

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

NUMBER II.

SEPTEMBER, 1848.

ARTICLE I.

THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY—ITS NATURE AND EVIDENCE.

1. *What Constitutes a Call to the Gospel Ministry, in the Biblical Repertory, for 1831: p. 196.*
2. *The Necessity of a Divine Call. Ch. II. of the Christian Ministry, by the Rev. CHAS. BRIDGES. Fourth Edition. London, 1835.*
3. *Necessary Call to the Ministry. Ch. III. of the Christian Ministry, by J. EDMONSTON, a Wesleyan Minister. London, 1828.*
4. *On the Call of a Minister of Jesus Christ to the Sacred Office. Ch. IV. of EADE'S Gospel Ministry.*
5. *What is a Call to the Ministry? Tracts of the American Tract Society. Vol. 9, p. 333, and vol. 10, p. 285.*
6. *The Use of Preachers, and How to Obtain More, by the Rev. A. A. PORTER. Charleston, 1848.*
7. *A Call to the Ministry—What are the Evidences of a Divine Call? in the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, 1841.*

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In conclusion, we express the fervent hope that defenders of the truth, as it is in Jesus, able men, who can rule their own spirits, who can understand the foundations both of truth and error, and who can maintain the truth against all assailants, may be raised up in large numbers in our country. They will be needed more and more. We are, therefore, not in the least inclined to favor those notions which inculcate non-resistance to errorists; while, at the same time, we abhor theological pugilism. Those men in our country, who have by oral debate or by printed publications, met the fautors of heresy, in lucid, kind, solemn, and able discussion, deserve well of their generation. We trust the number of such will be greatly increased. Only let them follow good ends by good rules, and in a good spirit, and they will do a work for which generations to come will bless them.

ARTICLE III.

THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS CONCERNING A GOD.

I. CHARNOCK *on the Attributes.*

II. PALEY'S *Natural Theology.*

III. LORD BROUGHAM'S *Discourse on Natural Theology.*

IV. LOCKE *on the Human Understanding.*

These volumes are introduced, not for the purpose of review, but as associated with the subject about to be discussed. Charnock on the Divine Existence and Attributes, has long been a text book for theological students and professors. It is learned, able and conclusive. Paley is not much less studied. His argument is simple, logical and

brief. From the existence of design in the eye, the ear and other bodily organs, he infers the existence of a designer, and proves that this designer is God. Lord Brougham applies Paley's mode of reasoning to the mind, and thus introduces a psychological argument in support of the Divine existence. Locke's great work on the Understanding, is a laborious inquiry concerning the powers of the human mind, and the manner in which they are furnished with knowledge.

With the exception of the last, the subject of the present inquiry is anterior to the field of argument upon which those writers have entered, and which they have so ably maintained. It is not proposed to ask, whether in the present state of the world, or in any past state of the world, the Divine Existence may not be proved by appeals to nature around and within us? On this subject, we have no doubt. Indeed, the Apostle Paul asserts it, when he tells us, "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Our inquiry refers to the *origin* of our ideas of a God. Those ideas once introduced, and having become the hereditary property of mankind, the natural argument becomes clear and satisfactory. *But how did such ideas at first originate?*

To this question, there can be but three answers — either they are innate — are matters of rational deduction from nature — or, are given by revelation.

I. These ideas are not innate. By innate ideas, we mean mental conceptions of the existence and character of things, which are generated with the mind itself. The treatise of Locke on this subject, furnishes the most conclusive proofs, that there are no such things as innate ideas, except in the visionary speculations of a certain class of philosophers. We subjoin the following remarks.

Innate ideas, were they to exist, would be entirely useless. All knowledge is attended with responsibility, and designed for practical purposes. Now, of what value can knowledge be to an unborn child? What practical lesson does it teach; what responsibility does it imply? If, therefore, innate ideas would be but a useless expenditure of divine goodness, we may fairly infer they have no existence.

But such ideas, so far as we can see, would be prejudicial. The powers of infancy, if they may be called such, are exceedingly feeble. To overburden them is virtually to destroy them. Were the knowledge of a man suddenly communicated to a child, his intellect would become a wreck. Against an evil of this sort, nature, as a kind guardian, disposes the mind to recoil from subjects beyond its comprehension. Now, if the mental structure be at first so frail, as after the lapse of years to be in danger from overtaxation, how exceedingly deleterious to the understanding of an unborn infant would be his stock of innate ideas! Would not such a natural outfit, so far from expediting subsequent progress, prostrate the mind in embryo, and transmit derangement even from the womb?

Such ideas are also impossible. The only methods by which we obtain ideas are, sensation and consciousness. Before, therefore, any ideas whatever can exist, these powers, that is the soul, must exist. The process of filling the mind with knowledge is in the very nature of the case posterior to the existence of the mind itself. A house is first built, then replenished; a ship is first constructed, then loaded. Just so it is with the mind: it must first exist before it can become the proprietor of knowledge. No one doubts but that the faculties for obtaining ideas, exist naturally in the mind. But, to conclude from this, that the ideas also exist, would be to deny the legitimate office of the mental faculties themselves; for of what use are they, if our knowledge can exist anterior to their exercise?

Nor is there a solitary witness in the whole world of the existence of such ideas. Who remembers them? Who can tell us what they were? No one, not even the greatest philosophers. Nor is it any objection to this, that very many thoughts and ideas, known to exist in our earlier years, are afterwards forgotten. Innate ideas must be of a very different character from those obtained in the ordinary way. They are written on the soul by the hand of God himself. Like the letters, therefore, of the decalogue, they ought to remain permanent. But no one can now read or find them! Certainly, then, they had no existence.

On the contrary, whatever ideas we now possess, have all come to us, not by being concreated in us, but wholly through sensation, consciousness and subsequent reflection.

Now, if all the knowledge of which we are conscious, has been derived from these sources, it is certainly a matter of just inference, that whatever knowledge we have at any time possessed, has been transmitted through the same media. What notions have we of light, save those that have been awakened by our organs of vision? What conceptions have we of sounds, except as they occur to us by means of hearing? Just so, the ordinary channels of knowledge being sensation, consciousness and reflection, we can predicate its existence only where such faculties are in operation.

But even should there exist a class of innate ideas, it is not likely that the being and character of a God should be among them. When we consider the intrinsic value of things, this might appear natural enough. But the mind does not pursue knowledge in this way. It notices, at first, only those things which are nearest, and which more immediately concern its well-being. Its attention is arrested by suffering, or the demands of appetite. It observes countenances that are near—it returns a cheerful smile. All the subjects of philosophy, government and religion, lie wholly beyond its comprehension, unnoticed and unknown. Probably there never was a very young child, who possessed at that age, the faintest idea of the existence of a Deity. Such conceptions are wholly the acquirements of later years.

It may also be stated here, that persons who by being deprived of some of the bodily senses, have not enjoyed any religious instruction whatever, have had no idea at all of a God. Shut up in their dark intellectual prisons, that great conception has never dawned upon the gloom with which they were enveloped, till science and art have introduced the knowledge of revealed truth. Now, if the idea of a God be innate—if it exist as a natural inheritance in every mind, such a result as this would never occur. But, according to the printed statements of many who have taught such persons, previously to the communication of Scriptural truth, the mind was wholly unconscious of the existence of any such transmitted legacy by the hand of creation.

From what we have here stated, it is surely not too much to say that our ideas of the being and character of a God, have not been derived through an act of concreation with

the mind itself. If enjoyed at all, they must come from some other source.

II. Did our ideas of a God, then, originate in logical deduction from the works of creation? This point has been very generally conceded by theologians to the advocates of natural religion. The reason of this is, as we conceive, because no discrimination has been made between facts as they exist under revelation, and facts that must have existed had no such revelation been made. From the very creation of Adam to John, on Patmos, there have been successive communications of the divine will to men. Our race has never been destitute, even in its most fallen condition, of some of the instructions and benefits of such communications. Not only the Hebrew and Christian modes of worship have been based on them, but they have been the platform of all the mythological and fabulous religions that have existed in the world. Now, to prove that all the facts of nature harmonize with the idea of a God, as made known by revelation, is certainly a very different thing from proving that the knowledge of those facts has originated the idea of such a being. The one is the discovery of a great truth; the other its application to things around us. The one is a labor comparatively easy; the other, as we conceive, a task superior to the human intellect.

Some advantage has already been gained on this subject, by disproving the innate idea of a Deity. This was one of the methods by which such an idea might be supposed to arise. If, then, this mode of reaching such a conception be impracticable, it is at least possible that the process of rational deduction may be no more successful. The idea, we admit, is an important one—yea, a necessary one. It stands at the foundation of all philosophy and religion. This, however, does not prove that a course of logic is the only, or even the best mode of originating such a conception. And as God is pleased to pass over helpless infancy in such a communication, it certainly can be no reproach to his character, if he also pass over helpless manhood. Neither the existence of reason in the child, nor its development in the man may have been designed for a work of this kind. The office of reason may be to apprehend the conception when revealed—to trace out its evidences when communicated. The discovery may be a work peculiar to

Deity, and to be communicated by divine teaching. And as reason cannot stand reproached at the threshold of its existence for the absence of such knowledge, so it is not to be condemned as useless afterwards, because it does not grasp a truth too remote and indefinite for its powers of comprehension.

The idea of a God, we remark, is not a matter either of consciousness or sensation. These, as we have seen, are the inlets of our knowledge. But it is through neither of these that we primarily arrive at the existence of a First Cause, consciousness bears testimony to the operations and exercises of the human mind. Now, if the notion of a God be not something already in the mind, it is impossible that consciousness should testify concerning it. We have an inward persuasion of our own existence, we experience the ebullitions of passion, we notice the order of our thoughts, the phases of our fancy: but in all these exercises, we apprehend nothing of the existence and character of a God, unless such a conception has been introduced into the mind in some other way, than by mere consciousness. Through sensation, we apprehend the material world around us. Our eyes, our ears, our senses of taste, touch and smell, are all so many means of intercourse with external nature. But here their offices terminate. The whole world of spirituality lies beyond their grasp. They neither see, touch nor hear a Deity. All that their instrumentalities can accomplish on this subject, is to furnish the materials from which the great idea may be deduced.

But is it probable that such a deduction would have been made without revelation? The materials of all the sciences have existed from the creation; but the discovery of the great principles of those sciences are comparatively of modern origin. The revolution of the earth around the sun, the motion of the heavenly bodies, the ebbing and flowing of the tides, the circulation of air, the growth of plants and animals, the chemical agents which originate the form and character of bodies—all these have been in existence since the days of Adam. Yet how many centuries passed before the physical laws that control these elements were discovered? During this whole time too, these various agencies were in perpetual operation before the eyes and senses of the whole world of mankind! We certainly overrate hu-

man reason, if we imagine that with suitable data, it necessarily infers the truth of which such data are the basis. It is quite probable, then, that with all the light of nature around him, man destitute of revelation, would have passed ages on ages, in utter ignorance of the existence of that Great Principle on which all other principles are based.

Nor is the existence of a First Cause, as some may imagine, one of those first truths, that would naturally flash upon the mind in the contemplation of physical nature. In our deliberate judgment, if reached by a process of reason only, it is the most remote, and the last to be attained of all the truths discovered in this way. The process of philosophical investigation is the following. A certain class of facts are observed to exist. After due investigation, these are referred to a certain cause or principle. Another class is taken up, and placed like the former under some general law. Thus, the ascertaining of facts, and their reference to specific causes, constitute the very essence of human philosophy. Now, the inquiry concerning some great principle or agent, in whom all these subordinate principles meet, and from whom they derive their efficiency, is a subsequent investigation, if indeed it be inquired into at all.

Nor does any supposed dependence of man upon his Creator for life, and breath, and all things, relieve the difficulty in the least. Philosophy abundantly teaches that a certain great law in nature may be a sort of nursing parent to our race for ages; and yet men remain during all this period in utter ignorance of its existence. Gravity had given to men years, months and days; it had loaded their barns with plenty, and scattered contentment around their fire-sides; it had given stability to their dwellings and security to their persons—it had, in short, made the world tenable—and yet, till the days of Newton, this great physical law, in which men may be said “to live, move and have their being,” was not even known! Now, if this be so of a physical principle, which exhibits itself at all points and to all men, what sanguine expectations should be entertained, as to the discovery of a still greater principle, less in contact with man, and even more mysterious in its being?

There is something also in the incomprehensibility of the Divine Being, which would ever make the discovery of his existence by mere reason, a formidable task. If the

author of all things, then God must have existed before all things. If the upholder of nature, then his presence must encompass nature. If the all-efficient cause of life and action, then must he be invisible, though every where acting. An eternal, ubiquitous Almighty, yet invisible Deity, certainly presents something not very congenial to the limited and erring faculties of the human mind. Hence, the universal tendency among all heathen nations, while they retain the names and titles of the Deity, to lose all the just ideas of the Being to whom they are applied.

There is, therefore, great probability that in their reasonings about a first cause, in the absence of revelation, men would make such first cause to be either chance or necessity. There are many things which occur under the observations of men, to which the specific causes cannot be assigned. These have been generally supposed to exist fortuitously. There are also many things that exist in nature, the antecedents of which are unknown. These, in like manner, may be assigned to accident. Thus, from ordinary and partial beginnings, the theory of chance might so gain ground, as to be considered altogether adequate to the various effects produced in the operations of nature. Nor is this mere conjecture. The doctrine of chance has had its advocates in almost all ages and countries. With some philosophers this has been a favorite theory. Another class of persons would go to the opposite extreme, maintaining the eternity of matter, and the fixed necessity of effects in the order in which they occur. But, whether the one or the other of these hypotheses be adopted, the result would be the same as to the doctrine under consideration. Either effectually displaces, or rather anticipates the belief in a wise and Intelligent Ruler of the universe.

But suppose a different theory advanced. Suppose there were those who should infer from the works of creation, the existence of an intelligent and all-powerful author. How could such inference be proved? Especially, how could the conception be so realized, as to be made the foundation for obedience and worship? Columbus inferred, and inferred truly, the existence of a western continent. Had he not however made the discovery, his inference would have gone down with him to the grave in silent obscurity. Herschel inferred, from some irregularities in the motion of

Saturn, the existence of another planet revolving beyond him. But had he not by actual experiment brought that body to the knowledge of men, his reasonings would have been of little or no value. Precisely so, the deductions of philosophy, merely, concerning the being of a God, in the absence of proof, that is, in the absence of revelation, would have amounted, at most, to mere intellectual speculation. The argument may be well arranged and the result apparently conclusive, still the human mind experiences the need of something more than deduction in a case of this sort. It requires certainty—it seeks after positive proof—it demands an all-pervading conviction. Such proof philosophy could not give—has never given.

There is another difficulty. The idea of a God, or certainly of the true God, as strange as it may seem, has ever been a matter of aversion to mankind. The whole system of idolatry proves this—the disbelief of infidels in Revelation proves this. Now, if after the idea of a God has been communicated to men, “they do not wish to retain it in their knowledge,” but seek by every possible method to divest themselves of it, what is the probability of their discovery of such an idea, in the absence of all supernatural communication? The love of knowledge may prompt to difficult investigations on other subjects. The love of fame or gain may stimulate to the most dangerous and laborious enterprises in some earthly pursuit. But where would the man be found who would inquire after a Being, whom his imagination had clothed only in the garments of terror and wrath?

But our inquiry is one concerning a fact. Who then, we ask, is he that originated the idea of a God? Where can so great a philosopher be found? To what country does he belong? In what age did he live? So far as we know, this idea has always and invariably been communicated. It originated in Divine Revelation, and is transmitted by successive instructions from age to age. The notions the heathen entertain of a Creator, gross as they often are, have thus originated; and the ideas men in Christian lands possess on this subject, have had the same origin. The greatest theologians and the acutest philosophers, are indebted to early instruction, and not to personal discovery for this sublimest of all truths. True, that after the con-

ception once occupies the mind, it is so coincident with all that we see around us and feel within us, that it is received with all the force of a demonstration. True, that with a little study, we can so collect and arrange proofs from nature, as to bring ourselves and others to the conviction that every other hypothesis is absurd. Still, all this takes place after Revelation has disclosed the conception, and maternal love, with many a kind word, has sealed the lesson on our hearts.

There is another consideration on this subject of some force. The ideas men entertain of a God have usually been clear and influential, or the contrary, as they are relatively situated at a nearer or remoter distance from the source of revealed truth. Among all heathen nations, such ideas are exceedingly indistinct. Among those who enjoy the Scriptures, they are luminous and controlling. Now, what makes the difference? If our conceptions of a Deity are the result of reason only, then ought those conceptions to be uniform throughout the world. The sun shines, the showers fall, the heavenly bodies are seen in every part of the earth. If, therefore, our notions of a Deity are communicated by nature through reason, then ought all men to have equally or nearly equally distinct ideas of the being and character of a God. But so far from this being the case, the conceptions of men on this subject are clear or obscure, precisely in the ratio of their acquaintance with a direct revelation from heaven.

If a great number of persons were located at different distances from some luminous body, and it had been ascertained that those who were nearest to it could see with the greatest facility, and those who were farthest off, could see but obscurely; and if it were also shown, that all intermediate distances had more or less light, as they were at a nearer or remoter point from the luminous body, it certainly would be rational to conclude that the light they all enjoyed was communicated from the same source. Just so here. If Christian nations have a full and clear perception of the being and character of an unseen Creator, it is not because the works of God around them speak a different language from what they do elsewhere; it is not because they possess more sagacity and stronger intellectual powers than other nations; but solely is it owing to their more intimate ac-

quaintance with that revelation which God has given. On the contrary, if heathen nations have duller apprehensions of the character of the Supreme Being than their more favored brethren, it is not owing to the fact that nature does not speak within and around them, or, that they are destitute of those powers necessary to interpret her works, but wholly to the remoteness of their position from the Holy Scriptures.

If, then, we place all these considerations together, it certainly will appear true, that as a matter of fact, men have not originated the idea of a God by reasoning; and that, as a matter of speculation, they never could have originated such a conception.

III. We must therefore look into the Scriptures, not simply for the remoter parts of our theology, but for its fundamental idea — the being of a God. Here the great truth is revealed — is written — is made clear. The Great Unheard here speaks in the language of men. The Great Unseen turns aside the curtains of invisibility, and manifests himself to us as our God and Father. The types and symbols of uninterpreted nature are laid aside, and God comes forth to us as a teacher and a friend. The great machinery of creation, if not suspended, is apparently forsaken, while its Author and Manager exhibits to our admiration and faith Himself, his character, his will, his grace!

The first notion of a God was evidently *revealed* to Adam in paradise. He did not find it in the storehouse of his intellectual treasury, as a sort of legacy by creation. He did not institute a course of reasoning on nature for its discovery. No. It came to him in a manner better accommodated to his apprehension — more simple — more certain. God was exhibited to him in a form, he spake to him with an audible voice.

All men, save our first ancestors, have had parents to teach and guide them during the period of infancy and childhood. This, however, was not the case with Adam and Eve. Their early days were watched over by no parental eye; their immature faculties were trained by no parental lips. But were they altogether orphans? Was there no one to guard, no one to protect, no one to teach them? Has God furnished all their descendants with these necessary blessings, while he left the first and most needy

of our race to roam amid forests and beasts, destitute of care, destitute of sympathy? Certainly not. In truth, every parent has fallen, so to speak, into God's primeval office. He was himself the parent, the guardian, the friend, the instructor of our great ancestors. Into all the secrecy and tenderness of this original parentage and guardianship we may not enter. The fact, however, is obvious, and its necessity palpable.

Here, then, *begun* the notion of a God. It was communicated in a way best adapted to the nature of the human mind; and it was communicated divested of inference, unattended with speculation, unobscured by doubt. It was clear, definite, certain.

From this original source, the idea of a God has been transmitted from parent to child, from age to age, even to our own times. Subsequent revelations have made it more palpable and complete—all nature has been called upon to support and maintain it—its echo is heard on every breeze, and its thunder rolls in every storm. Still, as of man himself, paradise was its source, and God its Author.

Let not science then boast of a triumph it has never achieved, or vaunt itself of a crown it has never won. Human reason has accomplished wonders. It has proved itself almost divine. It has erected its monuments on sea and land, amid the thunders of heaven, and the infinitudes of space. There are fields of thought, however, over which it may not pass—there are truths too remote or too mysterious for its comprehension. In these it needs a guide—not philosophy, but revelation—not man, but God. Let it bow at the feet of so competent an instructor—let it light its brightest fires at the altars of the Eternal.

Nor can we conceive upon these principles, on what ground the doctrines of the three-fold existence of God, or of his unfathomed decrees, can be rejected. These doctrines stand on the face of Revelation, as the mysterious outlines of a revealed Deity. They are there presented as inseparable from the communicated idea of a First Cause. What liberty have we then of removing, from our conception of a revealed Jehovah, those inseparable adjuncts of his nature, as made known in the Scriptures? To doubt that they coexist in Revelation with the announced idea of a God, is to doubt that the great idea itself is there. Nor

can we throw ourselves back upon the incomprehensibility of the subject. We had known nothing of God at all, save as he is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. If, then, we entertain the idea thus communicated, we should entertain it, not as distorted and violated, but in its entirety and sanctity.

ARTICLE IV.

THE PLATONIC TRINITY.

For not less than fifteen hundred years, the question of the Platonic Trinity has been agitated in the Church of Christ. Not a few theologians, learned and orthodox, both in ancient and in modern times, have acquiesced in the belief that Plato taught something very nearly resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. How he came to a knowledge of this doctrine, whether from the light of nature, or from tradition, or from the sacred writings of the Jews, to which he is supposed to have had access in Egypt, has not been so clear; but that he learned it *somehow*, and did actually teach it, quite a number have been ready to affirm. Thus, Cudworth, in his *Intellectual System*, (Book 1, ch. 4,) tells us "that Plato really asserted a *Trinity of Divine hypostases*." Again, he says: "In Plato's second epistle to Dionysius, he mentions a *Trinity of Divine hypostases all together*."* And Dr. Cave, in his *Lives of the Fathers*, (In Vit. Athan., sec. 1,) speaks of "the ancient doctrine of the Platonic Trinity, as asserting *three Divine hypostases*, all eternal, necessarily existent, undestroyable, and in a manner infinite, and which had a common $\tau\omicron\ \delta\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ or Divinity."

Other orthodox divines have stated the matter less strongly. They have represented Plato as teaching, not a Trinity of hypostases or persons, but a Trinity of *Divine princi-*

* Cudworth enlarges on the subject of the Platonic Trinity, devoting to it some 50 pages.