

THE  
Reconcilableness  
OF  
**GOD'S PRESCIENCE**

OF THE  
**SINS OF MEN,**  
WITH THE WISDOM AND SINCERITY  
OF HIS  
COUNSELS, EXHORTATIONS,  
AND WHATSOEVER MEANS HE USES TO PREVENT THEM.

**In a Letter,**  
TO THE HON. RORERT BOYLE, Esq.

TO WHICH IS ADDED  
**A POSTSCRIPT**  
IN DEFENCE OF THE SAID LETTER.

THE

# GOD'S BIBLE

OF THE

LINE OF THE

WITH THE WITNESS

OF HIS

CONSELS, EXHIBITS, ETC.

AND WHATSOEVER MEANS BE HELD TO THE

IN A LINE

TO THE HON. ROBERT

TO WHICH IS REFERRED

## A POSTSCRIPT

IN DEFENSE OF THE SAID LETTER

SIR,

THE veneration I have long had for your name, could not permit me to apprehend less obligation than that of a law, in your recommending to me this subject: For within the whole compass of intellectual employment and affairs, none but who are so unhappy as not at all to know you, would dispute your right to prescribe, and give law. And taking a nearer view of the province you have assigned me, I must esteem it alike both disingenuous and undutiful, wholly to have refused it. For the less you could think it possible to me to perform in it, the more I might perceive of kindness allaying the authority of the imposition; and have the apprehension the more obvious to me that you rather designed in it mine own advantage, than that you reckoned the cause could receive any, by my undertaking it.

The doubt, I well know, was mentioned by you as other men's, and not your own; whose clear mind, and diligent inquiry leave you little liable to be encumbered with greater difficulties. Wherefore that I so soon divert from you, and no more allow these papers to express any regard unto you, till the shutting of the discourse, is only a seeming disrespect or indecorum, put in the stead of a real one. For after you have given them the countenance, as to let it be understood you gave the first rise and occasion to the business and design of them; I had little reason to slur that stamp put upon them, by adding to their (enough other) faults, that of making them guilty of so great a misdemeanor, and impertinency, as to continue a discourse of this length, to one that hath so little leisure or occasion to attend to any thing can be said by them.

I see you have been told that I am an  
 ignorant man, and that I am not fit to  
 be a minister of the Gospel. I am sorry  
 that I have not been able to do more  
 for you, but I have done what I could  
 do. I have written you a letter, and  
 I have sent it to you by the hands  
 of a messenger. I have also written  
 to the brethren, and I have asked  
 them to be kind to you, and to  
 do what they can for you. I have  
 also written to the brethren, and I  
 have asked them to be kind to you,  
 and to do what they can for you.

I will know, you mentioned  
 that you were not your own; whose  
 dear friend, and I am sorry that  
 you have not been able to do more  
 for you, but I have done what I  
 could do. I have written you a  
 letter, and I have sent it to you  
 by the hands of a messenger. I  
 have also written to the brethren,  
 and I have asked them to be kind  
 to you, and to do what they can  
 for you. I have also written to  
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THE  
RECONCILEABLENESS  
OF GOD'S PRESCIENCE,

&c &c.

CHAP. I.

I. The proposal of the difficulty to be discussed.—disquisition concerning the words prescience or foreknowledge waved. II. Great care to be taken lest we ascribe to God inconsistencies under the pretence of ascribing all perfections. Equal care lest we deny to him any perfection upon the first appearance of its not agreeing with somewhat else which we have found is necessary to ascribe. Our own minds to be suspected: and endeavoured with to the utmost before we conclude, what is, or is not to be ascribed to God; if we meet with a difficulty. III. Such divine attributes as agree to the Deity by the common suffrage of all considering men, to be distinguished from those that are only concluded to belong to him upon the subtile reasonings of but a few. Yet the danger to be carefully avoided, of mistaking any dictate of corrupt affection, for a common notion. IV. His own word, therefore our surest measure, by which we are to judge what belongs to him, and what not: which plainly asserts both his wisdom, and sincerity: as our minds do also naturally suggest to us. V. It also seems plainly both to assert and prove his universal prescience, particularly of such things from which he dehorts: whence his dehorting is no proof of his not-foreknowing. VI. These therefore to be reconciled, which is not so difficult as to reconcile his dehortations from sinful actions, with his predeterminative concurrence thereto. This undertaking waved as not manageable. VII. Nor necessary. The principal arguments that are brought for it, not concluding—that every thing of positive being must be from God—that otherwise he could not foreknow such actions. The former considered. How we are to satisfy ourselves about the latter. VIII. The undertaken difficulty weighed. Nothing in it of contradiction. Nothing of indecorum.

I. **WHAT** there is of difficulty in this matter I cannot pretend to set down in those most apt expressions wherein it was

represented to me, and must therefore endeavour to supply a bad memory out of a worse invention. So much appears very obvious, that ascribing to the ever blessed God, among the other attributes which we take to belong to an every way perfect Being, a knowledge so perfect as shall admit of no possible accession or increase; and consequently the prescience of all future events, as whereof we doubt him not to have the distinct knowledge when they shall have actually come to pass. Since many of those events are the sinful actions or omissions of men, which he earnestly counsels and warns them against; this matter of doubt cannot but arise hereupon, namely, "How it can stand with the wisdom and sincerity which our own thoughts do by the earliest anticipation challenge to that ever happy Being, to use these (or any other means) with a visible design to prevent that, which in the mean time appears to that all-seeing eye sure to come to pass." So that, by this representation of the case, there seems to be committed together,—either first God's wisdom with this part of his knowledge, for we judge it not to consist with the wisdom of a man, to design and pursue an end, which he foreknows he shall never attain:—or secondly the same foreknowledge with his sincerity and uprightness, that he seems intent upon an end, which indeed he intends not. The matter then comes shortly to this sum. Either the holy God seriously intends the prevention of such foreseen sinful actions and omissions or he doth not intend it. If he do, his wisdom seems liable to be impleaded, as above. If he do not, his uprightness and truth.

My purpose is not, in treating of this affair, to move a dispute concerning the fitness of the words prescience or foreknowledge or to trouble this discourse with notions I understand not, of the indivisibility, and unsuccessiyness of eternal duration, whence it would be collected there can be no such thing as first or second, fore- or afterknowledge in that duration. But be contented to speak as I can understand, and be understood. That is, to call that foreknowledge which is the knowledge of somewhat that as yet is not, but that shall sometime come to pass. For it were a mere piece of legerdemain, only to amuse inquirers whom one would pretend to satisfy; or to fly to a cloud for refuge from the force of an argument, and avoid an occurring difficulty by the present reliefless shift of involving oneself in greater. Nor shall I design to myself so large a field as a tractate concerning the divine prescience: so as to be obliged to discourse particularly whatsoever may be thought to belong to that theological topic. But confine the discourse to my enjoined subject. And offer only such considerations as may some way tend to expedite or alleviate the present difficulty.

II. It were one of the greatest injuries to religion, a subversion indeed of its very foundations, and than by doing which, we could not more highly gratify atheistical minds, instead, and under pretence of ascribing perfections to the nature of God, to ascribe to it inconsistencies, or to give a self-repugnant notion of that adorable Being, the parts whereof should jumble and not accord with one another, And yet equal care is to be taken, lest while we endeavour to frame a consistent notion of God, we reject from it any thing that is truly a perfection, and so give a maimed one. Whereby we should undo our own design, and by our over much caution to make our conception of him agree with itself, make it disagree to him. For to an absolute perfect Being, no other can agree than that, which not only is not made up of contradictions; but which also comprehends in it all real perfections either explicitly, or which leaves room for all, by not positively excluding any of them. Which to do, and afterward, to assign that as the proper notion of God, were itself the greatest contradiction. We need therefore to be very wary, lest we pronounce too hastily concerning any thing, which to our most sedate thoughts, appears simply a perfection in itself, that it carries with it a repugnancy to somewhat else, necessary to be ascribed to him.

We are first to suspect (as there is greatest cause) and inquire whether the ail be not wholly in our own minds. Which in this and such like cases, we certainly shall upon due reflection; find labouring under the natural defect of that incomprehensive narrowness that is in some degree, unavoidably followed with confusion and indistinctness of thoughts. And may perhaps find cause to accuse them of the more culpable evils, both of slothfulness, that withholds them from doing what they can, and self-conceit by which they imagine to themselves an ability of doing what they cannot. It cannot be unobserved by them that have made themselves any part of their own study, that it is very incident to our minds, to grasp at more than they can compass; and then, through their own scantiness (like the little hand of a child) to throw away one thing that hath pleased us, to make room for another, because we cannot comprehend both together. It is not strange, that our so straitly limited understandings, should not be able to lodge commodiously the immense perfections of a Deity; so as to allow them liberty to spread themselves in our thoughts in their entire proportions. And because we cannot, we complain, when we feel ourselves a little pinched that the things will not consist; when the matter is, that we have unduly crowded and huddled them up together, in our incomprehensive minds, that have not distinctly conceived them.

And though this consideration should not be used for the protection of an usurped liberty of fastening upon God, arbitrarily and at random, what we please (as indeed what so gross absurdity might not any one give shelter to by such a misapplication of it?) we ought yet to think it seasonably applied, when we find ourselves urged with difficulties on one hand and the other; and apprehend it hard, with clearness and satisfaction, to ascribe to God, what we also find it not easy not to ascribe. Nor would it be less unfit to apply it for the patronage of that slothfulness wherein our discouraged minds are sometimes too prone to indulge themselves. To which purpose I remember somewhat very appositely in Minucius Felix, that many through the mere tediousness of finding out the truth, do rather, by a mean succumbency, yeild to the first specious shew of any opinion whatsoever than be at the trouble, by a pertinacious diligence, of applying themselves to a thorough search. Though the comprehension of our minds be not infinite, it might be extended much farther than usually it is, if we would allow ourselves with patient diligence to consider things at leisure, and so as gradually to stretch and enlarge our own understandings. Many things have carried the appearance of contradiction and inconsistency, to the first view of our straitened minds, which afterwards, we have, upon repeated consideration and endeavour, found room for, and been able to make fairly accord, and lodge together.

Especially we should take heed lest it be excluded by overmuch conceitedness, and a self-arrogating pride, that disdains to be thought not able to see through every thing, by the first and slightest glance of a haughty eye; and peremptorily determines that to be unintelligible, that an arrogant, uninstructed mind hath only not humility enough to acknowledge difficult to be understood. Whence it is too possible some may be over-prone to detract from God what really belongs to him, lest any thing should seem detracted from themselves, and impute imperfection to him rather than confess their own. And may be so overascribing to themselves, as to reckon it a disparagement not to be endured, to seem a little puzzled for the present, to be put to pause, and draw breath awhile, and look into the matter again and again; which if their humility and patience would enable them to do; it is not likely that the Author of our faculties would be unassisting to them, in those our inquiries which concern our duty towards himself. For though in matters of mere speculation, we may be encountered with difficulties, whereof perhaps no mortal can ever be able to find out the solution, (which is no great prejudice, and may be gainful and instructive to us,) yet as to what concerns the object of our religion, it is



to be hoped we are not left in unextricable entanglements; nor should think we are till we have made utmost trial. The design being not to gratify our curiosity, but to relieve ourselves of uncomfortable doubtfulness in the matter of our worship, and (in a dutiful zeal towards the blessed object thereof) to vindicate it against the cavils of ill-minded men.

III. But if the unsuccessfulness of often repeated endeavours make us despair of being able, with so full satisfaction, to reconcile some things which we have thought were to be attributed to God; it will be some relief to us, if we find the things about which the doubt lies, are not of the same order, nor such as with equal evidence and necessity are to be affirmed of him. And when we make a comparison, we may find ourselves at a certainty concerning those his attributes which most commonly, and at the first view, approve themselves to every man's understanding. Among which we little hesitate, (as we are most concerned not to do,) about those which carry with them the import of moral goodness; and which render the object of our religion, at once, both most venerable and lovely. For none do more naturally obtain for common notions concerning him; so as even to prevent ratiocination or argument, with whomsoever the apprehension of his existence hath place.

Every man's mind, it being once acknowledged that there is a God, refuses to conceive otherwise of him, than that he is holy, just, merciful, true, &c. and rejects with abhorrence the notion of an impure, unrighteous, cruel, deceitful Deity. As for those that, by a long train of our own uncertain and lubricious reasonings, we endeavour to deduce; if we find ourselves constrained any where to admit a diffidence, it were rather to be placed here. For it is at first sight evident, since God is most certainly willing to be known of them that are sincerely willing to know him; that what is a natural impression stamped by his own hand on every man's mind, hath more of absolute certainty, than what depends on metaphysical subtlety; whereof so very few are capable, and whereby divers pretenders thereto, do so frequently, (and perhaps very dangerously) ensnare themselves. And it is of far greater importance, such a notion of God be entertained, as whereby he may be rendered amiable, and an inviting object of love (the very life and soul of all religion) than such as shall be the result, and entertainment, only of scholastic wit.

Yet also since it is very manifest that man is now become a degenerate creature, and in an apostacy from God: he is very little to be trusted with the framing his own idea of him; being certainly most unapt to allow any thing a place in it, that would have an unfavourable aspect upon his vicious inclinations

and his guilty state. And the contagion of man's sinfulness having spread itself as far as he hath propagated his own nature; so as no notion in his mind can be more common than the perversion and distemper of his mind itself; the possibility and danger is very obvious, of mistaking a dictate of depraved nature for an authentic common notion. And though these are not impossible to be distinguished, and in some cases very easy, as when men find it imposed unavoidably upon them, to apprehend and acknowledge some things which they are very unwilling should be true (in which case their sentiments have the same right to be believed as the testimony of an enemy on the opposite party's behalf,) we have yet no reason to neglect any other means, whereby we may be more certainly directed how to conceive of God, or what we are to attribute to him, and what not.

IV. Nor can we be at a greater certainty, than in admitting such things to belong to the blessed God as he plainly affirms of himself; or any way, by his word, evidently discovers to belong to him. For as none knows the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him, so the things of God are known to none but the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2. 11.) Taking therefore his own word for our measure in the present case (which I will suppose the reader not to think it unreasonable to appeal to; and what is here said, is intended only for those that have that estimate of the writings wont to go under that name) what it says of him (much more what it proves) will no doubt be admitted for certain truth. Though, if it say such things, as, to us, seem not so manifestly to agree with one another, our endeavour must be the more earnest and solicitous (as also it ought to be the more modest) to discuss, and remove the *ἐναντιοφάνεις* or whatsoever semblance of disagreement. And whosoever concern themselves to peruse that venerable book, will find every where, on the one hand proclaimed and magnified in it, (what our own minds cannot but have been pre-possessed of,) the most exquisite wisdom of God, whereby he forms and contrives the methods of all his dispensations, and disposes them in the aptest subserviency to his own great and most important ends: that "all his ways are judgment," (Duet. 32. 4.) and that he "worketh all things according to the counsel of his will." (Eph. 1. 11.) In sum, that all wisdom is appropriated to him, that he is celebrated in the stile of "God, only wise," (Rom. 16. 27.) Nor are we therefore to think it strange, if, many times, we are not able to trace him out, or understand the reason of every thing he thinks fit to do. For the paths of the more perfect wisdom, must therefore be expected to be the more abstruse, and remoter from common apprehension.

How often do we find ourselves so far outgone by wise and designing men, as that we are sometimes constrained to confess and admire their great prudence and conduct (when they have effected their purposes) in those managements, which we have before beheld, either with silent ignorance, or perhaps, not without censure. How much less should the wisest of men regret it, to find all their conjectures exceeded by the infinite wisdom. In the contemplation whereof, we find the great apostle (notwithstanding the vast capacity of his divinely enlightened understanding) exclaiming in a transport, O the depths ! Rom. 11. 33. And when our eyes tell us, from so manifest stupendous effects, how far we are exceeded by him in power, it were reasonable to expect he should surpass us proportionably in the contrivances of his wisdom also. And whereas the conjunction is rare, among men, of deep political wisdom, with integrity and strict righteousness ; this proceeds from the imperfection and insufficiency of the former in great part, that they know not how to compass their designs, unless often, by supplying their want of wisdom, out of the spoil and violation of their justice and honesty. Otherwise, these are things not so altogether out of credit in the world, but that men would rather accomplish their purposes by fair and unexceptioable means, if they could tell how. Only the respect and deference they have for them is less, than what they bear to their own interests and ends.

But besides the natural, inflexible rectitude of the divine will, we are secured, from his all-sufficiency, that we shall never be fraudulently imposed upon by any of his declarations unto the children of men. For there is nothing to be gained by it : and we cannot conceive what inducement he should have, to make use of any so mean and pitiful shifts for the governing of his creatures, whom he spontaneously raised out of nothing, and hath so perfectly within his power. Unless we should be so most intolerably injurious to him, as to imagine a worse thing of him than we would of the worst of men, that he loved falsehood for its own sake. And that, against his so constantly professed detestation of it, the declared repugnancy of it to his nature, and the even tenour of his word (every-where agreeing with itself herein) so often describing him by that property, "God that cannot lie." And, with the same positiveness, avowing his own uprightness, and requiring it, expressing his great love to it, and the high delight he takes to find it in his (intelligent) creatures. The righteous God loveth righteousness, and with his countenance doth he behold the upright. (Psal. 11. 7.) Nor is his testimony the less to be regarded for that it is laudatory, and of himself. For we are to consider the prerogative of

of him that testifies, and that if he were not *ἀπόκρισις faithful to himself* he were not God. Besides that his giving us this, or any representation of himself (to whom it were enough to enjoy his own perfections) is a vouchsafement, and done of mere grace and favour to us, that we may by it be induced to place with satisfaction, our unsuspecting trust and confidence in him. As also, that he says in all this, no other thing of himself, than what our own minds, considering him as God, must acknowledge most worthy of him, and agreeing to him with the most apparent necessity. This part, therefore, of the idea of God hath so firm a foundation, both in the natural complexion of our own minds, and the report which his word makes of him, that on this hand we are hemmed in as by a wall of adamant: and cannot have the thought of defending his prescience, by intrenching upon his wisdom and truth, without offering the highest violence both to him and ourselves.

V. On the other hand also, as it cannot but seem to us a higher perfection to know all things at once, than gradually to arrive to the knowledge of one thing after another; and so proceed from the ignorance of some things to the knowledge of them; and that nothing is more certain, than that all possible perfection must agree to God; so we find his own word asserting to him that most perfect knowledge which seems to exclude the possibility of increase; or that any thing should succeed into his knowledge. For how plainly is it affirmed of him that he knows all things. And even concerning such future things as about which our present inquiry is conversant, the affirmation is express and positive. 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. *Isai. 46. 9. 10. with ch. 41. 22. 23.* Nor is the affirmation naked, and unfortified. For in the same sacred records, we have the same thing both affirmed and proved: inasmuch as we find, in a great part thereof, are contained things foretold by most express prophecy, unto which the events recorded in other parts (and many of them in other unquestioned writings besides) have so punctually corresponded, as to leave no place for doubt or cavil. Instances are so plain and well known that they need not be mentioned. And surely what was so expressly foretold could not but have been foreknown. It seems then an attempt also equally hopeless and unrelieving, as it were adventurous and bold, to offer at the protection of his wisdom and sincerity, by assaulting his prescience or certain foreknowledge of whatsoever shall come to pass. And that their defence is not to be attempted this way, will further most evidently appear from hence, that it is not impossible to assign particular instances of some or other most con-

fessedly wicked actions ; against which God had directed those ordinary means of counselling and dehorting men, and which yet it is most certain he did foreknow they would do. As though it was so punctually determined even (Exod. 12. 41.) to a day, and was (though not so punctually) Gen. 15. 3. foretold unto Abraham, how long, from that time, \* his seed should be strangers in a land that was not theirs ; yet how frequent are the counsels and warnings sent to Pharaoh to dismiss them sooner ; yea how often are Moses and Aaron directed to claim their liberty, and exhort Pharaoh to let them go, and at the same time told, he should not hearken to them. Exod. 4. &c. Nor indeed is it more seldom said that the Lord hardened pharaoh's heart, lest he should. Though it may be a doubt whether those passages be truly translated ; for the gentler meaning of the hebrew idiom being well known, it would seem more agreeable to the text, to have expressed only the intended sense, than to have strained a word to the very utmost of its literal import, and manifestly beyond what was intended. After the like manner is the prophet Ezekiel (chap. 3. v. 4.) sent to the revolted Israelites. And directed to speak to them with God's own words, the sum and purport whereof was to warn and dehort them from their wicked ways lest they should die ; when as yet it is plainly told him, but the house of Israel will not hearken to thee, for they will not hearken to me. Unto which same purpose it is more pertinent, than necessary to be added, that our Saviour's own plain assertions that he was the Son of God, the many miracles by which he confirmed it, and his frequent exhortations to the Jews to believe in him thereupon, had a manifest tendency to make him be known and believed to be so, and consequently to prevent that most horrid act of his crucifixion (for it is said, and the matter speaks itself, that, if they had known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.) Notwithstanding that it was a thing which God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done. (Act. 4. 28.) That is, foreseeing wicked hands would be prompt and ready for this tragic enterprise, his sovereign power and wise counsel concurred with his foreknowledge so only, and not with less latitude, to define or determine the bounds and limits of that malignity, than to let it proceed unto this execution. And to deliver him up (not by any formal resignation, or surrender, as we well know, but permitting him) thereunto. Though the same phrase of delivering him, hath elsewhere, another notion of assigning or appointing him to be a propitiation for the sins

\* What there is of difficulty or doubt about this prophecy, see fully cleared in the late letter to the Deist.

of men, by dying ; which was done by mutual agreement between both the parties, him that was to propitiate, and him who was to be propitiated. In which respect our Saviour is also said to have given himself for the same purpose ; (Tit. 2. 14.) which purpose it was determined not to hinder prepared hands to execute in this way.

Now if it did appear but in one single instance only, that the blessed God did foreknow, and dehort from the same act, it will be plainly consequent, that his warning and dehortations from wicked actions in the general, can with no pretence be alleged as a proof against his universal prescience. For if the argument he dehorted from the doing such an action, therefore he did not foreknow it would be able to conclude any thing, it must be of sufficient force to conclude universally ; which it cannot do, if but a single instance can be given, wherein it is apparent, he did both dehort and foreknow. It can only pretend to raise the doubt which we have in hand to discuss, how fitly and with what wisdom and sincerity, he can be understood to interpose his counsels and monitions in such a case.

VI. Wherefore nothing remains but to consider how these may be reconciled, and made appear to be no way inconsistent with one another. Nor are we to apprehend herein so great a difficulty, as it were to reconcile his irresistible pre-determinative concurrence to all actions of the creature, even those that are in themselves most malignantly wicked, with the wisdom and righteousness of his laws against them, and severest punishments of them according to those laws. Which sentiments must, I conceive, to any impartial understanding, leave it no way sufficiently explicable, how the influence and concurrence, the holy God hath to the worst of actions, is to be distinguished from that which he affords to the best ; wherein such inherently evil actions are less to be imputed to him who forbids them, than to the malicious tempter who prompts to them, or the actor that does them : or wherein not a great deal more. And leave it undeniable, that the matter of all his laws, in reference to all such actions that ever have been done in the world, was a simple and most strictly natural impossibility. Nothing being more apparently so, than either not to do an action whereto the agent is determined by an infinite power ; or to separate the malignity thereof, from an intrinsically evil action ; and that this natural impossibility of not sinning with the ineluctable fate of his (at first) innocent creatures. Who also (as the case is to be conceived of with the angels that kept not their first station must be understood irreversibly condemned to the suffering of eternal punishment, for the not doing of what it was (upon these terms) so absolutely impossible to them to avoid.

This too hard province the present design pretends not to intermeddle in, as being neither apprehended manageable, for those briefly mentioned considerations, and many more that are wont to be insisted on in this argument.

VII. Nor indeed, is it at all necessary: for though many considerations have been with great subtilty, alleged and urged to this purpose, by former and some modern writers, (which it is besides the design of these papers severally to discuss) these two, which seem the most importunate and enforcing, will, I conceive, be found of little force; and then, the less strength which is in others, will be nothing formidable: that it necessarily belongs to the Original and Fountain Being, to be the first Cause of what soever being; and consequently that what there is of positive being in any the most wicked action, must principally owe itself to the determinative productive influence of this first and sovereign Cause. Otherwise it would seem there were some being that were neither *primum*, *first*, nor a *primo from the first*.

And again (which we are more concerned to consider, because it more concerns our present subject) that it were otherwise impossible God should foreknow the sinful actions of men (many whereof, as hath been observed, he hath foretold) if their futurition were a mere contingency, and depended on the uncertain will of the subordinate agent, not determined by the supreme. But neither of these seem able to infer the dismal conclusion of God's concurring by a determinative influence unto wicked actions. Not the former: for it may well be thought sufficiently to salve the rights and privileges of the first Cause, to assert that no action can be done but by a power derived from it; which in reference to forbidden actions, intelligent creatures may use or not use as they please, without over-asserting, that they must be irresistably determined also, even to the worst of actions done by them. Besides that it seems infinitely to detract from the perfection of the ever blessed God, to affirm he was not able to make a creature, of such a nature, as, being continually sustained by him, and supplied with power every moment suitable to its nature, should be capable of acting unless whatsoever he thus enables, he determine (that is, for it can mean no less thing, impel) it to do also. And except it were affirmed impossible to God to have made such a creature, (that is, that it implied a contradiction, which certainly can never be proved) there is no imaginable pretence why it should not be admitted he hath done it: rather than so fatally expose the wisdom, goodness and righteousness of God, by supposing him to have made laws for his reasonable creatures, impossible, through his own irresistible counter-action, to be observed:

and afterwards to express himself displeas'd, and adjudge his creatures to eternal punishments, for not observing them.

I am not altogether ignorant what attempts have been made to prove it impossible, nor again, what hath been done to manifest the vanity of those attempts. But I must confess a greater disposition to wonder, that ever such a thing should be disputed, than dispute so plain a case. And that a matter whereupon all moral government depends, both human and divine, should not have been determin'd at the first sight. It is not hard for a good wit to have somewhat to say for anything. But to dispute against the common sense of mankind, we know before hand, is but to trifle; as the essay to prove the impossibility of local motion. The notion of the goodness and righteousness of God, methinks, should stick so close to our minds, and create such a sense in our souls, as should be infinitely dearer to us than all our senses and powers. And that we should rather choose to have our sight, hearing, and motive power, or what not besides disputed, or even torn away from us than ever suffer ourselves to be disput'd into a belief, that the holy and good God should irresistibly determine the wills of men to, and punish, the same thing. Nor is it difficult, to urge more puzzling sophisms against the former, than for this latter. But the efforts of a philosophical wit against sense, and more against the sense of our souls, and most of all against the entire sum and substance of all morality, and religion, at once, are but like the attempt to batter a wall of brass with straws and feathers. Nor is the assault, on this part, more feeble and impotent, than the defence is wont to be of the other. For I would appeal to the quick refined sense of any sober and pious mind; after serious, inward consultation with itself; being closely urged, with the horror of so black a conception of God, that he should be supposed irresistibly to determine the will of a man to the hatred of his own most blessed self, and then to exact severest punishments for the offence done, what relief it would now be to it, to be only taught to reply, that man is under the law, and God above it. A defence that doubles the force of the assault. What! that God should make a law, and necessitate the violation of it! and yet also punish that violation of it! And this be thought a sufficient salvo, that himself is not subject to any law! Will a quick-scented, tender spirit, wounded by so unsufferable indignity, offer'd to the holy God, be any wit eas'd or relieved, by the thin sophistry of only a collusive ambiguity in the word law? which sometimes signifies the declared pleasure of a ruler to a subject, in which sense any eye can see God can be under no law, having no superior. But not seldom also, an habitual fixed principle and



rule of acting after one steady tenour. In which sense how manifest is it, that the perfect rectitude of God's own holy gracious nature is an eternal law to him, infinitely more stable, and immutable, than the ordinances of day and night ! Or what relief is there in that dream of the supposed possibility of God's making a reasonable creature with an innocent aversion to himself ? For what can be supposed more repugnant ? or what more impertinent ? If innocent, how were it punishable ? A law already made in the case, how can it be innocent ?

But whatsoever strength there may be in arguments, and replies, to and fro, in this matter : that which hath too apparently had greatest actual efficacy, with many, hath been the authority and name of this or that man of reputation ; and the force of that art of imputing a doctrine, already under a prejudicial doom, to some or other ill-reputed former writer. I profess not to be skilled in the use of that sort of weapons. And what reputation ought to be of so great value with us, as that of God and religion ! Though if one would take that invidious course, it were easy to evince, that such a predeterminative influx to the production of all whatsoever actions, is the dearly espoused notion of one, of as deservedly an ill character, as ever had the name of a Christian writer. And whether he would not take that name for a dishonour to him, I pretend not to know. But let us take this sober account of the present case, that in this temporary state of trial, the efficacious grace of God is necessary to actions sincerely good and holy ; which therefore all ought undespairingly to seek and pray for. But that in reference to other actions, he doth only supply men with such a power, as whereby, they are enabled, either to act, or, in many instances (and especially when they attempt anything that is evil) to suspend their own action. And surely it carries so unexceptionable a face and aspect with it, that no man, that is himself sober, will think the worst name, of whosoever shall have said the same thing, were a prejudice to it ; or should more oblige him to reject it, than we would think ourselves obliged to throw away gold, or diamonds, because an impure hand hath touched them ; or to deny Christ, because the devils confessed him. Though also, if any should impute the so stating of this matter, to any author, that hath been wont to go under an ill name and character, in the Christian church ; there were a great oversight committed ; to say no harder thing of it. For the writers whose names would be supposed a prejudice, have neither said the same thing, nor with the same design. They would have this indetermination of the power afforded to the creature, to be so universal, as to extend equally to evil actions and to good. And have asserted it with a manifest design to exclude efficacious

grace, in reference to the best actions. Whereas this account would make it not of so large extent: (as it were very unreasonable any should :) for though it may well be supposed extendible to many actions, besides those that are intrinsically evil or to any that are not spiritually good, yet nothing enforces (nor can it be admitted) that it should actually, and always extend so far. For who can doubt but God can overrule the inclinations and actions of his creature, when he pleases; and, as shall best consist with his wisdom, and the purity of his nature, either lay on, or take off his determining hand. Nor is it here asserted with any other design, than to exempt the blessed God, as far as is possible; from a participation in the evil actions of his creatures; in the mean time entitling him most entirely to those that are sincerely good. Though it must be left imputable to men themselves (it being through their own great default) if they have not the grace, which might effectually enable them, to do such also. And as for the latter. This supposed indetermination of the human will, in reference, especially, to wicked actions, is far from being capable of inferring, that God cannot therefore foreknow them; or anything more, than that we are left ignorant of the way, how he foreknows them. And how small is the inconvenience of acknowledging that, yea, and how manifest the absurdity of not acknowledging the like, in many cases? since nothing is more certain, than that God doth many things besides, whereof the manner, how he does them, we can neither explicate nor understand! for neither is it difficult to assign instances more than enough of actions done by ourselves of the manner whereof we can give no distinct account, as those of vision, intellection, with sundry other.

Some have been at great pains we well know to explain the manner of God's foreknowledge of these futurities, otherwise than by laying the foundation thereof in his (supposed) efficacious will or decree of them. They that can satisfy themselves with what Thomas and Scotus have attempted, and the followers of them both; that can understand what it is, with the one, for all things to be eternally present to the divine intellect in *esse reali*, and not understand by it, the world to have been eternal. Or, what with the other, that they be all present only in *esse representativo*, and not understand by it, barely that they are all known, and no more, (which seems like the explication of the word invasion by invasion) let them enjoy their own satisfaction. For my own part I can more easily be satisfied to be ignorant of the modus or medium of his knowledge, while I am sure of the thing; and I know not why any sober-minded man might not be so too. While we must all be content to be ignorant of the manner, yea, and nature too, of a thousand things besides, when

that such things there are, we have no doubt. . . . And when there are few things, about which we can, with less disadvantage, suffer our being ignorant; or with less disreputation, profess to be so. It cannot therefore be so affrightful a thing, to suppose God's foreknowledge of the most contingent future actions, well to consist with our ignorance, how he foreknows them, as that we should think it necessary, to overturn and mingle heaven and earth, rather than admit it.

VIII. Wherefore waving that unfeasible, unnecessary, and unenjoined task, of defending God's predeterminative concurrence unto sinful actions; our encounter must only be of the more superable difficulty, to reconcile his prescience of them, with his provisions against them, that is, how fitly the wise and holy God can have interposed his precautions and dissuasions, in their own nature, aptly tending to withhold and divert men, from those evil actions, which he yet foresees they will do. And it is, in the first place, evident, there can be no pretence to allege that there is any such repugnancy in the matter, as shall amount to a contradiction, so much as virtual, or which the things signified, on the one part and the other, can be understood any way to import, that indeed there should be a direct and explicate contradiction between foreknowing and dehorting, we may, at first sight, perceive the terms cannot admit; for there is nothing enuniated (affirmed or denied) in either. But let the sense of both be resolved into propositions, capable of being confronted to one another, and all that can be made of the former, will only come to this; "You will do such a thing," and of the latter, no more but this; "You ought not to do it;" these are at as great distance, as can be imagined, from grating upon, or jarring with one another. And wherein is the indecorum of it, that both these *effata propositions* should proceed from the same mouth, namely, of a governor, or one that hath authority over others.

We will, for discourse sake, suppose a prince endowed with the gift or spirit of prophecy. This, most will acknowledge a great perfection, added to whatsoever other his accomplishments. And suppose we this his prophetic ability so large, as to extend to most events that shall fall out within his dominions. Is it hereby become unfit for him to govern his subjects by laws? or any way admonish them of their duty? hath this perfection so much diminished him as to depose him from his government? It is not indeed to be dissembled, that it were a difficulty to determine, whether such foresight were, *for himself*, better or worse. Boundless knowledge seems only in a fit conjunction with as unbounded power. But it is altogether unimaginable that it should destroy his relation to his subjects. As what of it

were left, if it should despoil him of his legislative power, and capacity of governing according to laws made by it? And to bring back the matter to the supreme Ruler: Let it for the present be supposed only, that the blessed God hath, belonging to his nature, the universal prescience whereof we are discoursing; we will, surely, upon that supposition, acknowledge it to belong to him as a perfection. And were it reasonable to affirm that by a perfection he is disabled for government; or were it a good consequence, "He foreknows all things, he is therefore unfit to govern the world."

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## CHAP. II.

I. God's supposed foreknowledge of contingent actions, alters not the natural goodness or evil of them. II. How God may be said to act for any end? his public declarations to men have a more principal end, than their obedience, and felicity. Which is attained, though this fail. The difficulty, therefore, concerning the divine wisdom vanishes. III. That, concerning the sincerity of God considered. That other end, man's obedient compliance, attained in great part. IV. God not obliged to procure his published edicts should reach every individual person. It is owing to the wickedness of the world that they generally do not so. V. He shews special favour to some nations herein, without being injurious to others; yea expresses much clemency and mercy to all. VI. Where his gracious methods succeed not; to be considered he only applies himself to them in common with the rest. VII. Proposed to be inquired; what can be alleged out of his word, that seems less consistent with sincerity, towards them with whom things do not finally issue well? What fit course could be thought of more consistent therewith? As to the former, what appearance such alleged passages can be justly said to have? Propounded to be (afterwards) shewn; that the truth of the thing corresponds to that appearance. VIII. What his declarations to men amount unto? What they are, by them, encouraged to expect? IX. Expressions of passionate earnestness how to be understood? X. The ends to be brought about by God's own action only; and those which should be brought to pass by the intervenient action of man to be distinguished. God's word represents him not as so willing the salvation of all men, as that it shall be effected whatsoever course they take.

I. **A**ND, that we may consider the matter more narrowly would the supposition of such foreknowledge in God, make

that cease to be man's duty, which had otherwise been so? and take away the differences of good and evil? Would it nullify the obligation of God's law, and make man's own inclination his only rule? or, if it be said, because it is foreknown, man will do such a thing, therefore he may, where is the connection? For what influence can foreknowledge have, to alter or effect any way, either the nature of the thing foreknown, or the temper of the person that shall do it; any more than the present knowledge of the same thing, now in doing? which knowledge none would deny to God: and which, when it occurs to a man, is no more understood to make an evil action innocent, than the action makes the eye guilty, of him that beholds it only, and detests it at once. Surely what is, in its own nature, whether, good or evil, can never not be so, be it foreknown or not foreknown.

But if what was otherwise man's duty, be still his duty, what can make it unfit that it be declared, and made known to him to be so? and how is that otherwise to be done, than by these disputed means? yea (for this is the case) what can make it less fit, than it would be that God should cease to rule over the world? and quit the right of his government to his revolted creatures, upon no other reason, than only that he foresees they have a mind to invade it? It may now perhaps be said, all this reasoning tends indeed to establish the contrary assertion, that notwithstanding God do foreknow man's sin, it is however necessary he forewarn him of it—but it answers not the objected difficulty, namely, how reasonably any such means are used for an unattainable end. As it is manifest, the end, man's obedience, cannot be attained when it is foreknown he will not obey.

II. It may here, before we proceed further, not be unseasonable to consider, (a matter, as is known, wont to be much vexed in the schools) how God may be said to act for any end at all. And it appears very certain, that he who is so every way absolutely perfect and happy, cannot be thought to intend and pursue an end, after the same manner as we are wont to do; We being conscious to ourselves of indigency, or, at the best, of obligation to the Author of our being, are wont to design this or that end for the relieving of ourselves, or the approving ourselves to him. And, our satisfaction depending upon the attainment of it, we solicitously deliberate about the fittest means to attain it? and are tossed with various passions, of desire and hope and fear and joy and grief according as the end is apprehended more or less excellent, or likely to be attained; varying often our course upon new emergencies, as this or that

may probably promote, or hinder the success of our pursuit. In short, we pursue ends, as being both impatient of disappointment, and uncertain of their attainment.

The blessed God, being indigent of nothing, nor under obligation to any one, cannot be supposed to propound an end to himself as that whereupon his satisfaction depends, which were inconsistent with his already complete felicity, and would argue him but potentially happy. But acting always from an immense self-sufficient fulness of life, and of all perfections, doth ever satisfy himself in himself, and take highest complacency in the perfect goodness, congruity and rectitude of his own most holy will and way. And again, as he doth not seek a yet unattained satisfaction, in any end he can be supposed to propound to himself; so nor can he be thought to deliberate, as we are wont to do, concerning the means of effecting any. For deliberation would imply doubtfulness and uncertainty, which his absolute perfection cannot admit; nor doth need, the whole frame and compass of things intended by him, in their distinct references and tendencies, being, at once, present to his all-comprehending view; so that there can be no place for any intermediate knowledge with him, or for any new resolves thereupon. Known to the Lord are all his works from the beginning of the world. Acts 15. 18.

This being premised; it is now further to be considered, that howsoever one end oftentimes is not attained, unto which the publicly extant declarations of the divine will have a visible aptitude, namely, the obedient compliance of men with them; another, more noble end was, however, attainable, not unbecoming the designment of the divine wisdom, and which it was every way most worthy of God to be more principally intent upon. It is fit the mention of this be prefaced with an obvious remark;—that the misapprehension of the state of things between God and man doth, in great part, owe itself, to our aptness to compare unduly, the divine government with that of secular rulers; and our expectation to find them in all things agreeing with each other. Whereas their cannot but be a vast difference, between the constitution and end of God's government over his creatures, and more especially mankind, and that of man over his fellow Creatures of the same kind. The government of secular, human rulers, can never be, in the constitution of it, altogether absolute, nor ought, in the design of it, primarily to intend the personal advantage of the ruler himself, who as much depends upon his subjects, and hath (at least) as great need of them, as they can be understood to have of him. But as to the blessed God the matter is apparent and

hath its own triumphant evidence, that since he is the original and root of all being, that all things are mere dependencies upon his absolute pleasure, and entirely of him, and by him, all ought to be to him that he alone might have the glory.

Wherefore, it must be asserted, and cannot fail of obtaining to be acknowledged, by every impartial, and sober considerer of things, that there is a much more noble and important end, that all God's public edicts and declarations to men, (the instruments of his government over them) do more principally aim at, than their advantage, namely, the dignity and decorum of his government itself: and that he may be found in every thing to have done as became him, and was most worthy of himself. And what could be more so, than that he should testify the aversion of his own pure and holy nature, to whatsoever was unholy and impure, his love of righteousness and complacency to be imitated herein, together with his steady, gracious propension to receive all them into the communion of his own felicity or blessedness (for the Redeemer's sake) who should herein comply with him? Nor are we to understand that he herein so designs the reputation of his government, as men are often wont to do things out of design for their interest in that kind, that are otherwise, against their (over ruled) inclination. But we are to account these his declarations (although they are acts of an intelligent Agent, and the products of wisdom and counsel, yet also) the spontaneous emanations of his own holy, and gracious nature, such as wherein he most fully agrees, and consents with himself. And is it now to be expected, that because he foresees men will be wicked, and do what shall be unworthy of them, he must therefore lay aside his nature, and omit to do what shall be worthy of himself?

III. And hereupon it may be expected, the more ingenuous and candid, will allow themselves to think the matter tolerably clear, in reference to the former part of the proposed difficulty; that is, will apprehend this way of dealing with men not imprudent, or inconsistent with the divine wisdom, since, though one end, in a great part, fail, yet another, more valuable, is attained. But yet, as to the latter part, the difficulty may still urge, namely, how it can stand with sincerity; whereas that end also which fails, seems to have been most directly intended, that the blessed God should seem so earnestly intent upon it: since it is hardly conceivable, that the same thing should be, at once, seriously intended as an end, and yet, at the same time, give the eye, which seems to design it, no other prospect than of a thing never to be brought to pass.

Wherefore we are next to consider, that we may proceed gradually, and not omit to say what is in itself considerable

though it is not all (which cannot be said at once) that is to be said;—that the public declarations of the divine will, touching man's duty, do attain that very end, his obedient compliance therewith, in great part, and, as to many (although it be foreknown they will prove ineffectual with the most) and are the no less successful, than the apt means of attaining it. Nor, certainly, if it were foreknown the world would be so divided, as that some would obey, and others not obey, was it therefore the fittest course, that these two sorts should, by some extraordinary act of providence, be carefully severed from each other; and those be dealt withal apart from the rest. But rather, that the divine edicts should be of a universal tenour, and be directed to all as they are; the matter of them being of universal concernment, and equally suitable to the common case of all men.

IV. Neither yet was it necessary, that effectual care should be taken, they should actually reach all, and be applied to every individual person. Since it is apparently to be resolved into the wickedness of the world, that they do not so; and that there is not a universal diffusion of the gospel into every part. For it being evident to any one's reflection, that men are in a state of apostacy and defection from their Maker and common Lord, and therefore subject to his displeasure. Whereas the merciful God hath done his own part, and so much beyond what was to be expected from him; issued out his proclamations of peace and pardon, upon so easy and indulgent terms, as are expressed in his gospel; if, hereupon, men also did their part, behaved themselves suitably to the exigency of their case, and as did become reasonable creatures, fallen under the displeasure of their Maker, (whereof their common condition affords so innumerable, so pregnant proofs) the gospel wheresoever it should arrive, would have been entertained with so great a transport of joy, and so ready and universal acceptance, as very soon to have made a great noise in the world: and being found to be of a universal tenour and concernment, and that what it says to one nation, it equally says the same to every one; it could not but be, that messengers would interchangeably have run from nation to nation; some to communicate, others to inquire after those strange tidings of great joy unto all people, lately sent from heaven; concerning the Emmanuel, God with us; God, again upon his return to man, and now in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And thus how easily, and even naturally, would the gospel soon have spread itself through the world? especially the merciful God having so provided, that there should be an office constituted, and set up; a sort of men, whose whole business it should be, to propagate



and publish those happy tidings. But that men should so indulge their sensual, terrene inclination, as not at all to use their understandings, and considering power, about other matters than only what are within the sight of their eye, when by so easy and quick a turn of thoughts they might feel and find out who made them, and was the Original of their life and being, and that things are not right, and as they should be, between him and them; and so by what is within the compass of natural revelation, be prepared for what is supernatural. And not that only, but to that stupidity, by which they are unapt to inquire after and receive, to add that obstinate malignity by which they are apt to reject and oppose the merciful discoveries and overtures of their offended, reconcilable Creator and Lord. How manifestly doth this devolve the whole business of the little, slow progress of the gospel in the world, upon themselves only! As suppose we a prince of the greatest clemency, benignity, and goodness, from whom a whole country of his subjects have made a most causeless defection; hereupon to send to the whole body of the rebels, a gracious proclamation of free pardon upon their return to their allegiance, and duty; and it only from hence comes to pass, that every individual person of them, distinctly understands not what the message from their prince did import; because, they that heard it would not, many of them, allow themselves to consider and regard it; and others of them, with despiteful violence, fell upon the heralds, barbarously butchering some of them, and ignominiously repulsing the rest. Who would not say, that prince had fully done his part, and acquitted himself answerably to the best character, though he should send to the rebels no further overtures. Much more, if through a long tract of time, he continue the same amicable endeavours for their reducement; notwithstanding the constant experience of the same ill success? Who would not cast the whole business of the continued ill understanding, between him and the revolters, upon themselves. And reckon it impossible, any should be ignorant, of his kind and benign inclinations and intentions, if an implacable enmity, and disaffection to him and his government, were not their common temper?

Though so infinitely do the mercies of God, exceed those of the most merciful prince on earth, as well as his knowledge and power; that wheresoever there are any exempt cases, we must conceive him equally able and inclined to consider them distinctly. And so vastly different, may we well suppose the degrees of happiness and misery to be, in the other world; as that there may be latitude enough, of punishing and rewarding men, proportionably to the degrees of light they have had, and the more

or less malignity, or propension to reconciliation, was found with them thereupon.

V. Nor again was it at all incongruous, or unbecoming, that the blessed God, this being the common temper and disposition of all men, to reject his gracious tenders, should provide, by some extraordinary means, that they might not be finally rejected by all. For what can be more appropriate to sovereignty (even where it is infinitely less absolute) than arbitrarily, to design the objects of special favour? Who blames a prince, for placing special marks of his royal bounty, or clemency here and there as he thinks fit? or that he hath some peculiar favourites, with whom he familiarly converses, whom he hath won, by some or other not-common inducements, and assured their loyal affection: though there be thousands of persons in his dominions besides, of as good parts, dispositions and deserts as they? It belongs to sovereignty, only so to be favourable to some, as, in the mean time, to be just towards all. Yea and it must be acknowledged, such are the dispensations of the holy God towards the whole community of mankind, as import, not only strict righteousness, but great clemency and mercy also. Though they might easily understand themselves to be offenders, and liable to the severities of his justice, they are spared by his patience, sustained by his bounty, protected by his power: their lives and properties are fenced by his own laws. And whereas they are become very dangerous enemies to one another: and each one his own greatest enemy; it is provided by those laws, even for the worst of men, that none shall injure them, that all love them, and seek their good. He interposes his authority on their behalf; and, if any wrong them, he takes it for an affront done to himself. By the same laws, they are directed to industry, frugality, sobriety, temperance, to exercise a government over themselves, to bridle and subdue their own exorbitant lusts and passions, their more immediate tormentors and the sources of all the calamities and miseries, which befall them in this world. By all which evidences of his great care, and concern for their welfare, they might understand him to have favourable propensions towards them, and that though they have offended him, he is not their implacable enemy; and might, by his goodness, be led to repentance.

Yea and moreover; he hath sent them a Redeemer, his own Son, an incarnate Deity, who came down into this world, full of grace and truth, upon the most merciful errand. And they have some of them been in transports, when they have but fancied such a descent, for the doing them, only, some lighter good turn; as upon the cure of the cripple. The gods (say they) are come down in the likeness of men! Act. 14.11. "He

being filled with the glorious fulness of the Godhead, hath been a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of men; and if they would believe and obey him, they would find that sacrifice is accepted, and available for them. And though they are disabled to do so, only by their own wicked inclination, even against that also they have no cause to despair of being relieved, if they would (which they might) admit the thoughts of their impotency, and the exigency of their case, and did seriously implore divine help.

VI. Now with whom these methods succeed well, there is no suspicion of insincerity. Let us see what pretence there can be for it, with the rest. It is to be considered, that, as to them he doth not apply himself to every, or to any person immediately, and severally, after some such tenour of speech as this, "I know thee to be a profligate, hopeless wretch, and that thou wilt finally disregard whatsoever I say to thee, and consequently perish and become miserable. But however (though I foresee most certainly thou wilt not, yet) I entreat thee to hear, and obey, and live." Indeed sending a prophet to a promiscuous people, he foretells him of such ill success. Ezek. 3. 7. But it is not told him he should succeed so ill universally, and it is implied, he should not. v. 21.

But the course the great God takes, is only to apply himself to these (as hath been said) in common with the rest. For if it be said he also applies himself to them by the private dictates of his Spirit; he doth not by it, make formed speeches to men. But as to those its common motions, whereby it applies itself unto them, doth only solicit, in a stated manner of operation, in and by their own reason and consciences (as he concurs with our inferior faculties, and with the inferior creatures, suitably to their natures and capacities) speaking no other, than their own language, as they are instructed out of his word, or by other means. Which he usually continues to do, till by their resistencies, they have sealed up their own consciences, and consequently (according to its more ordinary fixed course, and laws of access and recess) shut out the Holy Spirit both at once. Nor is it more to be expected, he should universally alter that course; than that he should alter the courses of the sun, moon, and stars, and innovate upon universal nature. So that what is endeavoured for the reducement of such, as finally refuse to return, by particular applications to this or that person, and beyond what is contained in the public declarations of his written word, is by substituted ministers and inferior agents, that know no more of the event, than they do themselves. And that this was the fittest way of dealing with reasonable creatures, who, that will use his own reason, sees not?

VII. That our disquisition may be here a little more strict

we shall inquire both,—What may be supposed possible to be alleged out of God's word, in reference to them that persist in wickedness till they finally perish, which it can be thought not consistent with sincerity, to have inserted, upon the supposed foresight of so dismal an issue. And what more convenient course we can think of, which sincerity (as we apprehend) would have required.

As to the former. It may, perhaps, be alleged, that he professes to will the salvation of all men. 1. Tim. 2. 4. Not to desire the death of him that dieth. Ezek. 18. 32. Yea and professes himself grieved that any perish. Ps. 81. 12. 13. Now these things, compared with his public declarations and tenders, directed, in a universal tenour, to all men, carry that appearance and shew with them, as if he would have it believed, his end were to save all. Wherewith his foresight of the perdition of so many seems ill to agree. For how can that end be seriously intended which it is foreseen will not be brought about? And how can it be thought to consist with sincerity, that there should be an appearance of his having such an end, unto which, a serious real intention of it doth not correspond? Wherefore we shall here examine, what appearance such expressions as those above recited, can, by just interpretation be understood to amount unto. And then shew that there is really with the blessed God, what doth truly and fully correspond to that appearance; and very agreeably too, with the hypotheses of his foreseeing how things will finally issue, with very many.

And first, that we may understand the true import of the expressions which we have mentioned, and others of like sound and meaning. We are to consider, that though being taken severally and apart, they are not capable of a sense, prejudicial to the cause, the defence whereof we have undertaken, which we shall afterwards more distinctly evince, yet) it were very injurious, to go about to affix a sense unto a single expression, without weighing the general design of the writings, whereof it is a part. It were quite to frustrate the use of words, when a matter is to be represented, that is copious, and consists of many parts and branches; which cannot be comprehended in one, or a few sentences, if we will pretend to estimate, and make a judgment of the speaker's full meaning, by this or that single passage only, because we have not patience or leisure to hear the rest; or perhaps have a greater disposition to cavil his words, than understand his meaning. If a course resembling this should be taken, in interpreting the edicts or laws of princes and states (suppose it were a proclamation of pardon to delinquent subjects) and only this or that favourable clause be

fastened upon, without regard to the inserted provisos and conditions; the (concerned) interpreters might do a slight, temporary, and easily remediable wrong to the prince, but are in danger, more fatally, to wrong themselves.

The edicts of the great God, that are publicly extant to mankind (the universal publication whereof, they partly withstand, and which they too commonly deprave, and perversely mis-interpret, where they do obtain) carry no such appearance with them, as if he had ever proposed it to himself, for his end, to save all men, or any man, let them do what they please, or how destructive a course soever they take, and shall finally persist in. If that were supposed his design, his so seemingly serious counsels and exhortations, were as ludicrous, as they could be thought, if it were as peremptorily determined all should perish. For what God will, by almighty power, immediately work, without the subordinate concurrence of any second cause, must be necessarily. And it is equally vain, solicitously to endeavour the engaging of subordinate agents, to do that which without them is absolutely necessary, as it were to endeavour that, by them, which is absolutely impossible.

VIII. That which his declarations to men do amount unto, is, in sum, thus much,—that, whereas they have, by their defection and revolt from him, made themselves liable to his justice, and very great consequent miseries; he is willing to pardon, save and restore them to a blessed state, upon such terms as shall be agreeable (the recompence due to his injured law, being otherwise provided for, at no expence of theirs) to the nature of that blessedness they are to enjoy, the purity of his own nature, and the order and dignity of his government. That is, that they seriously repent and turn to him, love him as the Lord their God, with all their heart and soul, and might and mind; and one another as themselves, (being to make together one happy community, in the participation of the same blessedness,) commit themselves by entire trust, subjection and devotedness to their great and merciful Redeemer, according to the measure of light, wherewith he shall have been revealed and made known to them; submit to the motions and dictates of his blessed Spirit, whereby the impression of his own holy image is to be renewed in them, and a divine nature imparted to them: and carefully attend to his word as the means, the impressive instrument or seal, by which, understood and considered, that impression shall be made, and the very seeds out of which that holy nature, and the entire frame of the new creature shall result and spring up in them; so as to make them apt unto the obedience that is expected from them, and capable of the blessedness they are to expect: that if they neglect to attend

to those external discoveries, and refuse the ordinary aids and assistances of his good Spirit, and offer violence to their own consciences, they are not to expect he should over-power them, by a strong hand, and save them against the continuing disinclination of their own wills. Nor (whatsoever extraordinary acts he may do upon some, to make them willing) is there any universal promise in his word; or other encouragement, upon which any may reasonably promise themselves that; in the neglect and disuse of all ordinary means, such power shall be used with them, as shall finally overcome their averse, disaffected hearts.

IX. It is true that he frequently uses much importunity with men, and enforces his laws with that earnestness, as if it were his own great interest to have them obeyed; wherein, having to do with men, he doth like a man, solicitously intent upon an end which he cannot be satisfied till he attain. Yet withal, he hath interspersed, every where in his word, so frequent, God-like expressions of his own greatness, all-sufficiency and independency upon his creatures, as that if we attend to these his public declarations, and manifests of himself entirely; so as to compare one thing with another, we shall find the matter not at all dissembled; but might collect this to be the state of things between him and us; that he makes no overtures to us, as thinking us considerable, or as if any thing were to accrue to him from us. But that, as he takes pleasure in the diffusion of his own goodness, so it is our interest to behave ourselves suitably thereunto, and, according as we comply with it, and continue in it, or do not, so we may expect the delectable communications if it, or taste otherwise, his just severity. That, therefore, when he exhorts, obtests, entreats, beseeches that we would obey and live; speaks as if he were grieved at our disobedience, and what is like to ensue to us therefrom; these are merciful condescensions, and the efforts of that goodness, which chooseth the fittest ways of moving us, rather than that he is moved himself, by any such passions, as we are wont to feel in ourselves, when we are pursuing our own designs. And that he vouchsafeth to speak in such a way as is less suitable to himself, that it may be more suitable to us, and might teach us, while he so far complies with us, how becoming it is that we answerably bend ourselves to a compliance with him. He speaks, sometimes, as if he did suffer somewhat human, as an apt means (and which to many proves effectual) to bring us to enjoy, at length, what is truly divine. We may, if we consider, and lay things together, understand these to be gracious insinuations; whereby, as he hath not left the matter liable to be so mis-understood, as if he were really affected with solici-

tude, or any perturbation concerning us, (which he hath sufficiently given us to understand his blessed nature cannot admit of,) so nor can they be thought to be disguises of himself, or misrepresentations, that have nothing in him corresponding to them. For they really signify the obedience and blessedness, of those his creatures that are capable thereof, to be more pleasing and agreeable to his nature and will; than that they should disobey and perish; (which is the utmost that can be understood to be meant, by those words, God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth,) but withal, that he so apprehends the indignity done to his government, by their disobedience, that if they obey not (as the indulgent constitution and temper of his law, and government now are, in and by the Redeemer) they must perish. And that he hath also such respect to the congruity and order of things, as that it shall not be the ordinary method of his government over reasonable creatures, to over-power them into that obedience, by which it may come to pass that they perish not. All which may be collected from those his own plain words, in that other recited text, and many besides of like import. When, with so awful solemnity, he professes, that as he lives he takes no pleasure in the death of sinners, but that they may turn and live; and adds turn ye, turn ye, why will you die? (Ezek. 33. 11) that is, that their repentance, and consequent welfare, would be more grateful to him than their perdition, upon their persevering in destructive ways. But yet, that if they were not moved to repent, by these his pleadings and expostulations used with them, they should die, and were therefore concerned, to attend and hearken, to such his reasonings and warnings, as the apt means to work their good; not expecting he should take extraordinary courses with them, in order to it. And that the real respect he had thereunto, should never induce him, to use any indecorous course, to bring it about; but that he had a more principal respect to the rules of justice, and the order of his government, than to their concerns. And that he, notwithstanding, expresses himself aggrieved that any finally perish; if we consider and recollect, what notices he hath furnished our minds with, of the perfections of a Deity, and what he hath remonstrated to us of his own nature, so plainly in his word; we cannot understand more by it, than the calm dispassionate resentment and dislike, which most perfect purity and goodness have, of the sinfulness and miserable ruin of his own creatures.

In all which we have a most unexceptionable idea of God, and may behold the comely conjuncture of his large goodness, strict righteousness and most accurate wisdom all together: as we are also concerned, in making our estimate of his ways, to

consider them : and not to take our measure of what is suitable to God, by considering him according to one single attribute only; but as they all are united, in his most perfect Being. And in that blessed harmony, as not to infer with him a difficulty what to do, or what not. Which sometimes falls out with men, where there is an imperfect resemblance of those divine excellencies, not so exactly contempered together. As it was with that Spartan prince and general in Plutarch, when finding a necessity to march his army, and taking notice of one, for whom he had a peculiar kindness, that through extreme weakness, was not possibly to be removed, he looked back upon him, expressing his sense of that exigency, in those emphatical words, *How hard a matter is it at once ἐλεειν και Φρονειν, to exercise pity and be wise!* God's own word misrepresents him not, but gives a true account of him, if we allow ourselves to confer it with itself, one part of it with another. Nor doth any part of it, taken alone, import him so to have willed the happiness of men, for any end of his, that he resolved he would, by whatsoever means certainly effect it : as we are wont, many times, with such eagerness to pursue ends upon which we are intent, as not to consider of right or wrong, fit or unfit in our pursuit of them, and so let the cost of our means, not seldom, eat up our end. Nor did that belong to him, or was his part as our most benign, wise, and righteous Governor, to provide that we should certainly not transgress, or not suffer prejudice thereby; but that we should not do so, through his omission of any thing, which it became him to do to prevent it.

X. It may therefore be of some use further to take notice, that a very diverse consideration must be had, of the ends which shall be effected by God's own action only, and of those which are to be brought about (in concurrence, and subordination to his own) by the intervenient action of his creatures. Especially (which is more to our purpose) such of them as are intelligent, and capable of being governed by laws. As to the former sort of these ends, we may be confident they were all most absolutely intended, and can never fail of being accomplished. For the latter, it cannot be universally said so. For these being not entirely his ends; but partly his, and partly prescribed by him, to his reasonable creatures, to be theirs. We are to conceive he always, most absolutely, intends to do, what he righteously esteems congruous should be his own part which he extends and limits, as seems good unto him. And sometimes, of his own good pleasure, assumes to himself the doing of so much, as shall ascertain the end; effectually procuring, that his creature shall do his part also. That is, not only enacts his law, and adds exhortations, warnings, promises, to enforce it, but



also emits that effectual influence, whereby the inferior wheels shall be put into motion, the powers and faculties of his governed creature excited and assisted, and (by a spirit in the wheels) made as the chariots of a willing people. At other times and in other instances, he doth less, and meeting with resistance, sooner retires; follows not his external edicts and declarations, with so potent and determinative an influence; but that the creature, through his own great default, may omit to do his part, and so that end be not effected.

That the course of his economy towards men on earth is, *de facto, in fact* ordered with this diversity, seems out of question. Manifest experience shews it. Some do sensibly perceive that motive influence, which others do not. The same persons, at sometimes, find not that, which at other times they do. His own word plainly asserts it. "He works in us to will and to do, of his own good pleasure." Where he will, he, in this respect, shews mercy; where he will, he hardeneth, or doth not prevent but that men be hardened. And indeed, we should be constrained to rase out a great part of the Sacred Volume, if we should not admit it to be so. And as the equity and fitness of his making such difference (when it appears he doth make it) cannot without profaneness be doubted, so it is evident, from what was before said, they are far removed from the reach and confines of any reasonable doubt; since he forsakes none, but being first forsaken. Nor have men any pretence to complain of subdalous dealing, or that they are surprisngly disappointed, and lurchd of such help, as they might have expected; inasmuch as this is so plainly extant in God's open manifests to the world, that he uses a certain arbitrariness, especially in the more exuberant dispensation of his grace; and is inserted to that purpose, that they may be cautioned not to neglect lower assistances; and warned, because he works to will and to do of his own pleasure, therefore to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Phil. 2. 12. 13. Whereupon, elsewhere, after the most persuasive alluring invitations: Turn ye at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit to you, I will make known my words to you, it is presently subjoined, because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hand and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. Prov. 1. 23. 26.

From all which it is plainly to be understood, that the general strain and drift of God's external revelation of his mind to man, in his word, and the aspect of even those passages, that can, with most colour, be thought to signify any thing further,

do amount to nothing more than this, that he doth so far really will the salvation of all, as not to omit the doing that which may effect it, if they be not neglectful of themselves, but not so as to effect it by that extraordinary exertion of power, which he thinks fit to employ upon some others.

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### CHAP. III.

I. Such a will as the word of God represents him to have of man's welfare we ought to believe is in him. The distinction of his will of good pleasure, and of the sign: of his secret will, and revealed (as applied to this matter) animadverted on. II. God truly wills the matter of his own laws, and their welfare for whom he made them. III. Is not made liable to disappointment hereby. Nor can hence an imperfect will be ascribed to him. IV. The second head (proposed Ch. II. p. 262.) discussed; that no other fit course could be taken, that can be pretended more agreeable to sincerity. Two only to be thought on:—to have published no written word, or to have overpowered all by strong hand into compliance therewith. The former not fit. The latter unfit also. The congruity of things makes them necessary, with God. The incongruity, impossible. V. Innumerable congruities obvious to the divine understanding not perceivable by ours. Two things manifestly congruous, to our apprehension; that the course of God's government, be for the most part, steady, and uniform: that he sometimes vary. VI. Both these, many ways represented congruous, in reference to matters within the sphere of nature, and policy. VII. Equally congruous, that matters be in some degree correspondently managed within the sphere of grace. VIII. The congruity of both these in the matters of grace more distinctly expressed. IX. The conclusion.

I. **NOR** is it reasonably to be doubted, (such a will being all that can be pretended to be the visible meaning of the passages before noted) whether there be such a will in God or no: and so somewhat really corresponding (the next thing promised to be discoursed) to the aspect and appearance hereof, which is offered to our view. For what should be the reason of the doubt? He; who best understands his own nature, hav-

ing said of himself what imports no less : why should we make a difficulty to believe him ? Nor indeed can any notices we have of the perfections of the divine nature be less liable to doubt, than what we have of his unchangeable veracity ; whence, as it is impossible to him to lie, it must be necessary, that he be really what he hath represented himself so to be. I must here profess my dislike of the terms of that common distinction the *voluntas beneplaciti, et signi*, between the will of good pleasure and of the sign, in this present case. Under which, such as coined, and those that have much used it, have only rather, I doubt not, concealed a good meaning, than expressed by it an ill one. It seems, I confess, by its more obvious aspect, too much to countenance the ignominious slander, which profane and atheistical dispositions would fasten upon God, and the course of his procedure towards men ; and which it is the design of these papers to evince of as much absurdity and folly, as it is guilty of impiety and wickedness : as though he only intended to seem willing of what he really was not ; that there was an appearance to which nothing did *subesse, exist as a foundation*. And then why is the latter called *voluntas? the will* unless the meaning be he did only will the sign, which is false and impious ; and if it were true, did he not will it with the will of good pleasure ? And then the members of the distinction are confounded. Or, as if the evil actions of men were, more truly, the objects of his good pleasure, than their forbearance of them. And of these faults the application of the distinction of God's secret will, and revealed, unto this case, though it be useful in many, is as guilty.

II. The truth is (unto which we must esteem ourselves, obliged to adhere, both by our assent, and defence) that God doth really and complacentially will (and therefore doth with most unexceptionable sincerity declare himself to will) that to be done and enjoyed by many men, which he doth not, universally, will to make them do, or irresistibly procure that they shall enjoy. Which is no harder assertion, than that the impure will of degenerate, sinful man is opposite to the holy will of God ; and the malignity of man's will to the benignity of his. No harder than that there is sin and misery in the world, which how can we conceive otherwise, than as a repugnancy to the good and acceptable will of God ? Methinks it should not be difficult to us to acknowledge, that God doth truly, and with complacency, will, whatsoever is the holy, righteous matter of his own laws. And if it should be with any, a difficulty, I would only make this supposition. What if all the world were yet in innocency, yielding entire universal obedience to all the now extant laws of God, which have not reference to man as now fallen (as those of repentance, faith in a Mediator, &c.)

would it now be a doubt with any, whether God did truly and really will, and were pleased with the holiness and righteousness which were every where to be found in the world? Surely we would not, in this case, imagine the creature's will more pure and holy than the divine; or that he were displeased with men for their being righteous and holy. Now again suppose the world revolted, what then is that holy will of God changed? will we not say it remains the same holy will still? and stands the same rule of righteousness and duty that it was? Doth the change of his rebel creatures infer any with him? or do only the declarations of his former will remain to be their rule, and keep them still obliged, his will itself being become another from what it was? Surely he might as easily have changed his laws.

And if we say his will is changed, how should we know it to be so? If we know it not, surely such a thing should not be said or thought. If we knew it, how should those yet-extant laws and declarations continue to oblige, against the Law-giver's known will? and then the easy expedient to nullify the obligation of a law, that were thought too restrictive, were to disobey it. And men might, by sinning once, license themselves to do the same thing (though then we could not call it sinning) always. And so the creature's should be the supreme, and ruling will. Nor had it been a false suggestion, but a real truth, that man, by becoming a sinner, might make himself a God. Or, if it shall be thought fit to say, that the divine will would not, in that supposed case, be said to be changed; but only, that now the event makes it appear not to have been, what we thought it was; that were to impute both impurity and dissimulation to the holy, blessed God, as his fixed attributes. And what we thought unfit, and should abhor, to imagine might have place with him one moment, to affix to him for perpetuity.

III. And whereas it may be thought to follow hence, that hereby we ascribe to God a liability to frustration, and disappointment. That is without pretence. The resolve of the divine will, in this matter, being not concerning the event what man shall do, but concerning his duty what he should, and concerning the connection between his duty, and his happiness. Which we say he doth not only seem to will, but wills it really and truly. Nor would his prescience of the event, which we all this while assert, let frustration be so much as possible to him. Especially, it being at once foreseen, that his will, being crossed in this, would be fulfilled in so important a thing, as the preserving the decorum of his own government. Which had been most apparently blemished, beyond what could consist

with the perfections of the Deity, if either his will concerning man's duty, or the declarations of that will, had not been substantially, the same that they are. We are, therefore, in assigning the object of this or that act of the divine will, to do it entirely, and to take the whole object together, without dividing it, as if the will of God did wholly terminate upon what indeed is but a part (and especially if that be but a less considerable part) of the thing willed. In the present case, we are not to conceive that God, only wills either man's duty or felicity, or that herein his will doth solely and ultimately terminate. But, in the whole, the determination of God's will is, that man shall be duly governed, that is, congruously both to himself, and him. That such and such things, most congruous to both, shall be man's duty, by his doing whereof, the dignity and honour of God's own government might be preserved, which was the thing principally to be designed; and in the first place. And, as what was secondarily thereto, that hereby man's felicity should be provided for. Therefore, it being foreseen a violation would be done to the sacred rights of the divine government, by man's disobedience, it is resolved, they shall be repaired and maintained by other means. So that the divine will hath its effect; as to what was its more noble and principal design, the other part failing, only, by his default, whose is the loss.

And if yet it should be insisted, that in asserting God to will what by his laws he hath made become man's duty, even where it is not done we shall herein ascribe to him, at least, an ineffectual and an imperfect will, as which doth not bring to pass the thing willed. It is answered, that imperfection were with no pretence imputable to the divine will, merely for its not effecting every thing, whereto it may have a real propension. But it would be more liable to that imputation, if it should effect any thing, which it were less fit for him to effect, than not to effect it. The absolute perfection of his will stands in the proportion, which every act of it bears, to the importance of the things, about which it is conversant. Even as, with men, the perfection of any act of will is to be estimated, not by the mere peremptory sturdiness of it, but by its proportion to the goodness of the thing willed. Upon which account, a mere velleity (as many love to speak) when the degree of goodness in the object claims no more, hath unconceivably greater perfection in it, than the most obstinate volition. And since the event forbids us to admit that God did ever will the obedience and felicity of all, with such a will as should be effective thereof; if yet his plain word shall be acknowledged the measure of our belief, in this matter, which so plainly asserts him some-

way to will the salvation of all men, it is strange if, hereupon, we shall not admit rather of a will not-effective of the thing willed, than none at all.

The will of God is sufficiently to be vindicated from all imperfection, if he have sufficient reason for all the propensions, and determinations of it, whether from the value of the things willed, or from his own sovereignty who wills them. In the present case, we need not doubt to affirm, that the obedience and felicity of all men, is of that value, as whereunto a propension of will, by only simple complacency is proportionable. Yet, that his not procuring, as to all (by such courses as he more extraordinarily takes with some) that they shall, in event, obey and be happy, is upon so much more valuable reasons (as there will be further occasion to shew ere long) as that, not to do it was more eligible, with the higher complacency, of a determinative will. And since the public declarations of his good will, towards all men, import no more than the former, and do plainly import so much; their correspondency to the matter declared is sufficiently apparent. And so is the congruity of both with his prescience of the event. For though, when God urges and incites men, by exhortations, promises, and threats, to the doing of their own part (which it is most agreeable to his holy, gracious nature to do) he foresee, many will not be moved thereby; but persist in wilful neglect, and rebellions till they perish: he at the same time, sees that they might do otherwise, and that, if they would comply with his methods, things would otherwise issue with them. His prescience, no way, imposing upon them a necessity to transgress. For they do it not because he foreknew it, but he only foreknew it because they would do so. And hence he had, as it was necessary he should have, not only this for the object of his foreknowledge that they would do amiss and perish: but the whole case in its circumstances, that they would do so, not through his omission, but their own. And there had been no place left for this state of the case, if his public edicts and manifests, had not gone forth, in this tenour as they have. So that the consideration of his prescience, being taken in, gives us only, in the whole, this state of the case, that he foresaw men would not take that course which he truly declared himself willing they should (and was graciously ready to assist them in it) in order to their own well-being. Whence all complaint of insincere dealing is left without pretence.

IV. Nor (as we also undertook to shew P. 262) could any course (within our prospect) have been taken, that was fit, in itself, and more agreeable to sincerity. There are only these two ways to be thought on besides; either, that God should wholly

have forborne to make overtures to men in common: or, that he should efficaciously have overpowered all into a compliance with them. And there is little doubt, but upon sober consideration, both of these will be judged altogether unfit. The *former*; inasmuch as it had been most disagreeable—to the exact measures of his government, to let a race of sinful creatures persist, through many successive ages, in apostacy and rebellion, when the characters of that law, first written in man's heart, were in so great measure outworn, and become illegible; without renewing the impression, in another way; and re-asserting his right and authority, as their Ruler and Lord;—to the holiness of his nature, not to send into the world such a declaration of his will, as might be a standing testimony against the impurity, whereinto it was lapsed;—to the goodness of it, not to make known upon what terms, and for whose sake, he was reconcilable; and—to the truth of the thing, since he really had such kind propensions towards men in common not to make them known:—that it had, itself, been more liable to the charge of insincerity, to have concealed from men what was real truth, and of so much concernment to them. And he did, in revealing them, but act his own nature; the goodness whereof is no more lessened, by men's refusal of its offers, than his truth can be made of none effect by their disbelief of its assertions: besides the great use such an extant revelation of the way of recovery, was to be of, to those that should obediently comply with it, even after they should be won so to do. And the *latter* we may also apprehend very unfit too; though, because that is less obvious, it requires to be more largely insisted on. For it would seem that if we do not effect any thing which we have a real will unto, it must proceed from impotency, and that we cannot do it, which, who would say of the great God? Herein therefore, we shall proceed by steps. And gradually offer the things that follow to consideration.

As, that it were indeed, most repugnant to the notion of a Deity, to suppose any thing, which includes in it no contradiction impossible to God, considered according to that single attribute of power only. But yet we must add, that this were a very unequal way of estimating what God can do, that is to consider him as a mere Being of power. For the notion of God so conceived, were very inadequate to him, which taken entirely, imports the comprehension of all perfections. So that they are two very distant questions,—What the power of God alone could do? and—What God can do? And whereas to the former the answer would be,—whatsoever is not in itself repugnant to be done. To the latter, it must only be,—what-

soever it becomes or is agreeable to a Being every way perfect to do. And so it is to be attributed to the excellency of his nature, if amongst all things not simply impossible, there be any, which it may be truly said he cannot do. Or, it proceeds not from the imperfection of his power, but from the concurrence of all other perfections in him. Hence his own word plainly affirms of him that he cannot lie. And by common consent it will be acknowledged, that he cannot do any unjust act whatsoever.

To this I doubt not we may with as common suffrage (when the matter is considered) subjoin, that his wisdom doth as much limit the exercise of his power, as his righteousness or his truth doth. And that it may with as much confidence, and clearness, be said and understood, that he cannot do an unwise, or imprudent act as an unjust. Further, that as his righteousness corresponds to the justice of things, to be done or not done, so doth his wisdom to the congruity or fitness. So that he cannot do what it is unfit for him to do, because he is wise; and because he is most perfectly and infinitely wise, therefore nothing that is less-fit. But whatsoever is fittest, when a comparison is made between doing this or that, or between doing and not doing, that the perfection of his nature renders necessary to him, and the opposite part impossible. Again, that this measure must be understood to have a very large and most general extent unto all the affairs of his government, the object it concerns being so very large. We, in our observation, may take notice, that fewer questions can occur concerning what is right or wrong, than what is fit, or unfit. And whereas any man may in a moment be honest, if he have a mind to it; very few (and that by long experience) can ever attain to be wise. The things about which justice is conversant being reducible to certain rules, but wisdom supposes very general knowledge of things scarcely capable of such reduction. And is, besides, the primary requisite, in any one that bears rule over others: and must therefore most eminently influence all the managements of the Supreme Ruler.

V. It is moreover to be considered, that innumerable congruities lie open to the infinite wisdom, which are never obvious to our view or thought. As to a well-studied scholar, thousands of coherent notions, which an illiterate person never thought of—to a practiced courtier, or well-educated gentleman, many decencies and indecencies, in the matter of civil behaviour and conversation, which an unbred rustic knows nothing of; and to an experienced states-man, those importancies, which never occur to the thoughts of him who daily follows the plough. What government is there that hath not its arcana, profound



mysteries and reasons of state that a vulgar wit cannot dive into? And from whence, the account to be given, why this or that is done or not done, is not, always, that it would have been unjust it should be otherwise, but it had been imprudent. And many things are, hereupon, judged necessary not from the exigency of justice, but reason of state. Whereupon, men of modest and sober minds, that have had experience of the wisdom of their governors and their happy conduct, through a considerable tract of time; when they see things done by them, the leading reasons whereof they do not understand, and the effect and success come not yet in view, suspend their censure; while as yet all seems to them obscure, and wrapt up in clouds and darkness. Yea though the course that is taken have, to their apprehension, an ill aspect. Accounting it becomes them not, to make a judgment of things so far above their reach, and confiding in the tried wisdom of their rulers, who they believe, see reasons for what they do, into which they find themselves unable to penetrate. With how much more submiss, and humble veneration, ought the methods of the divine government to be beheld and adored, upon the certain assurance we have, that all things therein, are managed by that wisdom, which could never in any thing mistake its way? Whereas, there was never any continued administration of human government, so accurate and exact, but that after some tract of time, some or other errors might be reflected on therein.

Again, it may further be said, without presuming beyond due bounds, that though infinite congruities must be supposed to lie open to the divine understanding, which are concealed from ours, yet that these two things in the general are very manifestly congruous to any sober attentive mind, that directly concern, or may be applied to the case under our present consideration, namely, that the course of God's government over the world, be, for the most part, steady, and uniform: not interrupted by very frequent, extraordinary and anomalous actions. And again, that he use a royal liberty, of stepping out of his usual course, sometimes, as he sees meet.

VI. It cannot but appear to such as attend, highly incongruous, should we affirm the antithesis to either of these; or lay down counter-positions to them, and suppose the course of the divine government to be managed agreeably thereunto. For, *as to the former*; what confusion would it make in the world, if there should be perpetual innovations upon nature; continual or exceeding frequent impeditons, and restraints of second causes. In the sphere of nature, the virtues and proper qualities of things, being never certain, could never be understood, or known. In that of policy, no measures, so much as proba-

ble, could ever be taken. How much better is it, in both, that second causes, ordinarily follow their inclinations? And why is it not to be thought congruous, that, in some degree, things should be proportionably so, in the sphere of grace? (whereto by and by we shall speak more directly.) We pray when our friends are sick for their recovery. What can be the sober meaning and design of such prayers? Not that God would work a miracle for their restitution, (for then we might as well pray for their revival after death) but, that God would be pleased so to co-operate, in the still and silent way of nature, with second causes, and so bless means, that they may be recovered, if he see good. Otherwise that they, and we may be prepared to undergo his pleasure. And agreeable hereto ought to be the intent of our prayers, in reference to the public affairs, and better posture of the world. And we may take notice, the divine wisdom lays a very great stress upon this matter, the preserving of the common order of things; and cannot but observe a certain inflexibility of providence, herein. And that it is very little apt to divert from its wonted course. At which weak minds are apt to take offence: to wonder, that against so many prayers and tears, God will let a good man die; or one whom they love; or that a miracle is not wrought to prevent their own being wronged at any time; or, that the earth doth not open and swallow up the person that hath done them wrong: are apt to call for fire from heaven, upon them that are otherwise minded, and do otherwise than they would have them. But a judicious person would consider, if it be so highly reasonable that my desires should be complied with so extraordinarily, than why not all men's? And then were the world filled with prodigies and confusion. The inconveniencies would soon be to all, equally discernable and intolerable (as the heathen poet takes notice, should Jupiter's ear be over-easy) yea and the impossibility were obvious of gratifying all, because of their many counter-desires.

And *for the other*, it were no less incongruous, if the Supreme Power should so tie its own hands, and be so astricted to rules and methods, as never to do any thing extraordinary, upon never so important occasion. How ill could the world have wanted such an effort of omnipotency, as the restriction upon the flames from destroying Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? or the miracles wrought in our Saviour's and the next following days? Such things are never done; but when the all-comprehending wisdom sees it most congruous: and that the cause will over-recompense the deflection from the common course. If no such thing did ever fall out, what a temptation were it to mankind, to introduce into their belief an unintelligent fate instead of a Deity? Besides that the convincing testimony were want-

ing, which we see is so necessary for the confirmation of any particular revelation from God, which comes not within the compass of nature's discovery, (upon which account also, it is as apparently necessary such extraordinary works should not be over-frequent, for then they become ordinary, and useless to that special end,) so that here the exertions both of the ordinate and absolute power of God (as some distinguish) have their so appropriate, and so visibly apt and congruous uses, that they are discernible to a very ordinary understanding, how much more to the infinite wisdom of God!

VII. Now hereupon we say further, there is the like congruity, upon as valuable (though not altogether the same) reasons that, in the affairs of grace, there be somewhat correspondent: that, ordinarily, it be sought and expected, in the use of ordinary means. And that, sometimes, its sovereignty shew itself in preventing exertions: and in working so heroically, as none have, before hand, in the neglect of its ordinary methods, any reason to expect. And we may fitly add, that where sovereignty is pleased thus to have its exercise and demonstrate itself, it is sufficient that there be a general congruity, that it do so sometimes, as an antecedent reason to the doing of some such extraordinary things, but that there should be a particular, leading congruity or antecedent reason, to invite these extraordinary operations of grace, to one person more than another, is not necessary. But it is most congruous, that, herein, it be most arbitrary; most agreeable to the supremacy of God; to the state of sinful man, who hath infinitely disobliged him, and can deserve nothing from him; yea, and even to the nature of the thing. For, where there is a parity, in any objects of our own choice, there can be no leading reason to this, rather than that. The most prudent man, that is wont to guide himself by never so exquisite wisdom, in his daily actions, where there is a perfect indifferency, between doing this thing or that, is not liable to censure, that he is not able to give a reason why he did that, not the other. Wisdom hath no exercise in that case.

But that the blessed God doth ordinarily proceed in these affairs, by a steady rule, and sometimes, shew his liberty of departing from it, is to be resolved into his infinite wisdom, it being, in itself, most fit, he should do both the one and the other; and therefore to him most necessary. Whereupon, the great apostle Saint Paul, discoursing upon this subject, doth not resolve the matter into strict justice, nor absolute sovereignty (both which have their place too, in his proceedings with men, as the sacred writings do abundantly testify) but we find him in a transport, in the contemplation of the divine wisdom, that, herein so eminently shines forth. O the depths of the rich-

es both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!\*

VIII. To sum up all, we conclude it obvious to the apprehension of such as consider, that it was more congruous the general course of God's government, over man, should be by moral instruments. And, howsoever it were very unreasonable, to imagine, that God cannot in any case, extraordinarily overway the inclinations, and determine the will of such a creature, in a way agreeable enough to its nature, (though we particularly know not, as we are not concerned to know, or curiously to inquire in what way) and highly reasonable to admit that in many cases he doth. It is notwithstanding manifest, to any sober reason, that it were very incongruous, this should be the ordinary course of his conduct towards mankind, or the same persons at all times. That is, that a whole order of intelligent creatures should be moved, only by inward impulses; that God's precepts, promises and comminations, whereof their nature is capable, should be all made impertinencies, through his constant overpowering those that should neglect them; that the faculties, whereby men are capable of moral government, should be rendered, to this purpose, useless and vain; and that they should be tempted to expect, to be constantly managed as mere machines, that know not their own use.

Nor is it less apprehensible, how incongruous it were also, on the other hand, to suppose that the exterior frame of God's government, should be totally unaccompanied with an internal vital energy; or exclude the inward motions, operations and influences, whereof such a creature is also fitly capable; or that God should have barred out himself, from all inward access to the spirits of men, or commerce with them: that the supreme universal, paternal mind (as a heathen called it) should have no way for efficacious communications, to his own offspring, when he pleases; that (so unsuitably to sovereignty) he should have no objects of special favour, or no peculiar ways of expressing it. It is manifestly congruous that the divine government, over man, should be (as it is) mixed or composed of an external frame of laws, with their proper sanctions, and enforcements, and an internal effusion of power and vital influence, correspondent to the several parts of that frame; and which might animate the whole, and use it, as instrumental, to the begetting of correspondent impressions on men's spirits:—that this power be put forth, not (like that of a natural agent) *ad ultimum to its utmost* (which if we would suppose the divine power to be,

\* Rom. 11. 33. See to the same purpose, ch. 16, 25, 26, 27. And Eph. 1, 5, 6, 7, with the 8.

new worlds must be springing up every moment) but gradually, and with an apt contemperation to the subject, upon which it is designed, to have its operations, and withal, arbitrarily, as is becoming the great Agent from whom it proceeds, and to whom it, therefore, belongs, to measure its exertions, as seems meet unto him:—that it be constantly put forth (though most gratuitously, especially the disobligation of the apostacy being considered) upon all, to that degree, as that they be enabled to do much good, to which they are not impelled by it.---that it be ever ready (since it is the power of grace) to go forth in a further degree than it had yet done, wheresoever any former issues of it have been duly complied with. Though it be so little supposable that man should hereby have obliged God thereto, that he hath not any way obliged himself; otherwise, than that he hath implied a readiness to impart unto man what shall be necessary to enable him to obey, so far as, upon the apostacy, is requisite to his relief: if he seriously endeavour to do his own part, by *the power he already hath received*. Agreeably to the common saying, *homini facienti quod in se est*. &c. That, according to the royal liberty wherewith it works it go forth, as to some, with that efficacy, as notwithstanding whatever resistance, yet to overcome, and make them captives to the authority and love of Christ.

IX. The universal, continued rectitude of all intelligent creatures had, we may be sure, been willed with a peremptory, efficacious will if it had been best. That is, if it had not been less congruous than to keep them, some time (under the expectation of future confirmation and reward) upon trial of their fidelity, and in a state wherein it might not be impossible to them to make a defection. And so it had easily been prevented, that ever there should have been an apostacy from God, or any sin in the world. Nor was it either less easy, by a mighty irresistible hand, universally to expel sin, than prevent it; or more necessary or more to be expected from him. But if God's taking no such course, tended to render his government over the world more august and awful for the present, and the result and final issue of all things more glorious at length, and were consequently, more congruous; that could not be so willed, as to be effectually procured by him. For whatsoever obligation strict justice hath upon us, that congruity cannot but have upon him. And whereas it would be concluded, that whatsoever any one truly wills, they would effect if they could, we admit it for true, and to be applied in the present case. But add, That as we rightly esteem that impossible to us, which we cannot justly do, so is that to him, not only, which he cannot do justly, but which, upon the

whole matter he cannot do, most wisely also. That is, which his infinite wisdom doth not dictate, is most congruous and fit to be done.

Things cohere, and are held together, in the course of his dispensation, by congruities as by adamantine bands, and cannot be otherwise. This is, comparing and taking things together, especially the most important. For otherwise, to have been nicely curious about every minute thing, singly considered, that it might not possibly have been better (as in the frame of this or that individual animal or the like) had been needlessly to interrupt the course of nature, and therefore, itself, to him an incongruity. And doth, in them that expect it, import more of a trifling disposition than of true wisdom. But to him whose being is most absolutely perfect; to do that, which, all things considered, would be simply best, which is most becoming him, most honourable and God-like, is absolutely necessary. And consequently, it is to be attributed to his infinite perfection, that, unto him, to do otherwise, is absolutely impossible. And if we yet see not all these congruities which, to him, are more than a law; it is enough that they are obvious to his own eye, who is the only competent Judge. Yet, moreover, it is finally to be considered, that the methods of the divine government, are, besides his, to be exposed to the view, and judgment of other intellects than our own, and we expect they should to our own, in another state. What conception thereof is, already, received and formed in our minds, is but an embryo, no less imperfect than our present state is.

It were very unreasonable to expect, since this world shall continue but a little while, that all God's managements, and ways of procedure, in ordering the great affairs of it, should be attempered, and fitted to the judgment, that shall be made of them in this temporary state, that will so soon be over; and to the present apprehension and capacity of our (now so muddled and distempered) minds. A vast and stable eternity remains, wherein, the whole celestial chorus shall entertain themselves, with the grateful contemplation, and applause, of his deep counsels. Such things as now seem perplex, and intricate to us, will appear most irreprehensibly fair, and comely to angelical minds, and our own, when we shall be vouchsafed a place amongst that happy community. What discovery God affords of his own glorious excellencies, and perfections is principally intended to recommend him, in that state; wherein he, and all his ways and works, are to be beheld with everlasting, and most complacential approbation. Therefore though now we should covet the clearest and most satisfying account of things, that

can be had, we are yet to exercise patience, and not precipitate our judgment of them before the time: as knowing our present conceptions will differ more, from what they will be hereafter, than those of a child from the maturer thoughts of the wisest man. And that many of our conceits, which we thought wise, we shall then see cause to put away as childish things.

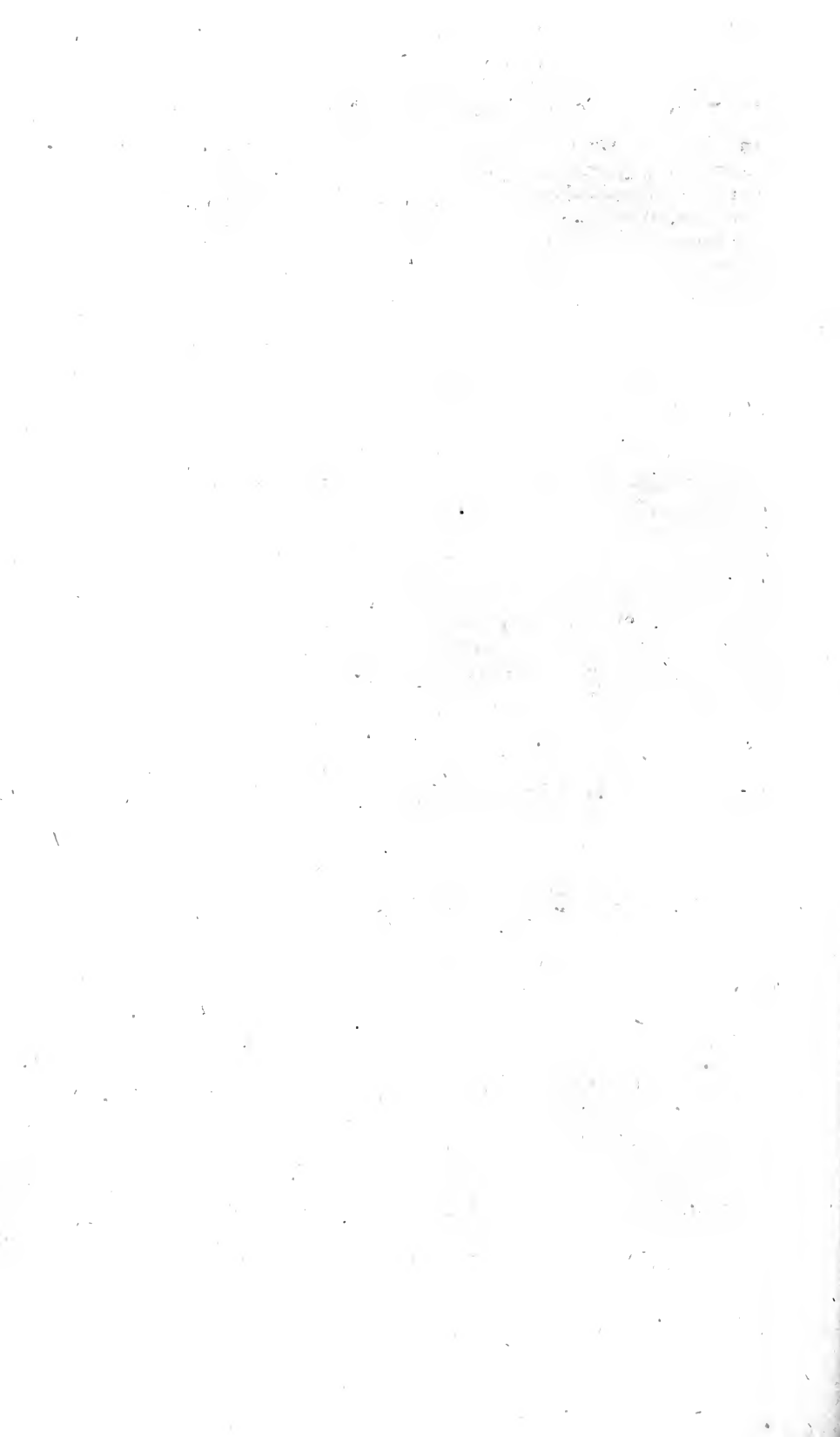


The disorder, Sir, of this heap, rather than frame of thoughts and discourse, as it cannot be thought more unsuitable to the subject, than suitable to the author; and the less displease, by how much it could less be expected to be otherwise, from him, even in the best circumstances; so it may lay some claim to your easier pardon, as having been, mostly, huddled up in the intervals of a troublesome, long journey. Wherein he was rather willing to take what opportunity the inconveniencies and hurry of it could allow him: than neglect any, of using the earliest endeavour to approve himself (as he is your great admirer)

Most honoured Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

H. W.





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**POSTSCRIPT**

TO THE

**LETTER**

OF THE

**RECONCILEABLENESS OF GOD'S PRESCIENCE,**

*&c. &c.*

1917

1917

1917

## A POSTSCRIPT

To the Letter

OF THE RECONCILEABLENESS OF  
GOD'S PRESCIENCE, &c.

**F**INDING that this discourse of the *reconcilableness of God's prescience of the sins of men, with the wisdom and sincerity of his counsels, exhortations, &c.* hath been misunderstood and misrepresented; I think it requisite to say somewhat briefly in reference thereto. I wrote it upon the motion of that honourable gentleman to whom it is inscribed; who apprehended somewhat of that kind might be of use to render our religion less exceptionable to some persons of an inquiring disposition, that might perhaps be too sceptical and pendulous, if not prejudiced. Having finished it, I thought it best the author's name should pass under some disguise, supposing it might so, better serve its end: for knowing my name could not give the cause an advantage, I was not willing it should be in a possibility of making it incur any disadvantage. And therefore, as I have observed some, in such cases, to make use only of the two last letters, I imitated some other, in the choice of the *penultimate, the last but one*. But perceiving that discourse now to fall under animadversion, I reckon it becoming to be no longer concealed. It was unavoidable to me, if I would, upon reasonable terms, apply myself to the consideration of the matter I had undertaken, of shewing the consistency of God's prescience of the sins of men, with the preventive methods we find him to have used against them, to express somewhat of my sense of (what I well knew to have been asserted by divers schoolmen)

God's predeterminative concurrence to the sins of men also. For it had been (any one may see) very idle, and ludicrous trifling, to offer at reconciling those methods with God's prescience and have waved that (manifestly) greater difficulty of reconciling them with his predeterminative concurrence, if I had thought there had been such a thing. And were a like case, as if a chirurgeon, undertaking a wounded person, should apply himself, with a great deal of diligence and address, to the cure of a finger slightly scratched; and totally neglect a wound (feared to be mortal) in his breast.

And whereas I reckoned God's prescience of all whatsoever futurities, and consequently of the sins of men, most certain and demonstrable (though it was not the business of this discourse to demonstrate it, but, supposing it, to shew its reconcilcableness with what it seemed not so well to agree) if I had believed his predeterminative concurrence to the sins of men to be as certain; perfect despair of being able to say any thing to purpose in this case, had made me resolve to say nothing in either. For, to shew how it might stand with the wisdom and sincerity of the blessed God, to counsel men not to sin, to profess his hatred and detestation of it, to remonstrate to men the great danger they should incur by it; with so great appearance of seriousness to exhort, warn, expostulate with them concerning it, express his great displeasure and grief for their sinning, and consequent miseries; and yet all the while act them on thereto, by a secret, but mighty and irresistible influence, seemed to me an utterly hopeless and impossible undertaking. The other, without this (supposing, as to this, the case to have been as some have thought it) a very vain one. But being well assured, that what seemed the greater difficulty, and to carry most of terror and affright in the face of it, was only a chimera. I reckoned the other very superable, and therefore directed my discourse thither, according to the first design of it, which was in effect but to justify God's making such a creature as man, and governing him agreeably to his nature.

Now judging it requisite, that he who should read that discourse concerning this designed subject, with any advantage, should have the same thoughts of the other, which was waved, that I had: I apprehended it necessary to communicate those thoughts concerning that, as I did. Not operously, and as my business, but only on the bye, and as was fit in reference to a thing that was to be waved, and not insisted on. Now I perceive that some persons, who had formerly entertained that strange opinion of God's predeterminative concurrence to the wickedest actions, and not purged their minds of it, have been offended with that letter, for not expressing more respect unto

it. And yet offered nothing, themselves (which to me seems exceeding strange) for the solving of that great difficulty and incumbrance, which it infers upon our religion. Nor do I much wonder, that this opinion of predeterminative concurrence, to sinful actions, should have some stiff adherents among ourselves. For having been entertained by certain dominicans, that were apprehended, in some things to approach nearer us, than others of the Roman church; it came to receive favour and countenance from some of our own, of considerable note for piety and learning, whose name and authority cannot but be expected to have much influence, on the minds of many. But I somewhat wonder, that they who have had no kindness for this letter, upon the account of its dissent from them, in this particular, should not allow it common justice. For because it hath not said every thing they would have had it say, and that would have been grateful to themselves, they impute to it the having said what it said not, and what they apprehended would be most ungrateful to all pious and sober men. The sum is, they give out concerning it, that it denies the providence of God about sin, which all good men ought to abhor from; and insinuate that it falls in with the sentiments of Durandus, which they know many think not well of.

All that I intend to do, for the present, upon this occasion, shall be to shew wherein the letter is mis-represented, and charged with what it hath not in it. To remark what is said against that supposed sense of it, and give the true sense of what it says touching this matter; with a further account of the author's mind herein than it was thought fit to insert into so transient and occasional a discourse as that part of the letter was. Whereby it may be seen, wherein he agrees with those of that opposite persuasion, and what the very point of difference is. Further than this, I yet intend not to go, till I see further need. There have two discourses come to my view that have referred to that letter. The one in manuscript only; which, because it is uncertain to me, whether the reputed author of it will own it or no; and, because it says little or nothing, by way of argument, against the true sense of the letter, I shall take no further present notice of. The other is printed, and offers at somewhat of argument, which therefore I shall more attentively consider. It doth this letter an honour, whereof its author never had the least ambition or expectation, to insert the mention of it into the close of a very learned, elaborate work\*; with which it might, yet, easily be imagined, its simplicity, and remoteness from any pretence to learning, would so ill agree, that

\* Court of the Gentiles, part 2, page 522

a quarrel could not but ensue. It is from one, who having spent a great part of his time in travelling through some regions of literature, and been peaceable, as far as I have understood, in his travels; it might have been hoped would have let this pamphlet alone, when, for what I can observe, he finds no fault with it but what he makes; and is fain to accuse it of what is nowhere to be found in it, lest it should be innocent.

It is an unaccountable pleasure which men of some humours take, in depraving what is done by others, when there is nothing attempted that doth interfere with them; nothing that can, righteously, be understood to cross any good end, which they more openly pretend to, nor the more concealed end (if they have any such) of their own glory. Common edification seems less designed, when every thing must be thrown down, which is not built by their own hands, or by their own line and measure. I plead nothing of merit in this little essay, only I say for it, that I know not what it can be guilty of towards this learned man, that can have occasioned this assault upon it by his pen. By how much the less it keeps his road, the more I might have thought it out of the way of his notice. I am sure it meant him no harm, nor had any design to pilfer from him any part of his collections. But he says, he may not let it pass. Then there is no remedy. But I wonder what he should mean by he may not. It must either mean, that he thought it unlawful to let it pass, or that he had a mighty strong and irresistible inclination to squabble a little with it. The former cannot be imagined. For then, for the same reason, he would have attempted sundry others of former and latter days, that have said much to the purpose, which this letter doth but touch obiter, and on the bye, in its way to another design. But those were giants, whom it was not so safe to meddle with. Therefore he could very wisely let them pass, though they have wounded his beloved cause, beyond all that it is in the power of his, (or any) art to cure. Whence it is consequent, that the whole business must be resolved into the latter. And this inclination cannot but owe itself to some peculiar aspect and reference he had to the author. Whom, though he was in *incognito, unknown*, yet (as I have been informed) he professes to have discoursed with upon the same subject many times. And so, therefore, he might once more before this public rencounter, if he had thought fit, and nature could have been repelled awhile.

It is true, he hath found me not facile to entertain his sentiments in this matter. And indeed I have deeply dreaded the portentous imaginations which I found had more lightly tinctured his mind, as to this thing, concerning the blessed God. Than which, upon deliberation, I do believe, no human wit can ever

devise worse. As I have often freely told divers of my friends, and it is very likely, among them, himself. Though I do not suspect the contagion to have infected his vitals; by a privilege, vouchsafe to some, that they may possibly drink some deadly thing that shall not hurt them. But why must an impatience of this dissent break out into so vindictive an hostility? I will not say I expected more friendly dealing. For, as I do well know it was very possible such a public contest might have been managed with that candour and fairness, as not at all to intrench upon friendship. So, as it is, I need not own so much weakness, as upon many years experience, not to be able to distinguish and understand there are some tempers less capable of the ingenuities that belong to that pleasant relation. But it was only a charitable error of which I repent not, that I expected a more righteous dealing.

He pretends to give my sense, in other words, and then gravely falls to combating his own man of straw which he will have represent me, and so I am to be tortured in effigy. "It can never be proved, that it implies a contradiction, for God to make a creature, which should be capable of acting without immediate concurrence." This he puts in a different character, as if I had said so much. And why might not my own words be allowed to speak my own sense? But that his understanding and eyes, must then have conspired to tell him, that the sense would have been quite another? It is only a predeterminative concurrence to all actions, even those that are most malignantly wicked (p.248) and again, God's concurring by a determinative influence unto wicked actions, (p.249.) which is the only thing I speak of; as what I cannot reconcile with the wisdom and sincerity, of his counsels and exhortations, against such actions. And if he had designed to serve any common good end, in this undertaking of his, why did he not attempt to reconcile them himself? But the wisdom and sincerity of God are thought fit, (as it would seem) to be sacrificed to the reputation of his more peculiarly admired schoolmen. If there be such a universal determination, by an irresistible divine influence, to all even the wickedest actions (which God forbid!) methinks such a difficulty should not be so easily past over. And surely the reconciling such a determinative influence, with the divine wisdom and sincerity, had been a performance worth all his learned labours besides, and of greater service to the Christian name and honour. But it seems the denying concurrence by such predetermining influence, is the denying of all immediate concurrence. And I am sent to the Thomists, Scotists, Jesuits, and Suarez, more especially to be taught otherwise. As if all these were for determinative concurrence. Which is very pleasant, when the very

heads of the two first-mentioned sects were against it, as we shall see further presently, the third generally, and by Suarez particularly, whom he names, have so industriously and strongly opposed it. Yea and because I assent not to the doctrine of pre-determinative concurrence, I am represented (which was the last spite that was to be done me) as a favourer of the hypotheses of Durandus. And he might as truly, have said of Henry Nicholas, but not so prudently, because he knows whose opinions have a nearer alliance to that family. Now I heartily wish I had a ground for so much charity towards him, as to suppose him ignorant that immediate concurrence, and determinative, are not wont to be used by the schoolmen, in this controversy, as terms of the same signification. If he do himself, think them to be all one, what warrant is that to him to give the same for my sense? When it is so well known they are not commonly so taken, and that determinative concurrence is so voluminously written against, where immediate is expressly asserted. Let him but soberly tell me, what his design was, to dash out the word *determining* from what he recites of that letter, and put in *immediate*, which he knows is not to be found in any of the places he refers to in it. Or what was the spring of that confidence that made him intimate the Scotists, Thomists, the Jesuits, and particularly Suarez, to be against what is said in the letter, in this thing? If he could procure all the books in the world to be burnt, besides those in his own library, he would yet have a hard task to make it be believed in the next age, that all these were for God's efficacious determination of the wills of men unto wicked actions.

I need not, after all this, concern myself, as to what he says about the *no medium* between the extremes of his disjunctive proposition. Either the human will must depend upon the divine independent will of God. &c. (as he phrases it in the excess of his caution, lest any should think the will of God was not a divine will) or God must depend on the human will, &c. Unless he can shew that the human will cannot be said to depend on the divine, as being enabled by it, except it be also determined and impelled by it, to every wicked action. A created being that was entirely from God, with all the powers and faculties which belong to it; that hath its continual subsistence in him, and all those powers continued, and maintained by his influence every moment; that hath those powers made habile, and apt for whatsoever its most natural motions and operations, by a suitable influence, *whenever* it moves or operates. Can this creature be said not to depend, as to all its motions and operations, unless it be also unavoidably impelled to do every thing to which it is thus sufficiently enabled?



I again say, was it possible to God to make such a creature that can, in this case, act or not act? It is here oddly enough said, that the author gives no demonstration hereof. Of what? Why that it can never be proved (as the reference to the foregoing word shews) that it implies a contradiction, &c. It seems it was expected that author should have proved by demonstration, that it can never be proved, that it implies a contradiction for God to make a creature, which should be capable of acting (as he feigns him to have said) without immediate concurrence. By what rule of reasoning was he obliged to do so? But if the proving there is such a creature, as in the case before expressed can act without determinative concurrence, will serve turn to prove, that it cannot be proved, it implies a contradiction there should be such a one: I may think the thing was done. And may think it sufficiently proved, that there is such a creature; if it appear (whereof there is too much proof) that there are such actions done by creatures, as for the reasons that were before alleged, it could not stand with the nature of God to determine them unto. And was nothing said tending to prove this, that it could not consist with the nature of God, to determine men unto all the wicked actions they commit? It seems unless it were put into mood and figure, it is no proof. Nor was it the design of those papers to insist upon that subject; but there are things suggested *in transitu, in passing* as such a discourse could admit, that (whether they are demonstrative or no) would puzzle a considering person. That God should have as much influence, and concurrence to the worst actions, as to the best. As much or more than the sinner or the tempter. That the matter of his laws to Adam, and his posterity, should be a natural impossibility. And I now add, the irreconcilableness of that determination, with God's wisdom and sincerity, &c. These I shall reckon demonstrations, till I see them well answered.

However if mine were a bad opinion, why was it not as confutable without the mention of Durandus? But that was, with him, an odious name; and fit, therefore, to impress the brand, which he desired I should wear for his sake. This is a likely way to clear the truth. Yet if it serve not one design, it will another, he thinks, upon which he was more intent. Are all for Durandus's way that are against a predeterminative influence to wicked actions? I could tell him who have shewn more strength in arguing against Durandus; than I find in all his arguments: who yet have written, too, against determinative concurrence to such actions, more than ever he will be able to answer, or any man. The truth is, when I wrote that letter, I had never seen Durandus. Nor indeed did I consult any book for the writing of it, (as I had not opportunity, if I had been so inclined) ex-

cept, upon some occasions, the Bible. Not apprehending it necessary, to number votes, and consider how many men's thoughts were one way, and of how many the other, before I would adventure to think any of my own: but I have this day, upon the view of his animadversions, taken a view of Durandus too. And, really, cannot yet guess, what should tempt him to parallel my conceptions with Durandus's, but that he took his, for somewhat an ill-favoured name.\* Durandus, flatly, in several places denies God's immediate concurrence to the actions of the creatures. Which I never said nor thought. But do really believe his immediate concurrence, to all actions of his creatures (both *immediatione virtutis, and suppositi*, that I may more comply with his scholastic humour, in the use of such terms, than gratify my own) yet not determinative unto wicked actions.

Again, Durandus denies immediate concurrence, universally, and upon such a ground, as whereupon, the denial must equally extend to good actions as to bad; † namely, that it is impossible the same numerical action should be from two or more agents mediately and perfectly, except the same numerical virtue should be in each. But (he says) the same numerical virtue cannot be in God and in the creature, &c. Whereas he well knows the concurrence or influence (for I here affect not the curiosity to distinguish these two terms, as some do) which I deny not to be immediate to any actions, I only deny to be determinative, as to those that are wicked. Yea and the authors he quotes (sect. 11.) Aquinas and Scotus, though every body may know they are against what was the notion of Durandus, yet are as much against himself, if he will directly oppose that letter, and assert determinative concurrence, to wicked actions. They held immediate concurrence, not determinative. The former, though he supposes divine help in reference to the elections of the human will, yet asserts the elections themselves to be in man's own power, and only says that in the executions of those elections men can be hindered. That (whatsoever influence he asserts of the first cause) men still, *habent se indifferenter ad bene vel male eligendum, have to choose indifferently good or evil.* The other, though he also excludes not the immediate efficiency of God in reference to the actions of men, yet is so far from making it determinative, that the reason he gives why, in evil actions, man sins, and God doth not, is that the one of those causes *posset rectitudinem dare actu quam tenetur dare: et tamen non dat. Alia autem, licet non teneatur eam dare: tamen quantum est ex se*

\* L. 2. Dist. 1. Q. 5. D. 34. Q. 1. † Dist. 1. Q. 5. ut. supr.

*daret, si voluntas creata cooperaretur; it could give the rectitude to an act, which it is bound to give and yet does not give it. But the other, though it is not bound to give it yet as far as it can, would give it if the created will, would co-operate, in the very place which himself refers to. Wherein they differ from this author toto cælo entirely; and from me that they make not determinative influence necessary in reference to good actions, which I expressly do.*

Thus far it may be seen what pretence or colour he had to make my opinion the same with Durandus's, or, his own, the same with that of Thomas and Scotus. But if he knew in what esteem I have the schoolmen, he would hardly believe me likely to step one foot out of my way, either to gain the reputation of any of their names, or avoid the disreputation. He notwithstanding, supposed his own reputation to be so good (and I know no reason why he might not suppose so) as to make it be believed I was any thing he pleased to call me, by such as had not opportunity to be otherwise informed. And thus I would take leave of him, and permit him to use his own reflections upon his usage of me, at his own leisure. But that civility bids me (since he is pleased to be at the pains of catechising me) first to give some answer to the questions wherein he thus expostulates with me.

Question. 1. Whether there be any action of man on earth so good, which hath not some mixture of sin in it? And if God concur to the substrate matter of it as good, must he not necessarily concur to the substrate matter as sinful? For is not the substrate matter of the act, both as good and sinful the same? To which I answer,

1. It seems then, that God doth concur to the matter of an action as sinful. Which is honestly acknowledged, since by his principles, it cannot be denied; though most, of his way, mince the business, and say the concurrence is only to the action which is sinful, not as sinful.

2. This I am to consider as an argument for God's predeterminative concurrence to wicked actions. And thus it must be conceived. That if God concur by determinative influence to the imperfectly good actions of faith, repentance, love to himself, prayer: therefore to the acts of enmity against himself, cursing, idolatry, blasphemy, &c. And is it not a mighty consequence? If to actions that are good *quoad substantiam*, as to the substance therefore to such as are in the substance of them evil? We ourselves can, in a remoter kind, concur to the actions of others; because you may afford, yourself, your leading concurrence to actions imperfectly good, therefore may you to them that are downright evil? because to prayer, therefore to cursing and swearing? and then ruin men for the actions

you induced them to? You will say God may rather, but sure he can much less do so than you. How could you be serious in the proposal of this question?

We are at a loss how it should consist with the divine wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth to design the punishing man, yet innocent, with everlasting torments, for actions which God, himself, would irresistibly move him to; whereas his making a covenant with Adam in reference to himself and his posterity, implied there was a possibility it might be kept; at least that he would not make the keeping of it, by his own positive influence impossible. And you say, if he might concur to the substrate matter of an action as good, (which tends to man's salvation and blessedness) he must necessarily concur (and that by an irresistible determinative influence, else you say nothing to me) to the substrate matter of all their evil actions, as evil, which tend to their ruin and misery, brought upon them by the actions which God makes them do. I suppose St. Luke 6. 9. with Hos. 13. 9. shew a difference. If you therefore ask me, why I should not admit this consequence? I say it needs no other answer, than that I take wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and truth, to belong more to the idea of God, than their contraries.

Question 2. Is there any action so sinful that hath not some natural good as the substrate matter thereof?

Ans. True. And what shall be inferred? That therefore God by a determinative influence produce every such action whatsoever reason there be against it? You might better argue thence the necessity of his producing, every hour, a new world; in which there would be a great deal more of positive entity, and natural goodness. Certainly the natural goodness that is in the entity of an action, is no such invitation to the holy God by determinative influence to produce it, as that he should offer violence to his own nature, and stain the justice and honour of his government, by making it be done, and then punish it, being done.

Question 3. Do we not cut off the most illustrious part of divine providence in governing the lower world, &c.?

Ans. What! by denying that it is the stated way of God's government, to urge men, irresistibly, to all that wickedness, for which he will afterwards punish them with everlasting torments? I should least of all ever have expected such a question to this purpose, and am ashamed further to answer it. Only name any act of providence, I hereby deny, if you can. In the next place, that my sense may appear, in my own words; and that I may shew how far I am of the same mind with those that apprehend me at so vast a distance from them; and where, if they go further, our parting point must be; I shall set down

the particulars of my agreement with them and do it in no other heads than they might have collected, if they had pleased, out of that letter, as

1. That God exerciseth a universal providence about all his creatures, both in sustaining and governing them.

2. That, more particularly, he exerciseth such a providence about man.

3. That this providence about man extends to all the actions of all men.

4. That it consists not alone in beholding the actions of men, as if he were a mere spectator of them only, but is positively active about them.

5. That this active providence of God about all the actions of men consists not merely in giving them the natural powers, whereby they can work of themselves, but in a real influence upon those powers.

6. That this influence is in reference to holy and spiritual actions (whereto since the apostacy, the nature of man is become viciously dis-inclined) necessary to be efficaciously determinative; such as shall overcome that dis-inclination, and reduce those powers into act.

7. That the ordinary, appointed way for the communication of this determinative influence, is by our intervening consideration of the inducements which God represents to us in his word, namely, the precepts, promises and comminations, which are the moral instruments of his government. No doubt but he may (as is intimated in the letter, p. 278.) extraordinarily act men, in some rarer cases, by inward impulse, without the help of such external means, (as he did prophets or inspired persons) and when he hath done so, we were not to think he treated them unagreeably to their natures, or so as their natures could not, without violence, admit. But it hath been the care and designment of the divine wisdom, so to order the way of dispensation towards the several sorts of creatures, as not only not, ordinarily, to impose upon them, what they could not conveniently be patient of, but so as that their powers and faculties might be put upon the exercises whereof they were capable, and to provide that neither their passive capacity should be overcharged, nor their active be unemployed. And whereas the reasonable nature of man renders him not only susceptible of unexpected internal impression, but also capable of being governed by laws, which requires the use of his own endeavour to understand and obey them; and whereas we also find such laws are actually made for him, and propounded to him with their proper enforcements. If it should be the fixed course of God's government over him, only to guide him by inward impulses; this (as is said, p. 278)

would render those laws and their sanctions impertinencies, his faculties whereby he is capable of moral government so far, and to this purpose, useless and vain. And would be an occasion, which the depraved nature of men, would be very apt to abuse into a temptation to them, never to bend their powers to the endeavour of doing any thing that were of a holy and spiritual tendency (from which their aversion would be always prompting them to devise excuses) more than a mere machine would apply itself to the uses which it was made for, and doth not understand.

Therefore, lest any should be so unreasonable, as to expect God should only surprise them, while they resolutely sit still and sleep; he hath, in his infinite wisdom, withheld from them the occasion hereof; and left them destitute of any encouragement (whatsoever his extraordinary dealings may have been with some) to expect his influences, in the neglect of his ordinary methods, as is discoursed p. 264. and at large in the following pages. And which is the plain sense of that admonition; (Phil. 2. 12. 13.) Yea, and though there be never so many instances of merciful surprisals, preventive of all our own consideration and care, yet those are still to be accounted the ordinary methods which are so *de jure*, which would actually be so, if men did their duty, and which God hath obliged us to observe and attend unto as such.

8. That in reference to all other actions which are not sinful, though there be not a sinful disinclination to them, yet because there may be a sluggishness, and inaptitude to some purposes God intends to serve by them, this influence is also always determinative thereunto; whensoever to the immense wisdom of God shall seem meet, and conducing to his own great and holy ends.

9. That, in reference to sinful actions; by this influence God doth not only sustain men who do them, and continue to them their natural faculties and powers, whereby they are done, but also, as the first mover, so far excite and actuate those powers, as that they are apt and habile for any congenerous action, to which they have a natural designation; and whereto they are not sinfully dis-inclined.

10. That, if men do then employ them to the doing of any sinful action; by that same influence, he doth, as to him seems meet, limit, moderate, and, against the inclination and design of the sinful agent, over-rule and dispose it to good. But now, if, besides all this, they will also assert; that God doth, by an efficacious influence, move and determine men to wicked actions. This is that which I most resolutely deny. That is, in this I shall differ with them, that I do not suppose God to have, by

internal influence, as far, a hand, in the worst and wickedest actions, as in the best. I assert more to be necessary to actions<sup>s</sup> to which men are wickedly disinclined; but that less will suffice for their doing of actions to which they have inclination more than enough. I reckon it sufficient to the production of this latter sort of actions, that their powers be actually habile, and apt for any such action, in the general, as is connatural to them; supposing there be not a peccant aversion, as there is to all those actions that are holy and spiritual; which aversion a more potent (even a determinative) influence is necessary to overcome. I explain myself by instance.

A man hath from God the powers belonging to his nature, by which he is capable of loving or hating an apprehended good or evil. These powers, being, by a present divine influence, rendered habile, and apt for action: he can now love a good name, health, ease, life, and hate disgrace, sickness, pain, death. But he doth also by these powers, thus habilitated for action, love wickedness, and hate God. I say, now, that to those former acts God should over and besides determine him, is not absolutely and always necessary; and, to the latter, is impossible. But that, to hate wickedness universally, and as such, and to love God, the depravedness of his nature, by the apostacy, hath made the determinative influence of efficacious grace necessary. Which therefore, he hath indispensable obligation (nor is destitute of encouragement) earnestly to implore and pray for. My meaning is now plain to such as have a mind to understand it.

Having thus given an account wherein I agree with them, and wherein, if they please, I must differ. It may perhaps be expected I should add further reasons of that difference on my part. But I shall for the present forbear to do it. I know it may be alleged, that some very pious as well as learned men have been of their opinion. And I seriously believe it. But that signifies nothing to the goodness of the opinion. Nor doth the badness of it extinguish my charity, nor reverence towards the men. For I consider, that as many hold the most important truths, and which most directly tend to impress the image of God upon their souls, that yet are never stamped with any such impression thereby; so, it is not impossible some may have held very dangerous opinions, with a notional judgment, the pernicious influence whereof hath never distilled upon their hearts. Neither shall I be willing without necessity to detect other men's infirmities. Yet if I find myself any way obliged further to intermeddle in this matter, I reckon the time I have to spend in this world, can never be spent to better purpose, than in discovering the fearful consequences of that rejected opinion, the vanity of the subterfuges whereby its assertors think

to hide the malignity of it; and the inefficacy of the arguments brought for it. Especially those two which the letter takes notice of. For as so ill-coloured an opinion ought never to be admitted without the most apparent necessity, so do I think it most apparent there is no necessity it should be admitted upon those grounds or any other. And doubt not but that both the governing providence of God in reference to all events whatsoever; and his most certain foreknowledge of them all, may be defended, against all opposers, without it. But I had rather my preparations to these purposes, should be buried in dust and silence; than I should ever see the occasion which should carry the signification with it of their being at all needful. And I shall take it for a just and most deplorable occasion, if I shall find any to assert against me the contradictory to this proposition,—That God doth not by an efficacious influence, universally move and determine men to all their actions; even those that are most wicked.—Which is the only true, and plain meaning of what was said, about this business, in the before-mentioned letter.