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ART. I.—REVIEW OF DR. MATTHEWS' LETTERS.

The Divine Purpose displayed in the works of Providence and Grace; in a series of Twenty Letters, addressed to an Inquiring Mind. By Rev. John Matthews, D. D., [late of] Shepherdstown, Virginia. Lexington, Ky.
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WE are so much accustomed to receive our literature from Great Britain, that we are prone to overlook valuable compositions produced in our own country; especially, if they proceed from a section of the United States not famous for book making; or from the pen of an author but little known. Notwithstanding the national pride, in relation to American literature, so disgustingly displayed in some of our popular journals, it is a fact, that our booksellers are in the habit of reprinting British works, on particular subjects, much inferior to writings of home-production, which lie in utter neglect. Perhaps the Eastern States ought to be considered as an exception from this remark; where, from the first settlement of the country, authorship has not been uncommon; and where almost every preacher, at some time in his life, has the pleasure of seeing something of his own composition, in print. Still it may be observed, that

the literature of New England circulates freely only within her own limits. Of the thousands of printed sermons which run the round through her homogeneous population, very few copies find their way into the other states, except where her sons form the mass of the population. This restriction, however, is becoming less and less every year; and as the population of other parts of the country acquire a taste for reading, the literary wares of our Eastern brethren get into wider circulation, and find a readier sale. But leaving out of the account large towns and cities, there is but a small share of literature in the greater part of our country. There are scattered every where through the land well informed and well educated men; but very few of them ever think of writing any thing more than a paragraph for the newspapers; or, at most, a fourth of July speech. Even in the oldest of the United States, celebrated for men of talents and extraordinary political and legal attainments, all the writings of a theological kind which have ever issued from the press, might, I presume, be easily compressed within the narrow limits of a common portmanteau. When, therefore, any thing in the shape of a religious book proceeds from that quarter, it should receive particular attention. It has on this account, as well on others, seemed to us proper to bring more conspicuously before the public the little volume, the title of which stands at the head of this article. These Letters, we have understood, were originally published in the *Evangelical and Literary Magazine of Virginia*. They were afterwards collected and published in a small volume at the Franklin press, Richmond; and in the following year, were reprinted at Lexington, Kentucky, with the author's name, which did not appear in the Richmond edition. This then may be reckoned the third edition of these Letters; but still they are almost entirely unknown to the reading population of the Middle and Northern States. Since this work was published, the worthy author has been appointed Professor of Theology in a Seminary in Indiana, and has entered on the duties of his office.

The object of the writer seems to have been, to exhibit, in a clear and familiar way, some of the strongest arguments for the scriptural doctrine of the universality and particularity of the Divine decrees; and to remove the prejudices, and answer the objections of many serious well meaning people, who are shocked at the mere mention of this subject, even if it be couched in the very language of inspiration. There are persons of some mental cultivation, and of a serious and devout character, who

cannot bear to read, or hear read, the eighth and ninth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans; or the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The real opinions of serious people cannot, with any certainty, be judged of by the doctrinal standards of the denominations to which they have attached themselves. This is especially the case in the South and West, where many people have been brought up without religious education of any kind whatever. Now, where such persons become serious inquirers, or hopeful converts, they join any religious society among whom they happen to have received their serious impressions: or, if there be different denominations mingled together, they commonly attach themselves to one or the other, not from any distinct knowledge of the system of doctrines which they hold, but from a preference to their order of worship and mode of preaching; or, from an opinion, that the members of one society are more intelligent, consistent, or pious than those of another. Persons thus introduced into a particular church, are often much perplexed and offended at some of the doctrines which they sometimes hear preached, and which they find in the creed of the society to which they have attached themselves: particularly, they are apt to stumble at the doctrine of *predestination* and *election*, as held by Calvinists. It is not uncommon to find serious people, whose feelings are so affected with the mere contemplation of these doctrines, that they are thrown into deep distress, and even agony, whenever they occur to their minds; and while they dare not totally reject them, as many do, they are altogether reluctant to receive them, and are afraid of the light by which they are shown to be a part of Divine revelation. We have known many estimable persons to continue in this state of conflict, between their judgment and their feelings, many years; who could never, with the least composure or patience, hear any thing said on these points. Not that they were convinced that these doctrines are not revealed in the word of God, but because, through some prejudice or unhappy association, they always excited in them feelings of horror and distress. To meet cases of this sort, the Letters under review, seem to have been written: and, in our opinion, they are the production of no ordinary mind. In the discussion, not only is all harsh and all technical language avoided, but there is a sparing use even of scriptural phrases, until the author has proceeded to some extent, in developing the true nature of the doctrine.

The plan adopted is, first, to depreciate "*the pernicious effects of party spirit in the church*"—next, to show "*the importance of truth*"—then "*the influence of prejudice*"—*the true doctrine of divine decrees, and of divine providence—the doctrine of a particular providence, extending to all events—that free agency is not suspended, or violated by the divine purpose—proof of the extent of the divine plan from the promises and prophecies—the purposes of God and moral agency consistent—but incomprehensible—the nature of moral government—salvation by grace—all favours bestowed according to God's purpose, good pleasure or foreordination. Therefore, it depends on the will of God, who shall be saved.—The means of salvation suited to each individual, included in the divine purpose—providence subservient to the purposes of grace—great events and small cannot be separated, in the plan of the Almighty—the former are made up of the latter.—Man, as far as he has foresight and means, is a predestinarian in all his own important schemes—the architect, the farmer, &c. determine on ends, and elect means to accomplish them.*

The eighteenth and nineteenth Letters are on the subject of "*the final perseverance of Christians;*" and in the last, the author undertakes to show, *that these views are adapted to excite devotion;* and, consequently, cannot be unfriendly to piety and morality.

It will be seen by the above syllabus, that in this little volume, very interesting and important subjects are brought into discussion: and it is one recommendation of this work, that a doctrine, most commonly handled in a forbidding and polemical style, is here treated with great calmness, and brought down to common apprehension, by means of familiar and appropriate illustrations. There is not a harsh or censorious word in the whole book. It may, therefore, be recommended as a specimen of mildness in the discussion of a subject, which commonly produces warmth and hard speeches. It would afford us real pleasure, to see a treatise on the other side, equally characterized by the spirit of candour and kindness: and whatever cause may be promoted by fierce controversy and denunciatory declamation, we are sure, that the cause of truth gains nothing by such weapons. The pool must be calm in order to be transparent; and truth is rendered invisible, or undistinguishable, in the perturbed waters of wrathful controversy. The Christian warrior should ever remember,

that the weapons of his warfare, though 'mighty to the pulling down of strong holds,' are not *carnal* but *spiritual*. Though he must *contend* for the faith, he may not *strive*. All 'vain janglings' and 'logomachies' are strictly forbidden; and all discussions that tend rather 'to engender strifes, than godly edifying.' We should, therefore, be desirous of giving currency to this unpretending book, on account of the Christian spirit which pervades it throughout. No one, however he may differ from the author, need be afraid of having his feelings wounded by the perusal of these pages. But this is not the only recommendation of this little volume. It contains much sound, and we may say, *profound* reasoning: or, to express ourselves more correctly, the result of profound reasoning; for there is no long and elaborate chain of ratiocination—here every thing is simple, and remarkably adapted to the capacity of common readers; but no man could render such a subject familiar, and easily intelligible, who had not deeply and maturely pondered it, and viewed it in all its important aspects, and especially, in its practical bearings.

The fact cannot be denied, that the doctrine of absolute decrees; or the divine purposes; or predestination; or election; or by whatever terms it may be expressed, is viewed by most men—and not the unlearned only—as an absurd and unreasonable doctrine. From the days of Lucian, it has been set up to ridicule, and scurrilous abuse; and they who hold it, are considered and represented, by men of the highest order of intellect and greatest learning, as denying human accountability; or as grossly inconsistent, in holding that all things are decreed in the eternal purpose, and yet that men are free in their actions. Seldom, however, are we favoured with any calm, impartial reasoning on this subject. It is treated, as if the doctrine was self-evidently false and absurd; and as if there was no need of argument; since every man's reason must teach him, that he cannot be justly accountable for actions, which by no possibility he could avoid, as they were from all eternity, absolutely decreed.

This strong prejudice against the doctrine of predestination, is not confined to the men of the world; it has entered the church; and by a large majority of those who have assumed the office of interpreters of the mind of God, it is rejected with abhorrence; and by many of them scouted as not only absurd, but subversive of all morality. And, which is somewhat surprising, ministers of churches, which formerly held this doc-

trine firmly, and expressed it strongly in their formulas of faith, do strenuously oppose it; and contrary to all common usage of words, and correct rules of interpretation, pretend, that it is not contained in their articles of religion. If a thousand impartial, intelligent men could be brought to peruse the seventeenth article of the Church of England, and of the American Episcopal Church, whatever might be their own belief, they would, as we suppose, unanimously declare, that the doctrine of predestination, as held by Calvinists, is clearly and strongly expressed in that article: and the whole history of the reformation in the Church of England, goes to prove, that this interpretation is correct; for in the early days of that reformed church, all her distinguished ministers were predestinarians; just as much as were the ministers of Geneva. No stronger evidence of this is needed, than the fact, that the Institutes of John Calvin—so grossly calumniated by many leading men of that church now—was the text book, enjoined by authority in both the universities. But our object in the remarks which we are about to make, is, to inquire, whether there is any foundation, in truth and reason, for the general aversion to this doctrine.

It cannot be doubted that the language of Scripture, in many places, is favourable to the doctrine. All things seem to be there ascribed to the counsel and will of God; and the minutest events as well as the greatest, to be under the government of his providence. Things, to our apprehension, most casual and more trivial, are specified, as under the direction of God: for what is more casual than the drawing of a lot, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord; and what seems more trivial than the falling of the hairs of your head, and yet this event, apparently unimportant as it is, never takes place, without our Heavenly Father.

But while the Bible, throughout, ascribes the occurrence of all events, of every kind, to the will of God; yet, it as uniformly represents man as a free, accountable agent; yea, it represents him as acting most wickedly, in those very transactions which are most expressly declared to be determined by the counsel of God. It would seem from this, that the inspired writers perceived no inconsistency between a purpose of God, that a certain event should occur, and that it should be brought about by the free and accountable agency of man. And it is believed, also, that men of sound minds, who have never heard of any objections to this doctrine, are not apt to be perplexed

with any apparent inconsistency between these two things. And, we are persuaded, that were it not for the ambiguity of certain words, and the artful sophistry with which truth and error are confounded by those who oppose the doctrine, very few persons would experience any difficulty on this subject. If a man of plain sense, should be informed by prophecy, that he would certainly kill a fellow creature the next day or year, and that in perpetrating this act he would be actuated by malice, it would never be likely to enter his mind, that he should not be guilty of any crime, because the action was certain before it was committed. But if you change the terms, and say, that he would be under a *necessity* to perform this act; that it being absolutely certain, he could not possibly avoid it, immediately the subject becomes perplexed, and involved in difficulty; for every man of common sense, feels that he cannot justly be accountable for what he could not possibly avoid; and that for what he does from absolute necessity he cannot, in the nature of things, be culpable. Here, the whole difficulty is produced by the use of ambiguous and improper terms. While nothing was presented to the mind, but the certainty of the event, coupled with voluntary action, no relief from responsibility was felt: but the moment we speak of the act as produced by necessity, and as being unavoidable, the judgment respecting its nature is changed. These terms include the idea of a compulsory power acting upon us, not only without, but in opposition to our own will. A necessary event is one which cannot be voluntary or free; for if it were spontaneous, it could not be necessary; these two things being diametrically opposite. So an unavoidable action is one which takes place against our wishes and will. But a voluntary action may be as certain as any other; and by one who knows futurity, may be as certainly predicted. Even a man may often be certain beforehand, how a voluntary agent will act in given circumstances, provided he knows the moral character of the agent. As if a being actuated by no other feeling towards another but malice, should be placed in such circumstances, that he has the choice of performing a benevolent action towards that individual or omitting it, he will most certainly neglect to do it, or, if he may with impunity, injure such an one, or do him good, he will most certainly choose the former; yet is such a malignant agent perfectly free, and perfectly accountable. These things are agreeable to the common feelings of all men, and depend on no metaphysical niceties. And there can be no doubt, but that a

large share of the difficulty which perplexes honest minds, in the contemplation of the Divine purpose, which fixes the certainty of events, arises from the confounding of things totally distinct, by the use of ambiguous terms.

But still it may be thought by some, that as to the point of man's responsibility, there is no difference between certainty and necessity; that if it be certainly fixed, that a man shall act in a particular way, it is impossible that he should do otherwise, and therefore he cannot be free. To which we would reply, that the whole difficulty supposed to exist, arises, as before, from confounding ideas which should be kept distinct. There is no manner of inconsistency between the certainty of a future action and liberty in the performance of that action. A voluntary action may be as certainly future as any other; and spontaneity is the only liberty which can be predicated of the will itself. If an action is voluntary, it is free; and the idea of a necessary volition is absurd and contradictory. When, however, we speak in accordance with common sense and experience, of liberty, as being essential to moral agency, we always mean liberty *of action*; that is, the liberty of doing *what we will*. Now, if certainty were inconsistent with freedom, it would seem, that uncertainty was that which constituted the liberty of an action; but it is evident, that an action produced by compulsion may be as uncertain as a voluntary act; and, as was before stated, an action may be perfectly voluntary and free, and yet certain. If we know what we will do the next hour, surely this knowledge of the certainty of our own act does not alter the nature. If, when considered as uncertain and unknown, it is free and voluntary, if the same action and produced by the same cause is viewed as certain or as known, it cannot affect the nature of the action, as to its moral quality. And if it were the fact, that the certainty of the existence of a future act destroyed its freedom, then the probability of its occurrence would have the same effect, so far as the event was probable. And according to this doctrine, every human art, or nearly every one, would be affected as to its liberty; for what action ever occurs, of the existence of which before hand, there may not be a probability in the view of some one? But why should uncertainty render an action free and moral, which would not otherwise be so? Surely this is no self-evident truth. So far from it, that in thinking of the morality of an act, or responsibility of an agent, we never take this circumstance into view, whether before it happened it was

certain or uncertain. And if certainty affected the character of an act before it occurred, why should not absolute certainty after the event, have the same effect? When an act is performed, its certainty is so great, that no power can render it uncertain; and no good reason can be assigned, why this should not destroy its freedom, as much as previous certainty. But the truth is, that the moral character of an action is not in the least affected by its previous certainty or uncertainty, but is determined by its own nature;—its conformity or nonconformity, to a moral rule.

Let us now return to the consideration of the decrees of God, or the Divine purpose. And the whole subject may be reduced to these two points. First, did God, when about to give existence to the universe, comprehend in his infinite mind a perfect plan of his own work? And secondly, is the existing state of things accordant with the original plan? If both these questions are answered in the affirmative, then the dispute about the decrees of God is ended; for, by his decrees nothing else is intended, than that perfect plan which originally existed in the mind of the Great Architect: and if creation and providence answer to this plan, then is it true, that God has “fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.” If any objection is felt to the word “decrees,” it may be changed for another less exceptionable; especially, as it is not the term usually employed in the Scriptures to express this idea; and also, because it is in relation to this subject, used in a sense considerably different from its common acceptation. The phrase “Divine purpose,” employed by an author, is both scriptural and appropriate, and liable to no objection which occurs to us. It is a principle with us, not to contend about words, where there is an agreement in ideas. Let us then see what exception can be taken to the first position laid down above, viz. that God when about to produce the universe of creatures, had in his mind a perfect plan of the whole work. This, of course, would include every creature and every action and event, with the nature which should be possessed by each, and the causes and qualities of every action. If the Supreme Creator formed any plan of operation, this plan would certainly include every thing which should ever come to pass, unless there are some things which are of such a nature, that they could not be embraced in any pre-conceived plan. This brings us up to the very gist of the objection. It is alleged, that the free doctrines of moral agents could not possibly form any part of such a plan, because, if

fixed by a purpose or plan, they could not come to pass as free actions, 'and depending for their existence on the free will' of voluntary agents, could not, in the nature of things, be fore-known. This is the foundation of two distinct theories; both of which must be fairly brought into view, and subject to the examination of reason. And we begin with that one which is most remote from what we believe to be the true theory. According to this, God neither proposed any thing respecting the free actions of moral agents, nor was it possible for him to know what they would be. As this theory has, at first view, the appearance of denying the omniscience of God, its advocates have taken great pains to obviate this objection. They allege, that as it is no disparagement of God's omnipotence, to say, that there are impossible things which his power cannot accomplish; so in regard to omniscience, there may be things which cannot be known, not from any imperfection in this attribute, but because, from their uncertain nature, they are not capable of being known. There is the appearance of plausibility in this representation, but it is only an appearance, for in regard to the performance of impossibilities, the thing is absurd and inconceivable, as for example, to cause a thing to be and not be at the same time. There is here really no object on which power can be executed. But the case is far different in regard to the knowledge of future contingencies. The defect of a knowledge of these argues a real imperfection in this attribute. We cannot conceive of a being possessing an increase of perfection by a power to do that which is impossible; for, as was said before, the thing is wholly inconceivable. But we can conceive of knowledge which extends to free actions of moral agents. Man himself possesses some degree of this knowledge; and we cannot attribute omniscience to the Deity without including in our idea, the perfection of this knowledge. To say that there are things which from their nature cannot be known, is only to say, in other words, that there is no omniscient being in the universe; for if there were, there would be nothing unknown to him. Moreover, it should be well considered before this theory is adopted, that this ignorance must relate to all actions of this class; for if one can be certainly known as future, without destroying its freedom, so may all. And it matters not by what means the knowledge of future contingencies may be acquired, it must equally, in all cases, affect the freedom and morality of the actions known. So that, if the Governor of the universe, from observing the conduct of crea-

tures in time past, should be able with certainty, to foreknow what they will do in future, such knowledge would be incompatible with the freedom of actions thus known. And, as we observed, in another part of this review, if certain knowledge is thus inconsistent with moral agency, no reason can be assigned, why probable knowledge, in proportion to its approximation to certainty, should not have the same effect.

But what idea does it afford of the government of the universe, to suppose, that the Supreme Ruler is totally ignorant of all the future volitions of his creatures, and of all the consequences of these volitions? Dark, indeed, are the prospects of the wise Director of all things, on this theory; and miserable must be the suspense and anxiety of him who sits at the helm, if every future voluntary act, of so many millions of free agents, is utterly unknown to him. No provision can be made beforehand to meet any emergency. The universe must be governed by sudden shifts and expedients, adopted as the exigence may demand. And on this principle, general laws, for the government of the world, would be altogether unwise, because they could not be so arranged as to meet the cases which might, in the course of events, occur; these being entirely unknown. Such a theory, if pursued, must lead inevitably to atheism. Nothing more is necessary to prove the falsity of this theory, than to trace it to consequences so absurd and dreadful.

The theory which takes from the Deity all certain knowledge of future free actions of moral agents, is not only repugnant to right reason, but contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. According to it, the fall of our first parents was an event unknown to God before it actually took place; and no provision, therefore, could have been made to meet the exigency. No plan of recovery could have been devised. All which, is expressly contradictory to numerous plain declarations of the Bible. That evidence, however, which demonstrably proves the falsity of this theory, is, the long chain of prophecy, which foretells innumerable events which are dependent on the free will of man. Many of these predictions have been exactly fulfilled, by men who knew not God; and generally, by agents who had no idea that they were executing any divine purpose, or accomplishing any divine prediction; and the responsibility of these agents, and the morality of their actions were not in the least affected by the circumstance that they were fore-ordained; and foretold by the prophets. The illustration of this position from the Scriptures, is full, and

could easily be adduced; but this has often been done by others, and is inconsistent with the narrow limits allotted to this review. We would simply refer the reader to the history of Adam, of Pharaoh, of Joseph, of Saul, of Nebuchadnezzar, of Cyrus, of Judas who betrayed Christ, and of the Jews who crucified him. If the Scriptures contain one word of truth, it is most certain that the free actions of moral agents are foreknown.

To evade the horrible consequences of denying foreknowledge to the Deity, as being subversive of his absolute and infinite perfection, some speculative men have invented a theory, if possible, more absurd; and that is, that God has the perfection of omniscience, but it is not necessary that he should exercise it, in regard to all events. They suppose, that he could know all the volitions of free agents which ever will exist, but that he does not choose to know them, before they come to pass, lest he should infringe the liberty of the creature. The former theory attributed the ignorance of the Deity of future contingencies to the necessity of nature; this ascribes it to his will. But according to both, actual knowledge of such events is not possessed; and the only difference in regard to the divine attributes which exists between them, is, that according to the first, God is supposed to be necessarily imperfect, while by the second, he is voluntarily imperfect. But as it relates to the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of governing the world with wisdom, they are precisely the same. God remains ignorant of every free action, of every moral agent, until it actually takes place. To whom the world is indebted for this extraordinary hypothesis, we cannot tell, but the chevalier Ramsay was the first writer, known to us, who published it. And it ought to have died with him; but to the grief of many of his brethren, and the surprise of all reflecting theologians, it has found an advocate in the learned Dr. Adam Clarke. But, there is so little danger of its being adopted by any considerate, sensible man, that we may safely leave it to sink by its own absurdity. We are not a little astonished, to find such a man as Dr. Beattie, in his *Elements of Moral Science*, seriously proposing the first mentioned theory, as a relief from the inevitable consequences of the doctrine of certain foreknowledge. It seems, however, to show how heavily these consequences press upon the Arminian scheme.

We now come to the consideration of the second general theory, mentioned above. According to this, God, it is ad-

mitted, does certainly and perfectly foreknow whatever shall come to pass, without any exceptions; but in regard to the free actions of moral agents, he has formed no purpose, nor made any decree, but leaves them fully to the freedom of their own will. And to support this theory, much pains is taken to prove that mere knowledge cannot affect the freedom or morality of the actions which are its objects: and it is, moreover, attempted to be shown, that a purpose, that an action shall exist, in future, must render it necessary. Now, in regard to the first position, we not only admit, but strongly maintain, that the foreknowledge of the certain existence of an action, does not render it a necessary action: if the agent be free, the action is free, whether we suppose it to be foreknown or not. And we agree also, that it is not the knowledge of a future action which renders it certain: it must, in the order of things, be certain before it can be foreknown. But if an event be certainly foreknown, it must have a certain future existence, and of that certain future existence, there must be some reason or cause. Now that cause is either the purpose of God that it should be so, or it is something else. If the former, then it is decreed; but if it be some other cause, whatever that may be, as it fixes the certainty of the event, it must be as inconsistent with freedom, as if the same effect was produced by the divine purpose. If another cause may render an event so certain that it may be infallibly foreknown, without any interference with moral agency, then the purpose of God may render an event certain, without any violation of the freedom of the creature. But if it be alleged, that there is no other cause of the event necessary to be supposed, than the free agency of the creature; we reply that, in one sense, this is true. It is true, as it relates to the proximate efficient cause. But if God knows how such a creature will act, there must be some foundation on which this knowledge rests; that is, there must be some reason why the free creature should act as it is foreseen that he will act. For as every free agent has the liberty of acting, or not; or of performing a different action from the one which he eventually performs, if there existed no reason why the one took place and not the other, all knowledge of the action before it occurs is necessarily excluded. It would be to suppose knowledge, without the least foundation for that knowledge in the object. In answer, it is sometimes alleged, that God's knowledge is not like ours; nor can we judge of his manner of knowing things, by what takes place among creatures. While we readily ad-

mit the general truth, we deny that it can have any application to the case before us. God cannot know that something exists where there is nothing. God cannot know that an event is certainly future, where there is, by the hypothesis, nothing seen by him which can be the cause of this certainty; or, in other words, God cannot see that an effect, yet future, will certainly be produced, if he does not know any cause of its existence. This mode of knowing things is indeed incomprehensible, but it does not involve a palpable impossibility.

But waving this discussion, let us assume only what is granted, that if a future event be infallibly foreknown, it must be infallibly certain; as certain as any decree can make it. In this point the two theories are perfectly the same. The event is as certain as it can be; for it will be perceived by all, and must be admitted, that it is as impossible, that an event foreseen by omniscience, can fail, as that a decreed event can fail. If mere certainty of existence, therefore, is inconsistent with free agency, the theory of foreknowledge is as subversive of freedom as a fixed purpose. But it is alleged, that the purpose influences the action, and therefore, there is a wide difference. We answer, that if the divine purpose—as we maintain—has no other influence on the action than to render it certain, there is no difference at all; for on some account, and for some reason, it matters not what—the thing is as certain as it can be, on the theory of mere foreknowledge. But it will be asked, how can an event be rendered absolutely certain, by a divine purpose, without rendering that event necessary? If an end is purposed and rendered certain, the means must also be put into operation, and made as certain as the end; therefore, he who purposes that a thing shall be, must be its proper and efficient cause; for how can he otherwise give effect to his own purposes, than by putting into operation such causes as will produce the predetermined end? And therefore that being who decrees an event, and provides for its accomplishment, must, in all reason, be considered the proper cause of it, which when the object of the decree is a sinful action, must lead to the blasphemous consequence, that God is the author of sin. A mere purpose without efficient action cannot possibly secure the certainty of any event, therefore a decree which shall secure the certain futuration of any thing, must be followed by an actual agency, which will be sufficient to accomplish the end. And if God decrees that an intelligent, voluntary being shall certainly perform an action, it is necessary to suppose, that directly or indirectly,

he should exert a power to influence the actions of this voluntary agent, in which case, the being thus influenced by the controlling power of another, cannot be free and accountable.

Here we have the whole strength of the objection to absolute decrees. This is the gordian knot, which it has been found so difficult to unloose, that most men are disposed to cut it. And it must be confessed, that there seems to be something incomprehensible to us, in this thing; and perhaps, the common method of acknowledging, that human minds cannot reconcile the fixed purposes of God with the free agency of man is best: yet it would be easy to show, that the difficulty is fully as great, and even greater on the Arminian, than the Calvinistic theory. The former, indeed, talks of conditional decrees or purposes of God, which are mere hypothetical things; a purpose to do this or that, if some other event should occur; but if this should not occur, to act differently. This, indeed, is to make the great omniscient God like ourselves. It is to represent him as dependent for his eternal purposes on creatures not in existence. But really, this theory can afford no manner of relief: for, as God, from the beginning, knew what the actions of free creatures would be, his own purposes were as much fixed as they could be, on any other hypothesis. If a ruler determines to punish his subjects if they commit certain crimes, and is at the same time assured that they will commit them, his purpose to punish is as certainly fixed as it can be.

But before we dismiss this subject as incomprehensible, let us examine whether there is not a theory on which the divine foreknowledge and purpose, may be reconciled, and on which Calvinists and Arminians may become united in their views.

Whatever plan the Almighty determined on from the beginning, or whatever purpose he formed in regard to the universe of creatures, all was done under the guidance of infinite wisdom. That God decreed, in wisdom, every thing which he did purpose, is admitted by all. To form a plan for the creation, arrangement, and government of the world, supposes that out of all possible plans, that was selected which seemed best to infinite wisdom. In the order of nature, therefore, the whole congeries of creatures and events, which compose the universe, must have been present to the Divine Mind before his purpose was formed; or to speak more correctly, all creatures, with all their relations and actions were in the view of God's infinite understanding, when he decreed their future existence; and the whole was viewed as one connected plan or system, and was

contemplated at one comprehensive glance, and all future existence was decreed by one single act. Now, whatever the nature and qualities of acts was viewed to be in the divine purpose, the same must they be in the event. If God determined that free agents should exist, and that their actions should be free, when this part of his plan is executed, free agents with their free actions will exist; and the decree, so far from being inconsistent with their freedom, is the very thing which renders it certain that such free agents and voluntary acts will ever have a being. Could not God from all eternity decree, that creatures endued with liberty should exist, and if this was his purpose, will not the event answer to it? And if such creatures exist and act, will not their actions be free? If, then, the plan of the universe adopted by infinite wisdom, included the existence of free moral agents and their free actions, such creatures and such actions must come into being, in consequence of the decree; human liberty, therefore, instead of being destroyed by the decree, is established upon an immutable basis. If God is omnipotent and wills the existence of a free agent, the next moment, such a being would instantly start into being, if he wills, that such a creature should exist six thousand years after the creation, the effect will as certainly follow, and will as exactly answer to the purpose of the divine mind. It would be very strange, indeed, if the Almighty could not effectually will the existence of a free, voluntary act: to suppose the contrary, would be to deny his omnipotence. Now, if he can decree the future existence of such an act, it will surely come to pass, agreeably to the design; that is, it will exist as a free act. Now whether we can tell how God can secure the freedom of such an act or not, we ought not to hesitate to believe that a being of infinite perfection can accomplish it. To say, then, that the decree by which the certainty of a free act is secured, violates free agency, seems very much like a contradiction in terms.

The objection, that the doctrine of absolute decrees necessarily makes God the author of sin, derives its whole force from overlooking the important fact, that there may be created agents, who are endued with the power of originating action by the very constitution of their nature; and who, although dependent on God for their existence and faculties, yet being supported in being, are capable of acting, and of acting freely. If such creatures did not exist, there neither would be, nor could be, any such thing as moral agency; and consequently, no such thing as praise or blame. But if God accomplishes his pur-

poses by crediting such agents, who are free and voluntary in their actions, and capable of doing right or wrong, it is not sound logic to infer, that the moral qualities of their actions must be ascribed to him. They are answerable for their own acts. If such active, accountable beings can be created—and why should we doubt it—their actions ought not to be ascribed to the Creator.

But still the difficulty occurs, that if God positively decrees that such creatures shall perform certain acts; to execute this purpose, it is necessary to suppose that he exerts an influence mediately or immediately, on their minds: and if a superior being causes one dependent on him, to perform certain actions, the latter, it is thought, cannot be accountable for such acts.

There are two methods of answering this objection. We first admit the fact, that God does exert his power in the production of all the acts of creatures, by such a concurrence with them, that the physical part of the act is the effect of his agency, but so far as it is of a sinful nature it is their own. Thus it is acknowledged, that God is the efficient cause of our free acts, considered merely as acts of intellect or will; but at the same time the act of the creature determines the moral quality of the thing done. This is the distinction invented by the schoolmen, and adopted by most Calvinistic theologians of former days; and which they attempt to illustrate by various comparisons. It is, however, a distinction not easily understood; and has never been so explained as to remove the darkness and perplexity in which the subject is involved. For, if God is the efficient cause of the action, as it is an act of the mind, and if he determines its physical nature, it does not appear that any thing is left for the creature, but to yield: the physical part of an act is the substance of that act, and its morality is the relation which it bears to something else. Now, although we may conceive of an act, as purely a mental energy, without taking into view any of its relations; yet when such an act is produced in the mind of man, who stands in certain relations to God and his fellow creatures; and is under a moral law, which measures and estimates the moral character of every act, it does not appear, how we can admit that it is as to its substance the effect of divine power, and yet as to its morality the act of the creature.

Others come up directly to the difficulty, and maintain that God is the author of sin, or the efficient cause of sin, but that there is nothing of the nature of sin in him. They allege, that

there is no necessity that what God makes should be like himself; or, that he should possess the qualities and attributes of his creatures. God creates matter, but he is not therefore material. He creates poisonous reptiles, but who would think of inferring, that, on this account, he possesses properties answering to this? So God may be the author of sinful acts in creatures, and not be, in any degree, a partaker of sin. It is, moreover, alleged, that we are so constituted, that we judge of the morality of actions without any reference to their cause. If a man is conscious of a voluntary exercise, forbidden by the law of God, conscience immediately pronounces sentence of condemnation, without the least regard to the cause. We feel guilty on account of a wrong choice, however that volition may have been produced in our minds. Free agency, according to this theory, consists in voluntary action alone; and for all such exercises we are accountable. There is, therefore, no inconsistency whatever, between the divine purpose and free agency. This theory has many advocates in our country, and is considered an improvement of the old Calvinistic theology. But it is repugnant to common sense; and the arguments employed in its defence are sophistical.

For, in the first place, reasoning from the effect to the cause is one of the most clear and logical methods of demonstrating truth which we possess, and if it were abolished, almost all useful reasoning would be at end. By the works of creation we prove conclusively, that God is wise and powerful, and benevolent, because we can see manifest indications of these attributes in the creatures. We do not, indeed, conclude from such reasoning, that there is a perfect resemblance in the thing made to the Creator, which is impossible; but we legitimately infer from effects which could not be such as they are, unless their cause was powerful, wise, and benevolent. There must be in the cause that which will account for the effect: and when a free intelligent agent is the cause, his character may be known as far as his design in the effect is manifest. If these principles are not admitted, and it should be denied, that the nature of a cause can be determined from its effects, then it would follow, that an evil being may have created this world; and that a superior excellence to any that existed in the cause, might be in an effect. Now, if the evidence of goodness in the constitution of creatures proves that God is good; if he is the author of sin the conclusion would be as legitimate, that evil exists in him, which is blasphemous. But it is said, that

though sin in itself be evil, yet God in producing it has a good end in view; and then we establish the principle, that it is consistent with infinite purity to do evil, that good may come; and if this is consistent with divine perfection, it is also with human virtue; but such a principle is severely reprehended in the word of God.

By some writers, the difficulty is got over by what may properly be called a metaphysical quibble. They reason thus. There can be no sin before the first sin; he, therefore, who is the author of sin, cannot be sinful, for that would be to suppose that sin existed before it did exist; that is, sin before the first sin. Now, if such sophistry deserves an answer, it may be briefly given thus. When we speak of God as the author of sin, the meaning is, sin in the creature; and when of the first sin, we mean the first sin of man; but if it be true that God, by an immediate agency produces this sin in man, the consequence would be, that moral evil in man or any other creature, is not the only or the first evil of that kind, since it must have had a previous existence in the cause of these sinful acts of the creature. A parallel case is this: God is the author of holiness, but if holiness be produced by God, then it did not exist before it was produced, and thus we come to the impious conclusion, that because God is the author of holiness, there is no holiness in him, otherwise, holiness existed before it was produced, that is, before it did exist.

Again, if God produces by his Almighty power, all the evil thoughts and purposes which arise in the mind of the sinner, they are not properly the acts of the sinner, but of him who produces them. It is, indeed, said, that God acts upon us to cause us to act, and that the act is properly our own, if it be our feeling or volition, and it matters not how it was produced. The judgment of conscience is, that the man is guilty of whatever he wills improperly, however that will may have been produced in him. As was mentioned before, they insist that we have nothing to do with the cause of an act, in judging of its moral nature. If, on our part, it is voluntary, that is enough; the sin is as much our own as it can be; and the appeal is made to our own consciousness of what passes within our minds, when we pass sentence of condemnation upon ourselves. Now, there is some truth in this statement, which gives plausibility to the whole. It is true, that when we are conscious of an evil purpose, we immediately experience a sense of guilt, without any inquiry after the origin of this volition; but why is this, but

because we take it for granted, in all our judgments respecting our sins, that they are our own acts. And if men could be convinced that God was the author of all their sinful acts, they would cease to feel that they were accountable for them. Men, commonly, do not believe in their own existence more fairly, than in the fact, that their thoughts are the actions of their own souls, and that they originate in the activity of their own minds. We do not deny the power of God to produce what he pleases in any mind, but if he produces evil, the creature is excusable, for who can resist omnipotence? Who can think any thing else, upon this hypothesis, than what is created within him? But an attempt has been made to show that God may produce sin in the creature, and the acts remain sinful, because it is admitted, by all who believe in the operations of grace, that he works in all his people, both "to will and to do." If then the holy exercises of the pious are produced by the agency of God, and yet these are holy exercises, and are felt by the saints to be their own; then there is no reason why he may not work in sinners all their sinful exercises, and yet they be their own sins. To which we would reply, that sin is sin by whomsoever produced. As was said before, we do not deny the power of God to produce evil in the sinner's mind; but we deny that it is consistent with his holiness. The question now, however, is, whether the sinner can be justly punished for evil thoughts wrought in his heart by Almighty power. And we are willing to admit the parallel brought for illustration, and when extended to its proper length, will overthrow the cause which it was brought to support. When God works in his people to make them willing to love and obey him, is the praise of their exercises of grace due to them? Do they not universally ascribe all the praise to God, saying, not unto us, &c. They feel that if such acts are rewarded, it is a mere matter of favour. Look, then, at the other side of the parallel. When God works in the hearts of the wicked to do evil, the blame is not to be ascribed to them, but to him who is the true author of their exercises; and they deserve no punishment for such acts, unless God should choose, gratuitously or arbitrarily, to inflict punishment on them.

And if God can create an active being, I mean one essentially active, capable of originating action, why have recourse to other efficient causes to account for the existence of the free actions of such creatures? Some writers assume it as a maxim, that no creature can act without the physical efficient energy of God co-operating, to give him the ability to put forth the

act; or as it is more simply expressed by the abettors of the last mentioned theory, no creature can act but as it is acted on. But we deny that this is a self-evident truth; and we are sure it never can be demonstrated. It is freely admitted that every creature is continually sustained in existence, and in the possession of its faculties by the power of God; but if that creature be in its very essence active, it is evident from the premises, that nothing more is necessary to cause it to act, than to continue its existence. According to our theory, therefore, the efficient cause of free actions is to be looked for no where else but in the free agents themselves; except in special cases where God may choose, for wise and good ends, supernaturally to operate on their minds. And if there be no necessity of introducing other causes of free and voluntary actions, why should we encumber the subject more deeply with the doctrine of divine efficiency or concurrence in the performance of sinful acts. No distinctions, however nice, will ever be sufficient to guard that system from the shocking consequence of making God the author of sin.

But it is feared, that the theory which we defend will make the creature independent of the Creator; there is no reason for apprehension, as we not only admit that the power of God is, every moment, necessary for the sustenance of the creature, but we maintain that every action of the creature will be accordant with his eternal purpose. To obtain a distinct view of this subject, it is requisite to recall to mind a few undeniable principles. The first is, that in the production of creatures, God acts wisely, or as a being of intelligence; like finite beings, God has no need to deliberate, compare, and reason, but he perceives instinctively all possible things with all their possible relations. In wisdom he made all things that are made. Every minute part of every animal and of every vegetable was wisely ordained to occupy its appropriate place, and suited to answer its appropriate end. The whole system, in the various relations of one part to another, was arranged and adjusted in infinite wisdom. This supposes that the whole existed in idea before the infinite mind when his purpose was formed to give it existence. In this plan free agents formed a part; these, with all their actions, also were contemplated previously (in the order of nature) to the decree which determined their future existence to be certain.

Again, in selecting his plan, the great Creator acted with perfect freedom. He was under no necessity to create any

thing. He is independent of all creatures, and stands in need of nothing. Not only was he at perfect liberty to create or not, but he was free to adopt any system which pleased him. If there had been any thing in the existing plan which did not please him, or would not answer his purpose perfectly, he was at liberty to reject the whole, and would have done so. When he purposed to create the progenitor of the human family, he had it in his power to have given existence to another of the same species: he might, for example, have made the last man first; or have formed a person distinct from any who ever shall actually exist. Now this being the case, the inquiry arises, could not God have placed at the head of the human family, on whom the destiny of the rest should depend, one who would not have sinned? If he could not; if every creature that could have been created of the human species would certainly have sinned as well as Adam, then it follows eventually that sin could not be avoided if man existed; and the conclusion is, that a determination to create man, involved in it the purpose to permit the existence of sin. But if the alternative be taken, and it be said, that God could have created, in the place of Adam, one who would not have sinned, still the same conclusion forces itself upon us; for if, when he might have formed a creature who would not have transgressed, he chose to form one whom he knew would, it is as evident as any thing can be, that by this selection he did determine to permit the existence of sin.

Let us now, for a moment, examine the theory which supposes, that the plan of the Almighty, as it originally existed in the eternal mind, is not the one which is actually in existence; but that while it was his purpose that evil should have no place in the universe, contrary to his will and plan, it has come in through the transgression of free agents; and that in consequence of this a new plan has been adopted, accommodated to the exigence of the case. If we understand the Arminian theory, this is the point by which it stands distinguished from the theory which we believe. The mere statement of this opinion seems to us to carry with it a confutation. For, when the original plan was formed and adopted, according to the premises, it was certainly known that it would utterly fail; and was it ever heard of among creatures, that any intelligent being seriously formed a purpose which he knew at the time could not and would not be accomplished? To suppose, then, that God with a perfect prescience of all future events, resolved upon a plan

of the universe entirely different from what he knew would come to pass, is a scheme so unreasonable, that we know not how any one, after distinctly considering it, can adopt it: and we seem to ourselves now to perceive the reason why some speculative Arminians have been driven to the theory mentioned above, that God did not choose to know what would really take place.

But passing by the inconsistency of this theory on account of these reasons, let us see to what consequences it will lead us. The hypothesis is, that the present state of the world does not accord with the original plan of the Almighty; but that by the introduction of sin against his will, the whole state of the moral world is changed, and of course the government of the world by providence must be entirely different from what it would have been if man had not sinned. One undeniable consequence is, that the end which God had in view in the creation is lost, unless we suppose that his glory can be promoted as well by a state of things which prostrates his own plan, as by its execution. But if the ruler of the universe was frustrated in his purpose by the first sin, so he must be by every subsequent transgression; and, therefore, the existence of creatures, instead of answering his original purpose, whether that was to make them happy or to promote his own glory, has entirely failed of its complete accomplishment. And if this has occurred by the actual course of events in time past, what security is there, that the same will not be the fact in time to come? yea, what security is there that things will not continue to grow worse and worse, until all nature shall rush to some dreadful catastrophe, in which every thing good in the creation shall be utterly lost in everlasting darkness and confusion?

It will not be satisfactory to answer, that God has wisdom and power sufficient to prevent such a catastrophe; for his wisdom and power, according to the hypothesis, are not adequate to the prevention of sin and its consequences; and if these may arise and spread and increase, how can the consequence supposed be prevented? If the plan of the Almighty Ruler of the universe may be thwarted in one instance, it may in all. No security for the final well-being of the universe can be found any where. Now is it reasonable to think that, on these principles, a God of infinite wisdom would ever have made creatures capable of frustrating all his plans, and disappointing all his most benevolent purposes?

But it may be alleged, that God foreseeing the evil which would arise from the abuse of free will, determined to provide

against it, and accordingly, has done so, by sending his Son into the world to repair the ruins which sin has made; and thus, although God will not be glorified according to his original design, he will, nevertheless, be honoured by the new remedial scheme. The ground of the objection, however, still remains. If God's first plan was entirely frustrated by the sin of his creatures, what security is there, that the same will not happen in relation to this new plan? As the will of man is still free, and as the success of the mediatorial scheme depends on the choice of man, why may it not happen, that the end aimed at in the second will also be frustrated? Indeed, according to this theory, the fact has already occurred; for the design of God in sending his Son was to save all men, but it is acknowledged, that only a small part of the human race has been brought to salvation hitherto. And there is no better hope for the future, for men are not better now than formerly, and judging from the past, we may conjecture, that the greater number will continue to neglect this great salvation. Hence it appears, that the great God has been disconcerted and disappointed in all his designs: not only was his original plan of a universe without sin, frustrated, but his remedial plan, which was to save all men from sin, has also failed. These are consequences which inevitably flow from the hypothesis, that the cause of events in the world is not in accordance with the original plan of the Creator. But it is impossible, after an impartial view of the divine attributes, to believe in these conclusions. They are repugnant to reason. They are dishonourable to the divine perfections.

It may be, however, that the sober Arminian will be disposed to take different ground, and to maintain, that God did, with the prescience of all his sins, determine to create man; and that the existing state of things he did resolve to permit; but that he decreed nothing respecting these actions, but left them free; so that when the creature sins, he is not under any necessity of doing wrong from any divine purpose. Now, here it is evident, again, that there is an idea attached to the doctrine of decrees which does not belong to it, and which we have heretofore laboured to separate from it. It is, that if their sinful actions are decreed, they cannot be free, and must come to pass by an unavoidable necessity. To remove all difficulty, however, on this account, we will agree to meet the Arminian on the ground last selected. And we do aver, that in this theory he comes substantially into the very doctrine which we

maintain. For if God formed man with the full certainty of all his sins, then the purpose to create such a being with a foresight of such acts, is virtually decreeing the future existence of such acts. If, when the purpose was formed to create Adam, his fall was distinctly foreseen, then the determination to give Adam existence, involved the purpose that such an act as his transgression should also exist. Not that God intended or needed to do any thing to cause man to sin; this we reject, as much as the Arminian: but he resolved to *permit* this event. And here is the true ground of distinction between effective and permissive decrees; in the execution of the first, God acts himself; but in the execution of the last, other agents act, and act freely, and without constraint.

It does appear, therefore, that there is a ground on which the sober Arminian and moderate Calvinist can meet; and on which, even their views of the divine decrees can be made to harmonize.

ART. II.—WORKS OF JOHN HOWE.

The Works of the Reverend and learned John Howe, M. A. sometime fellow of Magdalen College, Oxon. London.

A STRIKING evidence of the prevalence of evangelical piety in England, is found in the great currency which is given, at the present time, to the works of the old Non-conformists. The massy volumes which were prized in the seventeenth century had become repulsive to modern readers, and the great productions of these excellent men needed a garb more consonant with the pampered taste of the age. The enterprise, therefore, is highly laudable which has presented us with the labours of Owen and Baxter and Bates and Flavel and Charnock and Howe, in an elegant and convenient form, and divested of that uncouth and peculiar orthography which characterizes the ancient folios.

The writings of the last mentioned theologian have been less perused by the majority of Christian readers than many other contemporary works; not so much from any want of interest in the subjects which he treats, still less from any defect in his matter or style, as from the more subtle and philosophical nature of his reasoning. The principal performances of Howe must ever continue to be most prized by men accustomed to