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SPIRITUAL RENOVATION

CONNECTED WITH

THE USE OF MEANS.

A SERMON

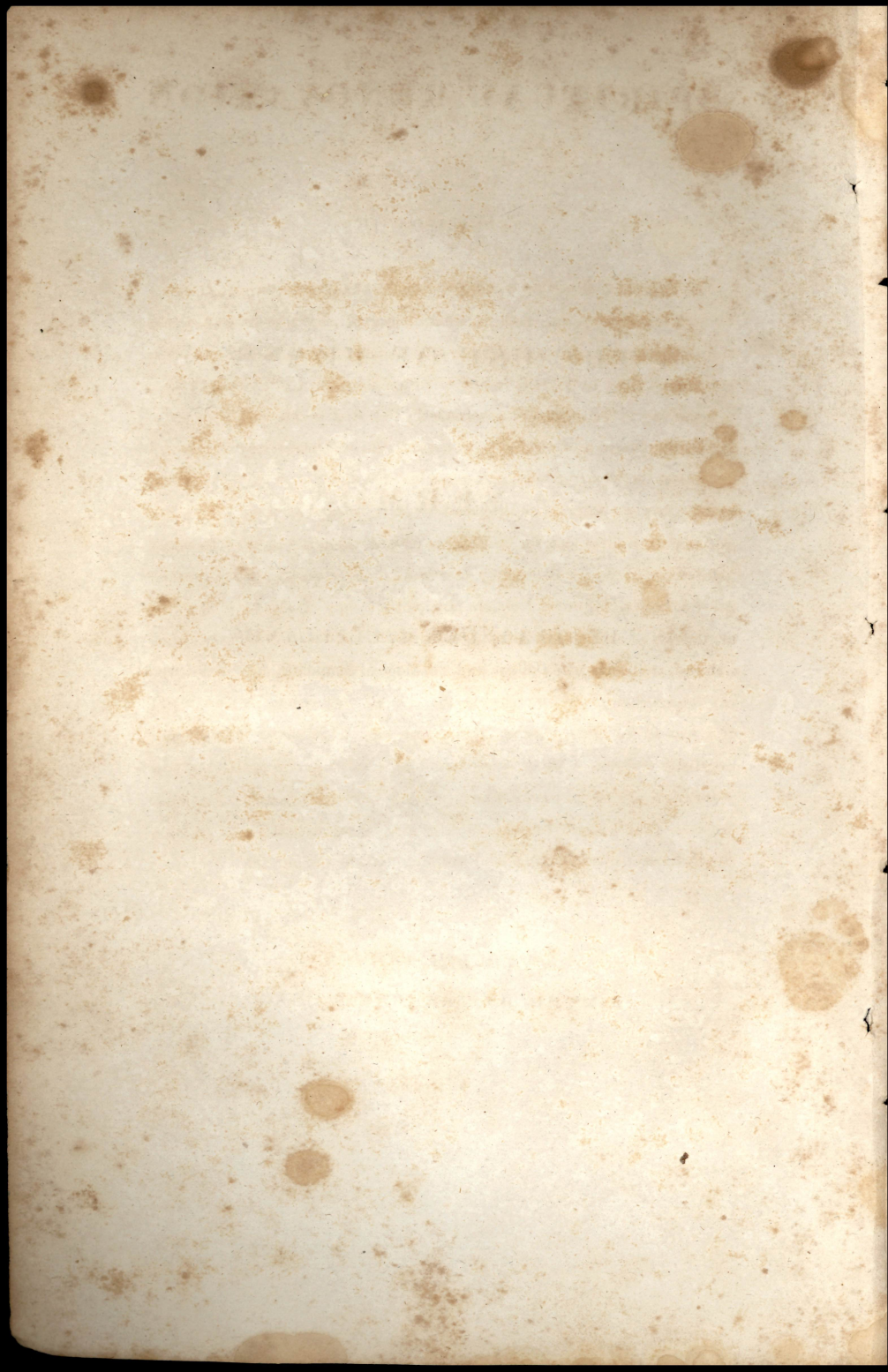
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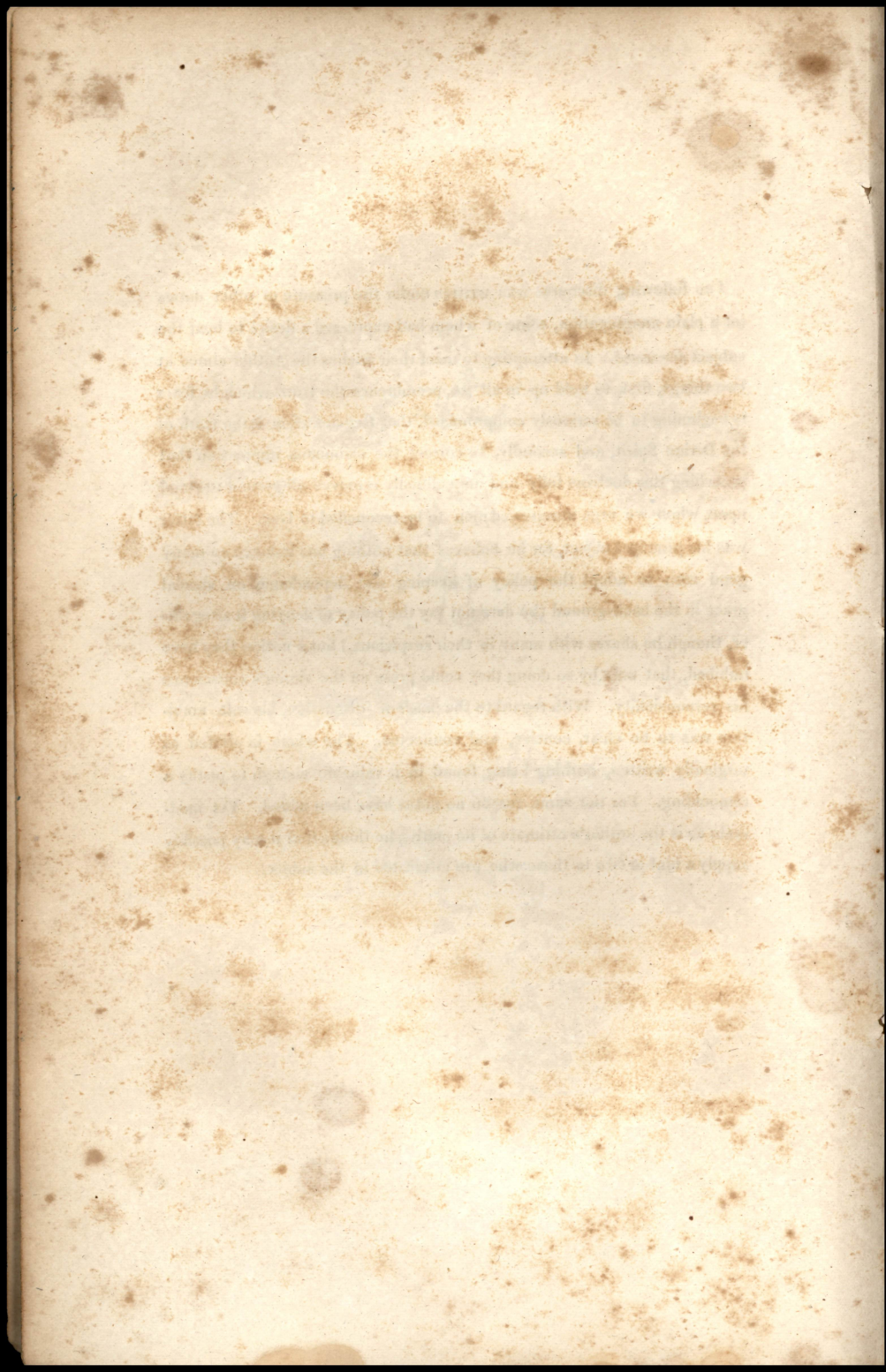


1834.



The following discourse was written under the pressure of other duties for a plain congregation, some of whom had expressed a desire to hear the subject discussed. In attempting to meet their wishes the Author aimed at two things, first, to hold up in all its prominence the truth which he fears is beginning to be seriously compromised, that Regeneration is the work of the Divine Spirit, and secondly, to correct the erroneous impression that preaching this doctrine fully and unqualifiedly removes all ground to stand upon, when we urge unrenewed men to be reconciled to God. The latter was his principal object, for he believes that nothing has induced so many good men to adopt the policy of keeping our dependence on special grace in the back-ground (he dare not say the policy of denying it altogether, though he shares with many in their suspicions,) but a notion they have imbibed, that only by so doing they could press on the sinner's conscience his responsibility. With regard to the *mode* of discussion, his sole ambition was to be clear, concise, and connected. The whole is printed as originally written, nothing being found in it valuable enough to justify a remoulding. For the same reason no notes have been added. Yet moderate as is the author's estimate of its merits, he thinks that it may possibly supply a hint or two to those who are interested in the subject.

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S E R M O N .

PART I.

LUKE 11, 9. *And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ;
Seek, and ye shall find ; Knock, and it shall be opened to you.*

These words form part of an address of Jesus Christ to a promiscuous multitude collected to hear his instructions and witness his wonderful works. It had been prophesied concerning him of old that "grace should be poured into his lips," and never was the pledge more fully redeemed than when he gave utterance to this cheering sentiment. It assures us that the Great God who loves every thing that he has formed, will refuse not the richest of his blessings to the meanest suppliant, but will be the generous rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The point to which it naturally invites our attention is *the duty of unregenerate sinners in relation to the things of their everlasting peace.*

In bringing this subject forward, I shall attempt no flourishes on its magnitude and importance. Many of my hearers have had too many painful and anxious thoughts respecting it, to need being reminded that I am entering on one of the most momentous and at the same time most difficult subjects in religion.—God grant that I may succeed in pressing on the consciences of some of you with a light and evidence never seen before, the unutterably solemn truth contained in the text, that your destiny is in your own hands, and that if found at the day of account strangers to the salvation of the gospel, on your own heads will be your crime and condemnation. To simplify as much as possible the discussion we shall give it the form of an answer to the two following questions.

I. Can there be any lawful exercises of unregenerate men on unregenerate principles—in relation to religion?

II. Do they secure, or give any encouragement to expect the Divine Blessing?

I. Can there be any lawful exercises of unregenerate men—in other words can and ought their respect for divine institutions, their pursuit of happiness, their investigations of truth, their convictions, their prayers, receive our approbation, though we are perfectly aware that all proceed from mere natural excitement, having no connection with a new heart?

To some of my audience the affirmative may appear so exceedingly plain and undeniable that it will surprise them to hear the question proposed. Such surprise will probably be far from lessened when they are told that there is not a point in Theology (even the Terrible Decree scarcely excepted) which is more a subject of controversial speculation, and that the negative is actually adopted by many persons of intelligence.—Though in my judgment it would be very easy to shew that this opinion, pious as are undoubtedly the intentions of its advocates, is pregnant with strange and destructive consequences, yet I will not allow myself at present to enter the stormy region of debate. It will be sufficient to offer a statement in favor of the affirmative which I hope will recommend itself to unprejudiced minds, and relieve the question concerning the doings of the unregenerate from many of its entanglements.

When we take a careful survey of the human mind, we must be forcibly struck with the great multitude and variety of springs by which it is moved. Each seems distinct from the other, each possesses its own independant energy as a principle of action, while all contribute to the happiness of the being whose character they form. The fashion which a long time prevailed of resolving them by a sort of intellectual chemistry into one uncompound element, has nearly gone by. Modern Philosophy, sick of vain endeavors to open all locks with one key, and to make that simple which God made complicated, has at last struck hands with *common sense*, acknowledging that man is a bundle of sus-

ceptibilities and impulses which by no process can be reduced to unity. Such for example is the *love of self*, strangely confounded by some with *selfishness*; Such are *benevolence, justice, attachment to kindred, love of truth, social sympathy*. What can be more evident than that all these are perfectly distinct from each other? To resolve them by metaphysical subtilty into the first, viz. *self-love* is no less absurd than pronouncing them to be modifications of the second or third. It is absurd, because entirely unequal to solve the facts of the case. I love an object and if asked the reason can only reply "because I love it," in other words because it is directly adapted to some part of my physical or moral constitution.

All of these impulses however, though natural—are not essential to man, *i. e.* he may exist without them. Thus by a desperately profligate course of life he may so completely dispossess himself of benevolence and the social principle, that the extremest misery of others shall be a source of amusement, or at least be viewed with frigid indifference, and facts would not be wanting to sustain me if I asserted that even the principle of self-love itself has been sometimes almost completely obliterated. Assuming now that human nature is compounded in the manner described, of various susceptibilities and propensities each demanding its own appropriate gratification,—I proceed to observe that the due exercise of them all in their proper proportions and order, constitutes the perfection of our moral being. When the private affections are in their place, the social in theirs, the religious also in theirs, then man is that noble creature at whose formation the "morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." In consequence however of the apostacy a mournful revolution took place; for in departing from the author of his being he lost the higher and nobler sensibilities of his bosom. That holy class of affections which could only be gratified by holding communion with the Father of Spirits, became extinct, and in consequence he found his meat and drink in satisfying more ignoble cravings.

This my brethren is what I call natural depravity. It is not the infusion of some mysterious occult principle of positive hostility to Moral Rectitude, but simply the absence of that aptitude and disposition to become united with the *great first fair and first good*, which was originally laid in man's constitution by the author of nature, and the exercise of which is essential to his perfection. It is true the Holy Scriptures represent the carnal mind as "*enmity against God:*" but then let it be considered that want of love, where love is due—may properly come under that denomination. We cannot help thinking therefore that the views entertained by many on the subject of unregeneracy are entirely unauthorized. They seem to imagine that what the scriptures call "*spiritual death*" is a complete prostration of every thing valuable and praiseworthy in human nature,—that a certain substantial dæmon whom they name *selfishness* has usurped the throne, the first act of whose domination is as in Eastern despotisms to cut the throats of all who previously lived in the palace, and the establishment of new servants from the highest to the lowest. But why is it not enough to say, that in consequence of our progenitors' apostacy—man has lost those *habits of holiness* which disposed him to know and enjoy his God? Why necessary to deny him a little miserable pittance of his former riches? The notion to which we allude, is directly refuted by revelation and facts.

1st. The Bible is explicitly in favor of the doctrine that unregenerate man is not entirely divested of really valuable and praiseworthy qualities. Examining its page, we always find it representing the corruption introduced by sin to respect *God as the object*, thus clearly intimating that the other instincts and propensions of his nature are able to perform their office with propriety. Hence the many encomiums on men confessedly unregenerate, hence the certain kind of approbation with which their best actions are rewarded. Ahab humbled himself in dust and ashes, and God said to Elijah "*seest thou how Ahab hum-*

bleth himself? I will not bring my wrath upon his house in *his* days." Now certainly none will alledge that Ahab's repentance proceeded from renewed principles: Yet it was so esteemed by God, as to bring down the most desirable of temporal blessings. In like manner the idolatrous Jehoahaz prayed unto the Lord and the Lord sent a deliverer—though "Jehoahaz turned not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam."

Let it not be said that these testimonies of approbation relate only to the outward conduct. This only increases the difficulty. Will the Great Being approve mere external conformity to the precepts of his law? Then the Searcher of hearts must be the friend and rewarder of hypocrisy; and what becomes of those tremendous threatnings denounced on his ancient people, because "they approached him with their lips, while their hearts were far from him?" Plainly therefore these historical facts bear testimony to certain internal virtues and good dispositions in the persons spoken of. Nor is it difficult to point them out. Both Ahab and Jehoahaz entertained a becoming sense of the divine power and justice,—they trembled at the thought of suffering the consequences of their crimes,—above ~~of~~ all they seem to have been actuated by an ardent patriotism and love of country which induced them to humble themselves before God for its preservation. Now these sensibilities were *his own planting* in their bosoms; and as the *God of Nature* he could not but look with a degree of complacency on the work of his own hands.

I remark secondly, that the notion which we are opposing seems to be contradicted by many facts. We cannot help sometimes thinking, that the doctrine of Natural Depravity may thank the perverse interpretation it receives from professed friends, for much of the odium it encounters. There are men who cannot be brought to believe that the human heart is that sink of vile-ness and abomination, that hell in miniature which some represent it to be,—and certainly as far as the question of the *entire* extinction of praiseworthy quality is concerned, it would be easier

to contradict than refute them. They call upon us for example to look back through the vista of ages, and fix our eyes on a young and lovely female—on her knees before a wretch so lost to hope, so disfigured by affliction's iron hand, that we scarce can trace on his countenance the lineaments of man. They tell us "yonder is a woman who regularly leaves the abodes of day to share with an aged parent the horrors of his dungeon: But mark her occupation." *Is it so indeed?* Has she become a *mother* to the author of her being? Our sight does not deceive us. The father is drinking in the stream of life from the bosom of his child: condemned to the most horrible of deaths,—death by famine, he is preserved by the kind deceit of this angel of peace, who gaining admittance under pretence of soothing his dying hours, robs her infant of its appropriate aliment, that she may consecrate it to him whose tender offices were the guard and joy of her early years.

Changing the scene; they ask us to mark that warrior spurring his gallant steed on the spears of a thousand enemies, seeking death, nor seeking it in vain. He falls, though not till he has made himself a bed of honor from the carcases of slaughtered foes. He is the commander of yonder host. His forces scattered and flying like sheep upon the mountains, he sees no hope for the preservation of his country unless they are furnished with some splendid and unheard of excitement. He determines for this purpose to sacrifice himself: It is done! The God of nature smiles on the sacrifice—and *the Republic is saved!* They then appeal to what every day passes before our eyes, and ask if it be possible to deny the existence of noble qualities in the human breast. It will not be entirely safe for us to answer that all the nobleness is in the mere external act. They will call us libellers to our face,—they will scornfully tell us that we do not believe the assertion ourselves,—they will appeal to every honest feeling in our bosoms,—they will tell us that for their part when they read the story of a Gustavus or a Tell, the

throbbings of their heart shall not be checked by the malignant and brutal asseveration that these heroic spirits acted from no other principle but cold and calculating selfishness. Verily my brethren we must acknowledge that there is a little truth in these representations. To deny that there survive in the unregenerate mind some good and praiseworthy dispositions—is to give the lie to every hours observation and to the finest sensibilities of our own hearts.

But let me not be misunderstood; let me not be charged with asserting that there is any thing in human nature deserving the name of *holiness*. We recognise the old distinction between holiness and virtue as both true and important. The former is love to God—the want of which nothing can compensate; the latter is the exercise of other praiseworthy affections which it is practicable for every man to exercise, and in the exercise of which we fulfil *one*, though not the *great* purpose of our being.

Perhaps the considerations advanced will be allowed to establish the *natural harmlessness* of such emotions: But it may still be asked whether they merit any higher praise than hunger, thirst, love of exercise, desire of rest and other animal appetites. Are they not even in their highest manifestations, utterly destitute of moral character? I know my brethren this has been said—and that he who would assert the contrary, may congratulate himself if he is not misconstrued, and branded with sundry inconvenient names; but in the face of such dangers, I will venture to maintain that the doctrine is a palpable absurdity. Our argument is short and decisive. We prove that certain developements of human feeling are morally *right*, *laudable* and worthy of *approbation*, by precisely the same evidence which proves that the idea of *right itself* is just and well founded. How do I obtain the primary notion of an eternal distinction in the nature of things between human actions? Surely in no other way, than by an intuitive perception of the distinction when they are subjected to my examination—one

class calling instantly up the sentiment of approval, the other that of dislike and condemnation. I do not reason the matter, and bring out my conclusion from a long chain of premises,—but at once see and feel that certain voluntary exercises of free agent, possess the attributes of blame or praiseworthiness, just as I see that every material object has length, breadth and thickness. Now this very same intuition which teaches me the general principle—teaches me also infallibly the application of it; and pronounces with an authority I cannot resist, that there is more in certain actings of human affection than mere natural *harmlessness*. There can be no mistake here. Let the unsophisticated feelings of our hearts decide the question—whether in exercising gratitude to a benefactor,—in stretching out the warm hand of charity to a fellow-creature whom affliction has laid low—in stepping forward to the defence of injured innocence, in sacrificing brilliant prospects of safe acquisition to an honest respect for the rights of others, we do not experience the delightful emotion of conscious rectitude. It differs indeed from the heavenly satisfaction of a “conscience at peace with God” in degree; and the difference is so great that I do not wonder at the unwillingness of those who have tasted the latter to acknowledge any resemblance. The resemblance however, exists, and the moral sentiment connected with every exercise of virtuous sensibility may claim affinity with the pure joys of the upper temple. Equally striking is the homage we pay to it in others. We bow before the distinguished benefactor of his country, or the venerable sage who has adorned a long private life with beneficence—as before superior beings, and praise our merciful Creator that the blight of the curse has spared so much that is valuable in our apostate nature. Choose the moment of being engaged in such contemplations my brethren, when you bring the question to an issue, whether unbiassed conscience refuses to human virtue every other merit but that of not being *positively sinful!*

After all however it is to be strenuously contended that even the best actions of the unregenerate are accompanied with sin. But if the view which we have taken be correct, the sin in such cases is of a peculiar kind, and exceedingly different from what is generally meant by the phrase *positive wickedness*: It is in a word, *sin of defect*. By refusing to exercise the religious affection,—“loving God with all his heart and soul and strength and mind,” he forfeits every claim to the divine favor and the rewards of holiness. He is a sinner in all that he does because in all that he does he “comes short of the glory of God”. But must we therefore conclude that no legitimacy can be attached to the exercise of those innocent principles that have survived the wreck of the apostacy? Because he fails in one, is it crime to exercise any? This would be strangely unreasonable; for it is evident that the disobedience to the law of his being, consists not in *exercising* them, but in neglecting to *add the exercise of another*. Let me illustrate this by a familiar example. A child is commanded to go to school, and two different principles of action are addressed. The first and noblest is the desire of excellence: he is told that by study only can he make those attainments which will qualify him to act well his part in life. The other is, fear of chastisement. Such however I suppose to be his *forwardness*—that the former consideration produces no effect upon him. Still *he goes*, from respect to the parental threatening. Now the point is, does the child act right? We all answer, unquestionably; because though uninfluenced by the more important motive, that under which he acted was really presented, and in itself a good one. This is exactly parallel to the case under consideration. It is true that God requires us to act in all circumstances from regard to his glory; But he has implanted other principles of action also, which even in the absence of the higher just mentioned, can give legitimacy to our doings, though they do not take away their essential defect.

Here then my brethren is the foundation on which I build the important doctrine of the lawfulness of an unregenerate

man's efforts while in an unregenerate state to secure his salvation, by improving the means put into his hands. From the view taken of Human Nature, there appear to be planted in it by the Benevolent Creator various impulses and susceptibilities. The exercise of these cannot be sinful in itself, for they are the work of him who looked on all that he had made and declared it "very good;" the sin therefore in such exercises—is that of *defect not positive wickedness*.

The question now remains, whether the principles advanced, can and ought to be applied to the concern of man's salvation. We answer this without hesitation in the affirmative. For why may they not? Why not from the same praiseworthy principles to which we trace industry, temperance, parental attachment, friendship, patriotism and sympathy, attend the sanctuary and turn over the sacred page? If from a motive of self-preservation I may lawfully endeavor to escape a burning mansion or raging flood, why may I not under the pressure of the same motive and with the same lawfulness—endeavor to flee from the wrath to come? We readily grant that cases may be conceived of a sinner attending the ordinances of salvation from motives *positively* wicked and provoking to God. It is so with the profane infidel who reads his Bible only that he may find new occasion to blaspheme; so with the unprincipled politician who does external honor to the house of God only to acquire a religious reputation; it is so alas with too many others, who with a "lie in their right hand" approach the altar of the Most High. But who does not perceive an essential difference between such cases, and that of a man who though unchanged in heart is animated by a profound respect for religion and its institutions—and cultivates an acquaintance with heavenly truth, from a desire (grant it to be merely natural) to deliver himself from impending wrath? Who sees not the distinction to be as important as that between the conduct of a man who gives a dollar to a destitute widow from a natural impulse of compassion, and of

him who gives a thousand pounds in furtherance of some infamous design? This explains the meaning of such language as the following: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord;" "God heareth not sinners;" The ploughing of the wicked is sin." The character there described is not simply and absolutely *unregenerate*, but *wicked*—a term which I could easily prove in a great majority of instances, points out gross and abominable evil doers, who have not only extinguished conscience but the natural sensibilities of the heart.

The sum of the whole matter is, that no unregenerate man has a right to relax one moment his diligence in seeking the blessings of salvation, under the pretext that in his present state his best actions his most honest efforts are an offence to the Majesty of Heaven. How much is it to be regretted that this plain, scriptural, and most solemn truth, should be so studiously kept in the background by some, because they cannot reconcile it with their Metaphysical theory of the Mind! It is to be feared—that abstract speculation has injured our Christianity quite as much as in times past it injured our Philosophy. We make our system, and then take the trouble of investigating facts, but generally too late to correct our pre-judgments. In this way only can we account for the earnestness with which many pious and enlightened men contend for the notion—that no unrenewed person can perform laudable actions, and that his most persevering efforts to secure his salvation deserve no other name than that of *splendid crime*.

It will be useful to take notice before we close, of two objections which may be urged against our doctrine.

1st, We may be told that we deny the total corruption of human nature. In reply it need only be observed, that if by the phrase "Total Corruption" is meant that there is nothing in human nature but what is vile and loathsome, that utter perversion has seized on all its powers and affections, no such doctrine is contained in the sacred scriptures. Is it really come

to this,—that in order to maintain the corruption of man, I must deny him the power of seeing with his eyes, hearing with his ears, and speaking with his tongue? Few we suppose would carry the matter so far. But if there be no positive depravity here,—if the word *total* is to be so qualified as to exclude the consideration of our corporeal faculties—why may we not assume that something valuable will be also found remaining in the nobler part, the soul? That man is totally corrupt—we contend for as earnestly as those who think they differ from us: we believe it to be a fundamental doctrine of the gospel; but then we claim the privilege of understanding it and endeavouring to make it intelligible to others. Man is *corrupt*,—because though possessing many noble features of character he comes into the world destitute of the most noble and excellent of all,—love to the being who made him. “God is not in all his thoughts.” He is *totally* corrupt; as this essential defect accompanies all his actions, rendering his best services light and empty in the eye of infinite purity. Whatever he does is sinful—because when weighed in the balance it is found wanting. Now cannot this plain and reasonable doctrine be maintained without outraging common sense as well as scripture by fastening upon it the dogma we oppose? Must we make man a devil, in order to hold that he is a sinner? No wonder such difficulty is found in persuading men to believe in original corruption when it is linked with such astounding absurdity; nor is it surprising that many enlightened persons accustomed to view the truth and the error in constant combination, should reject the whole as an old wife’s fable.

It is objected secondly, that the view which we have taken is calculated to have a pernicious influence on the minds of enquiring sinners, by cherishing in them flattering ideas of their own worth—inducing a hope that their condition is not so very deplorable—and thereby blinding them to the necessity of a change of heart. All these consequences we deny. There is

nothing in any part of the scheme which we have submitted, tending to lull the sinner into a false security. We tell him indeed that he retains many innocent and amiable qualities; which we urge him to cultivate. But we at the same time remind him of something which is *entirely wanting*,—and declare that if it be not obtained, *he must perish*. He may not be far from the kingdom of heaven,—but he is not *in it*; and we warn him that his destruction is equally certain, whether he perishes at an immeasurable distance from it or at the gate. Is this a statement calculated to lull him asleep:—Is this healing the wound of the daughter of Zion slightly, (and crying “peace” when there is no peace? Let me cite the great example of the son of God, who knew the nature of his own gospel, and how to preach it, at least as well as the most orthodox of his successors. A young man appears before him possessed of many amiable qualities, though evidently a stranger to true religion. “Jesus looked on him and *loved him*.” He does not break forth into sweeping and furious accusation; he does not give the lie to the interesting youth, when he declared that with all his diligence, and to the full extent of his knowledge he had kept the law: On the contrary, he allows him full credit for his excellent deportment, expresses probably his affection by a look of unusual tenderness,—and then utters the awful truth, “*yet one thing thou lackest*.” In this as in all other things he has left us an example; and it is not to be doubted that if the example were more carefully copied,—if the christian minister instead of dealing in vague unqualified vituperation, made every reasonable concession which the sinner could demand, a way would be opened to the unsanctified heart which is now closed up by a wall of adamant.

We have extended our remarks on the 1st question proposed to a considerable length, in order to divest the subject of many difficulties with which it is encumbered, and that we might have a solid foundation for our answer to the 2d enquiry, whether

“any doings of the unregenerate will receive the divine blessing. The foundation I trust *has been laid.* We have proved that he has a *right to seek*; we shall come to you this afternoon, and shew that he will not seek in vain.

We conclude at present with addressing a class of hearers, whom we have always considered as on some accounts the most interesting in our religious assemblies,—those who distinguish themselves for their high and elevated morality, and yet give us no reason to believe, that they have experienced the great change which is essential to a well founded gospel hope. My dear friends, the sentiments which I have been expressing throughout my discourse and which are the sentiments of my heart, give a sufficient pledge that I am not going to employ the language of abuse. I have no intention to charge you with being hypocrites. I believe you are not, nor shall I contend that your amiable qualities are nothing more than refined modifications of sin and selfishness. Press on my brother in your virtuous career, continue to adorn your station by firm unbending integrity,—clothe the naked,—feed the hungry,—wipe the tear from the cheek of the mourner, and enjoy the delightful luxury of contemplating the happiness your benevolence has caused. In all this you do well and prove that you are a man,—that exalted being whom God fashioned in his own likeness, and who though fallen retains a portion of his image still. But suffer a word of admonition from one perfectly disposed to render justice to your excellencies. Is there not one thing which you lack—and that more important than all the rest? Have you given to God your heart? Do you love him supremely—and is your habitual language “Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” Alas, do you not feel that whatever credit we may give you for a thousand good qualities, you are awfully defective here? Does not conscience tell you in a voice of thunder that the curse of ingratitude and rebellion is upon you; that while you are honestly discharging your duties to your fellow worms,

you are robbing him to whom you owe every thing you have, and hope for, of his due? *Here* is your sin. You do the less, but neglect the *greater*. You are honest, you are generous, you are grateful, you are all that can be wished in your social relations—but “of the rock that begat you, you are unmindful.” Dare not I beseech you to live any longer in this condition. God is willing to be found, and is only waiting to be sought. As he has given you faculties which it is lawful for you to exercise, he will surely bless them in the hallowed employment of seeking his love and favor; but on the other hand, remember that “the field which beareth thorns and briars is rejected and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.”

PART II.

LUKE 11, 9. *And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ;
Seek, and ye shall find ; Knock, and it shall be opened to you.*

Having discussed the lawfulness of an unregenerate man's exercises in religion, we proceed to the 2d question proposed,—that of *profit*. There is no need of our entreating your candid and prayerful attention. You are reasonable men and possess the feelings of men, one and the most powerful of which, is the desire of self-preservation. You cannot therefore but treat with favor every attempt to explain your duty, and remove stumbling blocks out the way. I am aware that you have some reason to complain of the manner in which our subject is often presented. You have been driven into despair, by sweeping declamations on your inability even to lift a finger for your salvation. Not a solitary pin has been left to hang a hope upon. You have been exhorted to *do*, at the conclusion of discourses which elaborately proved that you can *do nothing*—urged to pray, and told in the same breath, that your prayer is an abomination to the Lord. Nor have you been better satisfied with those who undertake to convince the sinner by learned logic, that he possesses complete, natural power to repent and believe, and can as easily create a new heart, as pass into the next room. However their speculations might improve our theological vocabulary ; you felt that they did not remove the real difficulties of the subject. The power they gave you was only a “word of promise to the ear ;” it was not a *practical* power,—not the power which we all understand from its actual operation ; for they candidly acknowledge, that in not a single instance has it been exerted since the fall, without the concurring influence of

the spirit of God. Between such a power, and the old fashioned impotence, you saw little to choose.

It will be my endeavor to address you in a more clear and consistent manner. Would to God I could so impress my own convictions on the minds of unrenewed hearers, that they would leave this house with a firm resolution to "seek until they find, and knock until it be opened to them." The position to be established is—that *in exercising our natural powers and affections on the means of grace put into our hands, we have every reason to expect the divine blessing.*

To guard against misconstruction on a most vital topic, we beg to be considered as pleading for no connection between human exertions and converting influence, which would imply any merit in the former,—or such a congruity, that the sinner may put himself in the attitude of a claimant, and demand his reward. Our hope of salvation rises from an altogether different source. "*Grace*"—Grace in its most rich and boundless import, is the foundation—the superstructure—and the topstone of that spiritual temple which God has erected in our world. If the noblest aspirations of the most advanced christian, scarcely entitle him to be looked upon without displeasure—if even the tears of his purest repentance are impure, his most perfect works such "filthy rags," that nothing but his confidence in the intercessions of the Great Advocate sustains him in his approaches to the throne—how supreme would be the folly of raising a claim of merit on efforts possessing no higher character than those which we are considering. Neither do we plead for such a connection, that God could not depart from it if *he would*. We meddle not with the mysterious prerogative of divine sovereignty; but are satisfied with the fact, that our beneficent parent gives every possible encouragement to his rebellious children when they seek his favor,—smiling on their feeble efforts, and imparting that supernatural assistance which their frailty needs.

We call your attention in the 1st place to the *general character of his providential government of the world*. To every serious enquirer into his works and ways, the reflection must often present itself, that they are all connected with each other in the most lovely order. This stands related to *that*,—*that* to a third, and the union of the whole forms that golden chain which we call “divine providence or government.” Hence are derived our ideas of cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, means and end. We observe certain occurrences always preceded by certain others,—and suppose the establishment of a connection between them, which we designate by various terms according to the nature of the case. As an example of the pleasure which the divinity seems to take, in linking together his works and effecting his purposes by an extended train of preliminaries, I may refer you to a class of his operations where it is impossible to discover *any* abstract propriety in the intervention of second causes. Thus when he created the heavens and the earth, he did it by a *word*. Even then, to illustrate the great principle of his government,—that of connection and dependency, he gave them a rude and chaotic existence, adorning and perfecting them by a regular process through seven days.

The same in almost all those miraculous interpositions which are recorded in the sacred page. When he visited Egypt with plagues, it was by the agency of Moses. When he stopped the sun in his course, the instrument was the prayer of his servant Joshua. When as the incarnate mediator, he went about performing deeds of miracle and mercy; he was generally pleased to associate them with some prescribed action in the subject. Hence the command to the blind man to anoint his eyes with clay; hence his usual custom of requiring the diseased to come to him and be touched. The whole life of man is made up of such connections. The most simple method, perhaps, of bringing creatures into the world, would be a work of immediate creation; but how different is that actually adopted. How are we

preserved in being? By eating, drinking, sleeping and respiring. How do we attain that highest ornament of our nature,—knowledge? How become qualified to scan with intelligent gaze the starry concave, explore the nature of the ten thousand objects that surround us, and converse on themes for angels? By commencing with a few sensible ideas—and going through an almost infinite series of preliminary exercises. On the same principle we sow and plow, and in consequence reap and eat. Before we can recline in comfort, we must have spent our waking hours in procuring a couch and covering.

But farther; if the author of nature has determined, that his blessings be only obtained in connection with certain acts or exercises on the part of his creature,—it will naturally follow, that the performance of these preliminaries must give a ground of hope that the contemplated end shall be obtained. The contrary supposition would be a libel on the goodness of the deity. Accordingly, as it is the rule of his dispensations that we always *fulfil conditions* prior to receiving,—so it appears to be equally settled that on fulfilling them, we *shall* receive. Sometimes, indeed, to display his glorious sovereignty he counteracts the best concerted enterprises, and sends the demon of disaster to blast the labors of the most persevering industry. But these, all men agree are exceptions to his ordinary system, and never to be taken as rules of conduct.—In general, the use of means secures the desired blessing.

These being the principles by which God usually regulates the communication of his favors, we may fairly ask, whether they do not create a strong presumption, that something of a similar kind will be found in the economy of grace. Why should he depart from his ordinary rule? If in the common routine of affairs, the nature of his creatures renders it proper to connect the bestowment of good with creature exercises, what is there in the concern of man's salvation to make it inexpedient here? Is it said that redemption is peculiarly of grace, and must ne-

cessarily stand opposed to human effort? This is in a measure true,—and, we would admit the consequence, if it could be shewn that the doctrine of an established connection between the endeavors of the unregenerate, and the blessings of salvation attached any meritorious value to the former: but this we firmly disavow.

Some may bring forward the objection, that regeneration being the instantaneous work of the holy spirit, absolutely scorns the aid of means and preliminary exercises,—that from the nature of the case, they must be as inefficacious as food or medicine administered to the dead. I offer in reply the following observations.—Allowing the truth of the statement—what does it prove? Simply, that God has by an established law, ordained a blessing on means *in themselves inadequate* to produce the end. And what is this but a very ordinary mode of his procedure. What virtue was lodged in the clay with which Christ anointed the eyes of the blind man? What magic charm in Joshua's seven trumpets to overturn the massy ramparts of Jericho? That these prescribed antecedents had their use, we may not doubt,—but it consisted entirely in the illustration they afforded of the principle of connection and dependency.

We venture farther, and ask whether the objector will dare to say, that there is *any* second cause which may be said to have a proper efficiency in producing the effect. After all the theorising of philosophers, it is extremely doubtful whether in the idea of causation, there ought to be included (except when we apply it to the great God himself,) any thing more than *simple priority*. Let me state a familiar case, bearing a close analogy to that under consideration. The husbandman consigns a grain of wheat to the earth. Now what connection of efficiency is there between his act and the infusion of vegetable life? To answer that he *disposes* and *adapts it* for receiving the vital principle, is mere verbiage,—and can mean nothing more, than that he has placed it in those circumstances, which give reason to expect

that it will be the subject of a divine operation. The infusion, however, of vegetable life in a dead seed, is a work quite as great as the communication of spiritual life to a morally dead soul, though occurring more frequently it excites less attention. Yet it must in all instances be preceded by a certain process on the part of man:—Why then in relation to the other case, may there not be a system of means provided for the sinner which secures a corresponding work of God?

But I go on to observe, that perhaps the objector is mistaken when he asserts the absence of every kind of adaptation. That unregenerate efforts exercise no proper efficiency is freely granted. But we cannot admit the absence of a relative *fitness*, which divine goodness may very properly regard in its beneficent arrangements, and which we see it *does* regard in other instances. One of the great and fundamental laws imposed on our mental constitution, is that to all our valuable acquisitions, we are led on step by step in a regular progression. By the exercise of one natural principle in our bosom, we become matured for the exercise of another,—and another, and so on in an indefinite series. How easy for example, to shew that all the boasted acquirements of the sage, can be traced back to the operation of the ignoblest animal instincts! His first step was to obtain the knowledge of language. The task was soon mastered by his childish propensity to imitation. He next went to school: that which carried him there, was the instinct of filial obedience. His application to study was sustained not by literary taste, but by emulation,—sense of shame, and fear of punishment. In this manner, our various impulses and constitutional affections may be considered as so many steps appointed by the author of nature, on which his rational creatures ascend to their destined perfection: and why we ask, may not a similar plan be adopted by him in the economy of salvation? Why may we not suppose him to commence, by presenting excitement to the meaner

springs of the complicated machine,*—vividly impressing the sinner's imagination and lodging the seed of truth in his intellect, rousing his desires of happiness and fears of ill, his natural sense of gratitude and perceptions of moral beauty, as preparatives to the last and crowning work,—when by his spirit, he “shines into the heart and gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of himself?” In fine, may we not conclude from universal analogy, that he has established in grace, as in providence, a close connection between certain exercises on the sinner's part and a propitious agency on his own,—that consequently, faithfulness to the extent of our natural ability will secure all necessary blessings from above—on the same ground, and with the same certainty, that in common life “the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”

2dly, Our conclusion rests on other grounds than analogical reasoning. It appeals to the undeniable fact, that *Jesus Christ has instituted various ordinances, the professed design of which, is the regeneration and conversion of sinners.* Such are reading the word, serious meditation, earnest prayer, and “the ministry of reconciliation.” To speak of the last more particularly;—that it is intended for unregenerate men *as such*, appears evident not only from its nature, but the unambiguous command of our blessed Lord, “Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel to every creature;” “behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves;” “go and teach all nations.” Next to the plain terms in which this solemn commission is expressed, its best interpreter is the conduct of those entrusted with it. Now we all know how the apostles acted. They avowed themselves their master's ambassadors to pray *sinners* to be reconciled to God. Following the example of their dear Lord, who had announced that he came to seek and save that which was lost, they preached salvation to those who were “*faar off*,” as well as those

* See remarks No. 1, at the end.

“who were nigh:” no extent of depravity, no darkness of understanding, no depth of unregeneracy, prevented them from washing their hands of the blood of men, by proclaiming the whole counsel of God. If the fact be so, my brethren—if Jesus Christ has instituted ordinances for the benefit of sinners as such, we infer that these have not only a right to use them, but a pledge of the divine approbation and blessing. Let none deny the conclusion who admit the premises. If the unregenerate man has instituted means of whatever kind put in his hands, we see not how it can be doubted whether the use of them to the extent of his real ability, guarantees the attainment of the end. Why were they prescribed, if they were not to be effectual; or how on this supposition can we vindicate the divine truth and wisdom?

3dly, I observe, that beside the general pledge contained in the institution of saving ordinances, *there are given explicit assurances to the diligent improver of natural principles and external aids.* Such is the exhortation of our blessed Lord in John 5, 39:—“Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.” That he was here addressing men destitute of all pretensions to a change of heart, is plain from the connection: as such, they are here treated, for the searcher of hearts cannot recognise men but in their true character. What then is the proper meaning of the exhortation? Obviously this,—that as they were rational beings, possessing natural sensibility—an approving and condemning conscience, they were immediately to engage in the investigation of divine truth, if they desired a part in that eternal life which begins in regeneration, and is consummated in glory. If it be asked whether holiness, or a right state of moral affection was not an indispensable *prerequisite*; I answer *no*,—and for the plain reason, that our Lord’s design was to teach his hearers the *manner of obtaining* salvation,—of which, *holiness was an essential part*, and therefore could not be a condition. He would only

have mocked his hearers, had he told them that by searching the scriptures they would obtain salvation; if in order to "search," it was necessary that they should be in a great measure saved already. This would be literally prescribing the end, as means of attaining the end. Besides,—how could these persons search the scriptures on regenerate principles, while utter strangers to divine *truth*,—that "incorruptible seed of which we are born, and which liveth and abideth forever?" The performance of the duty then, here enjoined, must be prior to a change of heart, and cannot require it as a qualification.

To the same class, we refer such exhortations as these,—
 "strive to enter the straight gate:" "Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth to everlasting life," "seek ye the Lord while he is to be found, call upon him while he is near." I am aware that they are generally expounded otherwise; thus we are often told that to seek God, we must exercise faith,—and repentance—and love &c.—but I cannot help thinking, that such a mode of interpretation destroys all their force and beauty. Nothing seems plainer, than that they prescribe to wretched and lost sinners *in that character*, something which is perfectly *practicable*; and the word "practicable" I use in its obvious and popular sense, applying it to actions which there is no serious difficulty in performing, without supernatural assistance. We have another objection to that gloss. If these exhortations imply the necessity of holy exercises, it will be difficult to see how they answer the purpose of exciting the sinner to use all diligence in making his calling and election sure. Will he not very naturally complain, that the preacher is blowing hot and cold upon him with one breath? He is exhorted to certain doings and efforts; but then he finds attached to them a condition which no mortal man has ever performed, without being the subject of divine agency. This he calls an *impossible* condition, and all our logic will fail to convince him of the contrary—for it is well known, that many of the learned

distinctions which divines so happily employ in their contests with each other, completely elude every attempt of ordinary minds even to apprehend them. Thus circumstanced, he will probably consider it a settled point, that the exhortation cannot be addressed to *him*,—but to the highly favored children of the spirit exclusively, as they alone possess the qualifications for obedience.

It may be replied, that though obedience to the exhortation depends on divine aid, yet the unregenerate are to be urged forward on the principle, that outward performance is better than entire neglect. But is this true? Will any one say that a man, who while unrenewed in the spirit of his mind sits at the sacramental table, acts less criminally than he who under a sense of his unfitness refrains altogether? What then means the curse pronounced on unworthy partakers?—But we need not dwell on a point so evident. If any doctrine be clearly contained in the scriptures, it is, that hypocrisy or the external performance of commanded duty while stranger to appropriate dispositions, is a crime immeasurably more aggravated than the most glaring omission.

For these and other reasons, we think that the plan of identifying the exhortations referred to with the precepts of law, requiring holiness and moral perfection, is indefensible. They are not the proclamation of a stern uncompromising legislator; but the entreaties of a tender friend, and their design is to urge upon us that faithful improvement of our evangelical privileges, between which and spiritual blessing, the divine goodness has established an intimate connection. Viewed in this light, they are plain, simple, and delightfully encouraging. They subject the poor sinner to no torturing dilemmas; they require no inconsistent or impracticable conditions. They tell him that salvation is brought to his very door; and give the cheering certainty, that if he only exercise the diligence and assiduity which befits the high destiny at stake, he shall “not labor in vain

nor spend his strength for nought." In a word, they are exhibitions of the same divine munificence, whose paths drop fatness on the pastures of the wilderness,—that "giveth to the beast his food, and *hears the young ravens which cry.*"

4thly, We appeal to the scriptural fact, that *diligence has in all cases been rewarded.* Sacred history is one of the best expositors of sacred truth. If, then, there was no connection between the doings of the unregenerate and spiritual blessings, we might presume, that some examples would be recorded of a sinner falling short of salvation, after persevering endeavors to secure it. But nothing of this kind is discovered: all the facts are decidedly on the other side of the question. Why (to select one example from a host) was the gospel received in its love and power by the Berean Jews, while persecuted in a neighboring city? You reply, "because the spirit operated on their hearts." The answer is pious and true: we only remind you, that the sacred narrative connects his operation with something in the previous dispositions and conduct of the persons themselves. The Bereans "*were more noble than those in Thessalonica.*" Now it is certain, that the former were not regenerate when the gospel was first preached to them:—yet there was a frankness in their character,—an amiable docility and love of truth, which prompted them to impartial investigation, and an honest improvement of their religious advantages. "*Therefore,*" it is emphatically added, "many of them believed." A clearer intimation of the principle by which God regulates the communications of his grace, no language could give.

If an appeal be made to later experience, a thousand proofs force themselves upon us from every side. Is it not an undeniable fact, that wherever, in consequence of evangelical truth being preached with simplicity and fervor, or a combination of other favorable circumstances—the minds of men are unusually stirred up from their lethargy to ask, "what these things mean," and to make a serious business of investigating the

claims of religion,—there, in the same proportion, it asserts itself to be the “power of God unto salvation,” as in apostolic times? The benignant Paraclete seems not at all fastidious in the choice of occasions, on which to display the riches of his goodness; nor does he refuse his presence, when he cannot find a service as unexceptionable as that of the seraphim round his eternal throne. He walks amidst the tumult of a camp-meeting—overlooking every thing but the fact, that he is *invited*, and *welcome*: that frantic vociferation so torturing to the delicate nerve, “discourses to *his* ear excellent music:” those extravagancies which mar the beauty of too many of our religious revivals, have not, as yet, been found to scare him from the office which he loves. Most surely he does not approve them: but among the tares, precious seed has been sown, and he will not suffer it to be lost. Some may choose to think, that he blesses only those occasions of which he himself is the first exciting cause,—that the earnestness and desperate struggle of the soul for an interest in saving mercy, are, without any exception, as much a part of his special agency, as the actual renovation in which they terminate. There is, however, no proof of this. The history of many of the excitements in our day, gives little room for attributing to them a higher origin than animal panic—curiosity—fondness for the mysterious, and the natural love of stimulation: yet they are blest—nay we dare not refuse to believe that in *every* instance, good has been accomplished as lasting as eternity. In the face of almost daily observations like these—can we doubt whether a heavenly agent is abroad among the sons of men,—and “*wailing to be gracious?*”

Lastly, consider the tremendous charges brought against despisers of the gospel. “And thou Capernaum,” exclaimed the indignant Saviour, “who art exalted to Heaven shall be brought down to hell: Wo unto thee Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which are done in thee, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in dust and ashes: I say, it shall

be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." The question now fairly meets us,—wherein the sin of despising and rejecting the gospel consists: what shall take from the impenitent hearer every plea of extenuation for his amazing folly in loving darkness rather than light? Many, perhaps, will be disposed to rest satisfied with replying,—that though the reception of the truth is the immediate operation of God's spirit in the soul, yet every man has a *natural* power to believe, for the non-exercise of which, he shall be condemned at the divine tribunal. Others, thinking this to be an idle play of words, evading what it professes to answer, may call to their assistance the doctrine of a federal connection between our first parent and his posterity. According to their theory, the inability of sinners being the fruit of crime, is itself a crime,—and they may be justly condemned on the well known principle, that the cause is accountable for all its effects. Without offering an opinion, at present, on either of these systems,—I think it must be acknowledged, that the doctrine which we have been advocating, is absolutely necessary to a *complete* statement of the sin and inexcusableness of unbelief. We are authorized by it to assert,—that though the moral agent cannot regenerate himself, he may procure the *grace* of regeneration; and we prove his guilt and folly in the same way, that we prove the inexcusableness of a man perishing for lack of food, when we tell him that by an easy process of plowing, sowing and reaping, he would have undoubtedly obtained it. Supposing him to object, that he could exercise no control over the seed cast into the furrow, we should at once answer, "Thou Fool, that is not quickened which is not *sown*; what prevented you from placing it in a due condition for receiving the heavenly influence? Your industrious neighbor knew as little as yourself, the mysterious art of turning a dead kernel into a living plant: but he felt, that he was in covenant with a bountiful parent—who, fully understood the matter, and would send him

the sunshine and the dew. In this trust he acted, and now has enough and to spare while you perish with hunger!"

Such, also, is the very language that shall be addressed to the impenitent gospel hearer. He will be distinctly told, that though the spirit alone could "work in him to will and to do," yet this spirit was as freely offered him as *atonement*, *pardon*, and every other covenant blessing; that by acting out his natural powers on the system of divinely appointed means, he would have as firmly secured his salvation as if it had depended on his own unassisted energies;—in fine, he will discover that God does not condemn any man *simply for unregeneracy*, but for the basest and most wanton neglect. Thus shall he be struck dumb before an assembled universe; and while he listens to the tremendous doom pronounced from the lips of eternal justice,—while he listens, foaming with agony and rancor against the most high, shall be at the same time forced to acknowledge, that "he is clear when he speaks, and righteous when he is judged."

Before leaving the subject, I must hold a short conference with those who are strangers to the grace of the gospel on their advantages and responsibility. To make you feel, my brethren, as you ought on this point, has been the design of all my remarks. I have not been prostituting this desk to the service of visionary theory; but have been honestly endeavoring to extricate from its entanglements, a doctrine, which is the life-blood of a sinner's hope, and so practical in all its connections, that its influence on your conduct will decide eternal issues. It is possible, that some of you may not be entirely satisfied with my exposition. But dear hearer, you are aware that the weakness of an advocate is no argument against the goodness of his cause. Let it be granted then, that I have only given a melancholy proof, that "the treasure is committed to earthen vessels," yet I beseech you, let not a thought obtain entrance into your minds unfavorable to the *truth itself*, which it has been my en-

deavor to elucidate. Throw, if it so please you, my observations to the winds,—but remember God has himself declared, “I have no delight in the death of the sinner, wherefore turn yourselves and live:” “Whosoever *will*, may come and take of the waters of life freely.” These announcements you dare not gain-say, and if there appear any inconsistency between them and some others contained in the sacred page, it is because you at present see through a glass darkly, & only know in part: “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

But it is not enough to embrace them with a speculative assent. Your faith must be a *practical principle*. You are to consider the fact, that salvation is brought near, to be as certain as *your own existence*, and under the influence of this lively belief, to use all diligence in making your calling sure. You cannot regenerate yourself.* True: they who affect to convince you of the contrary, are either ingeniously playing with a word; or if they mean what they affirm, they have formed a sadly low estimate of the nature of true religion. The life of God in the soul of man,—that high and holy sensibility, by which he becomes as differently affected to every object in heaven and earth as if he had lost his identity, and was literally changed into a new creature,—that heavenly taste and temper which fits him for angelic employments, and makes him dissatisfied with every thing short of perfect union with the “sempiternal source of joy,”—all this is something more than a simple act of choice, and requires a far higher cause than the mind’s self-determining energy. We say then, you *cannot* regenerate yourself. But surely these things you can do. You can immediately forsake open and deliberate sins. You can gladden the hearts of pious friends by forsaking the haunts of vice, and by accepting their affectionate invitation, “come let us go up to the house of the Lord, to the house of the mighty God of Jacob.” Remember “God

* See remarks No. 2, at the end.

dwells in Zion, from thence commanding the blessing, even life forever more,"—and who knows how soon after finding yourself within reach of heavenly truth, some chosen arrow may pierce your heart,—*piercing*, but to heal! To this, what should prevent you from adding solemn meditation on religious subjects; and who will dare to damp the thrilling encouragement, that perhaps while in the very act,—while you “commune with your heart upon your bed and are still,” a ray from the father of lights may illumine your darkness?

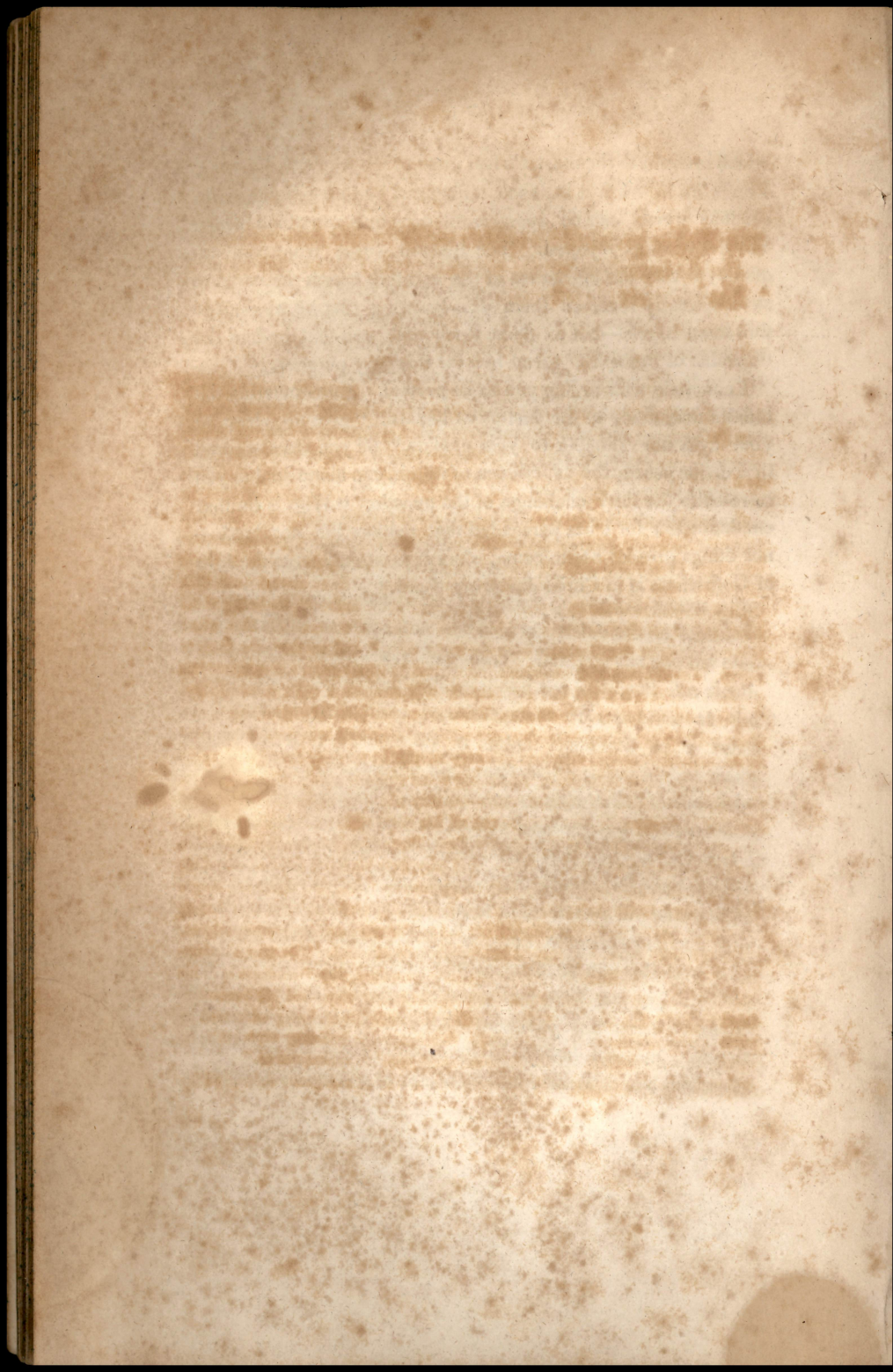
Above all, be instant in prayer. You say, indeed, that you cannot exercise holy dispositions.—But remember that the natural sensibilities of your bosom are not in themselves displeasing to God: and if your prayers are dictated by an honest desire to escape his wrath and secure the happiness which he offers, they will be accepted. Ask you, on what ground? I answer on the same ground, that the father of all listens in kindness to the cry of the meanest of his creatures,—the croaking of the raven and the bleating of the lamb; on the ground, that in all such cases he is smiling on his own work, and gratifying cravings which he had himself implanted. In a word, if you cannot pray as christians, *ask as creatures* and fear not the issue.

But this is not enough. The abandonment of virtuous habits, meditation, prayer and attendance on the preached gospel, are doubtless among the most powerful instrumentalities which God blesses to the production of holy affection; but to secure their end, they must be combined with vigorous efforts on the part of the sinner himself to put forth *holy acts*. A more desperate condition cannot well be conceived than that of a man, who makes no other use of the principles we have advanced, than to fold his arms, and to adopt the posture of a quiet expectant, under the pretext that he “must wait God’s time.” Whatever may be the pleasant dreams of self-complacency, while taking note of the severity of his religious exercises,—the frequency of his attendance on the sanctuary and the prayer meeting—how much

his secret thoughts turn on God and eternity—and with “ what strong crying and tears he offers up supplications to him who is able to save from death ;” the searcher of hearts pronounces him a wretched self-deceiver. With all his loud professions of busy doing, he really does nothing. The decisive acts of “ re-
 penting” and “ giving up the heart” to God he never attempts, or at least, so languidly as to shew that he attaches little importance to them, whatever appearance of bustling activity may characterise his general deportment. Do not think that you shall obtain any thing from the Lord my brethren, if you maintain this shocking error. Be persuaded, that the most effectual means of grace are honest and determined efforts to *perform your duty* ; and let all the powers of your souls be concentrated in definite acts of repentance and faith. If you think it paradoxical, that we exhort you to attempt that which cannot be accomplished without higher assistance, we ask whether you are not distinctly conscious of the existence of various active principles within you,—the due exercise of which would lead to a *certain kind* of repentance and faith ? Can you not see the reasonableness of the divine precepts, and the justice of the divine anger against sin ? Are you incapable of trembling at the thought of your unutterably wretched condition as a rebel against God, or of admiring the gracious provision he has made for your deliverance ? Is there not an excellency in the character of Jesus Christ, which, as you contemplate it, never fails to kindle your wonder and love ?—In short, do you not feel a power of so directing your trains of thought on religious truth—that the purest and best feelings of your nature are wrought up to a tense excitement, and that at such moments you can fully enter into the spirit of him who approached our redeemer with the exclamation “ Lord *I believe ; help thou my unbelief* ?”—You say perhaps that acts thus produced can have no moral value, being the mere promptings of natural emotion. But so (we have good reason to presume) were the faith and penitence

which brought to the master's feet most of his primitive disciples. Few were in the first instance, influenced by those high considerations which can be appreciated only by a sanctified heart. Yet none were rejected. The blessed Jesus who was acquainted with the infirmities of the creature whom he came to save, tenderly received them *all*,—knowing that he was not to find them angels—but to make them such, and that he had the “residue of the spirit” given him for this very purpose.

I conclude with urging you to be *prompt*. Remembering the infinite magnitude of the destiny at hazard, “give no sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids,” till you have secured that divine peace, the experience of which, can alone enable you to re-echo the lofty challenge of the apostle, “Who is he that condemneth; for I am persuaded that neither life nor death—nor things present nor to come, shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.”



*The Author promised his readers not to trouble them with notes.
But the importance of the points treated of below has tempted
him to subjoin the following.*

No. I.

[See page 26th.] The doctrine, that regeneration is generally preceded by a *lower excitement* or a process of natural emotion, is not popular with some, though how the fact can be denied I see not. There is but one command they say, which should ever reach the sinner's ear; "repent—create to yourself a new heart, and do it *now* : There is nothing in any of your exercises previous to this, which will not be cause of shame and bitter regret." Now the force of this exhortation, is, in their opinion, completely destroyed, by telling him of an inferior stage through which he must pass before he can yield obedience. We answer, that regarding the obligation of men immediately to repent and believe in the highest import of these terms, we are of the same mind with these gentlemen. It is an eternal truth, that the moral agent is bound to exercise holy feelings to the author of his being *at all times and in all circumstances*. So he should be told and commanded. But, alas! it is one thing to "call spirits from the vasty deep," and another—for them to come. The stubborn and undeniable fact is, that he labors under a mysterious impotence, which is not the less real because it is compatible with responsibility. Blessed be God, however, there are effectual means provided for overcoming it, and these must be put in vigorous operation while as Heaven's ambassadors we never cease to reiterate that *now*,—at *this very moment* he must lay down his weapons of rebellion. The difficulty of reconciling these truths is purely theoretical, and occasions no trouble in practice which—we may illustrate by an analogous case. Imagine the venerable Mrs. Fry on one of her angel visits to New-Gate Prison, and attempting to reform an abandoned ruffian. She perfectly knows that the wretch is as fully obliged to be a good patriot, and obey from his heart all the laws of his country, as if he had never felt the corrupting influence of vice. *Nor does she a single moment compromise their claims*. But she is equally well convinced, that flaming discourses on law and obligation are not the spell to work on her present subject, whatever might be their efficacy on minds differently moulded. The man is distempered by sin. Darkness has overspread all his faculties, nay "madness is in his heart." He must be approached therefore in another way, and her benevolent mind suggests the method, without boding the possibility of being addressed by some angry moralist with the reproof: "Madam—no half-way expedients, no tampering with rebellion. Tell him to submit or take the consequences."

Commencing operations, she searches with a woman's sagacity among all the

dark corners of his perturbed spirit for some embers of better feeling, which may be fanned into activity and communicate a little warmth to the torpid system. Nor is she very high in her exactions at first. Were it but a lingering regard to a poor desolate child—or the recollection of a pious mother, whose soft hand upon his head, when she breathed over him her dying prayer he has felt through all his career of sin and guilty sorrow—or a remaining sense of shame, she gladly accepts it and endeavors by every gentle act to draw it out into healthy action. Perhaps she finds in the desert, unpromising as it seemed, many such flowers of beauty—maimed and crushed, but not torn up by the roots or past restoration. All receive her culture, and soon the miserable outcast is astonished to find himself in a new world of feeling. He begins to taste again the happiness of innocence, and to find that the unthought repast of calm thoughts has a relish which sickens to the thought his former brutal pleasures. The revolution is greatly assisted by that beautiful law of providence, which has formed an association between the kind emotions of our nature, so that one calls forth another, and excludes those which are uncongenial with it. Gratitude to his benefactor awakens good will to his species, and the latter prepares him to love even that indignant country which has cast him from her bosom, and consigned him to chains and ignominy. Such miracles, it is said, have been wrought, but always by a gentle and gradual process similar to that described. I am far from bringing this forward as an exact representation of the mode of obtaining piety. But I think, that usually something of the kind takes place,—that it begins with a fuller development of *natural* affections in reference to God and eternity, which leads to earnestness in devotional exercises, and the vigorous use of all those means which bring in contact with the source of renovating influence. Symptoms like these should be carefully watched, and the spiritual physician should endeavor by every prudent means to awaken them, without fear of being branded as an ignorant empiric, because he attacks a deep seated disease from without. When human agency cannot reach the mark directly, it is *forced* to take a circuit: in resuscitating from apparent death for instance, it begins with chafing the extremities.

There is nothing, however, in the views we have taken, which forbids us to grant that the policy of keeping the mind of the unrenewed man close pressed with a conviction of instant obligation, is a good one. Its extraordinary success dispenses with every other argument in its favor. But the cause of this success deserves examination. It is the vigorous carrying out of the principles laid down in our discourse, by the very men perhaps who think that they reject them. By the extreme urgency of their address, the sinner is made (not to make to himself a new heart,) but to feel *desperately in earnest*, and surrender himself entirely to that preparatory discipline which the spirit blesses to regeneration and conversion. *They* indeed think otherwise—they suppose, that by the circle they drew around him on such a night and at such an hour, they compelled him to a decisive act of holy submission. But we fear they are much too sanguine. “Frail humanity” wrote its mark on every part of his exercises too visibly to be mistaken, and even the act of absolute surrender, in which they seemed to terminate, was probably nothing more than a spasm of natural emotion.

Do not be alarmed good reader, or think that you are communing with an enemy to revivals of religion. It is impossible for any one to be a warmer or more unqualified friend to them. Revivals of religion consist in the unusual direction of thought and feeling to religious subjects among considerable bodies of people. Their effect is in all instances, to place many in the most favorable relation to those saving influences which can alone plant true piety in the heart,—and of such a state of things I devoutly pray.—Would to God, that it were found in every district in our land. My whole doubt is, whether in the first or even the *second* stage of progress, many of them are more than natural phenomena, so ordered by the providence and spirit of God as to issue at length in a copious shower of gracious influence, and the “turning of many to the wisdom of the just.” Their operation may be thus illustrated. A young man of careless habits is persuaded to attend a conference meeting. His seen a marked solemnity on every countenance, and many of his young companions in great apparent distress. Deep passion of every kind is contagious, and he soon begins to feel a stirring within himself, which he cannot control. The awful truths of religion stand out before his mind with a freshness and glory, of which he previously had no conception. The ideas of God, of sin, of pardoning mercy, of Heaven and hell—ideas so grand and affecting, cannot fail when brought near, to plunge him into a maze and tumult of thought, which seems to him unaccountable by the ordinary laws of mental operation. In this he may be wrong. But his error is of no practical consequence, as the great object is attained of breaking his stupid sleep, and rousing all his faculties to the pursuit of everlasting good. He becomes a professed enquirer, and lays himself open to every good and gracious influence. The various truths of religion, find each of them, a string that vibrates to their impulse. He loves, he fears, he hopes, he rejoices, nay he gives himself as he thinks, by a solemn act of surrender to God, and sits down among his covenanted people. Yet in all this he may be simply using the *religion of the means*. That of the *end*,—the unction of the Holy One, by which he passes from darkness to light, from the power of satan to the kingdom of God’s dear son, may be still future. In the *far* future however it cannot be, much less in the *uncertain* future: only let him avoid the fatal extremes of waiting for it, or settling down in the calm security that he has it,—and let him press manfully forward in the path of commanded effort. “If we being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him.”

No. II.

[See page 34th.] On this point, (the inability of man to regenerate himself,) some may think that I express myself too strongly—not that they suppose the doctrine untrue, but that it is embarrassing, and not safe to be advanced in the public ministrations of the gospel. While I appreciate the motives of such, I must protest against a policy, which, though followed by present advantages, cannot work favorably in the issue. If there be one truth contained in revelation more clearly than any other, it is, that the disorder produced in the mind of man by the fall, whatever be its metaphysical nature, is an evil which absolutely needs the remedial grace of the holy spirit. Our deliverance from this part of our misery, constitutes a full half of the gospel,—which offers the atonement of the second person of the glorious trinity as the means of pardon, and the almighty agency of the third as a source of moral strength. To suppose that the latter should not be plainly and fully preached, but should be treated as a mere *esoteric* arrangement of the christian economy, concerning which, strangers and neophytes should be kept as much as possible in the dark—is an affront to the good spirit of God, dishonors the gospel as a provision for human necessities, and is calculated to cherish a spirit very different from that profound humility and prostration of soul, in which the essence of our religion consists.

I have called that state or condition of the mind which needs divine agency—*disorder*. If asked to define it more particularly, I doubt whether I should succeed. But yet I am perfectly sure of the fact: I see it and I feel it every day and hour—that there is a strange disease in my moral system—a dislocation and mal-arrangement of its constituent parts, nay, the positive absence of something which should be there. This, I am necessarily led to consider as something *prior* to my voluntary acts, as the uniformly wrong direction of the latter can only be accounted for by some previously exciting and permanent cause. To say that man in *all* the “appropriate circumstances” of his being acts sinfully, and that he will continue to sin with as perfect certainty as that God will continue to act right, is just to say in other words, that before he becomes holy, a strong hand must be applied from some quarter to his springs of action. I know what an outcry is raised concerning the “unphilosophical and antiquated dogma,” of “physical regeneration”—and that in using such terms as “dislocation”—“mal-arrangement”—“strong hand,” I may be considered as placing myself among the *weak ones* who advocate it. But I will not allow myself to be frightened with portentous words, when I can appeal to common sense to decide, whether the fact be not precisely as I have stated. There is but one system pretending to be Calvinistic, which can deny the conclusion with any consistency,—that of the ingenious author of “Views in theology,” who contends that the whole disorder introduced by the fall, consists in man’s being placed in such a relation to the external world, that the motives to act wrong strike him with more force than those to do right. According to this theory, we are doomed most cer-

tainly to sin, not because of any aptitude or predisposition in the mind itself; but because our creator has placed us in what the French tacticians call a *false position*. Regeneration is on the same principles, nothing more than the alteration of our external relations, or a counteraction of their unfriendly influences by a sort of internal rhetoric, which gives a vivacity and impressiveness to the better motives not previously felt. It is the same process which we use in reforming the rogue, when we give him a new suit of clothes and put a thousand pounds in his pocket. I have no fear of this theory becoming fashionable, though I respect the acuteness of its author.

Our brethren of the New-Haven school as they are called, take on this point, ground that is perfectly orthodox. They hold, that though sin and moral demerit can only be predicated of voluntary acts—yet “there is a tendency or bias to sin in the very constitution of the human mind”—that “there is in the nature of the soul an infallible tendency or propensity to sin.”—These are the words of one of their friends in a well written pamphlet lately published. Professor Fitch is equally explicit. “An ultimate purpose of an agent he says, is preceded by a *disposing cause to render it certain*, though it would be preposterous to call it sinful in itself.”—“The predisposing cause, is that which occasions the certainty of the agent preferring one ultimate good to another.”—“There must be *that in the beings themselves*, and the measures of an outward providence which affect them, united, which forms a disposing cause.” The language of Dr. Taylor is not less strong. A considerable, and not the least interesting part of his “*Concio ad Clerum*” is occupied in proving that “it is the *nature* of man to sin, and only to sin in all the appropriate circumstances of his being.” It clearly appears then, that our New-Haven divines acknowledge in the most decided terms, the existence of a cause of moral delinquency lying back of sinful acts—a something, which disposes to such acts, and renders their commission certain in all circumstances. The only difference between them and others is, that they will not apply to it the name of “sin.” Whether they are right here, I will not pronounce. Spite of my orthodox prejudices, I am compelled to acknowledge that they reason plausibly, and if Calvin be against them, men as great as Calvin—Augustine and Zuingli are on their side. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the extremes. If our old divines go too far, when they unqualifiedly bestow on the *causal something*, the attributes and terms of proper blame-worthiness, these gentlemen would be too fastidious if they required us always to acknowledge by the language we select, its want of moral character. The source of all moral deformity cannot well be thought fair, nor the fountain of all pollution clean. To do them justice, they are sufficiently liberal on this point. At least, I find Professor Fitch talking of an original state of “*vitiolity*” and of “*concupiscence*,” which satisfies my mind, that though he will not call the thing to which he refers “*sin*,” yet he does not on the whole *like* it.

I say then, that this is not our principal subject of complaint with these gentlemen. What we regret is, that after conceding with regard to the state of human nature before the commencement of voluntary acts, almost all that could be asked, they should completely forget it when they enter on the other parts of their theory.

All their discussions on moral agency, liberty of choice, regeneration and holiness, seem to suppose that in getting rid of the word "sin," they had put out of the way the invincible predisposition itself: whereas all they have really done, is to give the monster a more decent name than he had before, and then to *hide* him. Thus, when we ask them what regeneration is; they answer, a simple change of choice or preference, a determination of the mind to love God whom formerly it hated. When we ask whether this new and (all the circumstances considered,) *surprising* determination does not necessarily suppose a change in the previous state of mind from which choice arises, they do not as far as my observation enables me to pronounce, formally deny it, but shake their heads and proceed to envelope the subject in a radiant fog of eloquence. But surely we have a right to press this point. If the cause of that uniform and always victorious bias to moral evil by which man is at present characterised, lies as they themselves acknowledge, in something farther back than acts of choice, it is, perhaps, not very important for us to know whether it should be called *sin*; it is exceedingly important, however, to know the *fact*, that we may seek in the proper quarter for deliverance, and avoid being mystified into a belief, that the renewal of the soul in holiness consists merely in new elections. If this be all, it is natural to enquire what becomes of the *cause* above mentioned? Is it changed or unchanged? If changed; by whom or what? By the holy spirit, or by one of the mysterious choices of the sinner himself? If unchanged; what becomes of the certain futurity of unholy exercises, and none but unholy? Such questions are not to be dismissed with the reply that we have no concern with this cause, as it has been proved that it is not sinful. A child could answer, that its sinfulness has nothing to do with the subject. It is not the *turpitude* of the predisposition which creates a difficulty, but its *existence*. So long as they acknowledge this, let them call it by what name they please, it will smell no sweeter.

The question therefore must be fairly met by them. Can a totally depraved being like man, by exerting the simple energy of his will,—by bare acts of choosing and refusing, break up the whole system of impulses, sensibilities and affections with all their checks and balances, which form our moral character—can he by a "sic jubeo" or a "presto passe," conjure out of his soul that indefinable *something* with which they acknowledge he is born, and which renders it as certain that he will unceasingly sin, as that he will die? Then, I grant that he can regenerate himself. But I like the philosophy of the scheme as little as I do its theology. Choice is an *effect*. It is the result of the combined action of all the appetencies of the individual, which converging to a single point cause a preference or operation of will, but cannot be *caused by it*. Our elections do not exert their force backward on their origin, more than the stream flows upward to its fountain.

On the whole, we may take pleasure in reflecting, that if these gentlemen are seriously in error on some points, they hold so much of the truth that we can find an antidote in their own principles. I heartily wish them success in their chivalrous enterprise of building bridges over the bogs of Calvinism. But until their works are brought to a more perfect state, I prefer to go *round*.

ERRATUM.—Page 35—13th line from the bottom, for *virtuous* read *vicious*.