, a plan of all his works; of which the purposes of his grace most certainly constitute a great part. Yea, perhaps the whole scheme of creation and providence, was contrived to display its riches and glory, and to accomplish its grand designs. It appears from the sacred word, that the divine plan, or covenant of grace, was fixed and settled in the councils of the divine Father, Son, and Spirit, before time had being; for Christ, under the character of Wisdom, is said to be *set up from everlasting*, and was anointed as mediator in the covenant of grace. For verily, he was foreordained from before the foundation of the world; but was manifested in these last times, for you who believe in God that raised him from the dead. 1. Pet. 1: 20. There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. 1. Tim. 2: 5. David, as a type of the adorable Redeemer, says, that God had made with him an everlasting covenant, *ordered in all things, and sure*; agreeably to which, the Lord declares in

Ps. 89. 'I have made a covenant with my chosen: I have sworn unto David my servant, thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn in my holiness that I will not lie unto David; his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me.' All this has its fulfillment in the antitypical David, the Lord Jesus Christ, between whom and the Father, a council of peace was held in eternity; the plan formed, and a covenant entered into, *ordered in all things and sure*. Thus 'his COUNSELS of old were faithfulness and truth. And He is wonderful in them, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' Is. 44: 10. And He is excellent in working, to accomplish his purposes: for 'the Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.' — And in short, He worketh **ALL THINGS** after the counsel of his own will.

2. That if the plan, formed in the councils of the adorable Trinity be a perfect plan, (and it would be blasphemy to suppose otherwise) then every individual that should be made a partaker of the blessings of the covenant of grace was fixed by name, and comprised therein. And this appears,

(1) From the reason and nature of the thing. For to suppose God to determine the manifestation of his grace and favor, and yet not to fix on whom to manifest it, is contrary to the nature of perfect intelligence; for absolute wisdom and knowledge excludes forever all doubt and uncertainty. But, if God designed to display his grace without determining the subjects of it, his designs might have been

rendered abortive, and He have been disappointed of his end. For to design grace without fixing the objects, leaves all to random and uncertainty: which is incompatible with consummate wisdom. But,

(2.) It clearly appears, from the evidence of Scripture. Christ's prayer in John 17, is an abundant testimony to this point. He declares, that power was given him to give eternal life, to as *many* as the Father had *given* Him. 'I pray for them, I pray not for the world; but for *them* which thou hast *given* me; for they are thine, and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, — keep through thine own name *those* thou hast *given* me. — Father, I will that *they* also, whom thou hast *given* me, be with me where I am, to behold my glory. And in the 10th of John he says, I am the good shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep — My sheep hear my voice, and *I know them*, and they follow me, and I give unto *them* eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hands.' The Apostle, Rom 8: 28, asserts, 'We know that all things work together for good, to *them* that love God, to *them* who are the called according to his *purpose*. For *whom* He did *foreknow* He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; moreover, *whom* He did predestinate, them he also called,' &c. And in Eph. 1: 3, 4, 5, 'He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ; according as He hath *chosen us* in Him, before the foundation of the world, that *we* should be holy, and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated *us* unto the adoption of *children* by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise and glory of his grace.' And 17, 18, 19, It is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, that gives the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; and that enlightens the understanding

to know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the *saints*: and what the exceeding greatness of his power, to *us-ward* who believe. God makes his people willing in the day of his power, by working in them, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. And He is the author and finisher of faith; fulfilling in his children, all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.

Surely then, if God thus blesses, and works, according to the good pleasure of his goodness, He must have fixed, determined, and known, on whom the blessings should terminate. Numerous are the passages that prove this, but I shall add only one more, where the Apostle, after mentioning some who as concerning the truth had erred, adds, Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS.** — 2 Tim. 2: 19.

3. As then, the Lord knoweth them that are his, having their names written in the Lamb's book of life, and engraven on the palms of his hands, every circumstance concerning them must be ever open to his view and direction. Grace guides and influences his dispensations towards them, till He brings them to the full enjoyment of himself.

This is evident from that wonderful and astonishing *act* of his grace, the gift of his dear Son; who, as soon as man fell, was manifested under the character of the seed of the woman, and afterwards was further made known to the patriarchs, and to all the prophets by various important characters, types, and figures, down to his coming in the flesh. To Him gave all the prophets witness, Acts 10: 43. — God *so* loved the world as to give his only begotten Son. John 3: 16. When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, Gal. 4: 4. Beginning at Moses and all the

Prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself. Luke 24 : 27.

But not to enumerate the many passages on this point, I would observe, that the Scriptures are full in setting forth the appointment, mission, offices, and work, of the adorable Immanuel ; representing, by names and characters, the most endearing ; by types the most significant ; and by figures, metaphors, and similitudes, the most apt, beautiful, and pleasing, the amazing transactions of his birth, life, and death. Indeed the greatest part, if not all the divine oracles, either immediately, or remotely, have relation to the glory of his person, grace, offices, and work.

The same appears also from the *operation* of grace in and towards his people — in making known his mind and will by his prophets, who foretold and described their state and circumstances through all the periods of time — in calling the elect out of darkness into his marvellous light ; taking one of a city, and two of a family, and bringing them to Sion ; fixing the time when, the place where, the means by which, and the manner how, they are to be delivered from the slavery of sin and Satan — in appointing by weight and measure, their trials and temptations ; not suffering them to be tempted above, what they are able ; but with every temptation making a way for their escape — in scattering many great and precious promises throughout the sacred pages, suitable to every exigence ; and which are brought home to their souls by the divine Spirit, for their comfort and establishment, while passing through this waste howling wilderness, in their way to the heavenly Canaan — and making them more than conquerors through Him that hath loved them and given himself for them ; and at last, giving them an abundant entrance into his kingdom and glory.

*14

Now if we consider these things, with their dependent circumstances, of causes, connections, and effects, we may, I apprehend, safely assert, that God must have fixed, and ordered, in his infinitely wise counsels, every other event. Which I shall attempt further to prove in my next, and thus conclude the subject.

I rest,

Yours.

LETTER XXIV.

Consideration of the dispensations of grace continued, particularly that to accomplish the designs of grace every other event, as well as its final consummation in glory, must have been fixed and determined by God.

My Dear Friend,

Grace is the sole work of God, from its birth in eternity, to its final consummation in glory. But to accomplish the grand designs of grace, every other event must have been also fixed and determined by Him; which, as I think, will appear from the following considerations.

1. It seems impossible for God to fulfil the purposes of his grace without it; especially, when we consider, that one single thought, in its progress is often attended with consequences, both for number and importance, far surpassing finite understanding. One eternal, comprehensive thought of God, produced the universe, with all its circumstances. One thought of Eve, entailed sin, guilt, and misery, on all the human race. One gracious thought of the Most High, supersedes, overrules, and renders all the effects of the catastrophe, effectually subservient to his own glory, and the good of his chosen. For He has declared that '*all things work together for good to them that love God; to them that are the called according to his purpose;*' and if *all things*, then there is not a thought or action, taken in the concrete, but shall, some way or other, so terminate.

He has also affirmed that He knoweth the thoughts afar off; 'neither is there any creature that is not *manifest in his sight*: But *all things* are naked, and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Heb. 4: 13. If so, there cannot be the least doubt, but He makes the whole subjective to his will, and subservient to the completion of his grand designs of grace to his church.

2. Sin and grace* enter as as it were, into all the events

* The dispensation of Grace, or the Gospel, is the wisdom of God in a mystery. Angels desire to look into it, and were the heralds that proclaimed its glory, Luke, 2: 14. But notwithstanding it is so rich in every blessing, and so suitable to the exigencies of our fallen race, it is despised and rejected by, and its glories hidden from, the greater part of men.

It is much to be lamented, that in this land of light and liberty, where the gospel is held forth in its purity, and where arts and sciences flourish to a degree, not exceeded, if equalled, by any nation, that so few know, even in theory, its grand and sublime truths, and that fewer still know them experimentally, as the power of God to salvation. Of old, the gospel to the pharisaical Jews, was a stumbling block; and to the wise Greeks, foolishness. So it is still, to the Pharisees of every sect, and to most of the learned of every nation; 'But to them that are called, it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.'

The acute astronomer, who measures the distances and magnitudes, and traces the motions of the heavenly bodies; and the sagacious philosopher, who pries with such intensesness into the arcana of nature, for the most part content themselves with their respective discoveries; and contemplate with more pleasure, the position of the planets, the bloom of a plum, or the plumage of a butterfly, than that astonishing work for which the whole frame of nature was formed, and is still upheld and preserved. True it is, the heavens, which declare the glory of God — the firmament that showeth his handy work — and the earth which is filled with his goodness, display a peculiar glory; and therefore merit our particular notice; and ought to be a continual stimulus to praise the mighty maker. But the gospel rises infinitely above the visible creation, in its glories, and in its blessings;

of our world. All the evil in the universe arises from the demerit of the former; and all that is intrinsically good, from the latter. Sin lies at the bottom of all misery, and grace is the source of all the happiness ever experienced by the creatures of God. So that sin or grace affects, more or less, the whole creation. And there is such a concatenation in the progress of both, that to separate them, would be literally turning the world upside-down. Without sin there had been no room for that eminent display of grace, which now shines in so conspicuous a manner in the grand plan of redemption. Sin's being, then, must be supposed in that eternal act of the Father, appointing his dear, and only begotten Son, to take it away by the sacrifice of himself. For had not sin then had a determined being, such a provision had been needless, and therefore could never have been made; for God does nothing at random. If we suppose sin existing, and no act of grace in God towards the guilty sons and daughters of men, what would have been the consequence? and what the difference in the affairs of

and consequently, so much the more demands our affectionate regard; especially, as our eternal happiness or misery, is connected with our reception or rejection of it.

It is foreign to my present purpose, to enter into a particular discussion of this glorious work; but I would recommend to all, seriously and diligently to search the Scriptures, where the truths of the gospel in their various branches, are fully revealed. They are of the last importance to every individual, and the knowledge, the experimental knowledge of them, stands closely connected with our eternal welfare and glory. 'This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' Let me intreat all to whom this may come, not to make light of the gospel; much less to despise and reject it; for ye cannot escape divine wrath if ye neglect so great salvation as it exhibits. May the divine Comforter lead us into a spiritual acquaintance with its sublime truths, and make us partakers of its inestimable blessings.

the world? Destruction, which now marks its footsteps, would then, have swallowed up all. But grace limits, and binds its influences, extent, and consequences; and says, hitherto shall ye go, and no further. So that not an impure thought, word, or act, more or less, can arise among the creatures, than God has actually determined the being and permission of. For if the contrary be supposed, it would entirely subvert, and overturn, the whole plan of infinite wisdom; as such a thought, word, or act, could have no determinate being; and then God could have no knowledge of it, nor its consequences; — nor, could He then guard against its influence; consequently, it could be no part of his plan; while yet both it, and its effects, must intermix and interfere with those that are: which, when we consider what innumerable multitude of events arise in the progress of one single thought, or action, must render the accomplishment of his plan, if He has any, impossible; — and if He has none, wisdom must work without design; which is altogether absurd and contradictory. We therefore infer that every event must be comprised in the grand scheme of things, and be made subservient to the purposes of divine grace. And this will further appear, if we consider,

3. That there is not an impure thought, word, or action, but will ultimately tend to the glory and exaltation of it.

Sin and grace will forever divide the whole world of mankind. Sin will justly consign unknown multitudes to the punishment demerited by their transgressions: Grace will bring all, that are predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, to a participation of that glory to which they were predestinated. Every sinful act of the former, will heighten the grace that distinguishes the latter; for when these consider that they are of the same lump, alike guilty — and justly demerit the same punish-

ment as those; and that there was no difference between them but what flowed from free, sovereign, and discriminating grace; and when they further perceive, that not a sinful thought, word, or action, of which those were the subjects, but they themselves, were, or would have been, the subjects also, had not grace prevented; it cannot but have a natural tendency to raise their never-ceasing songs of gratitude to Him who made them thus to differ. And, with regard to their own personal transgressions, what sinful act of mind or body but will have the same tendency, and impel them to cry, 'To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen.'

From these considerations we may justly conclude, that there is not a sin committed by the elect, or non-elect, but shall ultimately advance the glory of divine grace. And if so, it must have been designed for that end. For it would be absurdity altogether to suppose that God manifests his glory in any shape, in any measure, or by any means, without his determinate will and purpose so to do.

4. The Scriptures are full of prophecies and promises respecting Christ and his Church, of which a great part have been accomplished, and the remainder are daily fulfilling; and as all these are connected and linked together in a chain, or series, of cause and effects, with all other events; it is impossible to separate the latter from the former, without rendering the divine purposes, respecting the grand scheme of grace and salvation, ineffectual and abortive. Consequently, if God has any fixed determinate will, relative to the being of the one, He must also have of the whole.

I might have entered into a more extensive discussion of this part of the subject, but what has been observed in my former letters, renders it unnecessary. I might also have traversed the capacious field of revelation, and selected innumerable passages in support of, and as infallible testimonies for, the important truth before us; but as there are numerous discourses extant, in which the doctrine is professedly treated of from Scripture, and as my principal and avowed intention was to examine the subject from principles of reason, I shall waive the consideration of it from the sacred Oracles; knowing that if the point be proved from the evidence of reason, none will dispute its being a truth of revelation.

I would now conclude, with observing that, I humbly apprehend, it has been proved, beyond all sober contradiction, that Predestination, in its most absolute sense, has the full concurrence of reason, as well as revelation, for its support. Consequently, the doctrine is of more importance than men in general will allow, and ought not to be trifled with. Indeed, the denial of it strikes at the very foundation of the existence of God; nor can his being and attribute be supported, but on the supposition of its truth. Both must stand or fall together. Infinity, which includes every possible excellence, can be no longer ascribed to the Most High; if his will, knowledge, or power, admits of limitation, Omnipotence cannot pervade, or absolute wisdom guide his arm; if anything comes to pass, and He commands it not. Nor can independence, and sovereignty, be his prerogative, if He does not do 'according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.' But Scripture joins with reason, and the nature of things, and fully evinces that God, 'who sits in the heavens, does

whatsoever pleaseth Him.' That 'his counsel *shall stand*, and He *will do all his pleasure.*' That, as He has purposed, so *shall it stand*; and as He has thought, so shall it *come to pass.*' And that, 'of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are *all things*; to whom be glory for ever and ever.'

Will my much esteemed friend, whose opposition to the doctrine of Predestination, laid the foundation of this disquisition, now permit me to intreat Him to weigh, with all impartiality and candor, the arguments here produced—suffer them to rest with due weight on your mind; and, I doubt not, but your judgment will be convinced of their propriety and truth.

That the Divine Spirit may lead you into this, and every other important truth of the everlasting Gospel, is the wish, and sincere prayer of

Your real Friend,

WILLIAM TUCKER.

ANSWER TO
SEVEN QUERIES
ON
PREDESTINATION.
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

1st. Whether the Almighty cannot make a creature who shall be capable of acting independent of any necessitating causes; and, consequently, capable of refraining action; and whether man was thus made?

2d. Whether the Almighty cannot make a creature, whose actions shall be contingent; and yet himself certainly fore-know what the creature's actions will be?

3d. Whether (though we cannot comprehend how this can be,) yet, to take the negative, does not circumscribe that Being who is infinite?

4th. Whether to maintain that God has predestinated, fore-fixed, or appointed all things that shall come to pass, does not make Him the Author of sin; and how this can be reconciled with Jer. 7: 31?

5th. Whether the Predestination spoken of in Scripture, does not solely relate to the happiness of the election of grace?

6th. Whether, if the Almighty has absolutely fixed such a concurrence of causes as necessarily produces whatsoever comes to pass, and sets the whole in motion; it does not totally destroy the ideas of praise and blame?

7th. Whether it is in any way directly dishonorable to the divine perfections, depreciates the glory of the councils of grace respecting the blessed Jesus, and the church of the first-born in Him; or, is likely to have any bad influence on the children of men, either saints or sinners; or, is contrary to Scripture, to conceive of predestination, as revealed to us, solely relating to Christ and his people; without extending it to all things, whatsoever comes to pass?

QUERY I.

Whether the Almighty cannot make a creature who shall be capable of acting independent of any necessitating causes; and consequently, capable of refraining action? and whether Man was thus made?

ANSWER.

It is hard to say, in many cases, what the Almighty can, or cannot do. The Scriptures tell us, that with God all things are possible. Is there anything *too hard* for the Almighty? Certainly not. And yet we are told it is impossible for God to lie; He will not, nor can He, alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth; for He is of one mind,

and none can turn Him; He cannot deny himself. These passages have the appearance of the one contradicting the other; for while it is asserted in the first, that God can do all things, it is as fully affirmed in the second, that there are some things He cannot do. But this seeming contradiction is easily reconciled, if we consider that God can do all things that are consistent with his perfections; or, that would be for his glory to do; but on the other hand, He cannot do anything that is inconsistent with them, or that would be the least dishonorable to Him. Not, but even these may be in his *power*, were they in his *will*; but His wisdom, and holiness, render it impossible for Him to will anything contrary to those perfections. Therefore there are and it is his glory that there are, some things which He cannot do.

Now I apprehend the query ought to be stated thus: '*Is it consistent with the perfection of God and for his glory, to make a creature who shall be capable of refraining action? and was man thus made?*' If necessity is taken in its unlimited sense, and has respect to all the actions of the creature, I answer in the negative; for if the positive be supposed possible, the creature must be supposed wholly independent; and an independent creature is a contradiction in terms; the creature could be no longer such, but a God: for independence is characteristic of Deity, essential to it, and incommunicable; and therefore impossible to a creature. Besides, were it *possible* for God in his *infinite power*, to make a being wholly independent, it never could be his *will*; for, He will not give his glory to another. Therefore, with the strictest propriety, it may be said, He cannot do it.

If by necessity here, be meant, what some call, natural necessity, or such a necessity as impels to action with-

out the consent, or contrary to the will of him that acts, it is evident God can make a creature capable of acting in some respect, independent of such a necessitating cause; for angels and men are so made. And yet with regard to action, simply considered, they can as soon cease to be, as cease to act. It is in the very nature of intelligence to act; and it is impossible for an intelligent creature to cease from action. And men cannot, throughout their whole existence, refrain from action one moment. They may *difersify* their actions, but not *cease to act*. Were they to attempt it, the very attempt would be an act of the mind; they could not, even *try* to cease acting, without a *will* so to do; and the volition must continue as long as the attempt.

If by action, in the query, is only meant the acts of the body, or the exercise of the several members thereof, it is clear, that man can refrain them at pleasure, and God has given him that power and capacity. But, at the same time, the very *refraining* them implies an *act* of the *will*; and consequently, men *do* not, neither can they wholly *refrain action*, when *considered in its whole extent*.

If by necessity, in the query, be meant moral necessity, or that necessity which arises from motives presented to, or which the mind has in view, I think it evident God has not made, neither can He, in so far as we can see, make an intelligent creature capable of acting independent of such a necessitating cause: For what sort of intelligent creature would that be, that should act from no motive to no end? Such a being, if it acted at all, must be impelled thereto, as clouds by the wind. If no motive presented to the mind is the foundation of its acts, something else must be; for as they are effects, they must have a cause; and if the immediate cause be not the will of the agent, he must be com-

pelled and necessitated thereto, by some foreign power; and then, with respect to these acts, he cannot be a moral agent, and in no sense worthy of praise or blame. It is impossible for an intelligent creature, whether man or angel, to act in anything for which he is accountable, but from moral necessity; that is, he must act from some motive to some end. The strongest motive, in the mind's view, will ever determine the acts of the creature; and the acts, if he has power to bring them forth, will ever follow that motive. The strongest motive will as infallibly necessitate to action, as if compelled thereto by irresistible force. But with this difference; in the first, he acts by will and choice, and therefore accountable; in the latter, without consent or choice, and consequently, not accountable, nor worthy of praise or blame. Therefore to suppose a creature capable of acting independent of any necessitating cause, is to suppose him capable of not being an accountable creature; which is too absurd to be admitted. Upon the whole then, I humbly apprehend the first query must be answered in the negative. This would admit of more ample discussion; but, for brevity-sake I leave it, and proceed to

QUERY II.

Whether the Almighty cannot make a creature, whose actions shall be contingent, and yet himself know what that creature's actions shall be?

ANSWER.

This query confutes itself; for if it be meant that the creature's actions may be contingent to God, and yet himself know what that creature's actions shall be; I think it implies a manifest contradiction; for, certain knowledge of

events destroys their contingency to whom they are known. Are day and night, the rising and setting of the sun, the ebbing and flowing of the tide, the eclipses of the two luminaries, and the like, contingent events? Is there any event we know, before its existence, contingent to us? Can anything, Omniscience views, be contingent to Him? Does He certainly know the actions of his creatures, and yet not know whether they will take place or not? Has He, *can* He have a knowledge of events, and yet it be uncertain whether they will exist? The absurdity is so glaring, I wonder at the proposal of the question. But it seems to be given for no other reason, but to make way for the stumbling-block in

QUERY III.

Whether to take the negative does not circumscribe that Being who is infinite?

ANSWER.

I sincerely hope the querist had nothing in view but to have his doubts removed, or truth promoted. If he had, I must say, he has discovered more subtlety, than honesty, more art than sound judgment: for it cannot be circumscribing the Almighty to assert, that God cannot be that which is a self-evident contradiction. He cannot be ignorant, and yet have all knowledge. It is impossible He should know, and not know, at the same time; as must be the case, if the above be allowed. Infinite knowledge cannot be deceived, or be at an uncertainty about any thing; and it is His glory, that He cannot make a creature, whose actions shall be contingent, precarious, or uncertain, in the least degree, to Him. If it were possible, his wisdom would

ever prevent it; but as his wisdom and knowledge are equal to his power, it is impossible it should be. And the contrary supposition, while it seemed to vindicate the infinity of his power, would circumscribe his wisdom and knowledge. And, therefore, both the second and third queries, must be answered in the negative.

QUERY IV.

Whether to maintain that God has predestinated, fore-fixed, or appointed, all things that should come to pass, does not make Him the Author of Sin, and how this can be reconciled with Jer. 7: 31?

ANSWER.

The sovereignty of God so contradicts the pride of fallen men, that they labor with all their power, to reason themselves out of the belief of it. Though, at the same time, were they carefully to examine the working of their own minds, they would find it the continual bent of their hearts to have their own will done, in all things within their view and knowledge. Every man does his will to the extent of his power; and that things are not done that are in his power, is only because they are not in his will. This is a certain truth with respect to every man on the earth. But men are so foully fallen, so desperately wicked, and so exceedingly proud, that they deny that prerogative to God, which they every day assume to themselves. I am firmly persuaded, there is not any truth more demonstrably evident, and consistent, both with revelation and reason, than the doctrine of Predestination, though many brand it with the foulest epithets, and clog it with consequences it knows nothing of. The objection in the query, is one of the false

conclusions which some would foster upon it; but which, as it cannot possibly be true, neither can it be inferred from that principle. The Scriptures expressly and positively affirm, that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; and his perfections render it impossible to be otherwise. Scripture also, is equally clear, that he cannot be the Author of Sin; and his perfections render it equally impossible that He should; for to suppose it, would be making Him worse than all the worst of beings united.

But to come to the point, I would ask, what the querist means by being the Author of Sin? Is it that on supposition of Predestination, God must create men with sinful dispositions, or, that He must be the perpetrator, or actor in sin? Is it that by presenting motives, He instigates, incites, and influences to the commission of it: or that by powerful and irresistible energy, He impels to those acts, which are contrary to his law? These are the only ways, I apprehend, by which any can be the Author of Sin. Now, does the supposition of this doctrine, necessarily imply any of these things? I think none will be so bold as to assert this; and if there is any other way supposed, blame-worthiness cannot come into the account; and then the force of the objection falls at once.

Those who would impute this awful consequence on the decrees of God, seem to entertain the notion, that if God *absolutely* determined events, He must, by *positive exertion* of his power, *produce* them; but this, I apprehend, is the grand mistake from which arises most of the cavils about it. God did not, by *positive* influence, stimulate Satan to rebel, nor Adam to transgress; He only *withheld* that influence which He in no sense was obligated to give or exert, but which was necessary to preserve them from sinning.

I humbly conceive God has two ways whereby He brings his purposes to pass; and they are, by positive, or negative influence; by effectual working, or ceasing to work; by powerful energy, or withdrawal of influence. Every sinful act exists in consequence of the latter, and every other event in consequence of the former. Now, if God can be considered as the Author of Sin, because He would not influence to prevent it, it will follow, that He could not but be the author of it, if it existed at all; and it will follow also, whether Predestination be allowed or not, that He is the Author of every Sin that has been, is, and will be committed to eternity: for it was in his power to prevent them all, but He certainly withheld that power and influence necessary to such an end. But observe, He only withheld that, which He was in no sense bound or obligated to give: and consequently cannot be the least blame-worthy therein.*

‘God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.’ These words evidently point out the true state of the case; which, agreeably to the whole tenor of Scripture, makes God the author of man’s uprightness, and man the author of his own sin. Man, and man only, is chargeable with it, and not God. This I suppose none will deny. Now the question is, did God, or did He not, know, before He created man, that he would sin? I take it for granted that this must be answered in the affirmative; for the negative would destroy his Omniscience; and had He been ignorant thereof, He could not have provided a

* Whether the theory of the author in the foregoing paragraph, and elsewhere, be satisfactory to every reader or not, and though *every* theory attempting to account for the existence of sin, should also fail in like manner: it ought to be considered that the circumstance affects in not the slightest degree the arguments in favor of predestination.

ED.

remedy. Christ could not have been set up from everlasting, as the covenant-head, mediator, and surety of his people; or have engaged to fulfil the law, and to satisfy justice on their behalf, had this been the case. He therefore certainly foreknew it, but if He knew it, He must have determined to permit it; for, had He not, it was easy for the Omnipotent to prevent its existence; therefore as it does exist, and as nothing exists contrary to the will of Him who says, 'I will do all my pleasure,' it certainly was his determination to permit it, and his will, that sin should have being. Yet, neither this his determination to *permit*, nor his withholding that influence which would *prevent* it, either stimulates, excites, influences, or impels, the creature to the commission of it; but the creature does it freely and voluntarily, without the least motive from God, or the least regard to any decree respecting it. And therefore, notwithstanding the fore-fixing and the determining its being and existence, the creature alone is the author of it, and is alone blame-worthy.

It is asked, how this (viz: God's predestinating all events) can be reconciled with Jer. 7: 31. 'And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart;' to the same purport with which is Chap. 19: 5. and 32: 25. The alledged difficulty here is, the latter clause of this verse, is supposed to be inconsistent with God's predestinating, or fore-fixing all events; but if it be, the difficulty lies equally against the fore-knowledge of God: for it expressly affirms, 'it came not into his heart.' If, by not coming into the heart of God, be meant, He was ignorant of their doing it, how can He be infinite in knowledge? *He* cannot be omniscient, whose knowledge at any time, in any respect, admits of increase. But God is omniscient; his

understanding is infinite; and consequently, the text must carry another meaning. I apprehend the true import of the words is easily discerned, if we supply what is evidently implied in them, and read the text thus: 'To burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart *to command them.*' The same supplement added to the 5th. verse of the 19th. chapter, makes it alike easy and plain. And that this is the sense appears obvious from Chap. 32: 35. where it is said, 'neither came it into my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.' It is not said, it did not come into his mind that they *would* do it; but 'that they *should*;' that is, it did not come into his mind that they should do it by his desire or command; no, the Lord expressly forbids it, in Lev. 28: 21. and Deut. 18: 10. Upon the whole then, this passage does not, in the least, stand opposed either to the fore-knowledge of God, or his predestinating or fore-fixing whatsoever shall come to pass.

This would admit of a much larger amplification, but as I intend in some future period, if life be spared, and liberty given, to consider this objection more minutely, I shall now quit it, and beg leave to present the querist with a question or two; the which, if fairly and candidly answered, will, as I humbly believe, do away the objection.

1. Whether God, as an infinite Being, could not from eternity, fix and determine all events that shall exist to eternity, consistently with the glory of all his attributes and moral perfections, and the free volitions of rational creatures? And,

2. Whether the denial of this would not be circumscribing the Almighty; and limiting the Holy One of Israel, and deprive Him of that perfection of wisdom which is essential to his nature?

QUERY V.

Whether the Predestination spoken of in Scripture does not relate solely to the happiness of the election of Grace?

ANSWER.

It is absolutely certain that there are other things which God has fore-fixed, fore-ordained, and determined should come to pass besides those that immediately relate to the happiness of the elect. The happiness of the elect was not, and could not be, the ultimate end God had in view; it was but a mean, or subordinate end to that grand one, his own glory. It is in this, that all the divine purposes and decrees centre; this is the ultimate end of his designs, and the execution of them: and whatever means are subservient to this grand end, were most certainly designed, appointed, and fixed to be such. For as it cannot be supposed that God could propose and determine an end without fixing the means; so He could not make any thing the means to that end, without designing so to do. It is allowed that the happiness of the elect, and the things leading thereto, were fore-ordained and determined; and no reason can be given why one part of the means should not be fixed as well as another. The condemnation and punishment of the wicked, as it will display the righteousness, holiness, and justice of God, and must terminate in his glory; is a mean to that end; and consequently must be designed as such. This appears evident from the express testimony of Scripture; for, 'The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.' Prov. 16: 4.

But, suppose we consider the happiness of the election of grace, as God's ultimate end; and that this, and the means thereto, were the objects of Predestination, or the only things which He fore-fixed and determined should come to pass; I apprehend if we view things in the concrete, or the whole of them in their relation, connection, and dependence one on another, we shall find that there is not a single atom or iota, but has, either remotely or more immediately, some relation to the happiness of the elect; confirming in an unlimited sense what the apostle affirms: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.' Rom. 8: 28. I think there is no great difficulty in proving this to be the case, and then the querist would gain nothing by having the affirmative granted him. But I shall waive this at present, and attempt to prove that God (whether all things influence to the happiness of the elect or not) must have fixed, and determined, whatsoever comes to pass. And,

1st. From Scripture.

The Apostle to the Ephesians, Chap. 1: 11, asserts that the saints were predestinated according to the purpose of Him, 'WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL.' This text is full to the purpose, and is sufficient of itself to prove that God's will, purpose and decrees, are concerned about all things that come to pass: for it is said, He WORKETH ALL THINGS, and that after the COUNSEL of his own will; not by the contrivance, direction or determination of any other; but it is He that determined the end from the beginning, and brings to pass the times before appointed. 'The counsel of the Lord shall stand, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.' Psalm 33: 11. 'For the Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Sure-

ly as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.' Isa. 14: 24. 'His counsel shall stand, and he shall do all his pleasure.' Chap. 46: 10. 'There is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against Him.' Prov. 21: 30. And 'though there be many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.' Prov. 19: 21. 'For He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; none can stay his hand, or say unto Him, What dost thou? He giveth to none an account of his matters; nor hath any known the mind of the Lord, or been his counsellor, nor first given to Him; but of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.'

These, with multitudes of passages in Sacred Writ, assert and evidently prove by fair deduction, that God's will, decree, determination or predestination, has respect to all things whatsoever. And I am of opinion that whoever searches the Scriptures on this head, without any previous bias on his mind, and with a simple, honest desire to frame his sentiments according to them, must, as the necessary result, be convinced of the truth contended for. Especially if,

2dly. The perfections of God are considered: and particularly his omniscience, omnipotence and immutability. For,

1. As the effects of creation, in all respects, were seen and known before they took place, those effects must be consistent with the wisdom of God, and were the determination of his will; or he could not have exerted his power in the creation and preservation of those his creatures, by whom these effects are produced. To say otherwise would be a contradiction, and suppose Him to work without will or design, and to no end. Again,

2. As all things, of what kind and nature soever, that

have, do, or shall exist, were eternally known to God, their existence must be according to his will, or He would have exerted his power to prevent it. To deny this, makes Him impotent and weak, or unwise and mutable. Again,

3. As God is intelligence itself, his will must be concerned, in some respect or other, about all things knowable and possible: that is, He must will or not will all things which He knows possible in his wisdom and power to effect; consequently, whatever He effects, or is effected as the result of creation and his upholding power, must follow from his own purpose and absolute determination. Further,

4. God has a certain and immutable foreknowledge of all things. Now certain and immutable foreknowledge is founded on some certain immutable cause; which can be no other than the divine will: God knows certainly that such things will be, because He has determined in his will they shall be. Consequently, there neither is, nor can be anything existing, but as the effect of his will, purpose and determination. Again,

5. As God is omnipotent, He has power to give being to, or prevent the being of, whatever He pleases; and as the exertion, or non-exertion of his power depends on his will, whatever exists or non-exists, as the effect of his power, or the withholding it, must have being, or not being, only because God so determined. And further,

6. As God is immutable, and his thoughts the same through all generations, his will cannot admit of the least possible change from eternity to eternity; consequently, what He wills now, or shall will in future, He willed, determined, and decreed from eternity. And therefore, as whatever has being must exist, and be upheld therein by the power of God; and as his power cannot be exerted contrary

to his will, He must will and decree whatever has being, and that immutably and eternally. But,

3dly. This truth will also appear from the nature and constitution of things, and their relation to, and dependence on, one another.

It is an axiom, or self-evident truth, that no effect can exist without a cause. And it is self-evident also, that there neither is nor can be, any absolute certainty of the existence of an effect, without the same absolute certainty of the existence of the cause of that effect. It will follow, and is alike self-evident, that it is impossible to determine the existence of an event, with an absolute certainty of its being, without fixing and determining the means, or causes of that event. And, therefore, if God has absolutely and immutably fixed and determined on the existence of any event, He must also have absolutely and immutably fixed and determined, all the means leading thereto, and on which that event depends. But it is evident from Scripture, that God has absolutely fixed and determined innumerable events, and positively asserted they should come to pass; multitudes of which have had their accomplishment, and all (except a few instances where God miraculously interposed,) came to pass according to the course of nature; being effects of prior causes, which naturally led to them, and on which they depended; consequently these causes must have been fixed also, or there could not be any absolute certainty of the existence of them. Now with respect to all the promises and prophecies relating to Christ and his church, all predictions respecting the kingdoms, provinces, cities, towns, families, and individuals of the world; all judgments foretold that should come on the wicked, and their final punishment; are events absolutely fixed and determined; and made known as such in the revelation God has given. If we then consider the in-

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conceivable number of those events, the different times, and various manner of accomplishment; I think it cannot be doubted, but that they stand in connection, and are some way or other dependent on every other event in the world, which are means and causes leading to, and by which all those known fixed events are brought into existence. Consequently every other event must be fixed also. So that (whether we consider all things as relating to the happiness of the elect or not) I think it evidently appears, on the whole, that God must have fore-fixed, fore-ordained, or decreed, whatsoever comes to pass.

QUERY VI.

Whether, if the Almighty has absolutely fixed such a concurrence of causes, as necessarily produce whatever comes to pass, and set the whole in motion, it does not totally destroy the idea of praise or blame?

ANSWER.

Many things that might be said here, are superseded by what has been observed on the preceding queries; and which I need not repeat: therefore I shall confine myself to a few things that appear necessary, to take off the seeming difficulty with which this query may be thought to be clogged.

The decrees of God, or his absolutely fixing such a concurrence of causes as necessarily produces whatsoever comes to pass, cannot destroy the idea of praise or blame; because this principle does not influence the will in its choice; nor is it any motive to our actions. The will suffers no constraint, but enjoys the most perfect liberty in its volitions; nor is the soul conscious in the least, of being influenced or impelled by this principle, to any of its acts; nor indeed is it: but it feels

all the liberty and freedom it can possibly desire. And consequently, cannot be freed from praise or blame, on the supposition of the truth contended for.

It is the innate and natural idea of all mankind, and the language of common sense in all nations, and all ages of the world, that praise or blame-worthiness is in proportion to the soul's inclination to good or evil: it is not the actions of the body, simply considered, which are supposed to merit either; but their being done by choice and design: it is as the will is in any action, that constitutes that action evil or good. And let our belief be ever so firm, with respect to God's sovereign ordination of all events, it alters not the case; but this sense, idea, or consciousness remains the same. It never entered into the heart of the believing Ephesians to suppose they were freed from praise or blame, because God 'worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.' Nor had the three thousand that were converted under Peter's sermon, the most distant notion that Christ's 'being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,' freed them in the least from blame in crucifying the Lord of life and glory: No; on the contrary, they were pricked to the heart, and under a sense of their guilt, cried out, 'men and brethren, what shall we do?' And I appeal to all those who believe Predestination in the most extensive view of it, whether it has the least tendency to take from them a sense of their guilt; or whether they have the most distant idea of its leading them to suppose that they are thereby, or on that account, free from blame? No, I am fully persuaded that those have the quickest sense of sin, guilt, and demerit, who most firmly believe the doctrine. And it is a fact, that so far is it from destroying the notion of praise or blame, that the firm belief of it, fixes the idea more strongly. And I am bold to affirm, that no man, who

denies or disbelieves it, has, or can have, such an enlarged, strong, and quick sense of sin and its demerit, as those who are most firmly persuaded of its truth; therefore experience shows that the objection has no foundation in fact.

I would ask, what is it that constitutes demerit? Is it not a want of conformity to a given law, under which we are, and which of right we are bound to obey? Our ideas of praise and blame arise wholly from conformity, or want of conformity to this law: and nothing but a supposition that we are under no law, can destroy those ideas: for where there is no law, there is no transgression, or obedience. Therefore, unless it can be proved, that God, by his secret purpose and determination, makes void his own law, the ideas of praise and blame will ever remain.

The will of God, or his secret purpose concerning all things, is his rule of action with respect to them. His revealed will, or that law which He has given to us, is our rule; this alone is binding on us, and we have nothing to do with his secret will, as any rule for us to walk by. To the law and to the testimony we should look, and nowhere else. This is binding on our consciences, and consequently as long as we have this rule, the idea of praise and blame cannot be destroyed.

Lastly, this is a stale objection, founded on the supposition that necessity is inconsistent with praise or blame, but which has been answered again and again; therefore I shall only observe, that if praise or blame be inconsistent with necessity, it is impossible there can be either in all the creation of God; for there cannot be an act of any creature, but arises from some kind of necessity. Every event (and so every act of every creature both of mind and body) is an effect of some prior cause; the cause existing, the effect necessarily follows. And it is evident to a demonstration, that

every cause makes its effect as absolutely necessary, as the sovereign will and determination can do. Consequently, as this objection lies as full against events being the effects of causes, there is no just foundation for bringing it against God's decrees. Upon the whole, then, I think it evidently appears, that God's fixing such a concurrence of causes as necessarily produce whatsoever comes to pass, does not destroy the idea of praise or blame.

QUERY VII.

Whether it be any way dishonorable to the divine perfections, derogatory to the glory of the counsels of grace, respecting the blessed Jesus, and the church of the first-born in Him, or is likely to have any bad influence on the children of the men, either as saints or sinners, or is contrary to Scripture, to conceive of Predestination as revealed to us, solely relating to Christ and his Church; without extending it to all things whatsoever comes to pass?

ANSWER.

As I am firmly persuaded, with the Apostle, that all things (without any limitation whatever) 'work together for good to them that love God;' extending Predestination to the counsels of grace, respecting the blessed Jesus, and the first-born in Him, is with me, extending it to all things whatever that come to pass. If any thing can be pointed out that shall not, some way or other, terminate in the glory of Christ, as the mediator of the everlasting covenant, and the happiness of the elect, I will give up the point. But what things are those that can be supposed will not eventually terminate here? Is it sin in any shape, or in any degree, or in any of its awful consequences? Certainly not.

And if so, what is there, or what can there be, that God does not, and will not cause to work together for these ends? If sin, which is so hateful to God, and which, in its own nature, tends to his dishonor, and the destruction of his creatures, is made to work for those ends; surely there is nothing but shall so work: and consequently, the query is a mere begging the question; for if the Lord has made all things for himself, and all things work together for the good of them that love Him, the querist has what he pleads for, and at the same time, predestination extends to all things whatsoever which come to pass.

I might enlarge, but what has been said on the former queries, I apprehend, renders it unnecessary; and therefore would but just observe, that there seems to be a great deal of artifice in the construction of these queries; and I am fearful the author, though he seems to take it for granted, that predestination has relation to Christ and his church; yet, would, if what he pleads for, or seems to dispute, were allowed him, question next whether there is such a thing as predestination at all: for certainly, if it can be supposed no way dishonorable to God, for Him to have no concern in a great part of the affairs of the kingdom of his providence, but to leave them to that supposed something, but real nonentity, CHANCE; it cannot be dishonorable to leave more, yea all things to the direction of this non-existing no cause, nothing. But far from us be such a thought. Surely nothing can be more dishonorable to the Filler of immensity, and Creator and Supporter of the universe! Does any thing come to pass, and He commands it not? Has He not fixed the bounds, and limited events, to the numbering of hairs, and the falling of sparrows? If He has not, where is his wisdom, where is his power? How is He sure his designs shall be executed, and his promises fulfilled, either to Christ, or his

Church? How can the saints be safe, if their enemies are not bound and limited; or how can He know how many sons and daughters shall be brought to glory? How uncomfortable to a child of God, under the exercises of afflictions and temptations from his enemies, the world, flesh, and Satan, to suppose God has not determined their weight and measure? How must it confirm the wicked in their wickedness, to suppose that God has not fixed, or determined the things they are concerned with, and do? And how contrary to Scripture, which affirms God's thoughts are the same through all generations; and that He does his pleasure in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?

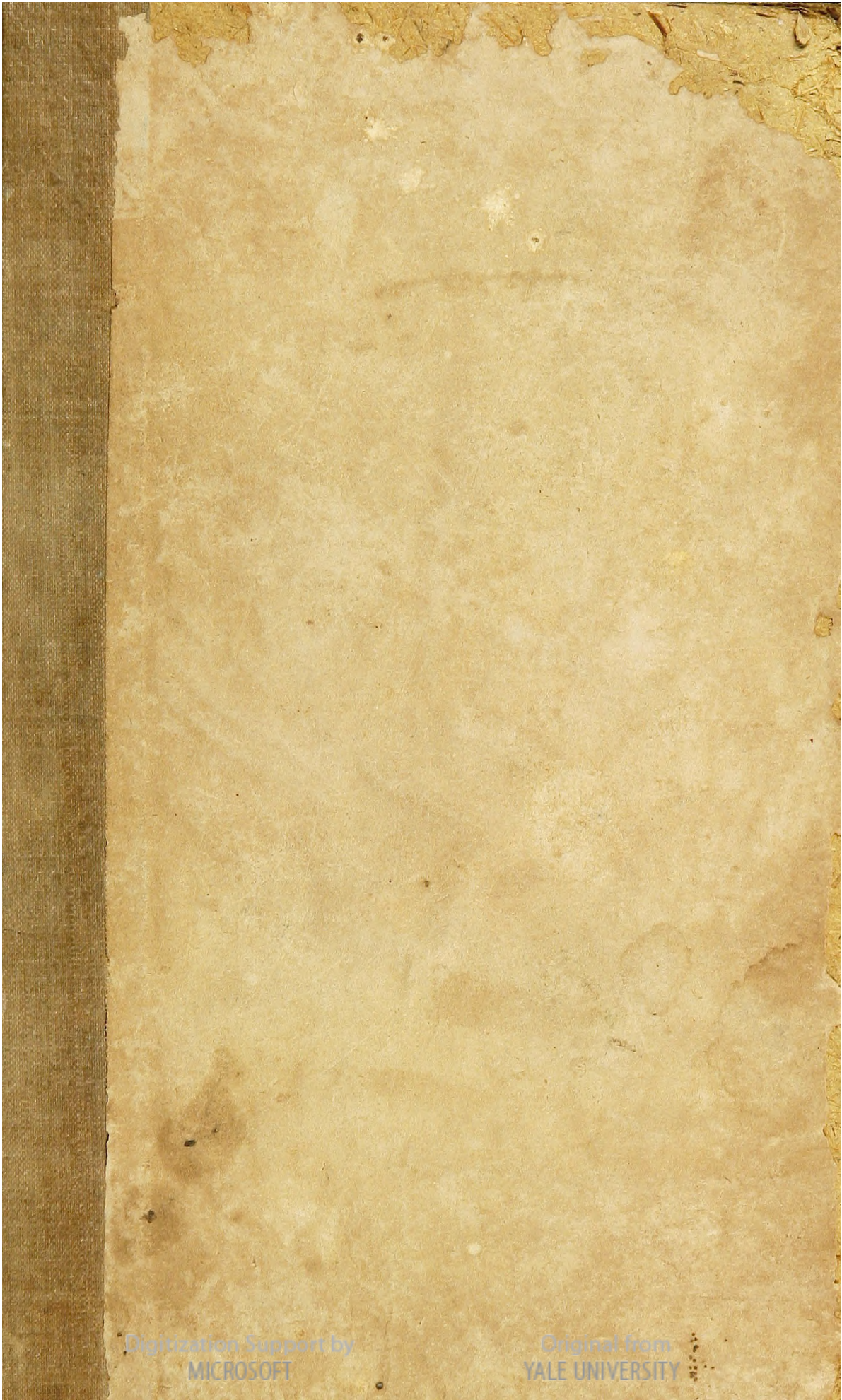
Methinks there is something so egregiously absurd in the supposition, that it makes me fear there is more at the bottom beside a desire for the promotion and furtherance of truth: If so, may the Lord convince the author, and lead him by his Spirit into all truth; and then he will see and rejoice, that of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen.



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