

standing these admissions, the scriptures every where represent a *present* God ; and an absent, careless God, is not the God of the bible. The inspired writers labour to set forth the energy of God, as diffused throughout the whole of the material system. A distant Deity may do for a phlegmatic Dutchman, be congenial to a heartless hypocrite, an Owenite, or to a corrupt professor who wishes to put God out of sight ; but the spiritual christian seeks communion with God, while the voice of nature proclaims his proximity, and “the book that never lies,” declares that it is in “*Him* we live, move, and have our being.”

Averse as we are to every thing that can tend, even by remote application, to materialize the Godhead—to destroy the personalities in the Divine Nature—to make the Jehovah of the scriptures an identification of the universe, or material nature a modification of the Godhead—to Platonize or Gnosticize that one Divine Being whose personalities and spirituality are so clearly revealed,—or that would insinuate the world to contain the germ of a perfect divinity, and that nature is advancing towards an apotheosis : opposed as we are to the transcendental mysticisms of Germany, as developed in the schools of Semler, Fichte, and Schelling, and to the hierarchical symbols of protestant ideality, as set forth in the teachings of Froude, Pusey, Newman and Ward ; repugnant as materialism is to us in its most refined forms, its poetical drapery, or devotional mysticisms, we can well understand how uninspired authors, as well didactic as poetic, when treating upon a subject so infinitely superior to the human faculties, as the omnipresence and omnipotence of God must ever be, should employ language incapable of sustaining a severe scrutiny. “Even the inspired writers themselves,” says professor Stuart, “are forced to adapt their phraseology to the comprehension of those to whom it is addressed, and frequently borrow the diction of poetry to convey ideas which must be interpreted, not according to the letter, but the spirit of the passage.”

In plain truth, the bible is a book of condescension and grace, through which God speaks to our senses ;

and by clothing spiritual objects with material imagery, he puts on the drapery of nature that we may perceive the presence of his spirituality. The bible seeks to affect as well as to inform, to impress as well as to instruct; and that it may excite our sensibilities at the time it enlightens our understandings, it unveils the infinite perfections of God, rather in their manifestations than in their essence. *Anger* is not a passion in God, but it reveals a *principle* upon which he acts for the maintenance of his justice. God is not man that he should lie, nor the Son of man that he should repent; but he can clothe a principle of action in an affection which we can comprehend, and thereby render intelligible to us the principles of his administration. In the same manner, he impresses us with a consciousness of his omnipresent and directive agency, in the desolating fury of material elements. It is thus the thick cloud is his pavilion, a tornado the breath of his nostrils, hail-stones his artillery, lightnings his arrows, thunder his voice, the winged storm the chariot in which he rides, exciting its fury, curbing its impetuosity, directing its course, and causing it to spend its contents wheresoever, and upon whomsoever he pleases.<sup>1</sup>

I love to contemplate a thunder-storm in the unrivalled magnificence of sacred poetry—in the luxuriant style of the eighteenth psalm. I love to gaze upon the spangled heavens, in a still night, pervaded by the tranquility of an unbroken solitude, and with the nineteenth psalm for my companion. I have a rich pleasure in a fine spring walk, when I can gaze upon nature in her resurrection livery, mark the beneficent agency of God in every form and in every tint, dwell upon his divine benevolence, and exclaim with glowing satisfaction, “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.”<sup>1</sup> I love to contemplate the innumerable races of living creatures, to study their relations, connexions, necessities and supplies; and to say in the warm gushes

<sup>1</sup> Psalm civ. 14, 15.

of an expressive admiration, as I lift up my wondering soul to the Fountain of Life, "These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works."<sup>2</sup> There is a refinement in the meditations of nature, when we rise from nature to nature's God; when we see God in his works, and rejoice in all his ways before him. I love to couple him with the seasons; and to exclaim, "The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter."<sup>3</sup> I like to study "the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge;" to bless him for the effects of spring, and to feel that my garments are warm, "when he quieteth the earth by the south wind."<sup>4</sup> "*He* maketh small the drops of water; they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly." Who knoweth not in every operation of nature, in every change of season, and in every adaptation throughout nature's wide domains, "that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."<sup>5</sup>

By the society of these inspired observers of nature, I am both honored and delighted. I feel safe in their company, and am not afraid of their breath. *They* study the world of nature in connexion with its Almighty and ever-present author, reveal the Creator in the creature, and display in every thing his "eternal power and Godhead." While in their presence, and breathing their spirit, I *feel* it is *God's* earth that I tread: *His* water

<sup>2</sup> Psalm civ. 27—31.

<sup>4</sup> Job xxxvii. 16, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm lxxiv. 16, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Job xii. 9, 10.

that I drink : *His* table at which I sit : *His* funds from which I am supplied ; and that I am fed with kindness and clothed with love. I seem to *meet* God at every turn, to *see* Him in every object, to *feel* Him in every impression, to *hear* Him in every sound, and to *converse* with Him through the medium of all his creatures. Thus delighted, I bless him for the wisdom, order, beauty and munificence of his economy, place my humble tribute at his feet, and learn to confide in his guardianship. *Nature* is not God, nor a modification of God, any more than a mirror is the object it reflects or a modification of it ; but nature *is* a mirror, and as a mirror it may be used, especially by those who have never seen *Him* who is the visible image of the invisible God.

I am not a modification of God, neither am I a mere machine, subject to certain impulses upon which my volitions depend, and over which I have no control. I am a creature whose original has been debased, whose nature has been corrupted, and whose heart is depraved ; but I am possessed of moral attributes, for I received my being from God, exist under his providence, and am accountable to Him. I am upheld by his arm, defended by his shield, hid in the secret of his pavilion, covered with his feathers, and magnified by his condescensions. To *Him* I owe my existence. *He* formed the speck of entity, and wove the raw material into the delicate web of life. *He* produced this living tissue, and placed within my breathing frame an undying agent, destined to be present at the resurrection of the dead, to survive the general conflagration, to witness the amazing spectacle of an assembled world before the judgment seat of Christ, and to outlive, not only the sun in the firmament, but the ages of eternity ! “ *Thy* hands have made me and fashioned me.”<sup>6</sup> “ My substance was not hid from *Thee*, when I was in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. *Thine* eyes did see my substance, yet’ being unperfect, and in *thy* book all my members are written, which in continuance were fa-

<sup>6</sup> Psalm cxix. 73.

shioned, when as yet there was none of them.”<sup>7</sup> How precious also are *thy* thoughts of contrivance! how great the number of divine conceptions in my organic structure! Human instrumentality was present at my birth; but “*Thou* art he that took me out of the womb;” and though surrounded by the arms of maternal fondness, and supplied with the delicious milk of nature, “*Thou* didst make me hope when I hung upon my mother’s breast. I was cast upon *Thee* from the womb; *Thou* art my God from my mother’s belly.”<sup>8</sup>

For the space of forty years I have walked in and out amidst the machinery of life, been enveloped by malignant vapours, and surrounded by death; yet scarcely has a wheel grazed me, or a disease afflicted me. I had parents who advised me, inclinations which prompted me, and interests which swayed me; but it was *God* who took me by the hand, teaching me to go, though I knew not that he led me. When in the days of my youth, inexperienced and unlettered, without friends, and destitute of resources, I wandered far from the place of my nativity, how condescendingly he guided me! How wonderfully was I preserved from destitution, and from moral infamy! In a waste howling wilderness he found me, and therein he led me and instructed me, and kept me as the apple of the eye. When helpless and unprotected, I went from county to county, and from one place to another, as if to honour incipient principles, and do homage to the feebleness of his work, he suffered no man to do me any wrong; yea, he reproved superiors for my sake, saying, in effect, “Touch not mine adopted, and do my servant no harm.” “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” How touching is that interrogation—how tender and how kind: “Wilt thou not from this time cry to me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?”<sup>9</sup> Answer, my soul—answer the paternal inquiry—“*Wilt thou not*”—

<sup>7</sup> Psalm cxxxix. 15, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm xxii. 9, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Jer. iii. 4.

wilt thou not from "*this* time"—from this time call him "Father"—call him "*thy* Father"—thy Father the "*guide of thy youth*?" "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Am I distinguished by gifts, by service, by position, by connexion, or by any thing else of advantageous import; to whom shall the attribution of these distinctions be directed? To whose agency, and to what source must they be ascribed? To whom but *God*, and to what but the *goodness* of God, and that goodness in the hand of divine *sovereignty*, can *I*, with any, even the least show of truth and reason, attribute them? *Who* made *me* to differ, save he who fashioned me and furnished me; who loved me and led me, and who compassed me about with mercy as with a flood? *He* unquestionably is the benevolent author of all those distinctions, which contrast with others may bring out. Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.

Now that which is true of the species individually, is true of them collectively; for this reason I have spoken of myself, supposing that what is true of myself in relation to the source of honourable distinctions, is true of every other individual, however rich his endowments, or varied his talents. But in case this matter should be questioned, will the person who questions it inform us what that distinction is, or what those distinctions are, which had not their origin in the sovereign goodness of God?

Are they *physical* distinctions? It is the *Lord* "who hath made us, and not we ourselves."<sup>10</sup> We are only clay, he is the potter;<sup>11</sup> and as the clay is in the hand of the potter, so were we in his; and so we are still.<sup>12</sup> "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?"<sup>13</sup> If the thing formed cannot say to the former, by way of complaint, "What makest thou?" neither can it say, *I* made myself, and therefore *I* made myself to differ from this plain piece, or that deformed vessel. For

<sup>10</sup> Psalm c. 3.<sup>11</sup> Isa. lxxiv. 8.<sup>12</sup> Psalm lxxiv. 8.<sup>13</sup> Mal. ii. 10.

“did not he that made me in the womb, make him?” And might he not have made *me* what he made *him*? and have made him what he made me? If not, *why*?

Are they *intellectual* distinctions? He who made the house furnished it; and both the house and the furniture are just what God made them, and no more. It is a treasure we have in earthen vessels; the extent and excellency of which, are from *God*. The lowest instinct, as well as the highest intellect, has its source in divine goodness; and if he who gives to one man ten talents and to another one, might have reversed it, the inference will be that the distinction is referable to the sovereign goodness of God, and to *that only*.

Are they *superior dispositions*? If disposition be to the intellect what temper is to the steel, he who made the intellect tempered it. The temper we know may be changed, but if the change be beneficial, it must be attributed to a divine efficiency. Of innate ideas we presume not to speak; but that there are innate tendencies few people will deny. That the mind, originally considered, is without ideas, we are free to admit; but that it is without certain propensities when thus contemplated, is without proof, and contrary to the experience of mankind. Hobb's slate, and Locke's sheet of white paper, may illustrate the idea of a mental blank; but it should be remembered that the blank has been touched by a divine pencil, so that when plunged into the colours which surround it the pattern becomes observable, for the blank takes not its tint by *accident*. If a man has good natural dispositions, let him thank God for them. He may plane and polish his mind, as a mechanic does his wood, but the *grain* is there beforehand; and if he differs in grain from others, he should not forget who it was that placed the grain there.

Or, are they the distinctions of *birth*? What has an unconscious infant to do with its birth? It depends not upon the vessel from which heap it shall be taken, upon what wheel it shall be turned, for what uses it shall be especially adapted, or into what class it shall be put. These particulars are determined by the will of the Potter.

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another to dishonour?" Sir Isaac Newton might have been born an idiot, and an idiot been born Sir Isaac Newton; in like manner a monarch might have been born a beggar, and a beggar been born a monarch, had the sovereign will of God so decreed it. Who but God makes a man to differ in this respect—or in any other?

Should it be said this reasoning is not conclusive, seeing there is a wide difference between *original* and *acquired* distinctions; and seeing whatever force the arguments may have when applied to the former, they can have none when applied to the latter. Our reply to this is, if the reasoning is conclusive in relation to original distinctions, it has answered the end for which it was brought forward; and in relation to *acquired* distinctions it may be observed:—

First, that *whatever* a man acquires, he acquires under the *providence of God*. Now the providence of God is nothing less than the agency of God, ordering, exciting, permitting, restraining, and guiding all things to their final results. It is the exercise of God's supremacy, founded upon his essential rights, compatible with his moral perfections, and necessary to the order, safety, and general happiness of mankind.

That instruments are employed under the government of God, is very clear; and there are three descriptions of them—irrational, rational, and spiritual. The first class are unconscious, the second class are conscious, and the third class are gracious. Unconscious instruments act impulsively, conscious instruments voluntarily, and gracious instruments evangelically. In the first description of instruments we see matter without mind, in the second we observe matter with mind, and in the third, matter, mind, and spirituality.

*Irrational* instrumentality comprehends all inanimate nature; and all nature that is animate, but not human. Nature is thus a tool-house for providence. Every element and every atom are at God's command. He holds the winds in his fists, the waters in the hollow of

his hand, and rides upon the heavens by his name Jah. "He commandeth the sun, and it shineth not, and he sealeth up the stars of heaven. By the breath of God frost is given—also by watering he wearie the thick cloud; he scattereth the bright cloud, and it is turned round by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy."<sup>14</sup> In like manner, he has lice, locusts, and wireworms—besides every other creature, not only under his control, but at his command.

By *rational* instrumentality is understood instrumentality endued with reason, comprehending nearly all the human species, but leaving out angels, fallen and unfallen. These are all in his hand, and they all serve him voluntarily—intelligently or ignorantly; by accident or by choice; with good will or without it. Nothing is more despotic than the heart of an eastern monarch; yet "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."<sup>15</sup> As a husbandman waters a garden by his foot, or a meadow by his spade, by opening new channels for the stream, so God accomplishes his purposes by opening new mediums of interest; and as the water, when changed in its course remains unaltered in its properties, in like manner a man changes his course while he continues unchanged in his nature. Men follow their dispositions, their dispositions follow their interests, their interests follow the hand of providence, and the hand of providence follows the eye of purpose. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord."<sup>16</sup> The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; as it is written, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." The most subtle minds are employed in his service, the most impetuous passions held under restraint. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Read the history of his providence: "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail,

<sup>14</sup> Job xxxvii. 11—13.<sup>15</sup> Prov. xxi. 1.<sup>16</sup> Prov. xxi. 31.

out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together!"<sup>17</sup> Instruments are what the workmen make them, and no more. "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?"<sup>18</sup> We ask *who*? "There are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand."<sup>19</sup> "The Lord maketh frustrate the counsel of the heathen; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect."<sup>20</sup> He uses different materials in his service; as many, and as much of them as he needs, but no more. The miller uses the wind as long as he has any work to do by it, and then lays on the brake. The farmer lets the water run till the drains are filled, and then shuts the sluice. The mechanic uses the stream as long as he wants it, and then lets down the hatch. The grinder employs the wheel for a time, and then pulls off the strap. The engine-man propels the train to its destination, and then throws off the steam. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

*Spiritual* instrumentality is an agency put forth by the people of God, with a dependence upon his aid, and in subjection to his will. It is a sanctified medium through which God operates in relation to the fulfilment of his gracious purposes; and concerning these instruments God himself says, "This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise."<sup>21</sup> "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."<sup>22</sup> Through the medium of the church, God operates upon the world; and the spirituality of the former is the fertility of the latter. Hence the pious Jews of old prayed—"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. *That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.—Then*

<sup>17</sup> Zech. x. 4.<sup>18</sup> Lam. iii. 37.<sup>19</sup> Prov. xix. 21.<sup>20</sup> Psalm xxxiii. 10.<sup>21</sup> Isa. xliii. 21.<sup>22</sup> Isa. xxxv. 1.

shall the earth yield her increase—and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.”<sup>23</sup>

All therefore that comes within the meaning of the words—matter, mind, and spirituality,—all that is comprehended under the categories of nature, reason, and grace,—all that can be called conscious or unconscious, gracious or ungracious, active or passive, personal or relative, voluntary or involuntary, all furnish instruments for God to work with. He has only to signify his desire to use them, and myriads are instantly at his command, waiting to know his pleasure, and ready to fulfil his word. “He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,”<sup>24</sup> saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”<sup>25</sup>

Here let us pause for a moment, “to see this great sight.” What labyrinths in God’s designs, what phenomena in his plans! How mysterious are the operations of his agency, how wonderful the combinations of his mind! What intricacies and perplexities—what complications and involutions—what contradictions and hostilities there appear to us! How multifarious the objects, how heterogeneous and scattered the materials! Yet he collects them with his eye, grasps them in his hand, arranges them by his skill, and in attaching them one to another, imparts to them all a unity of tendency, so that they move onwards under his guidance upon the railway of time, towards final results, with as much precision, and with far greater certainty, than the train to the station. There are crossings as well as stations, on the lines, but not an accident occurs with God. Collateral and intersecting lines, and branches to the main trunks, are covered with carriages, but they all move on upon one or other of the lines, are attached to one or other of the trains, and ultimately arrive at one or other of the termini; and though we see the trains frequently shifting their carriages or their lines, their passengers or their

<sup>23</sup> Psalm lxxvii. 1, 2, 6, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Dan. v. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Isa. xlvi. 10.

luggage, they nevertheless subserve the purposes of him, "who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."

Some look upon God as governing whole systems, or presiding over whole communities, without regarding individuals, or concerning himself about the minutiae of things; but as a whole is but the aggregation of all the parts, or the entire amount of all the particulars, it follows that a general providence must involve the doctrine of a particular one, the truth, nature, and extent of which were so impressively taught by Jesus Christ, when he dissuaded his apostles from alarming apprehensions, on the ground that they were of more value than many sparrows, and that even the hairs of their heads were all numbered. A man numbers his houses, numbers his books, numbers his fields, and numbers his cattle—his friends, his relatives, his children, his necessities, his sovereigns, (if he has any) and many other things; but he never thinks about numbering the hairs of his head. God, however, does this; for he is far more particular than we are, and cares much more about us than we do about ourselves. Let us not despise little things. They are the hooks and eyes which connect separate parts—the rings and the tin-tacks which sustain the drapery, and not unfrequently the hinges and pivots upon which important results are seen to turn.

Interest, disposition, impulse, and various motives, may operate upon the springs of action, and determine the human will; but God is cognizant of them all, and arranges and combines them accordingly. "The preparations (disposings) of the heart of man, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord." So that while a man's heart deviseth his way, "the Lord directeth his steps."<sup>26</sup>

Kings and politicians, ambassadors and magistrates, are what they are, as to station and influence, by the providence of God. "For promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth

<sup>26</sup> Prov. xvi. 1, 9.

up another."<sup>27</sup> "With *Him* is wisdom and strength, *He* hath counsel and understanding. Behold, *He* breaketh down, and it cannot be built again : *He* shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, *He* withholdeth the waters, and they dry up : also *He* sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. With *Him* is strength and wisdom : the deceived and the deceivers are *His*. *He* leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. *He* looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. *He* leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. *He* removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. *He* poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. *He* discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death. *He* increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them : *He* enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again."<sup>28</sup> To all these declarations may be added God's own signature: "*I* form the light, and create darkness, *I* make peace, and create evil : *I*, the LORD, do all these things."<sup>29</sup>

In what way the providence of God can consist with the freedom of the human will, or the freedom of the human will with the providence of God, is not a subject for present inquiry. There they are, and there they will be, whether we can understand them or not. We may strain our eyes till we lose all power of vision, without being able to discover the imperceptible hair by which this, and by which many other subjects, are separated. The facts are ours, the philosophy is God's. He is his own interpreter, and we must leave him to form an harmony of his own dispensations. Thus much appears certain : God is an agent, but not a subject ; man is a subject, and an agent too. Man is an *agent*, or he could not *act* ; he is a *subject*, or he could not act under the *government of God* ; he acts *voluntarily*, or he could not be *accountable* ; he *is* accountable, or he could not

<sup>27</sup> Psalm lxxv. 6, 7.<sup>28</sup> Job xii. 10—24.<sup>29</sup> Isa. xlv. 7.

be capable of *guilt* ; he *is* capable of guilt,\* or he could not be capable of *punishment* ; he *is* capable of punish-

\* *Man is capable of guilt.* This is obvious from the numerous methods invented by men of corrupt minds to relieve themselves from the charge. Some ascribe the cause of it to *astrology*, and curse their stars, as Job did the day of his birth ; some discover the secret in *phrenology*, and talk about brainular developments and organization ; others trace all the streams to *demonology*, and blame the devil for everything ; others pretend to find it not in the will of the creature but in the will of God, and instead of charging the evil upon their own determinations, attach it to the determinations of Jehovah ; others again, refer it to divine permission, and seem to think that as God could certainly have prevented what he evidently permitted, there cannot be much the matter, if indeed there be anything ; some persons refer it to the immediate agency of Jehovah, others to the complications of divine providence, others to weakness of grace, and others to the "old man," who, they say, does nothing else but sin, and who therefore is justly to be blamed for the whole.

These assumptions, it need scarcely be remarked, are not only unfounded, and some of them extremely blasphemous, but contrary to the plainest dictates of reason, the express declarations of scripture, and the secret witness which excuses or accuses all the day long. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God ; for God *cannot* be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he *any* man." He neither counsels nor commands, impels nor induces a man to sin. "But every man is tempted, when he is *drawn* away by his *own* lust, and *enticed*. Then when *lust* hath CONCEIVED, it *bringeth forth* SIN : and *sin* when it is FINISHED, *bringeth forth* DEATH : " James i. 13—15. This is God's explanation of the matter, and it reveals seven facts. (1.) That sin originates in the sensuous part of man, which is depraved. (2.) That the sensuous part of man is excited by the presence of objects, or by the imagination. (3.) That the percipient faculty, strengthened by attention, excites desire. (4.) That desire is strengthened by anticipation and allurements. (5.) That intellect contrives the means of working out the desire. (6.) That the force of desire "hales" the soul towards its object, and determines the will. (7.) The will once determined, the effect is produced. Now, in all this we see the agent, the object, the illicit commerce, the conception, the birth, and the death,—the commencement, the progress, and the consummation. We observe its origin, its mode of operation, and its result. The root, the branches, and the fruit, are described ; but to know the forgiveness of sin is far better than to understand the philosophy of sinning, and he who knows by experience what it is, will find little difficulty in admitting that though it is committed by the will of man, it can be pardoned only by the will of God.

ment, or he would not be *threatened* with it, neither would he be *afraid* of it! The human mind is a created efficiency; it is, however, a depraved efficiency, and its operations, both intellectual and moral, are under the government of God, which is supreme and universal. Men abuse their power, but God never abuses his; and where they act wickedly, he orders wisely. His "works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride, he is able to abase."<sup>30</sup>

One thing, however, is beyond all dispute abundantly clear, namely, that whatever distinctions are acquired under the providence of God, those distinctions are owing to the beneficence of that providence under which they have been obtained. This is a great fact; and it is an intelligible fact; and a fact so intelligible, that he who runs may read. Who gave us dispositions, and opportunities, and friends, and courage, and skill, and health, and strength, and success? "Bless the *Lord*, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the *Lord*, O my soul, and forget not *all* his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles."

It may yet be objected that *industry* is the true source of acquisition. But what is industry without the concurrence of God? "Except the *Lord* build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the *Lord* keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early,—to sit up late,—to eat the bread of sorrows:"<sup>31</sup> for vexation is sure to follow frustration, and if God's blessing is withheld, disappointment is sure to come in its stead. Industry is a good thing, but "the blessing of the *LORD*, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."<sup>32</sup> What said God to the

<sup>31</sup> Dan. iv. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Psalm cxxvii. 1, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Prov. x. 22.

industrious Jews, who, like many other professing people, were too industrious to be religious, and too covetous to be honest: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."<sup>33</sup> "Thou shalt *fear* the Lord thy God," said Moses, "and he shall *bless* thy bread and thy water." The Jews have a saying that providence works while men are asleep; and we know who said, "Take no thought for to-morrow." Anxiety will not change the weather, nor alter the decrees of providence. It will not add an inch to a man's stature, nor create one additional hair,—white or black. But our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of temporal things, and our resources are in his providence. Idleness is wickedness, and he who is too good to work, is too bad to eat; at the same time a steady reliance on God's mindfulness of us, is necessary to insure *rest*; "for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

A man may acquire knowledge, literature, polished manners, wealth, titles, and every other distinction,—personal, relative, and official; but *how* does he acquire them? Dependently on God, or independently of him? If the former, then he is indebted to the providence of God; if the latter, he may rationally and safely ascribe them to his own resources. But who is so infatuated as not to *see* a providence? Who is so blind as not to see *afar off* that God has the ordering and determining of men and things, however great or however small. Who gives opportunities, skill, inclination, energy, perseverance, and everything else which leads to acquisition? It is *God* who contrives the whole machinery, regulates the machinery contrived, and renders its operations conducive to success. Talents would be useless without application; but application requires opportunity, and it is the providence of God that creates opportunities. Men have original capacities and tendencies; but as

<sup>33</sup> Haggai i. 6.

these capacities and tendencies are under the providence of God, and subject to divine arrangements, it is obvious that no man can acquire anything independently of God ; and that consequently every man who acquires beneficial distinctions in this life, be they of what description they may, owes them to the sovereign goodness of God, and to that only.

We say, the "sovereign goodness of God." For that he owes them to *God*, is a fact, standing out in so clear a light, and striking the common sense of mankind so strongly, as to admit of no rational contradiction. That divine *goodness* is the source of all that can distinguish, enrich, and dignify man in his present state, is a fact attested by universal consent, and published by the whole world. And that this goodness, although perpetual and exuberant, is determined by the *sovereign will of God*, is equally plain to a reflecting mind. For, in the first place, man can merit nothing by his birth, by his talents, by his tendencies, or by any thing else. That which is not deserved cannot be demanded ; that which cannot be justly demanded may be righteously withheld ; that which may be righteously kept back must be given as a gratuity, if given at all ; and that which is thus given must be ascribed to the sovereign goodness of God. Besides this, God is the *Sovereign Proprietor* of the world. The silver and the gold are his, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills. He farms out the earth to the children of men, but he is Lord of the manor himself, and holds the fee-simple in his possession. He fixes his own rent, determines the conditions of the tenure, creates and dismisses his own tenants—or rather stewards—and does all his pleasure.

John said, "A man can receive *nothing*, except it be given him from heaven."<sup>34</sup> And this observation applies with as much force to things temporal as to things spiritual. For, as James remarked, "*Every* good gift and every perfect gift is from *above*, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither

<sup>34</sup> John iii. 27.

shadow of turning."<sup>35</sup> Our very acquisitions are free donations, and are thus viewed and described by holy men of old, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Wealth is a distinction; but wealth, whether hereditary or acquired—whether obtained by the law of descent, by legacy, by fraud, or by industry, is not a man's own, if absolutely and independently considered; and for this clear reason,—man as a responsible being, destitute of merit, and filling the office of steward—above which condition he can never rise—cannot acquire an absolute or independent right in any thing. Above his nature, office, and accountability, he can never become elevated; and this being the case, all he is, and all that he has, belong to *God*.

God gives wealth, and other talents as well, but then he never gives away his *right* with them. "Thine, O, Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O, Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.—All things come of thee, and of thine *own* have we given thee.—All this store that we have prepared to build thee a house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is *all thine own*."<sup>36</sup> Sentiments worthy of the man after God's own heart, who, having "set his affection to the house of his God," not only gave the *pattern*, which he drew under inspiration,<sup>37</sup> but in his trouble, or poverty, prepared for the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and ten times as much silver, and brass and iron not knowing how much, "for it was in abundance."<sup>38\*</sup> The

<sup>35</sup> James i. 17.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Chron. xxviii. 19.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Chron. xxix. 11—16.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Chron. xxii. 14.

\* According to the common data for computation, this amazing sum, said to have been prepared by David, under comparatively limited means, amounted to 46,038 cart loads of silver and gold, which at the rate of one ton per load, was equal in value to

people offered willingly ; but they gave God nothing that was not his own. How could they? 'They had *received* all they possessed, for they had nothing but what they received, and therefore could not glory as though they had not received it. They gave it to *God*, which is more than *some* people do, and more than what the Jews *always* did ; but thousands of people, and of professing people too, will not let God have his *own*. They bury it, as the

£889,687,500 sterling. In addition to all this (see chap. xxix. 3, 4.) he contributed 125 tons of gold, and 293 tons of silver, or £18,923,312, 10s. 0d. sterling, making in all the sum of £907,769,812, 10s 0d. ! A sum exceeding the whole amount of the national debt of this country ! without including the enormous quantities of brass and iron, and the liberal bestowment of precious stones, which, when viewed collectively, must have exceeded the imperial revenues of all the crowned heads in Christendom ! Inspired by the example of their sovereign, the people gave munificently also, and nearly, if not quite, EIGHT THOUSAND MILLIONS STERLING, must have been contributed towards the erection of this costly fabric ; a sum sufficient to have built the whole of solid silver ! It is probable therefore the Chaldean talent is here reckoned by—which would reduce the sum to about one half ; or else the Jewish talent was much smaller at that period than afterwards. In either case however, the contributions formed a magnificent exhibition of the *voluntary* principle, and brought out the efficacy of religious willingness in splendid contrast with the *compulsory* principle, and in a manner which must certainly put to the blush not a few modern voluntaries. When—alas ! *when*—will our rich men—our christian leaders and our congregations, imitate these legal Jews, in their zeal for chapel-building ? How is it that we laud rich men for giving fifty or an hundred pounds towards building a chapel, or removing a chapel debt ? Why is not every chapel subscribed for before it is built ? and what is the reason we have not ten chapels where now we have only one ? Is it because professors of religion have not the *means* ? It is no such thing. The true reason is, they are *worldly*. That is the clear, broad fact ; and it applies as well to one party, as to the other—as well to the dissenter as to the churchman. The world is in the *church* ; in the dissenting as well as in the state church—in the voluntary, as well as in the compulsory principle. Worldlyism reaches the chapel-goer, as well as the church-goer ; it pervades the hearts and fills the lives of both classes ; and, in few words, it is that accursed, though fascinating idol, before whose shrine the dissenter and the churchman—the man who professes to serve God and the man who professes to serve him not, perform an unreluctant and obsequious homage.

man did his talent, and fancy themselves the most prudent of stewards ; or they pervert its uses in a thousand mischievous ways, so that, give it to *whom* they may, they give little or none of it to *God*— and give it to *what* they may, they give little or none of it to *religion*. “The people gave willingly” and abundantly ; but how grudgingly and parsimoniously do some people give, although they profess to be the Lord’s saints, and to live under a dispensation far more spiritual and efficacious than was that of the Jews ! Such people seem to forget that *their* prudence is not piety ; and that carefulness with *them* is covetousness with *God*. How few people lay up for the Lord, as did the projector of the Jewish temple. Men lay up for any thing but the gospel, and for every body but God ! How is this ? Do they like religion *less* than than they like any thing else ? and love and serve the creature more than the Creator ? Where the treasure is, there the heart is ; and out of the abundance of the heart, men *act* as well as speak. “By their *fruits* ye shall know them.”

Alas ! how few people appear to understand the end of God’s gifts, and to use them accordingly. How seldom is the Giver acknowledged in the gift ! How frequently is it the case that *His* love is never tasted, *His* goodness never perceived, *His* friendship never valued ! Men live as if there was no providence, and as if there was no God. In their speculations for gain, and in their pursuits after pleasure, “God is not in all their thoughts.” In fatal and even brutal stupidity they live on, as if it was not appointed once for man to die, and after that the judgment. Lamentable as all this truly is among the ungodly and the worldly, it is a thousand times more awful in its relations, when the same criminalities are charged upon God’s professing saints. And yet with how much truth, and with what pathetic emphasis, may it not be said, even of them, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib : but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider ?” “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end !” Would that they remembered “Lot’s wife,”

—that they studied the parable of the talents—of the barren fig-tree—of the unjust steward—and of the wealthy glutton ; and that they well considered the examples, admonitions, instructions and warnings in both the Old and New Testaments.

One more remark : Let persons who deny God the use of his own, bear steadily in mind that he who gives sometimes takes away ; he who clothes sometimes strips ; he who fills sometimes empties ; and he who fattens for the slaughter, slaughters when he has fattened. Hear the word of the Lord, ye who are called *Christians*, and surnamed by the name of Calvin, or Wesley, or Luther, or Knox, or any one else ; ye who are designated Gillites or Fullerites, Antinomians or Arminians, Baptists or Independents ; ye who are members of churches, and ye who are not. What saith the Lord ? “ She did not know that *I* gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold which they prepared for Baal.” And what then ? “ *Therefore* will I return and *take away* my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax.”<sup>39</sup> Who hath made thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received ? and what hast thou received that thou hast not abused ? and what hast thou abused that thou hast not forfeited ? and what less than guilt is implied by forfeiture ? And does not guilt call for repentance ? “ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ? ” Remember that mercies abused are judgments delayed ; and that when God calls for his own he will have it. No matter where secreted, when *he* looks for it, he will find it ; when he demands it, he will take it away ; notwithstanding the nature of its securities, or the precautions of the holders. Riches have wings, and they fly away when God calls them, nor has any person power over them so as to retain them in that day. How often do we see this ac-

<sup>39</sup> Hosea ii. 8, 9.

complished. How often is the pinnacle exchanged for the plain, the castle for the cottage, and idleness and luxury for hard work and vile raiment ! How frequently do we observe riches taken suddenly from men, or men taken suddenly from them ! And when God makes out an order, or sends in a bailiff, it is no use to shut the door or to resist the authority. He has instruments at his command, and in great plenty ; for "all are his servants." If he does but "touch the bell," they are instantly around him, saying, "Here we are." He can throw in a fresh note and change the whole piece ; pull another string, and alter the entire scene ; introduce a new object and bring out a new view ; and in millions of ways accomplish his purpose. Who then is favourably distinguished in any way, but must exclaim, "I rejoice and tremble !"

## CHAPTER VII

### RELIGIOUS DISTINCTIONS CONSIDERED IN THEIR SOURCE.

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It has been made abundantly evident, that personal, intellectual, social, and moral distinctions, are all referable to the sovereign goodness of God, as the prime source of their origin; and it now remains to be made clear that other and more important distinctions, involving the honours of a glorious immortality, have *their* origin also in the same celestial source.

Were it not for the perverting influence of education, interest, and prejudice, a doctrine proclaimed—trumpet-tongued—by reason, revelation, and the “whole course of nature,” might safely enough be left with the affections and judgments of all good men.

For if the lesser benefits are from *God*, how can the greater be originated by the creature? If the lower springs are from Heaven, must not the upper ones have a supernal source? If minor distinctions have their origin in the sovereign benevolence of God, and in that *only*, it can hardly be supposed that major distinctions can have any other.

*How*, it may be asked, in the absence of direct proof to the contrary, can it be supposed that he who is infinitely particular in the dispensations of his providence,

should be otherwise in the dispensations of his grace? If even the hairs of the human head are all numbered, can the heirs of salvation be unregistered? Is the fall of a sparrow to come within the arrangements of divine providence, and the salvation of a sinner to be a matter of chance? Can it be supposed that he who wrote my name on earth, did not write it in heaven? Am I to believe that he who keeps the records of time, does not keep the records of eternity; and that he who enrolled me in the former, did not place me on the latter? Was I delineated on the page of time, and not drawn in the volume of eternity? Is it possible that God should arrange every thing for me in relation to this world, and nothing for me in relation to another? Could he appoint the bounds of my habitation below, and make no appointment for my dwelling place above? Or, was my locality on earth of greater importance than my residence in heaven?

Then, as to the *source* of all these distinctions. If divine goodness is the original spring of all providential honours, we may be sure it is the fountain of eternal life, with all its distinctions and glories. If temporal mercies flow from divine beneficence, spiritual blessings can stream from no other fountain; and if man is unworthy of the former, how much more is he so of the latter! If he can merit nothing under the law of works, how can he be supposed to earn any thing under the law of faith, where the reward is reckoned not to him that worketh, but to him that believeth? And if it is once admitted, that all secular benefits, distinctions, and honours, have their rise in the benevolent love of God, to suppose that the infinitely more momentous blessings of salvation should have any other original, is a misapprehension of the subject so gross and so astonishing, as to suggest intellectual imbecility, if not mental alienation.

Finally, as it regards the *sovereignty* of divine goodness in the distinctions of grace, can these distinctions, by any stretch of the imagination, or by any candid conception of the human mind, be for one moment supposed less sovereign than the distinctions of providence? That

spiritual distinctions *do* exist, is a fact lying open to public observation, attested by the wisdom of God, and uncontradicted by all mankind—except here and there an egotistical coxcomb, or a self-sufficient deist. That, like the distinctions of providence, some possess them and others not, is a great fact, palpable to our senses; and that those who *do* possess them might *not* have possessed them, had the will of God otherwise determined, is another great fact, easily perceptible, and standing out to view like the Nelson statue in Trafalgar square, the monument at London Bridge, or the cupola of St. Paul's cathedral.

Now the conclusion deducible from these two facts is this: that the grace of God which is the grand source of all religious distinctions, is as sovereign in its exercise as it is free in its nature—as discriminating in its objects, as it is ennobling in its effects. For where was there a law necessitating the Divine Being to bestow these distinctions upon any of the fallen sons of Adam? or to determine upon whom they should be conferred? The obvious truth is, that there existed no such law at all; and therefore, no such law can be supposed to have been in operation. This being the case, God was free either to exercise or not to exercise the grace which contains salvation; and as the objects of his distinguishing regards were mingled with the mass of mankind, and unable to lay a foundation for his preference, because no better than others, it follows, that God was free in the choice which he made, and that sovereignty determined the elections of his grace. Election therefore, is an act which was ruled not by equity, but by sovereignty; not by the will of man, but by the will of God. It is *consistent* with equity, but then it is *not* equity, neither does it *spring* from equity. Salvation, in its fullest sense, is to sinners a gracious provision. Sovereign goodness determined the objects of its reception, infinite wisdom devised the means of its communication, and these means constitute the plan of grace, displayed in the mediation of Christ and proclaimed in the gospel of truth.

But if salvation is *wholly* a gift, then sovereignty