

## ARTICLE VII.

## THE DIVINE DECREES.

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THAT God has decreed or "fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," is a doctrine which holds a conspicuous place in the history of dogmatic theology. It has been a prominent element in not a few of those great controversies which have agitated the church. Upon it, and the ethical and metaphysical problems intimately connected with it, has been expended much of the profoundest thought of every age. It has often been discussed with earnestness and eminent ability, though not always with Christian candor and charity. By many it has been defended on biblical and rational grounds, as one of the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity; by others it has been rejected as contrary to reason and scripture, and as having no place in the Christian system. Some have claimed for it the highest practical value, while others have insisted that, if true, it is a purely speculative doctrine, having no connection whatever with the practical duties of religion; and yet others have branded it as a false dogma, fraught with all manner of mischievous tendencies. It is a doctrine which can be easily misrepresented and caricatured; and which has often been rejected through sheer misapprehension and prejudice; while it is manifestly held, in its true spirit and substance, by many persons who sedulously exclude the formal statement of it from their creed. Indeed we are persuaded that not a few of its most vehement opposers might, by an unprejudiced inspection, find all the essential elements of this doctrine among their most cherished convictions of religious truth. We are willing, moreover, to admit that the formal rejection of the doctrine, and the prejudice entertained against it, are in part, at least, traceable to the infelicitous manner in which it has sometimes been represented and defended. There

has not always been, on the part of its advocates, a judicious and discriminating use of terms, nor a sympathetic appreciation of the difficulties and objections with which, to most minds, the doctrine of divine decrees is environed. It has been made to wear a stern and forbidding aspect, which does not properly belong to it, and needlessly to assume an attitude of antagonism to certain other well-established truths.

It is earnestly hoped that the present discussion of this important doctrine may tend to abate prejudice and misunderstanding, and to promote that unity of faith which may reasonably be expected to characterize those who are taught by the same "Spirit of truth."

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE.

In stating what we believe to be the Calvinistic and true doctrine of divine decrees, we shall aim to distinguish it, on the one hand, from fatalism, and on the other, from Arminianism; from the views of those who pervert it, and from the views of those who reject it. It stands midway between the doctrine of necessity and the doctrine of contingency. It invests God with a universal sovereignty and dominion; but does not reduce the universe to a mere piece of complicated mechanism, moved alike, in all its parts, by the direct exertion of his omnipotent and resistless power.

In discussing this subject we encounter at every step the difficulties arising from the ambiguity and inexact use of language. Here the subtle boundary line between truth and error is easily obscured by a double-meaning word or phrase. We shall not, therefore, rely wholly upon any one formal statement or definition of the doctrine; but having given such a statement or definition, shall endeavor to elucidate it, and guard it from misapprehension.

By the doctrine of divine decrees we mean that, *God from eternity purposed or determined so to constitute and govern the universe as to make it certain that all events would take place precisely as they do take place.*

To indicate further the exact meaning of this statement, it is important to observe several things :

(a) The decrees of God are to be distinguished from his laws, statutes, edicts, and commands. The term "decree" is, in many respects, an unfortunate one to denote the thing intended. It is apt to suggest the idea of legal enactment and authoritative requirement. It is generally used, except by theologians, in this legal sense. It is often so used by the sacred writers. Hezekiah "published a decree" throughout all Israel, requiring the passover to be kept (2 Chron. xxx. 5). Cyrus "made a decree," commanding the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra vi. 3). "Caesar Augustus made a decree," requiring that the people throughout his empire should be taxed (Luke ii. 1). The Christians were accused of doing things "contrary to the decrees of Caesar," that is, contrary to his laws or edicts. But in theological discourse the word "decree" has a very different meaning. It is not a synonym of law, command, precept; but of plan, purpose, determination. When it is said that God decrees an event, it is not meant that he commands or requires it; but that he has a purpose respecting it, which renders its occurrence certain. An event may be commanded which is not decreed; and so an event may be decreed which is not commanded, but prohibited. It is important in treating the subject now under discussion not to overlook this distinction; and to remember that a divine decree is not a law, rendering the thing decreed obligatory on any body, but is a mental purpose or determination, which renders the thing purposed certain to exist.

(b) The decrees of God are to be distinguished from his wishes, desires, and preferences. A decree may involve a desire, or it may not. Much the same distinction exists here as was pointed out above between laws and decrees. God may desire what he does not decree, and may decree what he does not desire. His commands always imply that he sincerely wishes the thing commanded to be done; but his purposes or decrees imply no such wish. When therefore it is said, as it sometimes is, that God wills everything

which he decrees, it must be remembered that when *will* is used as a synonym of *decree*, it is not then a synonym of *wish* or *desire*.

(c) The decrees of God are to be distinguished from his prescience or foreknowledge. Foreknowledge and decrees are intimately connected, but not identical, though in Greek the same word (*προγινώσκω*) is often used to denote both. Without raising the question, at this point of the discussion, which is the ground of the other, we wish distinctly to state that by divine decrees we mean something different from divine prescience. To say that God foreknows all things, is not the same as to say that God decrees all things, or purposes to do what secures the certainty of all things.

(d) The decrees of God are to be distinguished from his creative and administrative agency. There are those who hold that the purposes of God are themselves the producing cause of all events; that they have an inherent, causative energy; and that there is no intermediate act, on the part of God, between his purposes and the existence of the events purposed. But this theory we cannot adopt. All analogy is against it. Human purposes have no inherent power of causation. Man determines to do something, and then does it; and the act of doing is distinct from the determining purpose. May we not hence infer that it is so with God? And even aside from the analogical inference, may we not affirm that the divine purposes are not themselves the immediate efficient cause of the events to which they relate? Do they not long lie inoperative in the mind of God? Did not the purpose of creation exist untold ages before anything was created? And was not the creative act a distinct act put forth at that point of time to carry into effect the prior purpose? It is important then to distinguish, since there is ground for the distinction, between the purposes and the creative and providential agency of God. Our statement of the doctrine under discussion is, not that God so created and so governs the universe as to render it certain that all events will take place as they do; but that from eternity God so *purposed* to create and govern the universe, etc. "God

*executeth* his decrees in the works of creation and providence.”

(e) The decrees of God are not merely his purposes to *permit* events to take place as they do. Some hold that, with regard to the existence of sin, we can only affirm that the divine decrees extend to it in the sense that God determines to permit it, that is, not to prevent it. But this language does not seem to express the whole truth. God might, indeed, be said to decree the existence of whatever he could have prevented, but determined not to prevent. But the decrees of God are not mere negatives. They are purposes positively to do something, and to do that which renders certain the existence of all events, sin included.

(f.) It is important to notice, that according to our statement of the doctrine, the decrees of God relate *primarily* to his *own acts*. He purposed, from eternity, to do precisely as he has done, and as he is doing, and as he will do; that is, to create the universe as he did create it, and to govern it as he is governing it. But while the decrees of God relate thus primarily to his own acts, they relate *secondarily* to all events which follow directly or indirectly as a consequence of his acts, or have the ground of their certainty in his acts. And if all events come into existence, not necessarily, but certainly, in consequence of what God does (which we hold to be the case), and if God does as he does in consequence of his decrees, then may it be properly said that all events are decreed, and that God has purposed “whatsoever comes to pass.”

(g.) It is important, further to observe, that our statement of the doctrine of decrees designedly discriminates between *certainty* and *necessity*. It does not affirm that God determined that all things *must* take place as they do, but that he determined that all things *will* take place as they do. It does not say that God purposed so to create and govern the universe as to render it *necessary* for all things to come into existence precisely as they do, but so to create and govern the universe, as to render it *certain* that all things would come into existence precisely as they actually do. No one can correctly understand the doctrine of the divine purposes who

overlooks this most important distinction. It is sometimes said that this distinction is not real, but imaginary. But we most unhesitatingly and confidently affirm its reality. The mind easily and instantly distinguishes between the two ideas of certainty and necessity, whenever they are brought before it. Language abundantly recognizes this distinction. The terms and propositions employed to express certainty are not the same as those employed to express necessity. To say "he *will* do that," is not equivalent to saying "he *must* do that." To say "an event *certainly will* take place" is one thing; to say "an event *must necessarily* take place" is quite another thing. The difference is plain, and is acknowledged and acted upon, by all men in the common intercourse of life. Certainty has sometimes been called "moral, or philosophical necessity;" but President Edwards distinctly says, that it is "improperly so called." It is better to call it by its proper name. It is certainty, and nothing else; as distinguishable from necessity as from uncertainty. Accordingly in our statement of the doctrine of divine decrees, we are careful to use no terms which suggest the idea of necessity, but only those which imply the certainty of future events. And by the certainty of events we mean their simple futurity. We only affirm that, in consequence of what God has purposed to do, it is rendered certain that they *will be*; not that they *must be*. Respecting the *manner* in which they will be brought into existence, whether by a necessitating cause, or otherwise, we here make no affirmation. That point is not included in our statement, but is designedly and carefully excluded from it, and is left to be determined by its own proper evidence. So far as respects the doctrine of decrees, it is an open question whether events which are certain to take place, will, or will not, take place under the law of necessity or of physical causation. A rejector of the doctrine of decrees may believe in the literal and absolute necessity of all future events; while an advocate of the doctrine of decrees may consistently and firmly believe that many future events will not take place necessarily, that is, as the unavoidable effects of a necessitating cause.

We have dwelt upon this point, because it is by recognizing and emphasizing this manifest distinction between certainty and necessity that the Calvinistic doctrine of the divine purposes is distinguished from all forms of fatalism.

With these remarks, designed to indicate more clearly the meaning and scope of our formal statement of the doctrine under consideration, we now proceed to adduce some of the

## II. PROOFS OF THE DOCTRINE.

There are single arguments in favor of this doctrine which to our own mind, are, independently of the others, conclusive; and if the cumulative force of all those to be presented be not convincing to our readers, the fault will doubtless be in the defective mode of their presentation, rather than in their intrinsic weakness.

1. Our first argument is derived from the works of creation and providence, or from what God actually does. It is admitted by all theists that whatever God himself really does, he from eternity purposed, or predetermined to do. The only question then is one of fact, viz. Does God, by his creative and providential agency, secure the certainty of whatsoever comes to pass, or render it certain that all events will take place precisely as they do take place? No one will hesitate to answer this question in the affirmative, in respect to a very large class of events. The existence of whatsoever comes to pass as the immediate result of divine agency, without the intervening voluntary agency of any other being, is confessedly rendered certain by what God does. All events which are effects, of which God is the sole efficient cause, are rendered infallibly certain by the causative action of God, and so by the eternal decree which rendered certain that causative action. Here there is no room for any difference of opinion. But are the acts of moral beings, and the events which are the inevitable consequences of such acts, rendered certain by the divine agency? If so, then the doctrine of divine decrees, as we have stated it, is manifestly true. The question may be restricted to the voluntary acts of moral beings, since all events consequent on

such acts are rendered certain by their certainty. Does then God do what renders it certain that moral beings will always act precisely as they do act? In seeking for the true answer to this question, we observe :

(a) That the acts of moral beings are certain, whatever may be the cause or ground of that certainty. Take any past act, for example, Judas's betrayal of Christ. It certainly has taken place, and the event proves that it was certain to take place. Its *post*-certainty is no greater than its *ante*-certainty. We can conceive of a person looking forward eighteen hundred years, and beforehand knowing its future existence to be certain, just as a person can now look backward eighteen hundred years, and know that its past existence is certain. So of all moral acts which have been, or will be, put forth. The very supposition is, that they *will be*, and their certainty is a mere *will be*, a *simple futuration*.

(b) There must be some cause or ground of the certainty of moral acts, whether we can determine what it is, or not. If any event is certain, there is some reason why it is certain. This is as true of moral acts as of anything else. There certainly is a fact to be accounted for.

(c) It cannot be satisfactorily accounted for unless it be referred to the divine agency. It does not result from *chance*. No theist will say that moral acts *happen* to be certain; neither can the certainty of their occurrence be referred to any law of necessity. Mathematical truths are necessarily true. In the very nature of things, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides of the triangle. But we cannot thus explain the certainty of moral actions. There is in the nature of things no necessity for their existence, and of course none for the certainty of their existence. What imaginable ground of their certainty, then, is there, if the divine agency be excluded? If what God does, does not render their existence certain, it is past our power to conjecture what does render it certain.

(d) We come, then, to the inquiry: What positive evidence is there that the creative and providential agency

of God does render certain the moral acts of his moral creatures? For convenience, we will pursue the inquiry with reference to the moral actions of mankind only. It will, we suppose, be readily conceded by all, that the agency of God extends to the existence of all men, to every part of their natural constitution, and to all the circumstances of their life. He creates them. He gives to them their complex nature, so "fearfully and wonderfully made," with its material and immaterial properties. He appoints the time and place of their birth, and all the conditions under which their life begins, and all the circumstances in which they act from the beginning to the end of their career. Now, is there not in what is thus unhesitatingly referred to the agency of God, a ground of the certainty of the moral actions of men, or the reason why they act as they do? Had God given them a different nature, or caused them to be born at a different time, or in a different country, would not all their actions have been different from what they now are? Take any given moral act: A man takes up arms to aid in suppressing the great rebellion now existing in our country. Manifestly, if God had caused him to be born blind, or had given him a weak and puny or crippled body, he would never have performed that patriotic act. Who cannot look back and specify some particular providential event, but for which the whole after-course of his life would have been very different from what it has been? If, then, it be true that the present moral acts of men would not have been, if the divine agency towards them had not been just what it has been, are we not warranted in saying that it was the divine agency which rendered their present acts certain? Had God constituted and circumstanced them otherwise than he has, they had certainly acted otherwise than as they do; therefore, in constituting and circumstancing them as he has, did he not render it certain that they would act as they do? This view, we think, accords with the practical judgment of men in daily life, and with the conclusions of the ablest mental philosophers. When seeking for an explanation, or reason of human conduct, do

not men ordinarily trace it to their circumstances and their constitutional propensities? Is it not a dictate of that common sense of mankind, which is the soundest philosophy, that men act as they do, because of the nature they possess, and the circumstances in which they act, including in circumstances all outward influences that affect them? Whatever extreme theory of the contingency of moral actions some persons may adopt, even they will betray, in their ordinary dealings with men, a practical conviction that the ground, or occasion of human conduct,—that which renders it certain,—is as stated above. This conclusion of the practical common sense of men, is the same which President Edwards so incontrovertibly established, and which he expressed by the formula that “the Will always is as the greatest apparent good,” or “is always determined by the strongest motive.” He did not mean that the will, in the literal and proper sense of the word, is *necessitated* to follow the strongest motive, but that it *certainly does*. He speaks, indeed, of the necessity of volitions being as they are, but he is careful to say that by their “necessity,” he means “nothing different from their certainty.”<sup>1</sup> His doctrine is, that there is in motives that which renders volitions certain. But by motives he does not mean exclusively objective motives. At least, he refers the strength of objective motives, in part, to the nature and state of the mind itself. Thus he says: “Things that exist in the view of the mind, have their strength, tendency, or advantage to move or excite the will, from many things appertaining to the nature and circumstances of the thing viewed, *the nature and circumstances of the mind that views*, and the degree and manner of its view.”<sup>2</sup> He thus distinctly recognizes the combined influence of objective and subjective motives, as the ground of the “philosophical necessity,”—that is, the certainty, of all volitions, or of all moral acts. But this motive-influence is what it is, because men are constituted and circumstanced as they are, and

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<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, Part I. sec. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Part I. sec. 2.

their constitution and circumstances are determined by the divine agency; and hence it is the divine agency which renders the moral acts of men certain. And if this point be established, then is the doctrine of decrees true; for whatever God actually does, he eternally purposed to do.

2. Our second argument is analogical, based on the intimate connection which subsists between the natural world, and the moral world. These two great departments of creation are not separate and independent systems, but are correlated and constituent parts of one whole; and together make a *UNIVERSE*. So close is this relationship, so perfect is the unity, that we are naturally led to presume that, if God has a place or purpose which extends to every thing included in the one department of the universe, it will extend to every thing included in the other department also. The very oneness of the system, renders it highly improbable that certainty would reign throughout one half of it, and contingency throughout the other half. And the more we study the intimate connection between the natural world and the moral; and observe how the two are interwoven and interdependent, and how each is sensitive to whatever affects the other, the stronger does this improbability become, and the more are we inclined either to deny that there are any divine decrees, or else to believe that they extend to all objects and events whatsoever.

And we reason all the more confidently, from the evidence of decrees in the natural world, to decrees in the moral world, from this circumstance, that these two great departments of the universe are not only intimately related, but the relation of the former to the latter, is that of the lower to the higher,—the inferior to the superior. Manifestly, the material creation is subordinate to, and has its final cause in, the spiritual creation. And can we believe that God would constitute and govern the lower and less important part of his universe according to a predetermined plan, and yet have no such plan in regard to the higher and more important part? Will he have everything arranged from the beginning, according to the counsel of his own

will, touching "that which is least," and leave every thing relating to "that which is greatest," to caprice and contingency? If he has decrees which extend to the realm of matter, will he not much more have decrees extending to that nobler realm of mind for which all material existences were created, and are governed? What, then, is the truth in regard to the natural world? What is the testimony of all the physical sciences as to the doctrine of divine decrees? Do they not with one voice proclaim the universal reign of order, method, law? Do they not find throughout the entire field of their investigation in every object, however vast or however minute, traces of intelligent design or purpose? And as these natural sciences advance, how do the evidences of design, and of unity of design multiply in every direction! Nature is written all over with the proofs of the eternal purposes of its Creator. And now can we believe that he who acts so invariably according to a predetermined plan, in this subordinate part of his universe, acts without a plan, equally comprehensive in the higher spiritual realm? If the scaffolding exhibits such forethought and orderly arrangement, in its minutest details, is it not incredible that the Great Architect should have no definite and fixed purpose in regard to the building itself, including all the particulars from the foundation to the topmost stone?

The study of nature is thus fitted to commend to our faith the doctrine of the divine decrees. Justly has a living divine, discoursing on the "Oneness of God in Revelation and in Nature," observed: "And if there be one doctrine of religion, in theory, which a natural philosopher should embrace more generously than another, it is the doctrine of decrees. Law in nature—decree in religion. The two revolve around each other like twin stars. Both are developments of one truth—that God acts by plan and not by caprice."<sup>1</sup> And the same author appositely cites the following testimony of Hugh Miller as to the harmony of the "two

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. A. Phelps's Convention Sermon. 1859.

revelations" touching this doctrine: "In looking abroad on that great history of life, of which the latter portions are recorded in the pages of revelation, and the earlier in the rocks, I feel the grasp of a doctrine first taught me by my Calvinistic catechism, at my mother's knee, tightening instead of relaxing. The decrees of God, I was told, 'are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.' And what I was told early I still believe." Such testimony is alike honorable to the head and heart of him who made it.

3. Our next argument is derived from the character of God, particularly from his foreknowledge and benevolence.

(a) *Foreknowledge.* God from eternity foreknew all future events, or "whatsoever comes to pass." But a future event cannot be foreknown unless its existence is absolutely certain. It is a palpable contradiction to say that God can foreknow an event as certain which is uncertain. By the very supposition it is an event that will exist; of its future existence there is an absolute certainty. But if an event is certain, there must be some ground or cause of its certainty. Foreknowledge does not make it certain, but implies that it is already made certain. As President Edwards well says: "There must be a certainty in things themselves before they are certainly known, or (which is the same thing) known to be certain. For certainty of knowledge is nothing else but knowing, or discerning the certainty there is in the things themselves, which are known. Therefore there must be a certainty in things to be a ground of certainty of knowledge, and to render things capable of being known to be certain."<sup>1</sup> What, then, is it that renders certain the existence of foreknown events? We have already shown, as we think, that the certainty of future events can be accounted for in no possible way, except by referring it to the divine agency, and so ultimately to the divine decrees. Either all events are made certain by what God

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<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, Part II. sec. 12.

does, and so by what he decrees to do, or else they are uncertain, and if uncertain, then unknown, and if unknown, then is God destitute of foreknowledge.

Thus, if it be granted that the divine foreknowledge extends to whatsoever comes to pass, the doctrine of divine decrees seems to be a legitimate and unavoidable conclusion. Foreknowledge is conditioned on, or founded in, decrees. In various ways have men endeavored to invalidate this simple argument. Some have taken the ground that it is, in the very nature of the case, impossible for the free moral acts of men to be known beforehand. This, it is said, no more implies any disparaging limitation of God's foreknowledge, than the fact that there are some things which are impossible to him — that is, which his power cannot accomplish — implies a disparaging limitation of his omnipotence. But the cases are by no means parallel. Things which God's power cannot accomplish are instantly seen to be, in their very nature, impossibilities; e. g. God cannot enclose a triangle within two straight lines, and cannot make two parallel lines meet, and cannot make twice two equal five. These are manifestly inherent impossibilities, and imply no defect of power on the part of God. We cannot conceive them to be done. But it is not so in regard to a knowledge of future moral acts. It is conceivable. There is nothing in their nature which renders them inherently unknowable; and ignorance of them implies a defect of knowledge inconsistent with our idea of an omniscient God. And what an idea does this theory give us of God, as creator and sovereign! He blindly exerts his creative and administrative power to bring into existence and sustain and govern a universe, in regard to all the most important and sublime issues of which he is beforehand utterly ignorant! But it is enough that this theory, which denies that the free acts of his moral creatures are, or can be, known to God, is contrary to the whole tenor of scripture, which represents God as in manifold instances foreknowing and foretelling the conduct of men. The very idea of prophecy, which

pervades the Bible, implies that moral acts may be, and are, foreknown.

In order to avoid the manifest absurdity of denying the possibility of God's foreknowledge of moral acts, some have adopted a still more absurd theory, viz. that God has the power of foreknowing all things, but chooses not to exercise it in regard to the voluntary acts of moral agents. He is not only ignorant beforehand, but is voluntarily ignorant, of all that his intelligent creatures will do, that is, of the most important events in the universe which he has brought into existence! The statement of such a theory is its best refutation.

Others, who admit that the divine foreknowledge extends to all events, moral acts included, deny that we can legitimately infer decrees from foreknowledge. God can foreknow, it is said, what he has not decreed. Of those who take this position, some merely affirm that God foreknows moral acts in a way unknown to us; while some go further, and affirm that instead of decrees preceding and being the ground of foreknowledge, foreknowledge precedes and is the ground of decrees. In regard to the first point, that we do not know how God foreknows, and therefore have no right to say that his purposes are the ground of his foreknowledge, we reply that we do know that God cannot foreknow an event which is not absolutely certain. It is a contradiction to say that an actual event can be foreknown, whose existence is, in the least, uncertain or contingent. But if a foreknown event is certain, there must be some ground or reason for that certainty, and that ground or reason must be known to God, and it must be either his purpose or something else. But we have already shown that there can be no conceivable cause of the certainty of an event which does not ultimately depend on the divine will or purpose. The plea, then, that foreknowledge is a mystery, and that we do not know how God can foreknow an event, and therefore are not warranted in referring his foreknowledge to his decrees, is not valid. But the most plausible objection to this argument is that urged by those who affirm that the divine foreknowledge

must, in the order of nature, precede the divine decrees. They put the case thus: God, with all his necessary and essential attributes, must be conceived of as existing before any of his acts; foreknowledge is one of his necessary and essential attributes, while his decrees are acts; therefore his foreknowledge must precede his decrees. But the fallacy of this syllogism is obvious. It lies in the minor premise. The foreknowledge of actual future events is not an *essential* attribute of God. We can conceive of him as a perfect God without it. If he had not chosen to create a universe, he would still have been God. But, in that case, there would have been no future events, and therefore there could have been no knowledge of future events. *Foreknowledge* must be distinguished from knowledge. The latter is an essential attribute of God, and extends to all possible existences; but the former can extend only to things which will actually exist. It must, then, first be determined that events *will be*, or there can be no foreknowledge of them. They must be transferred from mere future possibilities which are objects of God's knowledge, to future certainties, before they can become objects of his foreknowledge. But this transfer can be made only by the will of God. He alone can determine whether a thing that *may be will be*. His determining purpose must precede and be the ground of its certainty, and so of his foreknowledge of its certainty. Therefore God as decreeing must be conceived of as preceding God as foreknowing, and hence it is perfectly legitimate to reason from his foreknowledge to his decrees.

(b) *Benevolence*. God is benevolent as well as omniscient. Knowing all things, he could select from all the possible systems open to his contemplation, the best — that by which the highest good of the universe would be secured. If he did not select the best possible system, that is, the best which, so far as it depended on his agency, could be actualized, then he is not perfectly benevolent. If he did select the best, then either the system actually existing is that best system, or else he has not brought into existence what he selected as the best system, but an inferior one, and

so, again, is not a God of perfect benevolence. If it be said that, although God chose the present system as the best, there are some things now included in it which he did not purpose should be included, we reply, *first*, he knew that the things referred to would be included in it, if the system itself were selected; therefore, in purposing the system he really purposed their existence. *Again*, in regard to the events referred to, one of three suppositions must be true. Either God was indifferent to their existence, or he purposed that they would not exist, or he purposed that they would exist. The supposition that a wise and benevolent God is indifferent to the existence of any event, in a system where all things are closely connected, and where momentous consequences flow from trivial causes, is wholly inadmissible. The supposition that he has purposed that an event would not take place, which yet does take place, is a denial of his power to prevent it. But, in respect to the mere power of God, it is manifestly adequate to prevent the existence of the whole system, and any and every part of it. The remaining supposition, therefore, must be true, that the existence of all actual events was purposed by God, in the sense we have explained, when, in the exercise of his infinite benevolence, he purposed the existence of the system in which they are now included.

4. *The Biblical Argument.* If the doctrine of decrees is plainly contrary to the teachings of the Bible, it must be rejected, however plausible the arguments from reason in its favor. If the scriptures are silent respecting it, giving no testimony either for or against it, though it may be true, and may have a place in our philosophy, we cannot claim for it a place in the great system of Christian truth. And if the testimony of the scriptures is not altogether explicit and decisive, some passages seeming to affirm the doctrine, and others seeming to be unfavorable to it, and all, without violence, being susceptible of either interpretation, then are we warranted in adopting that interpretation which shall make the testimony of the scriptures accord with and confirm the deductions of reason. Were the last supposition

true (the first two being manifestly untrue), we should have no hesitation in placing the doctrine of divine decrees among the doctrines of revelation. The scriptures certainly do seem, in some passages, to teach the doctrine, and the speculative arguments are, to our mind, so conclusive, that we can but let them rule in all cases of otherwise doubtful exegesis. But we go further than this, and express our conviction that the testimony of the scriptures, taken as a whole, is not doubtful, but is sufficiently clear and decided to warrant us in calling the doctrine of decrees emphatically a biblical doctrine. To present this scriptural evidence exhaustively, would require a treatise. Much of it, moreover, scarcely admits of a formal statement. It is incidental and indirect, and must be felt rather than stated, but is for this reason none the less convincing. This doctrine underlies the whole scriptures, shaping the language and thoughts of the inspired writers, even where it is not distinctly and directly alluded to, just as a geological formation of rock shapes the features of the earth's surface over half a continent, and is known to do this, although it *cropps* out and becomes visible to all in only a comparatively few localities. We shall only attempt to indicate a few of the *outcroppings* of the doctrine of divine decrees in the scriptures.

(a) The scriptures abundantly teach that God has decreed some things. Though they do not use the word "decrees," they speak of God's "counsel," his "determinate counsel," "the counsel of his will," his "eternal purpose." They speak of things which he "has determined before to be done," which he has "foreordained," and which he has "predestinated."

(b) The scriptures teach that the decrees of God, in their execution, extend to things in our view the most casual and trivial. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33). "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father" (Matt. x. 29).

(c) There are general statements which naturally imply that the divine purposes extend to all things, whether in the

material or spiritual world. "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. xlv. 9, 10). "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. i. 11).

(d) The scriptures teach that God's decrees extend to events in the moral world which involve the voluntary acts of free agents; e. g. the enslavement of Israel; their exodus and possession of Canaan (Gen. xv. 13; Acts vii. 6). A decree rendering certain these great events would be a nullity if it did not include and render certain also the conduct of Joseph and his brethren, of Pharaoh, and of Moses. So of the crucifixion of Christ. "And truly the Son of Man goeth, as it was determined" (Luke xxii. 22). "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts ii. 22). "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined to be done" (Acts iv. 27, 28). Here we are taught that not only the *fact* of Christ's death was predetermined, but also the very *mode* of it; "by wicked hands;" by the murderous gathering together against him of Herod, and Pilate, and the people, both Jews and Gentiles. The certainty of innumerable moral acts must have been involved in the certainty of the Saviour's crucifixion. The sanctification and salvation of men, involving their own free agency, are events often and in most express terms referred to the divine purposes. "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts xiii. 48). "Who hath saved us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. i. 9). "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of chil-

dren, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. i. 4, 5). "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate<sup>1</sup> to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. viii. 29, 30).

Is it said that the predestinating purpose of God, thus variously expressed, is based on the foreseen repentance and faith of men? We reply that repentance and faith are the very things said to be included in the divine purpose. "Chosen *that we should be holy*;" predestinated to be "conformed to the image of his Son;" but there can be no holiness, or conformity to the image of Christ, which does not involve repentance and faith; and no repentance and faith which does not involve some measure of holiness and conformity to Christ. And, furthermore, it is abundantly taught in the scriptures that men, left to themselves, certainly never will repent and believe. If any do repent and believe, it is because God gives them the special influences of his Spirit. It is his Spirit, and so his decree to give that Spirit, which renders their repentance and faith certain, and therefore his foreknowledge of their conversion does not precede his decree to convert them. Such is the kind of evidence which the Bible affords, to prove the doctrine that the divine decrees extend to all events, both in the natural and the moral world. Nor does it seem possible, on any just principles of interpretation, to set aside this testimony of the inspired word.

In the course of our discussion we have made no effort to prove, as a distinct point, the *eternity* of the divine decrees. This has seemed to us needless. It would be, to our apprehension, much like attempting to prove a self-evident truth, to attempt to prove that whatever purposes God now has

<sup>1</sup> "There seems to be no difference here between *προέγνω* and *προόρισε*, while, too, in Acts ii. 23; 1 Pet. i. 2; Rom. xi. 2, *προέγνωσις* is used directly for the divine will." — Olshausen, Com. in loc.

he always had and that whatever he decrees at all he decrees eternally. We can conceive of a succession in his decrees in the order of nature, corresponding to the succession in their execution in the order of time; but to suppose that God forms new decrees, and is now, from day to day, adopting new plans, seems repugnant to our most fundamental conceptions of his character. Moreover all objections raised against the doctrine are as valid against present as against eternal decrees. And it is, doubtless, owing to the plausibility of certain objections against the doctrine, more than to any defect in the arguments in its favor, that it fails to gain universal credence among philosophers and Christians. Any discussion of the subject, therefore, would be incomplete which did not notice the principal of these objections. To these, therefore, we now turn.

### III. OBJECTIONS.

The objections of greatest weight against the doctrine of divine decrees, and which we would here consider are three, viz: "that it is inconsistent with the moral character of God," and "inconsistent with the moral freedom of man, and is harmful in its practical influence." Are these objections valid?

1. The doctrine of decrees is inconsistent with the holiness, benevolence, justice, and sincerity of God. We might, in a general way, reply to this objection, by observing that it lies quite as much against the doctrine of divine providence as against the doctrine of divine decrees. Decrees are God's purpose to do as he actually does, thereby rendering certain whatsoever comes to pass. If there is nothing in his agency inconsistent with his moral perfections, then is there nothing in his decrees inconsistent with them. But we will examine the objection in detail. How is the doctrine of decrees inconsistent with the holiness of God? By making him the author or approver of sin, says the objector. But to make God the author of the sins of his creatures the doctrine must affirm or imply that God is the efficient cause of the sinful acts of his creatures. But

this it neither affirms nor in any way implies. Our statement of the doctrine is that God determined so to constitute and circumstance his creatures that *they will* act as they do, not that they will, by their constitution and circumstances, *be obliged* to act thus, or be moved as machines or automaton. The relation of decrees to free-agency we shall consider more particularly hereafter. It is enough here to say that that is a gross misstatement or misconception of the Calvinistic doctrine, which makes the divine purposes sustain to the sinful acts of men the relation of cause to effect, and so makes God the author of sin. But if the doctrine does not imply that God is the author, it does at least, says the objector, "imply that he is the approver, of sin; and so *particeps criminis*." But if decrees imply approval of sin, it must be because they imply that God commands or desires men to sin. But decrees are not at all of the nature of commands or laws, as has been already explained. Neither do they necessarily imply a desire that the thing decreed exist. Here is just where the objection appears most plausible. Why, it is asked, did God determine so to constitute and circumstance men that they certainly would sin, if he did not wish them to sin? But, as a matter of fact, he did so constitute and circumstance them that they certainly would sin, whether he decreed to do so or not. The difficulty, therefore, is not peculiar to the doctrine of decrees; it is the old problem of the existence of sin. But our doctrine does not necessarily imply that God wished sin to exist, for its own sake, or for any other reason. It is certainly supposable that he decreed the existence of sin, that is, decreed to do what rendered its existence certain, for other reasons than because he desired men to sin.

Some have supposed that sin inevitably results from the very limitation of finite natures, and hence that, in whatever circumstances God should place moral beings, there would be "conditions privative," which would render an experience of sin certain. This supposition is not absurd, nor without some degree of plausibility, and might perhaps

be accepted, were it the only alternative to the rejection of the doctrine of divine decrees. But in our view, there is another supposition far more satisfactory, viz. that God purposes so to constitute and circumstance men that they certainly will sin, not because he wishes them to sin, not because he does not, in every instance, prefer their holiness to their sin; but because there would result from such a change of their constitution and circumstances as would prevent their sinning a greater evil than their sin is. This supposition does not imply that God *could not* prevent sin in a moral system, but that such a modification of the present system as would be necessary to its prevention would involve evils greater than its existence. Neither does it imply that sin is brought into the system as "the necessary means of the greatest good," but that *the system* itself, in which sin does exist, but ought not to, is the necessary means of the greatest good. God chose the system, not on account of the sin, but notwithstanding the sin, which it includes. He prefers this system with sin to an inferior system without sin; but he would still more prefer this system just as it is in other respects with holiness in the place of sin. He decrees the existence of sin, therefore, not because he desires it, but because that divine system or arrangement into which sin is sure to enter, is indispensable to the highest good of the universe. Hence there is nothing in the decrees of God relative to sin, inconsistent with that immaculate holiness by which his whole nature is set in intense and unchangeable opposition to sin. He may foreordain its existence, that is, foreordain what renders its existence certain, and yet hate it with perfect hatred, and do all which a regard to the highest good of the universe permits to prevent its existence.

And if the doctrine of decrees, relative to sin is not inconsistent with the holiness of God, how is it inconsistent with his benevolence? The objector affirms that a perfectly benevolent being cannot purpose the existence of that which is itself so great an evil, and which draws so many dire evils in its train. But it is an indisputable fact

that a perfectly benevolent being can *permit* the existence of sin; for he does, and therefore he can, decree to permit it; for it is plain that what benevolence can do, it can decree to do. But as respects this objection, what is the difference between saying that God permits sin, and saying that God so constitutes and circumstances men that they certainly will sin? The permission of sin can be explained only on the supposition that it may be better for God to permit than to prevent it. But this same supposition explains how he can give men such a nature, and place them in such circumstances, that they will sin, and how he can decree to do this. It may be that by no other arrangement could the highest good of the universe be secured. Benevolence, therefore, may require God so to endow and circumstance men that they will sin, and to decree thus to endow and circumstance them; which is only saying that benevolence may require God to decree the existence of sin.

And if the doctrine of decrees is not inconsistent with the divine *holiness* and *benevolence*, wherein is it supposed to be inconsistent with the divine *sincerity* and *justice*? Is it said that God cannot consistently forbid nor punish what he has himself decreed? But if, as we have already shown, his decreeing a sinful act is perfectly consistent with his most intense disapproval of the act, then may it be consistent, also, with an expression of that disapproval, in the form of prohibition, and threatened and inflicted penalty? There is surely no insincerity in his forbidding, and no injustice in his punishing, what is intrinsically hateful and ill-deserving; but the intrinsic nature of sin is in no way affected by the fact that it is decreed. This last point will come more distinctly under notice, when considering the second great objection to the doctrine of decrees; and to that we now turn, confident that there is nothing in the doctrine, as we have stated and explained it, which does not harmonize perfectly with right conceptions of the moral character of God; yea, more, that right conceptions of the moral character of God logically necessitate a belief of this doctrine.

2. But the objection which is oftentimes urged against the doctrine of divine decrees, is its alleged inconsistency with man's *free moral agency*. We are willing to concede, that, if this objection be valid, it utterly disproves the doctrine of decrees. We believe that all truths, or facts, are self-consistent and harmonious; and we fully believe that man's free-agency is a fact, established by the best possible evidence,—that of consciousness. Therefore, we are ready to grant that any supposed fact which is inconsistent with the free-agency of man cannot be a real fact. If the doctrine of decrees and the doctrine of free-agency can be shown to be inconsistent, so that the one or the other must be rejected as false, we have no hesitation in saying, let the former be rejected and the latter be retained. But their inconsistency must be clearly shown. So many and weighty are the arguments in favor of the doctrine of decrees, that they cannot be set aside for any slight or dubious reason. Surmise and assertion are not enough, however plausible; we want positive and conclusive evidence that divine decrees are inconsistent with human freedom. But where shall we find evidence of such inconsistency? The Bible does not furnish it; consciousness does not furnish it. If it exist anywhere, we may expect to find it in the very nature of free-agency, or in the very nature of decrees. But what is there in the nature of free-agency inconsistent with a divine purpose so to create and so to condition men that they certainly will act as they do act? Free-agency consists in freely choosing; and we can as easily conceive of a person putting forth a choice which accords with the divine purposes as one which is opposed to them, or one in regard to which there is no divine purpose. The nature of the choice is the same, whether we suppose there is, or is not, a previous purpose or plan with which it harmonizes. If this seems like a *petitio principii*, then let us see if there is anything in the nature of decrees to sustain this objection.

If the divine purposes interfere with human freedom, they must do so, it would seem, in one of two ways: either by causing God to employ influences in securing their fulfil-

ment which are *irresistible* ; or by causing a *certainty* that the moral actions of men will be what they are.

Is it, then, necessary to suppose that, if God has purposes relative to the moral actions of men, he must, in their execution, employ influences which are irresistible, and which leave no room for freedom or choice on the part of men? We may suppose him to employ two classes of influences, in consequence of his purposes, viz. the *common* influences of motives, and the *special* influences of his Spirit. And is there anything in the influence of motives to which God subjects men, inconsistent with their free-agency? They cannot act morally without motives ; and if in any case the influence of motives which secures choice be consistent with freedom, then may it be consistent with freedom in all cases. And does any one suppose that when men by motives influence one another to action they thereby impair the freedom of their action? And cannot God influence a man by motives without interfering with his freedom, as well as a fellow-man can? It matters not by whom motives are employed ; the nature of their influence is always the same ; and if that influence be an irresistible energy necessitating all human action which it secures, then is there no such thing as free-agency in the universe, and no such thing is possible ; and therefore it is idle to object to the doctrine of divine decrees on the ground of its inconsistency with the doctrine of free-agency, since there is, and can be, no free-agency for decrees to interfere with.

But such is not the nature of motives. They are necessary to all choices, but choices are never a necessary consequence of them. They influence the will, but do not compel it. Men yield to motives, but they yield freely, and might in all cases and ought in many cases, to resist them. The perfect consistency of motive-influence with moral freedom is attested by the consciousness of every man. There is nothing, therefore, in those ordinary influences which the decrees of God may be supposed to cause him to employ in securing their fulfilment which in the least degree sustains the objection we are considering.

The same is true of whatever *special* influences God may be supposed to exert upon men in consequence of his decrees. Such influences he doubtless does exert in securing right moral action, whether it be in consequence of his decrees or not. But do these special influences of the Holy Spirit subvert human freedom? Are they irresistible and compulsory? There is no more evidence that they are than there is that the influences of motives are. We may, for aught that appears to the contrary, act as freely under the special influences of the Holy Spirit, either yielding or resisting, as we do under any other influence. The immediate, no more than the mediate, agency of God can be shown to conflict, in the slightest degree, with the free agency of those who are the subjects of it. And if those special influences which God actually does exert on men may consist with their freedom, the case is not altered by supposing those influences exerted in the execution of decrees. The influences themselves are precisely the same in kind and degree, whether they emanate from decrees or not. They may, therefore, emanate from decrees, and yet leave the free-agency of man unfringed.

If, then, the divine decrees do not interfere with human freedom, by causing God to exert on men any irresistible influences, do they, by causing a *certainty* that men will act as they do?

That the divine decrees do, through the divine agency in their execution, render the moral acts of men certain, is involved in our statement of the doctrine, and is explicitly maintained in our discussion. But is the certainty of a moral act thus secured, inconsistent with the freedom of the act? How inconsistent? Why may not the *freedom* of the act be made certain as well as the act itself? This we believe to be the case. The freedom of all moral acts is one of the things decreed and made certain. God has eternally determined that nothing shall interfere with man's free-agency. But still many cling to the belief that certainty does somehow prevent a moral act from being free, that is, necessitates its existence. But the mere fact that an

event will take place, has no causal relation to the production of that event, and exerts no influence whatever that tends to bring the event into existence. The fact that a man certainly will act in a given way, does not necessitate his acting thus, nor influence his will in the least. He acts just as freely as if there were no certainty in the case. Certainty is not necessity, and does not produce necessity. Here is where this objection takes its rise. Things radically diverse, are confounded, or are supposed to be inseparably connected. Let the real distinction between certainty and necessity be clearly apprehended and held fast; let it be seen that there is a wide difference between a *will be* and a *must be*, and all ground for the supposed interference of divine decrees with free-agency will vanish.

But if the certainty of moral acts is inconsistent with their freedom, then the difficulty is one which others have to encounter, as well as the advocates of the doctrine of decrees. All events prophetically announced were certain to occur. A prophecy or prediction of an uncertain event would only be a guess or surmise. But the conduct of men was repeatedly foretold. The Jews' rejection and crucifixion of Christ, for example, was announced by Isaiah centuries before the advent. Were not the Jews, therefore, free and responsible in their shameful treatment of the Saviour? So, likewise, if certainty renders events necessary, then all foreknown events are necessary, whether they are foretold or not, for all foreknown events are certain. Foreknowledge does not *make* an event certain, but *proves* it to be already made certain. Its future existence cannot be known, if it be at all uncertain. Every possible future event is either certain or uncertain. If it is uncertain, it cannot be certain, and therefore cannot be known to be certain. In other words, its certainty must be a fixed reality, before its future existence can be an object of foreknowledge. Whoever, therefore, holds that God foreknows the moral acts of men, must either believe that they are not free, or else admit that their certainty does not interfere with their freedom. Nor is the difficulty avoided even by a denial of foreknowledge in

respect to moral acts; for events are certain, whether they are known or not. With reference to events which have taken place, we can conceive of a point in the past when they were future, and when it was certain that they would take place. So if any events shall hereafter take place, their future existence is, by the very supposition, now certain: they *will be*. This is as true of events in the moral as in the natural world. If, therefore, certainty causes or implies necessity, all events are necessary, and there is, and can be, no such thing as moral freedom, or free-agency, in the whole created universe; yea, and God himself is no more free than his creatures are; for surely his own acts are certain, and are foreknown, and therefore on this supposition necessary, so that the whole universe, the Creator included, is under the iron dominion of relentless fate. There is no logical escape from bald fatalism, if we take the ground that certainty and necessity are identical, or are inseparably connected. If we shrink from the conclusion, let us abandon the premise. And if it once be conceded that moral actions may be certain without being necessary, then the objection against the doctrine of decrees which we are considering falls to the ground. If certainty is ever consistent with free-agency, it is none the less so when it results from a divine decree. If men can freely choose, as they do, while there is a previous certainty that they will thus choose, then can they choose freely while there are divine decrees, which render their choices certain.

Thus we find no evidence, either from the nature of free-agency or from the nature of decrees, that the two doctrines are inconsistent one with the other. Why then should an inconsistency be supposed, of which no proof can be found? We need not attempt to prove that they are consistent; still less to show *how* they are consistent; it is enough that there is not a shadow of proof that they are inconsistent.

A *third* objection often brought against the doctrine of divine decrees is drawn from its supposed bad practical influence. It is charged with a tendency to discourage effort and prayer, and to induce those adopting it to lead a care-

less and inactive life. Some rejecters of the doctrine go no further than to deny that it has any *good* practical influence. Thus Archbishop Whately says of one aspect of this doctrine, *election*: "When thus explained, it is reduced to purely speculative dogma, barren of all practical results;" and of this and kindred Calvinistic doctrines he observes: "It is not contended that the doctrines in question have a *hurtful* influence on human conduct, and consequently are *untrue*; but that they have, according to the soundest exposition of them, *no* influence on our conduct whatever; and consequently that they are not to be taught as *revealed* truths."<sup>1</sup> But how can we be sufficiently sure that a doctrine has no practical influence, to be warranted in deciding *on this ground alone* that it is not scriptural? A doctrine, though it may not directly point to and enforce any duty, may yet have a moulding influence on the entire character, and constitute one of those inward moral forces which shape the whole outward life. We are all daily influenced by truths to which we do not often have any conscious reference. They are not so much objective as subjective motives. Held among our fixed convictions, they may be ever silently working out their legitimate and beneficent results, although we may be unable to trace those results to their cause. It is not safe, therefore, to set aside a doctrine either as untrue, or unscriptural, simply because *we cannot see* that it exerts any good moral influence.

But most of those who reject the doctrine of decrees, go further than Whately does, and assert that it exerts a positively hurtful influence on those who hold it; or at least that its legitimate tendency is pernicious, though it is often escaped by a happy inconsistency. In reply to this objection we would observe:

(a) It cannot be shown that the doctrine generally exerts a hurtful influence on those who embrace it. If an appeal be made to facts, or rather to the character and lives of men, Calvinists need not shrink from the test. Without any disparagement of others, it may confidently be affirmed that

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<sup>1</sup> Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul, Essay 3.

in depth and richness of religious experience and strictness of practical morality and scope of active benevolence, no class of Christians have surpassed those who have held the doctrine under consideration.

(b) If evil sometimes apparently results from the doctrine, this may be owing to the fact that *the real* doctrine has not been clearly apprehended, or is not held in connection with other correlated doctrines, which are needful to give it its proper place and adjustment in the great system of religious truth. Almost any doctrine of the Bible may be so distorted, or misunderstood, or be taken out of its proper connections, and so pressed into undue prominence, as to exert anything but its wholesome, legitimate influence. But in such a case the fault is not in the doctrine, nor can the resulting evil be justly urged as an objection to it.

(c) In some instances it is doubtless true that "ungodly and unstable men" "wrest" the doctrine of decrees "to their own destruction." But this is only what they do with all other scriptural truths; not only those which "are hard," but also those which are easy, "to be understood. How many wrest the doctrine of the divine love, and make it the occasion of their endless ruin! And perhaps there is that in the nature of the doctrine of decrees, which renders it peculiarly liable to be thus wickedly wrested. Dr. Emmons shrewdly observes: "It is a mark of the moral depravity of mankind, that they are generally more inquisitive to know their fortune than to know their duty. They are more solicitous to know what God intends than what he requires."<sup>1</sup> But this disposition to neglect known requirements, in search of unknown purposes, is an argument for the doctrine of human depravity, rather than an argument against the doctrine of divine decrees.

(d) There is no reason apparent in the nature of this doctrine why it should tend to exert an unfavorable moral influence on any candid, truth-loving mind. "It discourages effort and prayer," says the objector. But how, if, as we

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. IV. p. 286. Boston. 1842.

have endeavored to show, it in no way impairs man's freedom and responsibility? A duty is made no less a duty by being decreed. And the neglect of duty is rendered no less sinful by being decreed. Effort is none the less important, and prayer is none the less efficacious, because included in God's eternal purposes. Yea, more: effort and prayer avail solely because God's purposes do extend to them and to their results. If this objection has any force, it is on the ground that all events are rendered certain by the divine decrees. But they are certain whether decreed or not, and are foreknown as certain. A belief in God's foreknowledge, therefore, or in the certainty of all events, has as much tendency to discourage effort and prayer, as a belief in God's decrees has.

We might go further, and easily show the adaptedness of this doctrine to exert, instead of a hurtful, a most healthful and benign influence on all who cordially and intelligently embrace it. We might show how it is fitted to inspire the heart with humility, reverence, submission, confidence, and religious joy; how it furnishes a needed check and counterpoise to other doctrines, and gives symmetry to the whole system of Christian truth. But this would be virtually to introduce a new argument in favor of the doctrine; whereas, we are here only answering an objection often urged against it; and that objection is sufficiently answered, negatively, by showing that there is no evidence whatever that the doctrine, rightly understood, is fraught with any harmful tendencies.

In conclusion, we are happy to add that we can honor and esteem those of our Christian brethren whose views on this subject do not harmonize with our own, while we sincerely regret their failure to receive a doctrine which, for us, solves many more theoretical difficulties than it occasions; the benign practical influence of which we have experienced; which is to us "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;" and the general rejection of which, we feel confident, would detract not a little from the working forces of our holy religion.