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SERMON XV.

BY JOHN W. NEVIN,

OF THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ALLEGHENY, PA.

ELECTION NOT CONTRARY TO A FREE GOSPEL.*

JOHN 6:37—40. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.*

In this passage, we have it plainly asserted that the blessings of the gospel are free to all who are willing to accept them. The very object of our Lord, in uttering it to the Jews, seems to have been, to bring before their minds the true character of his salvation, as a benefit designed not for their nation alone, but for the men of all nations under heaven; a benefit, therefore, which would have wide and glorious effect in the world, even though the posterity of Abraham should be found rejecting it in mass. "Ye have seen me, and believe not;" yet shall not my mission be in vain. Others will accept the salvation which ye despise; and come they from what region of the world they may, they shall experience the truth of the declaration that I am the "Bread of Life." "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast

*The substance of the following Discourse was originally preached in the First Presbyterian Church, in compliance with a desire, which had been expressed on the part of some persons in the Congregation, to have the subject discussed from the pulpit. The time seemed to call for it; and having been engaged by the Pastor to supply his place on an occasion when he was called to be absent from the city, I did not hesitate, on his recommendation, to make this the theme of one of my sermons at that time. A wish has been intimated, to have the sermon published; and it is now given to the world, accordingly, in the hope that it may be useful to some minds, in relieving them from difficulties on the trying question to which it relates. This explanation is given here, to account for some forms of expression that occur in the discourse.

out." "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."

The doctrine now stated, is not peculiar to any one part of the sacred volume. It stands out in strong relief from almost every page; and it enters vitally into the whole system of grace which it reveals. The language of the Old Testament is throughout of this tenor: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" The invitations of the New, are, if possible, still more free. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Declarations like these teach as plainly as language can, that men are never straitened in God, but always in themselves, when they live unblest with the salvation which is brought nigh to them by the gospel. The blessings of that salvation wherever the gospel comes, are like the light of heaven poured forth for the free use of all: and if they are not apprehended, it is only because the eyes of sinners are shut against their presence. They are a broad, deep river, sent out from the throne of God by all the habitations of men; and if any stand unrefreshed in their places, it is only because they will not betake themselves to the stream and drink.

Who can attentively consider the history of the gospel redemption, and entertain any doubt on this subject? Is not the whole mediatorial work an exhibition, and an overwhelming argument, of the love of God to lost men, and of his willingness to save them? It originated in love—it was carried forward in love—it came to its consummation in love; and it is set forth, accordingly, in the sacred volume as an irrefragable proof, that God is kindly and tenderly disposed toward the human race, and for the very purpose of overcoming the feelings of distrust that possess the hearts of sinners in regard to this point; and subduing them into penitence, gratitude, confidence, and child-like affection. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Is it true, that this immense sacrifice has been made on the part of Heaven for the benefit of earth? Is the story of the Redeemer's humiliation from the height of glory to the low estate of miserable man in this dark and dying world, a sober narration of facts that have actually taken place? Is it no fancy picture, but a sketch from real life, that the gospel holds up to view, when it tells, how he emptied himself, and became poor, and labored, and suffered shame, in the body, for the salvation of men? Is the record of the transactions that occurred on Calvary, worthy of credit? *Did he bear our sins in his own body on the tree,*

dying the death of a malefactor under the rage of men, and pouring out his soul in unutterable anguish under the wrath of a holy God? And can any doubt, after all, whether the grace of the gospel be, what it claims to be, the flowing of unobstructed kindness in the divine mind toward all who are willing to receive it? He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all—oh, how shall *He* be supposed to harbor still a feeling opposed to the welfare of a single soul, or to hold forth the slightest hindrance to its salvation? "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

The doctrine of the bible, as now stated, on this subject, falls in with every man's common sense and habitual consciousness. The blessings of the gospel are offered to all men alike, on the condition of their being willing to receive them on its own terms; and all men feel, that in accepting or rejecting them they act with just the same kind of freedom that belongs to them in any other exercise of mind whatever. Who doubts, in ordinary life, whether he have the power of choosing freely in his own mind or not? All men know that their wills are not controlled by any force contrary to their own nature in other cases; and the conscience of every man tells him that he is just as free in this respect, and as independent of control, in the state of his mind in relation to the gospel. The invitations of the gospel address him as they do other men; and if he will not comply with them, his own spirit is witness against him that the fault is with himself.

The passage, however, which I have taken for my text, asserts another doctrine, as plainly as the one which I have been thus far holding up to view. It teaches, that it is only by the intervention of an extraordinary impulse from God himself, that the minds of men are ever brought to embrace the salvation of Christ; and that wherever this impulse is put forth, the result of it is to make men willing to come to him for life. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me—I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me: and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And immediately after he added; "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The doctrine evidently exhibited in these declarations is, that when men are led to embrace Christ, they are led to do so by some kind of influence exerted upon them from God, which of itself secures the result, and without which they would never have taken the step at all. It is of no account to inquire, at present, *how* this influence is exerted; whether by trials in God's providence which draw out the soul after higher blessings than any that are to be found in this perishing world; or by the mere exhibition of truth, held up by any of the ordinary ways of

teaching; or by an impression made immediately upon the mind itself, without any means of this kind. The *fact* is all that is necessary to be contemplated now, and *that* is unequivocally affirmed by our Lord, in the passages just quoted.

And need I ask, if this doctrine, also, be not in accordance with the general representation of the bible? Is it not a doctrine incorporated with the very system of righteousness and life which the scriptures reveal? Is it not a part of every evangelical creed, that an influence from the Spirit of God is wanted, in all cases, to incline the soul of a sinner to a compliance with the gospel invitation, and that it is never embraced *without* that influence? It is surely unnecessary to spend any time, in argument on this point, at present.

But this doctrine of the necessity of a divine influence to bring men to Christ, so generally received, draws along with it another doctrine, less acceptable to multitudes who read the bible—I mean the doctrine of ELECTION. If no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him, it follows, that the ultimate reason of this coming in any case, must be looked for in God. One man comes, because he is drawn, and another persists in refusing to come, because he is not thus drawn; every man, says the Saviour, “that hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me,” and consequently if any do not come, it is because they have not been taught of God in a like way; in the divine mind, therefore, we must look for the ultimate reason of the difference that is found to have place between them. But if the ultimate reason of the difference lie in the divine mind, when that difference appears in fact, it is plain that it must have existed there from all eternity. If it be only an influence going out from God that ever brings a soul to repentance, God must have known from the beginning every case of repentance, that would ever take place; for who will say, that his own actions have not been always present to his mind, or that he ever does any thing, which he had not all along expected to do? And if God *knew* from the beginning every case of repentance that should ever take place, it is manifest his knowledge must have been the result only of his own *determination*, in regard to such cases; since we have seen that the reason of the thing in any case must be looked for ultimately in himself, and his own will, therefore, and nothing else, must be regarded as the ground of all he could know on the subject. This is the doctrine of Election, against which so many hard things have been uttered in different ages of the world, but which it will always be found much easier to cover with reproach, than it is to force it from the strong entrenchments of reason with which it is surrounded.

But I am called upon to-day to consider the difficulty which

grows out of the apparent opposition to each other of the two doctrines, which I have now presented to your attention—the doctrine of divine election, on the one hand, and the doctrine of the perfect freeness of the gospel offer, on the other. Can they be made to stand together, it has been asked, in the same system, without collision? Are they susceptible of reconciliation? In answer to this inquiry, I remark:—

1. THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT ONE THAT BELONGS PARTICULARLY TO THE BIBLE OR TO THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION. It presses with all its force upon every department of mind, and upon the whole range of human action. It grows out of the very idea of a moral universe—an idea, which is not peculiar to revelation at all, but set forth in every manifestation of the living world, and which constitutes the groundwork of religion, only as it lies at the bottom of all the common interests and activities of life. There is no reason why the interest of religion, should be regarded as being vitally concerned with the question, how this difficulty can be solved, more than any other interest. Christians are not held to the solution of it by their faith, more than all other men are; and if they should find it utterly impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of it, there would be no reason at all for them to be unsettled in their opinions, on that account, or disturbed in their feelings: if christianity could suffer under any trial of this kind, all the concerns of society would suffer just to the same extent, and the disadvantage, if any there should be, must in the nature of the case rest upon all men alike. Men have no right to urge upon religion this particular difficulty, as if it stood out to view only on the pages of the bible, or as if it were a distinguishing characteristic of the system of philosophy that the bible teaches; and the friends of the bible have no reason at all to show themselves sensitive, when attacked in this way, or to throw themselves upon their defense, as if the burden of removing the objection lay with any sort of exclusiveness on *them*. Christianity is but a part of the universal scheme of life, and is certainly not bound to sustain the weight of a difficulty that belongs to the whole, and springs from the very idea of its constitution as a whole. A few remarks will set this in its true light.

Election, in religion, is only one particular manifestation of that divine sovereignty which reigns through all the world of God's providence. The idea of this sovereignty, absolute and universal, is one that forces itself upon the mind in the very act of contemplating the being of God; and the whole course of nature is one steady development of its truth. If there be a God at all, his providence must extend to all affairs and all events, however minute; and in the very nature of the case, it must proceed according to the purpose of his own mind, had from all eternity. In actual life, accordingly, we meet with the decrees

of God every day. Election, and reprobation too, stand forth upon our view in whatever direction our eyes are turned. Is it not the election of God, that makes one man rich, leads another to honor and renown, and clothes a third with the high accomplishments of learning? Is there no election in the circumstances of men's birth and education, so widely different, and yet so deeply influential on their character and happiness? Where in fact are we *not* thrown upon this doctrine, in the ordinary providence of God? Where is the case, in which when the question is put, Who hath made thee to differ? the respondent will not be driven for his ultimate answer to the sovereign will of the Infinite Mind?

But the doctrine of election is not more implicated with the common experience of life, than is the doctrine of the perfect freedom of the human will. Every man carries in his own bosom the evidence, to him all-sufficient, that he is morally free under all circumstances; and he is never led to doubt for a moment that his fellow men around him are in this respect as free as himself. All men continually act under the influence of this persuasion. They proceed in all cases under the conviction, that the human mind is governed by motives only, and is at perfect liberty therefore to choose and refuse according to its own pleasure; and on this ground alone the virtuous are every where held deserving of praise, and the wicked of blame. Now this moral freedom, is nothing more than that liberty, in virtue of which the blessings of religion are brought within the reach of all to whom the gospel is preached. God addresses men in the bible, just as he addresses them in the constitution of nature; what he offers, he offers just as freely and fully in the one case, as he does in the other; and when the offer has been made, the mind acts just as freely, in embracing or refusing it, in the one case, as it does in the other. In the world of this life's interests, then, as well as in the world of religion, we find a doctrine of perfect liberty, in respect of man, on the one hand, as well as a doctrine of the most absolute sovereignty, in respect of God, on the other.

These doctrines, therefore, are not peculiar to the bible; and consequently the difficulty of reconciling them, is not one that should be considered as having any particular force in regard to religion more than to any other subject. If they seem contrary to each other here, they must do so throughout the broad range of human life. The difficulty lies in the fundamental idea of such a constitution as the world presents, and is universal in its applications.

2. **THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT A PRACTICAL ONE.** It does not bear upon any of the interests of life, in such a way as to interfere at all with human action. It throws no obscurity on a single question of duty; it unsettles no principle of prudence; it

brings no embarrassment into the operations of conscience; it disturbs no law on which the regular activity of the world is made to depend.

In ordinary life, this is abundantly manifest. Who stands still in his worldly pursuits—who feels himself paralyzed in his undertakings—who neglects the means of safety—who defies the approach of evil—who holds himself absolved from the charge of imprudence or guilt—on the plea, that all things are determined of God, and must take place according to his will? The doctrine of God's sovereignty over all affairs is one from which philosophy can make no escape; and yet men feel no difficulty in forming their plans, and going forward with their enterprises, just as if every result was dependent on themselves. They may puzzle themselves, occasionally, in their speculations, with the question, how this doctrine can be reconciled with their own free agency; but whether they find themselves able to solve the difficulty or not, they never dream of letting it disturb their thoughts, or perplex their movements, in any of the practical affairs of life. They are guided in these affairs by the principles of action that God has implanted in their nature, without suffering themselves to go back, and inquire, whether these principles are in themselves worthy of their confidence; and they feel, that if they even had it in their power to convince themselves that they are not, it would not avail to free them, in the least, from their force; they would still feel and act as they do now.

Now the difficulty is just as little practical in religion, as it is in common life. There is just as little reason, why a man should allow his mind to be disturbed with it, or hindered in the pursuit of its object, in regard to spiritual interests, as there is in regard to those which are temporal. It does not touch a single principle of action to which religion makes its appeal. These are all grounded in our moral nature itself, and whether we can explain the philosophy of that nature or not, will always make their power to be felt and acknowledged; the difficulty in question cannot strip them of their force, and the clearest solution of it could add nothing to their original strength. The sense of guilt—the apprehension of wrath—the desire of salvation—are all independent of this whole subject. The consciousness of acting freely, in accepting or refusing to accept the grace of Christ, is never disturbed by any speculation to which it may give rise. All the motives to holiness, are just what they would be if there was no difficulty in the case. The difficulty is not practical; and it should never be allowed to interfere with the soul's action in any case.

3. IF IT SHOULD BE FOUND IMPOSSIBLE ALTOGETHER TO SOLVE THE DIFFICULTY IN QUESTION, THE CIRCUMSTANCE WOULD NOT NECESSARILY AFFECT THE CREDIBILITY OF EITHER OF THE DOCTRINES TO

WHICH IT RELATES. Though baffled in all our endeavors to explain it, we might still maintain our faith in both, without being chargeable with any offense against sound reason. Things may be unsusceptible of reconciliation to a created mind, and yet not stand in contradiction to each other after all. A difficulty may be *above* reason, and yet not *against* it; it may lie beyond the grasp of human intellect, and yet involve no absurdity in its own nature. Those who oppose either the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of free grace, have not by any means gained the victory, when they have shut the holders of these doctrines up to the task of reconciling them with one another, and found them incapable of surmounting the difficulty. These last may be unable to show how the two things are upheld in perfect harmony, and yet be fully justified at the bar of reason for refusing to reject either the one or the other.

There are cases in which the contrariety that holds between two tenets is of such a nature, that one or the other must be false; but there are cases also in which such a contrariety may have place without affecting the truth of either. Things may stand so related to each other that our minds can by no means reconcile them with each other, and yet may have severally such evidence of being true, that we shall have no power to question their reality. How should it be expected to be otherwise? To be able to reconcile all facts that have place in the world, would imply on our part a perfect knowledge of the first principles and remote relations of things, such as can be supposed to belong to God only. There are, therefore, in every science truths clearly ascertained on their own proper evidence, which yet the most comprehensive minds are unable to reconcile with each other; the point where they come into contact, and appear in their full harmony, is hidden far back in the reason of things beyond the utmost range of human observation. And if the case be so even in the science of mathematics, why should it be thought strange to find it so also in the philosophy of morals?

We might admit, then, the doctrines which we are now considering to be of such a nature that we could not understand their agreement with each other, and still hold them both as true, without being chargeable with any offense against reason. It is not necessary, in order to believe them both with full confidence, and to have a practical sense of them on our spirits, that we should be able to show how they can be reconciled together.

4. THE DOCTRINES IN QUESTION, WHATEVER DIFFICULTY MAY ATTACH ITSELF TO THE THEORY OF THEM, ARE FOUND TO HARMONIZE PERFECTLY IN THEIR PRACTICAL FORM, AS THE OBJECTS OF SENTIMENT IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT. I have already said, that the difficulty of reconciling them is not one that bears upon the range of men's practical duties. It might be supposed, however,

that this consequence does not take place, only because one or the other of these doctrines is not really believed, or because one or the other of them is not adapted at all in its nature to become incorporated with the inward life of the spirit as a principle of living action. But I affirm, now, that this is not the case. The doctrines may dwell together as practical sentiments in the same mind, without any sort of conflict. In this view, they give rise to no difficulty whatever.

We sometimes hear it said, that the doctrine of election is not practical. The speculative difficulty that grows out of it is admitted to have no bearing upon practice, and so it is inferred that it is no matter whether people hold it or not. It is looked upon as a mere notion or metaphysical abstraction. But this is a wrong view of the case entirely. The difficulty that occurs from a comparison of this doctrine with the doctrine of human liberty, is indeed only in speculation, and has nothing to do with practice; but both of the doctrines themselves are practical in an eminent degree, and the one not more so than the other. It is as an object of *sentiment* mainly that the doctrine of election is important: It is only when it becomes incorporated with the interior feeling of the soul, that it can be said to be properly realized at all.

Both the doctrines now under consideration are practical, we say, in the highest degree; and they are found, at the same time, to harmonize under this character, in the most perfect manner. They can be *felt* by the same mind, and at the same time, without any attending sense of opposition or discord whatever. The one feeling has no tendency at all to *destroy* the other. They can live together, and stand out with equal distinctness upon the consciousness of the spirit, without bringing into it any sort of distraction or disunion. No schism is experienced in the inner man, under the presence of two forces, which speculatively regarded seem so hard to be reconciled. The soul feels it perfectly possible to admit in its living experience both the one and the other, without the least sense of violence done to its moral nature, or the smallest confusion of its moral views and feelings. The two articles of its faith subsist together in perfect agreement, and are not found to have the slightest disposition to clash with each other in their authority. And in fact, they impart vigor mutually one to the other. The sentiment of personal free agency is never so full, as when men have the deepest impression upon their spirits of the sovereignty of God; and the more truly they realize their moral accountability, and the necessity of their being active themselves in the business of their salvation, the more entirely will they feel their need of help from on high, and enter into the meaning of the declaration, that no man cometh unto the Saviour except the Father draw him.

The two sentiments sustain each other in the soul in which they dwell; and their influence, accordingly, upon the activities

of life, is the combined action of harmonious principles tending to the very best results. The idea of absolute sovereignty on the part of God, has been represented to be inimical to righteousness on the part of men: as tending to destroy the sense of personal responsibility, and to inspire the mind with presumptuous hope, on the one hand, or presumptuous despair, on the other. But however it may seem in theory, the operation of the doctrine, where it is practically felt, is in fact widely different. The two ideas create no schism within, and are attended with no conflicting operation in the forms of action to which they give rise.

In support of all that I have now been saying upon this point, I appeal to facts which are open to the observation of all. History is full of confirmation on the subject. Have the holders of the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, in different ages of the world, been doubters on the question of their own free agency? or have they showed themselves less diligent than others, in the cultivation of all that pertains to virtuous character? Quite the reverse. The doctrine has ever stood in close union with high ideas of responsibility, and severe views of duty. Even when it has degenerated into an extreme, bordering upon fatalism itself, as it has often done, it has still been found more friendly far to the interests of morality, than the idea which makes man independent of God in order to make him free. It always entered as an element into the best of the heathen systems of philosophy, and was that which, more than any thing else, seems to have given them whatever power they had. The sect of *Zeno*, among the Greeks, was vastly better in this respect than that of *Epicurus*. The Pharisees, among the Jews, with all their hypocrisy and formality, had a greater zeal for righteousness than the Sadducees. The Catholic Jansenists were immeasurably better Christians, than the Jesuits. And disguise the matter as men may, it cannot be denied that the faith of election has been connected with some of the brightest exhibitions of piety the world ever saw, among the ancient "witnesses for the truth," and the protestant churches of modern times.

And then, there are living this day, thousands of honest and intelligent persons, who assure us, that they have in their minds the most distinct consciousness of both the sentiments of which I have been speaking, without any sense of collision between them; while their own excellent lives bear witness that no relaxation whatever of the claims of religion is suffered in consequence. Shall we not give credit to what they say on this subject?

But I may go still farther. I appeal to every man's own consciousness for proof of my general statement. Whose mind is set at war with itself, by admitting the sentiment of God's absolute sovereignty, at one and the same time with the sentiment of its own moral liberty? I venture to say, such a mind cannot be

found. The speculative contemplation of these things, may create embarrassment; but the felt presence of them in the human spirit, never did. The vivid idea of dependence upon God, thus realized, never paralyzes the proper energies of the soul, though the absence of that idea is found lulling them into a deadly torpor every day. Every child of God, in remembering the history of his own conversion, will bear me witness to the truth of this assertion. And you, that have never yet yielded yourselves to God! ye can bear me witness too. Is it a deep and awful feeling of the sovereignty of God, that holds your spirits inactive in this mighty interest? Or rather, is it not just because you have no sentiment of this sort upon your souls at all, and because you flatter yourselves that you have it in your power to turn to God when you please, even though it should be upon a dying bed, that you are able to dream away life as you do? Let conscience answer.

Now we can have no more conclusive evidence of the harmony of the doctrines we have been considering, than this that I have now stated. We saw, a little while ago, that the doctrines *might be* in fact consistent, though the speculative difficulty attending them should be wholly insurmountable; and now we have the most satisfactory proof, that they *are* consistent. Whether we can solve the problem in its abstract form or not, we have it verified as an indisputable fact in the constitution of our own nature; and that is a better ground of trust immeasurably than any speculative argument can possibly be. And here we ought to plant our reason, rather than upon any other ground, when assailed with objection on this subject. Let the cavalier speculate as he may, he cannot overthrow an ultimate sentiment in our nature. *That* is of more account in the eye of true philosophy, than all his abstractions; and when he has reasoned to the uttermost, we are stronger than he, if we can turn to our own moral constitution, and there show him FALSE TO FACT.

5. IT CAN BE SHOWN, THAT EVEN WHEN CONTEMPLATED IN THE ABSTRACT, THE DOCTRINES UNDER CONSIDERATION DO NOT COME INTO ANY REAL CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER. We do not mean to say, that the mode of their ultimate reconciliation, as it takes place far back in the original ground of all being, can be made plainly apparent to the human mind; but we may see even in speculation, that the difficulty is only in appearance, and not real. We may see, that the two great ideas to which it relates, do *not* come into contradiction; that they are distinct and independent forms of truth, either of which stands entirely and eternally clear of the proper range of the other.

The doctrine of God's decrees in relation human actions, involves no other consequence, in regard to the actions themselves, than that they are CERTAIN; or, in other words, that they will take

place in one way, and in no other. The principle of this certainty, the particular manner of it, the constitution on which it may be found to depend, is not at all touched by the fore-ordination out of which it takes its rise. We can conceive of different constitutions of life, equally compatible with the idea of absolute certainty, in all their results. A series of events may take place in conformity with one kind of law, or it may take place in conformity with another kind of law, and be in both cases equally certain. Mere certainty is not affected by the way in which things are brought about; and the decrees of God, in rendering human actions certain, need not interfere, and do not interfere at all, with the principle of moral liberty in accordance with which they take place. Actions may be absolutely certain, and yet absolutely free. Nay more; in order to be free at all, it is indispensably necessary that they should be certain.

Actions, I say, may be certain, and yet perfectly free. Certainty and freeness are not in opposition to each other at all, and do not in fact touch upon the events to which they belong, under the same aspect in any degree. To say, that an action is certain, has nothing to do with the question whether it be free or otherwise; it may be so, or it may not be so, and yet be equally certain in both cases. The will is free when it acts according to its own constitutional laws, though in thus acting its movements are just as certain, that is, just as sure to take place in one particular way and not in another, as any of the changes which are occurring in the material creation, under the different kind of laws to which it is subject. And the greater the determination with which, in any given instance, the results of volition may be brought about, the more conspicuously free will they appear. We may sometimes calculate with absolute certainty, how a particular individual will act in certain circumstances; but we never feel as if the certainty of the result that is to take place in such cases, stood at all in the way of its being morally free. We are sure, that a certain course of conduct will take place, we calculate upon it with as much confidence as we do upon the rising of the sun the next morning; and yet we are perfectly satisfied all the time, that not the smallest constraint will be put upon the will of the person by whom it is to be exhibited, and never dream for a moment of questioning the liberty with which he is about to act. And we find no difficulty whatever in holding these two ideas, at one and the same time, in our minds. We can think in this case of an action being perfectly certain, and yet perfectly free, without the least embarrassment in our feelings, or the most distant thought of the metaphysical contradiction, that rises so imposingly into view, when the subject of the divine decrees is brought into consideration. And if our foreknowledge of men's actions extended to all that they will ever do, so that we could in any particular case predict with absolute certainty a whole series

of volitions, purposes, and deeds, still future, it is plain that we should have no difficulty still on the question of human liberty, any more than we have without this knowledge. In other words, we could on this supposition admit all the actions of a man's life to be certain, as otherwise they could not be matter of foreknowledge or calculation at all, and consent at the same time to their being regarded as free in the fullest sense of the term. We should not feel, that certainty and freeness stood in any sort of contradiction to each other whatever. And in fact, this sort of foreknowledge, though not possible on *our* part, is allowed actually to have place in regard to human actions, by all who have any proper notion of God. Even those who reject the doctrine of decrees, are ready to admit the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. But foreknowledge implies certainty in the things which it respects. Whatever the principle may be on which this certainty is secured, the certainty itself must have place in order to any knowledge being had previously of what is to come to pass. Here, then, we are brought at once to a living exemplification of the thought which we have just been presenting in the form of a supposition. There is one mind, to which all the actions of men are revealed before they take place. The foreknowledge of God extends to all moral events. I do not raise any argument at present on this ground, in support of the opinion that God has *decreed* all that ever comes to pass; I do not infer eternal *purpose* from eternal *foreknowledge*, as being the only sufficient foundation for it to rest upon. All I care to have established from the fact at present is, that the actions of men are *certain*, before they take place. Whatever theory we may embrace relative to the grounds on which that certainty ultimately rests, the certainty itself cannot be denied. And thus we must admit, that the actions of men may be certain on the largest scale, and are in fact certain as to God, without having their freeness in any measure brought into question at all. Whatever we may conceive necessary to constitute an action free, we must allow that it may be absolutely **CERTAIN** before it takes place, or else deny entirely the foreknowledge of God.

If after all any doubt should be felt in relation to this point, it may perhaps be relieved by another view of the subject. No actions can be more certain than those which are already past, yet who imagines that this certainty has any thing to do with the question, whether they were free or not? But if the actions of yesterday may be looked upon as free actions, notwithstanding this certainty, it is hard to say, why the freeness of those which are to take place to-morrow, should be considered at all affected by the supposition of their being equally certain. If certainty is compatible with liberty in reference to past time, I know no reason for holding it incompatible with the same in reference to time that is to come. In the mind of God both are equally

present. He looks upon the events of the future, as he looks upon the events of the past. They are beheld under precisely the same aspect of absolute certainty, and this certainty has as little to do with the question of moral liberty in the one case as in the other. There is really just as little reason, why people should be embarrassed about the freeness of their actions, when they are seen to be certain *before* they take place, as there is that they should be thrown into doubt on the same point, by seeing them to be certain *after* they have taken place. The mere fact of men's actions being *certain*, either before or after their taking place, does not stand in contradiction at all to the supposition of their being morally free.

I have said more than this. I have said, that in order to be free at all, it is indispensably necessary that our actions should be certain. There can be no such thing as moral liberty without this kind of certainty. To act freely, is to act according to the principles of our moral nature; to act as the nature of our minds directs. But this nature has its own fixed constitution, and all the operations of will that grow out of it, either in the way of choosing or of refusing, are in conformity with it. They cannot be this or that indifferently, but in the same circumstances exactly, must always be the same thing. To suppose any thing else, would be to suppose that the human mind is without all rule or order, and that it acts only by accident or caprice at all times, and without any reason whatever. If such a supposition were true, could there be any such thing as moral liberty in its actions? No more surely than there is in the tossing of a feather, that is made the sport of every wind that blows. The perfection of our moral being is, that it is subjected to law; and the very idea of liberty must perish just so soon as this kind of subjection is thrust out of view. To be free at all, our actions must have their reason in our own nature. They must take place according to some constitutional principles established in our moral being. And this is but to say in other words, that they must be certain. If we had the power of acting in any different way, so that we could do things without the consent of our own nature, or in direct violation of the principles of thought and feeling in which our moral existence is grounded, it would deserve to be called any thing rather than liberty.

In fact, however, the very idea of a system of being of any sort in which all certainty might be wanting, is out of the question. Let any man attempt to *imagine* a constitution of things, in which events might follow one another without law or reason of any kind, and he will find the thing utterly inconceivable. In the very act of imagining a system of any sort, the idea of plan and law forces itself into the scheme. Let it be stripped as far as possible of all resemblance to the existing order of life, and re-

moved as far as possible from all ordinary conceptions of fitness or reason, so as to comprehend all the confusion and chance that ever entered into the wildest dream of the philosophy of Epicurus; still will it be felt, that in the very act of being conceived, the conception has embodied in itself the notion of some law, some principle of certainty, pervading the entire scheme with its presence, and constituting the groundwork of all its fancied action. It is impossible to form the idea of a merely *material* system from which all notion of law shall be excluded; and to form the idea of a *moral* system, a system comprehending the action of spirits endued with the capacities of thought and will, is if possible more impracticable still. The mind refuses altogether to admit the notion of a world without law, and even when it tries to dream of chance or a self-determining faculty in its own nature, is perpetually thrown back in its feelings upon the idea of some original constitution lying beyond, and giving certainty to every thing that takes place.

It appears, then, that actions do not cease to be free by being certain; but that, on the contrary, they cannot be free *without* being certain, and in fact *must* be certain whether free or not. But if all this be true, the whole difficulty that is supposed to have place in reference to the doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty and man's free agency, falls to the ground. The sovereignty of God in this case is simply the ultimate *groundwork* of that particular constitution of life out of which the actions of men proceed. The question, whether that constitution be one of strict moral liberty, is not affected at all by the nature of the reason or cause in which it may be found to be originally grounded, but must be determined by simply considering the character of the constitution itself. If this be such as to do violence to the attributes of thought and volition, it must be pronounced incompatible with moral liberty, whether grounded in the will of God or not; and so, on the other hand, if found to furnish all the proper conditions of free agency, it must be held strictly compatible with moral liberty, wherever the ultimate reason of it may lie. The mere circumstance of its being established by divine decree, or by the eternal reason of things, or by some blind fatality, or by strange unaccountable chance, has nothing to do with the moral nature of the constitution itself. That must be judged of irrespectively altogether of the groundwork in which it has its being. It is a fact, a phenomenon, in nature, the character of which must be determined just by an observation of the thing itself, and for the clear perception of which it is not necessary that we should first trace it to its fundamental reason, and determine on what bottom it rests in the scheme of universal being. It is what it is, and should be tried on its own merits.

The only question, then, that is left for consideration in regard to the general subject, is, what is the proper groundwork of the

constitution to which I have been referring? The constitution makes it certain that the actions of men will take place only in one particular way. Whether it be in strict accordance with the principles of moral liberty, must be determined by considering its own character. We take it for granted that it is so in all respects. Under this aspect it may be thought of as having the ultimate reason of its certainty laid in different grounds; it may be thought of as being grounded in the sovereign purpose of God, or it may be thought of as being grounded in something else. The question now is, where is it most reasonable to look for its groundwork, or where most desirable to find it? Surely this must be answered alike by all. God is the only proper groundwork of life under all its forms. He is the first cause of all things, and by him all things subsist. The constitution of the universe can have no other reason ultimately but his wise and holy purpose to have it just what it is. The whole scheme of life must be grounded in his will. His own glorious plan is the pattern, according to which all things take place. They take place according to the nature of the particular system to which in different cases they belong; the changes that belong to the material world according to the laws of matter, and the activities of the moral world according to the laws of mind. But whatever may be the constitution out of which they take their rise, whether material or moral in its order, it is all grounded in the divine Mind, and upheld by a constant energy from God still clothing with effect the bright idea of the whole which was with him from the beginning. And who would have it otherwise? Who would have the course of nature grounded, if the idea were possible, in chance or fate, and not in the design of an infinitely wise, holy, and benevolent God!

If it should be felt by any, that this part of the discussion has been metaphysical and abstract, I have only to say it could not be helped. Contemplated practically, as I have before attempted to show, the subject is not surrounded with any great difficulty; both doctrines are susceptible of overwhelming proof, and may stand together in the mind, and be acted upon, without its being felt that they come into collision at all. But in its speculative form the subject is one that is in its very nature abstract in a high degree; and if persons allow themselves to be perplexed with it in this form at all, they must not complain, if in endeavoring to satisfy their minds, we lead them into the world of pure thought, instead of trying to entertain them with representations drawn from the sensible world, or from the rich domain of fancy.